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**The Whole Works  
of the Rev. John  
Howe, M.A. with a  
Memoir of the  
Author. Vol. VI.**

**John Howe**



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## The Whole Works of the Rev. John Howe, M.A. with a Memoir of the Author. Vol. VI.

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**Author(s):** Howe, John (1630-1705)

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**Description:** After the 1662 Act of Uniformity, which required all clergy to adhere to the doctrines and liturgies prescribed to them by the British Parliament, John Howe stepped down from his pastorate. In secret, however, he continued to preach to members of his former congregation in their private homes. This sixth volume of Howe's *Whole Works* contains over thirty sermons, seventeen of them devoted to the love of God and one's neighbor as written about in 1 John. Like many of his contemporaries, Howe combined depth of thought with earnestness of faith and conviction.

Kathleen O'Bannon

CCEL Staff

# Contents

Title Page.	1
Prefatory Material.	3
Dedication.	4
The Love of God and Our Brother, in Seventeen Sermons, on 1 John iv. 20.	5
Sermon I. 1 John iv. 20.	5
Sermon II.	14
Sermon III. Preached September 6, 1676.	22
Sermon IV. Preached September 13, 1676.	30
Sermon V. Preached September 29, 1676.	38
Sermon VI. Preached September 27, 1676.	46
Sermon VII. Preached October 4, 1676.	54
Sermon VIII. Preached October 11, 1676.	62
Sermon IX. Preached October 11, 1676.	70
Sermon X. Preached October 5, 1676.	78
Sermon XI. Preached November 1, 1676.	89
Sermon XII. Preached November 8, 1676.	96
Sermon XIII. Preached November 15, 1676.	105
Sermon XIV. Preached November 29, 1676.	115
Sermon XV. Preached November 29, 1676.	124
Sermon XVI. Preached December 6, 1676.	133
Sermon XVII. Preached December 13, 1676.	142
Thirteen Sermons on Various Subjects.	151
Sermon I. Preached at Mr. Case's, March 3, 1675.	152
Sermon II. Preached at Haberdasher's Hall, February 27, 1675.	164
Sermon III. Preached at Haberdashers' Hall, March 29, 1677.	173
Sermon IV. Preached at Plaisterers' Hall, February 28, 1677.	185

Sermon V. Preached at Haberdashers' Hall, June 1, 1677.	195
Sermon VI. Preached at Haberdashers' Hall, September 16, 1677.	205
Sermon VII. Preached at Mr. Case's, September 29, 1676.	216
Sermon VIII. Preached at Jewin-Street, March 15, 1675.	225
Sermon IX. Preached at Haberdashers' Hall, May 2, 1678.	234
Sermon X. Preached at Haberdashers' Hall, September 2, 1678.	243
Sermon XI. Preached September 8, 1695.	253
Sermon XII. Preached at Silver-Street, November 5, 1695.	265
Advertisement to Sermon XIII.	279
Sermon XIII. Preached at Brixham, January 23, 1658.	281
The Principles of the Oracles of God, In Two Parts. Part I.	300
Advertisement.	301
Lecture I. Preached November 7, 1690.	302
Lecture III. Preached December 5, 1690.	322
Lecture IV. Preached Dec. 12, 1690.	329
Lecture V. Preached Dec. 19, 1690.	336
Lecture VI. Preached December 26, 1690.	347
Lecture VII. Preached January 9, 1691.	358
Lecture VIII. Preached January 16, 1691.	366
Lecture IX. Preached January 23, 1691.	378
Lecture X. Preached February 20, 1691.	392
Lecture XI. Preached March 6, 1691.	403
Lecture XII. Preached March 20, 1691.	413
Indexes	421
Index of Scripture References	422
Greek Words and Phrases	426
Latin Words and Phrases	427
Index of Pages of the Print Edition	429



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THE  
WHOLE WORKS  
OF THE  
REV. JOHN HOWE, M.A.,  
WITH  
A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.  
IN EIGHT VOLUMES.

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VOL. VI.

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CONTAINING

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|---|--|
| I. THE LOVE OF GOD AND OUR BROTHER, IN SEVENTEEN SERMONS, ON <a href="#">1 JOHN iv. 20.</a> | II. THIRTEEN SERMONS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS.          |
|   | III. THE PRINCIPLES OF THE ORACLES OF GOD. PART I. |

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EDITED BY THE  
REV. JOHN HUNT, OF CHICHESTER.

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*B. Bensley, Bolt Court, Fleet Street.*



## **Prefatory Material**



THE LOVE OF  
GOD AND OUR BROTHER,  
CONSIDERED IN  
SEVENTEEN SERMONS,  
On [1. John iv. 20.](#)  
PREACHED AT A WEEKLY MORNING LECTURE,  
At Cordwainers' Hall,  
In the Year 1676.



## SERMON I.<sup>1</sup>

1 John iv. 20.

*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen; how can he love God whom he hath not seen.*

MY purpose at present is not to speak from these words either of love to God, or our brother, absolutely and singly: but comparatively only, according to that connexion which they have one with another; and the difference of the one from the other respecting their objects, as the object of the one is somewhat visible, and of the other somewhat invisible. There is one thing necessary to be premised to this intended discourse concerning the acceptance of love here, and it is this; that the apostle in this little tractate of love, as this epistle may for the most part be called, doth not design to treat of love as a philosopher, that is, to give us a precise formal notion of it; but to speak of it with a latitude of sense; not so indeed as to exclude the formal notion of love as it is seated in the inner man, but so as to comprehend in it such apt expressions and actings of it, as according to the common sense of men were most agreeable and natural to it. And therefore speaking of love to God in [2 chapter, ver. 5.](#) he tells us, that “Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected:” that is, the very perfection of the love of God stands in this, in keeping his word. So in [chapter 5, ver. 3.](#) “This (saith he) is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” And speaking of the other branch of this love in [chapter iii. ver. 17.](#) he saith, “Whoso hath this world’s goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” The apostle calls this the love of God also; it being one and the same divine principle of love implanted by God himself, which spreads itself to several objects all under one and the same communication, as having more or less of the divine beauty and loveliness appearing in them.

So that if any one should go about here to play the sophister, and say, “Love is a thing, which hath its whole nature, and residence in the inner man. Define it never so accurately, you will find it to be wholly, and entirely seated there. Now therefore, since nothing can be denied of itself, let it be confined and shut up there never so closely, admit that no expression be made of it one way or another, yet I need not be solicitous on this account: for let me walk and do as I list, the love of God may be in me for all that; since love is such a thing, wherever it is, as must have its whole nature within one.” To this the apostle would reply, No, I do not speak of love in so strict a sense. Love, as I intend it, is not to be taken so: or if it were, it must however be supposed to have that strength and vigour with it, as to enable

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1 Preached May 24, 1676.



it to be the governing principle of a man's life; to affect and influence his own soul; and so to run through the whole course of his daily practice. I speak of love according to what it virtually comprehends in it; namely, conformity to the will of God, and obedience to his laws whereby that will is made known. And thus love is elsewhere taken in Scripture also. Our Saviour you know gathers up our duty into love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself; upon these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." [Matt. xxii. 37, 40.](#) The apostle also tells us, that "love is the fulfilling of the law." [Rom. xiii. 10.](#) Therefore love to God and our brother, in this place, must be taken for the summary or abridgement of our whole duty; an epitome of the two tables; a virtual comprehension of all we owe either to God or man, that is, universal holiness, and an entire obedience to the divine will. But still in this system or collection of duties, love, strictly and formally taken, is to be considered as the primary and principal thing; as seated and enthroned in the heart and soul; and as the original principle, upon which all other duties do depend, and from whence they must proceed. The acceptation of love being thus settled, there are three things that I chiefly intend to shew from this scripture.

FIRST. That there is a greater difficulty of living in the exercise of love to God than towards man, upon this account, that he is nor the object of sight, as man is; and consequently, that the duties of the second table are, according to this our present state of dependence on external sense, more easy and familiar to us than the duties of the first. Hence proceeds that general propensity, which it greatly concerns us to be aware of; to acquiesce and take up our rest in a fair, civil deportment among men, without ever being concerned to have our souls possessed with holy, lively, and powerful affections towards God.

SECONDLY. I shall shew, that this impossibility of seeing God, doth not however excuse us from exercising love to him in this our present state. It is indeed one reason why he is actually so little loved in the world, but it is no sufficient excuse. For the impossibility of seeing God doth not render it impossible to love him, and to live in his love, while we are here in this world, dwelling in the flesh. And this also is plainly grounded in the text; for this vehement expostulation of the apostle, "If any man do not love his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" plainly supposes it to be an intolerable thing not to love God. And therefore hence he takes the advantage of enforcing the duty of loving our brother, because otherwise we should be convicted, and proved to be no lovers of God; taking it for granted, that this would be esteemed a most horrid thing, even at the very first sight. Otherwise his exhortation would have no force, nor pungency in it; but would be flat, and insignificant. Therefore he plainly supposes here, that though God's not being the object of sight doth render the exercise of love to him, upon that account, more difficult; yet it doth not render it impossible, or the neglect of it at all excusable; but



considers it as a thing to which men are most indispensably obliged. This therefore will be my second head to discourse upon from this scripture. And then in the

THIRD place, my design is to shew you the absurdity of their profession of love to God, who do not love their brother also; and how false and fulsome a thing it is for men to pretend to any thing of sanctity and religion, while they neglect the duties of the second table. Of these we shall speak in order, and begin now with the

FIRST observation, that the impossibility of seeing God renders the exercise of our love to him more difficult, than the exercise of it towards man whom we do see. In this doctrine there are two branches, which are to be distinctly considered.

I. That it is more difficult to love God than our brother.

II. That one great reason of it is, that we cannot see God, as we do our brother.

I. As to the former of these, that there is a greater difficulty in the exercise of love to God than to men, we may collect from the common observation of the world. For it is very plain and evident, that the common course and practice of men shews what is more easy to them, and what less; it plainly discovers which way they are most inclined. This is the thing, which I understand here by difficulty; and it answers the intent and force of the apostle's expression, "How can he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, love God whom he hath not seen?" This plainly must be understood in a relative sense, and have respect to some agent, and here must have reference to ourselves. It is less easy to us, that is, it is a thing which our nature in our present state doth less incline us to, actually to live in the exercise of love towards God, than towards men. And, I say, what men are more or less inclined to, is to be seen in their common course; and from the common observation of the state and posture of the world we may gather, that men in general are less inclined to love God, than one another. And though it be very true, there is too little of love, kindness, and mutual affection among men, and a great neglect of justice, common honesty, and the other duties of the second table, which love must be understood to comprehend; yet certainly the instances are not so rare of persons that are kind, courteous, affectionate, and well-humoured one to another, as of persons well-affected towards God. This is a thing which commands our assent even at the very first sight. Nay further, though it is also no less true, that men are too much lovers of themselves, to the exclusion not only of God, but of men too; yet certainly there is more of love to men, than to God, prevailing in the world. And to make this out let us go to the usual evidences and expressions of love; such as mindfulness of others, trust in them, a readiness to be concerned for their interest, a studious care to please them, loving to converse with them, or seeking and being pleased with it, and the like. If we descend, I say, to the consideration of such evidences of love as these are, we shall find that man is generally better beloved, than God is. And that this may gain the greater possession of our souls, let us a little consider these particular evidences of love; and then see whether men are not



generally more beloved by one another, than God is by them; hereby we shall plainly see, what is most agreeable to their temper, and what not. And,

1. *Mindfulness*, or a kind remembrance of others, is a most natural evidence of love. But what! are men who transact affairs one with another, so apt to forget each other, as they are to forget God? It is given us as a common distinctive character of a wicked man, that he is one that hath not God in all his thoughts. For thus saith the Psalmist, “The wicked in the pride of his countenance,” that is, his heart expressing itself in the haughtiness of his countenance, and his supercilious looks, “will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.” [Ps. x. 4](#). And by the same divine penman a wicked man, and a forgetter of God, are used as exegetical expressions. [Ps. ix. 17](#) But there is many a wicked man that will kindly remember his friends, his relations, even his very companions in wickedness. And if we demand an account of ourselves, do we not find it more easy and familiar to us to entertain thoughts concerning our friends, and relations, from day to day, than we do to think of God? Are we not also more inclined to love them than God? What we love we are not apt to forget. “The desire of our soul is to thee, and to the remembrance of thy name.” [Isa. xxvi. 8](#). Our love to thee, which naturally works by desire, will not let us forget thee; it is too deeply impressed and rooted in us ever to lose the remembrance of the object of our love. This is one thing that sheweth, that God is a great deal less loved by men, than they are by one another. Again,

2. To be apt to *trust* in one another, is a very natural evidence and expression of love. Whom we hate, we cannot trust; whom we love entirely, we know not how to distrust. One of the characters of love is this, “It hopeth all things, it believeth all things.” ([1 Cor. xiii. 7](#)) it abhors to entertain a jealous surmise of the person, who is the object of it. Now let the matter be tried by this also, and how much more ready are men to trust to one another, than they are to trust to God? What is there so vain, so uncertain, so unstable, which they are not more forward to repose their trust in, than in him? Therefore, saith the apostle to Timothy, “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded; nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God.” [1 Tim. vi. 17](#). Which charge implies the propensity of men’s minds, rather to trust in the most fugitive, uncertain, vanishing shadows, than in God himself. This is an argument, that he hath but little love among men; that he cannot be trusted; and that few will give him credit. But how safely and quietly do men repose a trust and confidence in one another? And indeed if faith and trust were not natural to men, there would be no such thing as commerce, which is the bond of human society. The world must dissolve and break up; all must live apart in dens, and caves, and wildernesses, and have nothing to do one with another, if they could not trust one another. Without mutual confidence, there would be an end of all traffic. But to this, human society shews there is a disposition; and you can easily find out persons, in whom you would as safely repose your trust and confidence, as in your own hearts. You can say, “I would put my life in such a man’s hands, or what ever is most dear to me.” And if that person should but promise to



undertake an affair, saying, "I will do such a thing for you, trust me with it, leave it upon me;" you would be as quiet, as if you saw the business done and already effected. But how unapt are the hearts of men to trust in God! and this it is, that holds off the world from him. He hath sent the gospel of peace and reconciliation to mankind, and therein declares the good tidings, how willing he is that the controversies should be taken up between men and himself; yet none will believe it, none think him in earnest, till he is pleased himself to draw them. "Who hath believed," saith the prophet, "our report? or, to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" [Isaiah liii. 1](#). Plainly intimating, that the arm of God must go forth to make a man believe him, and take his word. A strong argument, that he hath but little love among men, when he cannot be trusted; or, at least, when so few will give him credit!

3. A *readiness* to be concerned for one another's interest and reputation, is also a natural evidence of love. And we know how easily men are drawn in for one another, and take part with a neighbour, or a friend, when they are traduced, and evil spoken of; and especially when they see indignities and affronts put upon them. There is usually a great siding among persons upon such occasions. "Such a one has spoken ill of my friend, I must stand up for him to the uttermost. Another has injured him, purloined from him that which was his, and the like; I must right him." Should we not reckon him a base fellow, who should behold an act of stealing committed upon the estate of another, and not make a discovery of it, or endeavour to have him righted? But how little generally are men concerned for God, and his affairs! What robberies are every where committed against him, and yet how few do lay it to heart! How evil is he spoken of many times, and his truth, and his ways! But how few can say, "The reproaches wherewith they have reproached thee, have fallen upon me?" [Ps. lxix. 9](#). It is true, this is the sense of David, when he cries out, "As with a sword in my bones mine enemies reproach me, while they say unto me daily, Where is thy God?" [Ps. xlii. 10](#). It is to me as if one was forcing a sword into my bones, even into my marrow; a most intolerable torment to be upbraided in respect to my God: that he is either impotent, and cannot help me; or that he is false to me, and answereth not the trust I have reposed in him. But how few are there of David's mind, in this case? How many oaths and blasphemies can, they hear, wherein the sacred name of God is rent and torn, and yet their hearts are not pierced at all! Further,

4. An earnest study to *please* men is a natural expression of love. Now let the matter be estimated by this, how much less God is loved in the world than men. It is an ordinary thing with them to study to please one another, to humour one another. "Such and such things I do, and such I omit, lest I should displease a relation, a friend, or one that I have frequent occasion to converse with." But how few are the persons, who can say, "This I do purposely to please my God?" or with Joseph, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" [Gen. xxxix. 9](#). A man will oftentime cross his own will, to comply with that of another; and reckon it a great piece of civility to recede from his own inclination in order to gratify



another person, when he can do it without any great inconvenience. But how rare a thing is this with respect to God! To besuitablee to say, "In such a thing [ displease myself, that I may please God; I cross my own will, to comply with his." Among men there is especially one sort, that we are more concerned and obliged to please, so far as we can; and that is, such as rule over us. We are bound to please our superiors; and to obey them, that we may do so. And there is no obedience either to God or man, that is right in its own kind, but what proceeds from love, and is an evidence as well as an effect of it. "If ye love me," saith Christ, "keep my commandments." [John xiv. 15](#). "And this is the love of God," saith St. John, "that we keep his word." [1 John v. 3](#). More over the duties of the second table, which we owe to men, particularly that of obedience to superiors, are summed up all in love. The apostle having, in the 13 chapter of his epistle to the Romans, pressed subjection to the higher powers, in that they are of God, adds in the [10th verse](#), that "to love one another is the fulfilling of the law." "Render," saith he, in the same discourse, "to all their dues: tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honour, to whom honour." [Rom. xiii. 7, 8](#). Yet observe, all is wrapt up in love; for the command is immediately after, "to owe no man any thing, but to love one another:" and in short there is nothing which love doth riot comprehend, or to which it doth not incline us.

But however, though such obedience be due to our human superiors as procedeth from love; yet how apparent is the case, that herein is greater love shewn to men, than to God, though too little to both? There is indeed too little regard to laws both human and divine, in the most important matters; yet surely a great deal less to the latter, than to the former. The thing speaks itself as to common observation: and we daily see how much more human laws do influence men's practice, than those which are divine; and persons that are a great deal more prone to be precisely observant of them about matters, which they themselves do otherwise count indifferent, than of the laws of God, which are about the most necessary matters, and which also are acknowledged as such. Thus it hath long apparently been in the Christian world. A greater account hath been made of this and that arbitrary circumstance, than of the substance of religion itself. More stress hath been put upon the cream, the salt, and the oil, and such additional of human invention, than on the great obligations of the baptismal covenant. And if it were not so, it could never have been desired by any, that we should rather be all infidels, than not be Christians after their fashion, and in their way. For that it hath been evidently so, may be seen in this; that this whole nation itself hath at once suffered under the interdict of excommunication in former days. All the doors of our churches and chapels have been shut up, only for some non-compliance, with this or that human addition; thus they chose we should rather be no Christians at all, than not have Christianity with those additions. This shews a greater disposition in the minds of men to obey human laws, in circumstantial matters; than divine laws, in those points which are most necessary and important.



What then is more apparent, than that God is less loved in the world than men are; since persons are more forward to shew respect to them, than to him? Not but that we are bound to shew respect to them too, especially to those who represent him, and as his vicegerents rule over us. But surely it was never intended, that when we are to obey men for God's sake, we should regard him less; we should rather do it so much the more on this very account.

In a word, love ought to be an ingredient in every act of obedience; even to human government, as I have said before, as well as to that which is divine. What love is expressed in that great canon of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them;" (Matt. vii. 12.) that is, you ought to judge the case thus; "What would I wish to be done to me in such a man's circumstances? Would not I expect to be obeyed and revered, if I were a magistrate? My love to myself would incline me to expect it. Therefore my own love to myself, being the measure of that love which I owe to another, should oblige me to shew the same respect to him in his circumstances, that I would wish to be shewn to me in the like circumstances." But here is the iniquity of the case: those whom we should honour and love in the Lord for his sake, men are apt to put the supreme respect upon; which is to dethrone the supreme Lord of all, and to set up his creature in his place. And as to other persons, who are not invested with power and authority over us; how many are there of those, who will not wrong men, or do them any injustice! How many that are most highly civil, and candid in their converse with them, and strictly careful not to disoblige them by their behaviour! But who sticks at disobliging God, or makes a difficulty of disobeying him? Again,

5. Towards men there is a disposition deeply to *regret* any offence we unwarily have given them. When we, though undesignedly, have done another an injury; if, for instance, we but casually tread on his foot, or some such like matter, we presently say, "I am afraid I have hurt you, I am sorry for it." Common civility would oblige one to express such a regret. And if we by any rash word or weak action have trespassed upon another, we are reckoned almost unfit for society, if we do not shew a sense of our having offended such a person. Men that are not very ill-natured indeed, are apt to make apologies, and desire to be forgiven in cases where they have offended through inadvertency. But how much is it otherwise with men towards God, who trespass upon him every day, and never cry to him for mercy! who wear away their lives, from one month, year, and day, to another, in continual deviations from him, and rebellions against him, without its ever coming into their thoughts to say, "Lord forgive me, that I have lived so long in the world, as it were, without thee! that I have carried it to thee as if I owed thee no duty nor service! Lord, I have offended, I desire to put an end to this course, and to do so no more." Finally,

6. A *love* of converse or delight in each other's company, is another expression of that regard which men have for one another. Man is naturally a sociable creature; and how few



do you know, or ever have known, who do not affect company? Some few instances there are of persons, that are of a gloomy retired temper; but generally men seek to converse with one another, and take pleasure in it. But alas, how little do they care to converse with God! They had rather be any where, than in his presence. Many, otherwise ingenious persons, men of good dispositions and of facetious tempers, who, as they delight in converse themselves, so their conversation proves delightful to others; yet care not at what distance they keep themselves from God. How many, I say, of such ingenious persons do we know; who yet neglect to pray to God; take no pleasure in having any thing to do with him; take his holy name in vain; and set themselves at a distance from him, by their own evil practices? It may be they will come to the solemnities of public worship for the sake of order, and to express their respect to others; so that even in those things which are peculiarly appropriated to him, they shew more respect to men, than God. And how sociable soever their temper is, one with another; yet with the Almighty they care not to converse at all, but say to him, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." *Job xxi. 14.* From whence we may conclude, that to man in his present state, it is even natural to wish the great God out of being. "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God." *Ps. xiv. 1.* "I would there were no God, my vote shall go for it, that there were none; I could wish him out of the universe."<sup>2</sup> But you never heard of such a monster among men, as to wish there was no man beside himself. You never heard of such a hater of mankind, as to wish the whole human race into nothing.



Now all these things concur to evidence or prove to us, that God is much less beloved in the world, than men are by one another. And it must be allowed that the common practice of men sheweth their inclination. This is discovered by constant experience and observation, and the very aspect of men's deportment doth represent this as the true state of things. And, as I observed before, men may find something of it by the experience they have of themselves; even those who have applied themselves to the business of religion, seriously and in good earnest. They find they can presently set their love on work towards this or that creature; but how long an exercise of the thoughts doth it require, and how great is the difficulty and toil, before the heart can be wrought up into a frame actually loving God!



So that the former branch of this truth, that men are more inclinable to love one another, than they are to love God, is abundantly clear. The latter is, that it proceeds in a great

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2 For it is in the Hebrew text, : **אמר נבל בלבו אין אלהים** that is, *The fool hath said in his heart, no God.* And so it may as well be understood to signify the fool's wish, as his judgment. And this is the more likely to be the meaning; inasmuch as it is manifest, that this is not the speech of some particular persons, or of some rare instances of most monstrous horrid wickedness; but it is spoken of apostate man in general, concerning whom it is said in *ver. 3.* They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one.

measure from this cause, that God is not seen by us, as we are by one another; but this must be reserved for another discourse.



## SERMON II.<sup>3</sup>

**I**N my Former Discourse I told you, that my design from this scripture was not to handle singly and apart either the love of God, or of our brother: but to speak of them comparatively, with respect to the greater or less facility attending the exercise of the one or the other, according to their different objects; the object of the one being visible, and of the other, invisible.

The First Observation raised from the words, after settling the acceptation of love, was this: That it is more difficult to live in the exercise of love to God, than towards men; because he is not the object of sight as we are one to another. In which doctrine, as we observed, there are two things to be considered.

I. That it is more difficult to love God, than our brother. This has been proved from experience, and the common observation of the world, in several particulars. The,

II. Branch contained in this proposition, which we are now to speak to is this; that one great reason of this difficulty is, that men cannot see God, whereas they do see one another. In the prosecuting of this part of my subject it will be more necessary to insist on the explication, than on the proof of it; and still more upon the application than on either of the former. Something I shall endeavour to say to all, as the time shall allow.

1. For the explication of this matter: namely, How we are to understand, that the not seeing God as we do men, is a cause of its being more difficult to love him than it is to love them, take these few propositions, As,

(1.) That it is not an impossible thing in itself to love the unseen God: for if the not seeing him, did make it impossible to love him, he could never be loved by any one; because he is seen by none with the bodily eye, as we see one another. But it is plainly implied in our text, that there are some that love God, notwithstanding his invisibility. And the apostle therefore endeavours only to evince the absurdity and guilt of not loving our brother, because from thence a man may be convicted of being no lover of God, which he accounts as a most intolerable thing. The not seeing him therefore doth not make it impossible to love God, but only renders it less easy. That is, it is not simply impossible, and therefore he who can do all possible things, can make the nature of man to love him; he, I say, can form the nature of man to the love of himself.

(2.) The not seeing of God cannot be understood to be a necessary cause of this sad thing. It is not such a cause as doth necessitate this evil, and horrid effect. For that would be to reflect upon God, as if he had made a reasonable and intelligent creature, that was by the necessity of his nature prevented from loving him. This would be to suppose, that the seeing of God with the bodily eye, were necessary to the loving of him; which would make

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3 Preached May 31, 1676.

it altogether impossible that he should be loved by any of us at all, since he is visible to none. Nay, we might say further, he was never to be loved by any being, no not by himself, on the same grounds. The cause therefore of this difficulty is such as doth not necessitate the thing caused: for that indeed would imply that the nature of man is such as would never admit of his loving God, and so there would be a contradiction in men's very nature; to wit, that they should be capable of being blessed in him only, whom at the same time they are not capable of loving. For experience sheweth, that there is nothing else in which we can be blessed; nothing below, or besides God. Therefore this would infer, that man must be a creature made on purpose for misery; for it is evident he can be happy in no creature; neither in God could he be happy, if it were simply impossible he should ever love him, which is to cast the whole matter upon God himself. For if this were the case, then a man might say, "God hath given me such a nature as renders it impossible for me even to exercise love towards him." But far be it from us that we should entertain such a thought of God! that he should make man, a creature indued with an intellectual mind, and yet not capable of loving him, who is the Author and Original of his life and being! This it were even horrid to think of. And again,

(3.) Nor hath this always been the cause of such an effect; for there are some that are actually brought to love God, though they never saw him in the sense we speak of, to wit, with the bodily eye. It was not so with man from the beginning, that because he could not see God, therefore he loved him not, or was for that reason the less inclined to love him. He was formed at first for the love of his Maker, so as to take the highest complacency in him, and to make him his supreme delight. Man, I say, was made thus upright; but he hath since been trying inventions, to see if he could be happy any other way, or upon other terms. And therefore since this is not the necessary, nor the constant cause of such an effect as this, we must add,

(4.) That it cannot be a cause of itself alone, but must needs be a cause in conjunction with some other cause; by the intervention of some other thing, by the concurrence of which this sad effect is brought about. For if it be true, that there have been men who have loved God, though they never saw him with the bodily eye, there must be some other cause of the want of love to God in those persons who love him not, besides his invisibility. Because otherwise, since God was always invisible, and never seen with the bodily eye, it would necessarily follow that he could never have been loved at all. And hence again we may observe,

(5.) That the other cause therefore, which is considerable in this case, must needs be the degeneracy of man's nature. It is not to be imagined, that man in a state of integrity should be incapable of loving God further than he could see him: or that the sight of his eye should be the conductor of his affections, and of the motions of his soul, which is a reasonable intelligent spirit. But the nature of man is not now, what it was. Certainly the case was better with him formerly, than it is now in this lapsed state, in which we must confess him to be;



since there is so great an alteration in his very nature. This even the heathens themselves have seen, confessed, and lamented. I remember Plato brings in Socrates, somewhere speaking to this sense, upon a supposition of the pre-existence of his soul: "There was a time, says he, when I could have seen, and did see the *first beauty*, the highest and most perfect comeliness, and loveliness; but now being subject to the body, all that impression is vanished and gone." And divers ethers have complained of that great darkness and ignorance, which was in them; and of the bonds and chains that held their souls fast, so that they could not tell how to exercise the powers of them towards invisible things. It cannot be then, but the matter must be resolved into this; that if our not seeing God is the reason why he is so little loved, it is because our nature is grown so corrupt and degenerate, that what we see, takes with us most. And again,

(6.) We may add hereupon, that this degeneracy of the nature of man must needs stand very much in the depression of the mind, or intellectual powers, and the exaltation of sense. For the mind and the understanding, by the light which God had placed there, were to guide and govern the man; instead of which, sense usurped the throne and took the government of him into its own hands. During the distraction and interruption of that order, which God had originally set between the superior and inferior powers of man's soul, sense, I say, usurped the throne, and took the government into its own hands, and man has ever since basely yielded, and subjected himself to its dominion, so that nothing moves him now but what is sensible. In this therefore the degeneracy of man very much consists, that sense dictates, and is become the governing principle of his life. And,

(7.) We add further, for of this more will be said when we come to the use or application, that the not seeing God can be only a temporary cause of our not loving him; inasmuch as it is only a cause, with the intervention or concurrence of another cause, I mean, the disturbance of that primitive order, which God had settled between one faculty and another, belonging to the nature of man. Our not seeing God could never have prevented us from loving him, if things had not been so deplorably out of course with us, or if this confusion of order had never been brought in among us. Therefore this cause is only temporary, that is, so long as this great depravation of our nature doth prevail. But there are those, with whom it either doth not, or shall not prevail always. There are some, blessed be God, in whom this distemper and disorder of the soul of man is cured. For God hath sent his Son, the Redeemer, into the world on purpose to undertake this cure, and to rectify and set things right in men's spirits. And "Christ gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity."<sup>4</sup> and therefore surely from this monstrous kind of iniquity, the most horrid of all the rest, to wit, that most unrighteous unequal thing, that man should not love his own Original, and the Author of




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4 Tit. ii. 14.

his life and being. Therefore it was the resolution of the Redeemer, "I will die, but I will remedy this matter. I will give myself, I will sacrifice all that I have, but I will bring this matter to rights again." I say then it is only a temporary cause, which has been assigned of men's not loving God, subsisting only so long as man's nature continues depraved: which is not only curable, but in part is actually cured, when the work of regeneration is set on foot, and the Spirit of the Redeemer has begun to obtain in the soul; and it is completely cured, when the new creature becomes mature, and is risen up to its full growth and perfection. But in the mean time, so long as this distemper in the nature of man continues, our not seeing God is one great reason why we love him not. For that way of apprehending God, which should be the same with respect to invisible objects, that sight is with respect to those which are visible, is wanting. And this apprehension will still be wanting, that must supply the room of sight, so long as this degeneracy remains in us. While it is thus with us, that we are subject to the power of sense which has usurped the throne, the soul is destitute of those clear conceptions, those lively and vivid apprehensions, that issue in love to God. And so the great neglects of God, and the intolerable disrespect and affronts that are put upon him in the world, are, in a great measure, according to the present degenerate state of man to be resolved into this cause, namely, that he is not seen. Hence it is, that so many persons neither love, nor regard him at all.

2. Having thus explained the point we are upon, I now proceed to evince this truth, that one great reason, why men are not so apt to love God as they are one another, is because he is not the object of sight as we are. And this I shall do from the following considerations, namely,—that the object is such as would certainly command our love, if it could be apprehended aright; and—if it be not so, it must proceed from some defect in ourselves.

(1.) That the object is such as would certainly command our love, if it were rightly apprehended. For he is most amiable in himself; and has infinitely more obliged man, than they can, ever oblige one another.

God, I say, is most amiable In himself, who is chiefly to be loved by all, though he is not actually so; as he is confessed to be the Supreme Object of our understanding, while in reality he is least known. "God is light,"<sup>5</sup> says the apostle in one place of his epistle; and "God is love,"<sup>6</sup> as he affirms in two others; a Being of pure light, and glorious love. Would he not be loved therefore, if apprehended aright? "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods!" as we find Moses speaking with admiration, "Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"<sup>7</sup> God is a Being wherein the most perfect wisdom,

5 1 John i. 5.

6 1 John iv. 16.

7 Exod. xv. 11.

goodness, power, truth and righteousness, make so admirable a temperature, that it is not possible he should not be loved, if he were but known.

Besides, he has infinitely more obliged men, than they ever have or can oblige one another. Take any man whatsoever, whose soul you may suppose to be utterly destitute of the love of God, how low and abject soever be his state, yet you may say, “Thou impious wretch! thou hast not the love of God in thee; though he hath done more for thee, than all the men in the world whatever could do, even though they should all join together to oblige thee. For is he not the Author of thy life, and being? Could the invention of all the men in the world have formed such a creature as thou art out of nothing? Is he not a continual Spring of life to thee? Thou livest and movest, and hast thy being in him every moment. And it is with this design, that God doth continue to thee thy breath and being, that thou mightest feel after him, though thou canst not see him, and also labour to find him, though he be not far from every one of us. Thou art his offspring as even heathen poets tell us:<sup>8</sup> no creature could ever have made thee. No man is always doing thee good every moment, and at all times; but thou art continually sustained by the divine hand. The great God who made thee, feeds thee with breath from moment to moment, and is always exercising towards thee sparing and sustaining mercy; for his patience and bounty always concur together, in every moment’s addition to thy breath.” It were altogether impossible then but that God should be loved, more than all other beings, if he were but known. And then,

(2.) Since an object so excellent in himself, and beneficent towards us, must have been loved by us, if there were not some defect in ourselves, therefore it plainly appears that there is a defect; and it is owing to this, that sense has got dominion over us, and the ruling sway within us. For if he be not loved by any one, it must proceed from hence, that those lively apprehensions are wanting, which sense is the instrument of with reference to visible objects. This is in itself most plain, that such an object as the blessed God is, could not but attract our love, if there were not some great defect in ourselves, or if sense had not the power and dominion over us. And that it has such power and dominion, may be seen by comparing these two things together: to wit, that generally the objects of sense do make great impressions upon us; but the things that fall not within the reach thereof, or exceed its sphere, usually make little or none at all.

[1.] The things of sense, I say, do usually make a great impression upon us, and are the things that have the deepest influence and operation upon the minds of men, so long as they are destitute of the grace of God. Hence it is, that men, who are yet in an unregenerate state, are said to be “in the flesh.”<sup>9</sup> And a wicked man is spoken of as one, that is lost in the flesh; so that there is nothing comes near him, nothing affects the soul, nothing reacheth

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8 See [Acts xvii. 27, 28.](#)

9 [Rom. vii. 5.](#)

his heart, but what some way or other doth slide in upon him, through the mediation of his external senses. It is true, sense is the instrument of conveying to us the knowledge of many things that are not the objects thereof. But when any are spoken of under this character, of being in the flesh, it bespeaks the degeneracy of man while unrenewed to be so great, that he is a creature so wrapt up in the flesh, as that nothing can come at him, but what is sensible. And therefore of such persons it is said, "They savour the things of the flesh."<sup>10</sup> While this is the state and case of any man, it is no wonder that things, which are not the objects of sight, should move his heart but little. It is evident to all that make any observations upon themselves, how mighty a power sensible things have upon them. A danger that we see, how do we start at it! Without using any intervening thoughts, as soon as we see it we dread it. How apt are we also to be amused, by the variety of sensible objects! How apt to be ensnared and enticed by them! Therefore such as have a due care of themselves, what a watch and guard do they set upon their sense! For this purpose holy Job is said to "make a covenant with his eyes."<sup>11</sup> And we also read of a heathen philosopher, that would outdo Job, by putting out his eyes, that he might be able to contemplate the better; acting herein agreeable to this Arabian proverb, shut the windows, that the house may be light. Thus it is evident how great a power sense has over us, to draw us this way and that. And,

[2.] On the other hand, it is also obvious to experience, how little power, in general, those things have usually over us which fall not under the senses. Not only the objects of our love, but of our other affections signify nothing, make no impression if they be invisible. Therefore it is spoken of as a characteristic note of the saints, that "they look not at the things which are seen, which are but temporal, but at the things which are not seen, and are eternal."<sup>12</sup> We read particularly of Noah, who "being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, and through faith prepared an ark for the saving of his house."<sup>13</sup> Do but consider; here was one man, and only one in a whole world, that was actually moved by the discovery and report of things not seen as yet, who when he was warned by God of such and such things coming, though unseen at present, admitted into his soul a pious preventing fear. I say there seems to have been but one such man in a whole world, and he is thereupon recorded with honour in the book of God for it. So rare a thing is it that a man should be influenced by things not subject to sight, that if there be but one Noah, any one such person in the world, Record him for it (saith God) to future ages, for his excellency in this, that he took notice of the monition, or warning from God, as to things not seen as yet, so as to do what was agreeable to the exigence of the case. Accordingly he stands at this day

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10 [Rom. viii. 5.](#)

11 [Job xxxi. 1.](#)

12 [2 Cor. iv. 18.](#)

13 [Heb. xi. 7.](#)



as an eminent example to all succeeding ages. And you find, that it is the same faith which distinguished! those who belong to God, and is the principal rule of their life; to wit, “the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.”<sup>14</sup> Plain therefore and visible it is to us, and so it must be to all the world, that most persons are governed by their senses; while things not sensible never move, nor signify any thing with us. How plainly doth experience every day speak in this case! When we tell men of a judgment to come, a dreadful tribunal where they must all appear, and an endless state of things, that is before them; we are to them as men that mock. They cry out, “Surely, you are but in jest; you mean not as you say, when you tell us of such dreadful things; we see nothing like it, nothing tending that way.” Thus in like manner it is said, that when the inhabitants of Sodom were admonished by Lot, that fire and brimstone were ready to come down upon their heads to punish the most flagitious enormities of that people, “he was to them as one that mocked.”<sup>15</sup> So we are told this will be the language of scoffers in the latter days, “Where is the promise of his coming?”<sup>16</sup> As much as to say, “You have told us often of the great and terrible day, when the sign of the Son of Man shall be seen in the heavens, and that there shall be most terrible concomitants of his appearance; but we see nothing like it, no token of its approach, “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” Thus the judgment of sinners is framed only by what is seen; and what is not seen, is not at all minded; not regarded by them. So David says, “Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.”<sup>17</sup> They say, “All things are as they were. There is no alteration fallen out so important, as seems to portend such dreadful things, as you talk of. The sun runs its course as it has been wont, and there is the same succession of day and night, summer and winter, as in former times. Who therefore can make us believe, that there is such a day coming as that, which is so much talked of?”

Now, since we find, that God is such a one as you have heard; namely, most amiable in himself, and beneficent towards us, and consequently that he would most certainly be beloved, if there were not some great defect in us which hinders so blessed an effect; and since we find, that there is such a defect, that we have promoted sense to be the ruler in us, and that sensible things make a deep impression on us, while things that are not subject to the senses have little, or no regard from us; we have all the reason in the world to conclude, that the great reason why men love not God is, because they do not see him. He is out of sight, and they regard him not.

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14 [Heb. xi. 1.](#)

15 [Gen. xix. 14.](#)

16 [2 Peter iii. 4.](#)

17 [Psalm lv. 19.](#)

I THOUGHT to have insisted on many things by way of use, as I proposed, after having explained, and evinced, this second branch of my first proposition; but I shall now only hint at some things, which I propose to speak more largely to in the next discourse.

IN the first place, we may infer and gather from hence, that the apostacy and degeneracy in which this world has been, and is still involved, is very dreadful; in that it hath destroyed man's right disposition towards God. If it had wrought only so far as to deface men's limbs, and turn them into monstrous shapes, it had not been by many degrees so tremendous; but it hath deformed the mind, and spoiled the temper of the spirit as it hath reference to God most of all, which is a thing never enough to be deplored.

Again secondly, we may further infer, that there is a necessity for something or other to supply the room of our not seeing God, as man did in the state of innocence; inasmuch as he is not seen by us now in this lapsed state, so as to furnish us with such apprehensions of him as to engage us to love him. There must be something analogous to sight, some communications of God's grace, that must influence our hearts to love him; without which it is impossible.

Moreover thirdly, I would observe, It is a wonderful mercy that God hath not wholly concealed himself from men: that though he cannot be seen by the bodily eye, yet he hath vouchsafed to shew us, how we may attain to the knowledge of him. No man, saith John the Baptist, hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.<sup>18</sup> How then ought divine grace to be admired for this!

We may hereupon, fourthly, see the great necessity of much gospel-preaching, and that very lively and serious too. There are a great many that are apt to say, "What needs such ado? why must we have sermons so often?" Surely the exigence of the state of man is but little considered by them that say so. Do not we need to be often put in mind of the invisible God, when men love him not, because they see him not? If they should hear of him neither, what would become of them? Certainly they misunderstand the state of things among us, who think every little in this kind is too much.

Finally: We may see how little reason we have to be in love with this state of dependence upon sense, which amuseth our souls, usurpeth the power over them, and so disturbs and muddles our minds as to divert them from their true objects. How little reason have we to be fond of living in, and walking after the flesh; which is to live the life of a creature, as it were, buried alive. Surely, I say, we have no reason to be fond of such a life.

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18 [John i. 18.](#)

### SERMON III.<sup>19</sup>

HAVING told you in the introduction to the First Discourse, that love to God and man, is the summary of our whole duty, I proposed to insist on these three things.

FIRST, that there is a greater difficulty of living in the exercise of love towards God than towards men on this account, that he is not the object of sight, as man is: or, in other words, men are much more disposed to love one another, rather than God, inasmuch as they can see each other.

SECONDLY, that although this is one great reason why men in reality love God so little, yet it is no excuse.

THIRDLY, I proposed also to shew you the manifest falsehood and absurdity of any one's pretending to love God, who does not love his brother also. The FIRST of these we have made some progress in, and, in the handling of it, told you, that it contained these two parts:

I. That it is more difficult to love God than our brother.

II. That one great reason of it is, that we cannot see God as we do one another.

As to the former of these, we have shewn you in several particulars, that how much soever mutual love is wanting in the world; yet it is not so hard a matter to find out instances of kind, goodnatured men, who are friendly and fair in their deportment one to another, as it is to find persons who are kindly affected towards God. In the prosecution of this matter the usual expressions, or evidences of human love were considered. Such as mindfulness, or a kind remembrance of one another; mutual trust; a readiness to be concerned for each other's interest, and reputation; an earnest study to please, and oblige; and a disposition deeply to regret an offence, though given unwarily; and finally, a love of converse, or delighting in each other's society, is another expression, as we observed, of that regard, which several persons have for one another. In all which respects it appears from constant observation and experience, that men are more disposed to shew love and respect to one another, than to God.

As to the latter of these propositions, that all this proceeds for the most part from this cause, namely, that God is not seen by men as they are seen by one another, several propos-

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19 Preached September 6, 1676. N. B. The author begins the third sermon on the subject after the following manner: "It will be necessary, after so long an interval, to be somewhat larger than usual, in the recollection of what has been said from this scripture." And accordingly he proceeds to give a large recapitulation of the two former discourses, which he had preached about three months before; of which this is only an abstract. There is a like interval or chasm, with respect to time, between the VIII. and IX. of those posthumous sermons, published by Dr. Evans; and there are several more of the like nature in the manuscript volumes, out of which these discourses are selected.

itions were first laid down for the explication of this point; and then two considerations for the eviction of it, tending to shew, that it must necessarily be from some great defect in the nature of man, that the most excellent and most amiable objects of all others, should not be generally loved by us. After which, two or three hints by way of use were given you, and so we concluded the last exercise on this subject.

3. I now proceed to a larger and more close application of this important truth.

(1.) Hence we infer, that man is in a very low and lapsed, state. The present state of man, I say, is a lapsed state. He is fallen, and fallen very low indeed, when this is the case with him, that he is less apt to love God than man; and only for this reason, because he cannot see God. It argues, I say, man to be sunk very low, and greatly fallen. And can we hereupon think otherwise? For what! can it ever enter into the imagination of any of us, that God did ever create such a thing as the reasonable intelligent spirit of man, his own off spring, image, and glory, with an original indisposition to the love of himself? Do we think that God gave such a nature to man at first, as was capable of being employed about spiritual objects, and yet with this strange defect or flaw in it, that it should be impossible to this nature of man to love the Author of itself, and the Original of its own life and being? This can not be. It can never be, that a reasonable spirit, the immediate issue of the great Father of spirits, should be so alienated from its own Father; and that it should be so dependent upon sense, as not to be able to love him from whom it came, or anything which is above the sphere of that base principle, which now presumes to give laws to the immortal mind. It is not to be supposed, that God ever created man so, as that his invisibility, which is the excellency of his own being, should be the reason why man should not love him. For he is therefore invisible, because he is excellent. And to think that the nature of man at first was so formed, that the excellency of things should be the reason why they should not be loved, and his own excellence a reason for his creature not to love him, is too absurd for any rational person to imagine. It is therefore plain, that the present state of man is a very lapsed state.

Some of the heathen, as we observed before, have acknowledged and lamented this. We find one of them complaining, that the darkness of ignorance clouded his mind, and that this body and flesh was but as a living sepulchre to the man. Another complains of certain bonds and chains, that tied down tire mind of man to the body, and the things of sense. And a third speaking of the excellent state of man at first, says, that he then lived in a sort of familiarity and converse with God, but that now it was become quite otherwise with him. Such things as these we find in the writings of divers of the heathen. And how incongruous a thing is it for us who have all the concerns of our souls, and what relates to our being, so expressly discovered and made known to us; how incongruous a thing is it, I say, that such a malady as this should be so little minded as it is by us! Many have very slight notions of the degeneracy of man, and make a little matter of it, and the most have a much slighter sense thereof in practice. How few are there, who carry it as those who apprehend themselves



fallen, and cast down from great excellencies! fallen short, very far short, of the glory of God! we live as if we apprehended no such malady, as if we knew not that there was a disease or distemper inwrought into our natures. Oh, how little is there of the sense of this to be found in the bulk of mankind! And hence I would farther infer,

(2.) That this depravity or lapsedness of the nature of man consists greatly, in the depression and declination of his mind, and intellectual powers, as to the particular work and office of guiding his passions, his affections, and practical inclinations. This was just mentioned before in the last discourse,<sup>20</sup> but shall now be more largely considered. I do not say, with some, that this is all that is meant by the corrupt state of man; but certainly it stands very much in this, that his mind and rational powers are become unfit for their proper business; and, that sense hath got the throne, usurped the reins, and governs his passions and affections. Herein I say, consists, in very great part, the corruption and depravedness of man's present state. And do not we find it to be so? Do not we see, as to the objects that draw men's affections daily into a certain course that it is not the mind, but sense which prescribes? Sense dictates and says, "Love here," and they do accordingly: "Love not there," and they obey. "Let that be the object of your love, which sense tells you is amiable and lovely; and that which sense says no such thing about, you may slight, neglect, and take no further notice of." Thus men are dictated to, and they do accordingly. It is plain then, that the depravedness of man's state stands chiefly in this, that sense takes upon itself to do the business of the mind and intellectual powers, and we consent it should be so.

But is not this a dismal thing? more dismal that it is not laid to heart! Is it not a dismal thing, I say, that the first rank and order of creatures in this sublunary world should be sunk into that low bestial life, so as to be governed by no higher a principle than what is common to them with brutes; and that the incongruity of this should not be reflected upon, and more deeply considered? That men should so seldom consider with themselves the unfitness of their course, or labour to shake off the usurped dominion over them? This, I say, is most sad and doleful to think on, that matters should have gone on thus from age to age, and from generation to generation, in so many successions to this day, and we have heard of so few in all that time, who have regretted to be so imposed upon, and forborne to live the life of beasts and brute creatures through so many ages! One would think it should some time or other have come into the mind of man, to think thus with himself. "What! is it a becoming thing for me, a reasonable and intelligent creature, one formed after the image and likeness of God, one of those creatures made at first for his immediate service and fellowship, that I must now be imposed upon, and dictated to by sense? that vile and base principle of sense, so as to love nothing but what that counts lovely, and neglect every thing which that takes no cognizance or notice of?" It is an amazing thing, that there should not be so much appre-

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<sup>20</sup> See Prop. (6.) p. 17.

hensiveness left among men, as to remember, that they were men, in their original, once at least that they were men, "Remember," saith the prophet in a like case, "and shew yourselves men." *Isa. xlvi. 8.* But alas, how little is there left of a sense of this degeneracy among us! how little resentment of the vile indignity that is done to the whole kind, and which the whole species of men have suffered to come upon them! to be degraded and brought down into an inferior rank and order! to do, to act and live, as if they were also made to die like the beasts that perish!

There are indeed many, in the mean time, who proudly arrogate and give to man that which belongs not to him in his present condition, and which this state does not admit of. They say him to be that which he is not, but in the mean time really see not, nor lament that he is neither what he was, nor what he should or ought to be. And to how little purpose is it to magnify human power, when it is manifest how forlorn the present state of man is? He is fallen very low! And what are these men intent upon, who make it their business now to magnify the nature and power of man in this condition? those parasites of mankind, as I may call them, what mean they by it? When he is become a lost perishing creature, they adorn him with shadows, and think they make up the matter by at tiring him with magnificent titles and attributes. As if when a person is condemned to suffer the execution of the sentence of death passed upon him, one should clothe him with a majestic robe, and bestow great compliments upon him. This is to add scorn to his ruin, and is only insulting over the wretchedness and calamity of the man's condition. And yet this is the course of them that go about to persuade man, that although the case is thus with him, he can recover his own excellence that he hath lost; that he can anew create himself, or repair the ruins of his decayed and shattered state. This is the way to add incurableness to his misery, by tempting him to neglect the only means of taking it off, and so make him miserable without remedy. But that persons out of a deep concern for the honour and glory of man as the top of the creation, should go about to make him believe himself now in an honourable state, and that he can even now do great things; now unsuitable and insignificant is this, as well as inconsistent with truth! And again,

(3.) We infer hence, that man is most especially prejudiced and impaired by his lapse or fall, in respect to his disposition and inclinations towards God. The wound is principally in his mind, and consists in the depression and enfeebling of its powers; but the mind itself is most especially hurt and impaired in respect of those inclinations by which it should be guided towards God. For in the state in which he is at present he is indisposed to the love of God; and for this mean reason, because he cannot see him. And that he is not able to love what he cannot see, shews him to be a very mean abject creature, and that his powers are mightily impaired. Surely the time was, that he could have loved what he could not have seen with his bodily eye; and how comes it to pass that because he cannot see God, therefore he cannot love him? This shews that his mind is impaired, that he is hurt chiefly in what



respects his Creator; and that his propensity, the bent and bias of his spirit towards God is lost.

This is the sad and dismal thing that is befallen the nature of man, because God is far beyond the reach of his sight, and he himself is sunk into flesh, lost in earth, and always imposed upon by sense, he cannot see him, cannot lift up the dull heavy eye of his mind to his God, which is the eye he must be seen with by his creatures. So that, as the apostle Paul expresses it, he is become alienated from the life of God, and without God in the world. [Eph. ii. 12.](#) And how much is this to be lamented, that man is so fallen off from God! that his original propensity to him is lost and dropped from his nature! If we had heard but of one man since the creation of the world with whom this was the case, it would deserve to be very much lamented. But that this should come upon the whole kind, that it should be thus, as I may speak, with the whole race of men; methinks the sense of it should never wear off from our hearts. Strange! that it should be the course and fashion of this world all over the earth, to live in an oblivion of him that made us, and with hearts devoid of his love, and only because he is so excellent as not to be seen by us with the bodily eye! It was reckoned a sad and terrible day, when a tribe was cut off from Israel; but if we consider what man was made for, what were the design and end of his creation, we see as it were a whole race of beings lost from the creation of God. For what can we think man was made for but to love, admire, triumph, and glory in his great Maker? But to all this he is lost, and abstracting what is done in order to the recovering him again, it had been as well if there had been no men at all, and for themselves unspeakably better. How strange then is it, that such a matter as this is, should ever escape our thoughts! If we speak of the corruption and depravedness of human nature, they are words of course that drop from us now and then, and some slight notions of the matter hover in our minds; but how few are there to whom it is a familiar thing to roll themselves in the dust before the Lord, in the sense of that vile and abject state, which man in common now is in? How few lament that they are by the fall cut off from God; and spoiled as to all their capacities, whereby they were suited to the divine love, service and communion! And yet the most tragical calamities that could possibly have fallen out in the world, or of which we could form any imagination, had been nothing in comparison of this. Nay if all mankind, as to shape, or impossibility of external enjoyments, were the most monstrous and most miserable creatures living, it were nothing when compared to the mischief and misery, which are the fruits of man's apostacy from his Maker.

(4.) We further infer hence, that man upon all these accounts must necessarily be at a very great distance from true blessedness. Whoever understands, or considers the connexion between blessedness and love, will soon perceive the reasonableness of this inference. It is impossible to be blessed without love; and it is necessary to every one's satisfaction, that it be a full and sufficient good that is the object of his love. If either of these be wanting, it is impossible it should be satisfying, or a suitable good to me. Or if on the other hand, there



be a good never so self-sufficient or all-sufficient, yet if I can not love it, if my heart be averse to it, this also is a sufficient bar to my happiness. The things that are seen, though a man love them never so much, can never satisfy, because they are not sufficient. The infinite incomprehended good is all-sufficient, and fit for every purpose; but this cannot make him happy, because he doth not love it. In the creature therefore man cannot be happy, in God he will not. He cannot in the creature, because that hath not in itself to give; in God he will not, because his heart is disinclined to him, and will not be brought to a closure with him by love.

Consider man according to this state of his case, and you must look upon him as one, who by his very constitution and present temper of his soul, is formed for misery; I say so long as he continues in his present situation. His heart inclines him truly to visible things, and to love the objects of sense, which can never make him happy. The good that is unseen hath enough in it to make him blessed, but then he will not love it. He will not apply himself to love God, merely because he is out of sight. You must needs think then that it is a great thing that must work the cure of man, who is thus involved in so great an abyss of depravedness and misery. And therefore I must add,

(5.) That there is a very great necessity of much gospel-preaching in order to persuade men to the love of God. For what is the design of the gospel, but to render God amiable to men? What is it but a method of rendering God lovely, and of restoring men's love to God? And since his loveliness is not the object of sight, there needs such a supplemental representation of himself, to supply the want of vision. And since the things that court our senses are obvious, and occur to us every day, yea every hour of the day, it is needful that we should be frequently put in mind of God; and that those discoveries of him which tend to beget the love of him in our hearts, should be very much urged and inculcated upon us. For otherwise what should countervail sense, or what shall we set against the sight of our own eyes? "No man hath seen God, at any time." What is it then that must supply that defect, and be in the stead of the sight of God to us? Why, "the only begotten Son of God, he hath declared him." [John i. 18](#). So that we have now a revelation of God himself. And our Lord Jesus Christ, who lay in his bosom, and came from thence to declare the Father to the world, has ordained that this revelation, of which he is the prime Author, shall be held out before us from time to time, by the use of inferior and subservient instruments.

I have often considered the strange prevarication, and sophistry, which some men use in stating things that are necessary to salvation; and the use they make of that state. That is, because they can make a shift to gather up the main principles of religion into a little compass, as they may very easily, they say, "Here is all that is necessary to salvation. And therefore since in that way, or in that church all things necessary to salvation are taught, what need is there of any more? why should not we come over thither? or why should we separate from it?" Methinks it were an obvious easy thing to most people to detect the fallacy. They state





what is objectively necessary to salvation, without considering the condition of the subject, and what is necessary for that subject. That is, they state what is necessary to be known and believed in order to our being saved, but consider not what is necessary to bring men to this knowledge and belief of these necessary things, so as to make a due impression of them upon their hearts. If, for instance, you were to prescribe to a sick languishing person a remedy for the taking off his distemper; would you only tell him of such and such good substantial food that you would have him eat? and would you then think you had done the business? Alas! the poor man is sick; he desires nothing, can take nothing, can digest nothing, and casts up all you give him. Why then do you talk to him of such things as will make wholesome and substantial food, when he can neither receive nor retain it! So in like manner in the present case and exigence of man, considered as a fallen creature, if the bare proposal of the sundry heads of religion, necessary to be known and believed were sufficient; then to have a sermon once in a man's life time might do the business; or a mere system of the principal parts of the Christian religion would do what it is urged for, and answer the exigence of the case. This, I say, were a thing easily to be granted, if it were really so with men, that a doctrine would be understood as soon as proposed, and received when understood, and so beget its due and proper impression, upon the hearts of men. But truly the case is manifestly otherwise, since man is fallen into so depraved a state. And to talk thus, is to speak of a scheme of divinity suitable only to innocent men in paradise; when no more was needful to be done than barely to propound things with respect to the clearness of the understanding, the rectitude of the will, the agreeableness of the powers one to another, together with the truth and goodness of their objects. But to say that this is all that is requisite, that there is enough held forth or laid before men, the knowledge and belief of which is sufficient to save them, is just as if one should say, that such and such things proposed to a sick man would do him good if lie were not sick. So in like manner this way of propounding the gospel would serve the turn for men, if they were such as when they were at first created. Indeed it were no gospel, if it were only enough to save men from sin, who as yet were no sinners. The very notion implies a contradiction. For doth not the same sin which makes them stand in need of a gospel for the reconciling them to God, disaffect at the same time their hearts unto God, and make them unwilling to close with him? Therefore they need to have precept upon precept, and line upon line; here a little, and there a little. And they that preach the gospel to men, are urged "to be instant in season and out of season, to admonish, exhort, reprove:" (2 Tim. iv. 2.) and all little enough, indeed all too little.

Surely then there is somewhat else to be considered in the matter. When we consider what is objectively necessary, it is also to be considered what will bring men to believe these necessary things. And in order to that there is need of their being frequently inculcated, inasmuch as things that are seen are more the objects of our love, than the things which are not seen; and what we ought to set our hearts most upon, are out of sight. God himself is



the great Object men are to be directed to, and to whom they must be united, or they are lost. He is invisible, and they are apt, as you have heard again and again, to mind nothing but what is seen. There fore it is a strange unapprehensiveness of the real state and condition of mankind, which those are guilty of, who decry preaching as a needless thing. Surely they that do so, have little studied the nature of man! There are several other things that remain to be spoken to, which I cannot insist upon at this time.



## SERMON IV.<sup>21</sup>

WE have gone through the first part of my design from these words, which was to shew, that men are less apt or disposed to the exercise of love to God than to one another. And we have made some progress in the application, by way of inference; and therein have endeavoured to shew,—that the in disposition of man to the love of God is a proof of his being in a lapsed and very degenerate condition—that this degeneracy must consist principally in the depression of the mind and its intellectual powers—that more especially man is prejudiced by the lapse or fall with respect to his inclinations towards God—that in consequence of this, he must needs be at a great distance from true blessedness, which is inseparably connected with the love of God—and in the next place, it was further inferred, that there is great occasion for frequent gospel-preaching, which is the method instituted by Christ for restoring and reviving love to God in the souls of men. But though this is necessary, yet we are also to know that it is not sufficient; for all the preaching in the world cannot alone make the sensual heart of men to love God. And therefore we proceed to infer further,

(6.) That since men are so very unapt to love God, and for this reason, because they see him not; there is great need of the communication and influence of that glorious and mighty Spirit of life to relieve him in this sad extremity and distress. For surely it is a very distressed case, that man cannot love his own Maker, the Author of his life and being, him in whom is his eternal hope, and all because he cannot see him. It is a case that calls for a very great and powerful hand to redress; and no other hand is proportionable to the exigence thereof. Though he works by means, and even by that of the gospel-revelation, yet it doth not follow that the means will do the business alone; but the contrary follows, that because they are means, therefore there must be an agent, and an efficient, to use them, and one proportionable to the work of forming and disposing the spirits of men towards God, that they may be capable of his love, and admit it into their hearts so as to rule and govern there. And what can do this but the Spirit of God? What else is it that can awaken and rouse the dull, sluggish, drowsy spirits of men? What else, I say, can quicken, purify, and refine spirits lost in pleasure and sense? The way of bringing any soul to love God, is to give it the spirit of love. There is no other way of doing it. Now the apostle says, that “God hath given to us not the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”<sup>22</sup> One and the same Spirit is all these at once. And till that Spirit is given us, there is nothing but enmity and disaffection towards God; there is nothing but feebleness and impotence, as to any thing that is good; there is nothing but distemperature and diseasedness in man, which have pierced him to the very heart. This Spirit therefore, in reference to these several exigencies, is a Spirit of love, of



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<sup>21</sup> Preached September 13, 1676.

<sup>22</sup> [2 Tim. i. 7.](#)

power, and of a sound mind. That same Spirit that makes the soul capable now of doing things that require power; that same Spirit that rectifies the mind, and heals it of those distempers under which it was wasting and consuming before, is a SPIRIT OF LOVE. It is said to be a Spirit given, a Spirit superadded to our own, a Spirit that we had not before. Indeed it must be some other spirit than ours, which must render us capable of loving God.

You know, that the apostle recounting the several fruits of the Spirit, (as he had done those of the flesh before) sets this of love in the front of them. “The fruit of the Spirit is love joy, &c.”<sup>23</sup> And after telling us, that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him;”<sup>24</sup> he tells us also of a Spirit different from that of the world, the Spirit which is of God, which such as they had received. “We have received,” says he, “not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God.”<sup>25</sup> And in this same chapter, wherein is our text, you have the apostle John speaking to this very case, to wit, the impossibility of our seeing God: “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.”<sup>26</sup> Love to one another as Christians or saints, is also a fruit of that same blessed Spirit. And if there be such a principle of love within us, it plainly speaks that God dwells in us, and we in him, and that he hath planted his own love in our souls, which is perfecting there. It is manifest now that he hath taken possession of us, and drawn us into union with himself, so as to become the great Fountain of that principle of love in us, whereby we are capable of loving him, and loving such as are his, for his sake.

And because the act of the heart in loving supposes some foregoing act of the mind by which the object is perceived to be lovely, therefore this same Spirit is elsewhere called “A Spirit of wisdom, and revelation, in the knowledge of him, whom we are to love.”<sup>27</sup> The apostle is there praying earnestly on behalf of the Ephesians, that this Spirit might be given them, by which they might be capable of knowing, and knowing practically, as the word *επιγνωσις* signifies, and of coming into union with that blessed One that is known. And on this union love hath a great influence. St. John says, “We know the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. That is the true God and eternal life.”<sup>28</sup> The understand-

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23 Gal. v. 22.

24 1 Cor. ii. 9.

25 1 Cor. ii. 12.

26 1 John iv. 12, 13.

27 Ephes. i. 17.

28 1 John v. 20.



ing here spoken of is said to be given by which we so come to know God in Christ, as to be brought into union with him by love: it is, I say, a given thing, men have it not of themselves.

It is very requisite, and therefore I so long insist upon it, that we understand how necessary it is, that there be another and a better Spirit than our own, to render us capable of loving God, whom we have not seen; for otherwise we shall never love beyond the sight of our own eye. And it is very strange, that this necessity, since the case speaks itself, and the Holy Scriptures so often declare it, should be no more understood. If there be no such necessity, what is the reason we are taught to “pray for the Spirit,”<sup>29</sup> as starving children do for bread? That we are bid to “live in the Spirit,”<sup>30</sup> “to walk in the Spirit,”<sup>31</sup> and “by the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the flesh?”<sup>32</sup> And are we not told, that we must “be born of the Spirit, or else we shall never enter into the kingdom of God?” [John iii. 3](#). All this is plain language one would think, and easy enough to be understood by those that have a mind to it. But it is very observable, that those notions which tend to make as little as possible of the depravity and corruption of man’s nature, to magnify beyond measure the power of man in his fallen state, to depress preaching, and to make light of the operations of the Holy Ghost upon the minds of men, are all of a sort, ail of a piece. These are notions that hang upon one thread, and when we see wherein they issue and terminate, we may easily discern the danger of them; and into how great hazard they bring the eternal concerns of the souls of those men, who suffer themselves to be tainted with them. We again farther infer,

(7.) That the work of regeneration must needs stand in very great part in the implanting and seating in the souls of men such principles, as may directly tend to control the dictates of sense, and in opposition to it rule and govern in men. The infirmity and distemper of man’s nature easily shew, wherein this cure and renovation must consist. This is at present the great distemper of his soul, it cannot love but where it can see. It is the sight of the eye that carries the heart, and draweth it this way and that way. A most dreadful distemper this! But as we know the distemper, we know wherein the cure must consist. Regeneration is that which restores the man to his right mind, and sets things to rights again with him. Though his former state is expressed by being in the flesh, he is now said to be in the Spirit, from the spiritual frame created in him by the great work of regeneration. Thus, says the apostle, “Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.” [Rom. viii. 9](#). And the thing produced in the work of regeneration is called spirit. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” [John iii. 6](#). While man is in flesh he is capable of loving nothing but what is seen, nothing but what to his senses

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29 [Matt. vii. 9, 10, 11.](#)

30 [Gal. v. 25.](#)

31 [Rom. viii. 1.](#)

32 [ver. 13.](#)

appears amiable and lovely. Herein therefore stands the work of regeneration, to take a poor sensual creature, a mere lump of flesh, and to make him spiritual; and then it is he becomes capable of loving God. There must be a new creation: and right principles planted in the mind, to influence the heart, and to direct and determine souls towards God, from whom they were cut off and so dreadfully alienated. Again in the

(8.) Place, we further infer, that the power by which it comes to pass that there are any lovers of God in the world is highly to be adored and magnified. You see it is far more difficult to love God, whom we see not, than our brother whom we do see. How then can this difficulty be overcome, unless divine power implant this principle of love? We ought therefore to make the representation of that power, that hath wrought this work in us, appear very glorious in our own eyes, that so with reference to this matter our hearts may be put in an adoring posture. Let us then bless and adore that glorious Being, who hath done such a thing as this; who hath made a stupid sensual heart, which could never rise beyond the sphere of flesh, ascend and enlarge itself, and fix and terminate its love upon the blessed God. "How great is the power" (should one say that finds it thus) "which hath done this in me! to make a clod of earth, a lump of clay to love God! This is as great a thing as out of tones to raise up children unto Abraham." In reality we ought not to think little, or meanly of this. And again,

(9.) We may further infer, that the life of Christians in this world cannot but be a conflicting life. The life of a christian as such must be influenced throughout by the love of God. He is to act according to the direction of St. Jude, "Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." [John iii. 21](#). Is this the business of a christian, and what must be his very life to live in the love of God all along? then he must indeed live a conflicting life all his days. That is, there must be a continual conflict kept up against imperious sense, and its dictates, which always is crying to the heart of man, "Love what is seen, what you perceive to be lovely:" there must, I say, be a continual striving in the heart of a christian against this; since he must keep up a continual love to him whom he cannot see, to him who is far above out of sight.

This sheweth, that they who know not what a continual striving against sense, its dictates, and inclinations means, are yet to learn what the business of the Christian life is. How can a man love God whom he seeth not? When there is a continual difficulty, there must be a continual striving and vigorous endeavours always used. Loving God is not swimming down with the stream of nature, it is quite another thing. And agreeable to this, what a strife is represented all along, through out the seventh chapter of the epistle to the Romans, between the "law of the flesh," and the "law of the mind;" the inclinations of sensual nature, and the spiritual dictates and prescriptions which are by the apostle called "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus;"<sup>33</sup> which doth as it were repeal, and abrogate the law of sin and death;

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33 [Rom. viii. 2.](#)

and so far as it obtains, delivers a man from its impositions, and imperious commands, which lead to death.

It is highly needful for us to state our own case to ourselves, and to consider what we are like to meet with in our Christian course; and if we mean to persevere, we must resolve upon a striving conflicting life all our days, for thus it must be. How much then are they beside the Christian course, who know not what it is to strive against any inclination of their own, nor to oppose the earthly tendencies of their own spirits; who can never find occasion to contend with themselves; who espy no fault in the temper of their own spirits, but carry the matter to themselves as if all were well; who can pass a whole day with no rebukes nor checks, when their hearts have run after their eyes only! These persons perhaps have never minded, never loved any thing better than what came within the reach of their senses, or could be seen with the eye; and yet they are innocent creatures in their imagination, and think they have no cause to blame themselves. But let us not be deceived, who see that the life of a christian must be a continual running counter to a man's own eyes, and the dictates of sense; since these prescribe to a man to love only what he sees, whereas certainly he is no christian who liveth not in the love of God whom he doth not see. In the

(10.) Place, we further infer, that the proneness of men to acquiesce in a civil deportment, and to rest in the mere formalities of religion, hath one fixed common cause, and that is, the want of the great principle of love. In this respect it is fit that we should consider what the case of man is. Men are very apt to satisfy themselves with a fair and unexceptionable carriage to others, or at most with a little formality in the duties of religion, and never look further; which certainly must proceed from one and the same cause, namely, the want of love to God. This, I say, in the

[1.] Place, is the reason why persons are so prone to acquiesce in a fair and civil deportment towards men. It is necessary for us to know this, that so the danger of it may be more care fully avoided and deeply dreaded. What is it that is really the principle of duty even towards men? Certainly it is love. This is easy, as the text supposes, towards men, in comparison of what it is towards God; men therefore are apt to take up with what they find most easy.

The state of the case lieth thus. There are characters of the ancient law, which God at the creation impressed upon the spirit of man; *Lex non scripta sed nata! the law not written, but born with us*, as one heathen writer expresses it, or the νομος φυσικος, *natural law*, as another heathen writer calls it. There are, I say, still some broken parts, some scattered fragments, some dispersed characters of this law, which was by our Maker put into our very frame, which lie discomposed and dispersed here and there in men, whereof some refer to our duty towards God, and others to our duty towards men. Those relating to men are more legible, are oftener read, and come more frequently under view. For how much more prevalent is this sense in the minds of men, "My neighbour is not to be wronged or disobliged,"

than this, "God is not to be forgotten, neglected, disobeyed?" Why, the matter being so, that the characters representing our duty to men are oftener in view, and so more frequently furbished as it were and brightened, than those which express our duty to God; being, I say, more frequently reflected upon, they are more put into practice. And therefore here men are apt to take up, saying, "I do that which is just, honest, and fair before men, and there are none that can charge me with the contrary." And so they think their case is good.

Indeed there are several things concurring to make such principles, as point out to us the duties we owe to man, more influential upon practice. As for instance, men have sensible kindnesses from one another, which work upon ingenuity, and so influence to a suitable behaviour to them that shew such kindnesses. When they receive a kindness from the hand of a man, it is from a visible hand. They see who doth them good. Though there is a thousand times more good done them by the invisible God, but his invisible hand they take no notice of.

Again, they are sensible continually of their need of men. All persons sensibly find they need some other, for they cannot live alone. They are not only obliged to a mutual dependence upon one another, but they are very sensible of it; and therefore are very apt to carry it so much the more fairly to men, as those who stand in need of one another.

Besides, men find a sensible advantage from the reputation of a fair, just, and honest carriage to others. "If I have not the repute of being a person kind, goodnatured and well-humoured, I shall have no friend; no body will converse with me, but be shy of me. If I have not the reputation of being a just man, honest and square in all my dealings, I shall have no trade, no one will trust me, every one will be afraid to hare to do with me." These considerations dispose us to good behaviour towards one another.

Finally, men are frequently sensible of hurt or some great inconveniencies accruing to them, if at any time they misbehave themselves to others. They that are morose and churlish do often fall upon tempers as cross-grained and perverse as their own, and so meet with such measure as they bring. If they be quarrelsome, it falls out sometimes that there are those who will quarrel with them, and will not take an affront at their hands. And though there are some that scorn the tutor age and instruction of fear, which should govern them in the conduct of their affairs; yet many others are more prudent, and are not apt to follow the hurry of their own pride and inclinations. They consider how much it concerns them, not to provoke those who will right themselves, nor to injure those who will be sure to meet with them one time or other. Yea, those who are more considerate will be very cautious how they make any man their enemy, even the meanest; for no man is so mean but it may be sometime or other in his power to do him a shrewd turn.

Such inducements there are, I say, as these unto a fair and unexceptionable deportment towards men, whom we see and converse with every day. And with this men are inclined to take up their rest; contenting and satisfying themselves with this, that they carry it to





others, so as that none have any great reason to find fault with them, and thereupon think that God will find none neither.

[2.] There is also a proneness in mankind, as we observed, to take up with formality in the matters of religion. For what besides formality can there be in the religion of those who love not God? If I pretend to worship him and not love him, though I spend all my days upon my knees will it signify any thing as to real religion? But because this is more easy, that is, bodily exercise than that of love, or an inclination of mind and heart to God, it is natural to take up with it for that reason, and to rest there.

The pharisees among the Jews, one would think should not have been to seek where religion really lay; but, alas! where did they place their's? In ceremonial sanctity, in washing their hands before they did eat bread, in cleansing their cups and platters, and in frequent purifications of themselves; all which they made to be as significant things, as the instituted rites of worship by God himself. Moreover they were very exact in tithing mint, rue, and all manner of herbs, while in the mean time they "passed over judgment and the love of God." [Luke ii. 42](#). What a strange oversight was this! that the pharisees, those devout men, those zealous pretenders to the greatest strictness in the observance of the law of God, as well as to the profoundest knowledge of it, even beyond all other men, should be guilty of such an oversight as to pass over the sum and substance of it, to wit, the love of God! And yet our Saviour speaks of it as their common character. If then the pharisees, those knowing and strict men, as they would be thought to be, were in such an error as this so commonly, we may well conclude that the spirits of men are generally prone to acquiesce in the mere externals of religion, and to take up with the outside thereof without ever going any further. They think their case is well enough with God if now and then they bow the knee, compliment him in duty, and put on some face and shew of devotion; while in the mean time the love of God is an unthought-of thing. So that how many must say, if they would speak as their case truly is, "I never thought that the love of God must go into my worship." Since then the proneness of mankind to acquiesce in a fair and civil deportment, and in the mere formalities of religion proceeds from one common, fixed cause, to wit, the want of this divine principle of love, it is necessary that we consider the matter, lest we ourselves be thus dreadfully imposed upon.

And now to conclude the First Part of our subject, it appears that temptations to atheism must needs find great advantages in the temper of men's spirits, while they are so depressed and overborne by sense. For its essence, particularly of practical atheism, consists in the alienation of the heart from God. And how easy a step is it from hence to speculative atheism, when a man has lived so long "without God ( $\alpha\theta\epsilon\omicron\iota$ , the apostle's phrase is.) in the world!" [Eph. ii. 12](#). For if he do not love God whom he hath not seen, for the same reason he will not fear him; neither hope nor rejoice in him as his chief good. How obvious is it for such a man to entertain such a thought as this? "Is it not as good to say, there is no God, or I will



own none; as to say there is no one that I will love or fear, nor any one with the thoughts of whom my heart is at any time affected?"

Let us therefore hence take occasion to admire the patience and much more the bounty of God towards his revolted creatures in this world. How wonderful is it that he spares and maintains them also! that he should make constant provision for such as put the highest affronts and indignities upon him, by loving and preferring his own dust, before him who formed it into what it is; by exalting the work of his hands above him; and finally, by profusely bestowing their affections on the creature, but none upon God the great Creator of all! Do not we think this is a thing not to be endured? and do not we wonder that it is actually endured and that men are permitted from age to age, to continue in this course, and are suffered by vengeance to live, when the whole business of their lives is to express how much more they value despicable nothings, creatures like themselves, than the great, the blessed, and glorious Lord of heaven and earth! Certainly it should be often our business to set ourselves to admire the sparing and sustaining mercy which God exerciseth towards this world while this is the state of things between him and apostate men.



## SERMON V.<sup>34</sup>

WE have hitherto been shewing you from these words, That men are less apt to love God than one another, principally for this reason, because God is not the object of sight as men are. We are now to go on to the

SECOND thing observed from them, namely, That we are most indispensably obliged to the exercise of this duty though we see him not, and therefore notwithstanding this excuse, it is a most intolerable thing not to love God.

This hath its manifest ground in the text, and doth fundamentally belong to the apostle's reasoning in this place. For the argument or medium which he reasons from is this, that if we do not love our brother whom we have seen, then we can not so much as love God whom we have not seen. By which he endeavours to represent how grievous a thing it would be, if Christians should continue in a mutual neglect of one another. Now all this would fall to the ground, and signify nothing, if they were disengaged from loving God upon the account of his invisibility. But the apostle takes it for granted, that all men must esteem it a most horrid thing to be convicted of not loving God; otherwise his argument would be altogether to no purpose. For it might have been replied to him, "Though we be convicted of this, that we do not love God, inasmuch as we do not love one another, yet what is the inconvenience of such a neglect? We grant the whole, but what are the ill consequences that follow upon it?" Now the apostle doubts not but they would see the consequences, and that every man must needs take it to be an intolerably hateful thing to pass for one that is no lover of God. This therefore is supposed by the apostle as a fundamental circumstance in his discourse—that not to love God, though we see him not, is a most horrid hateful thing, as well as absolutely inexcusable.

Now as this is plainly to be collected, so it is very necessary to be insisted upon. For as it is apparent, that as men commonly do not love God, or at least are less disposed to it, because they see him not; so they are very apt to excuse and exempt themselves from guilt upon this account. "Why should I look upon it, says one, as so abominable a thing not to live in the exercise of love to God? He is out of sight, sure he expects no such thing from us who cannot see him, and who live at so great a distance from him!"—What multitudes are there who can wear out the whole time of life, and never charge themselves with any fault all their days for not having lived in the love of God? As if the old heathenish maxim were their settled notion, *Quae supra nos, nihil ad nos: we have nothing to do with what is so far above us.*

And besides, this is not only the latent sense of most, or that which lies closely wrapt up even in the very inwards of their souls, to wit, that they have little to do with God, and

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34 Preached September 29, 1676.

need not concern themselves about him; but it is also what many have the confidence to speak out, and to declare in plain express words. It is very notorious that there are sundry persons in the world, not of one denomination or party only among the professors of the Christian name, who are not afraid to avow this very sense. Those who have made it their concern to look into the doctrines that have been handed about in the Christian world, do well know whose casuistical divinity this is, "That we are not obliged to love God, unless it be once or twice a year." Or as some have presumed to say, "If it be only once in a man's life-time it may serve the turn," as a worthy person, now removed from us, hath largely shewn; as also what the morals and practical divinity of that sort of men are. And another<sup>35</sup> of quite a different strain, who hath disciples more than a good many in our time, in his discourse of the human nature, would slyly insinuate, that we are not obliged at all to formal direct acts of love to God, from this very passage of Scripture in the next chapter of this epistle, This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.<sup>36</sup> As if because the apostle would there include all the external effects virtually in the principle, it was therefore fit to exclude the principle itself by the external effects. Nor indeed was there ever any time or age wherein the heart and life of practical religion and godliness were so openly struck at as in our days, by the perverse notions of some, and the scorn of others: as if it were thought a very feasible thing to jeer religion out of the world; and that men ought to be ashamed to profess love to God, because they can have the impudence and be so daring as to laugh at this and such like things.

We are therefore so much the more concerned to bestir ourselves, and to look more narrowly into the very grounds and bottom of our own practice in the ways of religion. We are to consider whether indeed we have a reason to oblige us to be godly, yea or no; and especially is it incumbent upon us to defend this great principle and summary of all godliness, *The love of God*. For certainly if we must yield to the extinction of this principle, if a love to God may be banished from among us, we turn all our religion into nothing else, but a mere piece of pageantry. How vain and foolish, how absurd and ridiculous things were the forms of religion, which we keep up from time to time, supposing this great radical principle was to have no place nor exercise among us! To come together, and make a shew of devotion to him whom we do not love, nor think ourselves obliged to love, is nothing but inconsistency and contradiction. And those who come on such terms, as oft as they undertake to worship God, must needs offer nothing but the sacrifices of fools. But it is our business to defend this principle; to vindicate it against every thing that can be alleged against it by those who would excuse themselves from the obligation to this duty, from their not seeing God. And

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35 Hobbes.

36 [1 John v. 3.](#)

that we may the more fitly prosecute the present design, we shall endeavour to do these two things.

I. To shew the vanity and impertinence of this excuse for not loving God, to wit, our not seeing him.

II. To demonstrate the intolerable heinousness of this sin notwithstanding, and to shew its horrid nature though God is not visible to us. Because persons are apt upon this ground or reason either totally to excuse themselves, as if there were no iniquity at all in it; as there are multitudes of people who can pass over their days one after another, without any emotion of heart to love towards God at all: or else because if they cannot obtain of themselves against the clearest light to believe it is no sin; yet they would fain have it to be only a peccadillo, or a very little one. “God, say they, cannot expect much love from those, who cannot see him! or that such beings to whom he is invisible should mind him much, or concern themselves with him from day to day!” Therefore, I say, we shall endeavour both to shew, how most impertinently this is alleged as an excuse for not loving God, or how unreasonable it is to infer from his invisibility, that we are under no such obligation, and after that, to represent to you the hateful nature of the sin; or to shew, that if we love not God, it is not only a sin notwithstanding this pretence, but a most prodigious and horrid one too.

I. That we may evince to you the vanity of this excuse, or the impertinency of alleging that we are not obliged to love God, because we see him not, there are these two things that we charge this excuse with, and shall labour to make out concerning it; to wit, that it is both invalid and absurd. It is in valid, because it hath nothing in it which a valid excuse ought to have. And it is monstrously absurd, and draws most intolerable ill consequences after it, if such an excuse should be admitted in such a case.

1. I shall shew the insufficiency of this excuse, or that it is vain and hath nothing in it which a valid excuse should have. “We do not see God, therefore we are not concerned to love him.” This will easily be made out to you thus. Whenever any thing is charged upon us by a law, and the exception lies not against the authority of the lawgiver, but only the matter of the law as applied to us, no excuse can be valid in that case, but where the matter brought in excuse shall be able to prove one of these two things: either that what is enjoined, is in itself impossible to us, or at least that it is unfit and unreasonable to be expected from us. But our not seeing God can never infer either of these. It neither renders our loving him impossible; nor unfit and unreasonable, supposing it to be possible.

(1.) Our not seeing God doth not render our loving him impossible. This it is needful for us rightly to understand before we proceed any further. The thing that we intend to make out to you is, not that it is possible to us to love God by our own natural power. You have heard already enough to the contrary. He can never be truly loved by us, till the Spirit of love is given us; which is also at the same time a Spirit of power, and of a sound mind.

Till then, I say, it is impossible that any should love God. But when he implants this principle in us, he doth not therefore render himself visible to our bodily eye, which is the seeing here meant, for we must understand the word in the same sense in both parts of the test. All that we have to evince then is, that our not seeing God as we do our brother, does not make it impossible for us to love him. So that our present inquiry is not concerning the power, that gives the principle of love; but only concerning the means that should be made use of, in order to the begetting or planting that principle. Which being understood, the several considerations following will plainly evince to us, that our not seeing God doth not render it impossible for us to love him,

[1.] Consider that the sight of our eye is not the immediate cause, or inducement of love to any thing, but only a means to beget an apprehension in our minds of the loveliness of the object. And then it is, that is, upon the perception of this loveliness, that we are brought to love the object itself. For after the sight of the eye there must pass in the mind an act of the judgment upon the object, before we can be brought to love it; otherwise we should love or hate every thing that we see promiscuously, and not distinguish objects of love, from objects of hatred. It is only the apprehension of the mind, even in reference to objects of sight, that brings us to love them. If there be any other means of begetting an apprehension in our mind concerning such and such objects, that they are lovely and fit to be loved, it is not necessary that we should see them with our eyes. To this we add,

[2.] There are other sufficient means to possess our minds with an apprehension of the loveliness of an object, and more especially those objects that are never liable to the sight of our eye. We do not need to insist much on so plain a case. It is plain that there are sundry ways, by which the apprehension of the loveliness even of an invisible object, may come to have place in us; invisible at least so far as to be out of the reach of our eye. To be a little particular here:

There is, for instance, with respect to the unseen God naturally a divine impression upon the minds of men, by which, when they are put upon reflection, they must needs own that he is not only a lovely, but the most lovely and amiable Object, and has the best right to claim their love. Whosoever they are that do acknowledge a God,<sup>37</sup> must also read such attributes and properties of the being of God engraven there, importing that he is the first and supreme Object of our love. No one that acknowledgeth a God but presently acknowledgeth too, that he is good; that he is true; that he is holy; that he is wise; and the like. And then his own heart must tell him, whether he will or no, that he ought to be loved above all.

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<sup>37</sup> As Epicurus himself confesseth this to be a proleptic notion, that prevents every man's reason, so as that he needs not argue the matter with himself, but if he will but read what is written in his own soul, must read that there is a God. See mere of this in the Author's Living Temple, Part 1. Chap. 2.

Again, our own-reasonings from the manifest visible effects and characters of divine wisdom, and power, and goodness, that are to be seen every where, may also beget an apprehension or judgment in us that he should and ought to be loved. Do we live in a world full of the divine glory, that arrayeth and clotheth every thing we can cast our eyes upon; and do we want ground to perceive, that this is the lovely Object that ought to captivate all hearts, and draw into a closure with itself the will of every intelligent creature? Moreover,

The express testimony of the gospel is another means more apt still to beget this apprehension within us, that God is one we should love, and whose excellencies do every way entitle him, with a most indisputable right, to the highest degree and supremacy of our love. "No man hath seen God at any time." What then? Is it therefore impossible that he should be loved? Hath not "his only begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, declared or revealed him?" [John i. 18](#). Surely he hath made such a declaration of him, given such a prospect and view of him to the world, as that every one who will believe a God, and receive his report, must confess him to be the most amiable and excellent Being. Here all hearts ought to meet and unite; and this ought to be the universal centre of love. "He is in Christ reconciling the world to himself;" ([2 Cor. v. 19](#).) giving mankind a lovely prospect of himself. And in him, who is the Emmanuel, God with us, he is ready to communicate himself, and to draw souls into union with him, and to a participation of his own likeness and felicity. Who then is there but must acknowledge, that upon this representation he lays a just claim to our highest love? Finally,

There is also the inward revelation of the Holy Ghost, by which the want of seeing God is abundantly supplied. It is true, this Spirit of wisdom and revelation, by which we come to the practical knowledge of God so as to love him, is but the portion of a few. But it is in the mean time the great fault and wickedness of every one who seeks it not, values it not, and makes it not his business, with an earnest and restless importunity to sue for it till it is obtained. God hath given no man any cause to despair; but if he seek that Spirit, by which he may be so known as to be certainly loved, he hath given him ground to hope that he shall have that knowledge of him, which shall be efficacious of that love. God has given no ground to any to despair, or fear that they shall seek in vain; but as our Saviour says in this very case, If they seek, they shall find, for he is more ready to give the Holy Spirit, than parents are to give bread rather than a stone to their children, [Matt. vii. 7-11](#). And now that there are so many ways for conveying the apprehension into the mind, which is to be the immediate parent of love, to wit, that this Object is most amiable; it is most evident, that the not seeing God, doth not render it impossible for him to be loved. And we may further consider to this purpose,

[3.] That in sundry cases besides, other means than sight, do suffice to convey such apprehensions into the mind, as to excite and raise proportionable affections in the soul. Then why should it not be so in this case? For what can any man say why he ought not to be moved

by such apprehensions concerning God, as are by other means brought into his mind than by sight? What! do you love nothing? do you never find your hearts taken with any thing but that which your eyes have seen? Is it an impossible thing, or what your ears never heard of, for a person to love only upon report, as being informed of such, and such excellencies and perfections in the object? Have not many been taken with the description of a country they have not seen? Or do we think it impossible for a blind man to love his children, his wife, his friend? Do we imagine that such persons, because they can see nothing, can therefore love nothing? Do you not love your life? You cannot see that, but only in the effects; and in the effects also you may see the blessed God himself, who is the life of your life. And who can deny, that they have notions in their own minds of things that are altogether unliable to sight: which, if they will but ask themselves the question, they must acknowledge to be lovely, and which many are actually brought to love. For instance: the notions of truth; the abstract ideas of this, and that, and the other virtue; things that are never discoverable by the eye; who that considers, but must acknowledge a loveliness in them? And how many in fact are brought into a real and hearty love with such fair and orderly contextures of truth, when they see things do well cohere and hang together? The ideas of justice, fortitude, humility, patience, temperance; how many are there that do really love and admire these virtues though they only perceive the beauty and usefulness of them by the mind, and in their effects?

So then it is no impossible thing that there may be that apprehension in the mind concerning God, upon which he shall be confessed to be lovely, and that he ought to be loved though he is never to be seen. The case is the same as to other affections, and there is a parity of reason between them. If it were impossible to love any thing but what one sees, we are proportionably incapable of fearing, hating, or admiring any thing but what we see. But let any one ask himself the question, whether he is not many times offended at the mention of things he doth not see: and whether his heart is not really afraid of things as yet invisible; or whether he hath not been many times raised into an admiration of sundry things, of which he has only heard the report. And again, I add in the next place,

[4.] That many persons have lived in this world in bodies of flesh as we do, exercising a holy love to God, notwithstanding they never saw him. Therefore it is no impossible thing; for *Quod fieri potuit, potest*, what has been, maybe: according to the old maxim. Do we think that there have been no lovers of God in the world, who have lived in bodies and depended on sense as we do? God knows there have been but few, in any time or age of the world; yet have there not been some who have loved him, and have not loved their lives unto the death for his sake? What professions of love, what raptures of phrase and expression do we find many times in Scripture from those whose hearts were full of, and overflowed with love? When the fire burned within, it could not be withheld from flaming out. "I will love thee, O Lord my strength," says David; and again, "I love the Lord," that is from my very bowels,





“because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.”<sup>38</sup> How full are the psalms of these expressions! and we must suppose the Psalmist to be full of an answerable sense. “As the hart panteth for the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God! My soul fainteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?”<sup>39</sup> How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts?<sup>40</sup> One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to be hold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.<sup>41</sup> For whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.”<sup>42</sup>

Such expressions as these verbal ones, and some significantly real actions and sufferings on the account of love to God, will not suffer us to doubt but that there have been true lovers of God, whatever there are in our days. And it is to be hoped, that there is some even now. However it is to be feared, that there are persons in the world who are heartily grieved, and vexed at the very heart, that there should be such expressions as these now mentioned, in those writings which they think it convenient to acknowledge as divine. For if they did not think thus, how loudly and clamourously would David and those who speak such words, have been cried out upon; and perhaps be charged with being fanatics and enthusiasts, as much as any in our days!

And that an unseen God should be loved, and an unseen Christ, who is also out of sight, is spoken of in Scripture not only as the true character, but the high glory of Christian believers. “Whom having not seen,” says St. Peter, “ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”<sup>43</sup> This is not barely affirmed, concerning these primitive Christians, but spoken of them as their high praise and encomium; as being a discovery of the refinedness, excellency, and greatness of their spirits, who could so far lift up themselves above sense and sensible things, as to place their highest and most vigorous love upon an unseen Object. That was glorious joy, and glorious love, placed upon what was not seen; a deserving Object, at least believed to be such, though not seen.

And so it is we know that the blessed God becomes visible. “By faith Moses endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”<sup>44</sup> The word of God is a representation of himself, and makes report of all the glorious excellencies belonging to him. Among the rest this is his peculiar

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38 Psalm xviii. 1. cxvi. 1.

39 xlii. 1, 2.

40 lxxxiv. 1.

41 xxvii. 4.

42 lxxiii. 25.

43 1 Pet. i. 8.

44 Heb. xi. 27.

and distinguishing attribute, “that he cannot lie.”<sup>45</sup> His truth is one of those excellencies; therefore it is impossible that he should misrepresent himself, or say that he is other than he is. “For,” as the apostle says, “what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”<sup>46</sup> He sure can best tell what an excellent and glorious Being he is, and as he has told us he is such a one (which it was impossible he should do if he were not really possessed of those excellencies) then there is all the reason in the world to acknowledge, that he ought to be loved infinitely above all. And this hath been the sense of many, whose practice also hath been answerable to it; who have been in this world, living in tabernacles of clay and earth as we do. Therefore it follows, that it is no impossible thing that God should be loved, though he be not seen. And supposing it not impossible, then

In the next place it is easy to be proved also, that it is not unfit to love God, for that reason. Sundry suggestions might be used to enforce this, and afterwards the absurdities of this excuse might also be brought in view. Indeed I have had it most in my eye, to expose this absurd principle, that men have no need to concern themselves with things unseen; I would fain, I say, drive it out of the world. And if men would but examine it thoroughly, it would appear to them monstrously absurd. To do this therefore, and set it before their eyes, would be worth our time, and shall accordingly be done hereafter.

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45 [Heb. vi. 18.](#)

46 [1 Cor. ii. 11.](#)

## SERMON VI.<sup>47</sup>

UPON the latter part of the text lies the main weight of the discourse we have in hand. “How can he love God whom he hath not seen?” In which it is plainly implied, that we are still perpetually bound to love God, notwithstanding his being invisible. And the vehemence of the apostle’s expostulation here, implies it to be a most intolerable thing not to do so. And therefore we have observed,

That not to love God is a sin most horrid and heinous, notwithstanding the excuse that we see him not. Here we proposed in the

- I. Place to shew the vanity and impertinence of this excuse; and then,
- II. To demonstrate the heinousness of this sin, and its horrid nature.

In order to evince the impertinence of this excuse, there were two things which it was charged with; to wit, that it has nothing which a valid excuse should have; and if it could be admitted, it would draw the worst consequences after it.

1. It is insufficient, as we have observed, to allege this as an excuse for not loving God, that we see him not; because it is not for this reason impossible, nor unfit, that God should require this by a law.<sup>48</sup>

(1.) It is not impossible. For the sight of our eye is not the immediate cause of our loving any thing, but only the medium by which the mind discerns the loveliness of the object. For there are other means besides this of sight, to possess our minds with the love of certain things. And since there are such in the present case, which lead us to the love of God, and have actually led others to it, it is therefore possible to be done, and is by no means an improper thing to be the matter of a law. We now proceed

(2.) To shew that it is not an unreasonable law; or, that it cannot with any colour be pretended, that it was an unfit thing that God should lay a law upon men, dwelling in flesh as we do, obliging them to love an invisible being. We shall here first examine what can be pretended from God’s invisibility, to make it unfit to oblige men by a law to love him: and

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47 Preached September 27, 1676.

48 Here we shewed that if any thing be brought in excuse for not obeying the law, and the exception is not against the authority of the law-giver, but to the matter of the law, that which is alleged as a valid excuse, must be able to evince one of these two things: either that the thing enjoined by this law, is impossible to them on whom it is enjoined; or that at least though possible, yet it is unfit, and therefore unreasonable to be imposed. Neither of which will be admitted. It is indeed impossible to men considered under the reigning power of sin, and while they remain so. It is so only by a compound impossibility; as there is a compound necessity, by which a thing is said necessarily to be, while it is. But to love God though we see him not, is not a simple impossibility; for then it were impossible, that he should be loved by any one at all.

then lay down some considerations to evince, that it is most reasonable and fit that men should, notwithstanding, be under this obligation.

[1.] Let us examine what may be thought of as a pretence to the contrary, or alleged against the obligation of this law. Perhaps some may object against it after this manner: “The admitting what hath been proved, that it is no impossible thing that God should be loved by men who see him not; yet it doth not therefore follow that it is the fit matter of a law. Many things are possible, yet very unfit to be enjoined, especially those things which are unsuitable to the common inclination of a people. The wisdom of law-givers teacheth them to study the temper of their subjects, and to suit their laws to them; and it would be thought very unfit and improper to make laws, that should cross the common genius of the people; and to urge the observance of them. But now the dependance that we have upon sense, cannot but infer a disinclination to the love of such things as sight cannot reach, nor come within the sphere and cognizance of our senses. To apply this to the present case. Every man, by consulting himself, may find a disinclination in his own heart to the exercise of love to God. “And what!” hereupon may the sensualist say, “must I be obliged to a perpetual war with myself? to run counter to all my most natural inclinations? to neglect the things which my own eyes tell me are lovely; and labour to love an invisible being, of whom I have none but cloudy thoughts, a very faint and shadowy idea? Who can imagine that I should be put into this sensible world, with such senses suitable thereunto, as I find about me; and that it must be expected from me that I must even renounce my senses, run counter to my very eyes, abandon the things which so presently court my love, and tell me so feelingly that they are delightful? In short, that I must retire from substantial good which I know, to seek after what appears to me as a dark shadow? and which whether there be any thing substantial in it, I know not?” Thus may the man devoted to sense pretend on such grounds, that God is not to be loved by such as we who dwell in bodies of flesh, and have so much dependence upon the things of sense. Well! let us examine this pretence a little, and see whether there is any thine in it to make the duty of loving God unfit to be imposed upon us in this our present state. And there are several things here to be considered in reference to this matter. As,

First. If we would have this inclination to signify any thing with relation to the fitness or unfitness of a law to be imposed upon us, we ought surely to examine whether that inclination be good or bad, and so judge. But can there be a worse inclination in any creature than to disaffect the Author and Original of its own being? And by how much the stronger the inclination is to evil, by so much the greater is the wickedness likely to prove. For do not we think every one more wicked as he is the more wickedly inclined, especially when he indulges his wicked inclinations? Doth not his evil inclination, I say, when indulged, add to, and not detract from his wickedness? If one be found to have killed another, the great thing inquired into, is the inclination indulged, the intention; whether or no it was through

malice propense. If he did the thing without the design of ill to the party, without inclination or propensity to such an action, he is looked upon as innocent. An unintended fact is not punishable as a crime. Therefore to allege inclination in this case, is but to excuse one wickedness by another.

Secondly. Consider what would become of this world, if men were to be ruled only by their own inclination, or if that were to be the only rule by which all laws relating to them were to be measured. What a dreadful state would you be in, if it were permitted to any man to rob, murder, rifle away your goods and destroy your lives, only because he is inclined to it? if every one might take from you what he would, and do any imaginable mischief to you or yours, merely because he hath a mind to it!

And whereas the disaffection to God is very common, and rooted and confirmed in men by their being disused to converse with things above the reach of their senses (which might tend to invite their hearts and attract their affections) how horrid a thing were it if such a vicious custom were to obtain the force of a law! or, if men were to be allowed to do so and so wickedly, only because they have been wont so to do! if the oftener the swearer, the drunkard, the fornicator and the murderer, have indulged their respective vices, the more lawful it should be for them to continue such practices! if men, in a word, should be so far a law to themselves, as to be permitted to do whatsoever they have been used to do! or, as Seneca says, if a reasonable creature should go like a sheep, not the way he ought, but that which he has been used to; what, I say, can be more unreasonable and unfit than this?

Thirdly. It must be considered, that though it is the wisdom of a ruler to regard the inclinations of a people in making laws, yet sure there must be a distinction made between things indifferent and things necessary. But is there any thing of higher and more absolute necessity than the love of God, though we see him not? Doth not our experience tell us, that we stand in need of somewhat that we do not see, in order to the continuance of our being? much more in order to our happiness. If you had nothing but what you see to maintain life, do you think it were possible for you to live another moment? I would appeal to the considerate reason of any man, whether he were not to be thought a madman that should say, "I will be alive the next hour?" Man! there is somewhat in visible and unseen that is the continual Sustainer of thy life; "in whom we all live, and move, and have our being." [Acts xvii. 28.](#) Our own experience must convince us of this, that there is an invisible Being which hath dominion over our lives, otherwise every man could measure his own time. But do not we find men die before they are willing, and when they would fain live longer? Why, it is somewhat unseen that imposes this necessity upon them, "Here thou must expire!" No man hath power over the spirit to retain it, neither hath he power in the day of death. [Eccles. viii. 8.](#)

And again, is it at all necessary to us to be happy? Our own experience tells us that we are not as yet happy and satisfied. And common experience tells all the world, that all the

things they can see and set their eyes upon, can never make them happy in this world. And if we expect to be happy in another, when will our eyes lead us to heaven? when will sense, inclination, and following the customs of this world bring us to blessedness? It were a dreadful thing, if in a matter of so absolute necessity, custom or inclination were to be the measure of the law which must govern us. And again,

Fourthly. I add in the next place, that it is true indeed that rulers do consider the tempers and inclinations of a people under their legislature. And there is good reason they should do so, and not impose unnecessarily upon the people, things of mere indifferency, and so run the hazard of urging them into tumults about matters of very little consequence. But sure there is no such need or reason that the great Author and Lord of all things should so much concern himself what the inclinations of those are whom he is to govern. If they dislike his laws, and have an inclination to tumultuate or rebel against him let their dislike and inclination be as strong as it will, He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh, and have them in derision; when they say, Let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us. [Psalm ii. 3, 4.](#)

Fifthly. There is a very great difference in the consideration of laws already made, and of laws to be made. This law was made for man when he was no way disinclined to the love of God. It is a law as ancient as his being. He had it as soon as he had the nature of man. It is therefore a, part of the law of nature, and one of the most deeply fundamental things in that law; for it is made the summary, and wraps up all laws whatsoever in itself; for all is fulfilled in love. And what! was it reasonable or fit that this law, so suitable at first to the nature of man, should be then repealed, when he thought fit to break and violate it? That were a strange way of superseding the obligation of a law, that as soon as it is transgressed, it should oblige no longer! Then may any subject be a sovereign; since there would be no need of any thing more to make a law cease to oblige him, than for him to disobey it.

Sixthly. Consider that our not seeing God is so far from having a necessary tendency to preclude the love of him, that if things were with men as they should be, and as they have been with some in the world, it would very much promote our loving him. For though we cannot see him, yet we see many things that are great arguments, and should be powerful inducements to us to love him. It is true we do not see God with our bodily eyes, but we see the effects of his wisdom, his goodness, his mercy and patience every where; and of his mighty power over all, especially over those who are for God and lovers of him.

If we take a view, as we can do with these eyes, of the beautiful and glorious works of his creation, we continually be hold in the visible things that are made, the invisible power and Godhead, ([Rom. i. 20.](#)) which we are called upon to adore and love. And in the works of his providence and the ways of his dispensations towards men great arguments of love do daily occur. And into what raptures of affection do we find holy souls transported even by the help of their own eyes! the things seen, representing to them the great unseen Object



of love. In what an extasy do we find David, upon the view of the beauty and glory of this creation! “How excellent is thy name in all the earth, O Lord our Lord, who hast set thy glory above the heavens!” What put him into this rapture? The sight of his own eyes. He beheld “the heavens the work of God’s hands, the moon and stars which he had ordained;” and therefore as he begins, so he ends the psalm in a transport; “How excellent is thy name in all the earth!” [Psalm viii.](#) And thus our own eyes may serve to be our instructors, and prompt us to the love of him the great Author and Original of all that glory, which we find every where diffused in this world.

The viewing God also in the ways of his providence, how hath it excited the love of holy men sometimes! When Moses and the children of Israel had seen that marvellous work of the sea divided, themselves conducted and brought safe through it, the waters made a wall on the right hand and on the left, and their enemies dead on the sea-shore, how did this set love on work in them! how is the blessed God adored and admired upon the account of what their eyes had seen of him! “Who, say they, is a God like unto thee? Who is like to thee among the gods, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” [Exod. xv. 11.](#) And after the people of God had seen that great salvation wrought that we find recorded in the fourth chapter of Judges, what a mighty raisedness of heart do we find in the next chapter, all shut up in this. “So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord, but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.” [Judges v. 31.](#) Here was love set on work and raised to the height, so as even to pour out blessings upon all the lovers of God. What a phrase of benediction is that, “Let all that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might!” which proceeded from the view of his excellent greatness.

So that this pretence, that God is not seen, doth not make it unreasonable or unfit that the duty of love to him should be imposed upon men by his law. They are not for this reason necessarily disinclined to love him, and therefore this excuse for not loving him is neither reasonable nor fit, nor can exempt men from the obligation, as the objection supposes. Let us then see,

[2.] What can be alleged to prove, that the love of God is most fit and reasonable to be the matter of a standing and in dispensable law. And to this purpose, in order to shew how reasonable this is, we shall only note in general, that if any should object against the fitness of loving God on this ground, because he is not seen, and affirm that for this reason men should not be required to love him; what they have to say in this case, if it signifies any thing to the purpose, must be as strong an objection in all cases of like consideration, and must at last come to this; that it is unreasonable and unfit that men should be affected with any thing they cannot see. But the falshood hereof, and the reasonableness of this injunction upon men may be gathered from this fourfold consideration; to wit, that we may be as sure of the objects of the mind, as we can be of the objects of our sight; that those of the former sort are generally more excellent; that we are concerned in them, as much at least, and in



many of them infinitely more, than in the others; and finally, that what can only be the object of the mind may be more intimately present with us, than those things which are the objects of sense. And if we can make out all these, which I hope we may, then it must be concluded that God is so much the more to be loved, yea infinitely more than any thing our eye can see or make a discovery of.

First. We may be as sure of the real existence of the objects of our mind, as we can be of any objects of our sight; or in other words, we may be as certain of the existence of invisible beings, as of visible ones. We may frame a notion of their existence with as much assurance; and form certain conclusions concerning their nature, though they are invisible to the bodily eye. We may especially be most sure of the existence of God, though we cannot see him; more indeed than we can be generally of the existence of visible things.

Sometimes the objects of our mind and sight meet in one, there is somewhat visible and somewhat invisible. As for instance, in actions that are capable of moral consideration, there is the action itself, and there is also the rectitude or irrectitude of that action. Now here is at once an object of my sight and of my mind; and I may be as certain of the one, as of the other, in many instances. As, suppose I see one strike, wound, or kill an innocent person; or, suppose I see one affront a magistrate," injuriously or barbarously; here I have the object of my eye and mind at once. That the action was done I am certain, for I saw the stroke; and I am no less sure of the affront, though that be an object of the mind. As soon as I see such an action done, do not I apprehend it to be ill done? Is not the thing which my mind apprehends, as real as that which my eyes see? Am I not as sure that it was ill done, as that the action was done at all? though the one falls under my eye, and the other only under the cognizance of the mind.

Again, if we look no further than ourselves, our own frame and composition, we may be as certain of the existence of what we see not, as of what we do see. We have a body. We are sure we have a body, for we can see it. It is many ways the object of our senses, or the external organs that are planted there. But we cannot see our minds, yet I hope we are nevertheless sure that we have minds. We are as certain that we have somewhat about us that can think, can understand, as we are that we may be seen and felt. I go not about to determine now what it is that thinks whether material or not, mortal or not; but every man that will consider, is as sure that he has a mind which he cannot see, as that he has a body which he can see.

To bring this matter home to our present purpose concerning the supreme invisible Being, the blessed God. It is most apparent that we may be as certain of his existence as of any thing; and unspeakably more certain of his constant existence, than we can be of any being whatsoever. There is no man that will use his understanding, but must allow this. For, suppose an object of sight before me, I am certain that it doth exist; for I see it. Now the following conclusion may be as certain to any one that considers, to wit, something is,





therefore something hath ever been. I will appeal to any understanding man, whether this be not as certain as the other. For if we should suppose a time when nothing ever was, when nothing existed, any man's understanding must tell him, it was impossible that any thing should ever have been, Suppose a season when nothing was, and then was it possible any thing of itself should arise out of that nothing, when there was nothing at all conceivable? that a thing should be before it was, and do something when it was nothing? Therefore it is hence most necessarily consequent, that there must needs be some original, eternal Being, subsisting of itself, that was always and never began to be; and therefore was necessarily, and so can never cease to be.<sup>49</sup>

Let this be but weighed, and let any sober understanding judge, whether this conclusion be not as certain as the former. That is, compare these two conclusions together, I see something, therefore something is; and this also, something is, therefore something hath ever been, some original Being that always was of itself, and could not but be. A man, I say, feels as great a certainty in his own mind concerning this, as concerning the other. He must renounce his understanding as much in one case, as his eyes in the other, if he will not grant this to be certain, that as some beings now exist, there has been always an original, self-existing Being.

And then supposing the existence of the thing already, I may form as certain conclusions concerning the attributes of what I cannot see, as of that which I can see. To apply this also to the invisible, eternal Being: look to any visible thing, and your eyes can tell what are its visible accidents. I look upon the wall, and see it is white. I know it is so, because I see it is so. Cannot I as certainly conclude concerning this original, eternal Being, that he is wise, holy, just and powerful? I know that there is such a thing as wisdom, and justice, goodness, and power in the world. I know that these things are not nothing, and that they did not come out of nothing; therefore they must needs originally belong to the original Being. Is not this as certain, and as plain, as any visible accident of any thing is to a man's eye? Must not these attributes necessarily first be in God, as in their original Seat and proper Subject? yea, a great deal more certainly, than any kind of quality we can suppose to be lovely in the creature can agree to it: because as for the original Being, that existed of itself; and therefore is necessarily and by consequence eternally, and invariably whatever it is. Therefore since these perfections are originally in God himself, or derivations from him, what should rationally keep a man in suspense, when by the intervention of his mind he sees such an invisible object, but that he should fall in love with that, as well as with any visible object, that commends itself as lovely to the sight. And I should next add,

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<sup>49</sup> This argument is urged at large, with great force and strength in the Author's admirable Treatise, entitled the Living Temple. Part 1, Chap. 2.

Secondly, That invisible excellency is infinitely greater than any visible excellency can be. As there is a reality in unseen things, and especially in this invisible Object, as much as in any thing we see with our eyes; so there is generally a higher excellency in invisible objects, than in those that are visible, and infinitely more in this than in other invisible objects. But this and the other considerations I cannot reach to now.



## SERMON VII.<sup>50</sup>

THE SECOND head of discourse which we are still upon Is this, That men are not released from the obligation to love God though he be invisible; and that it is not only an evil, but a most horrid and intolerable one too, not to love him, notwithstanding the excuse that we cannot see him. And this, as we observed, you have from the plain words of the text; inasmuch as all the force of the apostle's reasoning depends upon it. For he is endeavouring to evince how unreasonable it is we should not love one another, because upon this would ensue that infernal thing our not loving God; rather than admit which, it is supposed that men would admit any thing. For the prosecution of this truth we proposed to evince, in the first place, that this is a very vain excuse:<sup>51</sup> and have already shewn from many considerations, that it is not impossible to love God in these bodies of flesh, wherein we have such a dependence on the senses; neither is it unreasonable, or unfit that it should be enjoined as a duty. Against the contrary principle we have designed to insist on sundry considerations, and have observed already in the

First place, that we may be as sure of the existence of many invisible beings, especially of God, as we are of any that are visible. This we have shewn, and also that it is as easy to form conclusions respecting the nature of the former, as it is of the latter. Both these we laboured to evince from several instances: and concluded with observing to this effect, that since all perfections are originally in God, which we may discern by the intervention of the understanding, therefore it is as reasonable to love him, as any visible object how lovely soever; and more so indeed, because he is eternally and invariably the same. For, to add something further on this head,

I see and converse often with such or such a person, who because of certain amiable qualities that I discern in him, hath attracted and drawn my love: but I am never sure those qualities will remain in him always. I know not whether they be of that kind, yea or no, that they will remain. But I most certainly know, that he will not always remain with me the conversable object of my love. And therefore if sense, if the sight of what is lovely in him be the only ground of my love to him, I could never have loved him longer than my eye could see him. For as soon as he is gone out of my sight, I know not but he is gone out of being, out of the world, and so the object of my love may be quite lost. But I know that the eternal Being doth exist necessarily, and always. It is impossible that God should ever not exist, or ever be other than he was: and therefore if loveliness and amiableness were found there at any time, it is to be found there at all times; without variableness and shadow of change, yesterday, and to-day the same, and for ever.

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50 Preached October 4, 1676.

51 See page 46.

And now upon all this, since it is very plain and evident, that we may be as certain concerning what we see not, as concerning what we do see; as sure of the existence of invisible, as of visible being; and more especially about the nature and existence, (as far as concerns us) of the blessed invisible God; it is plain that there our love ought to have its exercise, as much as any where else, supposing such excellencies to be found in the invisible things, as may equally recommend the object to our love. Therefore we add,

Secondly: That, invisible things are really of far higher excellency, than those which are visible. As the things that we cannot see have as certain a reality as those that we can see; so, I say, they are of higher excellency: and this blessed invisible Object infinitely more excellent, as we must acknowledge, while we acknowledge him to be God. If we speak of such things as lie within the compass of our being, how plain is the case and how evident the inference! Sure the invisible world must needs be of incomparably greater excellency and glory, than the visible world. And if you reduce all kinds of being in the whole universe to these two ranks and orders, visible and invisible; certainly the latter must be unspeakably more excellent.

We who are for our parts set in the confines of both worlds, visible and invisible; we in whose very nature both meet, unite, and touch one another, and are as it were comparted together; we who are of a nature partly visible, partly invisible, partly flesh and partly spirit, or as the language of Plato's school was, *Νοῦς χοῦς*, mind and dust united into one compound; surely we should not be partial in our judgment of this case. Who should be impartial if we are not, who are set as a middle sort of creatures between the two worlds, and so are capable of looking into, and surveying the one and the other?

And if we contemplate both, even in ourselves, methinks it should be no difficult thing with us to determine which is of greater excellency, this bulk of flesh, or this spirit which inhabits it, and keeps it from being a dead lump, an useless, rotten, putrid carcass. Yea, if we should suppose the body of a man to be animated by some inferior vital principle to that of a reasonable spirit, yet this would be the more excellent part. It is true, we should then have before our eyes a certain sort of human brute, of which kind there are but too many in our age, at least that live and carry it as such. We should in short, to speak plainly, have somewhat before our eyes that wore the mere shape of a man, and could hear, and see, and smell, and taste, and move to and fro this way or that, and must ere long, after a few turns are fetched about, turn to dust, to rottenness, and corruption. But suppose we a spirit separately, such as is wont to animate a human body: here we have to contemplate something that can think, reason, and understand; that can form abstract notions of things, or compare one thing with another; something that can reflect upon itself, which our eye cannot do; that can control and correct the errors of sense; that can run through the vast compass of known things; is capable of solving problems and difficult questions; of laying down principles and maxims of truth, after having weighed and found them firm, so as that they may pass current:



for such there are which pass unquestionably every where for undoubted principles. In a word, we have here a kind of being to contemplate, that is capable of taking up what lies within the compass of philosophy, policy, and the whole human orb of learning; of being instructed in all the great mysteries of mechanical skill of every kind; and in short, that can turn itself every way; and is of a nature unperishable and immortal, not liable to, nor capable of corruption, but must last for ever and always endure. Who now would make any difficulty of owning, that this is a far more excellent thing than the other? this spirit, than that shape of a man which merely lives? But yet even this more excellent creature which we have been supposing, is somewhat diminished, and falls beneath a brighter order of beings, by its being proportioned to a human body. And upon this account man is said to be a little lower than the angels,<sup>52</sup> at least this is one account that may be given of this passage; for it is a diminution of the spirit of a man, that it is proportioned to its habitation, the body. But then consider those purely intellectual creatures, of whom we know not how to form a notion, which shall be more expressive than to call them Intelligences; inasmuch as they are, as far as we can apprehend them, beings of knowledge and light, and also of goodness and love proportioned to that light of theirs; what can match the excellency of such creatures as these, among the whole sphere of visible beings?



But let us further consider how vastly numerous that order of creatures is, as we may very well suppose, and partly collect from intimations of Scripture, where they are said to be innumerable. “The innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect.”<sup>53</sup> How much of glory and excellency must then be in the invisible world, beyond what we can possibly conceive of in this lower visible region! If we do but bethink ourselves and consider what a mere punctilio, a little point, this earth is in which we dwell, in comparison of that vast expanse that doth surround and encompass it about; how unspeakably, how inconceivably more numerous must we suppose the inhabitants to be, that replenish those vast superior regions quite out of sight, than those which inhabit and replenish this point of earth? How vast, I say, must we suppose the invisible world to be, if we consider the number of its inhabitants who are parts of God’s creation, whom we have reason to think do competently replenish all those vast regions that are, when our eye has gone as far as it can, far more exceeding the reach of our thoughts. What limits can we set to the creation of God in our most enlarged thoughts? Finite we must suppose it to be, but alas, we are never capable of measuring the bounds! And we have reason to believe it is every where replenished with such glorious invisible creatures as we speak of, in comparison of whom all the inhabitants of the earth, that ever where or shall be, are but an inconsiderable handful.



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52 [Psalm viii. 5.](#)

53 [Heb. xii. 22.](#)

Are we not then to think that the invisible world is far more excellent than that which is visible?

But then if we ascend to the great Author of all things, the blessed invisible Object that we are concerned to speak about, that vast profound abyss of all excellencies, perfection, and glory, how much more must we conclude there is of excellency in that sort of being in general which is invisible, than in that which is visible! If we consider him inhabiting his own eternity, if we consider his immensity who was before all time, whom “heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain,”<sup>54</sup> every where existing, and never not existing; in whom there is an infinite fulness, a rich fountain of being, life, wisdom, power, goodness and holiness, and whatsoever we can conceive under the notion of excellency and perfection: to think of such a Being that was every where before all time was, and continuing to be the same when time shall be no more, where no worlds are, and where never any shall be, replenishing all the space that we can imagine, and that we cannot imagine, all, every where, and eternally full of being, life and glory! what an object have we now to contemplate, and think of in the invisible order of beings! And what? would we confine all excellency as well as reality to this little, minute, inconsiderable earth! the things that sense can reach unto! As if our senses were to be the measure of all excellency, perfection and reality, and it was the same thing for any thing to be nothing, or at least worth nothing, as to be out of our sight.

How unreasonable were such an imagination as this! And indeed well might we be ashamed, and count it a reflection upon our profession of the Christian name, that we may so of ten read Pagans discoursing in transports of the Intellectual Pulchritude, of the beauty and excellency of mental and invisible things; while our hearts, in the mean time, are taken with nothing but what our eyes can reach to see, or our senses judge of. With what raptures do some of them speak of the first pulchritude, and the self-pulchritude, or that which is lovely of itself. Plato in particular calls him, “The Being that is with itself, always agreeing to itself always existing uniformly, never varying from itself, and lasting always.” Thus he speaks of the first ORIGINAL BEAUTY, meaning the great Object that we now speak of, to wit, the invisible God. But what a degeneracy is it to measure the objects of our love by the sight of the eye! whereas there is nothing fair or good, as philosophers speak, but what hath its derivation from the first pulchritude; or as it hath a kind of precarious beauty and comeliness derived to it from him, who is the first and original Beauty. If then we seriously bethink ourselves of this, we cannot but acknowledge that the prime Object of our lovelies among the invisible things. If we will but use our thoughts, we must say thus: this, I say, must be the conclusion, if we will not profess brutality, and renounce our humanity; that is, deny that we are human and reasonable creatures.

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54 1 Kings iii. 27.

But because here it may possibly be said, “That admitting there be so great excellency and glory in the invisible sort of beings, yet we are to love where we are concerned; we are to place our love among things with which we have to do, and upon which we have dependence; but how little can we have to do with things invisible, and out of our sight?” Therefore I add,

Thirdly: We are a great deal more concerned about invisible, than visible things. They are of much more importance to us, as well as of greater excellency considered in themselves. It will certainly be found one day, that faith, holiness, humility, meekness, mortifiedness to this world, a mastery over insolent and brutish passions, tranquillity, peace, and composure of spirit, those great ornaments of the hidden man of the heart, are of unspeakably more concernment, than all the things of the visible world besides. These are of greater importance to our present comfort, and to our future and eternal well-being, than whatsoever our senses can bring to our notice. But the invisible God is so most of all, who is infinitely beyond and above all.

And what! will any pretend, that they have no concern with God, because they cannot see him? no concern with him, “in whom we live, and move, and have our being, and in whose hand our breath is,” without whom we cannot move a hand or lift a foot, or think a thought, or live a moment? Have we no concern with him? none in this present state? Or are we the less concerned with God, because we see him not? May we not be convinced, if we will allow ourselves to think, that it is some what invisible, which our life and being depend upon? For we know ourselves to be depending beings. We do know and feel, yea our own thoughts and hearts must instruct us in this, that we are not self-subsistent. We have not in our own hands the measure of our time, nor the command of our own concernments. We find ourselves controled and over-ruled in many things every day. There are many thousands of things that we would have otherwise, if we could tell how. There is something invisible to which we owe our breath, and that hath dominion over us, whether we mind it or not. And have we no concern with that Being, which hath such immediate power over our lives, and all our comforts, in this present state and world? But what talk we of measuring our concernments by this present state? Have not our own souls a secret consciousness in them, that they are made for eternity? for a world where they are to be perpetual inhabitants, after a little short time is over? And have we not therefore now in this life, most to do with invisible things, especially with the great invisible Lord, both of the visible and invisible creation?

We should soon know ourselves to be most concerned with what is invisible, and most of all with God, if we would but understand the state of our case. We know ourselves to be creatures. We did not come into this world of our own choice, or by our own contrivance. We made not ourselves, neither was it the object of our choice, whether we would be of this or that rank or order of creatures; but were put into that rank of beings wherein we are, by a superior and higher hand. Yea considering what sort of being it is we have, and what a



nature the great Author and Parent of all nature hath furnished us with, it is easy for us by a little reflection to come to this knowledge, that we are not what he made us; that we are fallen creatures as well as reasonable ones; that we have incurred the displeasure of him that made us; that we are absolutely at his mercy; that there is such a darkness and blindness upon our minds and understandings, and such a stupidity and death possessing our very souls, that can never be supposed to have been in the first formation of such a creature by the hands of God. Lastly, we may find, that we are become impure and corrupt; that there are per verse sinful inclinations and affections, which we ourselves can-? not but disapprove of, and disallow upon reflection: and that hereby we are under a very egregious guilt, and so subject to wrath and eternal punishment. If we would but allow ourselves to consider this as our state, we should soon know that we have more to do with the invisible God, than with all the world of visible things. Yea further, how amiable would he appear in our eyes, if we did but understand ourselves! if we would but take notice what dark, blind creatures we are, how would it recommend him to us, who is represented as the light of our eyes, and the life of our hearts! In a word, if we would but consider what deformed creatures we are, how impure, and alluding to the expression in Job,<sup>55</sup> so plunged in the ditch, that our own clothes might abhor us, Oh how delectable would the thoughts of him be! how lovely would he be in our eyes that brings such overtures of purification to us! I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness; and from all your idols will I cleanse you.<sup>56</sup> And he that offers this, will certainly effect it in all those, who are designed for a blessed commerce with him for ever, in order to make them perfect in his own comeliness.

Then again, if we consider how liable we are to his wrath, how fast bound with the cords of our own guilt, how amiable would that notion and name of God be to us, which was proclaimed to Moses, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.”<sup>57</sup> But we measure things by the sight of our own eye, because we will not allow ourselves to take any cognizance of the true state of our own case. Whereas if we did but consider the matter, and give ourselves leave to think and inquire, we should know there are things which concern us unspeakably more, that are out of sight, than what come under our view day by day; and that especially we are most concerned with him who is least in our sight, and most remote from the view of our external eye. And then add to all this,

Fourthly: That invisible things are a great deal more capable of being intimate to us, or we may be infinitely more conversant with them, than it is possible for us to be with things that are seen. We love a friend whom we have often seen; and it may be, the oftener we have

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55 [Job ix. 31.](#)

56 [Ezek. xxxvi. 25.](#)

57 [Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.](#)



seen him the more we love him. But we cannot be with this friend always. The dearest friends must part. We cannot have him perpetually in our bosom to converse with in a friendly manner. A great many things must concur to the entertainment of our friends with delight, and to converse with them with pleasure. For instance, they must be in a pleasant humour, and at leisure for converse. We many times wait for visits, and they are not given; or we design them, but are disappointed. Messengers may be sent to this or that place, one after another; and yet two friends, that would converse, cannot be brought together. Besides, when we are conversing with such lower objects of our love, we must make use of speech, and are fain to employ words, those necessary but imperfect instruments, or media of conversation. But we cannot convey by words our full and clear apprehensions to others, so as to let them know all that we would have them know. And most of the controversies in the world, about matters of opinion in religion, do arise from hence, that men cannot be brought to understand one another. I cannot tell how to make another master of my thoughts, but one way or other the notion will be misrepresented, and so not lie so distinctly clear in another's mind, as it doth in his that would propagate it. But if we could this way infuse into them a full and clear knowledge of what we ourselves do intend, yet we cannot thereby infuse a living sense, nor convey the affections that are in our own bosoms to another by words.

But how intimately conversant may we be with the invisible God, and that blessed Spirit that understands not only our words, but our sighs and groans, and the living sense thereof that is unutterable. God can also be conversant with us whithersoever we go, wheresoever we are, so that as soon as we are minded to retire, we find him with us. As soon as we retire into ourselves with a design to converse inwardly with the living God, he is immediately present with us, and it is as easy to converse with him as with our own thoughts. As soon as we think, so soon are we with God, and as soon is he with us. In the twinkling of an eye we find him. We look unto him and are lightened. Thus with a cast of the eye the soul is filled; it finds itself replenished with a divine and vital light, that diffuseth the sweetest and most pleasant influences and savours through the soul.

Surely then, what is invisible, and most of all the blessed God, is most fit for our converse: an omnipresent God, who is every where present with us in the very first instant: so that there are no bodies, or other circumscribing circumstances to withhold and divert that commerce between him and us; but he is with us in our walking in the way, in our sitting down in our houses, in our lying down in our beds, in any wilderness, in any den or desert. Certainly it can be no way unfit, that he should be chosen for our converse, and for the great Object of our love, though we cannot see him. Our not being able to see him detracts nothing from the reasonableness of placing our love there, upon all these accounts. Therefore the pretence for our not loving God because he is invisible, is altogether insufficient, and carries nothing in it that a valid excuse should have to make it so. I should now proceed to



shew the intolerable absurdities of not loving God because he is invisible; but the time doth not give me leave to speak to them.



## SERMON VIII.<sup>58</sup>

HAVING in the three last discourses shewn the invalidity of the excuse for not loving God, drawn from his invisibility, we now proceed in the

2. Place, to evince more fully the obligation we are under to this duty, and to shew the intolerable absurdity of this excuse, that is, of pleading that we do not love God, only because we cannot see him.<sup>59</sup> For

(1.) It would infer, that we are to be affected or moved with no invisible thing whatsoever; or that nothing but what can strike our senses, ought to touch our hearts. For if this be a good reason in the present case, we do not love God because we cannot see him, wheresoever the case is alike, the reason will be so too; and so we are to be moved by nothing at all, but what is to be seen. No threatening danger then is to be feared or provided against, and no distant good to be cared for; and so our greatest concernments that should urge us more than all others, must be quite thrown aside. Our business for eternity and another world, the apprehensions of which, men cannot quite abolish out of their minds, must all stand still; and we live at such a rate that no man will be able to give a tolerable account what he liveth for, or what his business in this world is. For it is altogether inconceivable for what purpose such a creature as man is, should be here in this world, furnished with so much higher and nobler faculties than the brute beasts, and yet to do no other business but what they might do as well as we.

(2.) It would hence be consequent, that the blessed God would be everlastingly excluded our love, or that he could never be loved by his reasonable intelligent creature, for an eternal reason; because he can never be seen, as we see our brother with eyes of flesh. None of us in this sense can ever behold God; and if this reason be conclusive, to all eternity he must be excluded our love. And so it may be affirmed even of his reasonable creatures, "None do love him, nor ever shall." And again,

(3.) According to this way of reasoning, God would lose his interest in our love by the excellency of his nature. And how monstrously absurd is it, that by how much the more excellent an object is, so much the less it should be loved! For it is owing to the excellency of his nature and being, that God cannot be seen. And is it not a horrid consequence, that because he is so excellent as he is, therefore he is not to be loved? Nothing is more manifest, than that by how much the more excellent any thing is, so much the more it is remote from our sight. And shall this be admitted as a principle, that by how much the more excellent any thing is, the less it shall be loved? Shall God lose his interest in our love, merely because

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58 Preached October 11, 1676.

59 See Sermon V. p. 47.

he is so excellent and perfect as he is? or shall he for this reason be less loved than visible objects are? Again,

(4.) All commerce would hereupon cease, or rather never be, between the blessed God and his intelligent creature, at least all intellectual commerce suitable to such a creature. For if this were a good reason, He is not to be seen, therefore he is not to be loved, it would also follow, that he is not to be trusted, feared or obeyed. All which would infer, that God hath made an intelligent being with whom he can converse no way suitable to its nature, than which nothing can be thought more absurd. Further,

(5.) All differences of moral good and evil, in such a case, would be quite taken away, or all apprehensions of them, from among men. For the rectitude or irrectitude of actions is not to be judged of, nor discerned by the sight of our eye. We cannot by this means alone, tell whether this or that thing be right or wrong. And this by consequence would necessarily render mankind incapable of being governed by laws; because the reason why a law should oblige, doth not fall under any man's sight. The decency and fitness of a thing the eye does not reach; for to discern this is the business of the mind. And so it would be left altogether impossible for any one to assign a reason, why it should be more congruous to equity and justice for one to embrace his friend, than to murder him; why a man should relieve the poor who cannot help themselves, rather than oppress them; or why a man should not as well, and with as great reason and equity, affront a ruler, as obey him and be subject to his authority? So that in short you take away the foundation of converse with man, at the same time you take away the foundation of religious converse with God and invisible things. By this kind of argument you not only overturn the practice of godliness and piety, which is a great part of that love to God we ought to be exercised in, but you do as effectually by the same means destroy all civil commerce between man and man, howsoever related; and leave no foundation for human society, considering the members of it in relation to governors or rulers, and to one another. And

(6.) It would hence follow, that the original constitution of man's nature was made up of inconsistencies; nothing else but a piece of self-contradiction. That is, it would be necessary to do a thing, and yet at the same time impossible. It is necessary by the constitution of the human nature that man do love a known good, and therefore most of all the Supreme Good, which may be certainly known to be what it is, the absolutely best, the highest and most excellent Good, as hath been already shewn; and yet by this argument it would be impossible to do this. So absurd is this maxim or pretence, that we are not to be affected with invisible things, and are under no obligation to love God, because we see him not! In the last place,

(7.) It would also be consequent from hence, that man must be a creature from the very first, made only to be miserable. For it is impossible that sense should ever afford him relief against internal evils, or ever supply him with suitable and satisfying good. How then can he be otherwise than miserable?



Sense cannot afford him relief against internal evils, and no man can exempt himself from them, nor give himself any security that he shall never be invaded by such. Let there be never so great a calm, and according to his present apprehension let all things be never so well now; yet no man can assure himself, that he shall never meet with any inward pangs; that he shall never have cause to complain of the terrors of the Almighty besetting and overwhelming his soul, even ready to cut him off. These things have invaded as fortified breasts as any our age can afford; and no man knows when he is secure from them. And suppose they do invade a man, and conscience molested by known and often repeated wickedness does at length awake, and grow furious; pray where shall relief be had? Will the things of sense afford it? Will they ease such pangs, or work off agonies of this nature? In such a state of mind, for a man to feast himself with the objects of sense, or with that which pleases the eye, would be as impertinent as music to a broken leg, or fine clothes for the cure of a fever or an ulcerous body.

Nor can sense be the inlet to a man of any suitable or satisfying good. Let experience witness. To those who have all sensible enjoyments to the full, I would say, "Are you happy? Can you pretend to want any thing that sense can possibly supply you with to give pleasure to your spirits? Have you not what you would have? and yet can you say, All is full and well? "Undoubtedly what was the wise man's experience, would be every man's that were at leisure to consider the case; The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. [Eccles. i. 8](#). Sense, let it be gratified never so much, will still live unsatisfied, will be always craving and never contented. And therefore by this supposition it must needs be consequent, that man could be created for no other state, than a state of misery. But how absurd were it to suppose, that the God of all goodness had made a creature, whom it should be impossible, even to himself, to make happy! (for it is impossible to his nature ever to make himself visible to an eye of flesh) and that it should be only possible to terrify and torment his creature, but not to satisfy it and do it good! All these things do plainly evince that this excuse, to wit, we cannot love God, because we see him not, is not only insufficient, but also most absurd. Then, say we, it ought not to be admitted as an excuse at all, and men are still under an indispensable obligation to the love of God notwithstanding.

But here it may possibly be suggested to the thoughts of some, "Admit it to be a duty to love God, although we cannot see him. We acknowledge that his invisibility renders it not impossible nor unreasonable to love him; and therefore we see the excuse is insufficient, and that many inconveniencies and absurdities would ensue upon making it. But though it will be no entire excuse, yet it will sure be a great alleviation. And methinks the love of God in this world should not be so strictly urged; or though we should not live in the exercise of this duty, it should not be represented as so very great a crime." Therefore in answer to this we are to evince to you according to what was proposed.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See page 54.

II. The greatness and heinousness of the sin of not loving God, notwithstanding this excuse that we do not see him: that it not only leaves it a sin still, but a most horrid one. And this will appear if we consider sundry things that I have to mention to you, which will shew it to be injurious to ourselves and others, but chiefly to the blessed God himself, the great Author of our being.



1. It cannot but be a most horrid thing, inasmuch as it is a most injurious distortion of our natural faculties. And therein it is injurious even to ourselves, to our own nature, and to God the great Author and Parent of all nature, at once. For what do we think he has given us such faculties for, as we find the nature of man to be enriched with? Why hath he given us a mind, originally capable of knowing him, and that could once retain God in his knowledge; or a will that could then embrace him by love? It must needs be “very injurious perversion of our own faculties, to withhold and divert them from the prime, the best and highest use, whereof they were originally capable. And it is a very unaccountable thing that it should be thus, that man should have a power given him, originally ordained by the very designation of the God of nature to such and such purposes, and that it should never be applied there unto. Not to love God is to set those faculties one against the other, and both of them against him.

2. It is a most vile debasing of ourselves, and a sordid depression of our own souls. By love we most strictly join ourselves to that which is the object of our love, and enter into the closest and most inward union with it. And what is it that we love, while we love not God? Are not the things which our love terminates upon, such as we should even be ashamed to think of separately and apart from him? What is there that is not base, when severed from God, or if we do not eye and consider him in it? We cannot conceive of any creature whatsoever, not even of the best and most noble, but as of a most horrid idol, if made the terminative object of our love, taken apart from God, and not considered or regarded in subordination to him who is supreme. And as to the mind and spirit of a man, there is nothing that so defiles it, that renders it so impure as spiritual idolatry does. A vile and filthy thing, that the spirit of a man should be alienated from God, and prostituted to an idol! For we make any thing so, that we make the supreme object of our love. And so in effect we join ourselves to vanity, as idols are wont to be called; to that which is not only vain, but by this means made odious and loathsome.

And how deep a resentment should this be to us, that so excellent a thing as the spirit of man, God’s own offspring, should suffer so vile a dejection! that it should be depressed and debased unto such meanness as to join itself to vanity and dirt, when it might be united with the God of glory, with the fulness and excellency of the Deity; yea, and when it is apparent, that by the original designation of that nature he hath given us, we were at first made capable thereof! For how came we by that love which we find in our nature? We plainly see we can love somewhere? While we love not God there is something or other that we do love;



yea and it is altogether impossible to our nature, not to love something or other. And hath he “planted a vineyard and shall he not eat of the fruit thereof?” 1 Cor. ix. 7. He hath planted that love in our natures which we have made vile, by alienating it from him, and which may yet be made a sacred thing by being sanctified and turned upon God again. For it is the object and a suitableness thereunto, wherein consists the sanctification of the affections. And again,

3. Not to love “God is a most merciless self-destruction. It is a divulsion of ourselves from him who is our life. It is to rend our souls from the Supreme Good, and so abandon ourselves by our own choice unto misery. How infamous among men is the name of a *felo de se*, one that hath done violence to his own life, and perisheth by his own hands! Though the nature of the thing doth exempt him from personal punishment in this world; yet you know that human laws do very severely animadvert upon, and punish the crime as far as the matter can admit. Juries are impanelled, a strict inquiry is made into the nature of the case. “What did he do it voluntarily? was he *compos sui*? did he understand himself when he did it?” And if this be found to be the case; his goods are confiscated, and his memory branded with all the infamy that can be devised. And there is a great deal of reason for it. For the wrong that is done does not terminate upon himself, or his own relatives; but the prince is wronged, being robbed of a subject; and the community is wronged also, being deprived of one that otherwise might have been a useful member.

No man, as I remember Cicero somewhere speaks, *Nemo sibi nascitur, is born for himself*. Many claim a part in us besides ourselves, to wit, our prince, our country, and our friends. And when one destroys himself, many are injured by that self-destruction. And though some heathens have spoken of self-destruction as a very noble and generous act, yet Plato who had more light (speaking, as I remember, to this very case) says, “We are here in the body like soldiers in a garrison, who are not to stir out without the general’s order and direction; no more may any one dare to go out of the body, till the great Ruler of the world, who hath placed him there, gives him leave, or a call.” And he appeals to men themselves. “If you” (saith he) “had a slave that should kill himself, would you not say he had wronged you, as well as himself, who had an interest in him and his service?” And what! do we think all this while that God’s dominion is less over our spiritual and eternal being? over these souls of ours that are capable of being employed in his love and praise eternally? And is not this injurious to him, that men, who are naturally capable of all this, should yet throw themselves off from God, and cast themselves among a crew of damned spirits, whose business will be always to curse their Maker? Is not this, I say, an injury to the blessed God himself, who is the Author of that being and capacity to serve him, which we find ourselves possessed of? Moreover,

4. By not loving God we render ourselves altogether incapable of doing him any faithful service, upon which our great comfort and advantage, and his honour and glory do at once depend. For God is glorified only by our voluntary action and devotedness to him, And is

it not also more pleasant to serve God cheerfully than otherwise? but can we do that without loving him? And doth it not cast a most intolerable calumny upon him, that we should serve such a master unpleasantly, and with uncheerful service? Further,

5. We should, in breaking of this one law of love to God, break all. It is a breach of all the law at once, and so makes us incapable of doing God any service at all. For we can never serve him while we obey him not, and we can never obey him without love. We find that the whole law is summed up in it. Therefore we break the whole law of love to God in epitome, when we do not love him. All the law is fulfilled and comprehended in the one word *Love*. And though it is plain that the Apostle when he says ([Rom. xiii. 8, 10.](#)) “Love is the fulfilling of the law,” speaks there with a more direct reference to love to men, or one another; yet it is plain too that both branches may be reduced to one; for no man loves his brother or neighbour truly, if he do not love him for God’s sake, and upon his account. That great law against murder in the book of Genesis ([ix. 6.](#)) is founded upon this reason, “For in the image of God made he man;” so that it is God who is principally struck at, when one man murders another. Thus our Saviour made the summary of the law twofold, when he said, (to the lawyer, who had asked him, which was the great commandment,) “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” [Matt. xxii. 37-40.](#)

The whole of our duty therefore centers in this one thing, love to God. This is the radical principle whence all is to proceed; and every command doth bind us with this reduplication, “Do this and love God, and do that as a lover of God,” otherwise what we do is no more the same thing which the law enjoins, than the carcass of a man is the man. That which is the soul of the duty is wanting, and that is love. What signify, think you, those prayers to God, which are put up by one that does not love him? or of what avail is any other act of worship that is performed by such a one? And if we do any part of our duty which respects man, and that duty be not animated by the love of God, the love that one man can have to another in this case is nothing else but a sort of friendly intercourse among rebels, that have cut off themselves from their supreme Ruler; and take no more notice of his interest which he hath in common in them, but as they are confederated, and join in a conspiracy against him. Love among men, why do we talk of that? To love such men as have quite cut off themselves from God, as well as we ourselves have done, is only such a love as is among rebels, that treat one another kindly in a state of rebellion. To proceed,

6. It is a violation of the most merciful indulgent law, enjoining us a duty most agreeable to our own necessities, and the least toilsome and expensive of all others. How intolerable then is it to affront God, and even to do it with no pretence of advantage to ourselves, but greatly to our own disadvantage and loss! How merciful is the law of love! how direct a provision is there made in it for the necessity of man! Pray what shall we do, nay what can





we do with ourselves, if we place not our love upon God? It may be we do not find our present need of him, as long as we find objects of sense courting and flattering us in our way; but do not we know that this world must break up, and this frame of earth and flesh in which we dwell, dissolve! What then will become of him at last that will be found to have been no lover of God? How dreadful a thing is it for a soul to be stripped naked and to have nothing to enjoy! It cannot enjoy God, because it never loved him. For sure, what we love not, we can never enjoy.

Therefore it was a most merciful law that said unto us, w Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” It is a law teaching us to be happy, and to solace ourselves in the rich plenitude of divine goodness. Our necessity doth at once urge us, and the divine goodness invite us here to place our love. This is the true solution of Plato’s riddle, “That Love is the daughter of Pluto and Penia.” For it plainly appears that the rich plenty of divine goodness, and the poverty and indigence of the poor creature that cannot otherwise dispose of itself, are the true parents of love.

This is a thing also that will cost us nothing. To love God therefore is the most unexceptionable thing in the world. It is what we are capable of in the worst external circumstances. If a man he never so poor he may yet love God. If he be sick and infirm, if lie be never so mean, if he have no estate, no interest, or be never so little in repute, he is yet capable of loving God. This he can do any where, in any place, in any desert, or cave, or upon the most afflictive bed of languishing. There is no pretence against loving God, let a man’s case be what it will, or supposed to be. it is therefore a most intolerable thing to offend against a law that provides so directly for our happiness and most urgent necessities. It is such a law, an obedience to which will cost us nothing, neither can there be the least pretence of gaining any thing by the neglect of it. The sin is therefore the more horrid: and foul and shameful it is to disobey in a case wherein we have nothing to say for ourselves. And again,

7. It is a direct contradiction to our own light, and the common sentiments of mankind. For this is no disputable thing, whether we are to love God yea or no. There are many things in religion, and many things more that are affixed to it, that make much matter of disputation, and great ventilating of arguments, there is *pro* and *con*, this way and that; but pray who can tell how to form an argument against the love of God? To deny this is to affront our own light, and that of the world in common; for there is no man that will profess himself to be no lover of God. Did you ever meet with any one that would profess enmity to him? And the soul of man cannot be indifferent in this case. It must either be a friend or an enemy, must cither love or hate. God is not indifferent, or a mere nothing to us, and how should we be affected to him, if not by love? And we further add,

8. It is a most unnatural wickedness to the Parent of that being which we are each of us furnished with, to disaffect our own Original. That men should disaffect him from whom they immediately sprang, and whose image they expressly bear, is, I say, a most unnatural

crime. Suppose there were a son to be found that never could love his father, and always hated the womb that bare him; what a strange prodigy in nature would he be thought! But is not this infinitely more prodigious to disaffect the entire and supreme Author of our own life and being, of which parents are but partial, or at most but subordinate authors. And in the



9. And last place, not to add more, it is blasphemy against the divine goodness. It is a practical blasphemy. It is the most emphatical way of denying God. For as the man that does not believe him, denieth his truth and makes him a liar, so by manifest parity, he that doth not love him denieth his goodness, a great deal more significantly than can be done by words. For men many times earnestly speak what is not their settled judgment, and what they are afterwards ready to retract. But how horrid a thing is this, that a man by a continued course and series of practice should discover this to be the fixed sense of his soul, that God is not worthy of his love! that a race of reasonable creatures should bear their joint testimony against the great and blessed God, the common Author and Cause of all being, that he is not worthy the love of any of them! For we practically say so while we live in the neglect of this duty. What do we talk of words in this case, when deeds and our constant practice do more significantly and directly speak? and what doth the course of a man speak, who loves not God, but this, that he is not to be loved? Therefore sure, not to love God, though we see him not, is not only a sin, but a most monstrous and horrid one.

We should go on to make some practical inferences from all that has been said on this part of our subject, that we might thereby the more closely apply all; but of this hereafter.



## SERMON IX.<sup>61</sup>

**I**N speaking to the second part of our subject we have largely insisted in shewing you, that our not seeing God is no excuse for our not loving him. We have shewn particularly, that it is insufficient, and also very absurd to be alleged as an excuse; and that it is not only a sinful omission, but a most horrid wickedness, not to live in the exercise of love to God, notwithstanding this excuse that we cannot see him.

It now remains, as we promised in our last, to deduce from the whole some practical inferences, by which (if God will so direct his word) all may be applied, and brought home with the greater pungency to our own hearts. And,

1. We may hence take notice of the insolent wickedness of the world, that they so generally agree to confine the little love that is left in it to one another, and to exclude the Blessed God. That men do not love God speaks them very wicked: that they continue in the neglect of this duty, without any excuse, speaks the insolency of their wickedness. While they have not a cloak left them, not a colourable pretence, nor any thing to say for themselves that is so much as plausible, yet they continue their course of excluding God out of their hearts, and live as if they owed him nothing, and had no concern at all with him.

That men do not love God is a thing that cannot be excused, as you have heard; and it is as little capable of denial, as of excuse. The matter is open and manifest. The general face and aspect of this world sheweth, how little there is of the love of God in it. The very shew of its countenance speaks it plainly. Men do in this matter even declare their sin as Sodom. They openly testify to one another that they are God's enemies. So that every man that runs, may read how the matter commonly is with men in this respect.

Alas, how little doth God's interest signify in this world! this shews how little he is beloved. How little is his interest valued, in comparison of that which is merely secular, and human! We have instanced to you already in this and many other things, for the eviction of the matter of fact in this case. As for the matter of right and wrong in the case, you have fully seen, from the demonstration which hath been given you, that our not seeing, excuseth us not from loving God. Nothing can be more plain, than (as we noted heretofore) that although too little respect be paid in the most important matters to human laws, yet there is a great deal less paid to divine. Men are more prone to be observant of the laws of men than of God. But there is no true obedience to the one or the other which doth not proceed from love, so far as it is true. We are to owe nothing to any man but love, or what may spring from thence. It was the complaint you know of old, "The statutes of Omri are kept." [Micah vi. 16](#). A very scrupulous care, as is intimated and complained of, there was to observe them;

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61 Preached October 11, 1676.

while the statutes of God were neglected, or not so much respected among those that professed his name.

Yea, and which is more than that; how much more frequent are the instances that may be assigned of laws made directly against God's interest, and the precepts of the first table, than against those of the second! The world in the several successive ages of it, hath been full of instances of laws made for polytheism, infidelity, idolatry, the worshipping of false gods, and the abolishing, or very much depraving the worship of the true. But when did you ever hear of laws made for theft, false witness bearing, and the like? so as to oblige men under certain penal ties to invade each other's interests, as they generally make bold with God. We have heard and read very frequently of men persecuted even to the death by laws, for not burning incense to idols, for not denying of Christ, and the like; but when did you ever hear of a man exposed to such penalties for not stealing, for not cozening, not defrauding this, or that, or the other man? So apparent is it, that men can express somewhat of tenderness one to another, in respect of their own private and secular interest; when, in the mean time, there is no concern at all for the common interest of the Lord of all this world. So that what interest is in the world is shut up almost entirely among men themselves. And though there is too little regard to that interest; yet they confine what there is among one another, excluding the blessed God from having any part or share in their love at all.

And truly, sirs, I fear we are too little concerned about this sad case. We do not consider this matter as it deserves, nor with that solemnity that it challenges. We are not so affected about the rights and interest of him, whom we call our God, as we ought to be. It doth not pain us to the heart as it should, to think how little God is made of in his own creation, and among the works of his own hands. We sometimes, when we hear the matter spoken of, say it is a sad case, but we know not how to help it, and so pass it very slightly over. But do not we indeed know how to help it? And should not this affect us ten thousand times more, when it is a case, that we can only lament? Sure methinks, at least we should do that if we can do no more. But how prone are we to alleviate the matter by considering it as a common case. "Oh! this is a matter of observation every day. It may be seen in every place, that there is little of the love of God to be found among men." And is it a common case? Is it not then a thousand times more horrid that it should be so common? If there had been but one apostate creature from God in all the world, one person of whom it might be said, "He doth not love God," how shocking and horrid would this man look in our eye! But is it not inconceivably worse and more horrid, that there should be so general a revolt from God? and that the hearts and love of his poor creatures are so averted without cause, and wickedly alienated from him all the world over?

2. We further collect hence, that the conviction of the unreconciled part of the world must needs be very clear and easy in the great day. When this shall be the common case brought into trial (as indeed it will be with every man) "Was he a lover of God, or was he



not?" how easy and clear, I say, must the conviction needs be, since, as you have heard, it is a matter that admits of no excuse? If this be a matter not defensible at our own bar, among ourselves, when we controvert the matter one with another; how easily and gloriously will divine justice triumph in the eviction of his right, and of the wrong, that hath been done him by his creatures in the matter? Be hold a whole race of creatures, originally capable of his love and communion, gone off from him with one consent! alienated in heart and spirit, from the life and love of God! transmitting their enmity and disloyalty from age to age, from generation to generation! and, in a word, emboldening themselves in wickedness against him, because they see him not; and as they vainly think, because he sees not them.

85

And yet in the mean time it is very plain, that men might know him if they would; for they live, and move, and have their whole subsistence in, and by him. He is not far from any one of them. He supplies them with breath from moment to moment. They entirely owe themselves, their being, and preservation, to an every where present, and apprehensible Deity. Yet they do not, neither will they know him; and in this voluntary ignorance they sufficiently shew, that they love him not. How glorious then will the triumphs of justice be, when this case comes to be stated! when this shall be the charge brought against men, be they who they will, or whatsoever they have been in other respects, that they have been no lovers of God.

3. We are hence to note, and admire the wonderful patience, and bounty of God to this wretched world. How admirable are the riches of his goodness, and his sparing and sustaining mercy! that the treasures of wrath are shut up, and the treasures of bounty opened to a world, where he hath, upon the matter, but little or no love! One would wonder that this world should not have been in flames many an age ago, considering how enmity against God hath been transmitted from age to age. But how much more reason have we to wonder, that he so concerns himself about, and takes such care for a company of wretched miscreants, among whom he is not valued! Still his treasures are opened to us; his sun shines, his rain falls, and in ways of grace and mercy he leaves not himself without witness, in that he is continually doing us good, "Giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness;" ([Acts xiv. 17](#)) though in the mean time men will not know who feeds them, and maintains their life; and parcels out their breath to them, every moment, from time to time.

Surely it becomes us deeply to adore that patience and bounty, that are so continually exercised towards such creatures, who are here shut up in the dark, as it were, from one day to another. God appears not to them; they see him not, and in the mean time agree in this, that they will have no thoughts of him, but have him in perpetual oblivion. Yet all the while they have natural powers and faculties, which if employed in the inquiry, might easily inform them, that they did not make themselves; that they have not their life in their own hands, neither can they prolong it at their own pleasure, inasmuch as all of us "live, and move, and

86

have our being in God.” [Acts xvii. 28](#). However, they content themselves with their ignorance of him; and yet he hath sustained the world, and upheld the pillars of it, when sometimes it hath been ready to dissolve, and burst asunder, with that weight of wickedness that hath overwhelmed it for a time.

We ought surely in the contemplation of this to say, “How far are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts!” Men sometimes when they receive but a petty injury, and an apparent wrong from another, are presently wondering, that the earth doth not swallow up the man that hath done them this palpable wrong; that vengeance spares him; or that God suffers such a one to live. Oh! why do not we turn all our wonder this way; that God spares those that are perpetually affronting him! making it as it were the whole business of their life to testify to all the world, how little they care for him that made them! We ought then to consider with great admiration that vast and immense goodness, which is so indulgent to men all this while. Again,

4. We may hence learn too, the absolute necessity, and proper business of the Redeemer; how great need there was of a Redeemer, and what work and business he has to do on the behalf of sinful men. We may learn, I say, how great need there was of such a one. For who can stand under the weight of this charge, to have lived days, and months, and years in this world, destitute of the love of God? Any man that apprehends the horror of the thing, and knows how inexcusable a wickedness it is, and how horrid, notwithstanding any pretence of excuse, cannot but be greatly affected by it; methinks paleness must possess his face, and pining his heart, to be subject to so heavy a charge, and also liable to be convicted of not loving God. And then, one would think, it should be easy to understand what need there was of a Redeemer. The creation would not be able to sustain this burden, to have creatures in it that loved not God, and were disaffected to their own Original. If this guilt were to be parceled out among the creation, how soon would it make all things fly asunder! and how impossible would it be for things to subsist and hold together! How great then was the need of a Redeemer in this case!

And we may see what his business hereupon must be also; that is, both to expiate the guilt of such as have not loved God, and to procure that they may do so for the time to come. And these two we are to consider not as separate and apart from one another. We are not to fancy or imagine, that Christ hath only this to do, namely, to procure pardon for our not having loved God. Sure he is to procure grace also, that we may, and effectually shall do so for the future, or else he will profit us but little. If we have to do with Christ at all, if ever we receive any benefit at all by him, it must be this double benefit in conjunction; not the one separate from the other.

The imagination runs in common among men, as if Christ’s business as mediator was only to reconcile God to man, and not man to God. But how expressly doth the Scripture speak of this part too! You that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by

wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled. [Col. i. 21](#). He must reconcile us to God. And therefore the apostle again saith, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. [2. Cor. v. 19](#). To take out of the hearts of men the enmity that is reigning every where against God, and bring them into love with him, is the very business of the gospel.

There did not need a gospel to be preached to heaven, to incline God to man; but there was a necessity of dispensing one on earth to men, to incline them to God. If the business had only been to reconcile God to man, there had been no need of a gospel at all. The affair of our redemption might have been transacted between the Father, and the Son, in God's eternal counsel. Christ might have died as he did, and the ends of his dying be never known to us, were it not that this was the means, that the Spirit of Christ was to work by, in order to overcome men's hearts, and slay the enmity in them, not to be done by any other way. And shall any of us think, that Christ came into the world to procure the salvation of those, that loved not God? This were to think, that he came into the world to banish the love of God out of it.

Therefore we must know, that if ever we be the better for Christ it must be both in his expiating our guilt, for not loving God; and in removing our enmity, that our love may be set upon him, our hearts joined with him, and engaged in communion and fellowship with him, in our future course. For this is the business of a Mediator between God and man: to salve the breach on both sides; to make a mutual agreement between both parties; to vindicate God's right, and so to act the part of a just Redeemer, and to procure man's righteousness, which is the part of a merciful Redeemer. This was his thought: "This case must be either redressed in men by working a change in them, or else vindicated upon them." This he is obliged to as Redeemer. The Father hath given all judgment into his hand; and as it were, deposited his rights there, to be vindicated by him, or restored. [John v. 22](#).

5. Learn hence the generous nature of divine love in men. The love that we owe, and that good souls do live in the exercise of, and actually bear to God, of how noble and generous a nature I say, is it? Their love is of so refined and solid a nature, that it breaks through the whole sphere of sense, and flies above all visible things, and pitcheth upon an invisible object. There it terminates, and takes up its residence. It never rests till it has flown up thither, and seeks no excuse from the duty of love to God, merely because he is invisible. It despiseth to be so excused, and neglects, and disregards the dictates of sense in the case. This is the genius of divine love and the inward spiritual sense of the new creature, whereof this love is the heart, and life, and soul. "What! shall external sense impose upon me, and tell me what is fit for me to love, and what not? What! shall I love no higher than so? no higher than a brute?" Therefore, how much more noble and excellent a spirit is that of the truly good man, than the men of this world are of! and how excellent is the spirit of divine love, which is in the saints, above that which is earthly and sensual! Let us believe this therefore, and be convinced, that the spirit that is peculiar to godly men is quite another thing, from



a vulgar and mundane spirit; and its strain and genius different, from that of the men of this world. These love only what they see, and think they are excused from loving any but sensible objects. But says the good man, "When I have seen, and viewed all the good, and all the excellency that this sensible creation can offer to my view, I must have something unseen for my love to pitch upon which is beyond all this." Therefore a gracious spirit is an excellent spirit. It cannot grovel upon this earth. It must ascend above all visible things, and get up to that God who is invisible.

6. Since we are so strictly obliged to the love of God though we cannot see him; what reason have we to charge and condemn ourselves, and even loathe and abhor ourselves that we have loved him so little, and that so small a part of our life can be said to have been spent in this divine exercise! It is high time for us to understand the state of our case, and to consider it in this respect: though it is very much to be feared that it is but little considered; for alas, how generally do people carry it as if they thought themselves innocent in this point! After all the injury that has been done to God by our not loving him, this is the most intolerable aggravation that we should think ourselves innocent therein, and maintain that temper of spirit as if we apprehended all was well. And how plain is it that it will not enter into the souls of men, that they are guilty creatures before the Lord on this account, that they have not loved him?

If a man had secretly and privily been guilty of the death of another on such a day, and the matter was closely covered up and no body knew it; yet how would his own thoughts dog him and accuse him at night! The blood of that man would so cry in his conscience, that certainly he would have but a hard matter of it to compose himself to quiet peaceful repose. Why, men in not loving God are guilty of deicide, as much as they can be, or as far as their power extends. It is an attempt against God. It is saying in their hearts, "No God!" For it is a plain denial of his goodness, and therefore of his being. It is as much a denial of his goodness, as infidelity is of his truth. What a strange thing is it, that men can be so much at peace with themselves, can pass over whole days one after another, yet no such thing as the love of God to be found among them! and at night can sleep and rest, and their hearts never smite them for it.

Methinks it is strange that men can make so slight a matter of breaking all laws at once, as you have heard this is of not loving God; of subverting the whole frame of the divine government over us. For how do we obey it in any thing, who comport not with the first principle of obedience, namely love to God? Oh that men should be guilty of a more horrid fact, than it would be, if it were in their power, to turn all things out of order, and yet not only be able to rest but even to think themselves innocent all the while!

These things, in my apprehension, do make a most wonderful conjuncture, where they happen to meet together; these four things especially,—that it should be so plain to every man that he ought to love God,—that it should be so plainly demonstrable, as to the most,



that they do not love God; that it should be so confessedly a foul and horrid thing not to love him, even by every man's acknowledgement; and yet,—that so many can be guilty of this horrid crime all their lives, and yet live as if all was well, and they were innocent all the while.—All these things make, I say, an amazing conjuncture. I appeal to you if they do not.

But that none of us may be so stupid under such guilt as this, let us since we cannot excuse it, freely condemn ourselves. For who is there among us but must be forced to acknowledge, that the love of God is too little exercised, or is very faint and languid among us? Methinks we should hate ourselves for this, that we do not love God. It ought to be looked upon as a frightful thing, a monstrous indisposition in us. We should then in our own thoughts, commune with ourselves, and reason thus. “Why, what a creature am I! what a strange creature am I! of how amazing a composition! I have an understanding about me. I know that which is good and what is best. I know the Author of all goodness and excellency, must needs be the highest excellency and goodness himself. I have also love in my nature, which I can employ upon inferior things, and which I confess to be of unspeakably less, and of diminutive goodness. How monstrously strange is it then that I cannot feel daily emotions of love in my heart to God! that I cannot find my heart to beat for him! that every thought of him is not pleasant to me! How amazing and wonderful is this!” Why sure it is a very befitting posture, that we should be covered with shame and confusion before the Lord; and be even wallowing in our own tears, lamenting that there should be so stupid and cool an ascent in our hearts towards him: that we can spend whole days without him; give him no visits, and receive none that are of concernment to us; and in a word, lead our life as it were without God in the world.

It should make us ashamed to read that precept of an heathen emperor,<sup>62</sup> who expresses himself to this effect, and, “You must lead your lives with God. Then,” says he, “you will be said to lead your life with God, when you approve yourselves well pleased with every thing that he dispenseth to you, and take all kindly at his hands; and when also you obey that leader and ruler,” (he can mean nothing but the conscience that is in man) “which he has set to be the guide of your actions. So shall you lead your lives with God, and have daily converse with him.” And now to have daily our conversation in the world without God, and yet have no scruple about it, nor remorse upon it, is a marvellous thing; especially among us, who hear of him and from him so often, and know that we must be happy in him at last, or else eternally miserable. In the

Last place, Since our not seeing God cannot excuse us from loving him, how much we are concerned to see to it that it be no hindrance or impediment to this our duty of loving God. And that it may not, it is very necessary that it be some way or other supplied. Since it is impossible for us to see God, we ought to consider seriously with ourselves, whether

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62 Antoninus.

there be not something or other that may serve us instead of the sight of God, and be a means of our living in his love. And here I had several things in my thoughts to have hinted to you, and intended to have gone through them at this time; but I must leave them to the next opportunity.

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## SERMON X.<sup>63</sup>

SINCE it is necessary, that our not seeing God should be so supplied, as that we may be capable of loving him, notwithstanding; I now proceed to give some directions, which I hope will be of use to us in this great and important matter. As,

1 Let us fix the apprehension deep in our souls, of his certain necessary existence, and supreme excellence. Our sight doth not serve us to the loving of any thing, otherwise than as it is a means to beget an apprehension in our minds of the loveliness of it. Sight is in no case the immediate inducement of love, but only as it is ministerial and subservient to the nobler powers of the mind. And if by any other means than by seeing, we can come to apprehend so much concerning the blessed God, to wit, his most necessary existence, and supreme excellency, we shall not be at a loss then for an apt medium, by which our love is to be excited in us towards him.

These two things are the same in effect with those that the apostle tells us we ought to be assured of, in order to our coming to God with acceptance, namely, that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. [Heb. xi. 6](#). We may easily understand how he is a rewarder, if we compare this passage with what is said to Abraham, I am thy exceeding great reward. [Gen. xv. 1](#). God is at once both a rewarder, and a reward to those whose hearts are towards him. He is a rewarder by communicating himself, and not by giving rewards alien and diverse from himself. And it is necessary that we be assured, that he both is, and that he is in this sense a rewarder, as being in himself the highest excellency, or the supreme and best Good. For without a persuasion concerning both these, it is intimated, that we cannot come unto him in an acceptable manner.

Now loving him is one way of coming to him. It is that by which the soul moveth to him in desire, and then rests in him in delight. There can be no such motion in the soul towards God, without this double persuasion concerning him; namely, of his certain existence, and highest excellency, as our terminative good. And you have heard that we may be as sure of both these, as of any thing that we see with our eyes. For if our eyes tell us, that any thing is in being, our minds tell us as certainly, that there is an original Being. And if we can be any way sure, that there is such a thing as goodness, and excellency in the world; we may be as sure, that there is an original excellency, an original good, which must needs be the supreme good, and can be no where, but in the original supreme Being. For goodness and excellency are not nothing, and therefore cannot come out of nothing, but must proceed from the same fountain, from whence all being comes. We are not more sure of any thing that our eyes inform us of, than we shall be of this, if we do but consider, and use our understanding in the case.

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63 Preached October 5, 1676.

So that we should endeavour once to fix the apprehension of these things, as being most certainly true; and from our very souls should bless God, that we are at a certainty in these things; that we do not feel the ground loose under us, but are in this respect on firm ground, when we affirm that God most necessarily is, and is the highest and most excellent Good. And being once sure of this, it would be very unreasonable to be recalling this matter into doubt, or to be perpetually moving questions and disputes concerning it in our minds. It is what we may be as sure of, as that there is a world in being, or that any thing is, that we ourselves are, who being nearest to ourselves, may be surest of our own being.

And it would make strange confused work In the world, if in reference to all the actions of man, they should be ever moving disputes about them, whether they really are or are not. As if a man could not tell how to eat, but he must fall a doubting presently, "Is this real food before me, or is it not? or am I awake to eat it, yea or no?" Or as if he could not tell how to converse with any one, about never so important a business, but he must fall a disputing, "Is this a real man, or but a spectre? may it not be only the umbra of a man?" In short, what could be done, what business transacted in the world, if about such plain matters, doubts must be perpetually raised?

Every man that hath understanding, as hath been said, may be at as great certainty concerning the existence of the supreme and first Being, as of any thing whatever. Nay, a great deal more, because his existence is supremely necessary. So that if I confine certainty to the eye, then I am sure of nothing but what I see. But I am certain that God always was of himself, and therefore is necessarily; and so, not to be, must to him be simply impossible. This, therefore would be one great supply to our not seeing him, once to make the matter plain and clear, that he exists, and that he is the most excellent and supreme Good. Which would be a great deal in our way, towards the exercise of love to God, though we do not see him.

2. It will concern us much to use our thoughts in being conversant with other invisible objects. For certainly, minds and hearts that are continually busied about things of sense only, will be but in a very defective capacity, at all times, to converse with the invisible God. It needs a very refined temper of mind to behold him with the intellectual eye, and thereupon to love and embrace the blessed glorious God. And as while we converse with things that are vain, our minds are vain; while with things that are earthly, our minds are earthly, and bear the impress and image of those things with which we have most to do; so, if we did but converse with spiritual things, or those which are above the reach of sense, it would be a means to make our minds and hearts grow more spiritual, and consequently more fit for the love, and converse of the eternal, supreme, invisible Spirit.

It is a mean base thing, since God hath furnished our natures with a thinking power, to use our thoughts only about those things that lie in common to us with brute creatures. Can I, have I, a power to mind higher and nobler objects, and will I so vilely debase myself as



not to mind them! to mind only things that are earthy, drossy, and terrene! By this means I shall always keep myself in an incapacity to have to do with God.”

We should therefore consider with ourselves, that as we have faculties by which we are rendered capable of conversing with men and visible things; so we have faculties too in our natures, whereby we are capable of conversing with things that are not visible, and that are of a higher nature. It is easy to turn all the things of this visible state into a dusky shadow to ourselves. We can clothe all the world with darkness, in a moment, only by shutting our eyes. And therefore as our eyes would signify nothing to visible things, if we did not use them; so nor will our thoughts signify any thing in reference to the invisible world, unless we employ them upon their more proper, and peculiar objects.

We should also recollect with ourselves, that there is such a thing as an invisible world, which is the best and noblest part of the creation of God. We ourselves, as to the better part of our natures, belong to it. Therefore we should not behave as strangers, and unrelated to that world. We should consider how glorious the invisible world is, and recount who are its inhabitants, what are the affairs and pleasures, the excellencies and ornaments of those inhabitants. Let us think with ourselves, what vast numberless myriads there are of glorious spirits, creatures of God, that are composed all of mind and love, whose perpetual business and employment is to behold, and adore the great Father of spirits, the PATERNAL MIND, or REASON, as the Heathen have called him, the original intellect, that is every where and ALL IN ALL.

We should think with ourselves, that the affairs of those in numerable multitudes of glorious spirits, and their pleasures and delights, are the same. Their business is to be always beholding the divine glory; and by adoration and praise to return it to him, reflecting it back again to its own Original. We should think with ourselves, what the lovely ornaments and excellencies are of those blessed inhabitants: we should consider their vast knowledge, their mighty power, their pure holiness, their profound humility, the benignity, love, and serenity, that are every where to be found among those happy beings.

And when we have thought and considered all this, then let us ask ourselves, “Why am I a stranger to this invisible world?” For indeed we are strangers to it, while we are unrelated to God, and his Christ. But this is not our necessity, but our great folly, that we continue in so distant and unrelated a state. We are naturally aliens, strangers, foreigners; but there are overtures made to us by Christ, to become of the household and family of God. [Eph. ii. 19.](#) And his family is made up of heavenly ones, though part be in heaven, and part on earth. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, besides his natural, hath an acquired dominion and lordship over the whole of it. By him were all things made, both visible and invisible; and even besides that, by the blood of his cross, he is become the Head over all principalities, and powers, and thrones, and dominions; whether they be in heaven, or earth, or under the earth. [Col. i. 16-21.](#)

94

95

So that if we be of those who profess themselves to be christians, and are united to him, we are come to an innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect. [Heb. xii. 22, 23](#). We are actually joined as members of that body, which is all but one community of glorious creatures above, and holy ones here below, in whom the beginnings and first principles of the new creature, and the work of sanctification are to be found. So that we may again demand of ourselves and ask, "Why do we estrange ourselves and carry it as if we were unrelated to those invisible creatures?" Those blessed spirits are continually mingling with us, if we will believe the divine testimony concerning them. The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear him, and delivereth them, [Ps. xxxiv. 7](#). And what are all the angels? But ministering spirits sent forth for the good and service of them who are heirs of salvation. [Heb. i. 14](#). They are conversant in our assemblies, as some understand that passage in the first epistle to the Corinthians, where the woman is directed to have power over her head, that is, a vail, in token of her subjection to power, "because of the angels;" ([1 Cor. xi. 10](#).) though some understand this passage otherwise. And again, more expressly it is said, that unto powers and principalities in heavenly places is known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. [Eph. iii. 10](#).

Therefore in that we do not entertain more frequent thoughts, and exercise our minds more about what the Scriptures reveal in this matter, we are certainly injurious to ourselves. We keep back our minds from being clarified from earth and sensible things, by which they might be raised up to the honour and advantage of being employed about the blessed God himself. For if we were filled, all the day long, with becoming thoughts of the state and condition of the affairs of the inhabitants of the invisible world, how easy were it to fix upon God the great Ruler of all, the Father of spirits.

And being of the same community, making but one society with those blessed creatures, as being under the same Head with them, we make a great schism in the body if we break off ourselves from them, and their employments and affairs, and involve ourselves with things that are visible, and the objects of sense. Of all men in the world the sensualist is the greatest schismatic. He breaks himself off from all the affairs and concernments of the invisible world; and wraps himself in, this narrow sphere, as one quite cut off from God, and all that are more immediately conversant with him. We, I say, quite rend ourselves from that body, that happy society, if we do not apply ourselves more to mind the concernments of that other; world, and to have our spirits, thoughts and affections, exercised and carried up thither. And again,

3. It is necessary in order to supply our not seeing God, that we most firmly believe the report and testimony that is given of him in the gospel of his Son. What we cannot know by our own eyes, we must be beholden for the knowledge of to the report of others. And it is the business of the gospel to make a report of God to us, and the errand of his Son into the world was to bring us this report. He who best knew him, and from eternity was in his



bosom, “hath declared him;” and that on purpose for our relief in this case, because “no man hath seen God at any time.” Since therefore God is invisible, and we are creatures that depend so much upon sense, he “hath spoken to us by his Son, the express image of his person.” [Heb. i. 3](#). So that it is by no mean one that he hath sent us an account of himself, though we cannot see him.

All reports signify as they are believed. They signify nothing where no credit is given to them. But what should induce us to doubt, whether the revelation which Christ hath made to us of God, in his word, be true or no? What should make us imagine, that God should misrepresent himself? What! Doth he need to beguile us, his creatures, whom he hath entirely in his power? the works of his hands, whom he can wink and beckon into nothing? Do you think he means to beguile us with specious representations of himself, otherwise than the matter really is?

Therefore we should thus consider with ourselves. “We have not indeed seen God, nor is he liable to so mean a thing as human sight. But we have an express discovery of him by his own Son, who came upon this very errand: and what he has said was not casually, and on the by, as words dropped by chance; but he came for this very end, that he might acquaint the world what God is, and give to men an account of him, since he is not to be seen with eyes of flesh.” And sure, upon the account we have of this blessed and glorious Object, he must be acknowledged to be the most lovely Object. We are not then at a loss for an object of our love, if we will but believe the record, and testimony of the blessed God in his own word; and take it as a revelation from heaven with so merciful a design. How awful an acquiescence therefore doth that challenge and command! So that our hearts should readily suggest to us, that it is the greatest profaneness, if we do not with reverence, and veneration admit that testimony.

In what honour and veneration had those poor deluded creatures the image that was said to have come down from Jupiter! [Acts xix. 35](#). Why, God’s own word is his own lively image, a true representation of himself, which certainly came down, from himself. He hath sent many on this message; his own. Son, his prophets, and apostles, on purpose to draw men into communion and fellowship with himself. These things, saith St. John, are written, that we might have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. [1 John i. 3](#). And then he goes on in his epistle to tell them, that the message which the apostles heard of him and declared unto them, was this—that God is light, and God is love. [1 John i. 5](#). &c. Surely then such a Being is the most worthy of our esteem and love; and the message sent to men is most worthy of their acceptance, to wit, that such a God is offered to them for their God. Thus men are acquainted with him by the revelation they have of him in the gospel, that so they may be drawn into a communion and fellowship with him, the life and soul of which is love.



4. It is necessary, that we bend ourselves much to contemplate and study the nature of God, according to the discovery we have of him in his revelation. That which we do know and believe, makes an impression upon us only as it is improved by our thoughts; as it is considered or not considered. A great many things lie asleep in our souls, and signify nothing to us, for want of actual thought. At certain times and seasons, therefore, we should say to ourselves; "Well! I will now go on purpose, and sit down, and meditate upon God. This shall be the business of the present hour." For surely nothing can with higher right lay claim to our entire thoughts, than the Author of all. And it is a strange piece of negligence, that he, with whom we have such great concerns, and who is our All in all, should be so seldom the Subject of our solemn, designed, purposed meditation; that the thoughts of God should be casualties with us; that we should think of him only now and then by chance, and never find a time, wherein we may say to ourselves, "I will now on set purpose think of God."

How doth this correspond with the practice of the saints, who had communion with him of old? as we find the Psalmist intimating, that he thought of God on his bed, and meditated on him in the night-watches. [Ps. lxxiii. 6](#). I would not here propound to you the indulging, or gratifying of a vain curiosity, inquiring into the unrevealed things of God; but would recommend to you the study of those plain intelligible attributes of his, that are obvious to the understandings of the generality of men, because the Divine Being is not capable of a strict and rigid definition. These are enough to suggest such a notion of him, as renders him an Object worthy of our love and worship; while a multitude of things may be supposed concerning God, which it is not necessary for us to be acquainted with.

Consider then his wisdom, power, goodness, holiness, and the like, which are his communicable attributes; and add to these the incommunicable properties of his eternity, his immensity, his self-sufficiency, his self-subsistence, his necessary existence, and so we have an account of God. And then how excellent and glorious an Object both of love and worship have we before us! a Being of himself originally perfect; who is essential wisdom, goodness, love, truth, righteousness, and holiness. In what a transport should we be upon such a representation of God! We have his name often in our mouths, when it is with us but as an empty sound; as if that great, and venerable name signified nothing. He is near in our mouths, and ears, but far from our hearts; and then no wonder he is so little loved all the while. But would we once admit to have our souls possessed with the apprehension of the import of that mighty and venerable name, which was given to Moses; how would it engage us to bow our heads and worship him, who is "the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thou sands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." [Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7](#). Our Lord told the Samaritan woman, "Ye worship ye know not what." [John iv. 22](#). So do they, who make his worship nothing else but a ceremonious compliment; the mere bowing of the



knee, and the honouring him with the lip. But if it be the worship of love, it is impossible then that we should worship we know not what. For the interior faculties of the soul, as to love and desire, cannot be wrought upon by a shadow. They must be moved by something substantial, and set on work by something on purpose which really exists. When therefore we hear the name of God spoken, how should it make us stoop and bow before him! and into what an awful and pleasing commotion should it put all the powers of our souls at once! But to go a whole day, and forget God; and to let many days pass, without ever choosing a time to think of him, is a great iniquity. And while that iniquity abounds, the love of such must needs grow cold. And then again,

5, We must take heed, that we entertain no horrid and dismal thoughts of God, and that we believe nothing that is contrary to his own revelation of himself. Take heed lest the belief of a God suggest only a guilty enslaving fear. I mean not the fear of reverence, which the angels owe and pay; but that fear of horror, which is most proper to devils, and is the product of a diabolical faith. “The devils believe and tremble.” [Ja. ii. 19](#). They believe and are full of horror, as the word φοβισσονσι signifies. Do even shiver with the belief they have concerning God. As “perfect love casteth out fear,” so such fear will always put out love. For a fear proceeding from gross and horrid mis-persuasions concerning God, must needs stifle all dutiful, ingenuous, loyal affection to God.

It is the great art of the devil to possess men with the apprehension, if it be possible, that their case is the same with his own, that so thereby they may make it their own. If the devils can once persuade men, that God is as unreconcilable to them, as he is to themselves, who sinned with open eyes, without a tempter, and all at once in their own proper persons; if they can, I say, but make men believe this, then it is a most easy thing to keep the love of God from ever having any entrance into the soul. It is natural to hate those, whom we fear or dread; therefore, I say, the fallen angels believe and tremble, believe, and are full of horror.

But, do you believe, and bless God? Believe him actually reconciled, if you find your hearts do yield to him, Believe him willing to be at peace. Believe him when he testifies, that whosoever cometh to him shall in no wise be cast out. [John vi. 18](#). Believe him saying, “Though thou hast forgotten me, and hast set up thyself to be thine own idol, and hast been perpetually affronting me; yet do thou but accept my Son, and of pardon in and through him, and I will make thee my friend, my associate and my son.” Do but believe this, and try if it be in your power not to love him. This faith will certainly work by love. But take heed of believing what God hath never said; and what the destroyer of souls would make you believe he hath said. For whatsoever thoughts tend to the making him unlovely, or not amiable in your eyes, have them far from you. And

6. Make him your own by an entire, and cheerful choice, and acceptance of him for your Lord and your God. How mightily doth relation, interest, and property command love! You cannot see him it is true, but you may choose and apprehend him for your God; which rela-



tion, once understood, will happily supply the want of seeing him. Surely you would love your own child, your own father, your own husband, or wife, though you were born blind and could never see them. How many are apt to say, when they observe any thing lovely, in such or such a relation in another family; for instance, a dutiful, ingenuous child, "Oh had I such a one, how should I love him I" Why, you have an amiable description of your God; and do not your hearts say within you, "If he were my God, how should I love him?" And why is he not your God? he offers himself to be yours, and has put no harder terms upon you, than that you receive him for your God. Comply then with his righteous law, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." [Exod. xx. 3.](#) Say therefore, "Thou shalt be my God wholly and alone." As every covenant is made up by a mutual stipulation, so his willingness and yours make the bargain. He hath declared his own willingness, do you but make out yours, and the matter is effected, so as that none can tear you asunder.

And how pleasant a thing is it to have such a God your own to glory in, and to walk in his name! to be able to say, "God, even my God shall bless me! I need no other." How high matter of triumph was this to the Psalmist! Let it be told to the generations following, This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death. [Ps. xlviii. 13, 14.](#) As if he had said, We are willing that this should be known, in the present, and succeeding ages, Let it be transmitted to posterity. Let there be a perpetual everlasting monument of this, that we have had the Lord for our God. Thus a certain noble person would have an inscription put upon his tomb, without any further enlargement, to this effect, That he had been a servant to queen Elizabeth, counsellor to king James, and friend to sir Philip Sidney. By this it appears he would have all ages know whose servant, counsellor, and friend he had been.<sup>64</sup> In like manner should every good and pious soul declare to the present, and all future ages, that THE LORD IS HIS God.

7. Let your souls be filled with this apprehension, that God is always and every where present. How sweetly moving are those thoughts of God's omnipresence in the [139 Psalm!](#) They were so to the Psalmist and are so to all the saints. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness, and the

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64 The noble personage here alluded to, is Fulke Grevill, Lord Brooke; whose funeral monument is yet remaining in St. Mary's. Church in Warwick, and has on it this inscription: FVLKE GREVILL SERVANT TO QVEENE ELIZABETH  
CONCELLER TO KING IAMES  
AND FREND TO SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

light, are both alike to thee.” And when the royal Psalmist considered, how God insinuated himself into every bone of his flesh, and particle of his frame, saying, “Thou hast possessed my reins, thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb;” he breaks out at last in to these words, “How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!”

Let us then but habituate ourselves to the apprehension of an every where present Deity, conceiving all things filled with the divine fulness, and this will supply the defect, or the want of seeing God. Let every creature, every place, every providence, put us in mind of God. Thus begins, and ends the eighth psalm, the design of which is to contemplate God in these things, regarding them all as the works of his hands; “How excellent is thy name, O God, in all the earth, who hast set thy glory above the heavens!” And what an ecstasy do we find Moses in, while he is celebrating a particular providence! “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” [Exod. xv. 11](#). If then we did but labour to make this thought familiar to ourselves, that whithersoever we go, or wherever we are, we have a God to behold; that there are footsteps of God, everywhere, for us to take notice of, or impressions, and prints of his glory; this would habituate us to his converse, and make the motions and exercises of love, easy and familiar to us. This effect it had on the Psalmist in the [104 Psalm](#), who, after a glorious description of God, thus closeth it up; “My meditation of him shall be sweet, I will be glad in the Lord.” [Ps. civ. 34](#). He had been viewing God, as he was to be seen in the works of his hands; and his spirit was now drenched deeply in the thoughts of God’s active power and providence, every where diffused in the world.

We, in like manner, should always have such thoughts injected into us, if we would but consider with ourselves, that wherever we are, still we live, and move and have our being in God. The whole earth is full of his glory. By him all things consist. We can set a foot no where but still we tread upon his ground, and are in his dominion. We cannot live, but by a vital influence derived from him, How much would this contribute to the facilitating the exercises of love! By converse love insinuates itself into persons, they are captivated before they are aware. And there is no man of so morose, sour, churlish a nature, but will have a sort of kindness for such, whom he converseth frequently with. Assiduous converse wins hearts. How much more, when we have such an amiable object, should we associate with him! It will then ensue of course, that we shall be taken with him, and drawn by the cords of love into the happy bonds.

8. And lastly: Let us pray much and earnestly for the Spirit of life and love, which is his own gift. Among the many excellent fruits of the Spirit you see love leads the van. [Gal. v. 22](#). It is of considerable moment to state the case to ourselves thus; “The love of God is one of the fruits of his own Spirit.” How intent then should we be upon this, that he who claims to be the Object of our love, is pleased to be the Author of it? even of that pure, refined love, that is fit to be set upon so glorious an Object. Whereas such a carnalized, impure, drossy



love as ours, can never turn itself unto God; will always decline, and shun that blessed Object. He must form our love for himself, or it will never do.

As he therefore makes our love the sum of his law, and of all his precepts, so we should make it the sum of all our requests. For it is at once indeed both our privilege, and our duty. Both what we are to do, and what we are to enjoy, are all summed up In love. And if we make this the sum of our desires, how much of ingenuity would there be in this prayer, when we come to the Lord and say, "Lord if I should cast all my desires into one request, it is love! Love is the only thing. I beg only a heart to love thee." How much ingenuity is there, I say, in such a prayer! and how great also is the necessity of it! For we can as soon pluck down a star, or create a new sun, as plant in our own souls this principle of love to God, without his aid. Every good and perfect gift is from him; and certainly this is good, and a matter of high excellency, to have the heart possessed with his love. We can never understand the love of God to us, till our souls are, as it were, trans-elemated into a love to him. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him. [1 John iv. 16.](#)

And now, after all this would we be excused from the duty of loving God? that is, from being happy, from living a life of pleasure, from solacing ourselves with the immense Good? We should methinks as little wish to be excused, as a poor indigent man from having all his wants supplied; or a sick languishing person, from returning to health and strength; or a hungry fainting person, from receiving convenient food; or a weary person, from receiving refreshing ease and rest. Would we be excused from having God for our portion, our health and strength, our rest and all in all? We cannot indeed see God; but will that excuse us, when so many things present us with an idea and image of him? or when we have the privilege of addressing ourselves to him by prayer? The Scriptures do not speak to us in this matter with any intention or design to excuse us from this duty. There it is intimated, that all the good, which concerns a man's present state, comes from love to God. All, says the Apostle, shall work together for good, to them that love God. [Rom. viii. 28.](#) And with respect to the other world, it is said that, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath laid up for them that love him. [1 Cor. ii. 9.](#)

And if we would but consider the matter, it is plain we can not excuse our conduct, to ourselves; much less to God. For do not our consciences tell us, that nothing is so easy, nothing so ready? And it is likewise to be considered, what will be made of this one day. I make little doubt but one very great part of the torture of hell, will lie in a too late repentance; that we never loved what our convicted consciences must needs have told us was most congruous, and fit to be loved. When an awakened soul shall make reflection, and consider, what infinite reason there was for the loving of God, and yet it could never be brought to it; we can conceive no sort of mental torture to be more tormenting than this. So that they, who live destitute of the love of God, and content themselves with so doing, are busily preparing their own hell all their days. Oh, how tormenting will be the reflection! "I lived a



life's time in the world, and knew how reasonable a thing it was, how just and righteous to love God, and yet I never did love him!" This will be a most amazing subject for thought to feed upon, and to find torment by, through out an eternal state. And therefore we are the more concerned to be restless in our spirits, till we feel the fire so to burn within us, and can make our appeal to God, saying, Thou knowest all things, Lord! thou knowest that I love thee. [John xxi. 17.](#)

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## SERMON XI.<sup>65</sup>

**W**E have endeavoured from these words to evince to you the indispensable obligation there is upon us to the continued exercise of love to God, notwithstanding that we can not see him. This hath been doctrinally discoursed of, and also insisted upon by way of use, and particular application of that doctrine; but before we pass from it, it will be requisite to add somewhat further of a casuistical import.

It is very plain, that though there are not many sincere lovers of God, in this world; yet there are but few, who pretend not to be so. They are apt to please themselves with the conceit that they love God, and so take the matter for granted, though there be nothing of any such affection in their hearts at all. Others there are, who are apt to suspect that they do not love him in sincerity, and are too forward to conclude, that they have none of this divine affection, because they do not perceive it to work towards God, as their love does towards other objects. Finally, there are others again, who are very prone to censure those that speak of more passionate workings of affection to God, as mere hypocrites for this pretension. For since they experience nothing of such workings on their own hearts, they think it impossible there should be any such thing at all in the world. There are therefore three sorts of persons that our present discourse must have reference unto.

I. Such ignorant and careless souls as do, at random and without ever considering the matter, pronounce concerning themselves, that they are lovers of God; though if the matter be strictly looked into, they have no such thing as a motion of love in their heart to God at all.

II. Those that are prone to suspect, and conclude themselves to have no love to God at all, because they do not find this affection to work with that fervour and constancy, that they think it should, and which they perceive on other occasions.

III. Such as are very apt to suspect, and accuse others of hypocrisy or folly, who seem to express the most passionate and fervent love to God, and think that such an affection towards him cannot have place in a human breast. What therefore is pretended to be of a spiritual and holy kind, must be resolved, they imagine, wholly into enthusiasm; or be attributed to the power of fancy, or imagination; or to the temper, and disposition of the bodily humours, and the various structure and fabric even of the inferior parts of the body itself. To each of these sorts, reference must be had in what is now to be discoursed upon at this time.

I. As to those who confidently give out themselves to be lovers of God, though they never felt any motion of love to him at all in their hearts, such things as these it would be very fit for them to consider.

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65 Preached November 1, 1676.

1. That it is a very rash and unreasonable, as well as dangerous presumption, for them to conclude there is that in them which they have never perceived at all. For what might not one imagine, or fancy upon such a pretence? Supposing it possible, must I believe every thing to be true which is barely possible to be true? How many absurd things should I then believe! For there are many things that possibly may be, which yet it would be a very great absurdity to believe are in reality. It is a known rule, that of things that appear not, nor exist, the same esteem is to be had. If then it no way appears, or however appears not to me, that I am a lover of God; with what confidence can I pretend to it, or say that I am so?

2. It is to be considered that it is a most natural thing to men to be very indulgent to themselves, and to think that of themselves, which none would think or imagine but themselves. It is natural to every wicked man to “flatter himself in his own eyes, until his wickedness be found out to be hateful.” *Ps. xxxvi. 2.* Thus says the Psalmist, “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart,” that is, suggests to me, “that there is no fear of God before his eyes.” *Ps. xxxvi. 1* And truly this does as effectually speak or declare, that he hath not the love of God in him; yet at the same time he flatters himself, as it there follows, in his own eyes, till the matter comes to be plainly observable to every eye. Hence it may be very well understood, how it comes to pass that men are so apt to judge themselves any thing, which it would be horrid for them not to be thought to be, only from the kindness they have to themselves. For how horrid is it for any man to admit himself to be no lover of God! Therefore he must needs think himself such, or affirm that as true, which it were a horrid thing to confess and avow to be false. And so, upon the matter, their love to God depends upon, and runs into nothing else, but a partial and fond love to themselves.

3. They should consider how obvious the mistake is, to take a conviction of conscience in this case for an affection of the heart. That is, because they are convinced that it is a very reasonable and fit thing to love God, therefore they conclude, that they do love him. But how most irrational is the conclusion! They may as well conclude their approbation of any thing else, to be the possession of the thing itself. For instance, that they are rich, because they approve of riches; or that they are in very good health, because they approve of a sound habit of body. It is plain that this is all which the most can say, as to the bottom of their pretence. They have nothing at all in them, like the love of God, but only this conviction of conscience, that it is fit he should be loved. Of this there is a necessary and unavoidable approbation imposed upon their judgment, from the evidence of the thing itself. And as all men are convinced, that the obligation is indispensable, therefore they are willing to take it for granted, that they have the love of God in them.

4. It follows, as another thing to be considered, that if the love of God in itself be really a distinct thing, and different from such a conviction, then their love to him is reduced to nothing: for it is really nothing, distinguished from such a conviction, or apprehension in their own minds. And under a notion of its being an affection of a finer kind and nature

than to be obvious to common observation, they have refined it quite away, even into a mere nothing. For doth not every man's own sense tell him, that the love of tins or that thing, is quite another thing than a mental approbation of it? Or may not I be convinced in my judgment of the excellencies of one, to whom I have yet a settled aversion in my heart? How many cannot endure such persons, of whom upon conviction they cannot say they are not excellent men? And certainly it will put every sober considerer of this state of the case upon quite new thoughts, when we shall find he is not able to tell, what the thing is, that he calls love to God, if it must be distinguished from the mere conviction of the reasonableness of it.

5. It is also to be considered, that since love to God, if it be any where, is to be discerned and felt, and must be a ruling principle; it is then a most absurd imagination, that such a principle should be in men, of which they have no perception. For is it not absurd, that a principle, which is to have the conduct of a man's life, and so very great power in and over him in his whole course, should yet be neither discernible, nor felt? Indeed there are many thoughts and motions that stir in our minds, of which we take very little notice; nor can we in a little time say positively, whether we have such a thought or no. But that a principle, which runs through the universal course of a man's life, and which of all things should most frequently come under his notice, should yet be neither felt nor perceived by him, is the most unimaginable of all things we can conceive of. Therefore those who have so hastily pronounced themselves to be lovers of God, and yet never felt any thing by which this love is to be discerned, are besought to think again, to allow the cause a rehearing, to take it into new consideration, and not run away with a groundless conceit that they are what it so much concerns them actually to be, while they are only so in their own fancies and imaginations.

II. I now come to the next sort, namely, those who are apt to judge themselves wholly destitute of sincere love to God, because they do not find those passionate motions of it towards him, as they do towards many inferior objects. And there are sundry considerations, which will be very requisite to be weighed in this case too. As,

1 That certainly the actual exercise of love towards God may be often intermitted, when an habitual propension of heart towards him doth remain. The soul may frequently be put beside the direct acts, and exercise of this duty; and yet that virtue and principle, which hath touched their hearts, and by gracious vouchsafement is seated there, may still habitually incline them the same way. As the needle touched with the load-stone, is frequently diverted from its direct tendency towards the north; for being moved it shakes and quivers, and hath its various vibrations this way and that, yet there is a virtue in it that will bring and reduce it to the right point again. Therefore it is not this, or that act of love towards God, that gives the denomination; but the habitual propension, and bent of the heart. A man then is to be esteemed a lover of God, according as his heart stands habitually propense to him. But if the denomination depend upon this, or the other act; then a man would cease to be a lover



of God, as often as he loveth, or thinketh of any one else, or is diverted from it by this or that though never so necessary an occasion. And again,

2. It is very necessary, that we consider the act and the passion of love as very distinguishable, or different things. The act of love in a reasonable intelligent creature, is nothing else but the complacential motion of the will towards this or that object, that is apprehended amiable, or worthy to be loved. The passion of love is the impression made by an object, upon the animal and vital spirits of the brain and heart, which, being sensible, are reflected upon, and by many are taken notice of (through a great mistake) as if the very notion and being of love was placed there. Whereas the whole entire nature of divine love is separable from that passion, and may be without it; otherwise if passion were of the essence of love, it were altogether impossible, that the separate soul should be capable of loving God, or any thing else. This is a mere accident to our love, and a result that depends upon our present union with the body; which body is essentially necessary, neither to our soul, nor to our love, for both may be without it. And I add,

3. That those acts which are performed, as I may call it, in the upper region of the soul, and which are more peculiar to its intellectual nature, are as truly discernible, as the passions are which rebound upon, and affect the body. The acts of the mind, and of the will, are no more imperceptible than the passions; and it is as possible for me to be able to discern and feel the former, as the latter. Cannot I as well tell that I think such a thought, if I do think it; that I intend and purpose such a thing, if I do really entertain in my heart such a resolution, as that I feel the motions that affect my outward man? If therefore a person with a practical judgment esteems the blessed God to be his highest and best good, and accordingly chooses him as such, and settles this resolution in his own soul, saying, "This God shall be my God, my best and supreme Good, here will I seek my felicity, and take up my rest, and to him will I be an entirely devoted one for ever;" in this person certainly lies the substance and essence of love. And is not this perceptible? are not such acts as these capable of being reflected on, and taken notice of, if men would but more frequently turn their eyes inward, and habituate themselves to converse with themselves? But I further add,

4. That most certain it is, that during our abode in the body, the affections of the soul have more intimately an influence upon it. Such is the close and mysterious union between these two natures of flesh and spirit; that the influences between the one and the other are reciprocal. And therefore it is that the very temper or complexion of our souls doth so naturally, some way or other, represent itself in the outward man, as that it is very difficult, almost impossible, to hide and conceal what are the sentiments of our spirits upon certain occasions. Whence it hath grown into a maxim, *vultus est index animi: that the face is the character of the mind. Heu, quam difficile est crimen non prodere vultu! How hard is it for a man not to betray guilt in his countenance, if he has the sense of it in his own mind and heart!* And therefore we should consider with ourselves, how our affections work towards God;

even according to the usual way, wherein human affections are wont to shew and discover themselves. For I add,

5. That even spiritual, holy affections, such as respect the invisible God, and other invisible objects, do frequently so work in those pious souls in whom they are, as to make very great and deep impressions upon the body, and are accompanied with such passionate expressions, as are discernible, even to the inferior senses which belong to the animal nature. Let pas sages of Scripture to this purpose be looked into. How was the Psalmist affected and wrought upon by one affection towards God, when he tells us, “My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.” [Ps. cxix. 120](#). There is a proportion between fear and love, in this case. As for love, the same devout Psalmist says, “My soul thirsteth for thee, O God! yea my flesh longeth for thee.” [Ps. lxiii. 1](#) And again, “My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” [Ps. lxxxiv. 2](#). Now these are not to be understood as mere rhetorical strains; for indeed they are not so, but do plainly carry this signification with them, that though the flesh be more immediately incapable of desire, of thirsting, and longing after God, whereof the soul alone is primarily capable, yet, mediately, the flesh partakes thereof. That is, the heart and soul did so much long after God, that the flesh was affected and bore the impression of that vehement desire, which was in the soul, as in its original and proper scat. We are therefore to consider, that even the more passionate workings of love towards God are very agreeable to that kind of affection, which in respect to the object, and principle of it, is spiritual and divine. And therefore,

6. It must further be added, that if persons be very apt to be passionately affected in other kinds, and towards other objects, but do always find themselves dull, and insensible of such motions towards God and invisible things, they have a great deal of reason to suspect themselves to be under a very bad distemper. Indeed, when persons are equally, and alike, unapt to feel such passionate resentments in their hearts towards any kind of objects, the matter is quite otherwise. But if they can, ordinarily say, “I feel my love to work towards the creature, a relation, or other amiable objects in this and that passionate manner; but I can feel no love working towards God,” they are far from being in a good condition They have, at least, a good deal of reason to suspect, that a distemper prevails upon them. Their love languisheth, and needs re-enforcement; and they ought not to content themselves to have the matter so, as if it were a case to be approved of, and that needed no redress. But yet again,

7. We must consider, that tempers are very carefully to be distinguished. The temper of some men’s minds is more composed, according as the bodily temper is more fixed, and their natural spirits are less volatile. Hence some are of a more even deportment to every object, even to the observation of others, and seldom are seen to be exalted, or depressed, whatever occurrences happen to them in the course of their lives. They are not often seen, it may be, either to weep or laugh, to be either remarkably sad or cheerful. And grace, or



this holy affection wherever it is in its subject, is somewhat conform to the natural temper of the person; as water poured into a vessel, resembleth the form of that vessel. If the vessel be round, then it resembles a round figure; if triangular, then it resembles a triangular figure. So I say grace and holy affections, where they are, resemble their subject, and receive in some sense a likeness and conformity to it, so as not to change the natural temper of the mind. Indeed the great business of the grace of God is to influence men as to morals, and not as to naturals. Therefore it were an unreasonable thing for any one to make himself a measure to all other persons, how much soever they differ in temper from him. Or that any one should make another such a standard to himself, that however it be with him as to his natural temper, he must be just such as others are; which is equally to aim at a thing both unnecessary and impossible. Further,

8. We must warily distinguish between the exercise of love upon extraordinary, and sudden occasions, and such as are common and less surprising. As you know one may converse daily among the nearest relatives, and never feel any discernible pang of affection working towards them, as one docs to an object that suddenly appears. This proceeds from frequency and familiarity with them; when possibly the very same person would be in a transport upon the sudden and unexpected sight of the face of a friend, whom he had not seen for many years before. Now this is not inconsiderable as to our present case. It may be thus with many persons, who do not feel such a passionate pang of love towards persons, they daily converse with, as they do towards others, at the sight of whom they are surprised: yet notwithstanding this their love may be far dearer, and habitually much more strong to those relations whom they daily converse with, as occasions when administered abundantly shew; that is, they would do more for them, and be more deeply concerned if they saw them in distress, pain, and anguish. They would with much more regret endure separation from them, or take their deaths much more impatiently; which things shew their affections to be habitually much stronger, though upon sudden occasions, or in a certain juncture, they may work much more observably. And thus it may possibly be with some persons, who walk more evenly in their spirits before God. They have it may be fewer transports than others, who are of such uneven spirits, that the sight of God is often a new thing to them. They have him, less frequently out of sight, and are daily more conversant with him, and therefore are not subject to such violent emotions of mind. And if we compare these together, certainly we can never think, that there is a greater excellency in that temper which subjects a man, now and then, to higher transports of spiritual and divine affection, than in that temper of spirit, which is more steadily determined to a continual course of walking with God, in whom there is also an habitual complacence.

Lastly, This is further to be considered, that if at any time one would try the sincerity of one's heart towards God, it is much more clearly to be evinced by the influence this hath

on a man's life, than by the passionate or sensible impressions made upon the body. I say, we have a far surer evidence of our love to God, from the influence it has to govern and manage the course of our lives, than from all the passionate emotions, and resentments we may feel in the inferior parts of the outward man. Suppose such raptures, and transports, and ecstatic motions, as are very strange, and not without their delectation and pleasure: alas! these signify but little towards the evincing of true sincere love to God, in comparison of a stable course of living under his government, as persons who are beyond all things loath to offend and displease him. If you seek an evidence of the truth of your love to God, take this; "If ye love me keep my commandments." [John xiv. 15](#). And again, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." [1 John v. 3](#). Though we must take heed here of thinking, as was formerly said, that the external effect is sufficient without the principle; or that a course of obedience, in outward acts, to the rules set before us, will do the business, though there be nothing of the principle of the love of God in us. But take these in connexion, the principle with the effect, and they are a great deal more pungent demonstrations of love, than mere transports of extraordinary affection, now and then, are. Agreeably to which our Lord says, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and manifest myself unto him." [John xiv. 21](#). And again, as it afterwards follows, "If any man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him," [ver. 23](#).

So that we should take heed of putting too much upon the mere matter of passionate love in this case; unless, as we said before, it be manifestly discernable, that we can be passionately affected to any other kind of objects, while we find a stupidity, and dulness upon us, with respect to those, which are spiritual and divine. Therefore lay the great stress always here: "What doth the love, I pretend to, signify as to the conduct of my life? Do I live as a lover of God? as if it were an ungrateful matter to me, above all things, to displease him? as that I study, by all means possible, to maintain an intercourse of union, and communion between him and me? Is it such a love as makes his honour dear to me, so that I am above all things concerned not to disgrace the name which I bear, or be a reproach to him to whom I profess a relation? Is there such a principle in me as makes distance from God a wearisome thing? And would I fain be nearer to him daily, more acquainted with him, more conformed to him, and changed into his divine image and likeness?" If this is the influence that love to God hath upon our lives, it is the evidence, it is the thing, if any thing can be so, that must prove and demonstrate to ourselves the sincerity of our love.

113

114

## SERMON XII.<sup>66</sup>

WE have already in the preceding discourse offered sundry considerations to those, who are apt to take it for granted that they are lovers of God, though they never really discerned any motion of love to him in their hearts at all; or who fondly imagine that the conviction of their judgment in this matter, is to be taken for the affection of the heart. We have also spoken in several particulars to another sort, who suspect they are no true lovers of God, and are many times ready to conclude so; because their love to him is not so fervent and passionate as they think it ought to be. And now

III. We come to the third sort that we have to do with, to wit, those who are apt to censure other persons, merely upon this account; because they make profession of such a fervent love to God, as they themselves are altogether strangers to. All expressions of such a fervent passionate love to God fall under a suspicious censure, and accusation from these men. As for instance, they charge all such expressions of love with hypocrisy, or with enthusiasm: thinking it proceeds from, nothing else but a fantastic representation of the object they pretend to love; or else, they resolve it all into the temper of the body, and say it owes itself to nothing else but to such or such a crasis, a present habit and temperature, or a freer circulation of the blood, and quicker agitation of certain brisk and agile spirits. And thus they think that a mechanical account is to be given of all such kind of affections; and that whoso ever well understands the structure of the brain, or the nature of the spleen, and hypochondria, and the various twistings of the nerves about the veins and arteries, may very well be able to give a good account of all such kind of love.

I Now as to the first of these, to wit, the charge of hypocrisy, we must allow (as there will be further occasion to evince hereafter when we come to the last doctrine) that if any do pretend to such a love to God, and join with it an immoral conversation, there is a great deal of reason for the charge; and in such a case we must fall in with the accuser and say the same. But if this charge be fastened upon persons, whose walk and conversation is sober and just, we have then several things to say to it. As

(1.) It is a most uncharitable censure to say that all pretence to a more fervent and vehement love to God, is for this very reason hypocritical. I wonder why so? Does not this seem to say, that there can be no such thing as a real, and fervent love to God? This is surely a very strange accusation, at once without warrant, and against the express law of charity, which requires us to “think no evil.” [1 Cor. xiii. 5](#). And it is an essential character of it to be absolutely disinclined to take up an evil surmise, or bad thoughts of any one, where there is not a very manifest and apparent cause.

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66 Preached November 8, 1676.

(2.) The charge is most unreasonable. There is not the least ground for such a censure, supposing the persons to be in the main of a sober, just, and unexceptionable deportment among men. Of such it may most unrighteously be said, that they are hypocrites, while they pretend to love God. But how will you prove your charge? by what medium will you make it out, that all pretences of love to God, by such persons, are hypocritical? And surely that is most unreasonable censure, for which no reason can be given.

(3.) Such a charge or accusation must needs proceed from a most idle and pragmatic temper. For these censurers shew themselves to be vain busy-bodies, who meddle out of their own province. But what have they to do to judge the hearts of other men? That is a province they have nothing at all to do in. What is it then but a vain pragmatic humour that prompts them to meddle in a sphere wherein they have no concern? “Who art thou,” saith the Scripture, “that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth”. [Rom. xiv. 4](#). Nay,

(4.) It is to be guilty of the most insolent presumption; for it is to encroach upon the prerogative of God, to whom alone it belongs to search, and judge the heart. Who are they that take upon them to judge one another? “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” [Rom. xiv. 10](#). Whoever they are that do judge so, they subject themselves to the judgment of God. Therefore says our Lord, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” [Matt. vii. 1](#). That is, in effect, if you judge so at random, and where you have nothing to do, you shall know what judging means, when you shall be judged also.

(5.) I would further say, by way of question, Pray what is the thing you find fault with in this case? Is it this love itself, or is it the appearance of it? Sure it will not be said, it is the love itself. Who would be so impudently profane as to say, it is a crime to love God? or that such love is criminal, when it is warm and vehement? as if it were possible to love God too much. Sure this will never be said by those who consider that we are required to “love him with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind.” [Matt. xxii. 37](#) And besides, this were to make the accusation to contradict itself; for whensoever the charge of hypocrisy is alleged against anyone, the thing pretended to is implied to be good and commendable.

Or is it the appearance of such love that is found fault with? That is just the same thing as to find fault with the sun for shining. It is true, all discovery of this or any other excellency whatsoever ought to be modest, and sober; most remote from any thing of boasting or vain-glorious ostentation, than which, in such a case as this, nothing in all the world can be more fulsome. But what! should a man be ashamed to be come, and appear an earnest lover of God? Was the Psalmist shy of appearing so, when he again and again avowed it with so much solemnity? when he made professions of his love to God, which he designed, and no doubt knew would be recorded to all future times? And the noble personage whom we spoke of before, was he ashamed to have it recorded, that he was such a one’s friend? It is so remarkable that we cannot look over a page in the book of Psalms, but we shall find some or

other expression now made public to the world, of an avowed love to God. "I love the Lord," says he, "because he hath heard my voice and my supplications." *Ps. cxvi. 1.* And again, "I will love thee, O Lord my strength." *xviii. 1.* The word there used is most emphatically expressive of the most vehement, ardent, fervent love. "I will love thee from my very bowels." And what! is this a thing for a man to be ashamed of? to profess himself an earnest lover of God, if indeed he is so. He only has reason to be ashamed of saying he is so, who is not so in reality. But I say further,

(6.) That this same accusation is hypocritical. It carries the most palpable hypocrisy in it; for it is manifest that such persons do only pretend to be angry at the pretence of love to God; when it plainly appears they are angry that the love of God should really be in any one. And this is easy to be made out. For do not all men generally profess love to God? Now they are not angry with those that profess, but love him not. But what religion is there without love? and whoever professes religion, does consequently profess love to God. But let them make it appear by their practice, that their profession is but a mockery, that they do but say, "Hail!" and strike at the divine Majesty at the same time; let them I say with their pretence of religion, or love to God, but join some practical signification that they are not in good earnest, and they please well enough, no fault is found with them.

So that it is very plain the fault they are bent against is not hypocrisy, but sincerity. They are angry that there is any such thing as sincere love to God in the world. Therefore as Plato said to the Cynic, who trod upon a fine bed of his, and cried out, "I tread on Plato's pride," that he the Cynic discovered greater pride by this action; so we may say to these men who accuse professors of love to God, with hypocrisy, that it is with more hypocrisy. It is not the mere pretence of love to God, that they intend to accuse, as supposing it false, or that there is no such thing, but because they really suspect it is true. They think that such men have that in them, which they have not, and therefore they pass a kind of judgment upon them in their own consciences. This they cannot endure; and since they would fain malign them in their report, therefore they would do it as plausible as they can, and are more witty than to say, they censure them for loving truly, but for pretending to it falsely. But then again

2 The affection of this kind is by some charged with enthusiasm. "If (say they) there be any such affection, it is altogether enthusiastic. It owes itself entirely to the fantastical representation of the object, and so can have nothing sincere, or genuine belonging to it." To this, I say,

(1.) Why so? why must it needs be thought enthusiastical? What! because it is more than ordinarily vehement or fervent? as if no sober exercise or expression of love to God could be so. And we know too, though I lay very little stress upon it,

(2.) That the name of enthusiasm hath sometimes had a gentler sound than now it hath; since the *Εμπνευστοι*, and phrases signifying inspiration from God, are so frequently to be found in the writings of Plato, and others of the philosophers. And yet they were never

twitted as enthusiasts, nor treated as if that name carried any thing of evil signification, or the import of a bad character in it. But

(3.) Why should it be wondered at that there should be expressions of love to God which import great fervour and intenseness; since we know that such as have been professedly related and devoted to God heretofore, and of whom Scripture-records give us an account, have been all along very full of such expressions? What would they think of such expressions as these of David? "I opened my mouth, and panted; for I longed for thy commandments," [Ps. cxix. 131](#). "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times." [ver. 20](#). "Oh how love I thy holy law!" [ver. 97](#). "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." [xlii. 1](#). Yea we find that there have been such appearances, and expressions obvious to view, of this divine spiritual affection, that have incurred the censure of insanity; and yet they have been reckoned a glory. Thus it was with David, who when he was censured for dancing before the Lord, answers, "I will play before the Lord, I will yet be more vile, &c." [2 Sam vi. 21, 22](#). And says the apostle, "Whether we be besides ourselves it is to God; or whether we be sober it is for your cause: for the love of Christ constraineth us." [2 Cor. v. 13, 14](#). It is very likely he speaks here with reference to the censure of those false teachers, with whom you find him conflicting in that very chapter; as very frequently he does in both the epistles to the Corinthians, and also in others. They perhaps went about to represent him as a wild enthusiast; as one that was acted by an enthusiastical fury. Therefore he speaks according to their sense. Admit it, be it so; If I be really besides myself as they talk; it is the love of Christ which constrains me! He thinks himself not at all disparaged in the case. But I further say,

(4) I make little doubt but many do attribute too much to rapture, and ecstatic motions and transports of otherwise pious love. I refer therefore to what was said under a foregoing head, especially to that distinction which was given you of the act, and of the passion of love, which are not only distinguishable, but sometimes plainly separable things. There may be very intense love, very strong and mighty love, where there is nothing of passion felt. This is a thing altogether accidental to the nature of love, which may be diverse and distinct from passion; otherwise there would be no such thing as loving God at all in any other way. And we must further say,

(5.) That no doubt it is a very great fault to frame representations and ideas of God, and of divine things in our minds by the use of a liberty indulged to our own fancy and imagination, if therein we go beyond, or besides the warrant of his own revelation. And even there too we must be very careful, when we find God representing himself, or other matters of a divine and spiritual nature under borrowed expressions or similitudes, that we mind the thing that is to be represented, and held forth to us, and that we drain and defecate it from all the dregs of materiality, which belong to the metaphor; otherwise we may be greatly injurious, more than we are aware of, both to the divine honour, and to ourselves.



Too many do greatly gratify the luxury of their fancies in such cases. We read of one, but very likely there may be more instances than one, I say we read of one, a popish female saint, who pretended in vision to such a communion with our Saviour, that forsooth she took upon her to describe him; what sort of eyes he had, and what kind of features; and pretended to be most passionately enamoured of him. And per haps there are too many over-prone to frame imaginations concerning the Deity, altogether unworthy of, and disagreeable to that glorious and ever-blessed Being; and having thereupon formed such and such ideas of him in their own minds, are variously affected according to the import of the idea about him. For instance, those of very melancholy tempers are apt to frame ideas altogether unlike God, and such as render him in their eyes a dreadful, and hateful object. Or if the idea be such as imports loveliness; yet if it be fantastical, and an affection of love be raised thereupon, it is most plain and evident that such a person is all the while but hugging his own shadow, and entertaining himself with an empty cloud, or an idol of his own forming. And I do not know wherein he is, less guilty, than in falling down before an image. When we do in our own fancies create a God to ourselves, and an extraordinary motion of affection is working towards it, in one kind or another, it is our own creature that we are all this while entertaining ourselves with, and not God. Therefore we ought to take heed that our apprehensions of things be scriptural and regular; such as that light which shines in God's word, or that clear flame which reason, when it argues according to the word of God, doth give us. Otherwise we are mere idolaters, while we imagine that we have only complacency in doing homage to God. But I add,

Lastly, That the most regular, true, and rational apprehensions of God, do give ground for the most fervent and vehement love of him that is possible. And therefore it is a very foolish, idle thing, to charge love to God with being enthusiastical merely because it is fervent. For though it be such as answers truly, it can never answer fully such apprehensions of the object, as are agreeable to God, and such as God's own revelation gives ground and warrant for. Certainly there is no warrant to say that there is any thing of enthusiasm in such a pretence as this. There is no need that any such exorbitant digressions and excursions should be made to by-ways of representing God to ourselves, that so he may be amiable and lovely in our eyes. A true, and right apprehension of him, that is most agreeable to the Object itself, and his revelation, is the best and truest ground of the strongest and most vehement love. And certainly to a sober christian, a fantastical representation of a divine object will rather greatly cool and check his love, than contribute to the heat of it. But

3. Such an affection, as we are speaking of, is by others resolved into the temper and disposition of the bodily humours; or the various structure of our frame, and the freer motion of the blood and animal spirits. And to this also it is,

(1.) To be acknowledged that there is undoubtedly very much truth in the matter so far as that the affection may be the more intense, and exercised with a more sensible vigour, according as the body is so and so disposed, or as the habit of it is at that time.

(2.) Do not we also know that there are pious men of all tempers and constitutions of body? and is not every man the more pious, by how much the more he is a lover of God? And

(3.) Admit that bodily tempers signify any thing in this matter, that is, in the present exercise of the affections in general, what is to be inferred? Will it follow, that such an affection as this, in which the blood and spirits may be so and so concerned, hath therefore nothing spiritual and divine in it? which way should that follow? Why is it not as apprehensible, that divine and spiritual love may run in the same natural channel, and follow the same common course of operations with other love, as that wine and water may alternately flow through the same conduit pipes? Or why should it be more unreasonable and absurd, that divine and spiritual love should exert itself by the same corporeal organs with love of another kind, as having the same seat and subject, the faculties of the soul? I hope it is not one faculty in the soul that common love hath its seat in, and another faculty that divine love hath its seat in. Why should it be necessary there should be other internal organs for divine than, for common love, more than other external ones? Why may not divine love run the same course with common love in the respect that hath been mentioned? And why may not that be promoted, in its bent and exertions, by a brisk and quick agitation of the vital and animal spirits? What great inconvenience is there in this? Or what greater necessity is there for it to be otherwise, than there is for a man to have one pair of hands to do his common business, and another to lift up to God in prayer? May not a man speak of God or of divine things, and of other matters with the same tongue? and may not the same eyes which serve to read the Bible, serve to read any other book? But this carries more of folly, and foolery at the bottom, than to deserve more words to be said about it.

Therefore to wind up all, Will we severally resolve, upon all that hat!) been at so many times discoursed to you upon this subject, namely, the love of an unseen God, are we I say resolved to apply ourselves in good earnest to the exercise and practice of it? It is a very dismal thing, if all our hearing at such times and occasions as these are, must be for nothing else, but only to give the ear a present pleasure. Or that we must take such an opportunity as this to meet together, only to see one another's faces, without ever minding to lay up a stock, and to add to a treasure of that light and grace, that may actually influence our future course. Certainly we should be most inexcusable persons, if after all this we should make as little conscience of the actual frequent exercise of love to God as heretofore. If any that have heard so much of this matter, shall go hereafter from day to day, and have reason to say, "This day I have not loved God at all, I do not know there has ever been a pleasant thought of him," and so indulge themselves in the liberty of running on in this course, it will not



admit of being said all this hath been to no purpose. For it will certainly be found to have been to some purpose, but to a sad and dismal one, when the day comes, that every one must be judged according to the light they had. And the word that hath been spoken to those that live under the Gospel is that by which they must be judged.

Let us bethink ourselves, What is our life, if love run not through it? if a vein of love to God be not carried through the course of it? Alas, without this, life is but a dream, and all our religion but a fancy! What do such assemblies as these signify! What a cold pitiful business is it, for so many of us to come together, if no love to God stir among us! We pretend to come to a God, whom we do not love. What a pitiful account can we give of our coming together, if this be all! The shew, and shadow of a duty! a holy flourish! and that is all. This, I say is all, if the love of God do not animate our worship.

We cannot pretend to doubt whether God ought to be loved or no. It is a plain indisputable case. There are a great many things in religion, that are matter of doubt and disputation, and many things are made so more than need. And truly I take this occasion to say, it is no wonder there is so little love of God, and of true, living religion; because there is so much unnecessary disputing about the formalities of religion. It is a very sad and dreadful contemplation to think of, that so many persons can make the matters of religion a topic barely to please themselves with. If they can but toss an argument, cavil, and contend about this or that matter, then they are enamoured with, and highly applaud themselves, as if they could do some great thing in the business of religion; but all this while, and even by these very means, the love of God, and all practical religion vanishes. These things have exhausted, and wasted the strength, spirits, and vigour of religion itself, and made it look so languidly, and become so pitiful a thing as it is grown to be in our days; so that professors are now but the spectres, and umbrae of christians, mere skeletons. They are so in comparison of what christians were in former days, when every one might discern that in their behaviour, which might justly make them cry out, Aye! these are heavenly persons indeed! Heaven was seen in their converse, and all savoured of love to God. The Lord knoweth to what degree our religion is degenerated, and what it is like to come to at last!

And let us consider with ourselves, that we fill up our days with calamities, and make our souls desolate, and forlorn; we involve ourselves in all manner of miseries by estranging ourselves from God, and not living in the actual exercise of love to him.

Moreover let us consider that we are not always to live in this world. A dying hour doth expect us. We are hovering upon the brink of the grave. And what! is it a good preparation for death to live strangers to God, as long as we live in this world? Oh! with what horror must that thought strike a man in a dying hour, when his own heart shall tell him, "Thou hast not lived in the love of God!" Dare we, can we think, have we, I say, the confidence to think of going to God at length! to one that we have never loved, and to whom we have lived strangers all our days. But, oh blessed preparation for death! when a man shall be able, under

122

123

the expectation of expiring his last breath, to reflect and say, that his life hath been a continual walk with God. How easy a death must that man die! Death conveys him to no stranger, to no unknown presence; to die, in regard to him, is but to know that Being better, whom he knew before; and to love him better whom he loved before; and to have those enjoyments improved in degree, with the nature and kind of which he had a former acquaintance.

Let us then be serious, and in good earnest in this business; and know, we can never do any thing to purpose in it, if we labour not to have our spirits more entirely abstracted from the world. Alas! do we think we can serve two masters, God and the world? If we love the one, we shall despise the other; for as our Lord tells us,<sup>67</sup> we cannot love both. How often should these monitory, these weighty and wounding words be thought of, by them, whom they more especially concern? “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” [1 John ii. 15](#). Therefore saith the apostle, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” And is not this a cutting word of our Saviour’s to the Jews, “I know you, that you have not the love of God in you?”<sup>68</sup> And would we be branded for such? We had need then to watch the more strictly over ourselves, when we have to do with the affairs of this world, that our spirits be not ruffled, nor suffer a discomposure by the amusements of sensible things, or the variety of occurrences and affairs that we meet with in this our earthly pilgrimage.

Constant watchfulness, and much dependance upon God, and having him still before our eyes, would be a great help to us in this matter. It might make you wonder to hear, what some have professed to have attained unto, who were not of your religion. For instance, we are told of a nobleman of a foreign country, a romanist, who professed to have had such times, that when he passed along the streets of Paris, where continual diversions might easily have disturbed him, and could scarce be imagined to do otherwise, his soul was so taken up with God as to be no more moved, than if he had been in a desert. And Seneca himself, a pagan, writing a letter to his friend says to this purpose; for I remember not the very words, nor have lately seen the book. “You write to me to give you an account how I passed yesterday. Truly you have a very good opinion of me, to think I so pass a day as to be able to give you an account of what took it up. But since you desire it I will tell you. My window opens to the theatre, where are all the shews, and the noise and clamour that you well know the theatrical sports carry with them. Why (saith he) all these things (so much



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67 [Matt. vi. 24](#).

68 [John v. 42](#). See a moving discourse on these words by the Author in Vol. II. p. 481. entitled, A Sermon directing what we are to do, after a strict inquiry, whether or no we truly love God? It is only one single discourse out of seven or eight upon the same subject; and seems to have been published without his full consent, on account of the great impressions it had made upon the audience.

have I been taken up with divine matters) have no more moved me, than the whistling of the wind among the leaves of the trees in a wood &c.”

These things that I mention should be upbraiding to us, that we so little mind our spirits, and inward man, with the operative motions, and reflections thereof, and never look after a composed spirit, that is employed in minding God and taken up with the exercise of his love, through the worldly affairs and occurrences we meet with here. If we would do any thing to purpose in the exercise of love to God; if we would not be as those, that busy themselves about trifles; like the pharisaical hypocrites whom our Saviour speaks of, who were so zealous in tithing of mint, anise, and cummin, that in the mean while they forgot judgment, and mercy and the love of God; I say, if we would not be like them, but would do any thing to purpose, there must be times set apart for us to quit the world, with the torturing and distracting thoughts thereof, and let us labour to do it so totally as to forget that there is any thing in it but God, and misery.



### SERMON XIII.<sup>69</sup>

**W**E have largely insisted upon a twofold truth from these words, and told you, **FIRST**, That there is a greater difficulty of living in the exercise of love to God than towards man, upon this account, that he is not the object of sight as man is. And

**SECONDLY**, That our obligation to the love of God is most indispensable, notwithstanding that we see him not; or, that the impossibility of seeing God, is no excuse for our not loving him. There is yet another point which remains to be considered, and which was at first proposed with the former; and that is

**THIRDLY**, That they do most falsely, and absurdly pretend to the love of an unseen God, who love not their brother whom they do see. This point is full and direct in the eye of the text.

It is manifest the apostle speaks here upon the notice he had taken, that there were some persons of very high pretensions to religion, and the love of God, who were yet manifestly and notoriously defective in the exercise and expression of love towards men, and even towards their fellow-christians. And he counts it therefore necessary to cast a slur upon that empty kind of profession, and to give a dash unto that spacious fancy and gilded nothing of a pretence to the love of God, disjoined or severed from that other branch of love, namely, that towards men. In speaking to this it will be requisite to do these three things, in order to the rendering this truth more capable of belief.

I. To shew in what extent, or with what limitations, we are to understand this form of speech here in the text, the loving our brother.

II. To shew whence it comes to pass, that any should take upon them to pretend love to God, who yet have no love to their brother. And

III. To shew the absurdity and falsehood of that pretence. Upon which the use will ensue.

I. It will be needful to consider a little in what extent, or with what limitation this form of speech is to be understood, namely the love of our brother: that is, how we are to understand the expression, our brother; and what is meant by love, as it refers to him in this and other such like passages. 4

I conceive we may very warrantably extend the meaning of this expression, as was formerly hinted to you in the first opening of the words, to such a latitude as to understand by it the duties of the second table; as love to God includes all the duties of the first. So our Saviour hath taught us to understand both these, in the answer which he gave to that querist, who asked him which was the great commandment of the law. The answer was this; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy



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69 Preached November 15, 1676.

neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” [Matt. xxii. 37](#). And the apostle you know also tells us, that “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” [Rom. xiii. 10](#). All is summoned up in this one word Love.

And the same apostle in the very epistle from whence my text is taken, in insisting so much upon love to our brethren, as he doth throughout this epistle, guides us to his own drift and scope; and particularly when he tells us, that, “This is the love of God that we keep his commandments.” [1 John v. 3](#). It is manifest, that sometimes in this epistle he intends by this expression, the love of God, not merely that love which terminates upon him as the Object of it, but that love which is from God, as the Author of it, divine love. And he speaks of this divine love indefinitely, and says it is the keeping of God’s commandments; and of these commandments too we are to understand him speaking universally, and intimating that to love God is to keep all his commandments. It is love which runs forth in obedience to all his laws, which you know are divided into these two tables: the one is a comprehension of the precepts touching such things as relate to himself; the other of those which concern man. Therefore I doubt not but the word, brother, here in the text, may be taken in the same latitude, that neighbour is taken in, when it expresseth and signifieth to us the duties of a christian to his neighbour, as in that place before mentioned, “Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself,” that is, any man. So that the duties that we owe to men, as men, are all to be collected and gathered up in this, as that great summary, namely, love, to our brother.

It is very true indeed, brother is a title that many times in Scripture doth distinctly, and with some limitation hold forth to us a community and fraternity in religion; a brotherhood, who are in a state of subjection and devotedness to God, and are really his servants and children, as we shall have occasion further to speak by and by. But it is plain also, that it is some times used in Scripture in a far more extensive sense; as Adam in a, more extensive sense is said to be the son of God. You find it was part of the accusation against Job, (injurious enough no doubt, but that is nothing to our purpose) that he did take away the pledge from his brother, and made the poor naked, and sent them away unclothed. [Job xxii. 6](#). And so you know Paul bespeaks all that great assembly before whom he was convened, and with whom he was disputing, after this manner, t( men and brethren;” though they were far from being all Christians as he was. [Acts xxiii. 1](#).

And I wish that there were not too much need to insist upon this business of love to our brother according to this latitude: that those were not many in our days, who make a very great shew of piety towards God, and hold forth an appearance of religion even in a more eminent degree; and yet indulge in themselves a very great liberty (most injuriously assumed God knows) as to their dispositions and deportment towards men as men, with whom they are cast into human society. Yea, and there hath been a way found out to make little of all matters of this nature: a way to depreciate and speak diminishingly of whatever is of that import, by affixing characters upon persons which it is intended should lessen



them; as such a one is a good moral man, and the like. Truly, if it were only to assign to each man his proper place, or to determine that to be of less value and account which really is so, this were tolerable and very fit; but it is too manifest that very often religion is professedly magnified, not to the lessening only, but even the nullifying and exclusion of what is called morality. As if the tables were again to be broken, by being dashed one against another: or as if there were such incompatible things in the laws of God, that it is altogether impossible that a man should carry it as does become him towards men with whom he has to do, but he must intrench upon, and offer violence to the duty he owes to God; or, as if on the other hand, the duty which immediately terminates upon God, must quite shut out the world, and whatsoever relates to men as men.



Though yet by the way too, it is to be noted, there is all the while a very great mistake and misapplication in the use of the term morality. And I wonder whence we or any of us have learned to appropriate moral to the duties of the second table; as if the duties of the first table were not as much moral, as those of the second, and in a higher and more eminent sense so. Certainly he is but a person of bad morality that does not love God, and whose heart is not set upon him as the best, the supreme Good. It is a great injury to take the term moral, and affix it only or chiefly to the duties of the second table. I hope there is such a thing, which ought to obtain in our notion and practice, as being well-mannered unto God, or behaving ourselves well and fitly towards him. And that is the meaning of morality, when a man is in general well-mannered. Therefore he that behaves himself ill to God, doth very ill deserve the character of a moral man.

But the thing is, men intend civil by the term moral, and so mistake morality for civility. Civility indeed is only between men and men, as they are cast into societies one with another; but morality must needs run through the whole law of God. Every commandment of his law, which he hath distinguished from all other laws by vouchsafing himself to speak it by an audible voice, in ten words, to a vast assembly of men, we ought surely to account moral; and not elevate the authority or obligation of one part, by using terms with an intention to lessen or diminish another part of the same law.

But as to the thing itself, waving the name, (as it is pity there should be so much logomachy, or contention about the use or misapplication of bare words) it is I say the thing itself, wherein the religion of Christians hath been so very deficient, and by which it hath been so much slured, that a great many have learned in their practice, not to care what their deportments are to men, so they can but keep up a continual profession of, and course of pretence to, sanctity, piety, and devotion towards God. And therefore the exigence of the case so much requiring it, and the text so plainly inviting to it also, it will be very fit to say somewhat of the duty of loving our brother in this latitude, as comprehensive of all the duty we owe to men as men. Though what I shall say at present will be in general. What is particular I shall refer to lie enlarged upon in the use or application. And here I must hint to you that





a twofold extreme is carefully to be avoided, that when we speak in this latitude of loving our brother we do not,

1. By that love to our brother so intend the inward principle of that love, as to cut off the external acts of it: Nor

2. So confine the notion of this love to the external duties of the second table, as to exclude or shut out the internal principle. These are two extremes which men are very propense to run into, either into the one or the other of them. On the one hand,

1 Some are very apt to satisfy themselves that they are blameless, and not liable to exception, if their external deportment be fair and candid, just and equal, and also charitable now and then as occasion offers; though, in the mean time there be no such thing as the inward root and principle of this love in their hearts. It would be as great an absurdity for any one to say, that this love doth virtually include and comprehend in it all the external duties that flow from such a principle, as it would be to state those duties so abstractly, as to exclude the principle itself whence they are to proceed. They no way answer the intention and design of the Holy Ghost in this matter who only comply with the external part and letter of these laws, when, in the mean time, the spring and fountain of all these duties hath no place in the soul, namely love itself. For the external acts may proceed from another principle. A man may carry himself justly to others, for the sake of his reputation; and from the same motive may do many acts that carry in them mercy, pity and compassion to those that are in distress: but the principle from whence all this proceeds is self-love, and not love to his brother. Thus a man may do such and such an act of justice, such and such charitable actions, as the occasions of them are administered, merely because he would gain the reputation of being a most unexceptionable just man, a good-natured man, a charitable man. And many apprehend that they are greatly concerned to do so upon the account of prudence, out of a prudential respect, I say, to their own interest and advantage; such especially whose way of living in the world depends upon trade and commerce with men. They know, if they do not obtain and preserve the reputation of justice, none will have to do with them; every one will shun them; they will be thought unfit for any kind of commerce whatsoever. This is one extreme therefore that is carefully to be avoided in this matter. When we say that love to our brother includes all the duties of the second table, yet we must not say it excludes the inward principle whence those external duties flow; that is, such a love to our neighbour, as that which we bear, and owe unto ourselves, as we know our Lord resolves it, in the forementioned scripture. The other extreme is,

2. That we lay not the whole stress of the business upon the internal principle, without the external acts and expressions: that is, that none should content themselves with the imagination and conceit, that they have in their own hearts and bosoms the principle of love to their brother; but in the mean while never express it nor let it be seen. No, that must be a great secret to themselves, and kept close in their own consciences; they have love in



their breasts, but they can find no time or occasion to let it be seen: that is, they can, it may be, give him a good word, or as the apostle James expresses it, say to one in distress that wants food, or raiment, "Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled," but give them nothing for the body. They say that they pity such and such persons; and perhaps there may be some low degree of pity, but not such as exerts itself and commands the consonant act which is agreeable to compassion, and should be consequent or ought to follow there upon.

But we must understand this duty of loving our brother so as to comprehend the internal principle, and external expressions of it together. It is necessary that there be a sincere love in the heart, and that it demonstrate its own sincerity by such expressions and discoveries, from time to time, as the providence of God gives us opportunity. As occasions offer we should, as the apostle exhorts, do good to all men, but especially to them who are of the household of faith. [Gal. vi. 10.](#)

And if love to man is to be taken in such a latitude as hath been said, if it gather within the compass of it both the principle and all the actions that properly belong to it, we are not then to think we have a mean, low, ignoble object for our love. There is an image of God that man as man doth bear upon him. It is true, there is an image that hath been lost, but there is one still that is not capable of being so. The spiritual supernatural image wherein man did resemble God in holiness was banished from the nature of man universally, till he was pleased to renew it, and make us his own workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works. But there is besides that a natural image of God, which man still bears, inasmuch as he partakes of a spiritual, intellectual nature, resembling that of God. So that it is a noble object of love we have. We are to love men, even as God's own offspring, his sons, as he is the Father of spirits. There is in every man a spiritual nature, of which God owns himself to be the great Parent and common Father. Therefore to have a heart universally inspired with love to men as men, which flows even as far as the nature of man reaches and extends itself, even to all mankind, this, I say, we must understand to be the sum of the duty given us in charge under the expression of love to our brother.

We are to be lovers of mankind under one common notion; that is, to love upon a universal reason, which reaches to man as man, and so consequently to every man. "This is one of my own species whom I am required to love; of that rank and order in which God hath set me in the creation, and who all of us bear the image of the common Lord upon us." And you know it is the thing we find superadded, as the enforcement of one of the great precepts of the second table, namely "Thou shalt not kill;" and a reason why the breach and violation of it should be punished, that "in the image of God created he man." [Gen. ix. 6.](#) Certainly the reason is the same as to all the other laws of that table. And besides what is appropriated to the conditions of some men by the very terms of this law itself, yet men as men, under that common notion, and for that very reason, are the objects of that required duty. As when we are forbidden to kill, is not every man whatever the object of that prohibition? When we

are commanded not to steal, or bear false witness, are we not equally barred up from doing that injury to all mankind? When we are inhibited the coveting another man's property, is it not every man's property which we are thereby forbidden to covet? But then

It must also be understood that there is a stricter notion of loving our brother, to which we are to have a more particular reference, without excluding that more common extensive notion (as there is no quarrel at all between things that are in subordination to one another) that is, we ought upon the Christian account, in a special distinguishing manner, to love those who under that notion are to be esteemed or reputed brethren: I mean Christians, in the truest and strictest sense, as far as they appear so to us; that is, those who are the regenerate sons of God, who are the children of one and the same Father, and therefore are brethren to one another, on that account.

And you find that the apostle hath his eye to these brethren here, as It is manifest by many passages in this and the next epistles. If you consult the beginning of the next chapter, you will see who are to esteem one another as brethren in the most special sense. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is horn of God; and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten. [1 John v. 1](#). You see those are to be principally esteemed as brethren, who can look upon themselves and one another as related, upon the account of regeneration, unto the holy, blessed God as their common Father. So the notion of sons is manifestly taken in the third chapter of this epistle at the beginning; Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! [1 John iii. 1](#) Those, who are God's own sons by gratuitous adoption, are to be accounted by us as brethren, if we have any reason to look upon ourselves as of that character. Those who are sons by adoption, and there upon are entitled to the inheritance of sons, and are designed to that blessed state of the vision of God, and participation of his likeness, are characterized more eminently as his sons; which plainly tells us who are brethren to one another, and should, I say, be eyed and respected under that notion.

But here we must take heed of narrowing and limiting the object any further. This is limiting and restraining it enough, we need not do it any more. Many will allow this measure, that we ought to love a godly man, or one that bears God's image as such; but they will after this be the measurers of their own measure, or they will cut God's measure according to the square of their own fancies. And when they have said they ought to love a godly man as such, that is every good man, they will have him to be of their own opinion in the smallest matters, one of their own persuasion and party, one of their own temper and humour. So that in short, upon the whole matter, that same Christian love, that ought to flow to all good men, to all Christians as such, is confounded with that which ought to be called the love of friendship.

There is a vast difference between the love, which does, and ought to lie in common, between christians and christians, and that which should be particular, as between friends



and friends. It is indeed true, if I were to design and choose out myself a friend, an intimate, one whom I would trust, and with him deposit my secrets and the like, I might warrantably enough make choice of one with those qualifications before-mentioned; that is, as near my own temper as possible, or of such a lovely, amiable temper as would render his friendship acceptable to me. I might choose one of as much prudence as I could, of my own rank and condition, whose ends, interests, and designs lay very much the same way with my own. But it were a most unjust thing to think, that Christian love ought to be so confined. That must run to all christians as such, and under that very notion. So that it is not merely one of such a rank in the world, of such a temper and humour, of such or such a party, holding certain opinions in smaller and more disputable matters, that is the character of one who is to be loved as a christian.



Though indeed that has all along been in all times, and among all sorts of persons pretending to religion, a very usual practice, to fix the church, and set the boundaries of God's house, just according to the measure of their own fancy, and of their own persuasion. So the romanists will pretend to have the church only among those of their communion. And so we know there are others also, who would so confine the pale of the church. Besides, of others among ourselves there are not a few, who will allow none to be of the church but who will bear such external badges. One may as truly judge of a man by his clothes and garb of what profession or calling he is, and we may as well confine all human love and commerce to persons of such and such a complexion, as Christian love and converse to men distinguished only by certain external adjuncts. But I shall not here insist further on the extent and limitation of this form of speech, loving our brother. When we come to the use there will be occasion to say more on this head.

II. We are next to inquire, whence it is that any should pretend love to God, and yet be destitute of Christian, or even human love to their brethren. We have formerly shewed you, that the exercise of love to God is a thing of far higher difficulty than that which terminates on men. Love to an unseen God is unspeakably more difficult in the exercise of it than towards men that we see, and have occasion to converse with daily. Now though this be most true and apparent, yet the pretence of love to God is much more easy than the real exercise of love to our brother. It is a far more difficult thing to love God, than our brother; but withal it is a far more easy thing to pretend love to God, than really to exert it to our brother. We have in, the one the real exercise of love, and in the other case only the pretence to it. And there are two things particularly that do much more facilitate this business of men's making a shew, and putting on the pretence of love to God, rather than really exercising it to men.

1 That it is more cheap, and less expensive. And

2. It is more glorious, and makes a more glittering shew than the other does; therefore men are a great deal more apt, and more easily induced to it.



1. It is more cheap to pretend love to God, than really to exercise love to our brother. It will cost them less. The things by which men acquire to themselves a reputation of love to God, may stand them in little; only to be at some small pains to get notions into their minds, by which they may be furnished with talk upon such and such subjects. They are not one straw the poorer for this, it costs them nothing. Their keeping up the external duties of religion, going from time to time to Christian assemblies, waiting as much as they can upon the ordinances of God; all this may be done, and they be at no expence. There may be little or no cost in all this. But really to exercise love to our brother, will many times prove a costly thing. A man must deny himself, his own interest, gain, and advantage very often, that so he may be just or merciful as the circumstances of the case may be.

And it is plain, the great temptations that men have to encroach upon the rights of other men, and intrench upon the businesses that come within this summary of love to our neighbour, are principally from self-love, and self-interest. Men would be just if they did not find or imagine, that they should gain by this or that trick, by putting this and that cheat and fraud upon their neighbours with whom they have to do. They would be charitable if it did not cost them much, if they were to expend nothing. And thus to pretend love to God is a cheap thing; but to exercise real love to our neighbour according as various occasions may be, to draw forth the principle into act and exercise, may frequently prove very costly and expensive.

2. There is also more of glory in the shew, and glittering in the appearance of religion (in sometimes more than others, and it may be in our times as much as any) than there is in the discharge of the duties of justice and charity to men. He that acquires to himself the reputation of a godly man, by an ability to discourse of godly matters, having gotten a great stock of notional knowledge, gains thereby also the reputation of a man of a very refined mind. As the gnosticks in their age, an age of errors, were men of much pretence; had very high and sublime notions; but as to their morals they were as bad men as ever the world knew, if you will take the testimony concerning them, not from their professed enemies the Christians, who opposed themselves to them, but even from a heathen who characterized! them at large. (Plotinus) There were not a viler sort of men, as to matters concerning the duties of the second table, and what lay between man and man. But they were men of high speculative knowledge, had very airy, and sublime notions, wherewith they did seduce and captivate not a few A great reputation was acquired by them of that kind, when they could recommend themselves as persons, who had made it their business to separate from the rest of the world, to give themselves up to the study of all wisdom as the wise man's expression is. [Eccles. vii. 25.](#)

And as those men looked big and talked high in those former ages upon this account, I mean the reputation they had acquired for their knowledge and wisdom, which they boasted of; so many do now, and think to make a glitter in the places where they live, as

men of high, notional knowledge in matters of religion: but in comparison of this they think that to do good in a place where a man lives, to be a useful member of a civil, or a christian society, to observe the strict rules of justice, charity, and compassion, are mean things and very low matters, compared with that glorious shew and glitter, which the appearance of a great measure of notional, speculative knowledge casts upon men in their own eyes, and the eyes of them that are about them. Thus knowledge puffeth up, while true love would edify. But in the mean time that which so puffeth up makes a better shew, than that which does substantially, and solidly edify the soul.

It is too apparent a truth, which hath been hinted to you thus far, that there are persons, who upon such accounts as these, are easily induced to pretend to religion, and to make a shew of love, and devotedness to God, who are strangers to the effects of love to their brother. But from this so very apparent truth men are apt to induce as manifest and gross a falsehood; that is, because there are those who pretend love to God, that are found manifestly peccant as to the exercise of that duty which love to man would command, and ought to be the spring and principle of, that therefore all pretences to stricter religion than ordinary are hypocritical. No man who makes a more strict profession than his neighbours, and is more frequently conversant in the exercises of religion than they are, but he must needs be a pharisee and a mere pretender, only because some such persons are manifestly capable of being convinced as such. But this is no more reasonable, than because there is some counterfeit coin in the world, that therefore all is to be rejected as false, and not current; or because spectres and ghosts have been seen to walk in human shape, therefore there axe no true men; or as if, because some do hypocritically pretend loyalty and devotedness to the government, while they carry on conspiracies against their rulers, that therefore there is no way for others to approve themselves blameless, but presently to turn open and contemptuous rebels. This is strange kind of logic!

And in truth, none are honest men in their account, but such as will swear, and drink, and run into all wickedness and excess of riot with them. Of such a one they will be ready to say, "A very honest gentleman!" and then all the talk flies against such and such persons that addict themselves to a course of religion. And if some who are the notorious scandals of it have shewn themselves to be what they are, then those who make it their business to keep up a course of strictness in piety and religion, have the common infamous brand of hypocrites put upon them.

Now at this rate we must certainly quite turn the tables. Virtue must be called vice, and vice be called virtue, and the names of things be utterly altered. And we must account, that God's children and the devil's are to change families, fathers, and states one with another. For we shall have none left to be called honest men, or the children of God, but such as are no better than good -fellows: and all serious fearers and sincere lovers of God must be abandoned for none of his, only because some false brethren creep in among them.



And yet it very greatly concerneth those, who are actually and truly of the family and household, or the church of God by faith in Jesus Christ, though men do never so causelessly and injuriously scandalize the whole fraternity, upon the delinquencies of some false pretenders, to learn instruction by it, and to be abundantly more wary in all manner of conversation, upon the account of their calling him Father. All therefore that I shall by way of use leave with you at this time is the admonition of the apostle, If ye call upon the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear. [1 Pet. i.17.](#)

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## SERMON XIV.<sup>70</sup>

WE are endeavouring to shew you, that their pretence to the love of God is both untrue and absurd, who love not their brother. And as to this we proposed to shew in, the

I. Place, how we are to understand the duty of loving our brother; that is, in what extent and latitude, and also with what restriction and limitation.

II. Whence it is that persons pretend to the love of God, who never loved their brother. We now proceed,

III. To shew the falsehood and absurdity of that pretence; or to evince to you, that the pretence of love to God, where there is no love to our brother, is both false and absurd. That it is false is expressly enough said in this very verse, and we need go no further for the proof of it. "If a man say he loveth God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." What need we more to prove this pretence false? That it is also absurd, is to be evinced to you from the considerations we shall give you for that purpose, which are especially two: namely, the necessary connexion that there is between the love of God, and the love of our brother, in the nature of things; and the greater difficulty of loving God whom we have not seen, than our brother whom we have seen. So that it is absurd for a man to pretend, that he has mastered the greater difficulty, who has not overcome the less.

1 The absurdity of this pretence may be evinced from the necessary strict connexion there is between the love of God, and the love of our brother, even in the nature of the things themselves. And here we shall shew you that there is a four fold connexion between them—they are connected in respect of their object—in respect of their root and principle—in respect of their rule, and—of their end.

(1.) They are connected in respect of their object. Love to God and love to our brother, will be found to have in some sort the same object. I would not go about to prove any great affinity between the things themselves, but it is plain, I say, they have in some sort the same formal object. That is, our love to our brother if it be right and true, falls in with our love of God; so as that our love of God must be the very formal reason of our loving our brother, whom we can never truly love, if we do not love him for God's sake and because we primarily love God.

The truth is, whatever specimens of beauty or excellence we find any where in the creature, we are then only said to love them duly, when our love is pitched upon them as so many rays and beams from the first and supreme Good. And so it is the original primary Goodness which we rightfully love, even in this or that creature. It is true indeed, goodness in its original, and in its descent and derivation are not univocally the same. Nothing can be univocally common to God and the creature. But they are analogically the same. Goodness



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70 Preached November 22, 1676.



is primarily in God, and so descends, and is imparted to this or that creature. But it is only there by dependance upon him, from whom and in whom it originally is. And our love to our brother, in the strictest sense of that expression, is exerted, when it meets with that goodness, which is the most express and vivid image of God's own. We there love the representation of God in that subject wherein he has proposed himself to us as our pattern, even the excellency and glory of his holiness.

They that are in the strictest sense our brethren, as you have heard, are God's own regenerate sons; and because we are to love him that begat, we are to love them that are begotten of him. [1 John v. 1](#). And it is therefore to be observed, that elsewhere in this epistle, our states Godward are to be measured by this one thing, namely, our love to the brethren. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." [1 John iii. 14](#). So that if we compare place with place, it is very plain that the measure here is but *mensura mensurata*; that is, it is itself to be measured by a supreme measure, namely, our love to God. It is a mark or character, which itself is tried by a higher mark. "By this," says the apostle, "we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments." [1 John v. 2](#). So that no man may depend further upon this as a mark and trial of his state with respect to God, that he loves such and such his children, than as he is able to evince the love of them to be for God's own sake, and as they bear his image and likeness. And so the trial finally and ultimately resolves in this, "Am I a lover of God, yea or no?"

It is very true, that I may first and more sensibly have the perception perhaps of my love to this or that particular man. But I must run the matter higher, and particularly inquire, what is the reason I love this man? Is it because he is a good man? taking goodness in the strictest and most noble sense. Is it because he hath participated of the divine goodness? and is a follower, imitator, representer of God's moral goodness, which is his holiness? We must be capable of concluding ourselves lovers of our brethren, as they are holy ones, as they bear, or appear to us to bear, the image of God. And hereby, and not otherwise, can we conclude our love to our brother to be of the right kind, by our being able to evince that we love God primarily and above him, that is, that we love him for God's sake. And whatever is to be said of any thing for such a reason, and only upon that account, is much more to be said of that reason itself. We do not therefore love our brother aright, if God be not loved much more; our love to God being the very reason, why we truly and aright do love our brother.

Thus they stand connected in their object. You see they cannot be severed; and that a man cannot possibly love his brother aright, if he love not God: therefore the love of God must needs draw in the love of our brother, as a thing inseparably connected with it.

(2.) They are connected also in the root and principle, which in both is one and the same; namely, that very spirit of love, which is mentioned by Paul to Timothy, and which

God has given us, as well as that of power, and of a sound mind. [2 Tim. i. 7](#). We must know that love to our brother is a fruit of the Spirit as well as love to God. We have an enumeration of the several fruits of the Spirit in the epistle to the Galatians, “and love is set in the front of them all.” [Gal. v. 22](#). Now if you consider what fruits of the flesh those of the Spirit do stand in opposition to, you will find yourselves necessitated to admit and conclude, that love there, is not meant of love to God alone, but of that love which diffuses and spreads itself duly according as the objects are presented or do invite; in which the divine goodness is found, in himself primarily, and derived to this or that creature, and especially to such as bear, as was said, the more lively image and representation of his goodness.

140

We are not therefore to think, that love to God is one gracious principle, and love to our brother is another gracious principle: but we must know, that it is one and the same gracious principle of holy love which works towards this or that object, according to the excellency and amiableness thereof; that is, proportionably to what I see of divine goodness in it, which is the formal reason of my love. Holy love is the affection of love sanctified; which affection is not many but one, but yet turns itself towards this or that object according as the object claims and requires.

And therefore we find expressly that love to our brethren is resolved into the spirit of holiness, as its original cause, which is the thing that I would mainly, and principally inculcate, that so it may not be looked upon as a thing of an inferior nature; since we are too apt to look with a diminishing eye upon this duty of love to our brethren. It is really one of the fruits of the Spirit of holiness, a part of its production in renewed souls. See how expressly the apostle Peter speaks to this purpose. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren; see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.” [1 Pet. i. 22](#). So again we are told, that “the end of the commandment is charity (or love, for it is the same word that is rendered sometimes one way and sometimes another) out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” [1 Tim. i. 5](#). By the end of the commandment is meant the perfection, the top, the sum of it; or that which does virtually include all that lieth within the whole compass of the commandment. And what we are to understand by the word commandment, which is expressed indefinitely, we may see in what follows; namely, that it is the same thing with the law, “The law,” says the apostle, “is not made for a righteous man; but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, &c.” [ver. 9](#). which supposes the commandment and law here to be meant of the law in its extent, as it comprehends both tables; not only our duty to God, but to our brother also. And therefore that love which is the *coronis* and very sum of it, goes to both. Now it is said concerning this love, taken thus extensively, that it must proceed out of a pure heart, and faith unfeigned. It must proceed from that faith, which is peculiar to the regenerate sons of God. “They that believe are born of God.” [1 John v. 1](#). “And as many as received him to them gave he power to be come the

141

sons of God, even to them that believe in his name; which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." [John i. 12, 13](#). Now this same faith is the immediate production of the Spirit in the work of regeneration. It works out into love, and even into that love, which exercises itself upon our brother. Love to him, I say, must proceed from faith unfeigned. Therefore when the exercise of love was required by our Saviour, in forgiving an offending brother; and the question was put, how often they should forgive? and he replies, "unto seventy times seven;" presently the disciples, as knowing the great need and exigency of the case, said, "Lord increase our faith." [Luke xvii. 5](#). There needs much faith in order to the exercise of such love.

Wherefore this love is in most necessary connexion with what is intimate to the new creature, and what most essentially belongs unto the constitution of it. It is part of the work of regeneration, and of that holy creature, which is, when produced, called the new creature. You find therefore in that scripture, 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7. where several graces of the Spirit are mentioned together, that brotherly kindness comes among the rest, in conjunction with faith, patience, and the like.

Yea, and to evince this a little further, you find that in this very epistle in which is our text, love to our brother, even an indigent brother, is called by the name of love to God; that is, not with reference to him considered as the object (though in some respects, as was said before, God may be considered as the object too) but in reference to him as the Original and Author of this love. "He that hath this world's good," saith the apostle, "and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" [1 John iii. 17](#). It is as if he had said, it is plain, that this divine love, which God is the Author of, and of which this poor indigent brother is an object, is not in him, if he has no bowels of compassion towards him at such a time, when the exigency of his case calls for relief.

The apostle Paul tells the Thessalonian christians, that concerning brotherly love they needed not that he should write unto them, "for (saith he) you yourselves are taught of God to love one another." [1 Thess. iv. 9](#). Sure we are not strangers to the import of that expression in Scripture, or what it is to be taught of God. The expression is paralleled by those which represent men as drawn by him, efficaciously moved, and acted by his almighty Spirit. "Every one," saith our Saviour, "that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me." [John vi. 45](#). That hearing and learning of the Father, is expounded by that of being drawn, or powerfully attracted by the Father. Therefore the meaning of this expression, "You have been taught of God," is this; your hearts have been powerfully drawn by God into the exercise of this love to one another. "You need not that I write to you concerning this matter, for ye are taught of God." As in another case it is said, (the passage is taken from the prophet [Jeremiah xxxi. 34](#).) "They shall not teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me from the least to the greatest." [Heb.](#)



viii. 11. The same form of expression you see is used here, and must be taken in the same sense.

In the second chapter of the same epistle of John, ver. 20. we read of an unction of the Holy Ghost, by which the spirits of those who belong to God are so seasoned, and tintured, that they are even connaturalized unto the truth; and this is the way of God's teaching, even to love, as well as any thing else. It is a mighty, potent work of that Spirit of holiness, by which men are taught to love. He teaches so as none besides does. His way of teaching is by working in us the things that we are taught. And therefore they who think that whatsoever is required of goodness and holiness, may be the product only of human endeavour and acquisition, are to understand that we cannot do so much as this, without being taught so to do by the mighty power and Spirit of God; not so much, I say, as truly to love men as such, upon whom the stamp and impression of God's holy image is to be found. And indeed, they who think that all may be the effect of our own endeavour which is herein required of us, or of moral suasion, might learn better Christianity even from some heathens of Plato's school. A heathen philosopher, I remember, in one of his dialogues discusses this question, Whether virtue is to be taught or not? And he undertakes to demonstrate, that it is not a thing to be taught, but is infused, or inspired by God himself. Particularly he says as to this virtue of love, love to good men, that it is a divine thing infused by God. And he gives the reason of this general assertion, namely, that whatsoever virtue any do partake of, it is not taught by men, but infused from heaven above: "For, (saith he,) if it were a thing to be got by mere human teaching, then certainly good men might easily teach others to be good and virtuous; and only they must do it, be cause they alone have virtue, and so are alone capable of teaching it. But if they were capable of teaching it to others, nothing could hinder it but their envy and ill-nature; or unwillingness that any should fare as well as themselves. But a good man cannot be envious. Therefore (he concludes upon the whole) virtue is a thing not to be taught, a thing that cannot be got by teaching." We see then how it is to be understood, when love, which is so great a part of it, is said to be taught of God. So that love to God and the brethren agree in their root and principle. They have there a firm connexion; so as that it is impossible they should be severed, or that a man can be a lover of God who is not a lover of his brother.

(3.) They are connected also in their rule, which is one and the same law: for indeed the whole law of God is summed up in love. "Love is the fulfilling of the law," as we had occasion to shew formerly. [Rom. xiii. 10](#). And you see what the apostle means there by law, from the occasion of this discourse. "And this commandment have we from him, that he that loveth God, should love his brother also." [1 John iv. 21](#). He hath laid this law upon us, that we should thus dispense our love; that if we pretend to exercise our love to him, we must do it to our brother too. He will never otherwise take us into the *census*, or account, of lovers of himself.



And when the apostle James insists upon it, that “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all,” pray look back there, and see upon what occasion, and with what reference he says this. “If ye fulfil the royal law, according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.” [James ii. 8, 10](#). You find he has reference to this very thing, our love to our brother; which is what he calls the royal law. The law enjoined us is this, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” And if we be found peccant as to this, and obey it not, nor comply with the authority of the law and the Lawgiver in this instance, we make ourselves rebels throughout; we break the whole law, and all that we do besides signifies nothing. Therefore he gives an instance. The same law that hath said, “Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.” [ver. 11](#). The law doth equally and alike forbid inordinate love and unjust hatred: inordinate lust and impure love, as that which offends against one command; and inordinate hatred and ill-nature which equally offends against the other, as it is the root of murder. In opposition to which this law stands, as the summary of all that duty, which we must understand to be implicitly enjoined in that law.

(4.) Love to God, and our brother centre and agree in one end; that is, the glory of God, and our own felicity: which two, you know, do make up the end of man. We ought to love God, in order to our glorifying him; and we ought also to love our brother, for the same reason. So we ought to love God in order to our enjoying him, and being happy and blessed in him; and in like manner ought we to love our brother, in order to our enjoying God, and being happy and blessed in him.

The glory of God first depends upon our loving him, but it also as truly depends upon our loving our brother. Yea this glory of God which is the end, and some way ought to be the effect of our actions, shines a great deal more, sometimes, in the exercise of love to men. Thus saith David, “My Goodness extendeth not unto thee, but unto the saints, that are upon the earth, in whom is all my delight.” [Ps. xvi. 2, 3](#). As if he had said, Thou art never the better for it, but they may be. Here it is that we make the glory of God to shine forth in our course and practice when we do visibly exemplify the goodness of his nature in our own goodness, that is, in doing good; in those continual fruits and acts of goodness, which issue and flow from the principle of divine love (with which our souls are possessed) to those that are related unto God, according as their relation to him is larger or more special, as we have formerly shewed.

It is by our doing good that we shew to whom we belong, though that goodness of ours can reach only to men and saints. “The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness:” ([Eph. v. 9](#).) namely, that goodness which can flow and diffuse itself according as we have objects here below, upon which it may be continually pouring itself forth, and spreading itself. Herein we bear testimony to God, that we are the very children of his love. We do, as it were, herein



justify and honour our great Father. We own our Father, and own ourselves his children. “Love, that ye may be the children of God, says our Saviour, who doth good both to the evil and the good;” that is, that ye may appear to be his children. [Matt. v. 44, 45](#). And again, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.” [John xiii. 35](#). This refers to that more special love which we ought to settle upon nobody but those, who are particularly related and united to Christ. “You will own me in the world, and your relation to me; and I shall be owned and honoured among men by you, if ye love one another.” And this was the character of Christians in the primitive times of the Christian church, “See how these Christians love one another, and refuse not to die for one another.”

Yea, and again, our own felicity is promoted (which is another part of our end) by the love of our brother. For though God himself be the supreme felicitating object, yet he intends to be enjoyed by his in a community. He gathers them all unto himself in one body, of which body love is the common, bond, the unitive thing which as it were embodies and holds the members together; being the same bond of perfectness the apostle speaks of, or the most perfect bond which, says he, is charity. [Col. iii. 14](#).

And the case is plain and manifest, that where there is a languor and deficiency of Christian or brotherly love, the way of access to God is obstructed and barred up. Such persons have no free converse with God. A spirit that is full of rancour, under a distemper, filled with animosity though but to this or that one particular person, knows not how to go to God. The new creature is starved and famished this way. The soul cannot heartily enjoy God, hath no liberty towards God. Therefore our Saviour considering the state of the case gives this general law and rule: “If thou bring thy gift to the altar (he speaks in the phrase and language of the Jews under the Old Testament administration, designing the instruction of christians under the New) and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way (thou hast nothing to do at the altar, there can be no commerce between God and thee except thou go) and be reconciled first to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” [Matt. v. 23, 24](#). Love must flow, and have a free course between thy brother and thee, or it can have none between God and thee. And if it were possible how monstrous would it be, if in a man’s natural body all the nutriment should be drawn to one side! Would any one think fit to feed and cherish but one side of himself? Especially, would the new creature cherish only a love to God, and at the same time famish what may be called the other side, a love to his brother? He attempts a thing impossible to be done; and it were extremely monstrous if it could be done, or should ever take place.

Thus far you see then, that by an inseparable connexion which there is, in these four respects, between love to God and love to our brother, it must needs be an absurd pretence that men make of love to God, who exercise not love to their brother also.

2. I proceed to speak briefly (and so shall shut up for the present) to a further consideration, whence the absurdity of such a pretence ariseth; which is drawn from the greater



difficulty of loving God whom we have not seen, than our brother whom we have seen. It must needs be an absurd thing for a man to pretend that he hath mastered the greater difficulty, who hath not overcome the less. Which you see is the plain and full sense and meaning of the apostle's reasoning here.

But here it may perhaps be said, that "These two considerations do seem to contradict one another, or that the latter is repugnant to the former. For if love to God and to our brother be so connected as hath been shewn, then how can it be that love to our brother should be less difficult than love to God? Yea and if there be such a connexion, as it appears there is, it may rather be said that love to our brother seems more difficult: for we can never truly love him, till we have first been brought to love God; and so we love our brother secondarily, that is, upon his account and for his sake." For the clearing of this I shall briefly say two or three things to you.

(1.) That when we say, love to God is more difficult than love to our brother, we speak not (as formerly you may have taken notice) of implanting the principle of this love; but we speak of the exercise of it. It is God that implants the principle, and all things are equally easy to him; but it is we that are to exercise it.

(2.) Whereas we cannot exercise it neither without his concurrence, we are to consider that concurrence of his with reference not to his absolute, but to his ordinary power. Not, I say, according to the extraordinary, but the ordinary workings of the power of God. And though it be true, that according to the extraordinary working of his power he can make it equally facile to love himself and any creature in which his image shines, and more facile or easy many times; yet according to his ordinary working, his people find by their own sad experience, that they have more to do in getting their hearts to act that way, than towards the creature, according to that degree of divine goodness which they can take notice of. But though this be clear enough, yet we answer further.

(3.) There are many persons, who in some degree love Christians and good men upon lower and less sufficient motives; and not upon the account of what peculiarly respects godly men as such. And we are principally to understand the apostle as speaking to such persons, as pretended to love their brethren, professed Christians, upon these lower motives. As if he had said, "You are not yet arrived so far as to love your brother upon motives sufficient to establish your love, though you see him as one, with whom you have sensible converse. Are you then got so high as to love God? Is it a credible thing you should be able to love an unseen God?" So that the pretence carries the same absurdity with it, as if one should pretend this or that more difficult thing to be easy and facile, when many things that are unspeakably more easy he cannot do or effect. As if a man should pretend it easy to fly to the stars, who cannot walk upright on his feet. Or as if another were vaunting to be able to outface the sun, whose eyes are perpetually dazzled with the light of a candle. A likely thing you should love God, whom you have not seen; who cannot so much as love your brother, whom you have



seen, but upon the lowest motives! Wherefore these things have a connexion, and it appears from these considerations, that true love to our brother must be inseparable from the love of God. And so we have sufficiently seen the falsehood, and absurdity of such a pretence as this is.

The *Use* of all remains; and for the present it concerns us to bethink ourselves and reflect, that whereas all of us profess and pretend to love God (I presume there are none here but will avow themselves to be lovers of God, for to profess any religion is virtually to profess love to God; I say, we are concerned to bethink) whether our want of love to our brother carries not in it a conviction of the falsehood of that pretence. The languishing of this love shews a deficiency of the exercise of that noble principle of love to God. Love to God cannot be fervent, when love to Christians is so cool and feeble. And we have not only reason to complain that love is cold, but that envy and hatred are flagrant and burning hot. So far from loving one another are Christians now-a-days, that they cannot endure one another, nor tell how to live by one another!

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## SERMON XV.<sup>71</sup>

THE truth which we have in hand from these words, I mean the last of those which have been proposed from them, is to this purpose; That their pretence to the love of God is both false and absurd, who join not therewith love to their brother. And here

I. We have already shewn, in speaking to this proposition, how we are to understand love to our brother; with what latitude, and with what limitations.

II. We have shewn you whence it is that some may pretend to love God, who do not love their brother. And

III. We have shewn both the falsehood and absurdity of such a pretence: the former from plain words of Scripture; and the latter from such considerations, as do plainly demonstrate it to be a most unreasonable pretence, and therefore such as carries the most manifest absurdity with it.

The *Use* doth yet remain. And that which I more principally intend is to put you upon reflection: to engage you to reflect upon yourselves, and the common practice, but more especially upon your own; to consider how disagreeable it is to that love, which we owe to our brother; that so we may lament the great miscarriage that is to be seen in the common practice of the world, and reform it in ourselves.

And consider as to both, since we all of us profess love to God (as all implicitly do who profess any thing of religion, of which love to God is the very life and soul) whether want of love to our brother doth not too generally carry with it a plain confutation of that profession. And that I may the more distinctly pursue this use, and more comprehensively, as to the cases and persons concerned, I shall, according to the double notion of the duty in the text, take notice how little love there is to be seen towards men as men, or towards christians as christians.

*First*, Towards men as men: whom we may consider either universally, that is all men in general; or indefinitely, that is any man in particular with whom we have to do, or have occasion to converse withal.

I. How little love is there to be seen towards men universally considered! To love men as men, is to love them upon a universal reason, that extendeth or should make our love extend unto all men. As you know all the commandments of the second table are all founded in love, resolved into that duty, and gathered up into that one sum. And we find that this or that particular command being reduced thither doth oblige us to duty even to men as men, and that upon a universal reason common to all men. As we instanced before in that one negative precept, "Thou shall not kill," enforced by that universal reason, "For in the image of God made he man." The obligation of this in reference to the object, extends as

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71 Preached November 29, 1676.

far even as that natural image of God does; which as an ancient speaks, “every man bears whether he will or no, and can no more part with it than with himself.” It is indeed his very nature. But how little of such love is there to be found among us! How few true lovers are there even of their own species, who have a real and fervent affection (such as the object claims and challenges) for such as partake of the human nature with themselves! For I pray consider

1. How little is our resentment of the common calamities of the world, whether in reference to their eternal, or temporal concerns! How few regret it, or take it deeply to heart, that men are so generally without God in the world, and without Christ! That the knowledge is so imperfect among men of their own original, and of the end of their being; of him who made them, and what they were made for! That the knowledge of a Redeemer (the sweet savour of which the apostle tells as it was so much his ambition to have manifested in every place, [2 Cor. ii. 14.](#)) is yet so little among men! Who regrets or lays it to heart, that the world is so filled with violence, barbarism and blood? that a deluge and inundation of misery is with sin spread over the world, and transmitted and propagated from age to age, and from generation to generation? When we hear of wars and devastations, and garments rolled in blood here and there, how few are there who concern themselves for it, as long as they are quiet and at peace in their own habitations! And again,

2. How cold and faint are our supplications on the behalf of men so generally considered! though we are expressly directed by the exhortation of the apostle to make prayer and supplication for all men. [1 Tim. ii. 1.](#) How little comprehensive are our spirits to take in the common concerns of the world with seriousness as the case requires! How little do we imitate the blessed God in this! for a general philanthropy, or kindness to men is even a most godlike quality, and that wherein he hath represented himself as a pattern to us. And

II. We may consider men indefinitely, that is, any whom we have to do or converse with. And though there may be, as there ought to be the inward workings of love towards men considered under that formal and extensive notion, yet there may not be so much as the external expressions and exercises of love to men considered this latter way. This external exercise of love requires a present object, determined by such circumstances, and such particular occurrences and occasions as render it liable to the exercise of our love. So the apostle limits particularly our benefaction; “As we have opportunity let us do good unto all men, but especially to those who are of the household of faith. [Gal. vi. 10.](#) The poor, says our Saviour, ye have always with you, but me you have not.” [John xii. 8.](#) A present object so circumstanced, is required for the exercise of such love as goes forth into external acts. We cannot ourselves actually do good unto all. We cannot reach all, for our sphere is not so large. The most we can do in that kind is by prayer to our utmost to engage a universal agent, who can adapt himself to every one’s case and exigence. But within our sphere; I say,



and in reference to those we have to do with and where we have opportunity, how little does there appear of love to men!

The rule according to which we are to exercise our love, is that royal law, as the apostle James calls it, to love our neighbour as ourselves, [Jam. xi. 8](#). Or as our Saviour elsewhere expresses it, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye so to them." [Matt. vii. 12](#). A rule that hath been very highly magnified even among some of the heathen; and the Author of it also, our Lord Jesus Christ himself, upon the account of it. That is a known thing of the emperor Alexander Severus, who caused it to be inscribed up and down in the most noted places of his palace; and professed to bear so high an honour unto Christ, upon the account of his being the Author of so good a rule, as to desire to have him placed among the other deities. This indeed was designed before, but providence ordered it so as that it should not be said he came into so mean a copartnership for a Deity.

And that rule it is" plain doth oblige us in reference to men indefinitely, or to any man whatsoever. For we would not only wish that this or that good man should deal well with us, or regret he should deal ill, but that any man whatsoever should do so. We take it ill to be traduced, detracted, oppressed by any man. And so we have the object of our love in that extent plainly pointed out to us. Now we might here shew you, how this royal law is violated: namely, by such carriages and dispositions as are directly repugnant to love; or else by such a temper, disposition, and behaviour, which (though it doth not carry in it repugnancy to love, but would consist very well with it) proceeds from other principles, and not from a genuine, and pure principle of love. And here

1. We shall animadvert upon some things which are more directly repugnant to this love. As

(1.) A morose unconvertible frame and temper. When men are become unsociable, and nobody knows how to deal with them; such sons of Belial (as was said concerning Nabal) that one knows not how to speak to them. Such as, al though it has been a proverb that every man hath two handles, have themselves never a one that one can tell how to take hold of them by. It is impossible to, know how to converse with them, so as not to give them offence; always sour, captious, snarling, supercilious, and tractable on no terms. And this is a great deal more odious when religion is pretended for it; and when because they would be taken for persons more strictly and severally godly, they must needs therefore in their great zeal for such a reputation shew themselves uncivil and humoursome. As if religion, which beyond all things else tends to cultivate men's minds and manners, must quite destroy humanity out of the world, and render men incapable of civil converse.

If we did but read and consider such passages of Scripture, where we are enjoined to be courteous, and kindly affected to men; or consider such instances and examples as that of



Abraham treating with the sons of Heth, or that of the apostle Paul's deportment towards Felix, Festus, or Agrippa: we should soon see that much acquaintance with God is no way at all inconsistent with the most comely, fair, and even genteel deportment unto men; and that there is no inconsistency at all between religion, even at the very highest pitch, and a civil and ingenuous behaviour to them with whom we have to do.

(2.) We may instance in what is still worse, namely, an unmerciful temper and disposition, and a practice suitable to it. There is a heart that is hard as a stone, which hath no bowels, no compassion, even towards the most moving objects, which do from day to day occur. And this the apostle in this very epistle tells us very plainly doth argue the love of God not to have place in us. And again

(3.) Injustice, or unrighteousness is fitly reducible hither also as a violation of that royal law of love, inasmuch as love ought to be the principle of all the duties of righteousness. Else how can the duties of the second table be gathered up in that sum, as you heard before, of love to our neighbour as ourselves.

And here comes in all falsehood, the violations of men's words and promises, so that one does not know whom to trust; which is the thing that directly tends to break up all human society. For every thing of commerce between man and man depends upon human faith, as commerce with God depends upon a divine faith. A man that cannot trust in God can have no fellowship with him; and when there is no such thing as trust in men, there is no place for commerce between man and man. For if that should be once banished out of the universe, the world must disband, all human societies must break up; men must resolve to live as beasts, retired in cells and caves and wildernesses.

All that oppression also, extortion, and fraudulent commerce that are among men, belong to this head. If men did but love others as themselves, or if they would but do to others as they would be done unto, (which is the great measure of the exercise of love) none of this would be.

(1.) We may add as another instance, furious passions, rash anger, and precipitous choler, and the contentions and strife which are so frequent, and so hotly maintained among men. And we may add to these, fretting, envy, secret repining in men's spirits when others are better, or do better than themselves. This is a disaffection of soul, which, as some heathens have noted, speaks a direct quarrel with God, and a righting with him. Because a wise providence sees fit to favour such and such persons, therefore we will be sure to be none of their friends. And most of all repugnant to this duty of love are hatred, malice, revengefulness, a continual watching, and waiting for opportunities to do others an ill turn, from whom we conceive ourselves to have received one. And I instance,

Lastly, In that from whence almost all this doth proceed, namely, inordinate self-love which hath set all the world at variance. This is what the apostle means by lust; an affectation of drawing all to ourselves, by an inordinate and extravagant affection to which we indulge

ourselves and our own interest, each minding his own things. And so, whereas we should each of us fill up the sphere we converse in with love, that so dwelling in love we might dwell in God who is love, most men shrink their sphere into one point. They make themselves the only object of their love; all is confined there, and terminateth there.<sup>72</sup>

And therefore, because men's private interests do interfere and clash with one another, hence it comes to pass that the world is filled with all those strifes, quarrels, contentions, wars, and blood, with which it is afflicted from day to day, and age to age. Whence are all these but from lusts? and what are those lusts all gathered up into one, but inordinate self-love, that knows no regulation, and will be confined by no just measures? It is a most apt and elegant expression of the Roman emperor Marcus Antoninus to this purpose, who says, "Such an inordinate self-love is like an ulcer, or imposthumated part, that draweth all to itself, and starveth the body to which it belongs." But there may be also

2. A violation of this royal law of love to others, not only where things directly repugnant to it are indulged, but also where there are external carriages which would well comport with it, while they proceed not from a principle of love to one another, as the root and fountain of them. As in the opening of the doctrine we observed to you, that so waywardly are the spirits of men affected, that sometimes they will make the principle exclude the external acts and expressions, and sometimes the contrary. Men may carry it fairly and without exceptionableness to others, but it proceeds not from the principle of love, but some other principle.

As for instance, with respect to acts of charity, some express their compassion to those who are in distress, by relieving them in their exigencies; but it is out of vainglory, and to procure themselves a name. They sound a trumpet before them and proclaim that they give alms, as our Saviour speaks of the pharisees. So a man will be just and square in his dealings, but it proceeds not from love to his neighbour, such as we owe to ourselves, but only from

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72 There is an excellent passage to this purpose, which I beg leave to transcribe verbatim from one of the author's discourses on self-denial, never yet published. "Consider the great incongruity, yea the monstrous incongruity of his self-addictedness, that a creature should be addicted to itself; a creature I say, be it as good and great as it will! For what is the creature itself, the whole collection of all creatures together, but a mere drop unto the ocean, the drop of a bucket? Such a minute thing, a little inconsiderable thing that sprung up out of nothing into something but the other day, now to set up for itself! Monstrous incongruity, horrid absurdity! most of all for that self, that most addict themselves to serve, fleshly self. A fit thing to be a Deity! a thing whose wants and cravings continually might convince one, that it is not nor can be alone. How does it hug, and cleave, and cling to a sojourning soul for a merely borrowed life! feeling itself going when the soul is going. Is this a fit thing to subsist alone; by itself and of itself?" And so the author goes on to shew, that "to set up for ourselves as if we were born for ourselves alone, or as if we owed nothing to our brother, nor had any dependance upon God, cuts us off from him and forfeits all interest in his common care."

prudence; for if they do not carry it fair, they shall undo themselves as to their name and commerce in the world. Or it may proceed from fear; "I will not wrong or injure such a one for fear he should right himself upon me, and prove too hard for me at the long run." It may also proceed from deceit, and a treacherous disposition. They will carry it with all kindness to such till they can have an opportunity as it were to smite them under the fifth rib, as Joab did Abner, while he spoke to him peaceably. [2 Sam. iii. 27.](#)

These are manifest violations of this great and royal law; that is, they may be manifest to the persons themselves who are guilty, if they would but allow themselves the liberty to reflect, and take a view of the temper of their own spirits. In the exercise of this kind of love, *αγαπη ανυποκριτος*, an unhyprocritical love is required, love without dissimulation. [Rom. xii. 9.](#)

Now concerning all these things many are apt to think them but little matters. "They are but offences against men, say they, such as ourselves." Conscience as to these is little sensible or smitten in most men, because it is stupid, and cannot feel by reflections of this kind. But indeed these are very far from being light matters in themselves. They are things of dreadful import, if we consider what it is they argue or prove; that is, they argue little or no love to an unseen God. For thither it is that the apostle's argumentation directs us to run up the business. If it appear by these instances that there is no love to our brother, whom we have seen; how can there be any love to God, whom we have not seen? These things argue the little respect men bear to an invisible God, to an unseen Ruler and Lord. They argue how low the interest of the blessed God is among men, how little his authority and law do signify with them, and that men are sunk into a deep oblivion of him that made them.

These miscarriages where they are more common, prevailing, and customary with men, are all rooted in atheism. Where there is but little respect to the duty between man and man, it is an argument there is a much less respect to that which we owe to the unseen God, the Lord both of them and us. It argueth that when he hath settled an order in this world among his creatures, designed and appointed such a thing as human society, and directed that human love should be the common bond of that society; it argues, I say, a great want of respect unto God that men should make a rupture of that sacred bond, and so at once break themselves off from one another and from him.

This is a matter of dreadful consequence if we do but run it up to its original, and lay the stress and the weight of the matter where it ought to lie. As was said of a certain country, "The fear of God is not in this place," ([Gen. xx. 11.](#)) where it was apprehended there was a danger of suffering violence in reference to property; so it may equally be said, there is no love of God in that place; that is, in that heart and soul where so many manifest violations are continually offered (habitually and without regret) unto a law upon which he lays such weight; a law which God has made so fundamental, and built the frame of so great a part of all our other duty upon it.



And it may be now upon all this, some will be ready to say; “Truly it is a very sad thing there should be so little love among men as such, and highly reasonable it is that such love should obtain more than it does.” But they withal think it very reasonable that they should be dispensed with, especially in two cases; that is, where men are very wicked, or where they are enemies to them. In the former case they would be dispensed with upon the account of their pretended respect to God, who is injured by men’s wickedness; and they would fain be excused in the latter case, upon a real but very undue respect to themselves, whom they apprehend to be injured by such and such persons.

Therefore I would say somewhat more particularly (before I leave this head of love to men as men) to these two cases; that is, to evince to you how great iniquity it is that such limitations should be admitted of as these; namely, that we would extend our love to men in general, except the more wicked sort of men, and also such as are particular enemies to ourselves.

I. As to the former, the pretence is more plausible; they cannot apprehend how they should be bound to love a wicked man. And yet I shall shew you briefly what exercise love ought to have in that case, and upon what considerations; what place there is, and what room for love to those who are profligately wicked, whom we are thus urged to love.

(1.) It is plain, negatively, that we ought not to love a man the better because he is a wicked man, and yet it is plain that most men do so. It is as ill to love a wicked man for his iniquity, as to hate a good man for his goodness; as Cain did his brother Abel, which is noted also in this epistle. For there are persons, “Who (knowing the judgment of God that they which commit such things are worthy of death) not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.” [Rom. i. 32](#). But this is very remote from the temper of a gracious spirit. The Psalmist makes his solemn appeal to God concerning this case; “Do not I hate them that hate thee, O Lord? I hate them with a perfect hatred. I count them mine enemies.” [Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22](#). That is, barely considered as wicked, or upon the account of their wickedness and enmity to God; which is the thing upon which this professed, avowed hatred is founded. But notwithstanding,

(2.) There is room still for the exercise of love to such persons several ways. As

[1.] Love ought to be exercised in assuaging and repressing of undue and inordinate passions, which are apt to tumultuate, even in reference to cases of that nature. A fretting corroding spirit, when we find wickedness and a prosperous state in conjunction, is most expressly forbidden. “Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.” [Ps. xxxvii. 7](#). And again, “Let not thine heart envy sinners, but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.” [Prov. xxiii. 17](#). The daily and assiduous fear of God will be a check able to restrain such an ebullition of spirit where it doth prevail.



In like manner a vindictive temper of spirit as to such is not allowed. There are those, many times, who cannot have patience till providence has run its course, when they see wickedness prosperously triumphing and lifting up the head, but with impatient heat they are presently for calling down fire from heaven to destroy such. As it was with those over zealous disciples of our Lord, when entertainment and lodging were refused by the Samaritans. But see how our Saviour resents it, who rebuked and said unto them, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." [Luke ix. 55](#). There ought to be the exercise of love to the mitigation, and depression of the inordinate workings of the heart in such cases. And also



[2.] In serious and affectionate compassion, from the consideration of the tendency of their course, and of what these poor wretches are doing against themselves. The same compassion, I say, that we would have towards a distracted man, who we fear every moment will suffer by his own violent hands; and of whom we apprehend extreme peril, if he should be left a quarter of an hour to himself. These are persons that are likely to undo themselves, and in danger finally of piercing their own souls as they are wounding them every moment. The true spirit of Christian love to men as men, considered as never so wicked, ought to be exercised towards these persons upon that account, and because they are so. We reckon it as a very unnatural inhuman thing not to have great motions of pity and compassion, upon the hearing of towns, villages, and cities, in which pestilential diseases are raging, and tumbling thousands daily into the dust. But how much more dreadful is this case! and therefore how much more pitiful, compassionate love doth it require and challenge! And again,

[3.] Love should have its exercise in offering up very earnest prayers for them. It is a very sad case when the hearts and consciences of too many may witness and testify, that they could tell how to rage against such persons as they have observed to be wicked, and find their hearts ready to storm, at them; but never can find, from time to time, an occasion to put up a prayer to God for them, who have no disposition themselves to seek for mercy to their poor souls. And

[4.] In prudent and kind admonitions too, and rebukes, when providence administers the occasion; which is to be judged of by more rules and circumstances, than our present design will suffer us to mention. But besides what hath been said, as to the particulars in which this love is to be exercised in such cases, the considerations to move us to the exercise of it are manifold. As for instance,

We ought to consider that such have human nature and reasonable immortal spirits, capable of service to God as much as ourselves, and also of being in God as well as we are. And what! is there no place for love to them, who are bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and even of the same reasonable nature with ourselves?



We should also consider that we have a corrupt nature as well as they have, even the same corrupt nature. And if it has not broke forth into as ill practices, we owe it not to ourselves but to that mercy which distinguisheth persons, and doth exercise itself as it will.



And it may be even as to practice too, such we have been in times past, as the apostle speaks of some of the Corinthian christians. [1 Cor. vi. 11](#). Therefore the wickedness of such is separable from their nature, otherwise if we think the case better with us, how came it separable from ours?

Finally. Let it be considered, that God expresses a common love and kindness and indulgence to such. He does good to the evil and the unthankful, to the just and the unjust; and makes his sun to shine, and his rain to fall upon the one and the other. [Matt. v. 45](#). Yea and his particular love hath fallen upon many such, and doth mostly fall upon such, where it does fall. For herein “God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” [Rom. v. 8](#). If God did not know how to love sinners, not indeed for their wickedness, but notwithstanding it; where were we, and what would have become of us!

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## SERMON XVI.<sup>73</sup>

WE have already shewn from these words, that their pretence to the love of God is both false and absurd, who do not join with it love to their brother. And by way of use or application we have animadverted upon the common temper and frame, so very unsuitable to what this scripture plainly requires and calls for; namely, the little love that appears among Christians in our days. And after we had pressed and recommended love to men universally considered, and shewn also that we are obliged in our carriage and practice to shew our love to men considered indefinitely, that is, every one with whom we have anything to do; it was observed, that some would fain indulge themselves in the neglect of this duty, and particularly in two cases think that they may challenge a dispensation. We therefore proposed to consider them severally. 1. The case of those who think themselves to be under no obligation to love wicked men, especially such as are persons of profligate wickedness. In speaking to which we have briefly shewn what sort of exercise, love ought to have in this case. The 2. Case is that of those who think they may be dispensed with or excused from loving those that are their enemies, which we now proceed to consider. In the former case, as we have observed, persons are prone to think they may be dispensed without of respect to God, or on his account; in the latter case out of respect to themselves. A great piece of hardship many think it to be compelled to love them who they know are no friends of theirs, but are continually contriving mischievous designs against them. What room or place there can be for the exercise of love in such a case, we shall here briefly shew you, and then upon what considerations it ought to be vigorously exercised.

(1.) For the former of these, on which I shall not insist very largely.

[1.] There ought to be the exercise of love, even to enemies, in calming and subduing whatever is contrary thereunto in ourselves. All opposite passions, and the workings of them must be restrained; every thing of anger, wrath, malignity, bitterness of spirit, revenge or vindictiveness more especially. Thus ought love to be exercised in the maintaining of a calm in our own minds and hearts, that there may be no tumultuations of any undue or forbidden passion upon any such account. Yea and again,

[2.] There ought to be love exercised in a more positive way; in forgiving or passing by whatever trespasses are done against us, as we expect to be forgiven ourselves. Love ought to be exercised to such even in doing them good; which is yet more positive. "Do good," says our Saviour, "to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you." [Matt. v. 44](#). We should do them what good we can ourselves, and pray for them that they may have that good which we cannot procure for them. The order and gradation of this precept is very observable. We are first in general enjoined to love our enemies, to bless them that



curse us; and then we are enjoined to do them good, and to pray for them. As if our Lord had said, "First do all the good you can to them yourselves; but when you are gone as far as you can, then engage and set on work an almighty agent by prayer. Pray that God would do them good when you can do them none."

We should take heed of looking on this as a Platonical chimaera; as a thing that can only have place in the imagination, or as a matter altogether impracticable. Christ has enjoined us no impracticable things. And there have been great examples in the world, that of his own and others, who have been so influenced by the grace of God as to give demonstration that this was no impracticable matter. And have we never heard of any that have rendered themselves remarkable on this account? of those of whom it hath been said, "No man could take a readier course to make such a one his friend, than by doing him an injury?" I believe some of us have heard of such instances even in these lower dregs of time. This we should then fix with ourselves as our resolutions. "Doth any man make it his business and design to trouble and molest me? Is he from time to time seeking occasions to vex me? The next opportunity that occurs to me of doing that man a good turn, I will be sure to lay hold upon it. I will be even with him that way. If I can do him good, I will. This I would fix upon my heart as a law."

(2.) I will now proceed to give you some considerations that evince to us the reasonableness of such an exercise of love to our enemies; to such as bear us ill will, and are ready to do us an ill turn. As

[1.] Consider it is the law and glory of Christianity to do so. That it is the Christian law is plain, and you have heard it al ready. You see how in the sermon on the mount, our Saviour reflects upon that mean, sordid, narrow principle of the Jews, which mostly in those times did possess and steer that people. "You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, &c." [Matt. v. 43](#). He then plainly, as to the matter of the exercise of love, takes away the distinction between neighbour and enemy. Our Saviour will allow no such distinction. And it is very plain, that by neighbour and brother he means the same thing in that fifth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, where expounding the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," according to its spiritual sense and meaning, he makes the object of that law to be our brother; plainly intending by brother all those, whom it was unlawful to kill. "I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." It is plain he means anger and killing with respect to the same object. We are therefore to love our enemies under that common notion of brother. This, I say then, is most clear that our Lord Christ hath made this law with respect to enemies. Love them, bless them, pray for them, and do good to them, are his express precepts.

And it is the particular glory of Christianity, that such a constitution as this is, is to be found in it as a law. This must be acknowledged to be peculiar to Christianity. "To love



friends, that is common to all men; to love enemies, that is proper to christians;” as said an ancient in the Christian church long ago. It is true indeed such a temper as this hath been well spoken of among the heathen: but a great deal more praised, than practiced; more applauded, than imitated. I remember one of them says, that “It is to imitate God himself not to hate any one at all, and more especially to terminate the exercise of our most fervent and complacential love upon the best.” And we have heard of some who in lower things have done somewhat like this. As a great man of Athens, when on a certain night one followed him all along the street, reviling him and calling him most injurious and contumelious names, as soon as he came to his own house, he only commanded his servants to light the man home again. And every man must acknowledge it an amiable and lovely thing, when but a specimen has appeared, though never so faint, of such a kind of practice.



But I say it is the peculiar glory of Christianity to form and habituate the spirits of those who are sincere unto this temper; that so the instances of this nature may not be rare, and that love may be exemplified in men’s course and behaviour, according as the occasions of human life do require. And who can but reckon it a glory? For is not every creature upon that account the more excellent as his spirit is more conformed unto God? It is with this enforcement that this law is given by our Saviour, in the verse immediately after the precepts before mentioned; “That ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” As if he had said, Love your enemies, and do good to them that use you ill, that you may hold forth a visible resemblance of God; that his image in this kind may appear and shine in you; and that it may thereupon be made known to all whose children you are, and by whom you are begotten; that it may be seen, that there is a nature truly divine conveyed and transmitted into you, and so inwrought into your temper as demonstrate you to be the children of God. Certainly it is the glory of a creature to resemble its Maker; and by how much the more it does so, by so much the more glorious is that creature, for what is the glory or excellency found in the creature, but the reflection and impress of the divine excellency and glory? And again, in the

[2.] Place, let it be considered, that by this exercise of love to our enemies we make ourselves superior to them, according to the injunction which is laid upon us by the apostle: “Be not ye overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” [Rom. xii. 21.](#) The latter part of the verse we may take notice of by and by. All the while that a man can continue and keep up a spirit of kindness, and benignity, and goodness to his enemies, it is plain he is not overcome; he is upon the upper ground, and hath unspeakably the better of them. And it is the easiest and surest defeat of malice that can be imagined or thought of. For it is certain where an ill-minded, mischievous person doth bend and set himself against such a one as you, he will not only set himself to hurt you but to vex you. It is not only your hurt that he aims at, but he would disquiet you, and put your mind to torture. So then it is plain, let a



man have never so much hard usage from another, if there are manifest evidences that his spirit sinks not, but rather that he maintains a great spirit under all, it retorts the vexation upon him who designed it, and he himself alone is vexed who aimed at that design. Therefore he still keeps the superiority in this case, the temper of whose spirit remains within him placid, calm, and undisturbed; free from any unmanly, and most of all unchristian passions.

And it is love which hath that dominion, that it will not let such impure and unbecoming things as envy, hatred, or malice come into that state, which is all made up of goodness, kindness, and love. The strength of that gracious principle, working with its due vigour, expels and keeps them from coming into the soul, or making inroads there. And all this while there can be no vexation, no disquietude in the spirit of such a one. It is fortified, and so strengthened as to shut out what ever would disturb and break the peace within. And so he that hath set himself against you hath not his design, because, you are not overcome by him.

And to be sure whatever hand the devil hath in such attempts he is defeated; for he only desires you should sin against God, which certainly you do when you admit of any breach of charity. He does not care whether it be well or ill with you in external respects, only as it is a means to induce you to commit sin. So that if he stirs up a quarrel between any one and you his design is to transfer it between God and you; and having put it into the heart of any one to be your enemy, he would fain excite enmity in your heart against him, so as to render you God's enemy. This is the design he wholly aims at. Now he is defeated thereof, when your spirit remains conform to the law of God in this case; and you are not conscious of any evil temper of spirit towards them, who are in the mean time, working you all the mischief that they can.

[3.] This temper of spirit carries in it, and a suitable deportment expresses, a holy, great, and generous independency upon external things. For any man's ill will to you, and whatsoever effects there can be of it, are all to you external things. Such a temper of spirit then, I say, shews your independency upon all outward things, and a superiority unto all external good and evil; that you do not take yourself to be greatly concerned in matters that are so foreign to you as such a man's ill will, or any ill effects thereof. For whither can they reach if you do not betray yourself, or be false to yourself? "Fear not them that can kill the body only, and after that have no more that they can do." [Luke xii. 4](#). We are addressed to there as if we were hardly to reckon the concernments of the body any part of our own concerns.

So indeed some heathens have been wont magnificently to speak, reckoning up such things wherein good and evil may be said to consist; and upon stating the notions of the one, and the other, all the good and evil things of the body are cast out of the account. "For," says one, "do you think I take my body to be ME, and this flesh to be *myself*?" And so another, "They can kill me, but they cannot hurt me." So when one was to be beaten to death with hammers and axes, he cried out, "Strike on! thou mayest break in pieces this vessel of



Anaxarchus, but him himself thou canst not touch.” And another discoursing upon that question, *An injuria sit referenda?* denies it peremptorily, and reasons against it most strongly. “A good man, says he, is neither capable of being affected with injury, nor of affecting any one with it. Injuries can properly have place only among ill men, who are upon that account offenders and breakers of laws. But among good men there is no one that can do an injury because he hath that virtue that will not let him; and he cannot suffer injury neither, because his virtue keeps it off, so as that it cannot have access to his spirit. It cannot invade or disturb his inward man. There is nothing to be detracted or taken from him by such an injury. For as to external good he doth not reckon it his, he cares not for it, and so parts with it without loss.”

Thus many of them have talked at a high rate, but it is the great concern of Christians that they may feel in themselves what may answer the import of such expressions; and as one said, “Live rather than talk great things. “And certainly it is a great thing when the temper of a man’s spirit is such, as that in all his course he shall discover an independency upon externals; so as to hold it forth that he is little concerned with, or moved by any kind of good and evil as can only reach the out ward man, which ends with his life, and will shortly be as if it had never been.

Such a temper of spirit as this is will soon keep a man out of the reach of this lower, and more troublesome sphere. He is above, liveth in another world, in another region. His mind and spirit are not within the reach of storms and tempests, but above that region which is liable to the stroke of such things; and so he continually keeps the possession of his own soul. It is a dominion over himself, a dominion in himself, the peace and tranquillity of reason that such a man enjoys. Thus says our Saviour, “In your patience possess ye your souls.” That is a thing not very remote and alien from that temper of spirit that we are speaking of. For what think we patience is? It is not a mere sturdiness of spirit, a stoutness by which we are able to endure whatever comes; but it is that sweet and pleasant tranquillity, that repose of rest and spirit, by which it remains undisturbed whatever evils fall out to be our lot in this evil world. It is not merely to be able to bear, but to bear well; to bear becomingly and with a composed and quiet temper of mind, which admits no ill impression or resentments under what it happens to be our lot to bear.

So it falls in with love, and is animated by it. Love is the life and soul of it. Patience towards him by whom I suffer evil, is influenced by love to him; and then that evil which I suffer by him signifies nothing. And it is by this I possess my own soul; otherwise, I am not master of myself, but am an impotent slave to this or that passion, raised and stirred up in me by this or that outward affliction. And thus I betray myself to an, injury, which otherwise could not hurt or touch me. And again

[4.] It is further to be considered that the person that maligns me, or suppose them to be many that do so, they may yet have many excellencies, and on other accounts may be



very worthy persons. And it would be a useful consideration, to keep and preserve a good temper of spirit in us, and to quicken love to its due exercise, if we would turn off our eye from that one particular thing, the ill will they bear to us, and look upon, the many things that are good and commendable besides. And whatever, real goodness there is, that doth certainly challenge love. For what! do we think love is to have its exercise no where, but where there is perfect goodness? Then are we to love no creature at all.

What if in that respect we apprehend such a man to be evil or to do evil, who bears ill will to us or to our way, and those who bear our character upon them; yet may they not have very good things in them besides? Such may be sober, prudent, learned persons, and useful men in the world. And what! must; all that good be lost and buried, only because they have some particular animosity and ill will to us? It is too much to take our measure of what is to be loved, and what not, by ourselves and by our own interest; and it would argue a very private and narrow spirit, that we should judge of what is lovely and commendable, only by what has reference to us. We have no reasonable warrant to do so.

And perhaps it is a disputable thing that such and we differ in; and it is not altogether impossible, that they may be in the right, and we in the wrong. And it becomes such persons as we are, conscious to ourselves of human frailty, not to be too confident that every man is in the wrong who opposeth himself unto us. At least, it would become the modesty of christians to search so much the more, and inquire the more diligently into the matter, that they do not a double injury by being opposite to such persons wrongfully at first, and then persevering in it; and letting an unworthy, unsuitable temper of spirit obtain thereupon, and take place in them.

[5]. Suppose we be unjustly maligned by certain persons, then we have certainly God on our side; and consequently have a very good cause if we do not spoil it. If such and such bear us ill will, and we on our parts maintain the law of love inviolate, we are well as to the matter we suffer for, and we shall be tolerably well as to the manner of suffering too. Suppose we suffer hard things through their ill will, this is not so much, so we do but quietly bear our wrong; but if we miscarry here, we perfectly spoil a good cause. Whereas before we were right as to the matter, now as to the manner of our suffering under any one's displeasure, we have involved ourselves in guilt, and consequently have done so much to disoblige God from interesting himself for us. And certainly then we have done very ill for ourselves.

[6.] If we do suffer the displeasure and ill will of any unjustly with the effects thereof, and yet keep up love in our own hearts, those persons who injure us, do first a great deal more injure God. Therefore we have all the reason in the world to turn private, selfish anger upon that account, into a resentment of the indignity and offence done to the common Ruler and Lord of all. And certainly by how much more the exercise of our spirits worketh out towards him, his interests and concernments; so much the less shall we find ourselves prejudiced in our own spirits, by what does more directly tend to us, and hath an aspect



that way. We shall less consider that he hath injured us, and so be less tempted to render ill for ill, and hatred for hatred. He hath injured him that made him as well as us, which is a superior thing and a greater crime. And therefore that anger which turned the other way before, ought to turn against the dishonour that is done thereby to God, and into pity of the offender, upon the account of the anger of God incurred thereupon. And it ought to be considered further,



[7.] That if any such do never so unjustly malign us, and therein wrong us, they wrong themselves much more. That would be a great allay to our passion to consider they slightly hurt us, but greatly hurt themselves. They are more injurious to themselves, than to those they design hurt unto. They do us but some external injury, but they wound themselves to the heart and soul. Sure then there ought to be that love in us, which should work pity in us upon that account. Nay further,

[8.] We ought to consider that if they have wronged us, we have at one time and in one way or other wronged ourselves worse. We have done ourselves more wrong, than all the men in the world or the devils in hell could ever have effected against us, with their combined powers. If we have long lived in this world strangers to God, wandering from him who is our life: if we have lived in impenitence, disobedience, and rebellion to him, and strangers to his converse; we have then infinitely more wronged ourselves, I say, than men or devils can possibly do. And yet we can tell how to love ourselves for all that. Why then shall we not know how to love them who do us unspeakably less wrong, and are in no possibility of being so prejudicial to us as we are to ourselves? We can be indulgent to ourselves, who have done more wrong and hurt; why not to them, who have done us less?

[9.] We shall do ourselves a great deal more wrong than it is possible for them to do us, if we requite them with ill will, and do not maintain the law of love inviolate to them. We shall do ourselves a greater injury than they can make us suffer, though it were in their power to do as much as one creature can do to another. For they can but hurt us externally, unless it be our own fault; but we hurt ourselves internally, if there be any unbecoming passion working or raging within. And what reason is there, because one giveth me a light scratch, that I must therefore give myself a mortal stab? And yet further consider,

[10.] That whatsoever exercise our love shall have in this kind it will rebound upon ourselves, and turn to our own great advantage. For, in the first place, we shall have present peace and tranquillity within, which is a great reward; and we shall be also entitled unto that reward which is future, as all sincere obedience is, by the law of God and the Redeemer.

First. There is a great reward in this temper of spirit which it carries in itself. For do but consider what it is plain the law of Christ requires in this case. “Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.” [Matt. v. 44](#). Let us allow ourselves to pause here a little. What advantage is there in this temper of spirit, whereby a man without forcing, or straining the habitual frame thereof,





desires the fulness of all good to them, who perhaps rashly or injuriously wish all harm to him! Certainly the very sense of those words, "Bless them that curse you," if they were but transferred into and impressed upon our souls, is of unspeakably more worth than all the wealth of both the Indies. For a man to bear that temper of soul in himself, and to be able on reflection to conclude, though he be assaulted on all sides by the unjust displeasure of men, that there are yet no other but good propensions of kindness and mercy, tenderness and compassion, and a readiness to do them all the good lie can, as soon as ever he has an opportunity; the pleasantness of such a temper, if known and experienced, no one would change for the greatest advantage this world could afford him. How happy is it to be able to say with the apostle, "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat." [1 Cor. iv. 12, 13](#). As if he had said, "He that looks into our ways, nay into our breasts, shall be able to discern nothing but calmness there; even an undisturbed composure of spirit, and benignity towards them who are full of malignity to us." And

Secondly. This is that temper of spirit also to which the blessed God hath particularly promised a reward. "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee." [Prov. xxv. 21, 22](#). [Rom. xii. 20](#). It may be the person himself will not reward thee for so much good done to him. Concern not thyself for that; if he will not, God will. The Lord will reward thee for all that good which thou hast done, in lieu of the evil which he has done to thee. And I add,

Lastly, In this way you may quite conquer him at last, to whom you exercise love to that height. And how glorious a conquest is this! The apostle says in the forementioned place, which is quoted from the Proverbs, that you shall by this means, (by returning good for evil) "heap coals of fire upon his head." I know there is a controversy about these words; some understand them in a good, others in an evil sense. Some say there by is meant, that you shall engage God on your side, and his wrath and vengeance shall vindicate your quarrel. Others think that we may understand by coals of fire, the melting warmth of love; which will dissolve and mollify the obdurate, malicious spirit of the unjust adversary. And I for my part make Rule doubt but that is the meaning, and I am the more induced to believe it from what we find conjoined in both these scriptures. It is in the Proverbs, "The Lord shall reward thee," as one that hath been a subordinate benefactor to himself; who doth good to those, who carry it very ill towards him. But to this passage quoted by the apostle is subjoined this exhortation; "Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." Your goodness makes you glorious conquerors, and will melt down your enemy, and subdue him to you at the long run.

And there is no way wherein we can contribute so much to the accomplishment of God's promise, to wit, "If a man's ways please the Lord, he will make his enemies to be at peace with him." [Prov. xvi. 7](#). And we have the most reason (though we are not to limit God

as to the time or method of working things) to promise ourselves a happy issue and success this way, that is, to make our enemies at peace with us; when we in our whole deportment express and hold forth nothing but benignity, kindness, and sweetness to them, how ever harsh in their words and actions they are to us.

And we ought to bethink ourselves too (with which I shall conclude) that let us be put to forgive them never so much, God has forgiven us more. It is impossible they should ever offend us so much as we have transgressed against him. There fore let us not grudge to extend our love to our enemies, for if God had not done so to us, what had become of us? Miserable creatures had we been! “When we were enemies Christ died for us.” It was for enemies he laid down his life, and exposed himself to those cruel sufferings which he underwent. And when we expect eternal life by him, who hath done so much for enemies will we not at his word, and upon the obligation, of his own law, conform our spirits and practice to our utmost herein? For it is impossible we can have any enemies so injurious to us, as we have been to Christ; all which injury and wrong he is yet willing to bury in everlasting oblivion.



## SERMON XVII.<sup>74</sup>

THE truth which we have more lately handled from these words is this: That their pretence to the love of God is both false and absurd, who do not conjoin with it love to their brother.

We have insisted a little upon this doctrine, and have made some progress in the use, which was mainly intended to be this: namely, To animadvert upon the common practice of the world; and especially to put us upon animadverting on our own practice, wherein it is contrary to the law of that love, which we are required to exercise towards our brethren, considered as men, and as christians. We have already in the

*First* place, shewn and complained that there is but little of that love which ought to be exercised to men, as men, and we have particularly spoken to two cases, wherein many would plead an exemption; namely, the case of those who are profligately wicked, and of those who are their particular enemies: And we have shewed you how reasonable and necessary it is that love should be exercised to them as men, notwithstanding either of these circumstances. We are now to speak

*Secondly*, According to the other and more restrained notion of brother, to that love which we should have for one another as christians; or which should be generally exercised by us upon a Christian account. And is it not worth our while to take notice, how the law of such love is most commonly violated among them who bear the Christian name, and to give instances hereof? We will do this in two kinds. That is, we shall give you both private and positive instances, and let you see by both, how the law of love is too frequently broken and entrenched upon, even as if it were not a sacred thing.

I. We shall give you some private instances of this, wherein persons appear not to do what the law of love doth require. As

1. When the object of this love is mistaken; that is, either stated with too much latitude, or else is too much narrowed and limited.

(1.) I say when it is stated too largely, and men do give exorbitant measures of Christianity. There is a love to be exercised to all, as you have heard before; but there is, many times, a very unwarrantable extension of the notion of Christianity. There is so manifestly, when persons think the very assumed name itself a criterion enough of a christian, and so would stretch that which is peculiarly Christian love to a proportionable latitude. As very often the Christian name is assumed, and taken on by such persons as understand not, nor believe any more of the Christian religion than mere pagans. As to them it is by mere hap that ever that name comes upon them. As if it were enough to make a christian, only to live on such or such a turf; or as if because they think it fit and convenient to call themselves christians,

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74 Preached December 13, 1676.

therefore they must be accounted as such; and under that consideration be owned, respected, and loved as such without any difference, though all their practices hold forth nothing less than a perpetual avowed hostility unto Christ, as it is with too many others.

I would indeed allow to that profession as much of respect as can, with any appearance of justice, be understood duly to be long to a name; and such are to be loved suitably to the state and condition they are in. But totally to mistake their state and condition, and then to exercise love to them without discrimination according to that mistake, certainly there is a great injury done in this case: especially where the case is so very apparent that persons more significantly shew themselves what they are by what they do, than can be known by what they are called. And then,

(2.) When the notion of Christianity is too much narrowed and restrained, or of those whom we are to account and love as, christians. The whole christian fraternity is confined by some to those of their own party, or particular way and persuasion in respect of some little things, altogether extra-essential and circumstantial only to religion. And so Christian love comes to be confined to, and is exercised only within this little circle. This is a very great injury on the other hand; and the same thing in effect as to say, Lo, here is Christ, and there he is, yea, it is to say exclusively Here he is, and no where else! And it is as great a fault to say he is not where indeed he is, as to say he is where he is not. Love to christians, as christians, surely ought to run a larger course. And again,

2. When the principle of love doth languish. Suppose the object of it to be stated never so rightly, without any error or mistake, the languor and decay of the principle does every whit as much intrench upon the law of love, and is a more injurious violation of it, than a mistaking the object. When love so exceedingly fails among christians, as such, that upon reflection it is hardly to be known whether any such thing be alive or at work or no; when, I say, our love so waxes cold, it is, as our Saviour intimates, a time of great iniquity. And it is plain he means it of that love that ought to have its exercise to christians, fellow-christians, and not merely of love to himself. For in the context you will find him speaking of persons betraying one another; and hating one another; and then he adds, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." [Matt. xxiv. 12](#). And indeed the cause is very manifest and obvious to be from thence, from the abounding of iniquity.

He that loveth a christian as a christian, must be understood to love Christianity itself proportionably more. That which makes a thing such, is more such; that which makes a person lovely, is more lovely. To love christians as christians, is to love their religion. But now, when once the iniquities of the times abound, many who loved professors before grow cool in their love. It was taken up for their conveniency, and it is laid down for their conveniency, according as may best serve their turn.

Now this coldness of love among christians considered as such is a dreadful token, how little and slight an account so ever is made of it. The law of love doth not only say, Love

your brother or one another; but with a pure heart fervently.” [1 Pet. i. 22](#). And it is not a little that is contributed to the life and vigour of religion itself, by the vigour and lively exercise of this love. Therefore this great duty is recommended upon the very account, and with this design that our hearts may be established in holiness. “The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one towards another, and towards all men, even as we do towards you; to the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.” [1 Thes. iii. 12, 13](#).



3. An unaptness to take care of avoiding offences among Christians is another breach of this same law of love. Too many lay no restraints upon their spirits in this matter at all, or have no consideration of the case; never saying, “Shall I offend by this or that, or shall I not?” And others are as faulty in being apt to take offence, where the matter carries none in it. They are testy, froward, and captious, so that no one knoweth how to converse with them, or careth to have to do with them, or to be of their society. And again,

4. That I may hasten through many things, which I would at this time say to you in the close of all this long discourse, a very great difficulty either to give or receive satisfaction, is very unsuitable to the love of our brother.

To give satisfaction: how are the spirits of many straitened and bound up in this case, by their own pride and self-conceit, and the great opinion which they have of themselves! As if it were a far greater reflection to say, “Sir, I have done wrong;” than it is to do another wrong. Or that men must needs give out themselves to be of something above a mortal human race, that it is impossible they should ever have offended, or ever do amiss. How great mischiefs would one such word as this sometimes prevent, among those with whom we have a familiar converse, “Sir, I confess I have not done well in such a thing, pray pass it by!” That great precept of confessing our faults to one another, and praying for others, ([Jam. v. 16.](#)) how is it quite thrown out of doors now-a-days! how rare instances are there of any such kind of practice.

And there is as great an unaptness on the other hand to receive satisfaction. Persons insist highly upon the wrong, and cannot abate so much as one punctilio. Such things as forbearance and forgiveness, where there is an offence and wrong done, how little do they obtain in common practice in our time! And it is amazing to think that the moving enforcements which we have in Scripture of that one thing, should signify so little among us. Forgive ye one another the trespasses that ye commit one against another, even as God for Christ’s sake freely forgave us. Oh what! should not such a consideration as that prevail with Christian hearts to forgive, when it is considered how freely God for Christ’s sake is said to forgive us? “Be ye kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” [Eph iv. 32. Col. iii. 12, 13](#). And again,



5. A mutual shyness and strangeness to one another, without a sufficient cause, is also unsuitable to this Brotherly love. Many Christian friends grow of a sudden strangers to one

another, and no one can tell how or whence it should be. It may be the person that is passive in the case is altogether at a loss to account for it. For a long while he observes such a one to grow a stranger to him, and he cannot devise what should be the reason, or whence it should proceed, but upon a surmise. As if it were so great a difficulty to ask a person the question, Is it so? or if so, were it well? But instead of this, alienation must be the next thing, the first thing done without any more ado.

How intolerable is this among Christians! And surely if we should live to see a day wherein the Christian community should be scattered, and we tossed and driven to and fro, it may be it would be a grateful sight to meet such a man, to see such a face in a wilderness or upon the tops of mountains, whom formerly we could not endure. Cordial then perhaps would be the embraces among those persons, who almost mortally hated one another before. We have reason to pray to God that such distempers of mind among us be not thought fit to be cured by such means.

6. Another instance is neglect of mutual admonition and exhortation among Christians concerning known sins or manifest neglects of duties. We know that this is frequently pressed in Scripture, and the charge and weight of it is laid upon our love. Yea to neglect this is an interpretative hatred. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart, thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." [Levit. xix. 17](#). How often are we called upon to exhort and admonish one another? "Exhort one another daily while it is called, To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." [Heb. iii. 13](#). And how strange a thing is it, that any should take upon them to pass over such commands as these, as if they were reversed, as if they were repealed, as if such laws were abolished! Do we take upon ourselves arbitrarily, and at our own pleasure to abolish the Bible? or to abandon in our practice things as plainly pressed upon us, as any thing in the world can be? And how little is it considered how great a share such persons as neglect this duty of admonition, hath in the miscarriages of such as they converse with? How much do they partake of their sins! "Such a man would have been a more reformed man, less passionate, more orderly in his family, not so light and vain, if I had but, when occasion was offered to me, dropped a seasonable word to him." And so instead of having the benefit of Christian society, and partaking the fruits of one another's graces, we partake of one another's sins, and share the guilt with them. That is a sad part of Christian community!

And there is many times as much fault in the undue manner of reproof, as in the neglect of the thing itself; when it is done in so proud, and imperious, and passionate a way, as if the design was not to correct such a man's faults, but only to vent my own passion. Or while I pretend to mend the faults of another, I myself shall commit a greater. For it may be, the fault in the manner of reproof, is greater than the matter which I take upon me to reprove. But when this duty is sued from love, and is so managed as that it may plainly be



seen to be the product of love, then as it is in itself a great duty, so a great blessing doth often accompany and go along with it.

7. The neglect of doing good and kind offices for one another, as occasion doth require and call for, is altogether unsuitable to this law of love. For you know how we are charged and required, as we have opportunity, to do good to all, but especially to those who are of the household of faith. [Gal. vi. 10](#). And undoubtedly the apostle, using expressions of such import as he does there, is not to be understood as if he meant that this kindness, or doing good, was to be confined to the poor and indigent only, or to necessitous persons; though that is one great part of the sense: it is then to be referred to those good offices we should do to all who stand in need of our help, though it may be they are not indigent; but notwithstanding are the objects of our love, in such or such a particular case, wherein they may possibly receive assistance from us. But when persons are bound up in themselves, and so are little capable of minding any one's interest but their own, how greatly is love hereby suppressed, and stifled in the exercise of it! But besides these privative instances,

II. We shall give some positive instances too of the violation of this law of love, and so hasten to a close. And

1. Hard thoughts and rash censures of one another do very little comport with the love that should be exercised towards brethren. With respect to their particular actions, words or expressions, we are many times guilty of great injustice, and Wrong is done to this law of love. That is, when upon this or that action that we see done by such or such a one, it may be against our inclination or judgment, we put the worst construction upon it that we possibly can devise. So in like manner we are faulty when we torture the words of another, and wiredraw them, that we may if possible make them speak a bad sense, when it may be a much better might be put upon them. Persons also are guilty in this regard, when they are prone to load the differing opinions of others in some smaller matters with the most odious, and many times with the most ill-grounded consequences; putting them as it were into bears and wolves skins (as some did the Christians in the primitive times) that they may be the more exquisitely worried, and torn all to

But the matter rises many times much higher than this; and men proceed, upon some small matters of difference, to pass censures concerning such and such persons, as to their states Godward. They sit in judgment upon their souls, and pass determinations concerning them in reference to their very life or death. And yet it many times so happens, that such as contend for that small matter of difference are hypocrites, and they that are against it are hypocrites also. The one party is censured and judged as formal, superstitious hypocrites; and the other as phantastical, self-conceited, perverse hypocrites: and nothing less than the charge of hypocrisy will serve the turn, in this case, on the one hand or the other. So persons arrogate to themselves the peculiar business of the Almighty. But "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? (This is spoken of such smaller matters as we are speaking of) Why

dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ:" Rom. xiv. 4, 10. "Let us therefore (as it is afterwards inculcated and urged) follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." ver. 19.

2. Rash anger is another positive violation of this law of love: or tumultuous and insolent passions, that suddenly rise and storm and rage in Christian breasts one against another; many times on very small and little provocations, but to that height as no provocation can justify. How little is it considered that our Saviour, in the interpretation which he gives of the law in his sermon on the mount, does so interpret the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," as to make anger against our brother a kind of murder, and to bring it within the compass of that prohibition! Moreover,

3. Which is a great deal worse, inveterate grudges are also inconsistent with that love which we owe to our Christian brother. These strike at the very root of love, and tend to the starving and famishing the principle itself. Thus persons lay up something in their minds against this or that fellow christian, and there it shall lie, corrode, work and fret, till it is the occasion of their doing him hurt; but it is much more mischievous to themselves, and turns to their own far greater hurt and damage. "Grudge not one against another," says the apostle, "the Judge is at the door." Jam v. 9. An intimation that this is a matter that will be brought before the Judge. Here now is work for the Judge when he comes, that such and such have allowed themselves to harbour grudges in their hearts, till they are grown old and turned into rankling and festered sores within.

And certainly to a truly Christian spirit that is itself, and in a right frame, nothing will be more agreeable than to say, "I would not for all this world know or experience any thing as a settled grudge in my heart to any one who or whatsoever he be; so as to wish that his finger should ache, or that he should have the least harm or hurt upon my account, or for any disaffection he may bear or express to me." This now is a truly Christian spirit. But to allow myself to treasure up such things; to let them remain (*alta mente reposita*, as it were) against such a man, is very much against this law of love. He has offended you; it may be you are as prone to offend him, or to offend another.

It is little considered what is the true, the proper and right notion of the Christian church, or the churches of Christ in general. They are hospitals, or rather one great hospital wherein there are persons of all sorts under cure. There is none that is sound, none that is not diseased, none that hath not wounds and sores about him. Now how insufferable insolence were it, that in an hospital of maimed and diseased persons, one sick or wounded man should say; "Such a man's sores are so noisome to me, that I am not able to endure the being neighbour to him?" Is it fit to talk thus in an hospital "where all are sick? Cannot sore, and wounded men endure one another, when they are all there for cure? Indeed if a person is stark dead,





apparently stark dead, it is not fit he should remain there to be an annoyance to the rest. But further,

4. A secret delight taken in the harm of another is yet worse than the former. When those that call themselves Christians, or to whom that name may belong, secretly please themselves to see inconveniencies befall this or that person, this, I say, is a horrid violation of the law of love. It is a most unnatural thing to rejoice in the harm of another. In the body, as the apostle intimates, (1 Cor. xii. 26.) when one member is suffering, all the members suffer with it. And to delight in the harm of others is as contrary to the spiritual nature, which is diffused in the true body of Christ, as if the head any other member should rejoice that the hand or foot is put to pain. And

5. Directly opposite to this, but no less inconsistent with this duty of loving our Christian brother, is envy at the good of another. When I behold the good of another with an invidious, displeased eye, because such a man is better than I am; or is better reputed, or reported of; or has better gifts, or parts; or there is more appearance of his grace; and he doth more good, has more to do good with: these are most insufferable things, most directly contrary to love.

6. Most of all inconsistent with this duty is hatred. This is directly contrary to it, and, in the tendency of it, aims at no less than the destruction of the person himself. And how frequently is the case so even among some christians, that nothing can satisfy them but the destruction of those who differ from them! Nothing less than their destruction will serve their turn. This is a thing so common and manifest, as if it were quite forgotten that ever there was such a portion of scripture in the Bible as this; "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." 1 John iii. 15. And it is yet worse, when the very reason of that hatred is because such and such persons are better than themselves; as it is with many profane persons that go under the name of christians, and yet hate christians all the while for Christianity's sake; for living the Christian life, and observing the precepts of their common Lord: as Cain did his brother Abel, because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous. To shut up all,

7. Another positive instance of the violation of this law of love to our Christian brother (in the last place) is bearing hardly on one another's consciences in matters of external form relating to religion. I speak this with respect to private persons, for such I suppose my hearers to be. That is, when they do in their own minds wish, or any way within their own compass or capacity endeavour that the consciences of such who differ from them may be hardly borne upon.

It is very true indeed that the pretence of conscience, for apparent flagitious crimes, is a most wicked and blasphemous pretence. For that is to entitle God to my wickedness, or to charge him with it; inasmuch as I cannot allege conscience for any thing, but I must in that case look upon it, and refer to it as God's substitute and vicegerent, and as doing his



part within me. Therefore to pretend conscience for any thing that is in its own nature wicked and flagitious, is to cast all upon God; and to pretend that he hath enjoined me to do such or such a wicked thing. But when the difference is about small matters, which are (as we said before) extraessential to religion, even by common consent; it is a great violation of love for Christians in this case to affect and desire to have those who dissent from them hardly dealt withal, and their consciences grievously imposed upon on this pretence, that they must be, in such forms and external modes of religious worship, just as themselves, or they are not to be endured.



We do not count it necessary that it should be so as to the natural body. For I look upon matters of external form in the church, as I do upon the external vestments or coverings of our bodies. Now we do not think it necessary, that every member of the natural body, should have a covering of the same shape, size, and colour. And if this case were but considered as it should be, and Christian love did but do its part (abstracting from what necessity there may be by an authoritative sanction) we should not think it more necessary, that every member in such a christian community should be clothed in external form alike, than that every part of the body should have the same sort of garment; or, that for conformity's sake, a man should wear a cap on his foot as well as on his head.

Love, if it might be allowed its place and exercise, would consider the necessities of the several members. Love to ourselves, in the natural body, teaches us to do so. Sometimes it may be I have a sore toe or a hurt finger, that will not endure a pinching shoe or a strait glove: yet I do not think it necessary to cut off that finger or toe, or to let it go naked; but I provide a covering for it that it will bear, and that is suitable to it. Certainly, Christian love would lead us to act in like manner to the members of the Christian body, if it had but the place and exercise that belongs to it and which it claims.

Therefore now to conclude, let it be seriously considered by us how happy a world, and how happy a church it would make, if we could but learn according to what we have heard, to exercise this love to men as men, and to christians as christians. There would then be no contention in the world, or the church, but only a striving who should do the most good, and who should be most good and kind to others.

And it is a vain thing to hope, until the spirit of love revives ever to see good days. It is no external thing that will do the business. To be brought under the same form in every punctilio, in every minute circumstance, what would that do? What I say would this do if love be wanting, which is the life and soul of all communities, especially of the Christian community? Without this, the body would hang-together but as a rope of sand. Love then alone is the unitive, living cement, that joineth part and part and all to the head. It is this that must make Christianity to flourish, and the Christian church a lovely and a lively thing; a thing full of loveliness, life and vigour. And happy will it be when hearts are knit together in love, and all aim at the edification of one another, and also at the good of the whole;



bearing with one another in tolerable things, and labouring to redress what is intolerable and not to be borne. Therefore as we are to direct our prayers this way, so let us direct our practice also amongst ourselves, and all those with whom we converse. And so I have done with this scripture.

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**THIRTEEN**  
**SERMONS**  
**ON**  
**VARIOUS SUBJECTS.**



## SERMON I.<sup>75</sup>

Acts i. 7.

*And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*

THESE words are part of our Saviour's reply unto an impertinent question that was put to him by his disciples; after he had some time conversed with them since his resurrection, and immediately before he ascended, and went up into glory from them. They inquire of him, saying in the [6th. verse](#), "Lord wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He answers, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon, you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." And then it follows, "when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight."

It is obvious to the observation of any, that read the Evangelical history, what it was that the minds, even of Christ's more immediate followers, were intent upon, during the time of his abode in the flesh among them; and great was the expectation they had of a time when the Roman yoke should be shaken off, and when Israel, that had now been tributary long to that power, should be restored to its liberty. And when they found that they had now got among them one that manifestly appeared to be an extraordinary person, who could heal the sick, raise the dead, and do all other wonders with a word, they little doubted but now was the time of this great turn and revolution, which they so much hoped for. He that could feed multitudes as with miracles, they doubted not could easily maintain an army strong enough to do the business, upon very easy and unexpensive terms.

But see at length now what this great expectation of theirs came to! Which expectation, you must know too, had a private aspect even towards themselves, and their own concerns; for they doubted not if their Head and Lord became so great, they that were immediately related to him, must share proportionably in his greatness: and some of them, as the gospel tells you, thought of nothing less than sitting at his right hand, and left hand, in this his temporal kingdom which they thought he was about to set up. But see, I say, what this expectation came to! Him, whom they expected to be a potent glorious king, they had seen apprehended, and haled to judgment, and to death, as a most ignominious malefactor. They had beheld the end of him, and seen him expire, and die upon a bloody reproachful cross; and now all these great hopes of theirs were vanished. "We trusted," say they, "that this was he that should have redeemed Israel." Great hopes we had, that the so long expected work



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75 Preached at Mr. Case's, March 3, 1675.

would now, without any possibility of frustration or disappointment, have received its accomplishment and be brought to a glorious period. But they saw their hope laid in the dust; and now they reckon there was nothing more to be looked for from him; there was an end of him, and all their expectations from him. We hoped this was he; but we are fain now to think we know not what, or to think other thoughts of him.

Well, but at length he revives, and rises again; and now their hopes revive, and rise too. But their hopes are still of the same carnal, and low alloy; still their minds run the same way they had done, and they take up the matter afresh where they had left it. "Come Lord, what sayest thou now to this great business? Wilt thou now at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Now that thou hast conquered this same death that hath befallen thee, what canst thou not conquer? Shall the business be yet done?" See what he tells them in this reply of his; "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." What kindness (as if he had said) God hath for Israel, in that respect you intimate, it belongs not to you to know; it becomes you not to inquire. In the mean time there is another work for you to do. "You shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem," &c. He answers them first with a rebuke, and then with a promise. With a rebuke of that curiosity and carnality, which they betrayed in their question. As if he had said, "You meddle with things that concern you not; you too busily pry, and with an eye too daring and adventurous, into matters which God hath purposed to reserve and hide from you." But unto this mild rebuke he adds also a gracious promise. "There is a work for you to do that is properly yours, and which you have been designed to, and you shall be fitted and qualified for it; and pray let that content you, and serve your turn. Your work and business must be to be witness bearers to me, to my name and truth; to be my agents to carry on the business and design of that spiritual kingdom, which I am intent to establish, and promote, and spread through the whole world. And in order thereunto, you shall have a power come upon you which you shall little understand till you feel it, and which shall furnish you for this great work. "You shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

You see then the occasion and drift of the words, which I have designed at present to speak to; and these two things, (that we may not lose more time in any thing previous) we may observe from them,

I. That there are times and seasons respecting the church of God in the world, which the Father doth reserve and conceal in his own hand and power from men. And

II. That they are not concerned to be solicitous or make inquiry touching those times and seasons, but are to be patient of ignorance in reference thereunto. These I shall briefly open, and assert severally. And then,

III. Apply them jointly together.



I. That there are such times and seasons, that have reference to the state of the church of God upon earth, which the Father doth reserve and hide from men, in his own power. Now here concerning this we are to inquire, what these times and seasons are; and then what the hiding of them in God's own power doth import, which will serve for the explication of this truth. And then we shall let you see upon what accounts the blessed God is thus reserved towards men in this matter, hiding the events of such times and seasons in his own hand and power; and therein you may have some account of the reasons of what is asserted in this point.



As to the explication of it, two things are to be spoken to, namely, what these times and seasons are; and, what the hiding of them in God's hand and power is, or the putting them there, as it is here expressed. As to the former:

1. The times and seasons which he doth so hide, we may say concerning them that he doth conceal, first the final and concluding season of time, the period and upshot of time; and then, of each man's own particular time. He hides

(1.) The period of all time from men. We know not when the season shall be, that shall shut up time. It is a thing determined, that there shall be such a season, beyond which time shall be no more. As that great Angel is brought in swearing by him that liveth for ever and ever, "that there should be time no longer." [Rev. x. 6](#). But we are elsewhere told, that "of that day knoweth no man, no, not the Son" (as man we must understand it) "but the Father." [Matth. xxiv. 36](#). And,

(2.) The period of our own times also he hides, and keeps in reserve, as a thing put in his own power, and not into ours. "No man hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit, nor hath he power in death; and there is no discharge in that war." [Eccles. viii. 8](#). The measure of our own days he hath not put in our power. If any would hold the spirit in that day, or detain the soul in the body in which they live, they cannot do it. No man hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit; he must resign it when God commands it away; and that time is a thing he hath kept in his own power. You have that expression of Isaac remarkable to this purpose; "I am old, and know not the day of my death." [Gen xxvii. 2](#). Though he was grown a very old man, and very near to death, yet he could not know the time: though it were so very near that he might be sure it could not be very far off, yet he professeth ignorance concerning the time still. "My times are in thy hand," saith David. And into his hands he commits his spirit, as you have in the fifth verse of the same psalm. That life which he knew he could not command, he very willingly commits; he is well pleased that the measuring of it should be in the hands wherein it was. As if he had said, "I desire not to have it in mine own hand; I commit my spirit into thy hand; let it lodge here in this tabernacle as long as thou wilt, and let it go forth when thou wilt; this power is better lodged in thy hands than mine." Moreover,



There are contained within this compass of time in general, or of our own time, the seasons of good or evil unto the church in general, and the especial members of it in particular; which are for the most part unknown, and reserved in the hand and power of God.

The good seasons seem to be more especially referred to here; for it was a certain good to the church of God that the apostles were inquisitive about. "It is not for you to know the times." God hath his set time, an appointed time, where in to favour Zion, that may seem instant and at hand now and then; as they speak in the 102 psalm (we may well suppose as they would have it) The time to favour Zion, yea the set time is come. *Ps. cii. 13.* Methinks it should be come; why should not the full time be accomplished? If one may make an estimate from the affections of the well-wishers of Zion, it should be come. "Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof." But this could not be peremptorily said; he had stated the time of it with himself; the appointment of it was a matter in his own hand and power. And by consequence

The ill times, the more afflictive times of the people of God are hid, and put in his own hand and power too. For supposing that a good season be determined by him, a calm, and more serene, or halcyon season, it must be by consequence in his hand and power too to measure all the intervals: how long the intervening ill seasons shall last, how long it shall be that his people shall feed upon the bread of affliction, and have their own tears for drink, and have men riding over their heads, and they be themselves even as the street to them that pass over. All that time must come under the same mensuration, the mensuration of the same hand. So that to determine when the church of God shall enjoy better days, and how long worse times shall last, this they were to account and reckon upon that he had put it into his own hand and power. It is that which we have an interdict upon us to know. "It concerns not you to know, trouble not yourselves to inquire, the matter is in good hands." But then we are to consider too,

2. What its being in the power of God and being put there doth signify; which last we are to consider chiefly as leading to the other. The force and emphasis of the expression, seems to set forth more, than that it should barely import they are in his power; the phrase signifieth withal a positive act that is put forth in reference to their being so; that is, an act of the divine will which hath determined with itself that it will have the matter so, that such times and seasons shall remain in his own hand and power. As for those expressions in Scripture (hand and power) they explain one another. The hand of God is nothing else, but his power; his active power by which he ruleth the world, and changeth times and seasons, as to him seemeth good. But if you inquire for a more distinct explication of this matter, How this power and hand of God exerts itself, in reference to such times and seasons? Why, it doth so, in reference to the existence of them, and to the discovery of them.

(1.) In reference to their existence: his power doth effect, and bring it to pass, that there should be such times and seasons, as he hath stated and determined with himself. And so



more particularly his power orders, or effects such things as these, in reference to the existence of the times and seasons. As,

[1.] The commencement of them: that is, when such a state of things, good or evil, shall take its beginning; when such a cloud shall first begin to arise and spread itself over the horizon; when it shall scatter and be dispersed, and a bright and cheerful light spring up; “the day-spring from on high” to visit the desolate. This, his hand or power hath determined. And then,

[2.] How long such or such a state of things shall continue. The duration of it, its bounds and limits, are the work of his hand and power. So long my people shall be afflicted; as he did determine concerning the people of Israel, from the time that he spoke to Abraham about that matter, namely, four hundred and thirty years; and then ensued that blessed peaceful calm, and the glorious and wonderful works of providence, which did make way for that and introduce it, whereof the history afterwards gives an account. And again,

[3.] His own hand or power exactly measures all the degrees of good and evil, that shall be within such a compass of time; so as that there shall be nothing, more or less, than what his power orders. For we are not to take times and seasons here abstractedly; but so as to take in the events of such times and seasons: all those events which such times and seasons go pregnant with. All the births of those times, of what kind soever they be; his power orders every one so to come forth, even as it doth come forth. He works all things according to the counsel of his own will. [Dan. iv. 35.](#) And,

[4.] That hand or power doth order all the occasions and methods by which such and such seasons, with all that they are laden and burdened with, shall be brought about. No thing comes to pass but as that hand or power doth direct and order: not only the effects, the things that are produced; but all their causes, or whatsoever is productive of them. And we may add,

[5.] That the hand or power of God doth also order all the consequences and dependencies, of any such times and seasons. For there is still a concatenation in providences; and nothing falls out in the world but somewhat else depends upon it: this and that is done which is preparatory, and leads the way to something else that is to be done, till the end and the folding up of all things; till that season come, when it is determined, that time shall be no more. But,

(2.) This hand or power of the Father hath its exercise not only in reference to the existence, but also to the discovery and notification of those times and seasons which he hath reserved in his own power. That is, either to make them known before-hand or not, as he pleaseth; or else to make them known more or less clearly as he pleaseth, with greater or less degrees of obscurity or perspicuity, according as seems to him good. This is that he hath in his own hand and power, either to reveal or not reveal them, what seasons shall be as seemeth him good; or if he let any light break out before-hand into the heads or hearts of



those that are in covenant with him, then to let out so much and no more as seemeth him good.

And this may suffice for the explication of the first point. And would you now have some reason of it, why he doth thus put future times and seasons in his own power, and keep them there; why it is always his will and pleasure, while such things remain hid and reserved, that it should be so; the reasons will partly respect him, partly ourselves.

[1.] Respecting him there is a great reason for it on his part; that is, this twofold reason: it is his right, and it is his glory.

First. It is his right to have futurity thus in his own hand and power, it belongs to him as he is Ruler of the world, the great Disposer and Orderer of all things. For is it not inconsistent with sovereignty, to be accountable for every thing one means to do? should there be no *arcana imperii, nothing kept hid and secret?* It cannot stand with the absoluteness, at least, of his dominion, and that power which rightfully belongs to him over the whole creation, that there should be nothing determined or done, but there must be previous notice of it given to his creatures. He gives no account of any of his matters unto any. And then

Secondly: It is his glory, and his honour: it is the peculiar honour of his Godhead, to have the prospect of all his works in view, even from the beginning to the end. A glory that he can not share nor communicate. It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, to hide things, to have his way in the dark, so as that his footsteps shall not be known; and so to steer the course, and manage the whole administration of his government, that none shall be able to trace him, or know what he will do next; neither make any certain collection from what is done, what shall be done. As the wise man says, "He hath made every thing beautiful in its time," (hath ordered all things in the aptest and fittest seasons for the same,) "also he hath set the world in their hearts, so that no man can find the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." He hath set the world in their hearts, so as that the very world itself, that is, the stage on which are acted so many successive parts, doth become a blind to them, that they cannot see his way; nor from the beginning or former things conjecture, or make any collection what will ensue. As, you know, the eye that sees all things, sees not itself. He hath set the world in their heart, the seat of prudence, understanding, wisdom and knowledge; but the object is so close to the faculty that it cannot see. They cannot see what is done in the world so near them, so as to be able to discern and make inferences from any former things, to any future things yet to be done, at leastwise as to the timing of them, which our text refereth chiefly to. "Such a thing was done such a time, therefore such a thing will be done such a time."

This then is his peculiar and singular glory, that he can out do apprehension; and counterwork the conjectures and guesses even of all men. Sometimes such a state of things according to all visible human appearances seems instant; it may be nothing but gloominess, darkness and horror is to be looked for at such a time, according to all the prognostics we



can have; and lo! by a quick turn of providence, most unexpectedly a bright lightsome season is brought forth in view. Sometimes, on the other hand, external appearances are fair and pleasing; men are ready to cry nothing but peace, peace; and then a sudden cloud arises, and spreads itself over all, out of which nothing but storms and tempests ensue. And so doth the providence of God, as was aptly expressed by the poet, seem to sport with men; *ludere in humanis rebus*. God doth, as it were, glory over men in this kind, by giving them to see, how by letting such appearances come into view he can raise fears and scatter them; or excite such and such probabilities to make persons full of hopes, and presently dash them, that men may know the Lord omnipotent reigneth. There is no searching his understanding; he is not capable of being prescribed unto. None can direct the Spirit of the Lord; it runs the most unthought-of ways in its disposal and management of things. This then is reason enough as to God; it is his right to have the disposal of limes and seasons; and then it is his glory wherein his excellency doth shine and discover itself, and shews how far he transcends all the thoughts and apprehensions of men: how far his thoughts are above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways. And

[2.] There is reason too, in reference to his people, why it should be so; that is, it is their great advantage that thus it should be. As

First, That they may not be diverted from their proper work and business, the work they have to do from day to day, and from hour to hour; which certainly they would be, if they had the range of all future times open to them. They would be taken off from minding their present business; and spend their time in continual profitless ranges, to and fro, in the futurities that should lie open, and present a vast prospect to them. And again,

Secondly, That they may not be disquieted; for certainly it would be a very great disquietment to the mind of a good man, if he did know all things that should fall out in the compass of time, even his own time. But I hasten to the other thing, and therefore enlarge not further here.

II. The second point was this; We are not concerned, and therefore should not be solicitous to inquire, or know much of these reserved times and seasons, which he hath so put and hid in his own hand and power: "It is not for you to know the times, &c." And here we may reckon it is not for us,

1. As being none of our right, it belongs not unto us; we can claim no such thing. And,
2. As being no way for our advantage. It can profit us nothing. What should we get by it? It is therefore not for us. God hath so disposed the state of things, and the way of his dispensation towards us men, over whom he is Governor, as not to please and gratify our humour; but to do, in reference to his own, what may make for their real advantage. But what shall we be the better for knowing what God will do, what times or seasons shall come either of good or evil? I add further,
3. It would be our great disadvantage, and a prejudice to us. For,

(1.) It would multiply our troubles. For do not we know how apt we are to forecast troubles to ourselves? When we are not sure they will come, yet our minds will not be withheld from a most tormenting anticipation of evil, and possible troubles; (we do not know they are certainly future, but we apprehend them possible) and so that which God would have us suffer but once, we suffer a thousand times. We ought to admire here the divine wisdom and mercy in conjunction, upon this occasion; that he doth not let us have any more knowledge than what will suit with our power in such things. What a dreadful concurrence would it be in us between infinite knowledge and finite power! Could we know all things, and yet do but this or that; if a man should have the knowledge of such and such things to come, but no power to prevent it (as alas! what can our impotency do?) how dreadful, I say would this be!

There is a great deal of compassion in this: that since it belongs to our state as creatures to be able to do but little, to be mere dependencies, impotent things, that therefore we should not have a fore-knowledge of what it would be afflictive to us to foreknow. We are therefore put under a restriction that comes so close to us, as to stand betwixt us and to-morrow. "Take no thought for the morrow; sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." We are not to range with afflicting thoughts so far as to the next day. Thou wilt have enough in this day to trouble thee with, never let thy solicitude be conversant about the accessions of time. We foolish creatures should fetch the troubles of all our days into every day, if we could foreknow what is to come. Take then no thought for to-morrow! it is enough for you that you have One to think of you, and care for you. And it will make most for your advantage to be looked upon by him every day; who will make your strength to be sufficient for each day when it comes. And then,

(2.) As it would be a prejudice to us in the multiplication of afflictions, so in the diminution of mercies. For there is a great accent of pleasure and delightfulness certainly added to them by the surprisingness of them, when they come most unexpectedly. How grateful is a bright, warm, refreshing sun, shining all on a sudden out of a thick dismal cloud! Memorable things have been done for the church of God that they looked not for: such things as eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither had it entered into their hearts to conceive, or which they could form no conception of before-hand. "Who would have looked, said they, for such a day as this is?" How sweet is a mercy that comes unknown, unlocked for! "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing." *Ps. cxxvi. 1, 2.* God so provides in this matter, that nothing of the gust and sweetness of mercy shall be lost to his people; they shall have it with the best and highest set off or advantage. Now,

III. To make some brief use of all that we have observed, taken together; we may learn hence,

1. That there is an aptness in the spirits of men, even of good men, to be very inquisitively prying into futurity, beyond what God hath thought fit to reveal and put out of his own hand and power, as to the discovery thereof. "Lord wilt thou," (say his disciples,) "at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" wilt thou do it now? It would not, it seems, satisfy them or serve their turn, to have some understanding, such as they might collect from the prophets, whom they had in their hands, that God had a kind thought towards Israel, had not utterly cast off his people: they cannot be content to know only so much; but, Lord! shall it be now? Wilt thou now restore the kingdom to Israel?

That disposition of spirit, since it is so natural, ought to be watched and repressed; and as we find any hankering in our own spirits this way, we should see to it that they meet with their seasonable, and due rebukes, even from our own animadversions. We are, when a suffering time is upon us, very impatiently set upon it to know when it shall be over. If we have any expectation of a good time, oh! but when shall it be? Thus we would bring God to our punctilio, and to our very *now*. Upon such niceties would we be with him, so apt are we to dodge with the great Lord of heaven and earth. "That which I would have, shall it be now? or when shall it be? This is that I would be rid or freed of, but when? How long must I bear? how long must I wait?" This now is undutiful, and stands not with that creaturely submission, that is belonging and proper to our state: much less with the spirit of a child; that tractableness, resignation, yielding in all things to the Father's pleasure and wisdom, which is most agreeable to that relation. And again,

2. We may learn hence, that times or seasons whether they be good or evil to a people, fall not out to them casually, or by chance; but they remain in the hand and power of God. We are too apt to let our spirits work many times as if we thought such and such things came to pass by casualty. For if any ill state of things come upon us, how apt are we to aggravate the evil of it to ourselves, saying; "Had it not been for such a thing, this had not come; this might have been kept off: if it had not been for the miscarriage of this instrument, our case had not been so bad. If it were not for this or that unhappy accident, all had been well enough." Alas! we forget, these things are in his hand and power that over-rules and orders all, that it is not blind chance that regulates the world, but the counsel and wisdom of God, that run through the compass of all events, and hath the conduct of all things.

3. We may also learn, that men have it not in their hand and power to order times and seasons of good and evil, to God's people, as they please. We may sometimes seem to have that apprehension ourselves; and if we have not, some may have an apprehension, that it is in their hand and power to dispose and measure out good and evil, to the children of God, as they will. No, God hath not let the reins go yet, he hath the times and seasons in his own power. Say they sometimes, "We will pursue, we will overtake, and we will divide the spoil, we shall have our will over them," when God hath not said so: and his will and work shall stand against and above theirs. And take we heed of our attributing too much to creatures,

that what men have a mind to, shall be; or what they have no mind to, shall not be. There is a God in heaven that changeth the times and seasons, as he seeth good. And, for the shutting up of all, let us in reference to this matter, and upon what hath been spoken to you, take in the close these few counsels.

(1.) Let us labour to trust in him, who hath all the times and seasons which concern us, and his people, and the world, in his own hand and power. Have we not reason enough to do so, and encouragement enough? And so though we be blind and cannot see the product of to-morrow; know not what a day will bring forth; we shall have him to be eyes to us. He will be eyes to the blind, if they will but trust in him, As when a blind person is led by another he useth that person's eyes, who leads him. Let him lead us on from day to day, time to time y season to season. We cannot see with our own eyes, but is it not better for us that we have better eyes to see with? For we have one to see for us, who seeth infinitely better than we. We know not the product of the next day, or week; but is it not enough that he knoweth the event of all future times, and that he orders all things with exact judgment. "He is the rock his work is perfect, all his ways are judgment," ([Deut. xxxii. 4.](#)) or reason: the most exquisite reason, that is, the result of deliberation, and the most concocted thoughts. Deliberation, it is true, can have no place with him, who is the most absolutely perfect; but that which is equivalent is intended to be signified by the applying it to him. He sees with one view all the connexions of things; and so is able to outdo them who reason but by degrees, and by recollecting of things after things, so as to make a judgment at last. "Our God is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him." [Isai. xxx. 18.](#) To every thing there is time and judgment. He doth particularly state the time and season, and applieth to every thing its proper time when it is most fit it should fall out; and then it will so do to the best purpose. Trust in him, I say, who hath all future times and seasons in his own hand and power. The Father hath put them all in his own hand and power. Father! that is an expression of love, tenderness, compassion, and care. Is he not fit to be trusted then?

(2.) Submit to him, who hath all things and seasons in his power; resign, I say, and yield the matter to him. Subdue an unquiet, turbulent heart; beat down all wayward and perverse reasonings. Father is a name of authority, as well as love. The Father hath put all things in his hand and power; he who is the Head of the family, that great family, which is made up of heaven and earth. And are you children of that family, and will you not allow that he orders the timing of things as to him seemeth meet.

(3.) Since you cannot know his times and seasons, pray labour to know your own. Since you cannot know the times and seasons which he hath put in his own hand and power, know those that he hath appointed to you. Though he hath hid from you those seasons of future events, in the contingencies of the world, yet he hath not hid from you the duty of all seasons and events. This is our time. "Your time is always ready," saith Christ; ([John vii.](#)

6.) that is, the present time is ours, that he hath put as a prize into our hands; the present time for present work, if we have wisdom and hearts to make use of it.

It is a dreadful thing not to know our own time. "For man," says the preacher, "also knoweth not his time." *Eccles. ix. 12.* That was the miserable state of Jerusalem; they knew not the time of their visitation. For our Saviour beheld the city, and wept over it, considering what was coming upon it. Enemies should begirt it round about, such and such ruins should befall it, and all because they did not know in their day the things that did belong to their peace; but now they were hid from their eyes. Thou hadst a good time, as if he had said, if thou wouldst have known it. We are barred up as to future time; but we are bid to know the present time, and what God calls for at our hands therein. We may know when it is a time to mourn, and when to rejoice; when to weep, and when to be merry and pleasant.

He points out to us our more extraordinary praying seasons, if we would but observe the finger of providence, and take notice of his indications. It is a lamentable case, when we can not understand the time of such a thing; when we cannot know this is a time for such work, and this for such work. The present time points out such and such work that we should be intent upon. We cannot indeed know these reserved times and seasons; let us then know the times, that are left open to our view. As now this present time is come, but do we know what ought to be the work of this time? God hath ordered for us this time, this season to be waiting for him, humbling ourselves before him. The season tells us what the working of our souls should be now at this time; what there should be of humiliation; what of striving and wrestling with God; what endeavours to take hold of him, that we may yet keep him with us, while we have him. It is a happy thing to be able to know a praying day, when it comes; to know it so as to answer it by a suitable frame and temper of spirit.

So also you are expecting shortly another good time, a season of drawing nigh unto God, and to converse with him and with your great Redeemer, even at his own table. If God do order for you that season, that will tell you what disposition of spirit there must be; and you ought to be forecasting, that you may have a temper and disposition of spirit, suitable to such a season, and the work of it. If you have the season, it will then prove a blessed season; and if you should be deprived of it, yet all these sweet gracious workings of spirit will not be lost, they will be a rich advantage to you even in reference to a future holy course. Oh then if you cannot know God's time, labour to know your own! the present time for present work, that he seems to call you to. And then I add in the

(4.) And last place; Since you cannot look far into future time, look more into eternity, over and beyond all time. For it is only future time that God hath shut up from you, while he leaves eternity open to you. He would have you look over time into a vast and boundless eternity. Look then not to the things that are seen and temporal, (things measured by time) but to the things unseen and eternal! And doing so, this will be your great advantage and gain; you will find that though the outward man should perish (as there will come a crash



upon all our earthly tabernacles, and down they must) the inward man will be renewed day by day. If then, the outward man will perish, let it perish; if it will go down, let it go; there is somewhat we shall gain by that loss. In the mean while we shall in our souls be renewing strength day by day, if we keep our eye open to eternity; to that unseen state of things within the vail, whither he hath led the way, who is our great Forerunner to the glory that is to be revealed; with which glory the sufferings of the present time, this *now*, are not to be compared; not to be named in the same day, with that felicity which accrues to us hereafter. In a word, what we now suffer, within the compass of time, cannot bear any parallel with that glory and blessedness, which is to come after time is done. Let us therefore in the mean while seriously mind these things.

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## SERMON II.<sup>76</sup>

2 Cor. iv. 8.

*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed.*

I SHALL detain you very little about the context. In the foregoing verse the apostle speaks of a certain treasure which was committed to earthen vessels, with this design, that the excellency of the power might be of God; that is, might appear to be of God, and not of men. What this treasure was you may collect from the 6th verse. "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." Now "this treasure," saith he, "we have in earthen vessels;" that is, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, shining in the face of Jesus Christ: conveyed in and through a Mediator, and discovered in the gospel. It is a treasure of light whereof he speaks, a treasure of glorious light. And this is that, which he said was put into earthen vessels; intrusted to the ministerial disposition of very mean, and very weak and fragile instruments. And that upon this account, that all might see that the excellency of the power was of God, and not of them; that there was somewhat more than human in the matter, that such effects, as he had spoken of in the close of the foregoing chapter, should follow that dispensation they were intrusted with. Where also it is by the way intimated, that this same treasure is not a treasure of mere light; feeble, ineffectual notions, that were apt only to reach the mind of a man, and stay there as the matter of contemplation only; but it is a certain vital, vigorous light whereof he speaks, a light that carries power, efficacy, and a transforming influence along with it. The light of that glory which being beheld, changeth souls into the same likeness, from glory to glory. This light we have, this treasure of glorious light, in earthen vessels; that so the excellency of that power, which accompanieth this light, may appear to be of God and not of men: that all who observe it may be convinced, and constrained to confess something divine in it, when such things are discovered and held forth to men, as work at the rate, which the Gospel dispensation was designed to do, and did actually do.

And then in the words that we are to speak unto, and those that follow, he giveth a proof and demonstration of the excellency of the power, that did accompany and go with the Gospel light wherever it reached its end, and did the work to which it was designed; and to which it was also in its own nature adapted, and made suitable. Let this be a proof to you (as if he had said) that there is a certain excellency of power accompanying that light, which we are appointed to convey to the world; namely, that we, who are thus intrusted, though we are but a company of earthen vessels, are not for ail that presently knocked asunder by being on every side struck at, and dashed against. "We are indeed troubled on every side,

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76 Preached at Haberdasher's Hall, February 27, 1675.

yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." Certainly there was somewhat more than ordinary in this matter, that a little light should so preserve vessels of earth, that they could not be broken. There was an excellency of power went along with it. And this is brought for a proof of it, that their spirits were sustained and upheld in defiance of surrounding troubles. Our spirits are not broken, we are still where we were, whatever assaults are made upon us from without. This is that which the apostle says here, and is manifestly the design and scope of the words.

And in these and the following words we have the apostle very curiously criticising about the degree of the afflictions, which he, and others in his circumstances were exposed to, or the extent and limits of them; that they reached so far, to a certain point or degree, but no further. And he makes, as you see, a fourfold distinction between trouble on every side, and distress; perplexity, and despair; persecution, and desertion; dejection, and destruction: yielding the former as to each of these, but denying the latter.

And as to the passage which we have chosen to speak unto, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed:" we are to consider the subject, that is common to this, and all the rest; and then what is said about it by way of affirmation, and by way of negation.

It is very true, this apostle doth more directly speak here of a particular subject; that is, of such persons as were intrusted with the ministry and dispensation of the gospel: "WE have this treasure in earthen vessels, WE are troubled on every side," &c. But yet the same persons were considerable too in a capacity, that was common to them with all other christians. And he speaks in that guise before, of something that must be understood as common to christians in general; and not appropriated to ministers only: and that is, the having the light to shine into their hearts; that "light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." This was not peculiar unto them alone. It having shone first into the minds and hearts of the apostles; from thence, as its instrument, this light was further conveyed, and transmitted unto others. We take "we" therefore in that more exclusive sense, or as it holds forth to us a larger subject; namely, Christians as such, who are so in sincerity and truth; and I would observe to you,

That it is very possible to be encompassed with surrounding troubles, and yet at the same time not to be in distress. Or, if we take it with application to the subject; sincere christians, even then, when they are surrounded with troubles on every side, may yet be exempted from distress; may be troubled on every side, yet not distressed. And that this may be more distinctly spoken to, we are to consider,

- I. Of whom this is said.
- II. What it is that is said of them.
- III. Upon what grounds.
- IV. Make some use of the whole.



I. We are to consider of whom this is said. I have already in general told you, that we may justly extend it to all christians that are sincere; that is, who are entirely such, and who faith fully persevere.

1. To those, who are entirely such, or are christians through out: who do not content themselves with this, or that piece of religion: but have gotten the whole and entire frame of it. It is very possible, that the whole of religion may not, by these troubles on every side, be struck at all at once. But if a man be an entire christian, by the concurrence of all the integral parts which belong to such a character, it is likely that he will some time or other find himself troubled on every side; and yet may find himself also exempted from distress. The apostle tells us, that "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." [2 Tim. iii. 12](#). It was possible to be a sober man, and a pious man (as piety went in the pagan world) and yet not be persecuted. But if a man would be a godly man in Jesus Christ; if he would add Christianity, in that state of things, and at that time, to his profession of piety; then, as if the apostle had said, let him look to it, he will be persecuted; and then he had need to look to this also, that he be not distressed.

2. The true christian of whom we speak is also one that faithfully perseveres. Having been once an entire christian, by the concurrence of all that was requisite to make him so, he continues to be what once he was. Otherwise, by laying aside this or that piece of religion, when that comes to expose him to danger, the case would be altered. He neither would be exposed to affliction, nor so much need the support. If I did preach circumcision, says the apostle, when the doing of that was so great a salvo to a man, why should I then suffer persecution? I should then be liable to no trouble, the offence of the cross being ceased. [Gal. v. 11](#). "It were" (as if he had said) "an easy matter for me to avoid the stroke, if I could wave such a particular piece of Christian truth, and such a part of Christian duty; as this very juncture of time did challenge my owning and asserting even to the utmost hazard. I were well enough if I could dispense in this matter: but because I cannot, the offence of the cross is not likely to cease; I shall have that in my way if I were apt to stumble at it."

II. We are next to consider what it is that is here said of these persons. Something is said affirmatively, to shew the extent of the present affliction; and something negatively, to shew the limitation of it.

1. That which is said by way of affirmation, and to shew how far the present affliction did extend is this; "We are troubled on every side." It reached so far as to give trouble on every side. Here we are to consider what sort of trouble that is, in respect of the nature of it; then in respect of the degree of it.

(I.) In respect of the nature of it, it is plain it was external trouble. The very word there used, *θλιβομενοι*, signifieth dashing a thing from without. As the beating and allision of the waves against a rock make no trouble in the rock, no commotion there; but a great deal of noise, clamour and tumult round about it. That is the sort of trouble which that word in

its primary signification holds forth to us; and which the circumstances of the text declare to be the signification of the thing here meant. And then we have next to consider,

(2.) The degree of this same trouble; or what is intimated concerning it in the expression “on every side.” It is very true indeed we are not necessitated, by the literal import of the expression, (παντι) there used, to read it thus. We may as well read it, troubled in all things, troubled in all kinds, or at all times. The universal expression is capable of any of these additions, whereof there is none expressed in the text. It may therefore mean a great variety of those external troubles that we are liable to: such as we find the apostle making a distinct enumeration of pretty frequently; as in the [2 Cor. xi. 22.](#) and onward, and so elsewhere. And also the expression may import the continuedness of such troubles running along with us in our course. We are always troubled, surrounded with trouble, always filled with it. “In every city, bonds and afflictions abide me,” says St. Paul. This is said by way of affirmation, to shew the extent of this affliction. And then,

2. By way of negation, to shew the limitations of this affliction, it is said that it did not arrive to distress. That is the thing denied of this subject. While trouble on every side is confessed, the apostle, I say, denies their being actually distressed on this account. And there the word used (στενοχωρουμενοι.) signifieth such a kind of straitening as doth infer a difficulty of drawing breath; that a man is so compressed that he cannot tell how to breathe: that is the native import of the word. As if he had said, We are not reduced to that extremity, by all the troubles that surround us; but we can breathe well enough for all that. Properly there are meant, by this thing denied, two degrees or steps of inward trouble. As

(1.) That it is trouble that doth not reach the heart. For that is a distressing trouble which does so, which cuts and wounds the heart. But it does not touch there, as is the import of that expression in the 32 Psalm, “In the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.” [Psal. xxxii. 6.](#) That is strange that floods of waters should not come nigh unto him, when he is in the midst of them. No, they do not so invade his spirit as to affect that, they do not afflict his heart. And

(2.) Here is denied (supposing such afflictions do reach the heart) that they so overwhelm as to constrain them to acknowledge, that they are distressed. If the waters should so flow in upon a man's soul that he could not breathe, that were a distress indeed. But the matter is not so. Either it is a trouble that reacheth not the heart; or if it doth, it does not oppress or overwhelm it. But now,

III. We are to inquire concerning the grounds of this affirmation and negation; or how it comes to pass that such are troubled on every side, and yet not distressed.

1. Let us inquire how it comes to pass, that true, sincere christians are troubled on every side; to keep to the expression in our translation. It is to be observed, that besides the permissive and disposing providence of the great Ruler of the church and the world, who for wise and holy ends permits, and orders such a state of things sometimes; besides this, I say,

there are those proper inclinations in the persons immediately concerned, which directly reach the case. That is, there is somewhat in the disposition or temper of those, who are agents in this matter, or immediately work this surrounding trouble; and also in the patients, by which they are exposed, or do expose themselves to trouble on every side.

As to the former, there needs no other account be given of it, but only the hate, the malignity of a wicked heart; that will be as mischievous to any more visible appearances of God, and his interest, as is possible. Therefore wicked men will create trouble on every side, because they are so wickedly bent.

But then on the part of the patients, or suffering Christians, why are they so exposed? or why do they expose themselves, since the trouble that is on every side, upon the account of religion, might be avoided? To this we answer, that as the reason why others will create this trouble is from the corrupt malignity of their natures, so the reason why these do expose themselves to such trouble is from that new nature, that holy gracious nature, which is put into them, and superadded to what they naturally were before. We are to consider their religion as a thing, which is vitally united with them; that is, as it were, incorporated, and wrought into them, so as to make another sort of person in them from what there was before. For what a difference is there between the religion of one, who is not thorough, and in good earnest, in the business of Christianity, and one who is a christian indeed! To the former sort, religion is but as a sort of cloak. A man can easily lay aside his cloak if he finds it inconvenient, or a burden to him. It has no living union with himself; therefore it puts him to no pain or trouble at all to throw it away, if he finds thereby any inconvenience. But the religion of one that is truly and sincerely a christian, is a vital thing, and part of himself. And though a man can, easily part with his cloak, yet he cannot so easily part with his skin. That has a vital union with himself to which the spirit of life gives an animating power. And this is the case here. One that is only an overly outside professor hath put on a cloak of Christianity. If he finds that any prejudice is like to accrue to him upon this account, it is, I say, the easiest thing in the world for him to throw off his cloak. But one, who is a christian indeed, cannot do so. He cannot part with his religion. It is not as a cloak to him, but it is a piece of himself, and therefore he must be exposed. What will directly strike at such a man as he is, cannot be helped; for he cannot cease to be what he is. It is his very nature: that is, a new nature is put into him, which he cannot alter, or change and vary as he will; and therefore he must take what comes. But then again,

2. We are to consider the ground of the negation; why such, though troubled on every side, are not distressed. And they are not so, partly upon the account of that gracious presence that is afforded to them; and partly because of those principles which are in them, that necessarily carry matter of solace and relief, so as to keep them from distress, notwithstanding their being surrounded with external troubles. There is, I say,

(1.) A gracious presence afforded upon promise. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." [Isa. xliii. 2](#). This is promised and made good, more or less, in a higher or lower degree, as to the divine wisdom and goodness seems most meet. He will never leave nor forsake such, whose hearts he hath determined to himself, and who adhere and cleave to him. He will not cast away the upright man. Such a one then is not like to be in distress when he hath God so present to him. It is but turning himself to him, and he hath him at hand. And,

(2.) In subordination to the former, the very native tendency of the principles, which God has implanted in a holy soul, and which incline and dispose it towards him, are its great relief against every thing that tends to distress, or works that way. As for instance; faith, which adjoins the soul to God, interests it in his infinite fulness; when the soul must be far remote from straits or distress. Love too, is another principle by which the soul comes to have the actual fruition of that fulness, according to its measure; and what God doth now see meet, or fit, and suitable for it. There is patience also, by which the soul is composed; and brought into a perfect mastery and dominion over itself, so far as this gracious principle obtains. "By your patience possess ye your souls." You are outed of yourselves, if you be not patient; but if you be patient you enjoy yourselves. So that let the storm be never so great and boisterous without, there will be peace and calmness within. Patience is an ability to suffer. It is passive fortitude. He that can suffer, who is furnished with this ability, is in peace and quiet; is in no distress. He considers the case thus: "Such and such can afflict, and I can suffer; I am therefore in this respect on even terms with all the world. They can indeed lay upon me such and such things, and I can bear them through grace that helps me." If such be the temper of a christian that he cannot suffer, he must be a slave. Every such person must be subject to the power of those that can hurt him, or do him an ill turn; only because he can suffer nothing. He cannot suffer, therefore he must serve; or yield to every one's beck that hath any power to hurt him. But he that can suffer, hath the mastery over himself, and remains in self-possession. The other is outed of himself; and must resign his will, his judgment, his conscience, and every thing to the pleasure of another. Again, the principle of a good conscience also keeps a person from distress. When a man's own heart doth not reproach him, what can be distressing unto him? As Job said his should never do so, though he suffered, you know, very hard and grievous things. "My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live, till I die I will not remove my integrity from me." [Job xxvii. 5, 6](#). Where such a disposition of spirit remains there can be no distress; no distress can ever fall there.

IV. And now to make some brief use of this subject, we learn,

1 How happy a good man is when no external trouble though it compass him on every side, is yet able to bring him into distress. Is not this man a happy man that can defy the world? that can stand in the face of storms unhurt, untouched, unshaken? The matter deserves

our serious thoughts, that there should be such a privilege as this communicated unto mortality; unto a poor creature dwelling in mortal flesh. It gives us to see, that there is somewhat that greatens the spirit of such a one to that degree, as to make it too big for all this world. For what else is the reason, why such a one cannot be distressed? only because things apt to distress in their own nature, and in a subject more liable to it, are not able to compass, and entirely comprehend within themselves that spirit, which they would aim to distress. The spirit of a good man, as such, is too big for all this world; and if it have that grace in exercise, that is suitable to such a case, it is too big for this world entirely to compass. You cannot compress and straiten that which you cannot grasp. This world cannot grasp such a spirit. It is, I say, too big to be held within this narrow sphere. It looks above all sensible things. It is of too great a prospect to be confined in its apprehension of things, to time; it looks into a vast and boundless eternity. Therefore such a person cannot be distressed in his spirit. It surmounts the world, and is too great to be straitened by all the powers thereof, which can never reach unto it. Or if it should be brought into some very great trouble, it looks beyond this present troublous state of things. It looks into eternity, and says; "If it be not well now, it shall be. Things at present are not as I could wish, but they shall be as well as ever I could wish hereafter." In short you cannot confine the eye of such a one, but it will have a look at something beyond what is present and liable to common view. Therefore there is no way entirely to cut off relief from the spirit of a good man; for though it be troubled on every side, it is yet exempt from distress.



2. Hence we see also the vast difference that there is between such a one, and a wicked, carnal man that knows not God; who is unacquainted with, and unrelated to him. Such persons, when external trouble comes upon them, are presently distressed, or are very liable to be so upon every occasion. They have not the way of escaping the pressure thereof, that holy gracious persons have. A person is not distressed so long as he hath some way of escape or other left. This is intimated by St. Paul himself, when he says; "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." *1 Cor. x. 13*. It is no strange thing that an affliction or trial should be borne, when there is a way of escape.

But it may be said, Why is there any talk of bearing what I shall escape? I answer, it is plain that it is not escaping to suffer, that is there meant? but real hurt or damage by that suffering, so as to be not at all the worse for it, or prejudiced by it, at least in our spiritual concerns. It is such an escape as that, which our Saviour means in these words: "Watch and pray always, that ye may be counted worthy to escape the things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man." *Luke xxi. 36*. Not that they should escape suffering for he had been telling them before, what grievous things they should have to suffer; but that they should receive no hurt from their sufferings: that is, upon the whole matter they should



have no cause to reckon themselves sufferers, inasmuch as no damage should accrue to them from thence.

Now when a man hath a way of escape, he is not distressed; his state, I say, is not to be called a real distress. There is, at least upward, always a way of escape. David was sore distressed in Ziklag, after the Amalekites had invaded, and burnt it with fire and taken his people captive; yet it is said, that "he encouraged himself in his God." [1 Sam. xxx. 6](#). He looked upward, and had a way of escape or deliverance open to him from above.

But it is however said there, that he "was greatly distressed." I answer it is very true, and so any good man may be in a great degree distressed, as well as David. Thus the apostle Paul speaking of the impossibility of working any separation between him and Christ, and intimating that nothing could force him out of the arms of his love; not even persecution, or tribulation, nor famine nor the sword; mentions distress also as the supposed lot of good men. [Rom. viii. 35](#). But we must understand however only by this, that something may befall a good man which is apt to distress; but is not actually distressing, at least to that degree as to allow no way of escape. Then indeed a man would be in real distress, if that were true of him, which his enemies said of David; "Many there be which say of my soul, there is no help for him in God." [Psalm iii. 2](#). But this is not the case; there is no state in which a good man may be, wherein there remains no help for him in God.

It was indeed a distressing case, which you find Saul was in, when he had caused Samuel, or somewhat that appeared like to him, to be called up; who said unto him, "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?" To whom Saul answered, I am sore distressed, for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more. [1 Sam. xxviii. 15](#). This was a grievous distress indeed: there was great trouble from without, and God was gone. Here then is the vastly different state of a wicked wretch, from that of a godly man under affliction in a time of trouble, and when distress is n every side; God is gone! God is afar off! Besides such a one has no disposition to take the way that leads to God. Thus Elihu speaking of such distressed wicked men, says; "By reason of the multitude of oppressions they cry; they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty. But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" [Job xxxv. 9, 10](#). They lie groveling, and groaning, ready to expire away under their burden; but it never comes into their mind, to inquire after God, saying, Where is our God? This is a thing unthought of, and therefore theirs is a most distressed state and condition; having no shift left them, nor knowing what to do. But there is always this shift left to a pious soul, if there be nothing else, namely, to look up. "We know not what to do," says Jehoshaphat, "but our eyes are up to thee." [2 Chron. xx. 12](#). But when a man hath simply nothing to do, no prospect of relief, then the case is very forlorn; and this, at length, will be the case of all wicked men. We may easily guess, that they have nothing left to do, who cry to rocks and mountains to fall upon them. This speaks plain desperateness; and yet this will be the case one day with those, who find not





out in due season, the way of being exempted from distress. Then there will be a great deal of trouble on every side, when the world will be all in flames; and then it must certainly be distress. There will be, as our Lord informs us, ([Luke xxi. 25](#), &c.) distress of nations with perplexity; the seas and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming upon the earth: for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken, when we shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory; and when the cry shall go forth, "Lo he is come, behold his sign in the heavens!" Consider then how we are concerned to make sure of his favour, and to hasten to get into that state; wherein, though for a while we may not be exempted from trouble, yet we shall from distress: I mean from that distress for which there is no remedy, which can admit of no relief.

I thought to have propounded something by way of counsel, in order to such a course as this. As,

(1.) Labour to be disengaged from all terrene things, the things of this world. If there our life is bound up, if we are troubled there on every side, we cannot but be distressed. But if the world be crucified to us, and we to the world, there can be no distress; the troubles of it cannot be distressing to us. Dead things cannot feel, cannot afflict one another. Let us say then, "The world is dead to me, and I am dead to it; we are crucified one to another." The dead can lie quietly one by another, without giving mutual wounds. And then too,

(2.) Draw nigh to God, that large and boundless good, in whom all fulness is. Of them that fear him it is said, "their souls shall dwell at ease." [Ps. xxv. 13](#). The expression in the original, is, "Their souls shall lodge, or rest in goodness;" for the word there aptly signifies the quiet rest of the night. We must then draw nigh to God; and stick close to him in trust, confidence, love, obedience, subjection, and by a continual daily course of prayer. For they who are given much to pray will feel little of distress, in comparison of what they are else liable to. The Psalmist speaks of enemies, who were continually designing evil to him. "For my love," says he, they are mine adversaries, but I give myself unto prayer." [Ps. cix. 4](#). If there be any design against me, if my enemies are aiming at me, "I pray;" for so the expression is in the Hebrew text: that is, I betake myself to prayer, my known and usual resort, and then I fare well. Thus, in so doing, you will find your soul to dwell at ease, and rest in the goodness of God. A wicked man, in the midst of his sufficiency is full of straits; you, in the midst of straits will be in the fountain of all-sufficiency, and have the all-flowing goodness streaming on every side. And in such a course you may come to experience what is here said by the apostle, so as no longer to look upon this as a paradox, but as that which your hearts can witness to; namely, that though trouble be on every side, yet thanks be to God, we find no distress.



### SERMON III.<sup>77</sup>

James i. 2.

*My Brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*

**I** TAKE It for granted that by temptations here, we are to understand afflictions; such as are, for trial's sake, laid upon the people of God. And whereas such, namely, those to whom the compellation of brethren is agreeable, are enjoined to count such afflictions matter of all joy; this plainly implies, that to such persons they are so. For they are not surely enjoined to judge otherwise of the matter than it really is, nor directed to make a false judgment of things. Therefore the truth I have to insist upon you may take briefly thus;

That the afflictions laid upon Christians, for the sake of trial, are to a right and spiritual judgment the matter of joy; even of all joy, as you have it here expressed.

Now that this truth may be capable of use (which is the main thing I design upon it) it is necessary that I do these two things in the general; namely,

I. That I state this truth: and then,

II. Give you the grounds of it.

I. I shall state this truth, or shew you how it is to be taken and understood. And here we have two things to open to you; namely, the object of that judgment, which is here directed to be made, and then the nature of it. The opening of these two things concerning the judgment we are to make of afflictions, which good men are exercised withall, will take up the whole of the business that is needful by way of explication; so as that you may have the distinct state of the matter before you.

I. I shall consider the object of the judgment here to be made; that is, the truth of this proposition, that afflictions laid upon us for the sake of trial are matter of joy. And this is the thing to be judged; as indeed in any proper act of judgment, a proposition is still the object; wherein one thing is affirmed, or denied of another. And the truth of this proposition is the thing to be judged; that afflictions, such afflictions or temptations as the apostle speaks of, are really matter of joy. There fore it is necessary that we open to you this proposition as the object of the judgment here to be made. Particularly that we,—consider what is supposed here to be matter of joy; namely, afflictions, for the sake of trial: then—we shall open to you that which is affirmed, or supposed, concerning temptations; namely, that they are matter of joy: and—then the manner of the agreement of the one of these, to the other.

(1.) Let us consider what it is that is supposed by the apostle to be matter of joy; namely, temptations, or afflictions for trial's sake. Not any man's afflictions, but those that befall a christian; not any afflictions of a christian neither, but those which are laid upon him for the sake of trial, as the word (πειρασμοις,) used in the text doth plainly import. For t one



very well known, and very useful and necessary distinction of afflictions, that they are either corrective, even unto the people of God; or else tentative. This is not a distinction of afflictions considered in their natures, but taken from the end thereof: for in their natures they may be the very same, as the afflictions of good men and bad men may be.

Divers temptations are mentioned: which implieth not only multitude, as to number; but variety, as to kind. There may be the same kinds of them inflicted, for either the one or other of those ends. So that the distinction I mention to you is not of their natures, but it is taken from something extrinsical; as the end of any thing is extrinsical to the thing itself. God doth sometimes lay on afflictions to try, and sometimes to correct or chastise his people. The principle of those afflictions, that are for the sake of correction, is displeasure and paternal justice; which God doth exercise upon his own family, and among his own children. And they have been wont, as indeed they ought, so to understand the matter. Thus says the prophet Micah, in the name of the people; "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." [Micah vii. 9](#). And his anger is sometimes said to smoke, and continue long to do so; as several expressions in Scripture, that I might turn to, import. But when the afflictions are to try, the principle thereof is not displeasure; but wisdom, and sovereign good pleasure. In this case, I say, they are to be resolved into wise and holy sovereignty; not anger, as their principle.

Now it is concerning afflictions so designed, or directed to this end, namely, for trial, that the attribute here in the text must be understood; that is, that they are matter of all joy, and are to be so accounted. And because we must take the state of the subject, so as to understand the apostle speaking not of punitive, but tentative afflictions, as such; therefore we are a little more concerned to inquire in every case, how we may be able to discern when any affliction, or series of afflictions, are brought upon the people of God, or upon a particular person, for the sake of trial. For the stress of the whole business lies upon the right understanding of this matter, and is the main thing we have to do in stating of the truth before us.

In order to it therefore, you must know that though these two notions of afflictions, to wit, corrective and tentative, are very distinct; yet we are not to suppose that they are always to be separated. It is very possible that an affliction, or a state of affliction, may come upon a good man for both these ends at once; but it is impossible that both these ends should, at any time, be principal. When both these ends do fall in together, so that afflictions are sent both to correct and also to try; yet still one of them only is the principal end, and it is from thence that the denomination is to be taken. As for instance; that affliction is to be called tentative, or that state of affliction is to bear the name of temptation or trial, when this appears to be the chief end, which God designed and aimed at, in ordering such a state of things to be the lot of his people, or of this or that person. But when the principal end appears to be their chastisement, then they are to be accounted corrective afflictive; or punishments, and

judgments, as these expressions are also used with respect to the people of God. But yet it may be said, "How shall we know which end is principal, when an afflictive condition comes to be the lot of any of God's people?"

This case cannot be very distinctly and particularly spoken to now, for that would take up all our time. I shall only say this one thing to it at present, which is very plain and clear; and I doubt not satisfactory to every one, that seriously attends to it. When the people of God, who are in a state of affliction, have been and still are in a declension, as to matters of religion; or when this and that person can reflect, that they have been guilty of some very great enormity, some more notable transgression, and an affliction befalls them: why, truly, in this case they have all the reason in the world to look upon this affliction as punitive; that is, as principally designed for correction. But if the state of the church of God, when such an afflicted condition falls out to be their lot, is spiritually good; that is, if they have been for some time in a better condition than ordinary, or under no very observable delinquency and decay in their spiritual state; then the course of afflictions, which they at such a time fall under, is chiefly tentative; or to be reckoned as sent principally for the sake of trial.

And truly if we look into the afflictions which befell the people of God in common, at different ages, you will find, by what you have recorded in the Old Testament, concerning the church in those days (which consisted of the Jews for the most part) that miseries always befell them, when they were in a state of apostacy from God, or some more notable defection; which therefore constantly passed under the notion of corrections, or chastisements and punishments, upon that account. But as to what we find recorded of the sufferings of the church of God in the New Testament (which you know gives us an account only of a small space of time) those afflictions and sufferings befell good men, at a time when the church of God was in its best state; and when there was most of the vigour, the power and spirit of religion, that ever was known. Therefore we have most reason to look upon the afflictions, that befell them, as designedly tentative; whereupon it is that you have afflictions more usually spoken of, in the New Testament, under the notion of trials and temptations.

So that this is a short and summary account that I give you of this matter: afflictions befall persons for correction, when they are in their worst state; for trial, when they are in their best. And now you have the state of the subject (as far as it is necessary) cleared up to you. But concerning afflictions it is said, when it is discernible that they are principally tentative, that they are to be accounted matter of all joy. And

(2.) This is the thing spoken of this subject, which we are now to speak to; we are to reckon these afflictions joy, *all joy*. We shall need to say but little here. This joy, if we take in the term all with it especially, includeth these two things; to wit complacency, and glorification: a being well pleased with these afflictions, and also a visible glorying upon such an account. It is true indeed these things are wont to be expressed by two different words, (Χαρά, and Αγαλλιασις) whereas we have but one in the text. You have them put together

by our Saviour when he pronounces blessedness on them who suffer persecution for righteousness sake; "Rejoice" (says he) "and be exceeding glad." [Matt. v. 10, 11, 12](#). There is inward pleasure, an inward sense of pleasure, and a certain kind of triumph, that appear and shew forth themselves in conjunction. And when it is said, that we are to account it all joy when we fall into such temptations, it implies, that we are to comprehend both these together in the sense of the expression. In which expression, we are indeed to understand joy objectively, as is usual, and so very obvious that I need not hint it to you; not, I say, the act, but the matter of joy, as we before explained it to you.

(3.) We have further to consider, concerning this proposition, the agreement of the object, with the subject of it. How comes it to be truly said of afflictions that they are matter of all joy? How do these agree together? It is very plain it is not a natural agreement; it is no agreement arising from any affinity that these afflictions have, in their own nature, unto joy. Nothing more remote than affliction, and joy. Affliction "for the present is not joyous, but grievous." Therefore that which connects them must be something extrinsical; somewhat which God puts in the case, so as wholly to alter it from what it would else be in its natural state. But this we shall have occasion to shew by and by, when we speak to the grounds of it, which we are to come to presently.

2. Having considered the object, we are now to consider the nature of this judgment. The apostle bids us so to account such affliction, as we have considered, all joy, as that this may be a fixed kind of judgment with us; for so the word  $\eta\gamma\eta\sigma\alpha\sigma\theta\epsilon$ , signifies. I shall particularly say but these two things about it:

(I.) That it must be a judgment spiritually enlightened: a judgment that is irradiated by a divine light shining upon it, by which the truth of the thing might be discerned; which otherwise would go for a paradox, and that the most incredible one that ever was heard of. It must be a heavenly divine light, which must inform that judgment that shall be able to discern the truth here asserted, that these trying afflictions are matter of joy. And

(2.) It must be a judgment spiritually actuated and enlivened that so it may become a practical judgment. By the former means it comes to be a clear judgment, when divine light once shines in the mind, so as that the truth of this matter appears very clear; by the latter means it comes to be a practical judgment, that is, such as is impressive of a proportionable correspondent frame of heart, which is that which the apostle chiefly intends here. For it would do persons but little good, to have such a notion only hovering in their minds concerning afflictions, that they are matter of joy; this would be but a cold business. The word *count* here in the text, is taken from the word  $\eta\gamma\epsilon\mu\omicron\nu\iota\kappa\omicron\nu$ , from whence that phrase is taken, which is expressive of the leading faculty and power of the soul. But there is nothing leading, where nothing follows; the one implies the other. It is therefore implied here, that this must be such a judgment as commands what is duly and properly the subject of it, and what ought to be commanded; namely, the heart, and will, and affections of the soul. It implies that a



person willingly bear a temper of spirit, proportionable to this judgment; that is, maintain a holy cheerfulness and vigour, and liveliness of spirit, through the whole course of such an afflicted state, as may happen to be his lot. Such a judgment it is that being enlightened from above is in some measure clear, and does not suffer us to be always in the dark, puzzled and entangled in our thoughts about the matter. In a word, it is a judgment that being actuated by a divine power ought to be practical, proportionable and conformable to itself; that so we may carry ourselves in a state of affliction, as though we judged in this case, that it is matter of great joy that we are brought into such a condition as this.

Thus now you have the state of the truth in reference to the things propounded to be opened, concerning the subject spoken of; and particularly the nature of the judgment that is to be made concerning the afflictions that befall good men: which as I have shewn, must be spiritually enlightened, and so spiritually enlightened as to be a practical principle in the soul.

II. I now proceed to the next general head to be spoken to, after having stated this truth; and that is to give you the grounds of it. What should be the ground of this, that to a true judgment such afflictions as these are should be matter of joy? I can but just touch at what requires to be largely insisted upon. In general, if this be our case, that we are christians exercised with tentative afflictions, we are to count them all joy, if we would judge rationally and prudently; both upon God's account, and our own

1. On God's account; and you have no reason to think it strange, that this should be alleged as a ground of a christian's rejoicing in temptations. For God and good men are no such strangers to one another, but that wherein his interest is concerned and advantaged, they have real matter of joy. both upon the account of their relation to him, and the determination of their spirits towards him, and his interest. Now his interest is manifestly concerned to great advantage in this case; and by this means it hath always been promoted, and his glory hath shone forth illustriously through the trials that have befallen his people.

If we speak of the glory of God, which is capable of being given to him; which cannot be the glory that is essential to his being, but his extrinsical, or adventitious glory, it may be said to lie in these two things: namely, in the display thereof, and in the agnition and acknowledgement of his glory upon that display. That is all we can make of glorifying God, and of his being glorified in the world: that there is a lustre shineth forth, or a visible glorious representation of him made; and then, that this be acknowledged, or taken notice of, and he be confessed hereupon to be glorious. Why both these are concerned, whenever it falls out to be the lot of his people to be exercised with tentative afflictions.

(1.) There is a most visible display of his glory in this case; to wit, the glory of his power, of his wisdom, of his goodness, of his faithfulness and truth, both in sustaining and delivering his afflicted ones. There is a spirit of glory resting upon them in such a time and state as that is. "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye." [1 Pet. iv. 14](#). Men cast



upon you reproach, God puts a glory upon you; for, as St. Peter expresses it, "the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you:" it stays and abides with you, and hath a fixed settled residence upon you. Agreeable hereunto is the tenor of that prayer of St. Paul for the Colossians: "That ye might be strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience, and long-suffering, with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." [Colos. i. 11, 12](#). Here is a very great display of the divine glory in this case. And,

(2.) The agnition or acknowledgement thereof is wont to ensue, which is the other thing considerable in God's being glorified. Such as feel supports from God in their afflictions, do highly magnify him in their spirits; yea and many times his glory is acknowledged by afflicting enemies themselves. They are made to confess that they have to do with somewhat they cannot master, a spirit that is too hard for them, even an invincible spirit. They are made to own and confess that greater is he that is in the sufferers, than he that is in this world.

I have sometimes taken notice in the histories of former times, concerning the persecutions that befell the people of God more than once, that this expression hath been used in those cases, "The devil is in them;" that is, a more than an ordinary spirit. They could not but believe it was somewhat more than the spirit of a man, that supported them; but if they called it by any other name they must have reproached themselves, and acknowledged that they were fighters against God. However they could not but have a secret conviction, (and it appears sometimes they had so) that it was an almighty Spirit they were fighting against, when they were dealing with the people of God in this kind.

This then is the ground of joy to the patients themselves, that though they suffer, yet God is glorified. His glory shineth through all the clouds and darkness that involve them, and wherein they are inwrapt. The apostle speaks as if he did not care what became of him, so that Christ might be but magnified by him, living or dying. [Phil. i. 20](#).

2. I now come to shew that good men, exercised with such afflictions as the apostle speaks of, ought to rejoice in them on their own account; not only because of the glory that redounds to God thereby, but also because of the advantage that accrues to themselves; which is twofold, namely reputative, and real.

(1.) A reputative advantage accrues to them from hence: for it is an honour and dignity put upon them to be called to suffer on this account, that is, for the sake of trial. As I remember, a heathen moralist says, "A soldier who is one of the number selected or picked out to go upon some very hazardous enterprize, if he be one of true fortitude and real valour, he will not say "*Imperator de me male meruit, sed bene judicavit*. My general discovers a good opinion of me, and so he puts the honour of such a service upon me." So when God thinks fit to exercise his people in a way of trial, he puts an honour upon them, saying; "Come forth, now you shall be my champions, you shall be the butts and marks against which all

the power and malice of devils and men shall be directed, and yet I will make you stand." A poor bruised reed, God is able to make to stand, as in another case is said concerning a weak christian. A reed that is bruised, and hangs its head, is capable of being made to stand against all the storms and rage of earth and hell. "You," as if he had said, "are some of my instruments, which I will make use of to baffle hell and all the powers of darkness. I will make them, even by you confess themselves outdone."

218

Here then is a great reputative advantage, an honour and dignity put upon good men, to come forth as God's own champions; to contend on his behalf against every adversary and power in a way of affliction: that so they may overcome them by the blood of Jesus and the word of his testimony, not loving their lives even to the death. This is some of the honour of these saints of God. And if it had not been accounted so in former days, we should not have had, among the writings of some of the antients, consolations writ purposely to them who missed of martyrdom; whose lot it was to be delivered, and not to fall as martyrs, in the common day of trial. And then,

(2.) There is a real advantage accruing from afflictions or temptations of this nature, both present and eternal. They that are exercised with them get great advantage by them at present, and foresee that they are like to do so hereafter; as is instanced in one particular in the words immediately following my text. "My brethren count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." [James i. 2, 3, 4.](#) So that at the long run they tend to their consummation and perfection. But first it is said, "knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience;" which carries this intimation along with it, that this one single advantage or gain by the trial of faith, even the grace of patience, countervails all evils what ever which such trials can bring upon them.

And certainly it is so, if it be considered what a heaven patience carrieth in it; namely, that meekness, that subjection to the Father of spirits, that complacency in his will, that holy fortitude and greatness of mind, which, I say, patience carries in itself. So that if a man had lost all that ever he had in the world, and got patience, he is a great gainer. Such a one is refined, and purged, and shines so much the more gloriously, as a star in the higher region, or the upper firmament. But this is only a leading thing to the universal gain, which they, who are spiritual, have in other respects; for upon this improvement of patience the whole inward man partakes of so much more strength, vigour, sprightliness and activity. Spiritual strength and soundness are thereby throughout promoted; so that they have great reason to glory with respect to the present gain and advantage, accruing from their afflictions.

219

And then with respect to hereafter, what matter of joy and glory to think how all will be compensated to them in the other world! The "light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." If we suffer with Christ, we shall be also glorified together; "for I reckon," says the apostle, (this is the com-



putation I make) “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.” These are things not to be mentioned the same day, one” with the other, for there is no comparison between them.

Therefore you see how it is that this same joy doth guide itself, and which way the eye of the soul is directed to the exercise of it: not to pore upon afflictions alone, but to consider them as subservient to glory. Thus says the apostle, “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” And then it presently follows too, “We rejoice in tribulations also;” that is, considered with and in their subserviency to future glory. And this it is that makes them the matter of the highest joy.

But I would say something by Way of *Use*, though the time hath almost overslipt me. Sundry things might be *inferred* from hence, which I shall but name to you.

1. Since this judgment, and the temper of spirit agreeable thereto, are peculiar to the case of trials or tentative affliction, they must be necessarily otherwise where afflictions are visibly punitive, and principally of a chastising nature. As this judgment, namely to count them all joy, answers the one case; so truly deep humiliation cannot but answer the other; even very deep humiliation, abasing one’s self and lying low, and owning that the holy, righteous, jealous God is punishing them for the evil they have done. For in this case he is dealing with his children another way; he is not arraying them with glory, but clothing them with shame, before all the world. And therefore it is a season for them to be deeply humbled whenever that appears to be their stated case. Though to such persons there may be a mixture of pleasure, arising from the hope that God will bring such a state out of it (out of their sin and suffering) as shall turn into matter of joy afterwards. But the occasion of joy in such a case is more occult, and remote; and is wrapt up in a great deal more visible matter of sorrow, shame and humiliation, when it appears that an afflicted state is brought upon them purposely for punishment and rebuke. And again,

2. We may infer hence, that mere patience is not enough for christians under trying afflictions. It is not sufficient to be merely patient; they are to account their condition all joy. Therefore the apostle prays that more patience might be granted to the Colossians, in the place mentioned before; that they might suffer with joyfulness, and give thanks to him who had made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. [Col. i. 10-14](#). He writes there to such as were likely to meet with, or to have very little of any earthly inheritance; rather to lose what they had, for the sake of Christ: and he intimates that it was not enough for them to be merely content, or patient under such a loss, but it was suitable to their state to be in a high triumph and exultation of spirit upon this account; because God was thereby making them meet for another inheritance with the saints in light. Those christians do not quit themselves well, nor as becomes them, who do only not murmur or repine that they are tried by afflictions: for the thing to be aimed at, in the-midst of all such exercises, is to thank God, and rejoice in the thoughts of what they are to enjoy; namely, an

inheritance with the saints in their pure, lightsome, peaceful, blissful regions. "What an inheritance have I above! Blessed be God, though I lose all I have in this world, while he is making me meet for such an inheritance; and makes it evident he hath such a design in hand as this upon me!"

3. We learn too, that to be impatient and repining upon the account of afflictions, is greatly intolerable. To be patient merely, is not enough; to be impatient, is simplicity, folly, and sin. It is intolerable that we should think we are ill dealt with, when we are exercised with such afflictions as are designed only for the sake of trial. But I cannot stay on this head.

4. We learn, that joy is most exceedingly connatural to true living religion. There cannot be a greater demonstration of it than this, that there can be no state, externally so bad, that can make their joy unseasonable; or that can make it an incongruous, or unfitting thing for them to rejoice. To have a disposition unto spiritual and heavenly joy is a thing very intimate to the constitution of a true christian. That must needs be a very strong, predominant, prevailing principle in any thing, which converts and turns that which is of an opposite nature into nutriment to itself; such is the joy as can even feed upon, and maintain itself out of afflictions. God's people can rejoice, not only notwithstanding they are afflicted, but because they are so afflicted. The divers temptations they are exercised with are counted the matter of their joy. And we may yet further infer hence,

5. That there is something very peculiar in living true Christianity. For how odd a sound doth this carry to an unchristian ear, and how uncouth a taste to an unchristian heart, that afflictions are to be made, and accounted matter of joy. But it is past all doubt that there is a real truth in the matter. We find that it hath been so; and that this is not a mere notion that hovers in the air, but is a practical thing, and has been a tried case. Do not we read of the apostles' rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ? [Acts v. 41](#). This was not only so in their account, but was really so. So we are told of the believing Hebrews, that they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods. [Heb. x. 34](#). What! for a man to rejoice to be undone? A strange paradox that any, who was not seriously a christian, should count this matter of joy! Therefore true Christianity hath somewhat peculiar to itself be longing to it. It is a very extraordinary thing, which lies without the compass and comprehension of all, who do not experimentally know it.

Before I close, there are two things I would say to you by way of *counsel*.

1. Labour to fix this judgment in general upon your minds. Let it not seem to you as an uncouth incredible thing. It is a most certain truth, that afflictions in some cases may most reasonably be matter of joy. It is a sad thing when we cannot obtain so much of ourselves as to receive this notion, and to believe the truth of what is here implied. For when we are bid to count so, it is implied that it is really so; that is, that afflictions in such a case, namely, for the sake of trial, are matter of joy. But our spirits boggle at this; we cannot tell how to receive, or entertain it. And then,



2. Endeavour that it may be your judgment with application to yourselves and your own state and case. And we must here take notice to you of what is in itself most obvious, that when we are directed to count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations, we are also directed to do whatever is necessarily presupposed hereunto. It is never to be imagined or thought, that one who lives in sin; who is a secure, carnal, earthly-minded creature, and a stranger to God and heaven, if any affliction should come upon him, that he must off-hand count it a matter of joy. No there is something must intervene. What then is it we should apply ourselves to? Why to endeavour to get into a safe state of soul, and that things may be so with us Godward, that if ever; it come to be our case to be afflicted we maybe able to pass this judgment, so clear and satisfied as to impress the heart, that afflictions are to be counted all joy and in such a case may actually ourselves rejoice.

I Thought to have insisted on sundry things here, but have not time. Yet I must observe, that to get our states clear with respect to God, and to keep and maintain our consciences both clean and quiet, are necessary to such a happy state as to be able to rejoice in adversity. Then we shall suffer without grudging, and with rejoicing for the sake of Christ. How impossible is it ever to rejoice in an afflicted condition, till we have hearts brought under the power of a self-denying spirit; till we are mortified to this world, and our spirits loosened and disengaged from every thing terrene! The man whose heart cleaveth to this earth; who is taken with an ample estate, an opulent trade, a neat habitation, all desirable comforts and accommodation: the man, I say, who is so taken up with these things that his life his bound up in them, cannot endure the thought, upon any terms, of suffering in these kinds; it is death to him to think of it. But if a man's spirit be once divested of an earthly frame, and can tell how to digest the thoughts of being undone, he may rejoice, and say; "What am I, that I may not be undone? have not many as good as I been undone? who had as good an estate, lived in as good credit in the world? Why may not I be poor, come into straits, be destitute of friends, and exposed to wants as well as others?" When a man by familiar converse with these objects hath reconciled his spirits to them, so that he can digest these things, then he is in a way to rejoice in such a case, when it comes to be his, and is able to say; "Blessed be God that I had an estate to sacrifice for Christ! that I had liberty, and have still a life to sacrifice for him, whenever he calls for it." If we did but thus labour beforehand to inure ourselves to such thoughts as these; if we did but put the case frequently and make the supposition familiar to ourselves, "What if we were to live in a wilderness? dwell in a cave of the earth? What if we were to go up and down helpless, living upon providence for daily bread?" When we had, I say, used ourselves to think thus, and made the matter familiar to ourselves we might if it should come to be really our case, or God should put us upon the trial, turn it into a matter of triumph and great joy.

And so likewise it is highly necessary to live much in heaven, and to realize that state to ourselves; not to make it as a strange country, but this state rather in which we are. To a



man that is abroad in some foreign country, which is full of war, trouble, and blood, it is some comfort to him (if he be certain of a way of return) to think, "Well! I am not to stay here long in this troublesome country; I know how to get home, to mine own house in a peaceful country; I shall find all quiet there." How pleasant a thought I say is this, especially if a man is sure of a return! In this case he may be sure, and a christian may say, "My own country is a quiet country; there will be nothing but peace, rest, pleasures and delights to people of God. Here indeed I do not intend to abide. I do not expect to stay long here this is not my country." Oh, to be here as in a strange country, and to look upon that other, namely heaven, as our own; will make it possible to us not only to despise, but even to rejoice in what we meet withall that is troublesome in this world, because it is part of our way home. It is indeed a dirty way, but it is our way notwithstanding to our better country.

I would enforce all that has been said by a consideration or two, and so conclude.

1. Think with yourselves how pleasant it is to have spirits got into this frame and posture, that we can really count it matter of joy to fall into afflictions. Oh think, I say, how pleasant it is! For how happy are those persons, who when they have a prospect of great evils before them, are yet not afraid of them? and certainly we shall not be afraid of that, which we have an actual disposition to rejoice in. In such a case we shall be under the pressure of no very tormenting fear. "They that hearken to me" (saith Wisdom) "shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from the fear of evil." [Prov. i. 33](#). He that has got to this pitch, who can count it all joy to fall into divers temptations, is arrived already to a safe dwelling: he hath so hid himself in the divine presence, that he is secure from the fear of evil. No evil can ever reach him. And consider again,

2. That this is the only way we have to make any good or advantage of a matter, that is bad in itself and in its own nature. For let us a little recount ourselves. I believe there are few among us, if any, that have not some prospect, more or less, of troublesome days a coming; a very afflictive condition. Pray what shall we do in this case, if we will not do those things that tend to bring us into a capacity of making this judgment our own, in reference to our own concernments? What have we else to do? Would we busy our thoughts how any such condition shall be prevented? Shall that be our concern? Shall we try if we can stop the sun, or alter the course of the stars? Do we think to change the external posture of the world? That is, alas! a hopeless thought, a vain attempt.

But we have a nearer and a possible thing to do, namely, to get the temper of our own spirits altered; brought off from this world; pitched upon another, and a better world. We have no other course to take. Let us then drive the nail that will go. We have hopes that we may alter our spirits if we will employ our power so to do, but we cannot change the times and the seasons. That is our province and business. We have work to do here. We have a superintendency over our own spirits; here we are authorized; God puts us upon it to see to our own spirits, that if they be earthly, we may endeavour to get them made heavenly; if

impure, holy; if dead, lively; if vain, serious. This is our own proper business. So that as our case is, our circumstances are. We cannot hope to avoid suffering, our business therefore is to avoid suffering uncomfortably; this, I say, is our great business. To avoid suffering we cannot reasonably hope, though we should resolve to make shipwreck of faith, and a good conscience. For do we think, that all such persons that do so are secure from suffering? It is a remarkable passage from Scripture we have in St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. "There hath no temptation befallen you, but such as is common to men." That is one consideration. Another is, "But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted, above what you are able, &c." [1 Cor. x. 13](#). It is the former I would now speak to: "No temptation hath befallen you, but such as is common to men." As if he had said: You are liable to afflictions as you are men, not merely as you are Christians: so that you cannot certainly save yourselves from them, though you should abjure your Christianity. For what can a man be safe from, that is common to man? These afflictions follow humanity. Are christians the only men that are poor? that are crossed? or in a prison? If a man be a man (reckon only so) he is liable on that account to these things. Therefore, I say, since we have n way in the world to secure us from suffering, our great concern is to labour that we may suffer in the most comfortable way we can: so as that when it comes to be our lot, we may be capable of counting it all joy. And then we are a thousand times upon better terms, than if we were sure never to feel affliction: for that is only an external good; but the other is a spiritual good. And these are to be estimated according to the capacity and condition of the subject. I hope my flesh, my body, is not capable of so much hurt, as my spirit is of good. To be freed from afflictions, it is true, would be the advantage of the outward man; but to be able to bear them rejoicingly is an advantage to the soul; a thing capable of greater good, than my outward man is capable of.

Therefore this is the great thing that lies upon us to do; to take heed, since we cannot be sure we shall not suffer, that we do not suffer as evil doers; neither in respect of the cause, nor of the temper of our spirits: to take heed that we suffer not so, as that it shall be the effect of a controversy between God and us; or the affliction be regarded as his coming upon us with anger and displeasure. We are to see to it that we have no rebuke nor anger to reflect upon; (these tend to shame, these are humbling things) that we may regard his sovereignty and divine pleasure as things in which we may rejoice and triumph; which sovereign pleasure we may rejoicingly comply with, when once we can make it out, that the affliction of our lot is principally of a tentative nature, to try our loyalty to God, and fidelity to his interest.

225

226

## SERMON IV.<sup>78</sup>

1 Peter v. 10.

*But the God of all grace, who hath called us into his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*

I SHALL spend none of your time at all in looking upon the context. And although there are many great truths, which lie within the compass of this verse, as any of you may easily apprehend at first sight; I shall only pitch upon that one which I intend to insist upon, and which it may be hoped will be equally suitable to the time and to our case, as it is to the text. You may without further preface take it thus;

That to a right and well-disposed judgment, spiritual improvements and advantages by sufferings, are more desirable, than a freedom from those sufferings themselves.

That the ground may be clear, I shall present you with a supposition or two, before I proceed to make out the truth itself. As

First: We will suppose these expressions, to wit, “make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you,” do all of them hold forth to us spiritual improvement and gain. I apprehend that none of you will doubt, but the apostle by these expressions intended the better state of those, to whom he wrote, in spiritual respects. We may suppose not of each person considered absolutely, and singly; but all considered in common, that they might be brought into a better state with reference to their spiritual concerns and affairs; which indeed the word καταπτισαι doth more especially seem to hint to us. It signifies the setting in joint, what was unjointed before, and quite out of frame; and so rather imports a relation to a community, than to a single person alone. But take all together, and no doubt the expressions do intend spiritual improvement and advantage. And then again,

Secondly: We may lay down this further supposition, that the order of the sufferings here mentioned is not merely that of precedency in time, but of subserviency to some kind of cause that has an instrumental influence to their spiritual advantage. “After that ye have suffered awhile, or you having suffered a little” (as the words may be read, for the word “after” is not in the Greek text) “May the God of all grace make you perfect,” &c. But it would be very unreasonable to suppose, that these sufferings should only precede, and no more; or have only an idle priority in respect of time; for that were to suppose, that God, as it were, was consenting to it, that they should suffer for nothing, or to no purpose. And therefore we must conclude that the apostle intended to insinuate, that this precedent state of suffering would conduce, and contribute much to their spiritual improvement; which he

227

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78 Preached at Plasisterers' Hall, February 28, 1677.

had principally in his eye, on their behalf. These things being supposed, I shall endeavour very briefly to evince to you.

I. That a well-informed judgment will reckon, and does reckon and account, as you have heard, namely, that spiritual improvements and advantages by sufferings are more desirable, than a freedom from those sufferings themselves. And,

II. Shew you what reason and ground it has so to judge. And this I shall do only from the text, and with all possible brevity, that I may hasten,

III. To the use, which I chiefly intend.

I. That a well-informed judgment doth reckon spiritual improvements by sufferings to be more desirable, than a freedom from those sufferings themselves. We need no further light than what the text affords us to make this point clear, if we will but admit this twofold consideration;

1. That this great apostle was undoubtedly furnished with wisdom enough to understand what was really best for these scattered strangers, to whom he writes here. There can be no room for a doubt concerning this. And,

2. That he was prompted by that love, which would certainly engage him to pray for that which was best for them, according to his judgment. We can, I say, doubt of neither of these, if we will but consider that this prayer of his was indited by the Spirit of all wisdom, and love. We cannot therefore doubt but that he both understood that to be best for them, which really was so; and that he thereupon prayed for that, in great kindness of heart to this poor people, which he so understood to be best. No more need be said to evince that a well-informed judgment will determine thus, that spiritual improvement by sufferings is better, than a freedom from them, and more desirable. I proceed to shew

II. That there is a sufficient reason for such a judgment, which we may also see in the text; that is, that it is more desirable to have sufferings improved, than to have them presently removed from us. And this appears most suitable to that grace by which christians are called; and also to that glory unto which they are called.

Observe the connexion of the request, which the apostle makes on the behalf of these scattered Jews; (as we have most reason to suppose them Jews converted to Christianity) do but observe, I say, the connexion of the request, with the preface to it: "The God of all grace, who hath called you to his eternal glory by Jesus Christ, make you perfect," &c. It is to be supposed, that the preface in this prayer (as it is usually intended in all such prayers) should carry somewhat or other in it, agreeable to the matter afterwards prayed for. And so it really is here. For the apostle does not pray, that these christians might not suffer; but that upon, or by the means of their sufferings, they might receive that great and spiritual advantage, of being brought into a more perfect and better state, than they were in before; and gain more strength, more stability, more fixedness than ever. And to pray thus, I say, is,

1 Most suitable to that grace by which they had been called; or most suitable to God, as he is the God of all grace.

But it may be said, "Is that suitable to the gracious nature of God, to let his own peculiar people be abused by a vile, wicked world? to expose that sort of persons (who of all others do alone love him, and are true to him among men) unto violent and injurious usage from the rest of mankind?" Yes certainly; if we consider the matter well, it is most suitable. God is, it is true, a Father to that select people; but consider where the relation falls, and where it terminates. He is said in contradistinction to the fathers of our flesh, to be the Father of our spirits. [Heb. xii. 9](#). It is certainly most suitable to the love of God to let his own people suffer, if you will allow his love to be correspondent to the relation. He is indeed related to them as a Father, but to what of them? To their spirits principally, and especially to that spiritual product, or new nature, of which he is the immediate Author. There the relation terminates, to that he is chiefly related as a Father, and there his care and love goes with the relation, "Let it be well with their spirits, and it matters not much how it goes with them any where else. I am the Father of their spirits; I am to take care it may go well with them upon spiritual accounts. Therefore if their flesh feel pain, if it suffer want, if it be pinched and straitened, if it languish and complain, it agrees very well with my relation to their spirits, as a Father to them. Let it then be so, let sufferings come upon them, if all this shall prove to the greater advantage of their spirits; if they shall thereby come to have so much more thriving and prosperous souls; if by this means they grow more refined; more freed from terrene dross; be more fitted for my fellowship; rendered more capable of doing me duty in their respective places; and of tasting, and relishing the pleasure thereof; if this be the case, I think I deal with them but as a Father, whose relation is to their spirits."

The apostle speaks of this with a great deal of complacency, and as one that is highly well pleased. "Though (says he) our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal." [2 Cor. iv. 16, 17, 18](#). He does not speak this with any kind of regret that he found the outward man so struck as to be continually liable to perish.

"No," saith he, "let it perish daily; I matter it not. Though it does perish, that signifies nothing to me, so that the inward man be but renewed day by day." And,

2. It is more suitable to that state of glory, whereunto we are called; as well as to that grace, by which we are called. It is very necessary, to our being introduced into that glorious, blessed state, that we be prepared, and made some way fit for it, before we reach it. And the great concernment and necessity of this makes the apostle Paul bless God, with a great deal of triumph, on the behalf of those Christian Colossians to whom he wrote; and he puts them upon blessing of God, that though they were suffering to that degree as that they stood



in need of all patience, yet that all this while he was making them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. [Col. i. 11, 12](#). He speaks of it as the proper matter of thanksgiving, that though they suffered so much as to require their being strengthened with all might, according to the glorious power of God; yet it was all well enough: they were so far from having cause to complain, that they had a great deal of reason rather to give thanks to God. As if he had said, "It is a pure, a bright, and lightsome region that you are going to, and you need a great deal of refining before you come there, that you may be fit to be received. You need to have your spirits clarified, and freed from all impure dross, even while you are suffering so as that all patience is requisite unto it. You have therefore reason to give thanks, if God by this means is making you meet to partake of the inheritance of the saints, in their state of life, purity and perfection."

This is also intimated in that place before mentioned. "I do not care," as if he had said, "though the outward man perisheth, while the inward is renewed day by day." And how is it renewed? Why thus, the "light affliction, which is but for a moment, works out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But how do afflictions work out a state of glory for us? In answer to this, we are to consider what notion we ought to have of the glory, whereof the saints are to be partakers here after; and by which they are to be made happy and blessed. Now it is not merely an objective glory that can make me happy, and be the satisfaction of my soul; that is, to have only some glorious sights to behold and look upon, and no more. For I can be happy by nothing, which is not united to me; and it is impossible any one should be blessed by a distant good, severed from themselves. And therefore we are told how we are to conceive of this glory, by St. Paul, who tells us it is a glory that is to be revealed in us. [Rom. viii. 18](#). It is a glory most intimate to the subjects, and by which they are made glorious; not merely to be seen, but what they themselves are to bear: and therefore the apostle says it is  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \eta\mu\alpha\varsigma$ , to be revealed in, or into us. It is that impress of the divine glory, which is imparted and communicated from God to the soul, upon the vision of his blessed face; by which it is transformed perfectly now in to the same likeness, as much as a creature can be like to him. Here is the glory, by which souls are made happy and blessed at last; and into the stated participation of which they are now actually called by Jesus Christ.

Now consider this glory so, as here explained, and it is very apprehensible how the light afflictions, that are but for a moment, do work it out for us. For they gradually refine the soul after the image of the divine nature, make it more and more conformed to God; and according to the degree of the progress to which this refining work is carried on by such means while we are in this world, is our participation of the divine glory hereafter. According to the capacity of the vessel, which God hath designed to be a vessel of glory and honour, is the measure of that glory which is to be put into it in the other state. But certainly by this refinement, to which afflictions are so subservient and useful in this world, the soul is made more and more capable and receptive; it is refined, and enlarged at once. And thus it is more



suitable to that state of glory to which we are called, which was to be proved, in order to shew that it is more desirable to have sufferings improved, than to be freed from those sufferings themselves.

III. Therefore now to apply this, as the time will allow; and,

1. For Instruction.

(1.) We may learn hence, that we have another interest to Concern ourselves about, besides that of our flesh or outward man. For otherwise it could never be understood how that, which is really an offence and prejudice to the outward man, should be an advantage to us in any other respect. As chastising afflictions by a paternal rod are natural evils, but yet inflicted on us for spiritual good. It is plain then, I say, we have another interest about which we ought to be concerned.

(2.) We may further collect; that these two interests, as they are very distinct, so they are ordinarily too, very opposite to one another. That may make for the advantage of the spirit or inward man, which is greatly to the hurt and prejudice of the outward; and that which contributes to the gratification and pleasure of the outward man, may be very prejudicial to the inward. These are opposite interests, and we should consider them as such; and it would be of very great advantage to us, through our whole course, to carry this as a fixed thought with us, "That the interests of my flesh, and of my spirit, are of ten stated in such an actual opposition to one another, that what makes for the advantage of the one, is frequently hurtful and prejudicial to the other." For if we would but allow ourselves to consider this, and admit it as a fixed thought, then it would not, upon every occasion that occurs to us, be our first concern and care; namely, "What shall I do to save my flesh and outward man? how shall I order matters that all may go well with that?" especially as there is another interest in myself, which may be provided for by the methods of providence, that cast a severe and threatening aspect upon the other. And,

(3.) We may hence further learn, that the interest of the inward man is much more considerable than that of the flesh; which is the subject of the supposed sufferings, of which the apostle speaks, who puts up a very solemn request for spiritual advantage by such sufferings. He that loved them so well does not pray, that they might not suffer at all; but only that after they had suffered a little, they might be perfected and established. Certainly our spiritual interest is more considerable, than our outward interest; and we should be willing that the interest and advantage of the flesh, should be sacrificed to the interest of the soul: and that which I am willing to part with for another, must certainly be less considerable than the other. Bur,

(4.) We may also learn, that sufferings are not novelties among the people of God in this world; neither are they to be looked upon as novel, even the sharpest and severest of them. The apostle directs those, to whom he writes, in the same chapter, that they should look with another kind of eye upon an afflicted state, than to suppose it a new thing, or as

if nothing like it was known before. In the verse before my text, he intimates that they only suffered such afflictions as were common to others in the world, and such as many good men had endured, who were gone before them. And in another place of this epistle he admonishes them not to think strange even of the fiery trial ("which," says he, "is to try you") as if some strange thing had happened to them; assuring them: that after they had suffered awhile, the Spirit of glory and of God should rest upon them. That they should suffer was reckoned upon, taken for granted; and therefore it speaks a very strange spirit among us, if the thoughts of any sufferings should presently startle us. What! are we grown so soft and delicate, that we must meet with no afflictions in the world? as if it were a more wonderful thing that we should suffer, than others who have gone before us in former days. Wherein are we better than they?

2. I pass on to another use, which may be for conviction to us, who seem to be so much of another judgment from the apostle, in this important case. And there are two or three things which I would here premise. As

(1.) That there is no present question depending whether we should simply desire to be freed from affliction, yea or no; or whether, considering the matter simply in itself, we may not judge it desirable to be free from affliction. This is not the thing concerned in the present discourse, nor any part of it. It will be easily acknowledged, that the sufferings we speak of are natural evils; and evil as such, or in itself, cannot be eligible to a reasonable nature. But the thing we speak of is, that when these two matters are compared; to wit, freedom from afflictions, and spiritual advantage by them, we should not prefer the former: not but that a freedom from suffering, simply in itself and alone, is a desirable thing; but compared with the spiritual advantages arising from thence, is not to be preferred or desired by us. And,

(2.) I again premise, that by judgment here I do not intend a mere notional, but a practical judgment. For I make no question but we are all of the apostle's mind without any more ado; and agree with him that it is better to have spiritual advantage by affliction, than to be free from it. But when we speak of a practical judgment, here it is that our error lies, and wherein we are to be rectified. The practical judgment is that, to which the temper of a man's soul doth correspond: that which is of such power and prevalency with a man, as to impress its own likeness, or somewhat correspondent to itself upon his own heart, upon his will, his choice, and affections; and so consequently influence the course of his walking, and conversation. The thing therefore I complain of, in this case, is, that the temper of our spirits is so unsuitable; so unlike the apostle's judgment in this case, that spiritual improvement by suffering is more desirable than freedom from it. These things being premised, I shall evince, that there is a failure among us in these things, particularly that we are not likeminded with the apostle in this matter, and then, shew you the great evil of it, that is, of our error in this regard.



[1.] I am to evince that there is a great failure or mistake in our judgment, if we are not of the same mind with the apostle as to this point. And this I would do by putting a few queries to you, by which you may be able to convict yourselves where in the matter does require, and will admit. As

First. Whether are we move sensible of the external calamities which befall us, than of inward spiritual distempers? Suppose a person by some surprising providence lose all he had in the world, is reduced to the utmost distress and necessity, whether is not this more grievous, or more sensibly felt than inward spiritual evils? "Do I so cry and bemoan myself because of the body of sin and death, as I do when I have lost my friend, my husband, my wife, my child, my house, my estate, my pleasant delectable things in this world?" In such cases we cry out as undone persons; we mourn and refuse to be comforted. "But I have an earthly, vain heart; a heart that will not be brought to live in love, and communion with God; unapt to prayer, to meditation, to spiritual commerce with heaven." Do we so sensibly complain upon these accounts, I say, as men are apt to do under the sharp and acute sense of external evils? This shews which way the poize of our spirits inclines, and we may plainly discern it by urging ourselves with this question.

Secondly. Whether do we more dread and fear the continuance, and increase of inward distempers, or external sufferings? which, I say, is more the matter of our dread? I have a near evil that hath pressed me, and is like to do so still; a carnal, stupid, terrene, and corrupt heart; whether do I dread the continuance of this, or the increase of it; more than I do the continuance, or increase of any external sufferings that are upon me, or may threaten me? If you should be told, that there is danger of being devoured in all your external concerns by a formidable enemy; or that you are in danger of fire, of great losses, of coming into a decayed state in respect of your Trade and traffic; which things would you think of with the most dread? Should not we dread more the thoughts of being turned out of all, driven from house and home, of going to seek our bread in desolate places, of wandering in wildernesses and deserts, lurking in dens and holes of the earth? Should we not, I say, think of these things with more dread, than we ordinarily do of that close, latent enemy, that lies lurking at our very hearts and souls? namely, infidelity within, and disaffection to God? a proneness to depart from him, and a heart bent to backslide? Which sort of evils are we most apt to dread?

Thirdly. Which should we consider with more complacency, an external state of things just agreeable to such an idea as we could form to ourselves in our own minds; or an inward frame of holiness, agreeable to the idea which the blessed God hath set before us in the word of truth? which, I say, should we think of with more delight? Suppose we should have the prospect set before us of such a state of things in outward respects as we could wish; garners yielding all kind of store, nothing but prosperity, pleasure and peace in our dwellings; all



the liberty our hearts could desire, to do and walk according to our own inclinations: and frame again the prospect of an enlightened, lively mind and spirit; full of God, full of heaven, full of divine love, full of spiritual strength, vigour, activity and fervour in all holy exercises whatsoever; and which, I pray, of these seemeth the more grateful prospect to us? Or which is the more taking thing with our hearts, upon the view of the one and the other? to have in outward respects, all the opulence and prosperity our hearts could wish on the one hand; and on the other, to have hearts disentangled and freed from sin, so as that we may go to God upon all occasions with freedom, or without restraint, and always converse with him with delight?

Such questions as these closely urged may convince some, as the case may require, how much they differ from this apostle; and are of a different sense and estimate from him, in reference to what we are speaking of. And if there be such a disagreeing judgment in this case, then we are to consider,

[2.] The great evil of it. And this I might represent to you very largely; but, at present, take some account of it only in these few particulars.

First. It speaks great injudiciousness in the matter of discerning between things that differ, and which doth more excel. It is one great part of the work and business of judgment to distinguish between things, that are of different value from one another; and he is a very injudicious man, who is not able to prefer those things that are more excellent, which when compared and judged of do vastly differ: as it would argue very great injudiciousness indeed if I could not tell which of the two to prefer; a gay feather, or a rich diamond. The odds is so vastly great here, that it must needs argue a great want of discerning the just value of things: and so it must in like manner if we cannot tell which is to be rather chosen; a little freedom from pain and affliction, or that which is a great advantage and gain to the inward man.

Secondly. It argues very great unbelief of the truth of God's word in reference to this very case. It is expressly said, All things shall work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. [Rom. viii. 28](#). But we do not believe this; for it is plain that if we did believe it, it were then altogether impossible we should reject or less value that, which at the same time we believe to be the greater good. For it is spiritual good that is there meant, which is to be wrought out by external natural evils. And can we tolerate in ourselves an habitual indisposition to take God's word? Sure, methinks, we should look upon this as a most intolerable thing.

Thirdly. It argues a very low and mean temper of spirit, when we do not know how to value and favour most our best and most excellent good. It shews that we have a very vile esteem of our own souls, when we are more concerned about a clod of clay, a lump of flesh, than we are about them, or their benefit and advantage. And



Fourthly. It argues most unworthy thoughts of the wisdom and goodness of the providence of God, with respect to those sufferings and afflictions we speak of. It looks as if we did not really believe, that they are brought upon us for some greater good, than any we can lose, or be indamaged in, by them; or that we thought that neither wisdom, or goodness, conducted the course of affairs towards us. What account can we give, or what reasons produce, why the course of divine providence should run so and so (as it many times has done in the world) as to cast smiling fair aspects on the worst sort of men, and frowning severe aspects on the better sort? Hence men have been apt to make very sinister interpretations, and applications. Thus the prophet Malachi charges some in his time: "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words: yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? when ye say, every one that doeth evil, is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, where is the God of judgment?" [Mal. ii. 17](#). And truly, though we have explicit formed thoughts otherwise, yet the sense of our hearts will seem to be agreeable to such thoughts as these, if we tolerate in ourselves the error which I am detecting, and representing the evil of; that is, of supposing that it were better to be freed from afflictions, than to have them improved to our gain and advantage. Either we must think, that afflictions come upon the people of God by chance, and so that God has no design at all by such an ordering of things; or else, that he afflicts his people out of hatred and perfect ill-will: both which are monstrous, and horrid thoughts. It were altogether an unaccountable thing, upon the whole matter, why the course of the dispensations of God's providence should be as it ordinarily is, that the saints should be exposed to sufferings and afflictions, while the wicked live in ease, prosperity and pleasure; I say, this were unaccountable, if it could not be said that there is some greater good to be wrought out by these sufferings which shall abundantly compensate and countervail them. But if we persist in the error I speak of, we lose the only way of solving this difficulty of providence.

Fifthly. To represent the evil of this error yet more, I would observe, that it argues much impatience and weakness of spirit: for patience is passive power, fortitude, or ability to suffer. It argues very great weakness when we had a great deal rather not be good, than suffer affliction. Sure it is a sign that we can suffer nothing. And if there be such a disposition to faint in the day of adversity, our strength is small; as saith the wise man: and this is not only our great infelicity but our sin. [Prov. xxiv. 10](#).

Sixthly. It is a tacit choosing of sin, rather than affliction; and certainly that is a very bad thing. It is manifestly so, if we consider and look upon the case as it is. "Let me be impure still, drossy and terrene still, unlike to God still; so my flesh may but escape, my sense be gratified and indulged, and incur no prejudice."

Seventhly. It argues a great deal of pride; and also insensibleness both of what we deserve, and what we need. If any can by no means bring their spirits to think of suffering, there commonly lies at the bottom an insensibility of what they are; what wretched hearts, and

untoward natures they have. It is little apprehended what we deserve, and what we need, when we look upon such an aspect of providence as unsuitable; which threatens us with suffering, and is like to prove afflictive. This should be the sense of our hearts: "Alas! whatever I suffer, it is much less than my iniquity deserves! Yea, if I suffer never so severely, it is but what the exigency of my case requires. My heart is very sleepy and dead, and needeth rousing; it is very drossy and needs a hot furnace." And we should think so if we thought of ourselves aright, and if too good an opinion of ourselves did not blind our eyes. I might mention several things more, but the time permits not. I shall only design, hereupon in the close, to recommend two things;

i. That we should fix this judgment of the apostle in ourselves, as the standard and measure of our own. I judge thus, as the apostle Paul says; "I reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." [Rom. viii. 18](#). As if he had said, "This is my logic, I compute so upon the whole matter; and this is the result I come to, having considered it thoroughly, and viewed it on every side." Let us settle our judgment of this in like manner, and record it: "This was my mind at such a time, and I came then to be convinced of the truth of it. I will never alter it, till I see better reason (which I suppose I never shall) for laying it down, than I had to take it up." And,

ii. Agreeably hereunto let us direct the scope, current, and end of our prayers, on such days as these, as the apostle here doth his. It is necessary our hearts should be brought to an agreement with our judgments. What is the good I should most desire, and wish, and seek for my soul this day? If this be a right judgment which we have now heard of, it will be very good for us, at such times as these, and even at all times in our prayers to say: "I pray not that I may be freed from suffering; that is not the great thing I request. As to that I refer myself to the divine pleasure, and acquiesce in the determination of providence. But, O Lord! I have another request to make unto thee, that whatsoever shall befall me, I may have more of thine image; more life and strength; vigour and heavenliness; fitted for holiness in this world, and blessedness in the other. And then let my sufferings be what they will, so they be but subservient to this great design, of procuring my spiritual advantage."

And we pray upon pretty sure grounds when we pray thus. We do not need to doubt whether this be agreeable to the divine will or no. We are upon a certainty. If I should insist peremptorily in prayer upon this, and that temporal good for myself, or the community I belong unto, it may be said; "Where is the promise? and thereupon, where is the faith of being heard in such a prayer?" But I am sure I pray agreeably to his own will, when I pray, that I may be brought into spiritual prosperity. I am sure therein to suit with what he himself doth command. This will be acceptable, and well-pleasing to God; and turn to my ineffable good and advantage, both here and hereafter.

238

239

## SERMON V.<sup>79</sup>

Isaiah lxiii. 10.

*But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.*

IN the forgoing part of this chapter you have a representation, as it is generally agreed, of our Lord Christ in triumph; returning as a conqueror from his victories, with garments discoloured with the blood of the slain. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save," The enemies, whom the Messiah is supposed to have engaged against, are represented and set forth by Edom, and the metropolis thereof, Bozrah; because they were the next enemies to the church of God, mostly confined within Palestine, upon which Idumea bordered, and who were continually vexatious, and afflictive to them: by these, I say, are the spiritual enemies represented, which our Lord Jesus Christ was to set himself against. And so I have taken notice of a certain author (though I profess not to like all his allegories) who allegorically speaks of the carnal part, under the name of Edom. "The mind or spirit ought to follow God unweariedly, without deviating or turning aside, lest he come into Edom:" alluding no doubt to the word itself edom or earth, as the name of Adam comes from the same root. Against these spiritual enemies, that readily fall in with our carnal, earthly part, did our Lord Jesus Christ use his prowess, unto a glorious victory and triumph. This being represented, how ready the Redeemer was to undertake on the behalf of them, who were to be defended, and saved by him; a reflection is made upon God's former dealings on the behalf of this people, and their unequal carriage and deportment towards him, in the seventh, eighth, and ninth verses. But I cannot go distinctly over them. Unto which this complaint is subjoined; "But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit; therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them."

There are two things, which present themselves to our view, and consideration, from these words: namely, that the rebellions of a people professing the name of God, are very vexatious to his Spirit; and that such vexations engage him against them as their enemy. To speak to both these together, for the sake of dispatch, I shall do only these two things.

I. Inquire concerning the evil done; that is, vexing the Spirit of God, by rebelling against him. And,

II. Concerning the evil suffered; and that is his turning against them, so as to become their enemy. Upon which,

III. The use of all will ensue.

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79 Preached at Haberdashers' Hall, June 1, 1677.



I. As to the evil done, we are to inquire in the first place concerning the nature of it; and then in the next place, the cause thereof.

1. Let us consider the nature of the evil done, namely, the vexing of the Spirit of God. We are not to understand it as if the blessed Spirit of God was capable of such vexation, as we are in ourselves; that is, of real perturbation or passion. That, common reason will tell us, the divine nature is not capable of. But yet notwithstanding, this doth not signify nothing; there is some great thing lies under this expression, which we may conceive of in these two particulars.

(1.) His will is really crossed; somewhat is done, that is, against his will. I mean his will concerning our duty, not his will concerning the event; against his preceptive will and consequently against that good, which he wills to us upon the supposition of our compliance with his just and righteous will. He really wills many things in reference to men, which he doth not will effectually to procure that they shall be done. He wills our obedience and duty; and, as this is connected with it, he wills also our felicity and happiness. The will of God in the former part, is expressed by his precepts; in the latter, by his promises, so far as they are of a general tenor. But there is a will of his in reference to the event, of which it may be truly said, "Who hath resisted his will?" [Rom. ix. 19](#). When the commands of God are disobeyed, and persons by their disobedience rush upon vengeance, and put themselves under the effects of divine displeasure; then is that done, which is averse to the legislative will of God, as it is signified to us by his word. And this is implied in the expression in the text of his being vexed; namely, that there is a matter or object lying before him, at which he may take offence, or resent.

(2.) It is implied also, that he doth apprehend and resent this matter; though without any commotion, or perturbation. He resents it so as not to look upon it as a matter of indifference. It does not escape his notice, as profane, atheistical spirits are apt to fancy; who say, "The Lord shall not see, neither will the God of Jacob regard it." [Psal. xciv. 7](#) No, there is no such thing to be imagined. God takes notice of the matter, and resents the wrong done to him; yet so calm is the resentment, as every way agrees with the felicity of the divine nature. It is this which he lays up in store, as it is emphatically expressed by Moses, and seals up among his treasures. [Deut. xxxii. 34](#). This he keeps by him as the just matter of a controversy, which he will manage; and will animadvert upon it in his own time, and when a fit and proper season shall come. So much then are we to conceive as spoken of God, or of the Spirit of God, under the expression of its being vexed.

2. We are now to inquire concerning the cause of this vexation; or shew, what it is that thus vexes the Spirit of God. We may well understand in the general that sin does so; being in its own nature a direct contrariety to his good, and holy, and acceptable will. But especially rebellion against the Spirit of God is vexatious, which is a higher pitch of sin; and implies a



continued course of disobedience. Rebellion speaks a prevalent, and continued malignity of sin. "They rebelled, and vexed his Spirit."

But to be more particular here; we may understand what sin is more especially vexing to the Spirit of God, if we allow ourselves to consider what the titles and attributes of this Spirit in Scripture are. By these we shall know what is the tendency of the office and operations of the blessed Spirit of God; and so more easily conceive what tends to vex, and to grieve it, as you know the expression is elsewhere. "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." [Ephes. iv. 30.](#)

(1.) The Spirit of God is styled the Spirit of truth. [John xiv. 17.](#) It is therefore very grievous, and vexing to this Spirit, to have a light esteem of divine truth; to be indifferently affected towards it; to have a loose adherence to it; an easiness to part with it; and much more a proneness to oppose it, and run away from it. This, I say, must needs be vexing to the Spirit of God. And because I foresee I shall be able to speak but little to the use, I desire you as we go along to make reflections on each head; and to consider how far you may suppose yourselves guilty, and how far this age (professing the truth of God) is guilty of vexing the Spirit in this, and other respects. Again,

(2.) It is mentioned in Scripture under the name of the Spirit of grace. [Heb. x. 29.](#) It is therefore very vexing to this blessed Spirit when that grace, of which it is the author, and which it is its office and business to convey and apply, or effectually to reveal, is rejected; when in that gospel under which we live, and which is the ministration of the Spirit, grace is offered and despised; when there are few that express any regard to, or any desire or value of the Spirit of God: this is a most vexing thing to this Spirit.

(3.) It is called the Spirit of faith. [2 Cor. iv. 13.](#) Infidelity therefore must needs be reckoned a most vexing thing to this Spirit. When persons continue under the gospel in obstinate unbelief; and the great things, there revealed and discovered to us, are but as a tale that is told; or regarded no more than we would regard the word of a child; a most vexing thing to the Spirit of God this must be understood to be. More over,

(4.) It is a Spirit of contrition and repentance. This is an effect that is attributed to this Spirit as the author of it. The Spirit of grace and supplication shall be poured forth, as it is promised in Zechariah, and then it is that souls shall mourn over him whom they have pierced, and be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. [Zech. xii. 10.](#) An impenitent hard heart, a heart that cannot repent, is a most vexatious thing to the Spirit of God. We cannot conceive a greater vexation to him, than to find hearts hard as rocks and stones, under the dispensation of the everlasting gospel.

(5.) It is stiled the Spirit of love; which is the great principle, that disposes and inclines the soul towards God. He hath given us the Spirit of love, ([2 Tim. i. 7.](#)) that principle which influenceth, and is the life and soul of all the communion there is, between the blessed God, and those that do be long to him; which itself therefore is called "the communion of the

Holy Ghost." [2 Cor. xiii. 14](#). A cold heart then towards God, a heart that is disaffected to him, that keeps at a distance from him, that will not be engaged in sweet communion with him through love, is a most vexing thing to his Spirit. Again it is in the

(6.) Place, called a Spirit of power and of life. It is the Spirit that quickeneth, says our Lord. [John vi. 63](#). And again St. Paul tells us, God hath given to us the Spirit of power. [2 Tim. i. 7](#). It is a very vexatious thing to this Spirit, when any indulge themselves in deadness of heart; when they allow themselves to be formal, lukewarm, and indifferent; neither cold nor hot, as it was said of the Laodicean church, whom, our Lord threatens therefore to spue out of his mouth; a strong expression of his being vexed, and of his resenting the matter with very high displeasure. [Rev. iii. 15, 16](#).

(7.) It is stiled the Spirit of holiness. [Rom. i. 4](#). And here in our text it is said, They rebelled and vexed his holy Spirit. This is a most vexing thing, when persons professing the Christian name indulge themselves in a liberty to walk at random; are impatient of restraints; affect libertinism; have not refrained their feet but have loved to wander: therefore the Lord doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. [Jer. xiv. 10](#). When no bonds can be endured; when the yoke and burden of our Lord Jesus Christ are apprehended uneasy, grievous, and intolerable; and the resolution is come to this, "Let us cast away his cords, let us throw off his bonds from us, he shall not reign over us;" when the law of sin and death contesteth to that height against the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, as to engage us to comply with the lustings of the flesh; this is a most vexatious thing to the Spirit of our purity and holiness.

(8.) It is a heavenly Spirit; and the design of all its gracious operations upon souls is to fit them for heaven. "He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing, is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." [2 Cor. v. 5](#). And again says the apostle, "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things which are freely given us of God:" even those things which "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." [1 Cor. ii. 12, 9](#). A worldly heart therefore is a vexation to this Spirit; that is, when we mingle with, and suffer ourselves to be swallowed up of the spirit of this world: the inclinations and tendencies of which spirit are earthly, and running downwards; while the Spirit of God is aiming to lift us up towards God and heaven. Again,

(9.) It is a Spirit of prayer. So it is called in Scripture, the Spirit of supplication. [Zech. xii. 10](#) It is the great business of this Spirit to act souls, and to raise them to God, in the way of prayer. It is a very great vexation therefore to the holy Spirit, when persons grow to a prayerless disposition; do not care to converse with God in this duty; are slow in the business of prayer; either not minding it, or doing it as though they did it not: this, I say, is a very vexing thing. So he interprets it, and speaks of it with resentment: "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; thou art weary of me, O Israel." [Isai. xliiii. 22](#). When persons, who formerly

loved prayer, are now grown out of love with it; when those, that have taken pleasure in being in their closets, and shut up in corners, are now grown strange to him, and care not to come nigh him in that way; this is especially to provoke and grieve the Spirit. The very bent and tendency of such a soul runs now directly counter to his proper design and business; which is to engage the souls of men with God in that great duty, wherein they may enjoy continually a fruitful and useful commerce with him. But they decline, and will not be brought to it by this means. This is also a very bitter vexation. And again,

(10.) It is a Spirit of sincerity and uprightness; and wherever it obtains, it makes men upright and sincere. Thus it is called the Spirit of a sound mind. [2 Tim. i. 7](#) Hypocrisy therefore, or a deceitful dealing with the blessed God in matters of religion, is a most vexatious thing to his Spirit. When there is only a shew and appearance of love, and devotedness to him; and this only made a cover to a false disloyal heart: this is an abomination unto God. He loves truth in the inward parts, and his countenance beholdeth the upright; giving them pleasant, smiling, complacential looks, which are plain indications of his approving, and being well pleased with them. So again, he cannot but frown with displeasure, where there is falsehood and deceit; where there is an unsound heart; a latent hypocrisy, as if we designed to impose upon him by a cheat and shew; to deceive and mock him, who cannot be deceived, neither will be mocked.

(11.) It is a Spirit of union, peace, and meekness, among them that belong to God. It is designed to form the hearts of believers to these things; and so far as his Spirit is given, one heart and one way are also given; as we may see from [Ezekiel xi. 19](#). compared with other scriptures. Animosities among the people of God; heart-burnings, whether they be upon a common, or a particular, personal account; are the most vexing things imaginable to the Spirit of God, which is the Spirit of union, peace, and concord, and the very soul of the mystical body. It is a very vexatious thing when one member of this body goes to fight with another; and it may be some against the common interest of the whole. And it is in the

Last place, A Spirit of sobriety and temperance, in opposition to grossly sensual lusts. It is a very vexatious thing to the Spirit of God, when among a people that profess his name, there is a general profusion, and running into vile sensual lusts. Some are sensual, not having the Spirit. [Jude 19](#). The connection is very observable. Whereas God gives his Spirit, to form a people to that purity, that they may be different from the rest of the world; they allow themselves to run into the same excess of riot. And I believe there are few of us that ever heard, or read of an age, in which there were more gross instances of impurity among professors, than the present. How many instances do we hear of this kind! It must needs be very vexatious to the holy Spirit, whose design it is to form a people unto God, to bear up his name in opposition to a commonly dissolute, and debauched age.



You see then as to the evil done, what it is, and what is the cause of it; namely, sin, and more especially rebellion in those instances, wherein the designs of the Spirit (as represented to us by various titles and attributes in Scripture) are most opposed. We are therefore now,

II. To inquire concerning the evil suffered hereupon; or which we may expect will be inflicted on persons on this account: namely, his turning against them so as to become their enemy. Here we should speak distinctly,

1. Concerning the nature of this evil; and,
2. Concerning the issue of it, and how justly it does ensue in this case.

1. Let us consider the nature of this evil, and shew what is imported in it. And here something is expressed, and something is implied in the words of my text; “therefore he turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.” It is implied, that he shall cease doing for such a people as he hath done. If he was wont formerly to be a bountiful, liberal benefactor, he shall stop his hand. And especially it is to be expected, that we should be so dealt with in that very respect, wherein we have been vexatious: that is, Have we vexed the Spirit of God? then it is natural to expect that the Spirit of God will retire. This is certainly implied in his becoming an enemy to us. If he become an enemy, it is not likely he should hold that friendly commerce, which sometimes he hath done. If God become our enemy, his Spirit shall withdraw from us; shall not strive, nor wrestle with us. And then also these words express some positive evils against such persons; which t might instance in many particulars, but cannot now mention them.

2. I am to consider how justly this penal evil does ensue in this case; namely, that God should turn against those, who rebel and vex his Spirit. This is to be collected from the greatness of the evil done. Consider therefore how just cause and matter of provocation, this injurious dealing with the Spirit of God doth carry in it. Particularly,

(1.) Consider that this is very spiteful dealing, to do that which will vex his very Spirit. Sinners of this kind are expressly said to do “despite unto the Spirit of grace.” [Heb. x. 29](#) And surely to do that, which must directly contradict the very business and design of the Spirit, is a most spiteful kind of wickedness.

(2.) Consider that this is a wickedness, wherein the most immediate kind of affront is offered unto God. He deals with men in a more distant way when he deals with them in his providence, or the outward manifestation of his will in his word. But when he comes to deal with the spirits of men, and to have his work within them, and their spirits resist and oppose him; there is then a most immediate contest between the blessed God and them. And we cannot but think this is a high provocation unto God, and reckon upon this issue, that he must hereupon become our enemy. And,

(3.) It is to be considered that sinning so as more directly to vex the Spirit of God, does carry with it a withstanding of the Spirit in that which is its proper office; which is a great aggravation of the wickedness. It is one thing when I withstand a person in a thing, which



he does casually and by the by; and another when I withstand him in that, which is his stated business. It is, you know, reckoned a high affront among men to be resisted, and withstood in an office. To oppose an ordinary, private person, is but a small matter in comparison of affronting an officer, in the execution of his office. The Spirit of God, when it is about the work of diffusing gospel light and grace, is in the work of its own office. And when persons do such things as are vexatious in this respect; that is, oppose and withstand the holy Spirit in its proper stated business, this must needs be highly provoking. It is a bold and insolent affront done to the blessed God; and therefore may well infer upon such a people that dreadful thing that God should turn against them, and become their enemy.

247

III. Now as to the use (though these matters have been more lightly touched and considered, than the matter required for want of time) we may infer the following things.

1 We may infer hence, that among a people professing the name of God, the Spirit of God is wont to be at work; and where it is not doing any work, we cannot suppose it to be thus vexatiously resisted, and contended against. It was the testimony that Stephen bore against this people, even dying, that they constantly rebelled, and vexed the Holy Spirit. "Ye do all ways resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did so do ye." [Acts vii. 51](#). Now what doth this imply? Inasmuch as it is said expressly that there was a war kept up against the Spirit of God, from age to age, and from generation to generation; it implies, that as they were from age to age a professing people, so from age to age the Spirit of God was still, more or less, striving with them: or else how could they be said always to resist? Where there is no striving, there is no resisting. We ought therefore to consider this, that ordinarily where the gospel is professed; there the Spirit of God is at work, more or less; though not always so, as to prevail. It is a free Spirit; and works, as the wind blows, where it listeth, and to what degree also. But I conceive, that in all those who live under the gospel, the Spirit of God moves at some times, in one degree or another. For it is hardly to be imagined, that any should wear out a life's time under the gospel, and not, one time or other, have the injection of some good thought, some check or rebuke, as to their evil course; and some inclination, at least, to return, and alter their course. And I doubt not but there is a parity between these two cases; that is, as in matters of consolation the Spirit of God co-operates with our spirits, so he doth in matters of conviction, whether it ever becomes effectual or no. So that I reckon it most safe, and most honourable to God, when any injection of that kind is made in the conscience of any man, that lives under the gospel, to ascribe it to the Spirit in its common operations.

2. We are hereupon to reflect and consider, whether this may not be much our case and the case of the generality at this time, even thus like the Jews to have vexed the holy Spirit of God, which hath been for a long season dealing with us. Recount with yourselves the particulars mentioned; and think whether there has not been a great deal of vexation given the Spirit of God in those several ways. But I cannot stand now to remind you of them.

248

3. Let us be hereupon persuaded to hasten the taking up this controversy (for it is a dreadful thing to have it depending) by humbling, and abasing ourselves in the dust, before the Lord; for ourselves on our own account, and on the behalf of the generality of those among whom we dwell. Surely this ought to be much the business of such a day as this, even deeply to humble ourselves before the Lord, for the vexation given to his Spirit; and that our temper, course, and spirits run sp directly counter to him. We should not want matter of humiliation for many such days, if we did but seriously consider this case; though every day should be kept a fast, and as a day of humiliation on this account. And indeed it is sad, when the matter of humiliation is so very great and manifest, there should be any appearance of declining these occasions, or of shyness in closing with them. We desire to bless God for it, that it is in the hearts of any to join us, but yet it cannot but be observed that there is too great a coolness; and many persons are easily diverted, it is to be feared, from closing with such occasions as these. And methinks it is more especially to be observed, that but few masters of families do appear before God, at such times and on such occasions; who might represent their families, and in the name of them come and lie prostrate at the foot of the throne of grace.

Give me leave but to reflect upon a passage, which is not unworthy of our notice upon this occasion. They are the words of those idolatrous women that burned incense to the queen of heaven, who said to the prophet Jeremiah; "When we burnt incense to the queen of heaven and poured out drink-offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink-offerings unto her without our men?" [Jer. xlv. 19](#). 'Did not they come and fall in with us?' It is a sad case, if the men of our times cannot be as forward to fall in with the ways and methods of atoning God, and pacifying his displeasure against us, as they were in those days in ways pf so high provocation!

4. Let us apply ourselves particularly and with great earnestness to supplicate the continuance of the Spirit, where it remains breathing in us; and the restoring it, where it had been in any measure restrained. O, how loud and importunate should our cries be upon this account! It is a fearful thing to lie under the guilt of continual vexation to the Spirit of God. You know there is a particular accent put upon such wickedness. You know there is such a thing as the sin against the Holy Ghost, in an eminent sense; and we had need to take heed of every gradual approach unto it. I do not think that every sin against the Spirit of God, is that sin against the Holy Ghost; but we had need, I say, to look to ourselves as to any gradual approach to it. For how great is the censure laid upon that sin! It is therefore a fearful thing to have our heart and way bent against the way and course, the tendencies and motions of the Holy Ghost.

And when we consider the matter in this light, what reason have we to cry out, as we find the Psalmist does! "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me." [Ps. li. 11](#). It is a great matter God hath against us, when he hath this to charge us

with, namely the vexing of his Spirit. It is a part of the charge against Sodom, that they vexed Lot's righteous spirit. [2 Peter ii. 8](#). It is mentioned as a high aggravation of their wickedness that they vexed the spirit of a righteous man. But how much more heinous a thing is it to vex the Spirit of God! Is it (says the prophet Isaiah) a small thing to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? [Isai. vii. 13](#). And the more we apprehend the heinousness of this matter, the louder should our cry be, "Take not away thy holy Spirit from us, that Spirit, which we have vexed, grieved, and done so much to quench." And to this purpose consider, before I conclude, these two things.

(1.) The exigence of the case, and the necessity of having this Spirit. Alas! what will become of us when this Spirit is gone, quite gone and breathes no more? What do we conceive of ourselves, we that carry about with us bodies of flesh, animated by a living soul? What becomes of us when that spirit retires, and is gone? into what noisome putrid carcasses do we turn in a short time! and what a miserable carcass will that church become, out of which the Spirit of God is gone! a body without a soul! an unmoving breathless thing! If God should leave us the gospel, and the external frame of ordinances, what will that avail us when the Spirit is gone? The matter would be with us, as with some noble stately mansion-house, that is deserted of its great inhabitant. There you may come in, and walk from room to room, and find no body, where there was once great resort, and a great deal of splendour, pomp, and joy, but now, nothing but desolation! Such a thing will that church be, out of which the Spirit of God, the great Inhabitant, is gone. You might have gone to that ordinance and the other, and have met with life; but now no such thing; there are the empty rooms inhabited by no one.

We should therefore so apprehend the exigence of the case, that our spirits may be awakened and stirred up, even with the utmost importunity, to obviate and avert, as much as in us lies, so great a calamity as this, and so great a death. The presence and influence of the Spirit would stand us in the stead of a great deal of mercy of other kinds. It was supposed, that to have ministers and teachers in the church would overbalance a great calamity, where it is said; "Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers." [Isai. xxx. 20](#). But how much external misery would it outweigh, to have this Spirit (so teaching as none does) remaining among us! So that it may well become us still to be praying; "Lord whatever thou doest, withdraw not thy Spirit from us! Rather tear our flesh, pour our blood like water upon the ground, than cease to be pouring out thy Spirit among us!" We should make this much the design of all our prayers on such a day as this.

It may be, many are come before the Lord this day, to try to deprecate and avert that wrath, which threatens us with external calamities; or that they may do something for the saving their estates, and their pleasant delectable things: but this is a low design. Rather say,



“Let all these things go, if thou wilt Lord, but let thy Spirit remain! let that breathe, and work in us still; and do with us, in all external respects, what thou wilt.”

Let us labour thus, I say, to apprehend the necessity of our case. It is not necessary that we should be rich, or in quiet, or at liberty; it is not necessary we should have such, and such external accommodations; but it is necessary we should have the Spirit: for they that have not the Spirit of Christ are none of his. [Rom. viii. 9](#). And again,

(2.) Apprehend too (wherewith I close) the possibility of succeeding well, in our strivings and wrestlings with God, yet to obtain more of his Spirit. It is itself a Spirit of grace, and supplication; and according as it is complied with in that, which is its proper business and office, so we may expect more and more plentiful effusions of it. We are therefore to look upon this -as a hopeful case, if we set ourselves to strive with God for his Spirit, that it shall not withdraw. But if it be an in different matter with us, then are we lost before we are aware. We feel death creeping upon us by degrees, and we regret it not; death drawing near our vitals, but we mind it not.

This is a sad case; but if we, feeling a decay and languishment, cry with importunity to God, the case is not hopeless. He hath said, that he will give the Spirit to them that ask for it; and that he will pour out his Spirit upon us. Christ represents it as given to a child, as a boon from the Father; and that this gift is comprehensive of all good things. [Matt. vii. 11](#). compared with [Luke xi. 13](#). Nay, that the Spirit is to us, as bread to a child; for we can no more live without the Spirit, than a child can without bread.

If we would therefore set ourselves a craving in good earnest, and represent our case to the Father of spirits and mercies, his bowels would work towards us; and he would not long with hold his Spirit from them, whom he sees to want it, and ask for it. Therefore beg of God thus: “O Lord, behold a poor company of creatures gasping for life! thy Spirit is vital breath; we are ready to die, if thy Spirit breathe not. Pity thine own offspring, thou Father of mercies, and of all spirits!” Surely then this Spirit will return; for why should not we rest upon his promise, who has said, that God will give his holy Spirit to them that ask him?

And we may the more boldly ask, because we may suppose ourselves to be nearer those days, wherein there shall be a more general pouring out of the Spirit? And we might argue that those days are nearer indeed, if there was a more general, and importunate, and loud cry for this Spirit. This would import that a great measure of it is already come, and that far greater measures are coming. It would be an argument, that it would be a Spirit of consolation and joy, life and vigour; which would make religion a glorious thing, and Christians shine and live, both at once.



## SERMON VI.<sup>80</sup>

James i. 22.

*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your ownelves.*

THE limits of my time, since I intend to discourse to you only this hour upon this scripture, will not allow me to reflect much upon the context; which is all suitable, and of the same piece with the words of the text itself. We have at the eighteenth verse a very high eulogy given us of the word of God, as that which is the divine seed and principle of the new birth; and out of which God's great and glorious work of the new creation doth result. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." Whereupon the exhortation, "Be swift to hear," (ver. 19.) is grounded; that is, be very covetous of all seasons to wait upon the dispensations of this word. And then, at least, we come to this caution here in the text; "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only." Though hearing the word is the appointed means of this new creation; and is that, which by divine designation is able to save the soul of a man, by virtue of that efficacy which many times accompanies it from God; yet this is not to be understood, as if it should do any such work upon them, who only give it the hearing, and no more. And therefore the apostle thinks it seasonable, and necessary to give this intimation by the way, upon what terms we might expect so glorious an effect to be wrought by it: that is, supposing that we apply ourselves to attend upon it, with that earnest intention of the mind, as those who have a design to comply with, and to guide and govern their practice by the word they hear; otherwise all will come to nothing. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your ownelves."

We might recommend to you several propositions of divine truth from this scripture; but we shall choose to collect, and gather up all as much as we can into one, for the sake of greater dispatch, which you may take thus.

That it is a miserable self-deception for any to be hearers of the word only, and not doers of it. And herein we shall speak to these three things, as previous to the improvement of it.

I. Shew what it is to be a doer of the word.

II. What to be a hearer only. And

III. Wherein those, of the latter sort, do so miserably deceive themselves.

I. We are to shew what it is to be a doer of the word. The expression plainly imports a habit; according as we denominate every person that is of such or such a calling or trade, from the course and way of life which he follows. A doer of the word, (ποιηται,) is not one that doth some single act, now and then, which the word enjoins or directs; but one whose

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<sup>80</sup> Preached at Haberdashers' Hall, September 16, 1677.

wonted course, and the business of whose life it is to obey the dictates of this word, and who governs his life and the tenour of his actions by it. Just as we find the phrase of a worker of iniquity is, in the Old and New Testament, made use of to represent and hold forth to us the course of those persons, who trade in sin. They are said to be sin-makers, as the expression *κακοποιουντες* doth emphatically note: their business is to work sin; and they do often exert their strength, and power that way. So we are to understand in general, a doer of the word of God; that is, one whose business of his life it is to do it in a continual course. And this supposes, and includes in it many things, which I shall briefly hint to you.

1. It doth suppose a design, a formed fixed design, that this shall be my course. Accordingly we have the Psalmist speaking to this purpose; "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments: I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end." *Ps. cxix. 106, 112.* As if he had said, "I purpose and intend so to do; and this is an intention I resolve to pursue, throughout my whole course, from which nothing shall divert me." So in like manner when we attend upon the dispensation of the word, it should be with a settled design in our hearts, and a sincere purpose to learn somewhat in order to practice; to apply and accommodate to practice the truths we hear, and that are capable of being applied to this purpose.

2. It carries with it a very serious applying of our minds to understand what is the mind and will of God, which is held forth to us in his word: that we content not ourselves to have heard such and such things propounded to us; but that we distinctly apprehend the scope and drift of what we hear, and what is the great thing aimed at in it. For we can never be doers of the word and will of God blindly, and in the dark. It is necessary that we understand and know it first. It is a way we are to walk in with open eyes. A good understanding (says the Psalmist) have all they, that do his commandments. *Ps. cxi. 10.* He supposes a good understanding as necessary to the doing the commandments of God. We cannot do them, without having a right understanding of them. These words do also imply (which seems to be the particular sense of them) that a good understanding will certainly incline a man to keep his commandments; and that the keeping his commandments will argue him to have a good understanding. And indeed he is the wise man that understands this to be his interest, and accordingly makes it his business to know, and practice the mind and will of God.

3. It implies the use of our judgment in hearing the word, in order to distinguish what is divine, and what is human. For God hath thought fit that it should be so dispensed in the world, by such hands and instruments as may too possibly admit somewhat that is human into the dispensation of it. It is so sometimes merely as to the manner of the dispensation. There is nothing of this treasure that is conveyed to us by such vessels, but it will, some way or other, taste of the vessel: and that which we are principally to attend and mind, is t close with that which is most substantial, as supposing it to be altogether divine. It is also true sometimes that there may be some error as to the matter, as well as the manner. And there



our desire ought to be of the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby, even as new-born babes. [1 Pet. ii. 2.](#) New-born babes have a kind of discerning if the milk be pure, or if there be any thing ill tasted or unsavoury in it. And there is a certain kind of taste and relish, which belongs to the new creature. "Cannot my taste (says Job) discern perverse things?" [Job vi. 30.](#) And this was the great commendation of the Bereans, That they searched the Scriptures in order to know, whether the things spoken to them by the apostles, were of God or no. [Acts xvii. 11.](#) And it was noted to be a piece of generosity in them. They were more noble than they of Thessalonica, upon this account. We are to make use of our judgment: as the apostle prays for the Philippians, that they might abound in judgment and all sense, spiritual sense; that so they might discern the things that differ, or approve those, which are more excellent. [Phil. i. 9, 10.](#)

4. It requires a great deal of reverence to be used in hearing the word. So to hear it as that we may be doers, requires a very reverential attendance upon it; as considering, that this is a revelation that comes from heaven, some part of which is now to be held forth to us. It is a divine light, which, through such a medium, is to shine forth to us. And there is certainly altogether a fault in this respect, among a great many professors of religion; that the reverence is wanting, which is due to those sacred records that go under the name of God's word, and which he claims and appropriates to himself, as his word. I have wondered, I confess, to see how among scholars, and learned men, there should be so great a veneration for some or other notable pieces of antiquity, any aged volume, any old record; and how high a price and value have been put upon them. Now there is no such piece of antiquity as this in all the world that we know of. The holy Scriptures, at least a great part, are the most ancient writings in all the world. And it should challenge a mighty reverence and veneration, to have a word brought down, and transmitted to us, through so many successive ages. But to consider it as a divine word, a revelation come from heaven, doth much more claim our reverence. How strange a veneration did those Ephesians express for that image, which, they were made to believe, fell from heaven! All Ephesus, as it is expressed, is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter: ([Acts xix. 35.](#)) as if all the city were of a piece, all heart and soul upon that one thing, which they believed to be of heavenly descent. Now this word we are sure is a divine-breathed thing; for all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God. [2 Tim. iii. 16.](#)

Then it is that the word is like to be done, when it is received with reverence, not as the word of man, but of God: when we in our own thoughts prefix that preface to every part of that truth, which he himself hath prefixed to many parts and portions of it; namely, "Thus saith the Lord," who is the Lord of heaven and earth. It is his word, who made and sustains all things by the word of his power. When therefore we look upon this word as carrying the stamp of the majesty of God upon it, then it is like to command the heart; but it will signify little, till this is done.



5. To be a doer of the word supposes that we believe it, or that our hearing of it be mingled with faith. It profits not where it is not so; and signifies nothing, if there be not that mixture. The word of God, says the apostle, works effectually in them that believe. [1 Thess. ii. 13](#). But, as it is in another place, "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." [Heb. iv. 2](#). And it is never likely that men should practice that word, which they regard no more, than the word of a child. If any one, whose truth you suspect, tell you this or that, it will signify little to determine your practice, or to guide and influence any design you have in hand. Now, to receive this word with faith, is to rely upon the authority of the Speaker, or him from whom it originally comes. "This is the word of God. There is no more doubt to be made of it, than whether the things be, or exist which I see with my own eyes." For it is faith that supplies the room of sight, in reference to things that fall not under our eye. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. [Heb. xi. 1](#). "God hath said this; and therefore it is as sure, as if my own eyes saw it all." The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believes; but to them that believe not, it signifies nothing, it has no power with them. Again,

6. It requires love; a great exercise of love that the heart may close with it. It is said of some, that they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. [2 Thess. ii. 10](#). They had pleasure in unrighteousness. They had so much love to wickedness, that they had none for truth. Therefore they were left under strong delusions to believe lies, that they might be damned. So you find things are connected there. The love that is required here, is such as works out in sincere desire of the milk of the word, that so we may grow thereby. [1 Pet. ii. 2](#). Also in delight; for the soul hath a sweet and savoury relish in it. "O how love I thy law!" ([Ps. cxix. 97](#)) says David: which was the name of that revelation of the mind and will of God then extant; and was sweeter to him, than honey to his taste. [Ps. cxix. 103](#). Thy words (saith Jeremiah) were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy, and rejoicing of my heart. [Jerem. xv. 16](#). The word of God is then like to be done, when there is so dear a love to it; and the soul so taketh complacency in it, and unites to it, that it becomes as it were consubstantiate with the soul itself. And again,

7. It requires subjection; an obediencial subjection to it, and compliance of heart with it. Receive with meekness (as it is in this contest) the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls. [James. i. 21](#). There are many hearts of men so opposite to the word of God, that when they meet with that in, and from it, which is cross and adverse to their corrupt inclinations, their spirits swell, and storm and tumultuate; and they are ready to say with those in the prophet, The word of the Lord, which thou hast spoken to us, we will not hear. [Jerem. xlv. 16](#). You must then receive it with meekness; that is, so as to yield to it, how cross soever it may be to any present disposition of yours. The word has been so received by gracious hearts, when it hath spoken terrible things. When dreadful things were foretold by the

prophet to Hezekiah, he said; "Good is the word of the Lord, which thou hast spoken." [Isai. xxxix. 8.](#) Again,

8. It requires a previous transformation of the heart by it, so as that the proper stamp and impress of it be upon the soul. For the word can never be done by the hearer, but from a vital principle; of which it is itself to be the productive means. So it is said to be in the eighteenth verse of this chapter, in, which is my text; "of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." If the new creature be not wrought by it in the soul, there will never be that doing of the word, which is expected and required. There must be an exemplar copied out from the word upon our hearts; and then we are to practice, and do according to that exemplar: still comparing it with the first idea, to be seen in the rule, or word itself. You obeyed (says the apostle) from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. [Rom. vi. 17.](#) Or, as the words are capable of being read, into which ye were delivered. That is, you were cast into the very mould of the word; and have received the stamp and impress of it upon your souls, and so have obeyed it from the heart. Our Lord Jesus Christ in his kingdom (in that part of it which is more appropriate and peculiar) rules over a willing people and is not a king of slaves. He is obeyed with an inward inclination and propensity of heart. His power hath made his subjects willing; that is, by writing his law in their hearts, which is the great promise of the evangelical covenant. When souls are made the epistle of Christ, having his mind transcribed, and written out upon their hearts; then it is they obey, and do the word, and never till then. And then it requires also,

9. A faithful remembrance of it; that is, of its rules accommodable to particular occasions as they occur. The apostle subjoins here in the words following my text a representation of the man that hears, without a design of doing the word; who says he, is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. [Jam. i. 23, 24.](#) If we apply the apostle's similitude fully unto the purpose for which he brings it, it must not only have reference to such an idea, as we have exhibited to us in the word; or the representation of what we now actually are, but also of what we should be, both together. Looking into the word as into a glass we have a representation made to us there, of the new creature in all the lively lineaments of it; and so we see what we should be: and comparing ourselves therewith, we see what we are; and wherein there is a deflexion, and disagreement from our pattern. They that do only throw a transient eye upon the glass, go away and forget what they see; the image vanisheth presently out of their thought. Therefore there must be a perpetual image kept up before our eyes, by a faithful and continual remembrance of what the word of God representeth to us; to wit, of the true complexion of a christian, and wherein our own disagreeeth; that so upon all occasions we may be able to correct thereby what is amiss; and to direct our way and course according thereunto. And then there must be in the



Last place, an actual application of all such rules in the word, to present cases, as they occur. Thy word I have kept in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. [Psal. cxix. 11.](#) It is laid up in that repository and treasury for this purpose, to be used as there is need and occasion. Therefore so skilful ought we to be in the word of righteousness, which hath enough in it to make the man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnished for every good work; that upon all occasions, and whatever work we go about, we may have our rule still in readiness to apply, and actually may apply it to our case; so as neither on the one hand to walk dubiously, nor carelessly on the other. For those are extremes to be avoided. A continual scrupulosity is provided against by a continual acquaintance with the word, and having rules always in readiness to measure particular cases by as they occur; and, on the other hand, carelessness is inexcusable. For many walk without having any regard to their own spirits, and matter it not whether they are right or wrong. To have this word, as the measure of our lives, to apply to upon occasion, is necessary in order to avoid these exorbitances; the one whereof is so very uncomfortable, and the other so very dangerous, and destructive. But then we are,

II. To speak to the other thing a little; namely, what is it to be a hearer only? By being a hearer only, we must not understand every thing to be excluded, besides the bare external act of hearing; as if no more were intended by it, than the outward act common to man with the brute creatures: for, undoubtedly, there may be included in it many acts of the understanding, and of the outward man. So to be a hearer only, is in the general to hear without any design of doing at all. For when it is required that we should be doers, the meaning of it is, not that we must be doers of all that is bidden and directed by the word, just while we are hearing. Therefore that which is required over and besides hearing, is a design to be doing the word; while, to be hearers only, is to hear without any previous design of acting according to what they do hear. Some other motives and considerations there are, which bring persons to hear; but as for the business of practice they intend it not. It never came into their minds to look upon that as the true and, proper end of hearing that they should do and practice what they hear.

Now truth is but one, error is manifold. If there be but one right end, that end is to be aimed at, which is practice. And that we may be capable of this, but one entire frame and right disposition of soul is required. But various are the ends, and many are the ill principles and dispositions, which may have place in the spirit of a man in reference to this matter, It is, therefore, a manifold character, which I might give, if the time would allow, of the hearer only. For as there is a manifold end; and many indispositions, in the spirit of a man, to the true end: so manifold are the characters of such as are hearers only. Therefore we are not to suppose, that they all belong to one and the same person; but some to one, and some to another. There is,



I. The inattentive hearer; that taketh very little heed to what he heareth. We ought (says the apostle to the Hebrews) to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. [Heb. ii. 1](#) And set your hearts (says Moses) unto all the words which I testify among you this day. [Deut. xxxii. 46](#). He that never intends to be a doer of what he hears, will very probably little regard what he hears.

2. There is the inconsiderate hearer; that never ponders what he hears, nor compares one thing with another. I can but name particulars to you, which might well be enlarged upon. There is again,

3. The injudicious hearer; that never makes any judgment upon what he hears, whether it be true or false. All things come alike to him, he matters them not. Consideration is in order to judgment, and judgment follows upon it. We deliberate first, and then judge upon that deliberation. The inconsiderate hearer, therefore, will be an injudicious one. There is also,

4. The unapprehensive hearer: who hears all his days, but is never the wiser. Ever learning, but never comes to the knowledge of the truth. No light comes in to him, and he remains as ignorant after twenty years living under the gospel, as he was at the first.

5. The stupid, unaffected hearer; that is as a rock and a stone under the word. Nothing ever enters or gets within the stony ground. Things are heard sometimes that even rend hearts all to pieces, if rightly disposed; things full of terror, amazement, astonishment, and of dread; but they are heard by these without any trembling. Rocks and mountains may shake and shiver sooner than they. Again,

6. There are your prejudiced, disaffected hearers; who hear with dislike, especially those things which relate to practice: and with the greater dislike it may be, by how much the more what they hear, relates to the proper end of hearing. They cannot endure such things as aim at the heart, and concern the business and work of religion. And there are again,

7. Your fantastical, voluptuous hearers; that hear only to please their fancy or imaginations. So they come on purpose to try if they can hear a pretty sentence, any fine jingle, some flashes of wit. For it may be they have found some, who have to do with this sacred word, that will allow themselves to be so vain, as to gratify them in such things, when they come with such an expectation. Of which temper I remember an ancient saying, *Dissoluti est pectoris in rebus seriis quaerere voluptatem: it is a dismal token upon a person to seek for the gratification of his fancy in serious matters.* As if one would bring music to another, that lay under the torture of a broken leg; how very incongruous would this be! And such we are to





consider is the state of souls, all shattered, broken, diseased, and maimed. This is the common case of those we have to do with.<sup>81</sup> There are again,

8. Your notional hearers; that are of somewhat a higher form and sect than the others: who do not aim merely to have their fancies and imaginations gratified by something light and flashy but their understandings also. But it must be by some fine notion, which they have not met with before. And so they always come to learn some kind of novelty; and if they cannot meet with some new thing, which they have not met with before, they go away with a great deal of dislike, and distaste, at those they hear. With these, (and they are for the most part of the same sort, and therefore we may join them together) you may put,

9. Those talkative persons; who only come to hear that they may furnish themselves with notions for the sake of discourse: or that, when they come into company, they may have something just to talk of afterwards. Upon which a heathen moralist reflects with a great deal of ingenuity. "That is (saith he) when they hear such moral precepts as the philosophers use to deliver, and press in the schools; as all came into them in words, so, with them, all go out in words. Which is just the same thing, as if the sheep, when they have been grazing all day, should come at night to the shepherd; and cast up the grass they swallowed, to shew how much they had eaten. Grass it came in, and grass it goes out again. The shepherd does not expect this, but expects that of the grass they had eaten that day, there should come milk and wool from the concoction, and digestion of what they had eaten." It is much that we have need to learn such documents as these from a heathen. What! because all we hear comes to us in words, should it all come out in words again? No, the end is surely that it should be so digested, and concocted, as to yield work and fruit, agreeable to what we hear. And then there are again,

10. The censorious and critical hearers; who come on purpose not as doers of the law, but as judges. They come to see what they may carp at, and so to pass their verdict. "Were such and such things rightly methodized? such and such words well placed? was there an exact concinnity in what was said?" and the like. This now is all the design they have in

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81 The word here ακροαται, *hearers only* may remind one (says the author) of an ancient word that is of affinity with it, namely, ακροαματα; of which this is the sense. It was the name of certain songs and sonnets, joined with vocal and instrumental music, which were wont to be used in the conclusion of stage-plays, wherewith the hearers were entertained at their going out of the theatres. They were also very frequently used in the close of banquets. Why! the word of God is looked upon as such an ακροαμα, and the things contained in it as ακροαματα, so these [ακροαται] kind of bearers. "Thou art," (says the Almighty to the prophet Ezekiel) "unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words but do them not." *Ezek. xxxiii. 32.* Such hearers there are who come only to have their imaginations and fancies gratified with somewhat, that may be delicious to them; and that is all that they aim at. These sure are hearers only!

hearing the word. And then there is another sort too, and we have some experience, I am afraid, of too many such, in the age and day wherein we now live, and that is,

Lastly, Malicious hearers; that come on purpose to seek an advantage against those, they come to hear, particularly from what they preach. By this sort, you know, our Saviour was often pestered: who came to hear him; and to put questions to him; and so gave him occasion to speak, only to entrap and insnare him. To which maybe added your raging exasperated hearers, such as Stephen's were at his last sermon; who gnashed upon him with their teeth, and could not forbear violence to his precious life, upon their hearing him. Thus you see the characters of those that are hearers only, which are various and manifold. I shall only touch upon the

III. Thing, namely, to speak to the self-deception of such persons. And here I shall shew, wherein such are deceived; and the grossness of the deception itself.

1. Wherein such are deceived. And they are certainly so,

(1.) In their work. For they commonly think they have done well; and they find no fault with themselves, that they have been hearers only. And then

(2.) As to their reward they are also deceived. They get nothing by it all this time. That, and their labour are lost. "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed" [Jam. i. 25](#). But they never go away with a blessing; most certainly they miss of it, who are hearers only.

2. For the grossness of this deception, it will appear to be very great, if we consider,

(1.) That they are deceived in so plain a case. For it is the plainest thing in the world, that the gospel is sent in order to practice. Now how strange is it, that men should be deceived in a thing so plain! What can the gospel be sent for but only in order to practice? What other aim, or end, can it possibly have? As might be shewn in many particulars, if time gave leave. And,

(2.) It is self-deception; for they are said to deceive themselves; which is a far other thing, than when the matter is Wont to be expressed passively only, and in softer terms. As to say to a person, "Sir, you are mistaken; you are deceived and imposed upon." This, I say, is much gentler, than to say of a man, that he deceiveth and imposeth upon himself. For this carries in it an intimation, that men do use some industry in the matter; that they industriously deceive themselves, as indeed it must be so in this case. For if men did not use some art or contrivance, they could never have hid these things from their own eyes; particularly, that this word is sent to be the guide of men's practice. And to overlook such a thing as this all their days, (as those men must be supposed to do who are hearers only) is miserable deception. It is their trade, and a poor trade the Lord knows! And they must be supposed to have used a great deal of artifice with themselves, to veil so plain a case as this from their



own eyes and view; so as not to understand, that the gospel is sent to be their rule of practice, in order to their attainment of a happy state at last.

And now, to shut up all with a little application we may learn hence,

1. That persons are apt to overlook the main of their duty, and take up with some lesser parts.

2. That in the very business of hearing the word, there is great danger of self-deception, if persons do not carefully watch against it. And again,

3. We may learn, that the whole business of the gospel hath a designed reference unto practice. Be not hearers only, but doers of the word. As if he had said, Do not satisfy yourselves with merely hearing the word of God, as if there was nothing in it conducing, or referable to practice, as generally the things contained in it manifestly have; for this alone is not sufficient to answer the end and design of the gospel. Again,

4. We may learn, that it is a duty of very great concernment to attend upon the word preached or to be a hearer of it; for the whole business of our practice is to be consequent thereupon. It is then of great consequence to be a hearer of the word; and as much as this duty is neglected by many, the whole stress lies upon it of the design and end, for which the gospel comes into the world. The gospel signifies nothing unless it be believed, and this "faith cometh by hearing." [Rom. x. 17](#). There are many persons that humour and please themselves in talking against so much hearing, and so much preaching; and think it a vain, and needless thing. But that is certainly because they have little considered what hearing, and preaching are for. If it were only for the minister to teach, and the hearers to learn some new thing not known before, truly all necessary truth, by attentive diligent inquirers, might be learnt in a little while. But it is rather to urge and inculcate things, which were known before. Therefore when the apostle had said, that it is by the word of truth that we are be gotten of God, to be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures, he presently adds, "Be swift to hear." [Jam. i. 18, 19](#). As if he had said, these things ought to be often urged, and inculcated upon you; that so the product thereof, to wit, the new creature may be sure in you. If this be not done at one time, it may at another; some time or other it may be effected. Therefore be swift to hear, your life lies upon it. But then,

5. And lastly, You see of what consequence it is to add doing, to the hearing the word. And for that I need to give no other encouragement than that of our Lord at the close of his sermon on the mount. "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them; I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. But, (says he,) Every one 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." [Matt. vii. 24-27](#). And I cannot upon consideration of this



but apprehend, that, as the stability of many (I hope) hath been promoted by the much preaching, and hearing of our times; so there are many (I am afraid) near to a very dreadful fall, who have been hearers only of Christ's sayings, but never minded to be doers of them.

And I must needs think it strange, if we have not among us a general apprehension of the danger of losing our opportunities of hearing the word of God. We have these upon such terms, that we should, methinks, reckon ourselves always in danger. And if we have any cause for that apprehension, what in all the world can we imagine more provoking, and likely to infer such a doom and judgment upon us, as the penury of the word of God, than to be hearers only, without any design to be doers of it? Whereas if we did but set ourselves, with a more earnest design, to apply, and turn all that we hear, into fruit and practice; it may be this might prevent such a stroke as we are not without reason to dread, nor without grounds to fear. But if we should not prevent it, yet it would be a very comfortable thing however in a cloudy, dark and gloomy time, to be able to make such a reflection as this; "Blessed be God, while I had such seasons, I laboured to improve them as well as I could. I laboured to take all opportunities that I could, to hear with a design to do, to quicken and help me to move onward in Christian practice." It will, I say, be very comfortable to be able to make such a reflection in a time of gloominess and darkness which it is possible we may see, and how soon we know not. And if in such a season we should be able to make this reflection, it would be a happy provision for us against it. It would suppose us to have gotten some stock, some treasure within us, which we might draw forth. We should then have the word within us, which when we should lie down, rise up, or walk, might commune within us; and so we be capable of being preachers to ourselves.

In a word, if ever we should come to such a state of things, that we should never see the face, nor hear the voice of a minister of God's word, where our lot is cast; if we should wear out our days in a wilderness, a desert, or a cave; it would be comfortable to have this word a companion to us, and ingrafted into us, which is able to save our souls: it would be comfortable, I say, to have a stock of divine truth to live upon, when we should, as to the external dispensation of it, be in penury and want. Let these things, therefore, move us to a more earnest endeavour to be doers of the word, and not hearers only.

265

266

## SERMON VII.<sup>82</sup>

Luke xviii. 18.

*And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?*

My purpose is not to give you a particular explication of this parable. The design of it is sufficiently seen in the application of it, which our Saviour here makes. All that I shall at present do shall be to shew you, with all possible brevity, the strength of the reasoning which our Saviour here useth, from the importunity and success of this widow; in order to encourage our addresses to God, and a continuance therein without fainting. And his argument to this purpose may be seen to be very strong and cogent if we consider these two things in the general.

I. The parity of reason between the case he argueth from, and that which he argueth to.

II. The superiority of reason, which is in the latter case, above the former. For so we must understand him to argue, partly *a priori*, and partly *a fortiori*. And the strength of the argument both ways we shall endeavour to make out unto you.

III. We shall make application of the whole.

I. I am to consider the parity of reason between these two cases; which you may conceive especially in these four things.

1. That here was distress in the one case, and there is distress in the other. This widow comes to this judge in a very distressed case, as it should seem, though it be not particularly expressed; only it appears she was very much grieved, and that there was a great deal of wrong done her. And so in the other case, the elect of God are always very much injured; and they sustain a great deal of wrong from this evil world, in which they are. And surely if this unjust judge was moved with the distress of this suppliant, there is a great deal of reason to suppose, that distress will be moving in this case also; and that the elect will be heard, when they make their cries to heaven, urged by their own distresses.

2. There appears to have been justice in the one case, as we are sure there is justice in the other. This widow's did appear to be a just cause. She comes with this request to the judge, that he would avenge her of her adversary. The word *Ενδικησον*, there used, signifies, Right me of my adversary. She came to petition a matter of right, and all that she desired

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82 Preached at Mr. Case's, September 29, 1676.

was to have right done her. And there is a great deal of right in the other case also. "It is a righteous thing with God (says the apostle) to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you, who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." *2 Thes. i. 6, 7.* And again,

3. There was importunity in the one case, and there is importunity in the other. Why then should not success be hoped to correspond in this case, as well as that? This widow was so urgent, that the judge was sensible of a grievance in it; and found a necessity upon himself to do her right, lest he should be wearied by her importunity. The elect too are represented as crying night and day; that is, the loud voice of their prayers is not by fits, only now and then, but is continued, and incessant; as night and day take in the whole complex of time. And do you think then, saith our Saviour, that God will not hear their cry? Besides,

4. There is an obligation by office to do right, both in the one case, and in the other. The person, to whom this woman, applied herself, was a judge in the city. Now it is known, that in several of the more eminent cities of Israel, there were constituted stated judges, to whom all persons might have recourse, and bring their grievances, in order to their being redressed. So that this woman doth not come to a person unconcerned. She does not request, that an occasional kindness might be done her; as one might request such a thing of any one, when in necessity: but she comes to an appointed person, to one who by his office was obliged to right her. And God hath been pleased to take upon himself such an office, and to make himself known by the name of the Judge of all the earth; that all might know whither to apply, and to whom they may appeal and address themselves. And why is not right to be expected in this case, as well as in the other? So far this parable gives us ground to argue from a parity of reason. But,

II. It gives us ground also for arguing from a superiority of reason too, in sundry respects. As,—In respect of the supplicants in the one case, and the other:—in respect of the persons supplicated in the one case, and the other: and—in respect of the supplication itself in the former case, and the latter compared.

1. There is very prevailing and much stronger reason in the latter case, than in the former; if we consider the supplicants in both, and compare them. In the former case you have a poor woman; and here we are to consider,

(1.) That she was a single woman, only one person who comes to make her complaint to this judge: but in the other case you have a community, the whole body of the elect. How vast is the disproportion here! This great body joining in one cry, surely that must needs be unspeakably more prevailing! And,

(2.) (For we can but speak shortly to so many things as are before us) This was but an ordinary woman, of an inferior rank, by any thing that appears; that is, she is not mentioned here under any remarkable particular character, that might add weight to her cause and



suit: but this community is a choice community; the elect; a community of very peculiar persons, that are severed from the rest of men, and distinguished by God's own special seal set upon them. As when God's portion in the several tribes was spoken of, there were sealed of such a tribe, so many thousands; and of such a tribe, so many thousands. [Rev. vii. 4.](#) &c. All God's elect ones, are sealed ones; they carry a mark of honour upon them. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth, them that are his." [2 Tim. ii. 19.](#) And,



(3.) The supplicant was unrelated to him, to whom she makes her supplication. We do not find, that she pretended to any relation to him at all; only comes to him as the judge of her city. But in the other case, the supplicants are God's elect; his own peculiar people that he had taken, and made nigh unto himself: "called, and chosen, and faithful," as you have those expressions put together in Scripture. [Rev. xvii. 14.](#) And do not we think then, that a more especial regard will be had here? Besides,

2. There is a great superiority of reason in arguing from the one case to the other, if we consider the persons supplicated; or to whom the addresses are made in each case. In the general, in one case it is man; in the other, it is God. And particularly,

(1.) In the former case it was a wicked profane person, to whom the address was made; one that did neither fear God, nor regard man: good to no one, neither to God nor man; a vile wretched creature, wrapt up within himself; who studied, and consulted nothing but his own ease, and peace; having no fear of God before his eyes, nor any regard to man. But in the other case, you have the holy God addressed to; whose natural, essential holiness, is a perpetual law and obligation to him, to do always that which is best. His essential rectitude cannot but do such things, as have an agreeable rectitude in them to his own very nature.

(2.) In the one case it was a merciless man, that was applied to; in the other, a merciful God. How much stronger is the reason! This judge was a man who had no mercy, no pity to any one, but to himself. He took some pity of himself indeed, that he might not be wearied out with continual clamours and cries; otherwise, it seems, his heart knew no pity, there were no bowels of compassion rolling, or working in him. But in the other case, it is the Father of mercies who is addressed, and appealed to. It is he with whom there is so abundant pity, and kindness; so strong a propension and inclination to do good to the necessitous and miserable, only because his will inclines and leads him thereunto: the Spring and Fountain of all that pity and mercy, that is any where to be found, diffused among his creatures. If parents pity their children; if there lie bowels gathering in any towards the afflicted and distressed; from what spring, from what fountain did all this proceed? All must come from some original or other; and they can be derived from no higher, neither are they to be derived from any lower, than this great Father of mercies. And what! shall not he hear his elect? And again,



(3.) It was, in the former case, an unjust man that was supplicated; here it is the just and righteous God. As his holiness doth oblige him in general to do that, which is right and fit to be done; his justice, as a particular attribute in his general character, inclines him in this case to administer, and execute justice. As he hath been pleased mercifully himself to lay down a rule and law of mercy, in reference to those that are his (though it be impossible that God can injure a man in any thing, yet it is possible that men can injure one another; and very certain also that those are the worst used by the world, who have such a near relation to him, and whom he hath chosen and gathered out of the world) so here in this case, when there is a proper object of vindictive justice, shall not the Judge of all the earth do right, to whom righteousness belongs as part of his peculiar glory? And then again,

3. There is, in respect of the supplication on the one hand, and on the other, a great superiority, and triumphant prevalency of reason. For, in the former case, consider,

(1.) The matter of the petition of this widow; and that was only a private good, that she sought for herself: and consider also the petition of the elect of God. They have all one common concernment, wherein the interest of God is involved with theirs. So that whatsoever they supplicate for, as the elect of God, must needs be a matter that is so far public; that is, wherein they all agree, and in which their hearts and desires do meet, and concur. It is one thing for a particular person to desire to be gratified in some particular, private concernments; and another thing to insist upon such matters as are common to us, with all the elect of God. And this it is to be supposed is the matter of the supplications of the elect unto God in this case. It is that, wherein all the elect do centre and wherein all their desires do meet.

(2) Look to the manner, and style of the supplication; on the one part, and on the other. This woman comes in her own name, but the supplications of the elect of God run in another style; they come all in the name of the great Mediator, and Intercessor. And is there not unspeakably more reason, that we should expect their supplications to prevail? They come in the name of him, who is most nearly related to the Judge, and to them. "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. [1 John ii. 1](#). It is said in definitely, with the Father: not of his, or our Father; but the common Father of him, and us, as we are to understand it. And since with him we have such an Advocate, shall we not hope to prevail? Again,

(3.) Consider the principle of the one's supplication, and that of the other. We must suppose this woman's supplication to be dictated by her own sense of the urgency, and necessity of her case; and the unrelievableness of it by any other way than that of addressing herself to the known judge. In short, it was her own private spirit that dictated her supplication; for she alone knew her own need, felt her own necessity. But the prayers of all the elect of God have another principle. When they know not what to pray for, they are furnished with matter, and with sighs and groans at once. [Rom. viii. 26](#). There is a spirit appointed on





purpose, known by the name of the "Spirit of grace and supplications;" whose business it is to indite requests for the elect of God, and to strive and to wrestle with him: which is strongly moving at the same time in their own breasts; so as that their hearts, and the heart of God, as it were, are united, and joined by that Spirit. Shall they not then hope to prevail? They may say, when they are putting up such prayers as are the common sense of all the elect of God; "Lord, I do not speak of myself now. Thou hast taught me to pray. This prompts me to it, and puts me upon it; and I had never prayed so, nor uttered such cries: and such desires had not entered into my heart, if thou hadst not put them there." And shall not God hear his own elect offering up petitions of his own bespeaking? And desires of his own creating shall not he answer? Doth he stir up desires on purpose to disappoint them? or, will he make his people refuse to pray, by denying their petitions, and casting their prayers back upon their hands? And then,

(4.) Consider the end of one's supplication, and that of the other. The end that this woman aimed at, was nothing but self-advantage, to be relieved herself; but the end of the elect of God in their supplications, is somewhat wherein their interest is jointly concerned with his in reference to those great concernments, which belong to the whole body. They know he hath a concern twisted with theirs; and so can speak it, with Daniel, as the real sense of their hearts, "Do, defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city, and thy people are called by thy name." [Dan. ix. 19](#). This is the common sense of all the people of God: "Thou hast not been ashamed to be called our God. Thou hast taken us into a near relation unto thee. It is a grievous thing to be twitted with our God. It is as a sword in our bones to have it said to us, Where is your God? Thy concernments and ours are one; do therefore, and defer not for thine own name's sake." In this strain do all the supplications of the elect run. So that in all these respects you see there is a great superiority of reason, if such a widow should succeed well in her private request to such a judge, why all the elect of God should much more succeed in the requests, which they are day and night making to the great Lord of heaven and earth. And therefore,

III. Briefly to apply all this, we learn;

1. How great a privilege it is to have this matter clear to us, that we are of the elect of God; and how much therefore we are concerned to make our calling, and election sure; for then we find ourselves to belong to a community, that are continually praying prayers which shall be sure to prevail. And how great a privilege, how blessed a thing is this! Methinks when we understand how certainly the elect of God shall be heard, who are crying to him night and day; we should be at this work, night and day, poring into our hearts, till we are certain of this, that we are the elect of God. Then we shall be sure to put up all prosperous and acceptable prayers, when they are all of the same sense, and run in the same channel, as theirs are wont to do. And again,



2. We are to collect hence, that the elect of God, as long as they continue in this world, are to bear the character of praying ones. To be acted by a spirit of prayer, and to have continually a praying disposition, is characteristic of the elect of God, who are gathered in from among the common refuse of a sinful world. Therefore we had need to look well to ourselves concerning this thing. How stand our hearts Godward? Are they formed unto prayers? Is it become even a spiritually natural thing to us to pray? As natural as breathing is to a living man, so natural a thing is praying to the new creature, and as agreeable. The elect are supplicants day and night. The great business of their lives is prayer. This is that, to which the heart of an elect person doth impel him; so far as he is himself, and hath the true genius and spirit working in him, which is common to all the elect of God, and also peculiar to them. And again, we are to learn hence,

3. In how wretched a case they must needs be, who are the stated, and habitual enemies of the church of God in the world. It is a fearful condition that such men are in, to have all the elect of God crying against them, night and day. What will become of this matter at last? Who, that considers the case, would not dread to be found in such a condition as these are in? to be one against whom all the elect of God are joining their requests, night and day, and exhibiting complaints! For they do in common pray against the enemies of the name, and interest of God: and so every one is involved, and the cry of this whole community goes against each individual; that is, supposing them to persevere in a course of enmity to the interest of our Lord, and his Christ. So that this might make any heart to tremble, to think what this is like to come to, and what it must needs infer. What fearful storms of wrath and vengeance will be plucked down at length upon their heads, against whom all the elect of God are continually joining their requests! And, in the last place,

4. We see hence, how unreasonable a thing it is to be despondent in prayer, or to faint in this duty, supposing that the things we mainly insist upon are the common concerns of the elect of God. This being supposed we pray securely. Indeed if we vainly and unwarrantably set our hearts upon this or that particular thing, that would gratify ourselves; and nothing will serve our turn, but that we be so and so gratified; we may pray, and pray, and all to little purpose: for there can be no acceptable prayer that is not the prayer of faith; and that can be no prayer of faith, which goeth beyond the bounds of the promise. Therefore, if I pray for that, which was never promised, I may thank myself if I succeed not.

There are some things that cannot be the matter of a universal, absolute promise; being things which are in themselves of an uncertain, and variable nature: as all such things as have no intrinsic goodness of their own, but may sometimes be good to particular persons, and sometimes not. For circumstances may so vary the case, that the good that is in them may be preponderated by a far greater evil, if they should at that time be given. And whatsoever is a good of this nature; that is, good or not good, according as circumstances are, which often vary; it is apparent cannot be the matter of an absolute promise: for supposing circum-

stances so to vary, as that this should become an evil, you would then have evil to be the matter of a promise, which is contradictory and absurd. But since it is possible, that external or worldly good things, yea, and some also that may be externally subservient to religion, may in some circumstances do more hurt to the people of God, who does with a gracious care preside over their actions, and all things that have any respect to them, and who is best able to judge; they cannot, therefore, be the matter of his absolute promise. These things may be more hurtful, than gainful, in such and such circumstances; and he sees how to do them more good by the want of such things, than by the having of them. A less good, when compared with a greater, is then to pass under the notion of evil; and it would, I say, be unreasonable to suppose evil to be the matter of a promise. And where any thing of that nature is not promised absolutely, but with a reserved latitude to the wisdom, and goodness of our great Lord, and Ruler; our faith can be exercised no otherwise about them, than according to the tenour of such promises: that is, we may believe we shall have such and such things, if God seeth good; but if he seeth not good, he will deny, or withhold them, even in mere goodness and faithfulness to us.

274

But then in such things as are absolutely promised to all the elect of God, there we may give room and scope to our faith. And it is an unreasonable thing to be at all desponding concerning the matter of such prayers: as it is, with respect to others also, no less unreasonable to admit the least doubt, that we shall have such things if they be best for us; and what God in his unerring wisdom discerns will be for our advantage. Therefore let us settle this apprehension with ourselves, of how great concernment it is to us in prayer, to insist on such things, as are properly of common concern to the whole fraternity of the elect; and therein to take heed of any diffidence, or distrust.

Great and glorious things are promised to be the portion of God's elect in this world, at his own appointed time and season; but he hath not told us when that shall be. However we may, with this peremptory faith, go unto God in prayer, that he will make the kingdoms of the earth, the kingdoms of our Lord, and his Christ, who shall reign for ever and ever; that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established, above all the mountains; that there shall be new heavens, and a new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness. But we make all this matter a private business, if we go and cry; "Oh let it be so now! let it be in my time, that mine eyes may see it!" especially if we peremptorily insist upon it; without reservation: or submission to the supreme wisdom and will. Whereas if we pray in general, that such things may be; our hearts should be full of hope, faith, and joy, in the apprehension that thus it shall be; and we cannot be without success, since it is the common sense of all the elect of God.

And in matters, which respect the particular concernments of our souls, see that they be things of absolute necessity, and that fall within the consent of all the community. Let us pray against the body of sin and death; that we may have grace kept alive, and maintained

275

and improved; that we may grow, and be carried on from strength to strength, till we reach "the measure of a perfect man in Christ Jesus." This is the common sense of all the elect; and our prayers fall in with theirs, who have been, wont to cry out against the body of sin and death, as the great and most violent enemy they would be rid of. We may then be sure that our prayers shall have effect, and not be lost; and that God will certainly hear them.

If we are praying for the divine presence; he hath promised that he will never leave, nor forsake those that cleave to him. [Heb. xiii. 5](#). Whatever he may do to people in common, he will never break the bond between himself, and that soul which is one of his elect; and when they cry, "Lord never leave me, nor forsake me!" they shall be sure to be heard. When we pray for the divine presence to be afforded more especially to us, in reference to some special case, or season of trouble and trial, this is what God will not fail to do. If his presence be desired, I say, as to any special duty; so it will be, and God will hear us.

I hope you are desirous, and earnest in your prayers to God, for his more immediate presence, in reference to that special season of your approaching to the Lord's table. Sure all the elect of God have been wont to do so, praying and striving that they might at such times and seasons meet with God; that there might be a real intercourse, between their souls and him (whom they love) to such a degree as to him seems best. Why, God will hear all these cries, that are common to us, with all the people of God; and such prayers being directed to him, shall not be in vain. Therefore we should take heed, upon these accounts, that we faint not.

We must know that fainting may be either when faith languisheth, or desire. It is faint praying, when we pray as if we cared not whether we prayed or no. The word *εκκακειν* here rendered faint, in our text, is the same with that, which else where is rendered weary. Let us not, *εκκακωμιν*, *be weary* in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not: ([Gal. vi. 9](#).) that is, if ye be not sluggish in the course of well doing. Take heed therefore of praying the sluggard's prayer, or at the sluggard's rate. "The desire of the slothful kills him, because his hands refuse to labour." [Prov. xxi. 25](#). His own desires carry no life in them; they are even death to his very heart; cold things that strike death into the soul, and put no life into it.

And then too when faith languisheth, it is faint praying. "Let not that man," (says St. James) that is, the man who wavers like a wave of the sea, and is driven of the wind and tossed; "think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." [Jam. i. 7](#). What! come to God, as if we did not expect to get any thing by God! and as if we agreed in the same sense with those profane atheists, and symbolized with them who say, "What profit is it that we have prayed to him or kept his ordinances?" go heartlessly into the divine presence; give way to a cold, dull spirit, in the very performance of the duty; and never look after the success of it when it is over. Such had as good never pray at all, who pray only to keep up a custom, and to make a shew; and that they may be able to say when all is over, "The duty is done."

Let not such think they shall receive any thing at the hands of God; such especially as come to him with no expectation, and pray to him as to one that can not save.

It is to cast infamy upon the great Object of our worship; as if we were only blessing an idol, when we pray to the true, living God, as if he were such a one as the idols of the Gentiles are said to be, that have eyes but see not, ears but hear not, and can neither do good nor hurt. It is no wonder if such praying signify nothing; for it carries an affront in itself. Every such prayer is an indignity, and an insolent affront put upon the great God: as if the injunction of this duty upon the children of men, was either unreasonable and to no purpose, and so a reflection upon the wisdom of his law, who has commanded us to pray; (inasmuch as that is always unwisely enjoined that hath no end) or, as if there were no power in him to accomplish what we come to him about, though we come according to his own direction. It cannot, I say, but be an affront to God, either way, to come to him with desponding hearts. In the former case, if our desires languish, we are worse than the importunate widow; in the latter case, if faith languish, we make God worse than the unjust judge.



## SERMON VIII.<sup>83</sup>

Rom. v. 5.

—*Hope maketh not ashamed*—

**I**T will not be impertinent or unuseful to say something, from this scripture, concerning this property of the Christian's hope; namely, that it maketh not ashamed. But let us first, briefly consider the scope and series of the apostle's discourse here, and see how this passage depends and is introduced.

We have here, after a long discourse touching our justification by faith in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, some account of the privileges of a justified state in the beginning of this chapter. As first, peace with God. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." **Ver. 1.** And secondly, free access unto God, and the liberty of his presence. "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." **Ver. 2.** In which words we have also the patient, joyful expectation of the glorious state, that was designed for the people of God hereafter. And finally, cheerfulness in a present afflicted condition, is represented by the apostle as another privilege. And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also. **Ver. 3.** It was no such strange thing, that they should be found exulting in the expectation of so glorious a state, as that which Christians look for hereafter; but we have this also to say (saith the apostle) concerning our case, that we can glory in tribulation too, and triumph over all the difficulties that accompany an afflicted condition. And of this, as having something of a paradox in it, and appearing more strange he giveth the particular grounds and reasons. As

First: The knowledge of this truth, that tribulation worketh patience. **Ver. 3.** We are, as if he had said, well pleased, yea, and do even glory in our present afflicted condition upon this ground, that we know, by this means, that patience will be wrought out, We look upon it as a thing of very high value, that the mere hope of so much gain should make persons glory in such tribulations, which seemingly call for other affections. Tribulation is not a pleasant thing to be gloried in of itself; why then, or upon what account is it to be gloried in? Why, upon this account, as that out of it the gain of patience shall accrue, and result to us. By this we shall have our spirits composed to a peaceful acquiescence in the divine will, and the waywardness of our own wills shall be subdued and brought down. There is a future heaven to be enjoyed, a glorious heaven; and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of that state: yea, and there is a present heaven too involved, and wrapt up in patience. When once the heart comes to be resigned, and rest quietly and peacefully in the divine will, this is a present heaven; and bears a great resemblance to that which is future, and expected.



Secondly: The apostle adds, that of this patience there will be a further gain, to wit, of experience. *Ver. 4.* As patience comes to be more and more exercised experience will grow. And,

Thirdly: Of that experience shall spring hope, (*ver. 4.*) that shall reach and touch the other heaven; hope, as he had said before, of the glory of God: (*ver. 2.*) even such hope as will not make ashamed; and that for this reason, because (saith he) the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. *Ver. 5.* While we find, by the Holy Ghost that is given to us, an effusion of the divine love into our souls; while we find this love shed abroad in our hearts, and then testifying itself, as if there was an immediate assurance of heaven; this puts us out of all doubt that God will never let our hope be disappointed nor end in shame.

This is the order and contexture of the preceding discourses. And as to this passage that we have chosen to insist upon, we need not go about to vary the words, which you see are short and plain; "Hope maketh not ashamed:" only it is needful to inquire,

I. Of what this is spoken. And then consider,

II. This particular property of it.

1. Let us inquire of what this is spoken, or what it is that doth not make ashamed. It is here indefinitely said to be hope. But though it is so generally expressed, yet, it is plain, it is not meant of all hope. The circumstances of the text are sufficiently limiting, and teach us of what hope this is to be principally understood. It is hope of the glory of God; it is hope that groweth out of experience; it is hope that is maintained by the love of God, shed abroad in the soul, through the Holy Ghost given to it. It is in short then undoubtedly the Christian hope that is here meant; and whereof we find this is expressed, that it maketh not ashamed.

If you would have a more distinct account of this hope, take it thus: It is that sanctified affection of a renewed soul, by which it is carried continually to expect what God hath promised, concerning its own welfare and blessedness here, and especially hereafter; notwithstanding whatever difficulties do occur in the pursuit, and expectation of those things hoped for. And if you would know what it superadds to common hope, or what there is in this Christian hope of a distinguishing, peculiar nature; it superadds,

1. Sanctity. A true Christian hope, is a pure and holy hope. It engages them that have it, to purify themselves even as God is pure. *1 John iii. 3.* And again it superadds,

2. Solidity. That which a christian hopes for, is some so lid substantial good thing. He hopes not for shadows and lying vanities. They who lived in the exercise of this hope, to whom the author of the epistle to the Hebrews speaks, had before them the prospect of a better and enduring substance in heaven; (*Heb. x. 34.*) a substance that would never fail their hope. There is a kind of hope that runs all in the chase of trifles, for the most part. Men hope for things, which they cannot have; and if they had, were to very little purpose. It superadds,

3. Certainty. Men that hope at the common rate, do but hope conjecturally; and therefore their hope often maketh ashamed. Even at present they frequently outlive their hopes, they being pitched mostly upon things that are temporary. They hope for that, which is swept away like a spider's web. It is a most vanishing, uncertain hope. But if they should cast their eyes on futurity, that future happy state of things beyond time, they have no real ground to entertain any hope of it; or if their hope relate to present things, it is merely conjectural, and self-founded. God hath given them no ground for this hope. He hath not promised them, that they shall be rich; live a long life, and spend all their days in prosperity here. There is that strange kind of monstrousness in the common hope of men; that whereas a christian hopes, be cause God in his word hath promised, who cannot lie; they hope, even with reference to these their greatest concernments, because they think he will lie. For if they believed that he would not lie, but that all was true that he had promised and spoken; they would be in despair: they would with respect to these concerns, have no hope at all, but the horror of despair. Besides,

4. Which is another distinguishing circumstance of the christian's hope, every such person hath a community belonging to it. The Christian hope is common to them that are Christians, in which they all unite and meet: whereas in reference to the hope of other men, there is no such thing as a centre in which their hopes may unite and meet; and so they lie scattered, according as their own inclinations, and appetites carry them. Falsity is various, and manifold; truth can be but one. And therefore says the apostle, concerning the hope of Christians, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." [Eph. iv. 4](#). All the hearts of Christians do run into one hope; they meet in one and the same hope, the ground of which is that they are called to one, and the same state; and this call will warrant their hope, and justify it. "Why should not I hope to reach the state to which I am called? and why should not I attend to the affairs relating to that state? May not a man be warranted in things relating to his calling? This is my calling (saith the christian) and I hope for, and expect success." He can answer it to all the world, be the things never so great and high of which he is in expectation. They are very great things we hope for, but however to such things we are called. God hath called us to his eternal kingdom and glory by Christ Jesus. [1 Thes. ii. 12](#). This calling is not peculiar, or particular to persons severally; but the same unto all that are called, whose hope is one. There is a community, whose hearts as they run one way in desire, so do their hope and expectation; and their faith too being one common principle among them, they must needs have one common hope of the glory of God. Now concerning this hope which is proper to the Christian community it is said, that it maketh not ashamed; which we are now to speak to in the

II. Place, And as to this property of the Christian hope, which we now proceed to consider, we have only two things to do;

1. To open the import of it: and,

280

281



2. To demonstrate the truth of the assertion; or to shew how necessarily this property doth agree to the Christian hope, namely, that it maketh not ashamed.

1 We are to open the import of this property of the hope of Christians, which maketh not ashamed. Not making ashamed, is a negative expression denoting, that those who admit or give place to this hope, and in whose hearts it lives, and is fixed, are not liable to be made ashamed on this account. Now to make out this, there must be a concurrence of several things, which we must understand to be denied by this same negation: or that do not belong to the hope of Christians. As,

(1.) Shame, as it refers to the foregoing hope implies disappointment. There may be shame upon many other accounts, but as it refers to hope it implies a disappointment. They were confounded (as the expression is in Job) because they had hoped; they came thither, and were ashamed. [Job vi. 20](#). Job is speaking there allusively to a troop of travellers, or merchant men, passing through desolate countries, and expecting relief of which they fail, and meet not with. They were ashamed because of their hope; that is, because they had hoped, and were disappointed; they met not with what they hoped for.

(2.) It supposes hereupon disgrace and reproach. For shame is properly the resentment of any thing under the notion of its being ignominious, or that carries matter of reproach in it to us. We find therefore these in conjunction sometimes in Scripture; to wit, reproach, shame, and dishonour; [Psal. lxix. 19](#). and elsewhere. Now in this present case; to have hoped, so as to suffer disappointment, is an argument of weakness, and so is apt to spread a shame over a man's face, and even to clothe him with confusion. A man reckons it a reproachful thing to him to have betrayed his impotence, want of foresight, an aptness to be gulled and imposed upon in this respect; and very shameful that he should hope with no more security. When a person has cause, and apprehends that others have also of censuring him, concerning the hope that he had, there it is that shame takes place. But this we must understand to be denied here. This hope, which the apostle speaks of, shall never meet with a disappointment; and consequently no reproach, nor disgrace, shall attend the hoper. He shall never have cause to call himself fool, because of his hope; nor shall any one else have cause or ground to call him so for ever.

(3.) Shame doth also imply our own reflection upon that reproach; or else there is no actual occasion of shame, if we do not consider in our minds, or view the reproachful thing we are to take shame for. Therefore when the matter is such as only in vulgar estimate is shameful, but is not so indeed; to fortify one's self against shame in that case, is to overlook it, or look another way. So it is said of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he "endured the cross, despising the shame." [Heb. xii. 2](#). Because it was to him no shame, he overlooked it, and looked upon it with contempt. "This will be counted a shameful thing, but I mind it not." He looked another way, having his eye set upon glory. If any thing be really matter of shame, it is by reflecting on it that shame ensues. But this is denied here. In this case there shall be



no occasion to pore and look on, so as that from thence matter of reproach may accrue to you that have hoped for the glory of God. Let not your hearts misgive you; you shall have no uncomfortable reflection for what you have done in this matter. As there shall be no reproach, so you shall imagine none. And

(4.) Shame includes in it a heart-dejecting resentment hereupon. That is, a resentment seizes the heart upon this reflection, and sinks into the soul so as to depress it, and bring it low. Shame is grief; only distinguished from other grief by this particular distinction in the object, that it is grief for a thing under the notion of its being uncomely and ignominious. But that is denied here. Hope maketh not ashamed. You shall never grieve for this hope. You shall never suffer heart-displeasure on this account. Your hope shall never leave your heart to sink, because it fails and comes to nothing.

This now is the negative import of this property of the Christian hope; it maketh not ashamed. But then there is some what positive implied under this too. We may fitly understand a meiosis, as they call the figure, in this expression; that is, when less is said than is intended or meant. Your hope, Christians, shall not make you ashamed. No, it shall make you exult; it shall make you triumph, and glory; it shall raise, and heighten your spirits, so far shall it be from occasioning in you a sinking or dejection of soul. This is very common, in Scripture, for negative expressions to be put with an accent, to signify some very great positive thing. Thus it is said of the Messiah, that "he shall not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax;" ([Isai. xlii. 3.](#)) that is, he shall cherish and support it. Again, (of his commandments are not grievous," [1 John v. 3.](#) Here also a great deal less is said, than meant; for they are glorious, consolatory, and refreshing. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are paths of peace." [Prov. iii. 17.](#) This then must be understood to be the property of the christian's hope, that it is so far from making ashamed, or exposing him to ignominy, that it ennobles his spirit; and that it does according to the nature and degree of the thing hoped for.

It is obvious to observe how the hopes of persons, by degrees, greaten their spirits from their childhood. There is in some an aptness to mind greater things, and to live at a greater rate than others. And this we call generosity, it being not a name from the descent, but from the temper of the mind. It not only shews itself by men's being descended from noble and generous parents and ancestors (though there may be something in that too) but when such persons as are born to greater things come to understand their capacity, and what they are born to, their hopes do heighten or raise their spirits, and lift them up above the common pitch. So that the proper spirit of a nobleman, a prince, or a king, is greater than that of a common, and inferior man. And the reason is, because as he comes to understand his quality, his spirit grows with his hopes of what he shall come to; his very hopes greaten his spirit, ennoble and raise him, and make him think of living like one that expects to be in such a state, as that to which he is born. Therefore if a prince should be reduced in his infancy

to that condition as to be brought up in a beggar's shed, and under stand nothing of his birth; it is likely he would mind such things, as children of peasants use to do: but if he afterward come to understand the truth of his own original and descent, and what he was really born to; and withal what his capacity is, and the ground of his hope that he shall one day inherit such and such grandeur and honours ] with this hope his spirit will swell, and rise, and greaten.

And such is the property of the christian's hope. It not only makes him not ashamed; but it heightens, enlarges and greatens the christian's spirit, so as to make him aspire high, and to look for great things. Hence it is given as the description of them, to whom God will give eternal life, on that day when he shall give to every one according to his deeds; that they are such as, "by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for honour, glory, and immortality." [Rom. ii. 6, 7.](#) To these he will give eternal life; but to those that are contentious, against the plain truth of the gospel which should rule and govern them, will he give "tribulation and anguish, indignation and wrath." The former sort, who shall have eternal life for their portion, are such, whose minds, hearts, and hopes are carried after great things; who seek for honour, glory and immortality; who disdain and scorn this earth, and all sublunary things, and can say, "*non est mortale quod opto*; I have something above, better than, and beyond all that this earth can afford."

In a word, a true christian is one that seeks that better, even the heavenly country ([Heb. xi. 16.](#)) so as not to stoop to this world though there were never such opportunity for gaining it: he would not go back, though he had the opportunity of going into Egypt. And all this is by reason of the hope of coming to a better country. The christian would not go back into the world, being called out of it; though he should have opportunities for it as good as other men: no, because he is seeking a better country; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called his God. "Such are of a great, a noble, and generous spirit, like my children;" saith God. "Such are in some measure worthy of me. They discover something of an excellent spirit, heightened proportionably to those great hopes which I have set before them." And now,

2. We proceed to demonstrate this to be the true property of this same subject; which will be soon done, though we have but little time, if we do but consider these things about this hope.

(1.) Consider the Parent and Author of it. It is a divine thing, it is part of the new creature, it owes its rise immediately to the Holy Ghost; as the apostle intimates, when he says, "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." [Rom. xv. 13.](#) Far be it from us to think, that God should beget a hope in his, that should end in disappointment and shame!

(2.) Consider the object of this hope. Christians do not hope for creeping shadows; they have no reason to be ashamed of such great things, as they hope for. They hope for the glory of God, for a kingdom that shall not be shaken, for the unseen things of the other world.

Their hope entereth into that with in the vail, whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus. [Heb. vi. 19, 20](#). A man that hath only pitched his hopes upon mean, base, low things, hath cause to be ashamed that he was such a fool to hope so; but the christian's hope will never make him ashamed.

(3.) Consider the ground of their hope. They hope in God upon the encouragement of his truth and promise. Uphold me according to thy word, that I may live; and let me not be ashamed of my hope, saith the Psalmist. [Psal. cxix. 116](#). Thy word is that which I ground my hopes upon; shall I be ashamed? I hope in thee, thy truth, thy power, and goodness; let me not be ashamed. That prayer is as much as a promise, that he should not be ashamed. Prayer, by divine inspiration is as good as a promise. The prayer is, Let none that wait on thee be ashamed. [Psal. xxv. 3](#). The promise is expressly, They shall not be ashamed that wait for me. [Isai. xlix. 23](#). It is true, indeed, if there were not a proportionable ground for one's hope, a man might be ashamed of his hope; as well because it is too big, as because it is too little. But if there be a real ground for it, a word of promise from that God who cannot lie; then there is no cause to suspect the matter. There is no reason why any should be ashamed, let his hope be never so high, when he hopes only for what God has promised.

Now to make some brief use of what has been said.

1. See the highly privileged state of christians; though in this present condition of little and low enjoyments, yet their case is so good as that they shall not be ashamed. They shall have heightened spirits, their minds shall be greatened by their hopes, even while it is little that they can enjoy in one kind or another.

2. Hence consider and contemplate the different state of other men. It is not said, concerning their hope, it shall never make them ashamed. There is no body that warrants their hope to them. The christian's hope hath a very good warrant. I warrant you for your hope, that it shall never make you ashamed; but what have other men to warrant their hope? they have no one that undertakes to guarantee it, and therefore they are left liable to a shameful disappointment, and bitter disgrace upon that account. Yea, they are not only liable thereunto, but it is a sure and certain matter that it will end so; for "Their hope shall be as the giving up the ghost." [Job. xi. 20](#). We commonly say, "As long as there is life there is hope;" but their hope comes at length to the giving up the ghost, and then the man is gone. A wicked man's hope quite vanishes away; it does not remain weak, and feeble, and in firm only, but it is absolutely gone, and become nothing at all: as we have no hope at all concerning a person, when he hath once given up the ghost. Let the object of their hope be what it will, either such do hope for vain things, which are gone when they expire; or if their hope lies towards better things, it is a vain hope. If they hope not for vain things, yet they hope for these better things vainly, having no ground nor reason for their hope; and so still it perishes, and, as the giving up the ghost, comes to nothing. Or it makes them ashamed, and despised; sinks them into horror, amazement and consternation, and so much the more, by how much the



stronger was their hope. Such a disappointment is a most confounding thing; when a person expects it should go well with him, yet he perishes, and all his hope turns on a sudden into horror!

3. We learn hence also, that hope must needs be a very great thing in the life of a christian; and a most intimate, essential part of his Christianity. It is that which holds his soul in life. This property of hope, that maketh not ashamed, as Was said before, is not to be understood as merely negative: It is that which establishes the heart; invigorates, and gives life to the soul. Indeed you would make a poor thing of Christianity, if you abstract and separate this hope from it. "If in this life only (says St. Paul) we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." [1 Cor. xv. 19](#). The most peculiar and distinguishing things in the hope of a christian, objectively taken, are things beyond time. But if all we were to get by Christ were to be compassed within time, then we were very miserable creatures indeed; we should make a bad bargain of it, if we had no more by Christ, than what time can hold, and deal very poorly by ourselves.

A christian lives by hope all along, from first to last. He is born to hope, begotten of a lively hope,<sup>84</sup> is saved by it;<sup>85</sup> as if it had been said, he were lost if it were not for this hope. This then is the great, the momentous thing in the life of a christian; for if it were not for this, we should sink and perish. So that if I am a christian indeed, if I am a new creature, I must live by hope all my days. And that I may shut up all, I shall only leave with you a word or two of counsel, and caution.

(1.) Of counsel. Labour to establish in your hearts this hope, and maintain it; and live by, and upon it. But I can not enlarge upon this. And then,

(2.) By way of caution, I add; be sure that your hope be the truly Christian hope only: that hope, whereunto you can entitle the Holy Ghost as the Author, so as that hereupon we may say, we are begotten by him to that hope. And also see to it, that it be just commensurate with Scripture grounds. That is genuine Christian hope, that measures with the Scripture, and the word of promise. "Remember (says David) thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." [Ps. cxix. 49](#). Then you will hope for nothing, but what God has promised; and in the way, and according to the tenour of his promise. And you need to hope for no more, for he hath promised to give grace and glory, and to withhold no good thing from them that love him. [Ps. liiiiiv. 11](#). And what would you have more? what need your hope to range beyond that, or without the compass of this promise? But then it must be according to the tenour of his promise; for if you hope absolutely for that which is a matter only-of a limited promise, then your hope would be beside its ground, and so be liable to disappointments.

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84 [Pet. i. 3](#).

85 [Rom. viii. 24](#).

And you must know there are things which lie within, the promise, that cannot be the matter of an absolute hope; because God's promise, concerning them, is not absolute. As to temporal good things; outward prosperity to ourselves, or the church of God in common; there is no absolute promise of these: therefore if we hope for them absolutely, we deceive ourselves, and it is our own fault if we be made ashamed. Who bid us hope so? who bid us let our hopes run that way, otherwise than as God commands, or beyond what he has promised? We may hope absolutely for things, that are of an immutable goodness; but some things are not so, and are only to be estimated according to their end. Sometimes they will serve the end that God designed them for, and sometimes not; and when they do not, they are not good, but evil. External prosperity to the church of God, or ourselves, will not always be serviceable to the end, for which it is designed by God; to wit, to make our spirits better, and more of the temper which he looks for, and approves: and he always knoweth whether it will be best for that end or no. Now if we suppose an absolute promise for any variable good things, which are sometimes good and some times not; then take the time when they are not good, and can they be the matter of a promise? No sure; the promise would in that case, be turned into a threatening.

This then shews the reason, why it is altogether impossible that promises, concerning external good things, can ever be universal and absolute. They are not always good, but only as circumstances are. But from the nature of the thing promised we may be at a certainty how the promise is to be understood; that is, in reference to divine wisdom. Such things as do appear good for us, to that unerring wisdom, in certain circumstances, shall be bestowed upon us; and if we so order our hopes, they will never fail us, for no good thing will God withhold from them that love him. But when there is a doubt in the case, whether it be good or no, there is all the reason in the world he should decide the doubt, and we should yield a matter of dubious consequence to him. But if our hearts be so set upon any temporary good thing, as that such savour more with us, than those things which run into an eternal state; this we ought to guard ourselves against. As suppose it should be more consolatory to me, to be assured of present deliverance or prosperity, than to be told of being at the resurrection brought within the compass of his sheep, whatever troubles I meet with here: this is certainly a great distemper of soul, that I cannot taste the best, the sweetest, the most satisfying, and fullest good, more than present ease; but that any thing of earth would be more tasteful, and grateful. And this, I say, we should always take heed of; that we do not indulge ourselves in any thing, which is in itself of so very dangerous, and dreadful a consequence.

## SERMON IX.<sup>86</sup>

1 Thes. v. 6.

*Therefore let us not sleep, as do others—*

I CAN spend no time in giving you a view of the context, which is very suitable to the words now read. They are a caution against security, and contain in them these two things. To wit, in the first place, a monitory prohibition of it; “Let us not sleep.” And, secondly, a specification of the prohibited evil; “as do others:” which words plainly intimate that others sleeping is no warrant to us to do so. Common example indeed is apt to have that pernicious influence: but we are taught that it cannot justify us in sleeping, that others so generally, and as it were industriously, compose themselves to it. Moreover, these words signify, that others sleeping ought the more effectually to warn us not to do so. Examples that carry much of terror in them ought to strike our hearts with dread, and to possess us with a cautious prudent fear, lest we fall into the same dangerous and desperate state. It is as if he had said; “Come, let me shew you a fearful sight. Take a view of the world, cast your eyes round about on every side; behold the generality of men all asleep, asleep under wrath, care less and at ease, securely slumbering while their judgment lingereth not, and while their destruction doth not slumber: be warned by so dreadful an example not to do, as they do.”

The words do not need much of literal explication. Sleep is wont to be variously taken. You know what it means in the proper sense. In the borrowed sense it sometimes signifies, natural death; sometimes a quiet composure, and rest of the spirit: (( I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for the Lord only maketh me dwell in safety.” Ps. iv. 8. cxxvii. 2. Again, that is, in a moral sense, it signifies the state of sin: “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light.” Eph. v. 14. It denotes especially the security of such a state, with reference to the wrath and judgment of God, whether temporal or eternal; which sleep is always sinful, and in some cases penal too in some degree: for we read of a pouring forth a spirit of slumber, and a deep sleep. Isa. xxix. 10. Rom. xi. 8. But we must know that the word *Καθενδωμεν*, here used in the text, signifies a deeper or a more intense sleep. It is the word that is used by the Septuagint to signify the sleep of death. “Many that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” Dan. xii. 2. And they use the same word to express that fast sleep of the prophet Jonah, out of which all the storms and perils of the sea were not sufficient to awaken him. As for the words *us*, and *others*; the former plainly means true sincere christians, and the latter the rest of the world: the refuse, as the word *λοιποι* emphatically signifies; or the reprobate, and worst of men. Two things offer themselves to us from the words, namely—that these *others*, the refuse who are the most of men do sleep:



and—that God's own people by no means ought to do so. I shall speak to these two things:  
And,

I. Shew you, that these *others*, here referred to by the apostle, do sleep: And,

II. Upon what accounts it so very ill becomes the people of God to do so too. And then,

III. I shall make the use of both together.

I. I am to shew that the *others*, whom the text means, do sleep. And herein I must premise to you, before we come to evince this point, that by sleeping is not merely meant, that they do actually for the present sleep only; as if the apostle supposed them to be but in some present temporary slumber: but we are to understand him as speaking of them as habitual sleepers; or that they are under such a sort of sleeping disease, as is resembled by a lethargy; or a caros, which is reckoned a more intense degree of that disease; a *veternum*, or dead sleep. How physicians distinguish these things, or critics, I need not stay to tell you. But the thing that is plainly meant hereby is to represent this as the common state of the world, that it is an habitual drowsiness, such as that kind of disease serves to resemble.

Now that this is the common state of most of the world, we may evince to you by such things, as are usually incident to sleep; or are symptoms of a sleepy, sluggish disposition.  
As,

1. Forgetfulness, which has most proper reference to things past. Sleepy persons are very oblivious. So is the common case of the world. Men are forgetful of things they are most concerned to remember, and most forgetful of them. They have generally forgot that they are creatures; have forgot that with the rest of men they are lapsed, and revolted from their Creator, and become sinners; forgot that they sprung from an apostate race, and that they were children of wrath, one as well as another. Thus their strange forgetfulness of things, which one would think should continually urge them, shews that they are continually asleep.

2. Insensibleness, or stupidity, which hath reference to what is present. Persons that are in a more intense and deep sleep, you cannot make them feel without difficulty. Such as are in a caros, prick them and they do not feel. Sleep is a binding of the senses, and such a deep sleep strongly binds them. So the common case is with the world. It is a wonder of divine power if at any time their hearts are made to feel; and a thing to be recorded (as you find it is in the Acts of the Apostle's, [chap. 2. 37.](#)) if any are ever pricked in their heart, though never so pungent things are spoken to them.

3. Security; or unapprehensiveness of any future threatening danger. Why, so you know the case is with persons asleep. Let the danger be never so near, as well as dreadful; if the house be on fire, if the murderer be by the bed-side, if the sword be at the breast, the knife at the throat, yet they are void of all fear. And do not we know this to be the common case with the world? Destruction from the Almighty is no terror to them. They rush with all violence upon every danger, as a horse into the battle: or are like persons in their nocturnals;





who, if not hindered, would come upon rocks, precipices, or rivers, or fall into dangers that would certainly destroy them. Another thing incident to sleep is,

4. Misapprehension of all things past, present, or to come. For you know in sleep persons use to dream, and then how strangely do they misapprehend things? their heads are full of false images, or false conceptions of those things which are true. The case is so with the world too in their sleep. They can tell how to dis-imagine all the greatest realities, and turn them into shadows. God and Christ, heaven and hell, and the eternal judgment, which must determine them to the one or the other of these, are all fancies with them. But the pomp and grandeur of this world, which is called fancy;<sup>87</sup> the business and turmoils of it, which are all walking in a vain shew; outward prosperity, which is but as a dream when one awakes: these things are great realities, and with them these are the main things, and the most important. Riches and poverty, prosperity and adversity, which will be all thought fancies in a little while, are great things with these men; so aptly do they misapprehend in their dreams!

5. There is also (which is near a-kin to the last) a great unaptness to reflect upon any thing as absurd, though never so truly so, which occurs to them in this dreaming sleepy state. It is so with persons, you know, in dreams. Let things occur to them never so absurd, they never take notice of the absurdity. Let them dream themselves to be in never such odd, antic postures, all is well; they find no fault with any thing they do, or is done to them, while they are in their slumbers. And so is the case with the world too. The most absurd things imaginable, are no absurdities to them. To live in this world of God's making, while he feeds them with breath from moment to moment, yet as "without God in the world;" to be concerned a great deal more to please themselves than him, as if his favour were of no importance, and signified nothing; to study more the satisfaction of their flesh, than the saving of their souls; busying themselves all their days about mere trifles: these, I say, the most absurd things that ever could enter into any human imagination so much as to think of, are yet no absurdities to them. They find no fault with this; think all is well, though this be their continued course, which plainly shews they are asleep. Those things, for which persons when awake are ready to tear their flesh, and do abhor and loath themselves for, they indulge themselves even for a life's time, Baking no displeasing reflections upon them all their days; never at least till they awake, which shews what their state was before.

6. It is especially incident to a deeper sleep to be awakened with very great difficulty. The difficulty of bringing them to a right mind, to the exercise of their understanding, and to apply themselves to do according as a rectified understanding would dictate, shews them to be very much under the power of sleep, since there is so much ado to awaken them. And yet nothing will serve some, who are called upon by the word of God from heaven, even all

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87 Agrippa and Bernies came μετὰ πολλῆς φαντασίας, [Acts. xxv. 23](#).

their time, and yet never awake; roused by strange thunders of providence, many times, yet awake not.

7. Slothfulness is manifestly ascribed to such a sleepy distemper, or a listlessness to business. So it is with the world too. That which is the proper business of men, in this world, they will not be got to it; they are altogether indisposed there unto. You know how Solomon represents the sluggard whose hands refuse to labour and indulges himself in sleep and slumbers. [Prov. vi. 9, 10. xxi. 25. xxiv. 30-34](#). Again,

8. They are apt to shew great displeasure, and forwardness towards those, who attempt to awaken them. So it is with very drowsy persons, who soon grow peevish and angry if you offer to awaken them. They are ready to quarrel even with the very light itself, if it shine in their faces. Thus it is with the sleepy world too. This very light itself is as the shadow of death, and whatsoever it is that tends to awaken them.

9. And lastly, there is a constant proneness to fall asleep again, if at any time they are startled a little. Thus it is with the world. You may have here and there persons who are roused to bestir themselves a little, but presently they drop asleep again. They can hold their eyes open but a little while. And thus I have shewn what is the common state of the world, these "others;" they are generally asleep. I now come to shew,

II. That it ill becomes those who are God's own children, that is, true sincere Christians, to sleep as do others; namely the refuse of the world. This will appear upon a threefold account: it holds no agreement, either with their principles, or with their state, or with their design and end.

1, It is very unsuitable to their principles that they should sleep as do others; to the constituent principles of the new creature. As for instance,

(I.) Light is a main ingredient principle in that holy frame of the new creation. New creatures are all the children of God, as God is the Father of lights. They are born light, of light. It is true, light signifies holiness; not directly and formally, but consequentially, as being potently influential and efficacious. It derives, or makes an impression upon the heart which is correspondent, and agreeable to itself. The apostle tells these Thessalonians, that they are the children of the light and of the day. [1 Thess. v. 5](#). It is day with them. It is not only day round about them (so it is wherever the gospel is afforded to men) but God hath made it day within; or, as the apostle expresses it, hath shined in our hearts. [2 Cor. iv. 6](#). A daystar is risen there; and to lie sleeping under the light of such a day, is a very unsuitable thing. They have light whereby to discern, both the mysteries of grace, and the methods of providence; and very unsuitable it is in both respects that they should sleep. They have light to discern the mysteries of grace; those strange and wonderful things unfolded in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which should always hold the soul in an admiring posture, for it is a marvellous light they are brought into, [1 Pet. ii. 9](#). or an amazing light as the word signifies. ( $\theta\alpha\upsilon\mu\alpha\sigma\tau\omicron\nu\ \phi\omega\varsigma$ .) And they have light more than other men to discern the methods

of divine providence. The Lord's voice crieth to the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name. [Micah vi. 9](#). There is that wisdom which is of heavenly descent, wisdom from above, by which they know what is the nature of God, and what are the ways of God, which are highly conformable to his nature, in his government of the world. It is not likely these should be asleep, when comparing things together; especially when they expect God will be doing some strange matter on the earth: though, at some times, the appearances thereof are greater than at others, and things seem near even at the door. If they be so, they who have not internal light cannot apprehend it: but those who have enlightened eyes may, especially at some times, see that the providence of God is bringing it to pass. It is unreasonable then such should be asleep, who are not in darkness, lest the day should overtake them as a thief; as the expression is in the fifth chapter of this epistle and the [fourth verse](#). And again,

(2.) It is unsuitable to the principle of life and power in the new creature. They are made to live by the most agile and noble kind of life that is in the world, and to which sleepiness is most disagreeable. They are made to give themselves unto God: as those that are alive unto him, and gotten out of death, wherein they were sleeping before. They are to reckon themselves indeed dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. [Rom. vi. 11](#). I might also mention those three eminent principles of faith, love and hope, all directed to action; but the lime will not permit.

2 For sincere christians to sleep as do others is very unsuitable to their state. As in the ninth verse of this chapter the apostle observes, that God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. By which he intimates, that the refuse part of the world have the to kens on them of persons appointed unto wrath; while those, who are true and sincere are appointed to obtain salvation\* And,

3. It is unsuitable to their designs and ends. They who have so great things to do, as to serve and glorify God all their time in this world, and to save their own immortal souls, and to gain an immortal state of life and glory; methinks should have no time to sleep. It would be altogether unsuitable to their business to allow themselves so to do. But I cannot insist further here, and shall pass on,

III. To the use of this subject. And sundry things these truths taken together would yield us by way of inference, for our improvement. As,

1 That God's own people, and the men of this world, are two distinct sorts of people. They are *alii, atque alii*. "Let not us sleep, as do others." It would be a very useful consideration to us many times to think seriously of this matter, that there are two sorts of people in the world; and then to think seriously also to which I must annumerate myself, or to which sort I belong.

2. The people of God are a select and a saved people, the rest are a refuse people. This is plainly too held forth to us. Christians are a faithful, chosen generation, and possession; the others are not so, but are of a vile and abject sort. All indeed were naturally alike; but



they who are taken out and selected, are made a very peculiar sort of people, in their habitual frame, and in respect of the permanent fixed excellencies that are in them, above and beyond what are to be found in other men.

3. The people of God are not to imitate the rest of the world. "Let not us sleep as do others." They are a peculiar and a different people from these "others;" and therefore must do other kind of things. "What do ye more than others?" said our Lord to his disciples, upon a supposition, that they should only do so and so; or content themselves with going no further than the Scribes and Pharisees: but this absurdity is implied at the bottom, that for them to do no more than others were a most intolerable thing. Our Saviour there reasons *ex absurdo*, and supposes it very absurd that his disciples should do no more than others. They are not to be conformed to this world; not to run with others into the same excess of riot, though they speak never so ill of them for their singularity. [1 Pet. iv. 4](#). We may further learn,

4. That it is not enough for the people of God to abstain from the positive evils of these others, but they must beware also of their neglects. Many think that they do fairly well, that they are not guilty of those gross commissions that many other men are; but do not tax themselves for being guilty of their neglects, carelessness, sleepiness, sloth and security "But alas! we are not to sleep with others, to be emissive with them of what is incumbent upon us to do.

Well, that I may hasten to a close, this truth ought to be awakening to us all, and should put us upon rousing ourselves. What! is the world asleep about us? and do we profess to be of another sort from them, and yet sleep with them? Surely it highly becomes us to bestir ourselves, and to shake off this drowsy temper. If I had time I would shew in some particulars, how pernicious and mischievous a drowsy sluggish temper of spirit is to a christian. While he sleeps, corruption grows. "I went by (says Solomon) the field of the sluggard, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding (the sleepy person is a fool and a witless person) and it was all grown over with thorns." [Prov. xxiv. 30](#). Temptation prevails; "Watch and pray therefore, that ye enter not into temptation." [Mat. xxvi. 41](#). Where there is no watching, but continual sleeping, temptation carrieth all before it. Grace languisheth, and cannot but do so hereupon. Comforts fail, we cannot so much as taste them; much less can we fetch them from the proper objects which would afford them. While we sleep providences are unobserved. A great deal of instruction is to be got out of them, and much duty lies upon us in reference to them. But while we sleep, we take no notice of what ever God does in the world. The breathings of the Spirit also are neglected; for they do not always quite awaken, though they do in a degree. It looks to be complied, and comported with by our stirring up ourselves to meet with it. The divine presence is hereupon withdrawn! Christ is gone! How many good times are lost when our doors are knocked at, and we asleep! Is it not often so? Duties stand for little! all most slumberingly performed! in a slight, listless, heartless manner; as we do every thing, when we are between sleeping and waking. Either there is no calling



upon God, or it is to no purpose. It is a dreadful thing to sleep upon the knee. There must be a stirring up of ourselves to take hold upon God, and a watching unto prayer. With what wakeful, lively spirits should we attend at the Lord's table! but if we indulge ourselves in this sleepy distemper, so it will be even there too. Our eternal states are hazarded! Are we sure we have done all that is requisite, in order to the securing of them? If we had done ever so much, we should be less for sleeping. While the bridegroom tarried, all slumbered and slept; the wise as well as the foolish virgins; but the wise had their oil, and their lamps ready trimmed; but the foolish had not. He comes, and then the door was shut, and they were shut out. They were not ready, they had slept away their time. [Matt. xxv. 1-13](#). We make ourselves by this means liable to the surprisal of judgments. And is not that terrible to our thoughts, to think of being caught asleep, when God comes to plead in his displeasure with the inhabitants of the earth? I am afraid this would be the too common case among those who bear the name of christians, and is so now while God's judgments are abroad in the world. And I wish it may not be the case of many of those, who go for stricter professors among us, to be so surprised as the old world was. But certainly it will be inexcusable in us to do so who have had such warnings. We do not know that the old world had from Noah more express warnings than we have had. It is recorded as one part of his encomium, that "By faith he being warned of God, moved with fear, prepared the ark." [Heb. xi. 7](#). We have been warned, I do not know how we have been moved. But sure we are very much without excuse, if we are without fear and care upon such warnings as we have had. For what! would we expect voices from heaven? or must God send prophets among us, or else we will regard nothing? Needs it be proclaimed, that within so many days, we and our city shall be destroyed? Surely we have so much understanding as to compare the way of God's dispensation in former times, when the case has been as it is with us; and to make a comparison between the former, and the present case, in respect of wickedness and provocation! we may then see how we are to make the comparison, in respect of God's judgments.

I know there are pretences for security; and things do very obviously suggest themselves to the thoughts of many, by which they put off or prevent what there is of an awakening tendency in the judgments of God. And perhaps it may be said: "Why, to what purpose would it be for us to be so wakeful, and apprehensive of such and such fearful things coming on? we can not prevent them by that." But that is more than you know. You do not know but that most serious importunate seeking of the face of God, jointly and separately, in congregations, and families, and closets; being much upon the knee, much with God in private; may prevent a great deal: you do not know how much it may prevent of the divine displeasure. But if you do not by this means prevent the common calamity, is it not much to save your own soul? And though you be not hid in the common calamity, is it not a desirable thing to die accepted with God?



But if you still say, To what purpose is it? I answer, Not to that purpose, that we should torment ourselves with the forethought. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. [Matt. vi. 34.](#) This is not the meaning of God in requiring us to be watchful; nor that we should put ourselves upon the trial or use of any undue means, for the securing ourselves from external calamity. It is not, I say, to that purpose neither. But, positively, we have a great deal to do and a great deal we might do if we be awake, if we be not found asleep, when any wasting desolating judgment comes. We may be drawing near to God. Is it not better that judgments take us near to God, than afar off? We may be entering into our chambers; we may be making our calling, and election sure; clearing up our title to the eternal inheritance; labouring to get such graces in actual exercise, as are suitable unto such a time, and such a state of things: to be prompt and ready to know how to use our faith and patience and not to be as those who know not how to use their hands, when the time for action cometh.

Finally. We may be contemplating the heavenly state; recounting with ourselves, that it is happy for us we are sure of happiness above: endeavouring to frame our hearts to an indifferency, as to all sublunary things and enjoyments, ready to lose all and be undone. These are things we know not how to digest, without preparation. And to have these things snatched away, before our hearts are loosened from them, will be the way to pluck our hearts away too. But we should be crucified to the world, and have the world crucified to us. Then we are unconcerned with one another. Dead men He quietly one by another, give one another no more wounds. And certainly it is better to be taken in such a posture as this, when judgment comes, than to be found in all these respects altogether unprepared.

And whereas it may be said: "But why should we so concern ourselves; why should not we rest in peace and quietness? We have apprehended danger a great many times before to be very near us, but God has kept it off. He is able to keep us still." And this I am most troubled at of all, that this should be used as a kind of religious pretence for security, "God is able to keep off any threatening danger."

The doctrine is true, but grossly misapplied. Did never any storm befall the church of God yet? and what! was not God as able to have kept it off then? We should consider with ourselves. Is it, according to the aspects of providence, and God's ordinary methods before, likely that it should be kept off? How can we but think there is a day coming of God's reckoning with a people of such provocations as we are? What I are we more innocent than our neighbours, weltering in blood, and in great desolation, round about us? Nor do I think our danger is so much from incensed enemies abroad (for we hear of wars, and rumours of wars among our neighbours) as from the security of our own hearts. We have not so much reason to fear their arms, as we have a slumbering spirit in our own bosoms.

But if these threatened evils be yet kept off, what are we the worse for being prepared? We lose no labour. It is worth our labour to lie prepared to live or die, for good days and bad. We have been only doing, what is our duty at all times. We should be always watching;



for we know not when our Lord will come and call us. Therefore we have no reasonable pretence why we should indulge ourselves to sloth, and say; “Yet a little more sleep, and yet a little more.” No, no; there has been a great deal too much already.



SERMON X.<sup>88 89</sup>

Daniel ix. 25.

—*The street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.*

THAT we may the better discern the reference of these words, we shall give you a very general and brief account of the contents of the chapter, which consists more especially of two parts; a prayer, and an answer thereunto.

We have first, the prayer made by Daniel on the behalf of ruined Jerusalem, and captive Judah. The occasion of which we have an account of, premised in the first and second verses of the chapter; to wit, that at such a time as is there mentioned, Daniel did understand by the books (that is, no doubt, by consulting the writings of Jeremiah) how long the desolations of Jerusalem were to continue, and that God meant to accomplish seventy years in those desolations. Hereupon he knew that the time was near expiring. There was a way opened very far, for the restitution and deliverance of this people. The feign of Nebuchadnezzar was finished; and those of Evil-merodach, and Belshazzar past; Cyrus had succeeded; and having taken Babylon, transferred the monarchy (which had continued for many years among the Assyrians<sup>90</sup>) unto the Medes and Persians. This Cyrus is called the servant, or the anointed of the Lord, (*Isa. xlv. 1.*) by whom he meant to make way for the deliverance and restitution of his people; and by that Darius also, who is mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, and who, as some conceive, was at this time a viceroy under Cyrus.<sup>91</sup>



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88 Preached at Haberdashers' Hall, September 2, 1678.

89 It plainly appears, that this sermon was preached on occasion of the fire of the city of London, (which began September 2, 1666) and its restoration again to its former splendour, in a few years time. In order to illustrate some parts of this discourse, some account will be given of this affair, towards the conclusion of it, in a marginal note.

90 I suppose the author means the Babylonians. For the Assyrian Monarchy was dissolved, on the death of Sardanapalus, after it had stood above 1300 years, by Arbaces and Belesis. The latter of whom, who is also called Nabonasser, founded the Babylonish empire, which continued only 210 years; that is, to the time of Cyrus' taking the capital, who laid the foundation of the Persian Monarchy.

91 The opinion of those, whom the author alludes to, seems to be wrong. Darius, the Mede, was uncle to Cyrus, and without doubt is the same with Cyaxares in Xenophon; who both engaged, according to that author, in the war against the Babylonians. But Cyrus, who was general of the Persian army, commanded at the siege of Babylon; and took that city by a remarkable stratagem, of which Dean Prideaux gives an account, both from Herodotus, and the eighth book of the Cyropaedia of Xenophon. The city being taken, the whole Babylonian empire fell into the hands of Cyrus; who, as long as his uncle Darius, otherwise Cyaxares, lived, allowed him a joint title with himself in the empire; and out of deference to him, made him not merely a viceroy, but yielded him the first place of honour in it. Nine years are generally allotted by chronologers to the reign of Cyrus; the



Hereupon he applies himself to serious seeking of God's face; and makes that prayer, which you find continued [unto the twentieth verse of the chapter](#). From [thence, unto the end of it](#),

Is secondly, The answer to this prayer by the angel Gabriel, sent while Daniel was yet a praying. In which he acquaints the prophet with the measure and compass of that time, wherein the great things were to be done; which he now not only immediately prayed for, but which he further had a commission to acquaint him with; namely, that seventy weeks were determined for the bringing these things to pass (manifestly weeks of years, as is the Scripture way of computation sometimes) all which amount to four hundred and ninety years. Within the first seven of those weeks, that is, forty-nine years, the angel gives him to understand, that Jerusalem should be rebuilt: namely, the street, that is, all the inward part, or the houses of the city; and the wall that should encompass it about; that after the expiration of sixty -two weeks, added to those seven, the Messiah should come;<sup>92</sup> and that in the last week, even in the middle of it, he should be cut off. A prophecy to which after wards the event did so very punctually correspond, that a very noted philosopher speaking of it was wont to say; that surely that prophecy (as it was called) must have been written after the things were done.

But the words that we are to consider concern what was done within the first seven weeks, or forty nine years; for at the beginning of that time did the command go forth for the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem, as it was said it soon should. But the work was very soon after intermitted, as is reckoned for about three years; and then dispatched in the forty-six years that followed. Unto which the Jews have reference, more particularly speaking of the temple, "Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?" [John ii. 20](#). As it was not a total destruction which it suffered afterwards; so it was not a rebuilding from the ground, but a restoration, which it had by Herod.

This is that which is, in short, foretold to Daniel here, in reference to Jerusalem: that though it would be a troublous time, in which such a work should be attempted and carried on; yet the work should be carried on, and completed notwithstanding. And therefore what the words do more obviously present us with and offer to our observation, is;

That God takes care for the rebuilding of his Jerusalem, so as to effect it notwithstanding the troubles of the times.

But that we may consider this matter with the more use and profit to ourselves, it is requisite that we understand, that Jerusalem was capable of being considered under a twofold notion: either as spiritual, or as civil. In the former sense, by the name of Jerusalem is usually

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two first of which he reigned in conjunction with his uncle, and the seven following (Darius being dead) he reigned as the sovereign, and supreme head of the whole empire.

92 The Author undoubtedly means, in his public character.

in Scripture signified the church of God; and we are not to think that this sense was unintended in this colloquy, as I may call it, or interlocution about Jerusalem between Daniel, and the great God by his angel. Neither had Daniel a reference to it in his prayer, nor God in his answer by the angel, only considered upon a civil account; that is, as it had been a great, and an opulent, and a famous city, of much account in the world. It was not, I say, upon this civil consideration, merely, that either Daniel was so concerned: or that the great God did seem so directly, and with so special a care and providence, to concern himself about it: but as it was the seat of the divine presence, and worship; and had been the throne of his glory, though he had suffered it to be disgraced to a very great degree. And therefore both Daniel in his prayer, and the angel in his answer, speak of it under the name of the *holy city*, as you may see in the [sixteenth, nineteenth, and twenty-fourth verses of this chapter](#); in which they do, as it were, mutually and *certatim* interest one another. And so the thing we have to observe and consider is this;

That the great God doth mercifully provide and take care, that the building of his church should go on, even in troublous times.

It will be worth our while to consider this point a little. The people of God are by the apostle Paul called his building. "Ye are God's husbandry, ye are his building." [1 Cor. iii. 9](#). The conversion of souls is the building the church. The growth and improvement of the converted, is the building up or edification of particular souls. Such building work as this the blessed God takes care should go on; should not be laid aside altogether, even in times of difficulty and trouble, but should go on notwithstanding. For the power is greater by which God doth manage such work, than that by which he can be resisted in it; and the mercy is greater with which he is intent upon it, than to be diverted from it. If he have such work to do, who shall let it? If he will work, who shall hinder him? And if his merciful inclination hath once made him intent upon it, he will never suffer any thing to divert it. His power, I say, is too great to be resisted; and so is his goodness, to be diverted from such a work.

Yea, and he not only takes care that it should be carried on, notwithstanding the troubles of the time; but also that it shall be carried on in some measure by them, or that they shall be in some sort subservient thereunto. For he so orders it, as that even by the troubles of the times,

First: His under-agents, his instruments or builders whom he employs, have their diligence so much the more quickened. Those that were employed in the building of Jerusalem, appeared so much the more eager and intent upon the work; by how much the more Tobias, Sanballat, and some others did bend and set themselves against them in it. Yea, and

Secondly: By the means of such troubles too are particular souls, many times, stirred up, and made more serious and impressible; more apt to prize, and more ready to improve all good seasons, which tend to spiritual edification, as they do occur. When the word of

the Lord is more precious, when it is enjoyed upon very uncertain terms, it ought to be always so; and sometimes it is so, by God's gracious disposition. Then it is usually most savoury! then it is most operative, and doth most good! And so this work of building the church of God is carried on, not only notwithstanding, but even in some measure by the troubles of the times. Some brief use we shall make of this, and so pass on.

1. We should learn from it not to account and reckon, that in times of trouble and difficulty there is nothing to be done, but to sit still; no further endeavours to be used, for the carrying on of God's spiritual building. Far be it from us to think so! For our own parts we have reason thankfully to acknowledge, that it is somewhat a quiet time with us hitherto; but it is a troublous time in the world round about us; and too prone we are to stand at a gaze, as amazed persons wistly looking round about us; and having our eyes in the ends of the earth (as Solomon says concerning the fool) and in the mean time to neglect our own proper work. We mind what others are doing, in their busy hurries up and down in the world; and do but little consider what we should be doing. Our own work lies still too much neglected, as if we had no such thing to do as the building up ourselves in our most holy faith; as if we had finished our work, and had nothing more remaining, nothing left us to do. And,

2. We should take heed too of mistaking our work in a time when there is so much of hurry and confusion in the world; and when things are so blundered, that it is not very easy to discern what is to be done, and what not; or what way is to be taken, and what not. There are many who are so very intent upon this or that little mean design, in reference to this building, that it very much disturbs those, who are serious and in good earnest in reference to the main of the work itself. And there are those, who think there can be no such building at all, unless it be all according to their own model; and that the building of Jerusalem is nothing else, but the building up of their own party; that they are all the church, and that none have a share and part in it but themselves. But the main things, which belong to the constitution of the church of God, must be in our eye, while we are promoting the building thereof according to our capacities, and in our several stations; and whatever tends to promote real and substantial truth and holiness, is what we should be most intent upon in this work. But then again,

Jerusalem was to be considered too under a civil notion; as it was a great and a famous city, very much favoured by providence, and which flourished under the benign influence of it, through a long tract of time. And so we may by analogy enlarge our observation; and render the truth we observe applicable unto other cities and places, which are considerable, in some respects in the same circumstances, with Jerusalem. And the thing we have to observe, is,

That a city, or place, being ruined by its own wickedness, when it is restored, the restitution of it is owing to the fixed purpose, and active providence of God, who brings it about notwithstanding whatsoever difficulties.

All this we have exemplified in Jerusalem, and it is applicable to other places. Jerusalem you know, was reduced from the height of its prosperity and flourishing state, into a miserable ruin; and it continued in that desolate state according to the measure of time which God had appointed it. It was at length restored, repaired, rebuilt, and in a very troublous time. If you read over the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which give us the history of that affair, which the prophecy in our text refers to, you will find it was a very troublous time; and that the troubles of the time were directed in most express opposition to this work, the rebuilding of Jerusalem. There were those that bore ill will to that city, who sometimes mocked the builders of it, sometimes threatened them, sometimes stirred up the Persian princes against them, to hinder the work; representing to them that, that city was anciently “a rebellious city and hurtful to kings.” *Ezra iv. 15.* And though by this means they sometimes prevailed to have the work intermitted, yet by the favour of those very princes, some or other of them, God orders it that it is carried on, and brought to a perfect issue at last. The rebuilding of Jerusalem is enacted by a law, and enforced by other additional laws. You have Cyrus his decree; you have Darius his decree; you have Artaxerxes his decree, in the seventh year, and again in the twentieth year of his reign; if it was the same person, which I dispute not. So that by decree, upon decree, is the carrying on of this work reinforced; and all by the favour of the princes of that empire, the power whereof was endeavoured to be engaged against it; and sometimes it was, in some degree, upon the solicitation of its enemies. And solemn acknowledgements hereupon are made to the great God, that he did put it into the heart of the king, to ordain and decree so and so, in reference to this affair, as you find in sacred history.

Now consider, and compare the words of the text with the event, and the matter is plain; that it was by fixed purpose, and active providence, that the affair was brought to pass. The text says expressly, that “the street shall be built again, and the wall even in troublous times.” As if it was said, Let not the more formidable aspects of the times discourage you, as to the belief of this; the thing shall be done notwithstanding. And it was done.

This also affords and challenges too an application; and there are several things which by way of inference we may collect, and gather for our own use. As,

1. We have this implied, that a place or city long favoured by God, may be reduced to a very ruinous condition by its own wickedness. The rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the prediction here that it should be built again as it is expressed, does suppose such a ruin. “The street shall be built again, and the wall.” What! of Jerusalem? is there a mention of building that city again? This plainly implies then, that Jerusalem was in desolation. And so it was; and we are told plainly enough how it came to be so. Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, and before

them Jeremiah, in their solemn confessions and lamentations, do own the cause. They had sinned, they had deeply revolted, and therefore God had brought upon them all the evils that were written in the law of Moses. So they came into that desolate state. Their city was burnt with fire, and all reduced even into an utter ruin.

And it is our business this day to consider a like case to this. You know this has been the case of your city too. The mention of the rebuilding of Jerusalem bespeaks it to have been ruined before. And you can have no occasion to consider the rebuilding of London, but it will lead you to consider the foregoing ruin of it. That is our direct business, which lies in our way to consider; but especially the causes of it.

The ruin itself is first to be considered, that dreadful ruin! In reference to the ruin of Jerusalem we find the prophet, in the name of the people of God; or we find the people of God, whom he represents, laying it as a charge upon their own souls, to remember the misery, and the affliction, the wormwood and the gall, and to have their souls humbled within them. And what! can a dozen, or fourteen years abolish in us the memory of such a ruin, as that of London was? Can it be forgot how the lofty city was brought low; and how the more lofty flames triumphed over the riches, the pride, and the glory of it? The thing itself surely deserves, and claims to be long remembered, and deeply considered and thought of.

But especially the cause of this desolation deserves to be considered: namely, the provoking, and the punishing cause; the wickedness of London, and the divine wrath which was engaged thereby against it. The very fury of those flames, those flames themselves were the indications and issues of the greater and more furious heat of lust, and the more intense and hot ter fervour of divine displeasure. And if it be considered, methinks it should even yet melt hearts to think, that there was wickedness more outrageous, and wrath hotter, unspeakably hotter, than those flames!

And we should have no reason to think that there was a disproportion in the deserving, to the punishing cause; if the particulars of those evils I allude to were to be recounted and reflected on. But I am afraid we are very apt to deal by the judgments of God, as we are too commonly wont to do with sermons. We hear them, and they move us (it may be, if at all) a little only for the present; and all the impression of them is soon lost and vanisheth, as if we had never heard them at all. The judgments of God are audible sermons. They have a voice. The Lord's voice crieth to the city, "Hear the rod and him who hath appointed it!" [Micah 6. 9](#). Divine judgments are loudly audible, they have a crying voice; and it is strange that the voice of such a cry should be forgotten! that so dreadful an event of providence should be but as a nine-days wonder! that though the wound be healed, the scars should be worn out, and no remembrance left of it; but all returning to their former course, as if no such thing had been done among us!



But the consideration, as was said, of the thing that was done, would receive a great deal of weight by considering the doers; namely, God and ourselves. That the inhabitants of London, should be, as it were in a conspiracy to destroy London seems very strange. And yet was not that the case? How full have men's minds been of severity towards such, as they have thought, or suspected, to have been the designing instruments; but how merciful in the mean time to themselves! Every one added something to the burning; and especially every one that allowed himself in the ways of such sins, as we cannot but know are very provoking to his jealous eyes, and which God will least of all spare for, when they are found among them who profess his name.

And that it should be God's doing is never to be forgotten. That God should have such a controversy with a people, who had so long borne his name; and with a city, wherein he had so long dwelt! And yet, "shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" [Amos iii. 6](#). Are not we to acknowledge his own doing in the case? He is said to do, whatsoever creatures do; whatsoever second, or subordinate causes do, while he has them in his hand, or in his power: either to restrain, or let loose their inclinations and natural tendencies, as he pleaseth; though he do not prompt them to this, or that thing. And again,

2. We may collect hence for our further use, that such a desolation and ruin, followed by such a restitution and recovery is to be looked upon, as an argument of the divine displeasure not prevailing so far as unto a total rejection; and abandoning of such a people, or such a city. There was great displeasure against Jerusalem, and the breaking out of that displeasure in to such a judgment and vengeance, as came upon it, was indeed very formidable, if you consider that alone. But if you consider the promise, that "the street and the wall shall be built again", and that notwithstanding the greatest difficulties that troublous times may lay in the way of such a work; this shews it was not a displeasure, to a total abandoning that city. And we for our parts have reason to acknowledge the divine goodness in this, and that mercy has been remembered in judgment: that there has not been upon the ruin of this city such a curse or malediction, as was that of Jericho; "Cursed be the man before the Lord that riseth up, and buildeth this city Jericho! he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first-born, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it." [Josh. vi. 26](#). We have reason, I say to bless God that he has not so cursed us. And,

3. We may collect further, that much less is such a ruin, (when by the divine favour it is followed with such a restitution) to be looked upon as an argument against our religion; against the religion of our people, and our nation. Some might perhaps be too apt to make such an invidious interpretation and comment upon such a piece of providence; but the following issue of things is some refutation, a refutation good enough for such an argument. And it was the occasion of saint Augustine's writing those twenty-two books (as he himself

testifies) concerning the city of God; that there were, in his time, such conceits and apprehensions, upon such a like event that happened to a famous city. For the Goths having invaded Rome and sacked and ruined that city; the pagan enemies, of that time, had an apprehension among them, and talked it commonly, that this ruin was fallen upon Rome, upon the account of its having become so much Christian, as it was at that time. It was the design, I say, of all those books to contend against the folly of such an opinion as that; at least this was the occasion of Augustine's writing them, and that design is carried on very much throughout them. And again we may note,

4. That it argues a very favourable divine providence, when God does so fixedly purpose, and effectually bring it about, that a city so desolated should be restored and raised again, God's hand ought to be acknowledged in the raising, as well as in the ruin of such a city. Both were indeed alike strange as to our case. Before that desolating judgment came, in whose thoughts was it? who suspected such an event? As before that judgment came upon Jerusalem, that calamitous state and desolate judgment which befel that city, you find it said, "Who would have believed, that ever an enemy should have entered within the walls of Jerusalem?" So who would have believed that such a calamity was approaching as that of London's fire before it came? that all the power of this city should not be able to withstand the fire at first; but that it should diffuse, and spread so universally, so irresistibly; who, I say would have thought it? And who would have thought that it should have been so soon raised up again? and how much besides, and beyond expectation was it?<sup>93</sup> As in reference

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93 For the illustration of this and some other parts of this discourse it may not be improper to give the reader a short account of what the author here alludes to; I mean, the ruin of the city of London by fire, and its sudden and wonderful resurrection again from its ashes. Of which surprising events many of our historians have given us a very pathetic account; though possibly some of my readers are not much acquainted with them, and consequently will not be able to read this sermon with equal pleasure and advantage. The dreadful fire, so often alluded to, began on September 2, 1666; near the place where the monument now stands; by which one of the noblest, and most magnificent cities in the world, was turned into ashes in a few days. A raging east wind we are told fomented it to an incredible degree: which in a moment raised the fire from the bottom to the tops of the houses, and scattered prodigious flakes in all places, which were mounted so vastly high into the air, as if heaven and earth were threatened with the same conflagration. The fury, as an English historian observes, soon became insupportable against all the arts of men and power of engines; and besides the dreadful scenes of flames, ruins, and desolation, there appeared the most killing sight under the sun, the distracted looks of so many citizens, the wailings of miserable women, and the cries of poor children, and decrepit old people with all the marks of confusion and despair. The inscription on the famous pillar or monument, erected by that celebrated architect Sir Christopher Wren, in memory of this calamity, tells us; The fire with incredible noise and fury destroyed eighty-nine churches, among which was the cathedral of St. Paul; many public hospitals, schools, libraries, a vast number of stately edifices, thirteen thousand two hundred dwelling houses, four hundred streets &c. The destruction was sudden; for in a short time the same city, which was seen in a flourishing condition, was reduced

to Jerusalem, who of those, who beheld it in its ruins, would have thought or hoped that they should again with so much joy behold Zion the city of their solemnities, and see Jerusalem as before, a peaceable habitation? When God doth things not looked for, they ought to make the greater, and deeper impression. When he bestows unexpected mercies, he expects impressions of deep and lasting gratitude; such impressions as are not to be worn out. For what! will we refer all these things to chance? or to mere human industry? Is it by a casual concurrence of accidents that such a thing as this is brought about? With respect to a particular house it is said, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." [Psal. cxxvii. 1.](#) And will we disinterest God in so momentous a work as this is, the restitution of such a city? And again,

310

5. Take both the ruin and the restoration together, and we have mighty incentives, and strong obligations to study more the pleasing of that God, and keeping of his gracious presence, who must be our keeper; the keeper of you, and your city. We read of a certain city in Italy, whose inhabitants chained the statues of their gods to their particular stations; upon the apprehension they had of how great concern it was to the weal of their city to keep their deities among them, or that they should not be deserted, and forsaken by them. I need not trouble you with the particular occasion of it, But,

311

God is only to be held and kept among us by bands of his own making; by his own covenant and his own promises, by which he is most strongly held, if we do not make a violent rupture ourselves, and break off ourselves from him. But it is much to be feared the divine presence is little coveted, or desired; and it little appears that God hath a dwelling in many of the new built houses of this city, where men little concern themselves whether they have God with them or no. How many families are there, who, after so monitory a judgment, and after so obliging a mercy, yet call not upon the name of the Lord! or wherein that wickedness dwells, which will not permit him a dwelling there! Is this just dealing? that when he provides you houses, you will not permit him a dwelling there? He furnisheth your habitations, and you spoil his. We find mention made of a people, who say unto God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways:" ([Job xxi. 14.](#)) and yet he filled their

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to nothing: and after three days when the fatal fire had in appearance overcome all means of resistance and human counsels: by the will of heaven it stopped, and was extinguished." This was a sight, as Dr. Calamy observes, that might have given any man a lively sense of the vanity of this world, and all the wealth and glory of it, and of the future conflagration of the world itself. [Abridgment of Baxter's life, vol. 1. p. 314.] I shall only add, without inquiring into the causes of this dreadful calamity which the author has hinted at, in one part of his discourse; that all persons, as Echard tells us, were indefatigable in the great work of rebuilding, and making provision for the resurrection of this city: and that Sir Jonas Moore having raised Fleet-street, according to the model appointed; from that beginning the city grew so hastily towards a general perfection, that within the compass of a few years it far transcended its former splendour.



houses with good things. Ungrateful, and unworthy wretches! He tills their houses with good things, and they bid him begone. But as it follows there, “the counsel of the wicked is far from me”. [Job xxi. 16](#). Let it be far from you also. That vile temper, that wretched disposition of heart far be it from me! Let not my soul enter into their secret; into the secret of those, who have the heart so to requite the Lord! I only add, in the

6. And last place, that such a ruin, and consequent restitution, are no assurance to such a place or city that it should never be ruined again. Let us so far improve the instance of Jerusalem here. Upon such a prayer so solemn, and many a prayer besides offered up by spirits wrestling and deeply engaged about this business, here comes a gracious prediction and promise; to wit, “I will favour Jerusalem, the street shall be built again, and the wall, and the work shall be carried on, let the difficulty be never so great, and the contentions against it never so high and earnest.” Why, one would have thought divine favour had been now so fixed to Jerusalem, that it should never have been off more. But how much otherwise was the case! Jerusalem suffered many a distress after this rebuilding. For after this it was harassed much by the Grecians, Syrians, Parthians, and the Romans; and by some of these several times. And last of all it was taken, and so dreadfully ruined, (I mean the destruction brought upon it by Titus) that ever since one may go (as once was said of another place) and seek Jerusalem, in Jerusalem, and all in vain. But God forbid that this should be the issue as to London! God grant that it may never be so! that the prevailing and growing wickedness of this city (for it seems to be growing) may never bring things to that pass, as that one may as vainly go to seek London, in London.

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312

313

SERMON XI.<sup>94 95</sup>

Psalm lxxvii. 2, 3.

*That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health  
among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O  
God; let all the people praise thee.*

TAKE it for granted, it is generally known that it is by public authority recommended to us, this day, to celebrate the praises of God, for the preservation and success, vouchsafed to his majesty's person, and forces abroad: and particularly, that God hath protected and guarded so precious a life, amidst all the dangers and deaths, that threatened it in the siege of Namur; and given success to the design of [taking that fortress.

And whereas the proclamation by the lords-justices appointing a thanksgiving on this day in reference to these great things, takes notice: that this protection of the king's life, and the success of his forces in that great undertaking, is justly to be looked upon as an answer to prayer, especially the prayers of that day of fast, that was appointed and observed in the beginning of the summer, with relation to this year's expedition: I do accordingly, at this time, intend to consider the second verse of this psalm, in connexion with the third; as I did on that fast-day consider it, in connexion with the first.

The words of the proclamation are to this purpose; "That whereas they did appoint a general fast to be kept through this kingdom, for imploring the blessing and protection of Almighty God in the preservation of his majesty's sacred person, and prosperity to his arms, both at land and sea, which hath been observed accordingly; and forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God, of his infinite goodness, in answer to the prayers numbly and devoutly offered up to him, to grant to the forces of his majesty, and his allies, so great success in the taking of the town and castle of Namur: they do therefore adoring the divine goodness, appoint this day &c."

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94 Preached September 8, 1695.

95 This sermon, it appears, was preached on September 8, 1695; being the day appointed by public authority for a general thanksgiving, particularly for taking the strong town, and citadel of Namur, in Flanders, by king William: which place as bishop Burnet tells us, was so happily situated, so well fortified, and so well furnished and commanded, that it made the attempt seem bold and doubtful. Namur had been taken by the French about three years before, in the view of a great army; which was looked upon as one of the greatest actions of that long reign. But though the fortifications, both in strength, and in the extent of the outworks, were double to what they had been, when the French took the place; yet king William, after a short siege, retook that important town and fortress, in the view of a hundred thousand French, commanded by the famous Mareschal Villeroy: which, as the forementioned historian says, was reckoned one of the greatest actions of the king's life; and indeed, one of the greatest in the whole history of war.

Now, according to the observation that is justly made here, that God hath made the event to correspond so far unto prayer, I have, as hath been already said, determined to insist upon the second verse in connexion with the following, which run thus; "That thy name may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God! let all the people praise thee." Whereas on that day of public fast, I considered the second verse, in connexion with the first; the words of which are these: "God be merciful to us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us; that thy name may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations."

It was with this design that such mercy was petitioned for; or that God would be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us. Which expressions, relating to a community of people, and their public affairs, import favourable aspects of providence upon such a people, and such affairs; and that such requests were made, and such mercy supplicated for from heaven, with this design, that God's way may be known upon earth, his saving health among all nations. As this was the end and design of prayer, so the prospect, the expectation, and hope hereof, is made the great inducement, as well as the spring and source of praise. And what we aim at or seek for, is, that all people may every where praise God: that all nations may be glad and sing for joy because he will "judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth."

By the way of God we are to understand, the course of his economy in governing the world; but especially (as the expressions connected with it shew ) as it refers to the salvation of men. What our translation reads in two words, "saving health;" is but one in the hebrew text, *salvation*. And we know that from the same word comes that name Jesus, given to the great and eminent Saviour; who by a known and elegant metonymy, is hereupon again and again in Scripture called God's salvation. And judicious expositors understand this to be the highest intendment, and ultimate meaning of these very words; that Christ, and God's design of saving sinners in and by him, may be more known in the world. And therefore, taking the foregoing supplication as I now state it, connected with the resolved duty of praising God, and the invitation of all to a general concurrence herein; and we have a sufficient ground for that observation, which I shall now recommend to you as the theme and subject of our present discourse,

That our souls should be greatly enlarged, and highly raised in praising God for successes, and for favourable aspects as to our public affairs, from the hope, that thereby divine knowledge may more generally be diffused, and spread in the world. I shall, in speaking to this,

- I. Briefly shew you what I mean by divine knowledge.
- II. Shew you, that such means as are here intimated; to wit, the successes and favourable aspects of providence, with relation to the public affairs of such as profess the name of God,



and design to serve his interest in the world, have a tendency to the spreading of such divine knowledge among men. And,

III. I shall shew, that the hope and expectation hereof is a very proper, and should be the principal spring of our praises for such successes, and favourable aspects upon our common affairs. And so

IV. Make application of all, as time will allow.

1. I shall briefly shew you, what is here intended by divine knowledge. That is truly called such knowledge, whose object, and whose author, and whose nature are divine. And such I mean that to be, which I now speak of; and shall open to you in the terms of the text.

1. For the object of it; namely, God's way, and his salvation. The way of God, as I told you, is his economy, or course of dispensations in governing the world. And that takes in both religion and righteousness together, objectively considered; the knowledge of the true religion, and of all that men do mutually owe to one another. And we find that both are intended here in this context. That the general spreading of religion and righteousness is designed, and aimed at (with the desire and expectation of which the Psalmist's heart is so much taken up) you may see from the [seventh verse](#), which concludes the psalm. "God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him." This shall be the consequence of his saving us; his giving us success, or his making his face to shine upon us: that is, that as he blesseth us, men shall more and more be induced to bless him. That expression, "the fear of God" is, you know, a paraphrase of true religion: not only religion in general towards God, but even such religion as bath its foundation in Christ, the Saviour and Mediator between God and man. And this seems to be here intended in the words of the text, "That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations." There can be no such thing as religion in the world at all, which is not founded in the hope of mercy, as the spring and fountain; and of final felicity, as the end, that all shall result into at last. There could be no more religion upon earth, than in hell, if there were no hope of salvation. Men would but have the religion of devils, or fear God with a fear of horror. For the devils are said to believe there is one God, and tremble; (*φρισσοουσι*,) that is, gnash their teeth for horror. [James ii. 19](#). They tremble to think there is a power superior to them, which they cannot overcome; and that will take a just, and eternal revenge upon them, for their insolent rebellion and wickedness.

It is then the knowledge of God's salvation, that giveth a rise and spring to religion; and without this, there can be no such thing as true religion in the world. But then also, that righteousness is comprehended within the compass of the object of this knowledge, as well as religion, appears from the same context; "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for thou shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth." [ver. 4](#). As God, by the dispensation of the everlasting gospel, requires and teacheth us to live righteously, as well as godly; so doth that knowledge, which he ingenerates and worketh in the minds



of men (wherever that teaching is efficacious) produce righteousness towards one another as well as religion towards God. Both these I take therefore to be comprehended together, in the object of this knowledge; and so far it is divine. And,

2. It is divine also with respect to the author of this knowledge. The promise in the new covenant, which God said he would make with his people, and which is the connective bond of all that are his people indeed, is this; that they should be all taught of God. The passage is quoted from Jeremiah, [chap. xxxi. 33, 34.](#) by the apostle to the Hebrews; [chap. viii. 10, 11.](#) "For this" is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me from the least to the greatest." And indeed if that were not designed and meant, we could not give a reasonable account, why this should be made the matter of request and supplication to him, that his way might be known upon earth, his salvation among all nations. But though this is a knowledge to be taught and given by God himself, yet he useth means in order thereto. But by how much the more overpowering his influences are, and by how much the brighter and more penetrating his light is, in begetting this knowledge, so much the less doth the instrumentality of the means appear herein, and God is seen in it so much the more. And then,

3. The nature of this knowledge, as well as the object, and the author of it, must be understood to be divine too; inasmuch as it is plainly intimated to be efficacious and transforming knowledge, so as to make the subject like the object; that is, so as to make men appear like so many representations of God himself in this world; with respect to their holiness towards himself and mutual love, equity, and righteousness one towards another. This is the meaning of his writing his law on their heart. For whereas his law is all gathered up (as it is by our Lord himself) into this double summary of loving God with all our hearts and souls, our minds and strength, and loving our neighbours as ourselves; to have this divine knowledge, in truth and reality, is to have it so efficaciously operative, as to transform the very soul into this twofold love; and so accordingly to frame this world and the minds of men every where into compositions of love towards God, as the supreme good, and towards one another, in obedience and subordination to him. And this is that divine knowledge, which the text and context do manifestly intend. But,

II. We are to shew you how successes, and the favourable aspects of providence, relating to the public affairs of those who profess his name and espouse his interest, tend to propagate such knowledge as this in the world: that is, according to the expression in the text, to make it universal, so as that God's way may be known in all the earth, and his salvation unto all nations; and that true religion, and the fear of God may take place unto the utmost ends of the earth, according to the conclusion of the psalm. And when we behold God in such favourable aspects and appearances, how much does the hope revive, and rise in our

317

318

souls, that this shall be the final issue of things! namely, that God shall be thus known in all the earth so as to be every where worshipped, and subdue the nations of the world to his equal, mild and merciful government. I shall proceed here by these two steps.—I shall take notice to you, that we have a great deal of reason to hope for this end: and—that we may observe an aptitude in such means to subserve it.

1. We have a great deal of reason to hope for this end; as a thing, which God ultimately has in design, and will effect. We find several unaccomplished, prophetic scriptures of this import, as that “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas.” [Isai. xi. 9](#). And so operative will be this knowledge, that besides the impressions of religion which it shall make upon the souls of men Godward it shall also impress a universal peaceableness, and righteousness upon men’s minds, towards one another; so as that men shall generally agree to “beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” [Isai. ii. 4](#). Such will be the powerful efficacy of this divine knowledge, that it shall transform the world into love and kindness, benignity, and goodness; as God himself is love, and the supreme, and all-comprehending goodness.

And we see also a passage in the prophecy of Isaiah, which hath a more particular reference unto Christ: “Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my Spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench; he shall bring forth judgment unto truth” (unto victory it is read in the New Testament. [Math. xii. 20](#).) “He shall not fail, nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law.” [Isai. xlii. 1-5](#). How far we are concerned in that, I shall not insist to shew; though many have made their observation upon that expression of the isles waiting for his law, and applied it to these islands that lie so near to one another, and wherein we are so much concerned. This however was a thing to be gradually done, but withal it was to be certainly and surely done; namely, that judgment should at length be set by him in the earth. This expression plainly imports the universality of the effect, and not as if it were this or that single spot, to which such an effect was to be confined; though, in strictness” of speech, if it were any where known in the world it would be known or set in the earth. But that cannot be the design of the expression as it is generally explained; but that the earth in general is to be the subject of this great effect: and the expressions, though they are wont to be applied to the case of particular souls, yet they have a more diffusive applicableness, which is not to be overlooked. “A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.” A *meiosis* is acknowledged in these words: the meaning of which is, that he shall be so far from bruising the reed, that he shall strengthen it; he shall be so far from quenching, that he shall more and more inflame the smoking flax. This, I say, besides its being particularly applicable to

the case of individual persons, must be understood also to have a general reference to the state of the Christian interest. That though it be low and languishing and many times like a bruised reed, or a little smoking flax, where the fire is ready to expire and go out, yet it shall not be. That bruised reed shall grow stronger, and that smoking flax shall be blown up into a flame; and so will go further and further on, till the effect shall measure with the earth and have no other confines and limits than that; till he shall set judgment in the earth, and have wrought that general transformation in the world, that all eyes shall see the salvation of God.

And when we are told in the book of Daniel ([chap. ii. 45.](#)) of the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, that should become a mountain and fill the earth; I think there is nothing, in any time or age hitherto past, that can answer the import of such a saying as that is. This is a work yet to be done, and therefore yet in great part to be hoped for; that, that stone Christ, Christianity, his religion diffused, and spread among all nations of the earth, by an almighty Spirit poured forth upon all, shall be so great a mountain, as to measure with the world, and to fill all the earth. But I know nothing as yet done, that answers the import of so great a word of prophecy, as this is.

Moreover we are told that upon the sounding of the seventh trumpet (which most agree hath not been sounded yet) all the kingdoms of this world are to be the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. [Rev. xi. 15.](#) And this will be in answer to what was predicted long before, in the second psalm. "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utter most parts of the earth for thy possession." [Psa. ii. 8.](#) So that as to the end we have a great deal of reason to hope for it, which I proposed to represent to you in the first place.

2. We may also discern an aptitude in such means, as we speak of, to serve this end: that is, when there are favourable aspects of providence upon those that espouse the interest of God in the world; in opposition to the irreligion, the anti-christianity, and the unrighteousness, that obtain therein, and too generally take place. By the consideration of several things that concur, you may discern a happiness in such means to serve this end. As consider,

(1.) That the minds of men do naturally sink into atheism, or irreligion and a deep oblivion of God, when things run on in one course and tenor, with a still, uninterrupted stream. No thing is plainer or more obvious. Because from the creation of the world to this day, the course of nature hath been so constant, steady and uniform; therefore men have been apt to say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" [2 Pet. 3, 4.](#) And so when the series of providence is generally equal to itself, or because men have no changes, therefore they fear not God. [Psal. lv. 19.](#)

(2.) God hath himself declared, that in such a case as this, he will be known by the judgments which he executes. [Psal. ix. 16.](#) And when they are judgments of such a kind, as to ensnare men in the works of their own hands (to use the following words) and when



men's violent doings are turned upon their own pates, the Lord is then known by the judgments which he executes. "I know not the Lord, (said Pharaoh, [Exod. v. 2.](#)) neither will I obey his voice;" but by judgment upon judgment, and plague upon plague, he made him know him before he had done with him. He could at length say, "The Lord fighteth for Israel, against the Egyptians." [Exod. xiv. 25.](#)

(3.) Men are the more confirmed in their atheism, or in undue thoughts of God (which comes upon the matter all to one) when the course of providence seems to favour unrighteousness, or to run counter to a righteous cause. Then it is that they say, "God hath forsaken the earth; and if there be any God at all, he is surely a God that taketh pleasure hi wickedness; he liketh our violence, our injurious, and wrongful dealing to mankind; and even to them, who call themselves after his name." Thus because judgment, upon men's works of that kind, is not speedily executed, therefore are the hearts of the sons of men fully set in them to do evil. [Eccles. viii. 11.](#) For they say, "Tush! God seeth not, neither is there any knowledge in the Most High;" as such men are brought in, speaking in the [tenth, and ninety-fourth psalms](#): that is, this is represented as the sense of their hearts, which to him, who reads the sense, immediately impressed upon the mind, is equal to speaking; for he doth not need that they should put it into words. God reads it as it lieth there. But then,

(4.) When the course and tenour of providence in these respects alter, it tends both to revive, and rectify the notions of God, in the minds of men; I mean, when it alters so as to animadvert upon manifest, and palpable unrighteousness and iniquity in the world, and to favour a righteous cause.

This, I say, tends to revive the notions of God in the minds of men; for every body, in his distress, is apt to think of God. There are certain *semina*, certain principles of natural religion in the minds of all; which, though some take a great deal of pains quite to eradicate, yet they can never quite do it: nature is too hard for them: but those principles that they cannot extinguish, they make a shift to lay asleep. Lust is too strong for light. A propension to, and a resolution of being wicked, are for the most part victorious, generally governing in the minds of men; so as that the truths they hold, they hold in unrighteousness. [Rom. i. 18.](#) But affliction, and the cross rencounters of providence, revive the sleeping principles of religion; which are bound up in a torpid, and stupifying state. Men begin to bethink themselves, when they find themselves in perplexity and distress. And when the wise man in Ecclesiastes ([chap. vii. 14.](#)) bids us in the day of adversity to consider, he speaks according to the natural tendency of the thing; be cause there will be a greater aptitude in the minds of men to consider, when things are adverse to them, and run quite contrary to their inclination. And,

The notion of a God is not only hereby revived, but in some measure rectified too. They, who before thought God did countenance their way, now find, that this was a weak, infirm argument, and that it proves no such thing. They cannot now any further satisfy themselves





that, that Deity (which they cannot altogether disimagine) is favourable to unrighteousness; but that if there be a God, he is such a one, to whom right and wrong are not indifferent things. They begin, I say, to apprehend so now.

An ungodly frame and disposition of spirit had obtained, to a very great degree, among Joseph's brethren; but when they meet with a series of cross providences, these remind them of their unrighteous dealing with their brother: the thoughts of which had slept with them long, but now they revive; and they now begin to return to a right mind concerning that very matter. But what comes nearer our case is that Assyrian tyrant,<sup>96</sup> who had been so long the plague and pest of the world, and wrought such a destruction among the people of God. When providence came to animadvert upon him, and he lay under God's rebukes and frowns, he fancied himself a beast; and became like one, by the power of his own imagination, (as that is most likely to be understood) till he was capable of understanding, that the Most High did rule in the kingdoms of men, and give and dispose of them as he thought fit, [Dan. iv. 17](#) And as I noted to you before, Pharaoh would not know God, neither obey his voice to let Israel go, after a series of cross providences following one another; till at length he saw himself surrounded with waters, that gave a safe passage to the Israelites, but a continual threatening and terror to him and his army; but when he found their chariot-wheels taken off, he cried out: "Now we must all fly, God is fighting for the Israelites." Then he bethought himself of a God, who did not like such a course as his was of oppression and tyranny, over a people more righteous than himself.

Not that we are to think, that successes and favourable aspects of providence are themselves, and considered apart, a measure of right and wrong, in the world. That can by no means agree with what we have supposed already; There are the greatest variations of providence imaginable, but there cannot be variations of what is right and wrong: for what is right, always will be right; and what is wrong, will always be wrong. But supposing that a cause be in itself manifestly righteous on the one hand, and unrighteous on the other; (which maybe known by other measures) then providence falling in with that which in itself is apparently right revives and strengthens the apprehension of such a Deity, as approves of that which is right and equal, and disapproves the contrary. And so it tends at once, as I proposed to shew, both to revive, and rectify the thoughts of God. And here upon,

(5.) The great commotions of nations, when the world hath been long before in a deep dream, and a drowsy sleep, taking no notice of God that rules the world, and governs the kingdoms of men: when, I say, there are great agitations; collusions of interests, and concussions of nations; nation dashing against nation; if in this case an apparently righteous cause receives countenance, and is under favourable aspects from heaven, God comes to be a great deal more thought of in the world than he was. He is then also thought to be such, as indeed

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96 Nebuchadnezzar.

he is; a God who takes not pleasure in wickedness, nor approves of unjust, or unrighteous practices, though he may have forborne, and spared those for a time that used them. But further, when hereupon the thoughts of God are revived, and rectified in any measure in the minds of men, they become so much the more susceptible of superadded revelation from him; such as that, which is contained in the Scripture. For it is to no purpose, when the world is generally atheistical, and have either buried the notion of a God, or perverted it, so as that to think there is a God or that there is none, is all one with them; it is, I say, to little or no purpose for men to go up and down among such persons, in such a state of things, with a Bible; for they disbelieve such a kind of Deity, as that book reveals. But if the thoughts of God be recovered, and rectified in the minds of men, they are a great deal more susceptible of superadded revelation from heaven. And especially,

(6.) If that revelation be, as that of the gospel is, a revelation of grace. For when God hath discovered himself by terrible things; being displeased with the wickedness, the atheism, the irreligion, the unrighteousness of men in this world: if then there be a discovery of his reconcileableness, of his willingness, or readiness to beat peace with the world; in what a preparation may the minds of men be supposed to be to receive such a doctrine, as that of the Christian religion? a discovery of God in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Do but observe, therefore, that method of representing the great Christian doctrine of the gospel, of free justification by faith in Jesus Christ, which the apostle takes in the epistle to the Romans. He begins it with the discovery of the general wickedness of the Gentile world, and afterwards of the Jews. As to the former he saith, The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. [Rom. i. 18](#). And what is all this for? It is all to prepare and make way for the revelation of grace. We have proved, saith he, both Jew and Gentile to be under sin; and therefore that there can be no such thing as reconciliation to God, and acceptance with him, but it must be by the intervening righteousness of another. And so nothing, in the way of means, doth so dispose the minds of men to receive the gospel, as when God, in the methods and course of his providence, doth appear terrible against wickedness, the impiety and the injustice of men: nothing, I say, in point of means can be a greater preparation for the diffusion of the grace and light of the gospel, and the more ready and successful spread thereof. And I add,

(7.) That by such favourable aspects of providence upon them that espouse God's interest in the world, the great obstructors of the progress of the gospel come to be debilitated, and that power of theirs weakened, and retrenched; by which they opposed to the utmost the diffusing of religion, and the spreading of the knowledge of God; making it their business as much as possible to extirpate that religion, which godly souls do so much desire to see spread in the earth. When the providence of God doth animadvert on such, as make it their business to destroy true religion out of the earth; so as that instead of its being known in all nations it shall not be known any longer in their own, as far as it is in their power to extirmin-

ate it:<sup>97</sup> when such, I say, are animadverted upon, every eye seeth how this tends to prepare, and make way for, the freer diffusion of the gospel-light, and knowledge, among men. For they that would do such a thing as root out true religion out of their own nation, to be sure would be far from letting it spread in the rest of the world; and, if it were in their own power, there should be no such thing in the world at all. Thus it appears that favourable events to those, who espouse God's interest, tend to remove obstacles out of the way to the diffusion of true religion; and to promote the propagation of it, in the earth. I therefore come now to shew, in the

III. Place, That the hope of this issue and end should animate mightily our praises, and be the principal ground of thanksgiving unto God for such successes and favourable aspects of providence upon them, who espouse his interest in the world. This might be many ways made out, and indeed by such means as are most evident in reason, and most intimate to the very essence of religion. For in plain common reason it appears, that the creature is not to be his own end; much less are we to suppose, that God doth such and such things for the creature as his end. He that is the first, must be the last in all things. He that is the author of all things must be the end of all things. All this is plain to common reason. And if you go into the deeper inwards of religion, which are nearly allied to genuine, and rectified reason, nothing is plainer, than that this is grounded in those great things of religion, which are most essential to it. Self-denial, for instance: I do not pray to, nor praise God upon my own account, so much as upon his. For if I be a christian, if I be a disciple of Christ, I am taught to abandon myself, to nullify myself, and all interests and designs of mine, further than as they fall in with his, and are subservient thereunto. It is that which best agreeth with that great essential principle of all religion, the love of God, which is the noblest of all. By how much the more I love God, by so much the more is my heart raised in praises, when I find events to happen that have any tendency to promote his glory; and to make him more known, feared, loved, and honoured in the world. And, to speak summarily unto this matter, do but consider these two things; which we may superadd to all the rest.

1. That we ought to praise God for mercies, for the same reason that we pray for them. But we are not to pray for them ultimately for ourselves, but for God; that they may serve the interest of his glory, and be the means of diffusing the knowledge of him in the earth. It is not a real glory that can be wrought out for him; but it is manifestative glory; which stands in his being known and acknowledged by his creatures, the works of his hands, and so much the more by how much the more general it is. I have said we are to give thanks for mercies, upon the same terms that we are to pray for them. And how we are to do that, we are taught by that method of prayer which our Lord himself directed; in which the first thing

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97 The author alludes, I suppose, to the late French king's repeal of the edict of Nantz a few years before, and the terrible persecution of the Protestants in his kingdom.

petitioned for, is, "Hallowed be thy name." Math. vi. 9. And that God may be glorified, is the thing which is to be first in our eye and design. It ought to be so in our seeking mercies from him; and consequently it ought to be so in our rendering acknowledgements and praises to him, for his kindness and mercies. And again,

2. We ought to praise God for mercies, for the same reason for which we are to apprehend he bestoweth them. But it is plain he bestoweth them not for our sakes, but his own, "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel." Ezek. xxxvi. 32. "I do not do these things on your account, but for my own name's sake: that my name may be known among the heathen, and that the world may more generally acknowledge me to be God."

And according as things have this tendency and design, so let our praises be directed, this day, upon the same inducement, and from this same spring; namely, the hope that God's ways shall be known upon earth, and his salvation unto all nations: and that the present favourable aspects of providence will some way contribute hereunto, as they have this tendency and design. If we do not consider the matter so, we disparage our own victories, when we should give thanks for them; we make them little and inconsiderable, and upon the whole matter to have nothing in them. For abstracted from the subserviency in such providences to the interest of God, and religion, and righteousness in the world, I pray what have they in them? All goeth for nothing, and will be as nothing in a few years. We cannot say, that any thing is truly and rationally valuable, that runs not into eternity; that hath not a look towards an everlasting state of things, and the interest of that kingdom that shall never end. When the world passeth away, and all the lusts thereof, they who do the will of God abide for ever. 1 John ii. 17. It signifieth very little to particular persons whether they be rich, or poor, for a few days, here in this world. And it signifieth as little to nations, whether their condition be opulent or indigent; whether they be under oppression, or in a state of liberty: it signifieth little, I say, when it is considered, that these are replenished with inhabitants made for eternity, and an everlasting state of things, and who must shortly pass into that eternal state. Nothing is really, or upon rational accounts valuable with them, but what carries with it a signification of good, in reference to eternity. So it is to a person, so it is to a nation, and so it is to this world and all the inhabitants of the earth.

Therefore, while we praise God for the favourable aspects of his providence, which have such a tendency as this, generally and indefinitely considered, let us bring down this to the particular case before us. If we apprehend much is not done to ward this great end, by this particular instance of a favourable providence, yet consider this as a part, and as a step to more. And in order to excite our praises the more, to heighten them, and raise our spirits in this duty of praising God, let us, I pray, represent to ourselves the contrary state of the case, even as to this particular thing that we praise God for; namely, his preserving the life of our king. What, if we had been to mourn for the loss of him! A strong hold hath also been



taken, which a potent army came to relieve, Suppose the armies had fought; suppose the army that came to the relief of Namur had been victorious; and suppose there had been a total destruction of our own: think what the dreadful consequences would have been! when, instead of having the knowledge of God to spread further in the world, we should have had violence, and tyranny in the height thereof deluging Europe! and threatening a deluge as general, as such power could extend unto! What hope could we have left to our posterity, that they should long enjoy that gospel, which we enjoy; or profess that religion in peace which we profess in peace and tranquillity? I say, do but turn the tables; and consider what our case had been, if it were stated in a direct contrariety to what it is. There are many more things which I might have said,

IV. By way of particular use of this subject; but at present let us call upon God for a blessing upon what hath been now spoken.

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## SERMON XII.<sup>98</sup>

Joshua xxiv. 20.

*If ye forsake the Lard, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt; and consume you, after that he hath done you good.*

SOME few things I shall offer to your notice, by way of introduction to what I intend from this portion of Scripture. As, in the first place,

That the good which God had done this people, he was confessedly the Author of it. He not only was really, and indeed so; but he was owned, and acknowledged to be so. There was not a doubt in the case. It was a thing taken for granted, and which every one would own; that all the good which had been done to them, proceeded only from him, who is the Author of all good. And again,

That the good which he did for this people was very peculiar, such as he had then done for no people beside. He gave his testimonies unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel: he had not done so to any people. [Ps. cxlvii. 19, 20.](#) Moreover,

That the peculiarity of his favourable dispensation towards them was resolvable only into good pleasure. No other account could be given of it, why he should be so particularly favourable to that people above other people, than, as our Lord says in another case, “Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.” [Mat. xi. 26.](#) And lastly,

That though the destruction threatened unto one people, so and so offending against goodness and mercy, doth not import the certainty of such an event, in reference to another people, offending in the like manner; yet it imports the case of such a people to be very insecure, and that they are liable to the same destructive severities and consuming judgments, as if they had been the people immediately and directly threatened. I say they are liable, and cannot reckon themselves entitled to an immunity from such destructive judgments.

These things being premised, the ground of our present discourse will lie thus: That the good which God hath, of mere good pleasure, and in a peculiar distinguishing way, done for a nation; leaveth them liable to consuming judgments, if they grossly offend God, and generally revolt from him. In speaking to this, I shall,

I. Give you the state of this truth, generally, and indefinitely considered. And then,

II. Speak unto it with special application to our own case, and the state of things among ourselves.

I. I shall give you the state of this truth, as considered more indefinitely. And therein,—shall consider that good, which God may be supposed to do a people; of his own good, pleasure, and in a peculiar way: and—their liableness unto his consuming wrath, upon

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98 Preached at Silver-Street, November 5, 1695.

the supposition here put; that is, if they should grossly offend, and generally revolt from God, or rebel against him.

1. Let us consider the good, which God may be supposed to do such, or such a people, out of mere good pleasure. And here we shall consider, in what respects he may be supposed to do a nation good, and also upon what accounts.

(1.) In what respects. And for this we shall take our measure from what we find, even in this very chapter, in reference to the people of Israel. The chapter you see, begins with a large narrative and rehearsal of what God hath done for them; and it is well worth your notice, and observation. You must consider, that the time of Joshua's leaving them was now at hand. He was apprehensive of it, and therefore gathers the princes, and heads of the tribes to him on purpose to take a solemn leave. They had been under his conduct by divine appointment; and, as their general, he had led them into that good land, which God, by promise and oath to their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had entitled them to as their seed, and now conferred upon them. He was apprehensive of the state of their case, after his departure; knowing well the terms, upon which God had put himself under such bonds and obligations to them. Therefore he gathers the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for their elders, their judges and officers, who presented themselves before God. Upon which he begins his narrative of what God had done for them; and in what particular respects he had favoured them, and done them good. "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, your fathers dwelt on the other side the flood in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed and gave him Isaac."

Joshua here begins with that, which was the most observable thing, and was first in the divine eye and intention; namely, his making this people a plantation of religion, when the world was generally over-run with idolatry and wickedness. He puts them in mind how God did select, and sever the head of this people, from the rest of the idolatrous world. As elsewhere the history acquaints us with his calling him out of his idolatrous family, saying: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee." [Gen. xii. 1](#). And we are told, that "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." [Heb. xi. 8](#). This is the fit posture of a devoted soul, and so inwardly had God touched his spirit that he should upon his call readily answer him, and not dispute the matter, nor say, "Lord, must I go I know not whither? and into that state, and in that way I know not?" No, faith formed his spirit, not for disputation, but obedience. He obeyed, and went. "Here am I, thy ready prepared instrument; do with me what thou wilt." And that which God designed to do, was to make him the head of a religious people; among whom he would be known, when so gross and general darkness had spread

itself over the rest of the world. This was the main and principal thing in God's design; and with this Joshua begins this narrative: and then continues it in shewing in what ways, and by what gradations, God pursued the design which he had so graciously laid in favour of this people; out of whose line the promised seed was to arise, in which, at length all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.



But in the mean time, the more special notices of God were to be confined much within the limits of this people, or them that should be proselyted unto them. "In Judah was God known, and his name was great in Israel." [Psal. lxxvi. 1](#). And whereas this was finally a design of grace, the rest of the narrative sheweth, how providence did work in subserviency to that design; to multiply this people, to keep them entire, and unmingled with other nations: till that seed should spring out of them, in, the appointed season, in and by which there was to be so universal a diffusion of blessings through all nations.

Therefore, the workings of providence are recounted after wards, in subserviency to this design of grace, till he conies to shew how by a succession of wonderful works, in a continued series, God had conducted them from Egypt (where they were oppressed, and multiplied at once) through a wilderness, where they were under his more immediate care: till at last, according to promise, they were planted in Canaan; the type of that heaven, into which the antitypical Joshua, our blessed Jesus was to introduce all that should be adjoined to him as the great Captain and Prince of their salvation.

(2.) As we have seen in what respects, God did thus do good to his people; so we may also see upon what account. And this matter is capable of being resolved into nothing else, but the divine good pleasure. It was upon such terms, that this people were formed at first. The Lord did not set his love upon you, (said Moses) because ye were more in number than any other people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you. [Deut. vii. 7, 8](#). And why did he love them? why did he so peculiarly favour them? The matter resolves itself; he sets his love upon you, because he loved you. Divine love, which is the original love of him who is the Fountain of goodness is its own reason; for there can be nothing former to, or higher than the first. And the same thing Samuel takes notice of after they were become a formed people. The Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake; because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people. [1 Sam. xii. 22](#). How came you to be made his people? Nothing can it be referred to, but that he was so pleased whose people you are. And that he makes the ground why he would never forsake them, in respect of their external constitution, otherwise than upon such terms as he himself did express before, even when he took them to be his people. Of which more hereafter.

And when their state was to be restored, after its being lost in great measure through their defection and revolts from him, it is still upon the same terms. He would indeed gather them again, re-collect them out of the several nations into which for their defection they had been scattered. But why? Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sakes, O





house of Israel; but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen whither ye went. [Ezek. xxxvi. 22.](#) So that still the matter is resolved into divine pleasure and goodness itself, the prime import of his name, as he himself proclaimed it to Moses; The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. [Exod. xxxiv. 6.](#) And so much concerning the good, which God may be supposed to do for such a people indefinitely considered.

2. We are next to consider the liableness of such a people, notwithstanding, to more severe, and terrible, and even consuming judgments in case of their general revolt from him, and rebellion against him. This we see plainly exemplified, in the course of God's dispensation towards this people. And we are here to consider, that whatever good he did for this people, it was but according to free promise; and that such promise was made, with a reserved liberty to make use of his own right to vindicate himself, when, by injurious wickedness, the design of all that goodness is frustrated, and perverted, as much as in them lies.

(1.) It is plain, that whatever good he did for this people, was according to free promise. But that is more than can be said of other people. They had such promised peculiar favours, as no other people ever had. That is, they had that good and rich country, which they possessed, given them by immediate grant from heaven, which no people under heaven ever had the like besides; and a promise ratified and sealed by solemn oath, over and over, unto their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose God he declared himself to be, and the God of their seed; by which he obliged himself to do them good in this respect, by planting them, as a distinct people, in a rich country; where they should have all the accommodations that were needful for answering the ends, for which he would have such a peculiar people in this world. And though what he did for them was thus according to promise, yet

(2.) In the very tenour of that promise he reserved to himself the liberty of animadverting upon their wickedness; and of making a way (as he sometimes expressed! himself) for his wrath to break in upon them, till at length it came upon them to the uttermost. [1 Thes. ii. 16.](#) So that when any such destructive judgments should befall them, they could not pretend to be surprised; it was nothing but what they might expect and look for, even by the express tenour of that very grant, by which they held what they did before enjoy. And thus they were fore told it should be, as you may see if you look into the course of God's treating and stipulating with them. "It shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto my commandments, which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul; that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season," &c. [Deut. xi. 13.](#) All suitable blessings are, upon that supposition, promised to them. But it follows; "Take heed to yourselves that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them: and then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit,

and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you." [Deut. xi. 16, 17.](#)

Now according to the tenour of this word of his, which you may meet with in multitudes of other places, was the course of his actual dispensations towards them. For see how things were, between God and them, after Joshua's decease. He had seen them planted, and settled in that good land. And we are told that "when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land: And the people of Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua; who had seen all the great works of the Lord that he did for Israel." [Judg. ii. 6, 7](#) But now, Joshua being dead, we find soon after, that "Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim. And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them; and they were greatly distressed." [Judg. ii. 11-16.](#) And afterwards, in the residue of this second chapter of Judges, is the summary given us of their deportment towards God; and of God's procedure towards them, under all the several succeeding judges, that governed them, till the time they had a king set over them by their own choice. Whereas before, their government was designed to have been an immediate Theocracy; that is, they were to have lived in all points, under the immediate direction of God himself. But they affected to be like their neighbours, both in civil and religious respects and so God, having, in his first grant of special favour to them, reserved a power of doing himself right upon them, managed the course of his dispensation towards them accordingly.

And this we may take for an account of the state of this case, more indefinitely considered; forming our idea from what we find exemplified in this people. Great things were in a peculiar way of favour done for them; yet we find all this did not exempt them from the terrible severities of vindictive justice upon their revolts from God, and rebellions against him. I come now,

II. To consider all this with application to our own case, and the state of our affairs; in which application, two things must be considered.

1. A commemoration, with great thankfulness and gratitude, of the good, which God hath done for our nation; in a continued series, and course of dispensations, through a long tract of time. And,

2. A representation, notwithstanding, how vain an imagination it would be that we are thereby exempt from a liableness to vindictive and consuming judgments, in case of a gross

and general revolt from God, and rebellion against him. Of these two parts this application shall consist.

1. We are to make a thankful commemoration of the great good, which God hath done for our nation even in a long continued course; as he did for that people, who have given us the ground of our present instruction. And here we are concerned to say as we find the prophet speaking: "I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us; and the great goodness towards the house of Israel (we may say towards our England) which he hath bestowed on them, according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses." [Isa. lxiii. 7.](#)

And here we may go back a great deal further than Joshua could, at this time, in recounting God's favours towards Israel. They were not then of that antiquity. He had not so long a tract of time, as we have, to reflect and look back upon from their beginning to be a people; that is, the time when God took Abraham out of his father Terah's idolatrous family, to make him the head of a people, among whom there should be a plantation and nursery of true religion, from age to age, till the fulness of time. It was but a few hundreds of years, of which Joshua puts them upon the review; when he calls upon them to reflect upon, and look back to the years of former times. We have a far longer time to reflect and look back upon. Ours is a country severed and distanced, as you know from the rest of the world;

*Et penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos,*<sup>99</sup>

and we are at so remote a distance, that it is to be reckoned among the miracles of providence, that the gospel and Christianity should visit our island so soon.

It is true, the history of so early times is so much the more uncertain; but such as it is, it makes Britain to begin to be christianized even in the first century, and as some have reported by the ministry of Joseph of Arimathea, who had been under the ministry of our Lord himself, as the Teacher come forth from God. [John. iii. 2,](#) And though afterwards this island of ours was invaded, first by one pagan, then by another; still Christianity kept its footing, so as never to be extinct. And when at last the romish apostacy and corruption had spread itself, here did more ancient primitive Christianity contend long against it; and with that steadfastness, and earnestness, that they found it impossible to make proselytes without making martyrs, even in those early days, And after a more general night of popish darkness had spread itself over this land of ours (then unhappy indeed, as the greatest part of the Christian world was) the dawnings of renewed light were earlier with us, than with a great part of the rest of Europe, where the reformation has obtained. We may count above three hundred years back ward, wherein there was most express opposition among us, by the bright light which then shone against the worst of the popish abominations. And when that

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99 Virgil Ecl. l. 67.

light was grown brighter and brighter, unto a more perfect day; by what wonders of providence has our day been prolonged and the light of it extended for so long a space! With how indulgent an eye has heaven watched over us to prevent the return of that enchanted night and darkness, out of which we had escaped! what designs have there been prevented from time to time, to bring us back again under both a darkness and a bondage worse than Egyptian!

And it is admirable to see and take notice, how providence hath signalized the very seasons of our deliverance from those dark and horrid designs, which have been set on foot against us; that he should also twice put such marks upon such a year, and such a day; upon the year eighty-eight in one century after another, and twice upon the fifth of November in the same century; and at length draw two ancient mercies to meet together, as it were, upon one day, and in eighty-eight. This seems to be an artifice in wise providence to accommodate itself to our unapprehensive, and less retentive minds; that he should so mark out for us times and seasons, that when such a year, and such a day reverted, we might recollect ourselves and consider, and also those that shall come after us: "Oh, how hath God signalized these days, by special favours and kindnesses to England! and all aiming at one mark, that is, to keep us safe from that popish delusion and all the abominations which it sheltered, that he had before delivered us from; that we might not be brought back again, and return into so dismal, so gloomy, and so imbondaged a state.

And it concerns us to bethink ourselves as to this our last deliverance, now seven years ago the fifth of November 1688; in what a state of things we then were, and how our matters stood when a divine hand was reached forth towards us, to pluck us out of the gulph into which we were sinking. We are to consider in how prepared a posture all things were for our destruction, as to our most principal concerns; those especially of our religion, than which we are to count nothing more so. The providence of God ordered us the view of our danger; not that it might overtake, or oppress us, or end in our ruin, but that it might excite in us so much higher gratitude when he should deliver us. That is, in the course of providence he let it come to pass, that we should be under the power of a popish prince; intent to promote his own religion: that things should proceed so far, as that we should see mass-houses set up, even in the very metropolis of England; in this very city, Jesuits' schools opened; colleges in our universities seized, to serve the same purpose; and an Irish army brought into our bowels, easily to be assisted, if there should be occasion, by a French one; even when we knew how strict the confederacy was between those two princes, and by what methods the latter, to wit, the king of France, had been labouring to reduce all that were under his government to one religion, namely that of popery.

And where are they now that dispute whether a providence governs this world? Is there no specimen, no appearance of a divine hand in this? That all the while that mighty French monarch was gradually springing up, until at length he should appear on the public stage

with so aspiring a mind, as to think himself capable of giving law and a religion to all the world beside; as if he was not only greater, and more potent, but wiser too than all the rest of mankind, and a better judge of religion: I say, that while he was gradually springing up to this pitch, God should be forming his own instrument to appear upon the stage too, when it should be most seasonable? A prince, in such circumstances, and with such inclinations too! formed, and fitted, and placed on the stage, on purpose to give check (and we hope mate too) to that ambitious one, who made it his business, and doth still make it his business, to enslave, not only the bodies, but the minds and consciences too of all, to whom his power can reach and extend itself! is there, I say, nothing of a divine hand in all this? We know indeed what extraordinary, unlimited power could otherwise have done; but God uses to work by ordinary means. And if he had not marked out this way, if he had not raised up such a one, if he had not had this in his councils; to wit, “While that prince is gradually springing up, whom I design to be a just scourge to a wicked European people, I will have one that shall spring up by degrees at the same time, that shall prevent his being more than a scourge, that though he shall chastise yet he shall not destroy.” I say if God had not done so, by way of opposition to those horrid designs that were on foot; we might suppose it as probable a means for any of us to repel the inundation of the sea by our breath, as by any other means in view to have prevented a universal deluge of the greatest calamities and miseries, all Europe over, that could be thought of or imagined.

And if there be a divine hand eminently appearing in all this, and in a way of favour, if God hath been doing us, and the nations about us good; all this ought to be acknowledged with the most grateful mention, and with hearts full of thanksgiving. For, consider, What if this had not been? Then had there nothing been in view to prevent our case, long before this day, from being like theirs, who professed the Protestant religion in France, and in Peidmont. We might come nearer home, even to Ireland; which though we look upon it as a firebrand plucked out of the fire, yet we should consider that, and ourselves as firebrands, not plucked out, but consuming in the fire, till we, and our religion, should have been reduced to nothing. If we would urge our own souls to a grateful commemoration of the goodness God hath shewn, and the great things he hath done for us; we should, I say, state the case so as it would have been, if these things had not been wrought, and done for us.

Think then, what would have been our case! to be dragooned out of our habitations, our estates, and our families; out of our religion, our consciences, and eternal hopes, if we had not patiently comported with the former, to save the latter! And whereas the case of our brethren in France was such, that they had some refuges, some retreats, and knew whither to go; yet if the overflowing calamity had deluged all, us as well as them, whither should we have fled? what retreat should we have had?

Think we with ourselves, how many peaceful years have gone over our heads! Think too by what miracles of providence our state hath been preserved these several successive

years! seven years past, and how much more than seven might we look back upon! One valuable life indeed (most valuable! and of precious savour) hath been plucked away from the throne;<sup>100</sup> but the other is preserved: and by how slender a thread doth so great a weight hang, and depend, as our visible All! How strangely is that life preserved from year to year! so as that after every campaign, we have, as it were, a king given us anew, as by a resurrection from the dead. Through so many surrounding deaths is he kept, and still from time to time returned, and brought safe back again to us; whereas the continuation of such a thread by moments, hath so great a weight hanging upon it, that if there had been an intercision, as there might have been in a moment, it is inexpressible, yea inconceivable, what miseries might have come upon us. Though, as was said before, we are not to measure or circumscribe omnipotence, but we are to speak and judge of things according to the appearance, which they carry to our view; who are not expected to judge with the judgment of God, but with the judgment of men, of what is obvious to our notice. And upon all these accounts we have cause to own even with the most sincere gratitude, that God hath all this while been doing us good, and has done it of his own good pleasure, and in very peculiar kinds and respects. But then, I must come to the

2. Part too, that I may be just to the truth and to you, to shew how vain a thing it would be (though we are obliged to acknowledge, and indeed to own it with the greatest gratitude, that God hath been all this while doing us good; yet, I say, how vain it would be) thence to conclude ourselves secure from destroying judgments, and consuming wrath; if still we grossly revolt from God, and generally offend against that goodness itself. And to this purpose let us,

(1.) Cast an impartial eye upon our own provocations; and see what matter for divine displeasure, there is to be found among us. Certainly there is what may equal that of this people, who are our present exemplar. It may be some may say, "We are not for serving strange gods, as they did." But pray, how many are there who are for worshipping no God at all! Set the atheism of the one, against the idolatry of the other. And were the Israelites for worshipping strange and false gods? O, what multitudes among us are there, who cannot be supposed to be less guilty for their slight and careless and trifling worship of the true God; while they acknowledge and own him in all the perfections and excellencies of his being, which exalt him far above all blessing and praise! who come to worshipping assemblies with as slight minds, as others carry with them to the play-house! O, what provocation is there in this! How provoking is their wickedness, who deny the Lord that bought them! who contend even against his Deity itself, his All; who is to us our All in all, and upon whom our eternal hopes depend! How horrid is it to consider the gross immoralities that shelter themselves among us under the abused, and usurped Christian name! So that the justice,

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100 Queen Mary, who died universally lamented, December 28, 1694; in the 33d year of her age.

the honesty, the temperance, the veracity, which were to be found among pagans should be, from time to time, produceable to rebuke and shame us for their contraries, which we allow ourselves in, while we call ourselves Christians! Are not these high and great provocations? And then, let us hereupon consider,

(2.) What pretence have we to think ourselves secure from vindictive severities, or that wrath should not come upon us, even until it consume us, after God hath done us so much good? Is his doing us good, or his having done us good, any security? Pray let us weigh some considerations with reference to this.

[1.] How was it any security to the Jews? Do not we find, notwithstanding all the good which God had done for them, that yet there were times and seasons when their armies were routed, that they could not stand before their enemies? When their ark, in which they gloried (that peculiar symbol of the divine presence) was made a captive to their enemies, and ravished away from them by paganish hands? Was there not a time, when notwithstanding all the good which God had done them, the Assyrian power sacked and enslaved their country, and they were carried away even beyond Babylon? Did all the good, which God had formerly done them, protect their country from invasion; their great city, which was the glory and praise of the earth, from being plundered and ravaged; their temple, one of the wonders of the world, from being turned into a ruinous heap? Again let us consider,

[2.] Can we pretend any antecedent right to any of those favours, by which our state is distinguished from others, who have been most miserable round about us? Can we pretend any better right than the Jews had? They had a right by promise, we have not a right so much as by promise. Did God ever promise us that we should have peace in our own bowels, when the nations round about us should be involved in blood and ruin, and this for seven years together? This people had what they enjoyed by promise; but so conditional, so limited, as not to be a bar against such vindictive judgments, as did actually befall them: but we have not so much to say as that. We have no such prior right to our enjoyments, as that we can say, if such and such judgments should befall us, God would do us wrong; that if he should let our houses be burnt, our goods rifled, and ourselves come under oppression, bonds, tyranny, slavery, we should be injured, and wrong would be done to us by the common Ruler of the world. Dare any of us be so hardy as to say so? If we should, that alone would be provocation enough to bring the utmost of divine severities upon us; for we can claim no such right without invading his, who is the common Lord of all. And again,

[3.] Let it be considered, whether it is not very apparent that God hath done us all that good, all the while, which we have been the continual subjects of. Was it not all from him? Is it not he that protected our peace and religion hitherto; and kept off from us calamities and miseries, wherein others are involved? If we should deny that God hath done all this for us, even that itself were enough to give him matter of most terrible controversy against us. But,

[4.] If we do grant, that God hath done all this for us (ex emptied us all this while from miseries and ruins, put us under his protection, and that shadow, which his wings have spread over us; if we will grant, I say, that God vouchsafes us the mercy of all these years, which we have enjoyed) then let us consider, whether we must not apprehend him to have had some end, in such peculiar vouchsafements of favour to us. Is he indeed most infinitely wise, and in all respects the most absolutely perfect? And what! can he act without design? Can he in so distinguishing a way have shewn favour to us, and not to others, as it were by casualty? or without saying, “So I will do. When I suffer such and such miseries to fall upon a people, professing my name, in France, in Hungary, in Piedmont, in Ireland, and elsewhere; yet I will cover and shelter those who profess my name in England?” Do we think this was without design or end?

341

[5.] If there be a design, if God aims at some end in all this, let it be considered, whether it is not an end worthy of himself; an end that was suitable to the wisdom, the excellency, and greatness of a God? And if so, then

[6.] Consider, whether we can suppose it to be an end worthy of God, and suitable unto his universal perfection, only to gratify our inclination, by keeping off such and such miseries and calamities from us; when he hath not done it from others, round about us. Why was it more worthy of God to gratify the desires, and inclinations in this kind, of an Englishman, than of a Frenchman, or an Hungarian, and the like? Was his end only, that he might not disturb and disquiet a people unwilling to be disturbed, and not patient of molestation? Was this his end? But

[7.] If his end was higher and more Godlike, that is, that we might have a peaceful opportunity of enjoying the gospel, and improving it through such a tract of time; then let us consider, whether we have answered this end. Where are our advances? where is our profit? wherein is it to be seen that such a people have, for seven years together, lived under a peaceful state, and dispensation of the truth, and ordinances of the everlasting gospel; which with others have been discontinued, and with many actually broken off? Pray, where is the difference? wherein are we better after all than they? We have experienced God’s great goodness; and may still, if we continue in his goodness, and be attempered and suited thereto, in the disposition of our spirits, but if there is no such thing, what comes next but severity? Behold (saith the apostle) the goodness and severity of God! which are conjoined upon the distinct suppositions which are there put in the context [Rom. xi. 22](#). And in the next place,

[8.] Let us but consider, whether. we dare, any of us, lay a claim as matter of right, unto any of those private temporal mercies that we severally enjoy; namely, the health, the strength, the competent provisions which we find, and the reputation we have in the world, or with one another. Can any of us lay a claim to any of these good things, considered in a private, or a personal, regard? If we cannot, then the good state of a people, which results from the particular enjoyments, accommodations, and comforts, of the several individuals, is owing

342



entirely to the goodness and mercy of God. And who of us can say, "Because I have health this hour, therefore I shall certainly have it the next; I have health to-day, therefore I shall have it the next?" and so on. Can any of us say, "If we have peace this month, or this year, that we shall have it the next month, or year? Or, as we have now free opportunities of worshipping God, so shall we have in all future time?" How absurd reasoning would all this be! But then consider, further,

[9.] That greater miseries, than can be comprehended with in the compass of time, are due to every impenitent sinner; to every one who is not converted, or turned effectually unto God in Christ. What do we talk of their not being liable unto the troubles, the calamities, and miseries, that lie within the measure of time; who, in the mean while, are liable unto eternal miseries? that they are not liable to have their houses, or their city burnt, who are liable to that fire, which can never be quenched? and to have it said to them, "Depart ye cursed in to everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." [Mat. xxv. 41](#). And consider,

[10.] That they who live under the gospel, and obey it not, nor comply with the gracious design of it are every way liable to greater severities, than un-gospelized nations ever were. Would you think it a hard saying, if one should positively determine, that London is generally liable to more terrible things, than Sodom was, or Gomorrah? Hath not our Lord himself told us, that the people among whom he conversed, of Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, were exposed to worse calamities, than Sodom and Gomorrah, or than Tyre and Sidon? [Mat. xi. 21-25](#). We should consider this, not only with conviction but with consternation, to think what we are on this account liable to; as having still such matter of provocation, as you have heard found among us.

And therefore now, since it cannot with the least modesty be pretended that we are not liable, because God hath done us so much good, to the suffering of such grievous evils, as have been mentioned; as we have in view before us, even in ancient and in modern example: if this, I say, cannot with modesty be pretended, the most fruitful inquiry will be, how we shall demean ourselves agreeable to the state of our case, as being exposed to the terrible severities of consuming vengeance. Is it plain? doth the thing speak itself, that we are liable to very severe consuming judgments? What shall we do hereupon? how shall we demean ourselves, or what shall be our deportment in this case? I shall shut up this discourse with a few words in answer to this.

First, Let us not hereupon cease from the most grateful acknowledgements of God's great goodness to us, in lengthening out our tranquillity so far, as he hath been pleased to do. For wherein he hath done us good, even freely, and from mere good pleasure; certainly the most grateful acknowledgements are due. We are to give thanks with the most serious gratitude for all that good, which we could never claim; and to which we could not pretend that we had any right. But,

Secondly: Though we are to rejoice in the remembrance, and continual observation of God's great goodness, yet we are to mingle trembling with rejoicing ("Rejoice with trembling") that is, we are to take heed of being secure. Our hearts should not be secure, when our state is not. It is unbecoming a prudent and considering christian (our state being stated as you have heard) to admit such a thing as a drowsy slumbering security, to enwrap, and stupify his heart! or that we should be of them, that cry peace, peace to themselves, when sudden destruction may be at the door. "Therefore let us not sleep as do others," lest such a day of calamity should overtake us as a thief. It is very unbecoming a wise man to be liable to a surprise, while our case is so stated, standing in view as it doth before us.

Thirdly: We should have also inwrought into the temper of our spirits, a firm persuasion that God is to be justified, even upon the supposition that the most destructive, and consuming calamities should befall us. Let this be inlaid deeply as a principle with us, if any thing should fall out, or whenever calamities or judgments befall us, that it is our business the first thing we do, and shall be continually upon that supposition, to say, "Righteous art thou O Lord"! [Jerem. xii. 1](#). While we have no right to be indemnified, he hath a right to punish. Again,

Fourthly: We should also labour to keep our hearts loose from all our temporal enjoyments, and good things; that they may not be torn away from us by violence, but by an implicit, previous consent. "Lord, I have made over my All to thee. I have resigned all into thy hands. If it shall make for the honour of thy justice, and the dignity of thy government, for me to be involved in calamities and ruins (as no one can pretend to claim an exemption) I submit to it; and lay myself, and all at thy foot. I desire that my heart may cleave to nothing against thee, nor against any determination of thine. I live in my house, as having no right to it. I go out, as having no certainty, or assurance to return. I lie down in it, as if I expected to arise in the midst of flames." And so in reference to all the temporal good things we enjoy, we should lie before him as so many convicted creatures, ready to receive our judgment from his hand. For even his Moseses and his Aarons, while he vouchsafeth them mercy, and a pardon, with respect to their eternal concernments; yet, in reference to their temporal concerns, he may take vengeance upon their inventions. [Psal. xcix. 8](#). And in the

Last place: Make sure your interest in eternal good things, by coming to a covenant closure with God in Christ. Then shall your hearts not be afraid of the desolation of the wicked when it cometh. Then will you be able to apply to yourselves that sentence of the divine wisdom, the Son of God (for so we are to understand it, the supreme, archetypical, and eternal wisdom) "He that hearkeneth to me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from the fear of evil"; ([Prov. i. 38](#)), and so shall we have a calm, a quiet, a serenity in our own spirits; not from presuming, or because we conclude we shall not suffer, but upon a supposition that we shall: as was said to the church of Smyrna. "Fear none of those things which thou shall suffer." [Revel. ii. 10](#). This is the way not to be in an astonishment, or confusion

at such a time; having our hearts possessed with the faith of such a saying as this, which is surer and more stable, than the foundations of heaven and earth: When the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. [1 John ii. 17](#). Such a one may say, "I shall be unconcerned in the common ruin, when that day of the Lord cometh, which shall burn as an oven. When the whole hemisphere shall be like one fiery vault burning as an oven, I shall not be concerned in this destruction. All that have vital union with the Son of God shall be caught up to meet their Redeemer in the air, and be for ever with the Lord. I can see all this world consumed, and think myself to have lost nothing. My good lieth not here. My treasure is in heaven, and my principal interest is there."

Let this matter be once put out of doubt; and then with how cheerful, with how childlike, with how submissive spirits, may we expect and wait for the most dismal, and the most dreadful things, that can fall out within the compass of time!



## ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following serious and pathetic discourse was preached by the author, at Brixham in Devonshire, when he was about twenty-eight years of age; but upon what occasion is not certainly known.<sup>101</sup> It was communicated to the editor by a worthy gentleman in the West of England, who after mature deliberation has resolved to give it a place in this collection; not only because it is well calculated to make serious impressions on every reader, but also as it is a specimen of the excellent author's manner of preaching in his youth. There is, he thinks, no reason to doubt its being genuine; since (to use Dr. Evans's expression) it plainly carries in it the marks, which to a person of taste always distinguish his performances.

The following extracts from a few letters, sent to the editor by the gentleman, to whom the world is obliged for this excellent discourse, will be sufficient to give an account of it.

The Sermon (says he) bears date January, 1658; which, I believe, must be 58-9. For though it is not impossible but Mr. Howe might have been at Brixham, in January, 58; yet as the protector (Oliver) kept him much at Whitehall, it is not so likely to be preached then, as the year after: about which time he returned into the West.<sup>102</sup> For though he continued a little while in the same relation to the protector Richard, that he did to his father; yet Dr. Calamy tells us, he cannot find that he continued longer at court, than October, 58.

The copy was transcribed in the year 59. It is exceeding fair, and perfect. The spirit and language of it (the discourse) plainly evince it to be the production of that masterly hand. The writer, who took it after him, does not seem to have dropped any thing, whereby the sense is any way maimed; and has religiously copied it out, as appears from the repetitions, which were made for the relief of the hearers' memory.<sup>103</sup>

Though Mr. Howe has something to the same purpose with part of the contents of this sermon, in his treatise on Delighting in God, Part II. page 389-395, folio edition,<sup>104</sup> as one might reasonably expect; yet, though there are some of the thoughts, he has not only pursued the subject much farther, but in a very different manner: insomuch that there can be no room for saying it is publishing the same thing over again, which is an injury some eminent

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101 It is entitled in the manuscript, "A Sermon preached at Brixham the 23d. day of January, 1658; by Mr. John Howe, a faithful minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ."

102 Meaning to Torrington, in Devonshire.

103 This discourse indeed abounds with repetitions, more by far than any other the editor has seen of Mr. Howe's in manuscript; most of which be omitted in his transcript of it designed for the press, and he hopes without the least injury to the whole. The sense is entire, and delivered throughout in the author's own words.

104 There seems to be no resemblance, scarcely, in the whole sermon, to any thing in the pages here referred to; except in page 390: where the text is indeed mentioned, and briefly descanted upon, and that is all. [Vide vol. 2, p. 188, of this edition.]

authors have suffered after their death. Besides the forementioned place there can be no other, where he has any thing so near to the purpose.

That which brought our author on this side our country (for his charge lay 50 miles distant, to which he was lately returned) was his being related to the Upton family, of Lupton; which lies in the parish of Brixham, where, “the vanity of man as mortal,” took its birth.

It is very probable, that it was preached at once; and I have calculated on what day of the week, January 23, 1658-9, fell. And as D was the dominical letter for that year, the 23d. was a Friday; but if it was preached in 57-8, as the dominical letter was E, it was on a Thursday. So that as it could not be preached on a Lord’s day, it was therefore most likely preached at once.<sup>105</sup> To all which the gentleman adds the following general remark; the latter part of which, at least, is very just.

Though his style is not so smooth as some, yet it is as intelligible as any. And a person has this for his encouragement, that he is always sure to find something in Mr. Howe, that is well worth his pains.

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<sup>105</sup> It is very probable it was preached on a fast-day; either a private one or one of those public fast-days, which were frequently solemnised by authority before the restoration.

## SERMON XIII.<sup>106</sup>

Psalm ix. 17.

*The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.*

I CANNOT spend time in opening to you the connexion of these words, with those that go before. In the words themselves you have these two things more especially remarkable; to wit, the description, and the doom of wicked men. Their description you have in these words, that they are such as do forget God; and their doom is, that they shall be turned into hell. So that accordingly there are two observations that offer themselves to our view from this scripture.

FIRST, That it is the property of wicked men to forget God. And,

SECONDLY, That it shall be the portion of wicked men, who forget God, to be turned into hell. These two I intend to handle together in this order.

I. I shall shew you what we are here to understand by the wicked.

II. What by forgetting God. And then,

III. I shall evince unto you, that they are wicked persons, who do forget God. And then,

IV. That such wicked persons shall be turned into hell. And so,

V. Make use and application of the whole together.

I. I shall briefly shew you what we are to understand by these wicked, that the text speaks of. In the

1. Place, negatively, we are not to understand by the wicked here, all persons that have sin in them. There are a sort of men in the world, that will confess themselves sinners; who yet dare to acquit themselves of wickedness. Thus David speaks; "I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God." [Psal. xviii. 21.](#) Every man, that hath sin in him, is not presently a wicked person.

2. We are not to understand it neither of only gross sinners. As we are not to extend the signification of the word, so as to take in the former, so nor must we so much narrow it, as to take in only the latter. We are not to think that they are only spoken of as wicked ones, who live in gross, and profane wickedness; so as that every one may characterize and point at them as wicked persons. No, there are wicked ones that pass under the notion of honest, and good men, according to common estimation; and there is such a thing as heart-wickedness, which is hidden and concealed from the eyes of the world, so as that others cannot take notice of it.

And therefore, affirmatively, by the wicked here we must understand unregenerate persons; whoever they are, that are in a state of unregeneracy. Whether they be open and gross sinners, or secret sinners only, it is all one for that: if they be such as the work of

renovation hath not yet passed upon, they are those whom this scripture doth here intend by wicked ones.

II. In the second place we are to inquire what is meant by forgetting of God. The character, by which these wicked persons in the text are described, is, that they are such as forget God. Wherein then does this forgetting God consist? That is what we are next to consider. And in order to find out what we are to understand by it, our most direct course will be to consider, what is to be stated in opposition hereunto. And it is obvious at first sight, that it is thinking of God; as not to think of God, is to forget him. But here we must a little more particularly inquire, What is this thinking of God, to which the forgetting him must be understood to be opposed here? And, negatively,

1. We are not to understand by it a continual thinking of God; that is, always, every moment, and without ceasing. This you may easily imagine to be impossible, and I need say no more of it.

2. Yet, on the other hand, we are not to understand by it neither a thinking of God slightly and seldom. Superficial, and overly thoughts of God now and then, may well enough consist with that forgetting of God which is here spoken of.

And therefore, affirmatively, this forgetting of God stands in opposition to frequent and ordinary, serious and heart-affecting thoughts of God. That person is here spoken of as a wicked man that forgets God, who does not think of him frequently and with affection; with fear, and delight, and those affections that are suitable to serious thoughts of God. "How precious (says the Psalmist) are thy thoughts unto me O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them they are more in number than the sand: when I awake I am still with thee." [Psal. cxxxix. 17, 18](#). These thoughts of God, of which the Psalmist speaks, are such as God is the object of; as plainly appears from what is added by way of antithesis, "When I awake I am still with thee." My thoughts are ever working towards thee, as soon as ever I awake. Now here is this two fold character of such thoughts; to wit, that they are precious, and they are numerous.

(1.) They are precious thoughts; such as affect a man's heart, and ravish the soul. Now in opposition to this, persons that forget God have no such thoughts of him; that is, they have no joyous, pleasant, and delightful thoughts concerning God, such as the Psalmist speaks of; who also says, "My meditation of him shall be sweet, I will be glad in the Lord." [Psal. civ. 34](#). So that it is such a forgetfulness of God, which is here spoken of, that stands in opposition to such a remembrance of him as reaches the heart, takes the soul, and turns all that is within a man towards God. And then,

(2.) They are numerous thoughts, as well as precious ones. They are not only sweet and pleasant, but they are frequent also. "If I should count them (says the Psalmist) they are more in number than the sand." Such are my thoughts of God, so frequent and numerous, and they so flow into my soul, and so often recur again and again; that if I go to count them,

I may as well attempt to count the sands on the sea-shore: how great is the sum of them! Now it is in opposition to such thoughts of God that this forgetfulness must be understood. They are forgetful of God; the wicked persons, whom the text speaks of, who have not such thoughts of God frequently recurring upon their spirits, so as to affect and ravish them, as you heard before. And thus you see what this forgetfulness of God is, which the Psalmist speaks of. The next thing that is now to be done is,

III. To shew you the connexion between these two things, which have been opened to you; or to evince, that those who have no such thoughts of God, as these which we speak of, are wicked persons. So you see the text plainly represents the matter; “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” Why, to forget God, and to be a wicked person, is all one. And these two things will abundantly evince the truth of this assertion: namely, that this forgetfulness of God excludes the prime and main essentials of religion; and also includes in it the highest and most heinous pieces of wickedness and therefore must needs denominate the subject, a wicked person.

1. Forgetfulness of God excludes the chief and main essentials of all religion. I shall instance in a few which you will easily discern, at first sight, a forgetfulness of God must necessarily exclude, As,

(I.) It excludes the esteem and love of God, as our highest happiness, and chief good. It is a plain case, that this is a most essential part of religion; and you will easily acknowledge, that he must needs be a wicked man with a witness that doth not esteem God, nor love him as his chief good. To esteem God as our highest happiness is to take him for our God; and the man that doth not this, disowns God as none of his. For when you say, “God is our God, and we are his people,” what do you mean by it? Do you mean only the name of God, without any relation to him as your chief and highest good? is that all? Why, if there be any thing beyond a bare name, where or what is it? You must say it is this; God is my portion, happiness and delight; he it is whom I esteem, and love, beyond all the things of this world.” Nothing else can be a taking, or owning God to be your God. This is the very sum of all that God doth require from any people that would be related to him and own him for their God. “And now Israel what doth the Lord thy God require of thee? but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” [Deut. x. 12](#). “Otherwise,” as if he had said, you disown all relation to me. “If it be not thus, you are never to reckon me as your God. If your hearts and souls and strength do not run out in love to me, you are none of mine, and I am none of yours.” And God is again on the same terms with his people. “Hear O my people, and I will testify against thee; O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me: there shall no strange god be in thee, neither shalt thou worship any strange god. I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt.” [Psal. lxxxi. 8, 9, 10](#). The plain tenour of this scripture is this. “If you will have





any thing at all to do with me, if you pretend any obedience or affection to me, you must take me alone to be your God; you must not entertain any strange god; there must be no god that must be higher in your thoughts than I, or adored and loved more than myself. If it be not so, I there are such among you as will not thus hearken to me, I have nothing to do with you.” Thus it is evident, that it must needs be an essential thing in religion for a man to love, and esteem God above all things; he must esteem him as his highest, chiefest, and most excellent good: for it is such a valuing of God that can alone denominate a man religious.

And now do but a little consider. Do you think it possible for such an estimation or love of God, as the highest and chiefest good, to consist with a forgetting of God? Can a man forget God from day to day, in the sense of the text, and yet esteem and love this God as his highest happiness, and chief good? Is this possible? Can you apprehend it to be possible, that a man should place the top of his felicity in God; and love God above all things else in the world; and yet pass from day to day and never think of him with delight and pleasure? Is this, think you, consistent with the esteem of God, as your chief good? You cannot be so vain as to think so. That man would be hissed at as a ridiculous person, that will say; “What I love above all things in the world, I never use to think of. I love God better than any thing, but he hath no place in my thoughts; I never think of him; I can pass on from day to day, and never have a serious thought of him.” Is this possible? You see what the love of God in the soul doth carry in it, namely a remembrance of him, in the twenty-sixth chapter of Isaiah. (ver. 8.) “The desire of our soul is unto thee, and to the remembrance of thy name.” That person would be scorned as a most absurd wretch, that would ever offer to pretend such a thing unto God, as to say, “Lord I desire to love thee above all things in the world, and yet I never think of thee; it is very seldom that thou hast any place at all in my thoughts.” This is the most absurd, self-conceited speech that can be imagined. None, that have any wit at all, but know that if they have any understanding of God, their souls do earnestly and vehemently flow forth in love and desires to God. Our Lord says, “Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven—for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” [Matth. vi. 20, 21](#). Lay up your treasure in heaven, that is, in God; let God be your treasure. You know what a man counts his treasure: why it is that, which is most dear and precious to him; most valued by him, and loved above all things else. A man will count nothing his treasure, but what he holds in great esteem. Let your treasure then, says Christ, be in heaven: that is, let God who is in heaven, who there makes known his glorious presence, that is enjoyed by saints and angels, and which we expect to enjoy; let him be your treasure. And where our treasure is, there will our hearts be. What you esteem and love beyond all things, your hearts will be continually working to, and your spirits flow that way. It is a mere absurd vanity to talk of having a treasure in God, if a man’s heart be not with him. As she said to Samson, “How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not with me.” [Judg. xvi. 15](#). So the soul is apt

351

352

to say it loves God, and counts him its treasure, and highest happiness, when, alas! the heart is not with him. We find that a light esteeming of God, is the same thing with for getting him, and those expressions are used as synonymous by Moses. "Jeshurun forsook God that made him, and he lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation!" And then presently it follows, "Of the rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee." [Deut. xxxii. 15, 18](#). Thus to make a light account of God is the same thing, as to forget him; and therefore that person has never yet set one foot towards religion, who hath not yet made God his chief happiness, the only joy and delight of his soul. Therefore this is one thing, that forgetfulness of God doth exclude the estimation and love of God, as our portion and chief good.

(2.) Forgetfulness of God excludes dependance on God as our strength, and the life and stay of our souls; which is also a most essential piece of religion. That man knows nothing at all practically in matters of religion, that does not live in a continual dependance upon God as the life, and strength, and support of the soul. They are spoken of as persons who can not possibly obtain salvation, while in their present state, who are not yet come to that believing in God, which carries the whole heart to acquiesce, and rest and centre in God. "Who soever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed?" [Rom. x. 13, 14](#). Calling upon God is a thing essentially necessary unto salvation, and believing in him is indispensably necessary unto calling upon him. It is put for the whole worship of God: and it is impossible for a soul ever thus to call upon God; that is, to worship him, to live subject to him, and be devoted and given up to him, who doth not believe in him. And this believing in God respects him as the stay, and strength of a man's soul. It plainly implies a sensibleness of its being utterly impossible that I should subsist or live without God; and supposes a constant reliance upon him as my God, who is my very life and strength. And therefore you find how those, who do not so, are derided by the Psalmist. "The righteous shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him: Lo! this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. But I am like a green olive-tree, in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever." [Psal. lii. 6, 7, 8](#). The soul that is truly religious is by trust so planted into the very mercy of God, as I may speak; that there it is rooted, and sprouts as a tree doth, in the soul that bears it. But they are outcasts, and a company of profane irreligious wretches, that do not thus trust in God, and make him the stay, and support of their souls. "Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength!" It is remarkable to see in how ludicrous a way such persons are spoken of, as if they were to be hissed out of the creation. "Lo, there is a man that lives without God! a person not fit to be numbered among men! Away with him as a most ridiculous wretch, who thinks to live without staying upon God!"



Trust in God then is essential to religion. And do you think that this can possibly consist with forgetting of God? Can a man trust in God, as the stay and support of his life, of whom he is unmindful? who can pass one day after another, and never vouchsafe him a serious thought? Trust in God is a continual thing. I do not mean that it is to be exercised without intermission, but that it is an habitual dependance. And therefore it is said, "The just shall live by faith." [Heb. x. 38](#). We live by breathing, and it will not serve our turn to breathe to-day, and live by that breath many days hereafter. No, that which we live by is a continual thing. And thus the just shall live by a continual reliance and dependance on God; which implies a mindfulness of him. When the Psalmist speaks of that trust, which he reposed in God, he speaks of it in this language; "I have set the Lord always before me, because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved." [Psal. xvi. 8](#). Here was a continual minding of God. What is it to have God always before us, but to have him the prime, and the principal object of our thoughts? so as that there is nothing, on which our eye doth so much fix, as it doth on God. And this stands with that conjunction, or that dependance which the soul hath on God. So again: "Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord, for he shall pluck my feet out of the net." [xxv. 15](#). That is, My reliance is upon God; mine eye is continually towards him, and I have him ever in my thoughts. It is he in whom I live, and from whom I have all my expectation. Thus it is impossible, that a man should be in this sense a religious person who is forgetful of God; since he who thinks not upon him, cannot be supposed to depend upon him as the life and strength of his soul.

(3.) Forgetfulness of God excludes also the fear of God; and that awful subjection unto his laws and commands, as our rule, wherein the soul should continually live: and this is too an essential part of religion, as is well known to all that understand any thing of religion. Can he ever be said to be a religious man, that doth not live in the fear of God? Why, it is so essential a piece of religion, that the Scripture doth often call all religion by that very thing, the fear of God. And hence it is also, that you find all wickedness summed up in this very expression; "There is no fear of God before their eyes." [Rom. iii. 18](#). The apostle had been describing a wicked man at large, out of some of the psalms, ([xiv. liii.](#), &c.) and this is that which he gathers up as the whole of that wickedness he had been pointing out; to wit, there is no fear of God before their eyes. They are wicked persons with a witness that do not fear God, that live without having any fear of God before their eyes. And must not forgetfulness of God necessarily exclude the fear of God? What! Can any man be said to fear him, whom he thinks not of? to fear God when he minds him not, when he hath him not in all his thoughts? Do but observe the connexion between this passage and the eleventh verse of the same chapter, quoted out of the psalms. "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." It follows "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Indeed it is impossible it should; if they have no thoughts of God, if their minds and understandings be not bent towards him, it is impossible they should fear him. What! fear an unthought-of



God? a God that a man does not think of, from day to day? why, it is an absurd thing ever to be imagined. And therefore this is a further thing that the forgetfulness of God excludes; namely, that fear of God, and that reverential subjection, that we owe to his laws and commands, as the rule of our lives. And then again,

(4.) It excludes the intention of the honour and glory of God, as our end. That man hath no more religion in him, than there is in a beast; who doth not in the ordinary course of his life design, and aim at the glory of God, as the supreme and ultimate end of his actions. You know it is that, which is required and called for from us in every thing we do. "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." 1. Cor. x. 31. This is a truth obvious to the understanding of every one, that every person who is religious, intends and designs the honour and glory of the great God, as the ultimate and chief end of the ordinary actions of his life. So as if a man should come and ask him, "For what is it that you are going about this business, and those affairs; and what end have you in what you do?" he will say, "That I may honour and glorify God in so doing." This is religion. So then it is not enough to bespeak a man religious, to do things that are in their own nature honest and just, and not liable to exception; but to do them designedly for the honour and glory of the great God, as his end. Now. do but consider. Can a man do so, and not think of God? Can it ever be rationally said of any one of you, that you live from day to day in the service of the great God, and to the honour and glory of his great name, as the chief and principal thing you design in your whole life; when you do not, from day to day, think of God? do not from morning to night take up one serious thought of God? Why, your own hearts will tell you it is utterly impossible: and a man is nothing in religion, who does not come up to this; who does not make the glory of God the ultimate end of his affairs, and the actions of his life.

Thus you see that forgetfulness of God excludes the principal, and essential parts of religion. It implies, that a man doth neither esteem, nor value, the all-sufficiency and holiness of God, as his happiness and portion; nor doth he trust in the power and omnipotence of God, as his strength and support; nor doth he fear him, nor live in subjection to his laws and commands, as his rule; nor doth he aim at the glory of God, as his end: therefore every one who thus forgets God, must certainly be a wicked person.

2. Consider also what is included in this forgetfulness of God. As it excludes the main essentials of religion, why so truly it does include the most horrid and heinous pieces of wickedness that you can think of. I shall instance, very briefly, in a few.

(1.) It includes worldliness and earthly-mindedness. The soul, though forgetful of God, is not idle. If God be not the object of a man's thoughts and affections, something else is. They do not want an object. They find something else to employ themselves about, when they thus forget God and shut him out of their thoughts. For much is evidently implied in this scripture: "Many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping; that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their



belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” Observe those very persons who are here spoken of as minding earthly things, are also said to be such as have chosen to themselves another god. Their god is their belly. This we are not to understand strictly, but in a large sense; to wit, their sensual appetite. Their belly is their god; and accordingly they mind earthly things, and their hearts are quite taken off from God. And do not think this is a light piece of wickedness, to live a whole life’s time in this manner; especially under the gospel, and the profession of the Christian name. The apostle as it were weeps over it. It is a thing, saith he, that I cannot think of without passion and tears; to see a company of wretches that call themselves christians, and profess themselves to be so, who yet are the enemies of the cross of Christ: they are apparently such, for they mind earthly things. This then is one thing that forgetfulness of God includes, namely, earthly-mindedness; which is the most horrid wickedness you can think of, for it stands in most direct opposition to God: and therefore covetousness is called idolatry, or a taking another god. And then again,

(2.) It includes enmity against God. It is a plain case: if men from day to day forget God, it is because they hate him, and cannot endure the thoughts of him. It is expressly spoken of some, that “they liked not to retain God in their knowledge.” [Rom. i. 28](#). What is it to retain God in our knowledge, but to have frequent actual thoughts about him? such as I have already spoken of, numerous and affecting thoughts. This is to retain God in our knowledge. But can they be said to do so, who do not think of God i who have no actual thoughts of God, from day to day? Arid why is this? Because they do not like them. The thoughts of God are grating, grievous, and annoying to their spirits; and therefore it is they do not think of him, because they do not love to think of him. This must needs be so, especially considering the case of such persons under the gospel. God is ever before their eyes, they cannot look any way but they must see God shining upon them. He is shining upon them in his creatures, in his providences, but especially in the ordinances of the gospel of his Son; and yet these persons will not now mind God, nor take notice of him. What is the reason of it? They do not, because they will not: or because their hearts cannot bear it. “Oh! take away God from my thoughts! take him away from my soul! It is a burden, a pressure on my spirit! I cannot bear the thoughts of God.” Thus says the apostle; “They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally-minded is death, but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace. The carnal mind is enmity against God.” [Rom. viii. 5, 6, 7](#). Do but observe here: he tells us that they who are after the flesh, or carnally-minded, will not mind any of the things of the Spirit of God; and that it is to be resolved into this, namely, that a carnal mind is enmity against God. And it is a plain case that such a one is an enemy to him. Therefore it is, that he minds the things of the earth and of flesh; and will not look after God, nor spend any thoughts about him. No, he will rather choose to live upon dirt, and feed upon trash; and

356

357

to spend thoughts and affections, upon things that are as vile as earth and dung. And if such persons would but consult their hearts they would find it so. For, alas! when you are alone, and retired, have nothing else to do but to think of God (as upon such a day as this especially, when you have no other business but to think upon him<sup>107</sup>) pray consider, Which way do your thoughts run? can you say, it is God that is the object of your thoughts and affections? that upon such a day as this, they are from morning to night taken up about nothing else but God? You have nothing else to do but to think of God; and if your thoughts decline, and turn aside after covetousness and the things of this world, what is this but a plain enmity against him? And this is what the hearts of men say; they rather choose the most despicable, base objects to spend, their thoughts upon, than about God. And is it, think you, a light piece of wickedness for a man to have such an enmity in his heart against God? And then again,

(3.) In the third place, forgetfulness of God includes in it plainly a contempt of him; or implies that we have a base, low, dishonourable esteem of God. It is said (in the psalm next to that in which is my text) of the wicked man, that “God is not in all his thoughts.” [Psal. x. 4](#). The wicked wretch passes from day to day, and never affords God a serious thought nor allows him a place there. And what is the reason of it? Why the Psalmist puts it plainly upon an open manifest contempt of God. “Wherefore (saith he) doth the wicked contemn God?” [Ver. 13](#). He speaks, as indeed the interrogation imports, with a kind of passion. Oh! wherefore is it? what heart can think of a reason, why any man should contemn God? In short, their taking low base things into their thoughts while they shut out God, plainly proceeds from a contempt of him, and because they despise him in their own hearts. And,

(4.) To add no more, forgetfulness of God implies atheism; which involves in it all wickedness, as being the root and bottom of all. Persons who forget God, plainly deny in their own hearts, that there is such a one; who ought to be the highest supreme object of their thoughts and affections. This evidently appears from the connexion of the beginning of the [fourteenth psalm](#), with the following verses. “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works. The Lord looked down from heaven, upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand and seek God.” And the report you have is this: “They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one.” There is not a person to be found among all these wretches that understands, or seeks after God; or hath any serious thoughts or consideration about him. And what is the reason of all this? Why, like fools as they are, they have said in their hearts, that there is no God: and hence it is that their minds and understandings have quite forgotten, and given over to look towards him; whereas “he that comes



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107 This passage makes it very probable, that this sermon was preached on one of those Fast-days, which were frequently solemnized before the restoration, by public authority.

to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” [Heb. xi. 6](#). They are corrupted within themselves, and then surmise that there is no such Being to whom they are accountable; and therefore they live securely, neglecting and forgetting him, from day to day, through their whole life. There is also a like connexion in the [fiftieth psalm](#), towards the latter end. “These things hast thou done (having summed up a great many kinds of wickedness before in the preceding verses) and I kept silence. Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one, as thyself; but I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God!” To deny any of God’s essential attributes, is to take away his being. To say, that he is not so holy, as to hate sin; that he is not so just, as to revenge and punish sinners; is to say, that he is not.

Well! this you see is connected with forgetting of God. But this God whom you slight, and make so little reckoning of; this God, I say, will reprove you. And I pray, consider ye that forget God, who have all this while looked upon him, as if he was like the idols of this world, that the time is coming when he will set your sins in order before your faces.

And thus I have evinced to you this truth, that they are wicked persons who forget God; which is evidenced thus: to wit, forgetfulness of God excludes all religion, and also includes all wickedness; and what would you have more? It must needs then denominate such a person, who lives in the guilt of it, a wicked person with a witness; since it grasps within its compass all wickedness and shuts out all religion.<sup>108</sup>

IV. The fourth thing propounded to be spoken to, was this; namely, That these wicked persons, who thus live in a forgetfulness of God, must be turned into hell. I shall touch briefly upon it, and so close with a few words of application. As it is the property of the wicked man to forget God, so it must be his portion to be turned, into hell. The eviction of this will be easily evident from considering these three things only—it is most consonant to the justice of God that thus it should be—it is most agreeable to his law: and—it is most serviceable to his honour and glory.

1. The justice of God doth require this; that those persons, who live in this world forgetful of God, should at last be turned into hell. If God be just he must deal in this manner with a company of rebels; who never take notice of him all their days, and shut him out of their hearts and thoughts. What! Can the highest God, the eternal Majesty suffer such an affront as this from base dirt and earth, and never take vengeance? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? ([Rom. iii. 5.](#)) as the apostle speaks in this case. No, undoubtedly. But I cannot stand now to insist on particulars.

2. It is agreeable to his law that God should thus punish the wicked. It is one and the self-same law that is a rule of duty to us, and which by the divine appointment is a rule of

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108 If any should find this discourse to be too long to be read at once, particularly in families, here is a proper resting-place.

judgment unto him. And this righteous law hath determined, that they who thus sin, must be thus punished. For this we need go no further than the text itself. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." The law of God hath expressly provided in this case; so that if any man should now think to put in his exception against this determination of God, alas! it must be said to him: "Vain wretch, it is now too late! This law was made long ago; before thou wert born, or heard of in the world, and ever since the world was. And dost thou think a law shall be repealed in a way of favour to a most rebellious wretch, which the sovereign eternal God had established before the ages of the world; that it might be a fundamental and invariable rule of God's proceedings even to the end of it? Alas! it cannot be." God hath decreed many thousand years ago this law; that they who do forget him, shall be turned into hell without mercy. And if this be their continual state and frame without a change, it must needs be thus with them. There is no alteration in this case; for "God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent, (heathen Balaam knew so much of God as that came to) hath he said and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" [Numb. xxiii. 19.](#)

3. And again in the third place, it is most serviceable to his glory and honour, that thus it should be; I mean, that those who persist, and go on to the last in a forgetfulness of God, should be turned into hell. For what glory hath he otherwise of them? "The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." [Prov. xvi. 4.](#) He will punish them in the day of judgment, because they are the most perverse creatures that ever came out of his hands. He hath made them for the day of wrath, as the wise man speaks and there is no other way for the Lord to have his honour and glory of those persons.<sup>109</sup> See to this

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109 The learned author seems, almost every where, to quote texts of Scripture with great propriety, and is generally very happy and judicious in his descants upon them; of which all his posthumous discourses (as well as those published by himself) are an abundant testimony: notwithstanding the liberty he allowed himself, and the familiar freedom with which he delivered them, without written notes. But the editor is apprehensive, that some may look upon the quotation of this passage from Solomon, as an exception. It must be acknowledged, that these words have often been made use of in favour of a very discouraging doctrine: which, above all others tends to enervate the force of all the motives and arguments, that can be made use of, to engage persons to attend to the exhortations to a holy and religious life. And because some may imagine the author from his comment on the passage, understood it in the sense here alluded to; which is evidently contrary to the general strain, and tenour of his sentiments, in all his writings; it may not be improper to endeavour to set it in its true point of light, and to shew in what sense the author may be understood. It is very true, the glory of God's justice requires (as the author had observed) that wicked men be punished. For to suppose that God will make those happy, who live in a criminal forgetfulness of him, is a kind of outraging all his perfections: and no more to be imagined than that he will make an innocent being, for instance an angel that never fell, eternally miserable out of mere sovereignty and pleasure. Neither reason, nor revelation represent the Almighty as so terrible to the innocent, or so easy to the guilty. But to assert that wicked men, persisting in forgetfulness of God and a course of sin, will



purpose what is spoken in the words immediately before the text; “The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth.” and then it follows, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” And why must this be? Because God will never else be known by them. Here they live so many years in the world, and God shows himself by his creatures, by his providences, and by his ordinances; and they will take no notice of him: they spend away their days, and allow God none of their thoughts. “I cannot be regarded by these creatures (saith God) they do not regard, nor take notice of me. Well! I shall take my leave of them. When they come to be turned into hell, and to fall under the pressures of everlasting wrath and misery, then they will not forget God; then they will know the God, they never knew before; then they will remember him, though now they never think of him. Let them now try (saith God) whether they will forget me, now that I have them under my wrath and vengeance. While they are in this world, they banish me out of their hearts, and thoughts: I cannot get one spare thought from them from one day to another; but when they come to feel me, and the power of my anger, they will then know that, which they would never know before.” Thus you see, that God’s justice, his law, and his glory require, that those wicked persons who forget God should be turned into hell.

V. I shall close all with some few words of application,

1. We may hence learn, that religion consisting of mere externals will never save any man. A person may be a wicked man, and liable to be turned into hell, notwithstanding any religion that lies in mere outside shew. You see this plainly, that men are liable to be turned into hell for their forgetfulness of God. Why, a man may forget God, and yet live tunder ordinances, and under the gospel. A man may forget God, and yet may be a moral man; and just and righteous in his dealings among men. And therefore, it is nothing that lies in mere externals, that will either denominate a man religious, or that will save him from perishing. A man may go to the utmost extent of all outside religion, and yet forget God; be wicked all the while, and so turned into hell at last. And therefore, it is a vanity for men to deceive themselves into a hope, that all is well with them; and that all shall go well with them at last,

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be punished in the day of wrath; is to assert a very great and awful truth, and very probably is all that the author meant by this passage. But however, as the learned bishop Patrick observes, the sense of the place seems to be this; that God makes use of wicked men, as well as all things else, to answer the ends of his providence in this world. As for instance; by the ambition of tyrants he inflicts those calamities, which he designs upon a wicked nation or people. But the sense after all needs not to be so confined. God has made all things for himself; or, as the words may be rendered, he has made all things to correspond, or answer to each, other: yea even the wicked for the day of evil. That is, not only to be his scourge or instrument of bringing calamities upon others in this life, but has suited and proportioned the punishment of evil men to their deserts; or has settled the connexion between vice, and misery in the world to come: just as he has fixed the relation of virtue, to future happiness; or, as it is elegantly expressed, made righteousness and peace to kiss each other.

because they are professors, and enjoy gospel privileges; or that because no man can challenge them with fraud, injury, or wrong done to their neighbours. It is a vain thing for them to think that therefore they are safe, and in no danger. They are all the while forgetters of God, and that is enough to bespeak them wicked; let them in other respects, be what they will. And therefore you are to know, that it is not taking up a profession, or this and that form of religion, that will entitle a soul to glory and salvation at last; but it must be the having of such a work done upon the heart, as will turn the stream of a man's soul towards God, and carry his thoughts and affections after him. It is this or nothing, that must make you Christians, and save you from hell.

It is but too common a vanity in these days, wherein we live, for men of carnal hearts and corrupt minds; that could never endure to be at the pains and expence to wait upon God in the way of his ordinances, in order to have their hearts thus changed and turned unto God: it is, I say, a common vanity with such persons to think that all their business, in order to secure themselves and provide for their own safety and welfare, is to take up a certain form of worshipping and serving God. Alas! a man may perish, and go to hell, whatever form he is of, if he has a carnal heart; a heart that doth not delight in God: this will be sufficient to damn a man at last, let him take what course, or be of what religion he will. And it is a plain case, it speaks an unsound, shifting heart, which cannot endure that such a work as this should be done, but slinks away from it. Such are pinching and galling ways; and therefore they seek for ease and rest, some other way, and for a cheaper method of getting to heaven; as if going into such a party would save a man. Why, alas! it will not do it. It must be a change wrought upon the heart and soul, that will take it off from this world, and pitch it upon God; if we would have an interest in him, or live in his blessedness another day. There are those, who are like the persons saint Paul speaks of to Timothy. "The time (says he) will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." [2 Tim. iv. 3, 4](#). Thus it is with many wretched souls in the ways of God: while they have been walking in them, it may be they have been barren and unfruitful, through their carnal hearts, which cannot endure to have any thing done to the purpose; therefore they desire to find an easier way than this. They run to other teachers, having itching ears; and think of going to heaven upon other terms, by only taking up other forms, and changing the way of their religion. This speaks a heart to be unsound; as it is a sign of an unsound body, that can rest itself in no posture, but lies tumbling and tossing in the bed. It hath rest no where; when it hath rolled one way to another, it must come back to the same pitch and posture, it was in before. Why, the man is not well! alas! the fault is not in the bed, but the body; it is because the body is not well, but unsound and unhealthy, that it cannot rest. And so men under the ordinances of the gospel dispensation cannot find rest to themselves. They cannot indeed find fault with them; but they have



fleshly carnal hearts, that cannot endure any thing should be done to change, and turn them unto God; and therefore they seek out new ways, that they may get to heaven in a cheaper, and easier manner. And if such souls have a mind to go in those ways, that were never known or heard of before, for so many years, they will not find what they seek. For, alas! a carnal heart will carry its own pest, and trouble about it, wherever it goes: and they will be forced either to say at last, the old way of real religion is best; or else they will cast off all religion, and there will be the end, as experience in this case doth abundantly witness.

2. As this plainly instructs us, that religion, lying in externals only, will never save a man; so it informs us also, that wickedness, lying in the heart and thoughts, will abundantly suffice to damn a man. And this is no strange doctrine; at least it should not seem to any that have ever read the Bible, and know what belongs to true religion. Do not you know, that the heart and the thoughts are the prime and principal spring of that wickedness that ruins souls and turns them into hell for ever? “Out of the heart (says Christ) proceed evil thoughts; ([Matth. xv. 19.](#)) and these speak a man defiled, make him wicked, and turn him into hell at last.” Observe also this scripture: “O Jerusalem wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?” [Jerem. iv. 14.](#) Wickedness and vain thoughts here are parallel expressions, which expound one another. That wickedness, of which the prophet speaks, consists in the vanity of the thoughts: and those are a man’s vainest and most wicked thoughts, that run beside God; and have not him for their object, nor terminate upon him. Therefore wash thine heart from this wickedness, for certainly else there will be no salvation for thee. Alas! thou art a damned man, a lost creature, if thine heart be not washed from this wickedness of the thoughts. “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” [Acts viii. 22.](#) In short, to exclude God, out of our thoughts, and not to let him have a place there; not to mind, nor think upon God; is the greatest wickedness of the thoughts that can be. And therefore, though you cannot say of such a one, he will be drunk; or he will swear, cozen, or oppress; yet if you can say he will forget God, or that he lives all his days, never minding nor thinking upon God; you say enough to speak him under wrath, and to turn him into hell without remedy.

3. If they are wicked persons, who do not think of God, and shall for that reason be turned into hell, then all thoughts are not free; that is, men are not at liberty, as they vainly imagine to dispose of their thoughts as they will. Alas! the case is quite otherwise than what many poor wretches imagine. They go up and down in the world, never minding God from day to day, and they think this is no sin; saying, “Why, what is this? It is but the disposing my thoughts; and surely I may do what I will with my thoughts. What matter is it what be comes of them?” But saith God; “What is there else that I value more, or set a greater price upon, than the thoughts and affections of the soul? I must have them or nothing. So, be what thou wilt in profession and pretence; yet if I be not in thy thoughts, if I be forgotten



by thee, I will look upon thee as a wicked person, as one that shall be turned into hell.” Truly, if the case be so, you must learn to correct that foolish imagination, that your thoughts are free; or that you may use them as you please: and know, that if men will give him no place there, this is a desperate, horrid, wickedness, that the great God will be avenged upon one day.

4. Since the case is thus, that wicked men, and all those who forget God, shall be turned into hell; we may learn hence, that there are but few that shall be saved. Do but weigh the case seriously, and consider with yourselves, how few there are that so live, or in the face of whose conversations it appears, that their hearts are set upon God! whose minds are taken up about him, walking up and down the world from morning to night, rejoicing and delighting themselves in God! Oh, how few such there are; and consequently how few that are not wicked, and shall not be turned into hell at last! My friends, God doth not dally with us in such scriptures as these. They are plain words which are here spoken, and we may turn off the edge of them from rending and cutting our hearts if we will; but one day we shall hear what we are told, and read also, that, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” We may therefore easily learn from hence, that going to heaven is not so common a thing as most men take it to be. Alas! it is not, if the word of God be true. It will be found, that going to hell will be much more ordinary among men that live under the gospel, than going to heaven. For it is said, they shall be turned into hell that forget God. Now, are not these plain words? Do they not evince and demonstrate that a great part (alas! the greatest part) are hurrying into hell apace? And is it not sad and miserable to think, that poor souls should thus spend all their life-time, under a gospel of grace? and that so much light and love should shine from heaven in vain? It should not be thought of, without pain and agony, that men should thus perish; that there should be so few saved from hell and destruction, notwithstanding they are under a gospel of light and salvation! The truth I am upon is intimated in part of the message to the church of Sardis. “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy.” [Rev. iii. 4](#). Alas! how few are there, how few amongst a whole assembly and congregation of people that keep themselves from pollution through lusts? How few names are there to be found in an assembly, who come under the character of persons that have not defiled their garments? or, of those who have numerous thoughts of God from day to day? How few are there, that do not come under the character in the text, of being forgetters of God; and so of such as must be turned into hell? It concerns us all to be serious in thinking upon this matter. God hath been serious in revealing this truth to us; and his Spirit is poured out for the confirming, establishing, and pressing it upon your hearts and spirits, who ever you are; and therefore think well of it, and consider seriously how few good men there are, who shall finally be saved.



5. You may hence learn also, that God hath an inspection into, and a full knowledge of, the hearts and thoughts of men. This is evident, for you see he makes his judgment upon what lies within the inward man; and his judgment at last will proceed upon the same ground. "I must have those turned into hell (saith the Almighty) who never think of, nor remember their God: they must undergo my wrath that have thus forgotten me." Now if God's judgments must be thus determined upon what is in the heart of man, then he knows your hearts; and also what you do with your thoughts from day to day. His eye is upon your souls and spirits; and sees all the day long which way your affections lie, and which way they are carried: and it is by this, he must guide his judgment at the last day. Thus says the Psalmist; "He that planteth the ear shall not he hear? He that formed the eye shall not he see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity." [Psal. xciv. 9, 10, 11](#). He knows well all the vanity of your spirits, though you may not observe it. His eyes are observing us all the day long, especially on such a day as this; and according to the observation he makes, he must judge us at the last day. And therefore he must be supposed to have a full, and perfect understanding of all things; so as to be able in that day to lay out before a man the wickedness of his whole life; to spread before him the vain and wicked, the sensual and earthly thoughts, which he was perpetually exercised in; and of which his carnal heart was the continual tomb. And this cannot be a more difficult than it is a necessary thing to him, who must search the hearts, and try the reins, that he may judge accordingly at the last day. And then,

6. And lastly, we may learn hence, that it is not an impossible nor difficult thing for wicked men to know themselves to be such; and to make a judgment of their own estates Godward. For you see, they have a plain rule to judge by; namely, this truth: He that forgets God is a wicked man; and he is a wicked man that thus forgets God: and he that forgets God must be turned into hell, I pray now do but consider, and think with yourselves. Is it so difficult or impossible for a man to know, what is the ordinary course of his own thoughts? You may easily know if you will, at least the generality of you may know, what the current of your thoughts is; and so far make a judgment of your estate accordingly. This we must needs acknowledge. For those men who are carnal and earthly, their hearts tell them they have not a thought of God, from day to day, from week to week, from year to year. Such persons cannot be so brutish and absurd, but they may know it, if they will, especially if they will take God's word. If not, let them see whether they can have any surer rule that cannot deceive. But if they will take God's word, they cannot but see that they are those persons who are wicked, as they are forgetful of God: and upon that account must be turned into hell at last. My friends! if we do not study wilfully to ruin ourselves, is it so hard a matter for a man, a reasonable man, to sit down at night and consider, "Whither have my thoughts been this day? Who hath had my thoughts most? What have I taken most pleasure in this

366

367

day? Is it in God? hath he been so delightful and so pleasant, and the remembrance of him in my heart and soul, as the pleasures and comforts of this life have been to me? Have I taken so much delight to-day in the law of God, as I have in my friends, my riches, and my relations? And have I had that fear of God in my heart, lest I should sin against him, as I have had about my business and affairs, lest they should miscarry?" Is it impossible, I say, for a reasonable man thus to consider, from day to day, whither hath been the course of his heart and thoughts? And if he find it is thus with him; that he lives without having a thought of God, that may stay his heart, and ravish his soul; how obvious then is it, that he is a wicked wretch! that the wrath of God pursues him! and that he must be turned into hell, without remedy, if this continues to be the state and condition of his soul! Consider this, and give me leave to close up all, with one word of counsel and advice, to such persons as these: and may it be acceptable to your hearts!

(1.) Own your state and condition. If the case be thus, as you see it is, that they are wicked persons who forget God, and that such shall be turned into hell; why, look into your own hearts, and see whether they are not forgetful of God. And when you find that it is thus with you, let your judgment pass upon your souls and say; "My wretched and undone soul! thou art that soul whom this law condemns; whom this judgment convinceth as guilty of this wickedness against God, and liable to his vengeance upon this account!" Therefore I say own your estate. It is no difficult thing for you to know it. Say then, "I am the person whom the word of God condemns: I am under the curse as a person that has forgotten God, and must be turned into hell upon this account, if it thus continue with me." But this is not all. I would not leave a soul in this case miserably perishing, and despairing of all possibility of being saved; but however know that you cannot be saved while it is thus with you, and while your hearts are thus framed and turned from God. Therefore,

(2.) Labour forthwith to have the course and stream of your spirits turned towards God: otherwise, all your hopes of being saved are quite taken away. There is no possibility of your salvation, till your carnal earthly hearts be changed. Consider and believe it, there are but these two things; either a change of heart, or ruin. And therefore labour, I say, to have the course of your thoughts turned about, and directed forthwith towards God, without any more delay.

And in order to this, you must in the first place endeavour to get a right and distinct knowledge of God; otherwise you can never think rightly of him. Study his word; labour to know what is there discovered of his justice, righteousness, holiness, and power; of his goodness, and his love. Take in the whole compass of the discovery of God, to make up the object of your thoughts; otherwise you do nothing; your thoughts will pitch upon some other thing, besides God. If you take in but part of the attributes of God, that is not God. It will be some idle fancy that you take in, and not God, if your thoughts are not so compre-



hensive as to take in the whole discovery of God in those several attributes, by which he makes himself known.

And then in the next place you must labour to have a work of sanctification, and regeneration, wrought upon your own hearts. As there must be a right stating of the object, so there must be a right framing of the subject too; otherwise it will be to no purpose. If there be not a change wrought in the very inward of your souls, so as that your hearts be turned towards God; to love, and delight in him, with all your soul, and strength; alas! your thoughts of God will not be voluntary, but forced: they will never be free, pleasant, and delightful. And therefore you must often go to God, and cry to him, and say; “Lord, I see my thoughts run from thee! I cannot think of God at any time with pleasantness. Sanctify this heart! turn it to thyself! else I am lost, and shall be turned into hell.” Cry thus unto God mightily, and incessantly, till you find such a work done upon your souls; for that is the only thing that will procure a freedom, and facility of thoughts, towards God: those holy, pleasant and delightful thoughts of which a sanctified heart will be a continual spring and fountain.

And to press all this, I will deal plainly with you. If the case be thus; if your hearts are not turned, and changed, that you may have such thoughts of God as we have been speaking of, there is no avoiding the misery threatened in the text; but there must of necessity be an expectation shortly of being turned into hell. That must certainly be the portion of those persons that forget God. And is that a thing easy and tolerable to your thoughts? Ts it easy and tolerable to you to think of being sent into that place of torment, without remedy, and without hope? merely upon this account, because you would needs live without God in the world; and would never have your hearts brought towards him? Many deceive themselves with the opinion of a tolerable hell; and therefore, such a consideration hath no force upon their spirits in the least. But think upon it a little, think what hell is! Why, it is that place of torment, that God himself hath ordained for the punishment of wickedness and transgression against him. He himself is the Author of that state, and of that torment that doth belong unto it. It proceeds from almighty power, omnipotent wrath and justice. And is that, think you, a tolerable thing? That “Tophet (the hell which the text speaks of) is ordained of old—the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone doth kindle it.” [Isai. xxx. 33](#). Is this, think you then, a slight matter, for a man thus to hurry and throw away his soul? thus to suffer himself to run into this hell and destruction, and merely because he would live without God; slight, despise, and turn God out of his heart and soul, while he is here in the world? Hell is appointed and prepared by God, in order to that just revenge that he must take; and will take upon all those wicked transgressors, that have their hearts thus hardened, and shut up against him. Alas! that is a dreadful thing to think of. Revenge! the revenge of a God! that the eternal and almighty God should design such a thing, as the avenging of himself in such a way upon wicked men! O what heart, that is not made of stone or a rock, can choose but tremble? To think, “I shall shortly be subject unto



the wrath of God, because I have forgotten him, and have lived without him in the world; unless my heart be wrought upon, and turned to him as the God of my life;" how dreadful is this! Let me then recommend to you, in the close, that one scripture, partly touched on before, which is at the end of the fiftieth psalm. "Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." [Psal. l. 22](#). What! are those who forget God, wicked persons? must wicked persons be turned into hell? is this hell, and is this place appointed for the torment of such wretches, by the eternal and almighty God; that he may take his revenge upon them, for their slighting and neglecting of him, or for what they have done in this world? Why then consider this, all ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you. And so much shall suffice to be spoken to this text.





THE PRINCIPLES  
OF  
THE ORACLES OF GOD,  
In Two Parts.  
NEVER BEFORE PUBLISHED

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PART I.

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CONTAINING

I. AN INTRODUCTION, PROVING THE NECESSITY OF THEIR BEING TAUGHT, IN TWO LECTURES, ON [HEB. v. 12](#).

II. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, MANIFEST FROM THE CREATION, IN FOUR LECTURES, ON [ROMANS i. 20](#).

III. THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES, IN FIVE LECTURES, ON [2. TIMOTHY iii. 16](#).

IV. THE UNITY OF THE GODHEAD, IN TWO LECTURES, ON [JAMES ii. 19](#).

V. THE TRINITY OF PERSONS IN THE DIVINE ESSENCE, IN FOUR LECTURES, ON [JOHN v. 7](#).

VI. THE ATTRIBUTES AND PERFECTIONS OF THE DIVINE BEING, IN NINE LECTURES, ON [MATTHEW v. 48](#).



## ADVERTISEMENT.

WHEN the Editor first announced a new edition of the Works of the Rev. John Howe, he promised one volume, at least, from unpublished manuscripts. The sources whence these are derived, are stated in his preface to the First Volume. His original intention, was to have published the sermons which he obtained from the late Rev. S. Palmer, of Hackney, with a selection only of such, from Dr. Williams's library, as might appear most worthy of publication. But, on further examination, he found these manuscripts to consist chiefly, of a regular course of Lectures on "The principles of the oracles of God," which were delivered weekly, and commenced in the year 1690. He therefore determined to publish the whole; a determination which he has no doubt, the religious public will approve.

The Author had, doubtless, intended a complete system of Theology, though the design does not seem to have been carried fully into effect. He has, however, continued a regular course, as far as to the consideration of "The general and special grace of God in order to the recovery of apostate souls." There are, in the whole, seventy Lectures: and about fifty Sermons on the most interesting and important subjects. Of their authenticity, the Editor is convinced there will be no doubt entertained by the public, when they are informed, that in addition to the evidence derived from their preservation in a public library, as the works of Howe, some of the lectures and sermons are in his own hand writing, (a facsimile of which will be given,) as appears from comparing them with the letters of a correspondence between him and the Rev. Mr. Baxter, which are preserved in the library. To those acquainted with his former works, the internal evidence of these lectures will be conspicuous. The Editor thinks it not too much to say, they bear all the marks of Howe's comprehensive, peculiar, and extraordinary mind. So strikingly is this the fact, that had he found them on a desert he conceives he could not possibly have mistaken their "image and superscription."

Chichester, August 16. 1815.



## LECTURE I.<sup>1</sup>

Heb. v. 12.

—*Ye have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God;*—

MY design is to open unto you the principles of Christian religion, and for an introduction hereunto, I have pitched on this passage; without any intention to accuse (much less to upbraid) any in particular, with ignorance of those principles: but only in the general and indefinitely to shew the necessity of their being taught. And considering the matter abstractly, without reference to this or that people, or to this or that age, whether they be Jewish or Hebrew christians that did need to be so taught; or whether they be English or London christians in particular; my design is only in general to assert, the necessity of being taught such principles; that some time or other they be taught and we be instructed in them. And if they have been taught, that they be taught again (as the apostle's expression here is) that you be taught again, taught over and over, for these are things that we cannot too thoroughly have learned, or be too much versed in.

For the expressions here used,—“the oracles of God” and “the first principles” of those oracles—there is not much of obscurity in them. The word rendered *oracles*, doth by universal consent (as well in pagan, as christian and sacred writers,) signify divine revelations. It was the word among pagans by which it was usual for them to express the responses of their gods, or those they took to be such. It generally signifies what is divinely revealed, or understood, or taken to be so, nor is therefore the addition “of God,” needless or useless. Such pleonasm is ornative of speech, especially when they render the same thing more emphatically so, than if there were not that pleonastical addition. And besides, inasmuch as there are many (as the apostle speaks) that are called gods, and are worshipped as gods, the oracles of God are taken to be from God. And when he saith “the oracles of God,” (as the article may be well held, and often is to be understood emphatically,) it may be understood, the oracles of *the* God. He that is really so called, or to be called, and so it is an expression of latitude enough to take in what is of natural revelation, and what is of supernatural revelation; for what is of natural revelation is as truly from God as the other. All truth is from the first truth, there is no beam of light but what proceeds from the Father of lights, in whatsoever way it comes.

And then for the word here rendered *principles*, that is wont to be mentioned in as great latitude as can be supposed: it signifies all sorts of principles, whether of nature, or of art, or science whatsoever: and whereas, the apostle speaks here (as we render it) of the *first* principles: literally, it is the principles of the *beginning*, and that imports to us, that he did

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1 Preached November 7, 1690.

intend those principles in a very great latitude, all from first to last that can come under that notion, or within that compass. There is a chain or subordination of principles, even in principles themselves, as we shall have occasion, more hereafter, to take notice of: there are former, and there are latter principles. First principles do suppose within this compass, that there may be latter and last principles, but plain it is, that the apostle doth here intend principles of religion, and chiefly of Christian religion, but not solely. That is, principles of Christian religion, partly where of it doth consist, and that are peculiar and appropriate to it: and partly, such as it doth suppose, such as it doth necessarily pre-suppose, that may be common with it, either to the Jewish religion while it was to stand, and that still (as being common to that religion with Christianity) are to stand; as whatsoever is common with the Jewish religion, with Christianity must be perpetual; or which is common with natural religion, which we must understand in nature to be before Jewish or Christian. And even in time too, as to positive instructions, that which was natural did precede the other.

That therefore which I intend to ground upon this passage, you may take briefly thus—That there are principles of religion that need to be taught—And in pursuance of this I shall here,

- I. Say somewhat more generally of these principles.
- II. Shew the necessity of their being taught.
- III. Speak something of the way of teaching them: and then
- IV. Make application.

I Of these principles themselves: I shall shew there are such—and what they are—and of what kind.

1. That there are such, is a thing without all doubt. There is nothing, no created thing but hath its principles: principles of being there are belonging to it. Every complete substance that exists in the world, and is a created one, must be supposed to have such principles; and hath such generative and effective principles, and constructive principles: the principles from which it did proceed, and the principles of which it doth exist. There are also principles of knowledge as well as being. There is no piece of knowledge, no sort of science, but hath its principles as you all know. And therefore religion, Christian religion, theology, Christian theology must have it's principles too. It is a science, a practical one and of most absolute and universal necessity, and its principles must therefore be supposed of the most absolute and universal necessity too. Every piece of knowledge is not every one's business; but this is every one's business, to know God, to know how he may be saved, how it may be well with him to eternity.

2. But what are these principles? It is my present business to tell you of what sort they are. What they are particularly, that we must do by degrees as we come to them. Now you may judge of what sort they are by what the apostle mentioneth in this context; and by the reference this passage, in the beginning of the 6th chapter, hath to that we are upon, we



must suppose him to be still speaking of the first principles of the oracles of God. It may be thought strange that he should mention here things so small in their own nature as baptisms (not baptism but baptisms) and the laying on of hands, as if they were to come into the number of the first principles: not of principles only, but of the first principles.

To this I shall only say, I cannot think that was at all meant by the apostle, that they should be so taken for any of those principles. You are to consider to whom the apostle writes this epistle, namely to the Jews. These two, baptisms and the laying on of hands were anciently and (as we know) originally Jewish rites, transferred into the Christian church afterwards. And so the meaning of the apostle is only this; "I will not stand to lay again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God, especially not to you who have been instructed in these things all along so distinctly, they being nothing else but the doctrine of baptisms, and the laying on of hands;" and then goes on to the other two: that baptisms and laying on of hands did continually instruct them (as usages that did obtain among themselves) as to repentance from dead works and faith towards God, as it is here expressed. And so these words are very fitly to be rendered by way of parenthetical opposition to those that do immediately go before, that is, "not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and faith towards God, (being the doctrines of baptisms and laying on of hands, or the things which baptisms and the laying on of hands, heretofore so frequently used among you, did signify) or the resurrection of the dead or of eternal judgment." So there are but four mentioned of the first principles of the oracles of God. Against this way of reading this passage I meet but with one objection, and that is, the want of the greek article, before doctrine here, but that is so little an objection, if we consider how many greater ellipsis there are, that are frequent in Scripture, that it seems too light to be put into the balance against the weighty reason that is to be given for the other reading.

But it may be said then, What! Are there but four principles, as such, which have reference to the whole business of Christianity, which the apostle's discourse here must have final and determinate reference unto? "Repentance from dead works, faith towards God, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment;" are there no more than these?

Yes undoubtedly there are, but it was none of the apostle's design to give an enumeration of those principles, but to give an instance of such as he did not now intend to insist upon, but to wave and pass by. He only tells us this was not his principal business and design to deliver such principles, and he tells at the same time, what he thought fit to wave, while his discourse is moving forward to the information he would give them concerning the Melchisedekian priesthood of Christ: to which (after some warm discourse in the greater part of the [5th chapter](#)) he comes in the close of that, and pursues in the [seventh chapter](#).

3. But that I may shew more distinctly what kind of principles the apostle here hath reference to, take these considerations:



(1.) It is plain that they must be meant of doctrinal principles, principles of doctrine that are to be received into the mind and understanding. There are those that are doctrinal, and there are those that are practical principles. It is true indeed, all principles of the Christian religion are remotely practical, because the main end of Christianity is practice. But the difference between a doctrinal principle and a practical, lies here, that supposing a doctrinal principle to have reference to practice, to serve towards it at a distance, yet a practical principle is that from which action doth immediately proceed. As now, if we speak to the very heads themselves that the apostle speaks of, “repentance from dead works, and faith towards God,” the doctrine concerning these makes one sort of principle, and the habit another; the habit of faith, and the habit of repentance, that is a principle in the soul from which the acts of these immediately proceed. But the more essential doctrine concerning both these, must make the doctrinal principle concerning them; as there may be doctrinal principles about the most practical things, and those are the doctrinal principles, as such, that are here intended and which are to be the matter of teaching: which are to be taught, as the apostle speaks. It is very true that the papists do very industriously make it their business to overthrow that distinction of fundamental and extra-fundamental doctrines; of those that are essential and those that are extra-essential; such as are of absolute necessity, and such as are not necessary, or not so necessary. And they mightily insist and urge to have a catalogue particularly of those which we would have to go under the notion of fundamentals: because they think they could cavil and contend about any such catalogue that should be given, and look upon it as impossible there should be any so unexceptionably given, that nothing should be said against it, why this, or that, is taken in, or why such and such things should be left out. Therefore they would conclude there ought to be no such distinction; which is the most absurd thing that can be imagined] for to take away the distinction of fundamental and extra-fundamental is to suppose one of these two things. Either it must suppose that there is nothing necessary in Christian religion, which is a very strange supposition that there should be any such religion wherein nothing should be necessary; or it must suppose all things equally necessary, all necessary alike: and so that it were equally necessary that we know Salathiel to be the son of Neri, as to know that Jesus is the Son of God. But there needs no more to be said at present to this, than that whatsoever is necessary in point of doctrine to the soul’s acting of “repentance from dead works, and faith towards God”, (for the two things that follow are no matter of our exercise. The raising of the dead and the eternal judgment are no part of our duty; but our duty is summed up in these two, repentance and faith!) whatsoever, I say, is necessary in point of doctrine to the soul’s being exercised in one or other of these with the understanding and judgment of a reasonable creature, so much is necessary to make a doctrinal principle: whatever leads the soul into the exercise of repentance and faith, so much must be necessary under the head of doctrinal principles concerning our duty. It is true we must know the other things too as motives to

379

380

it, but these are to have the immediate influence upon things to be done. And I might more shortly say, whatever is necessary to bring the soul into union with God through Christ, all that knowledge that is necessarily antecedent to this, so much comes within the compass of what is fundamental in our religion, and indeed nothing comes within that compass but what is one way or other reducible to this, that must not one way or other have influence upon repentance and faith. And I add,

(2.) That as concerning these, some may be more deeply fundamental than others are, even of those that are of equal necessity. That is, there are principles that in reference to things depending on them have that notion of principles and are to be so considered, that yet may be consequential to other things on which they do depend. As in the building of a house (which is the metaphor the apostle, in this context, makes use of) there may be some parts that may be both fundamental to what is upon them, and superstructive in reference to what lies under them. And,

(3.) These principles may be partly of natural and partly of supernatural revelation. Of natural, that there is a God. Of supernatural, that Jesus is the Son of God. Though what is of natural revelation doth not comprehend what is of supernatural, yet all that is of supernatural takes in and includes all that is natural too. The same thing may be supernaturally revealed, and naturally; as the same conclusion may be both believed and known. And again,

(4.) They are generally the plainest things that are to go for such principles. God hath so graciously ordered it, that that which is most necessary should be most plain. Indeed some may object themselves here, the doctrine of the Trinity, but as concerning that, I hope when we come to it, it will appear that what God hath said about that is very plain; though what men have said and devised about it, is obscure and intricate enough, even what they mean for the explication of it. And I only add this, for the present, concerning these principles,

(5.) They must be supposed to be but few. The first principles, or the great principles of religion, do lie in a very little compass: as that which goes amongst us in the name of the apostles' creed (you know) is very short. And (if antiquity deceive us not) was much shorter than it is. Though it is true that the variety of apprehensions and sentiments, and the great dissensions and manifold errors, that have in after-times sprung up in the Christian church have occasioned the enlargements of creeds and multiplying of articles of faith; varying them this way or that, to meet with this or that wrong sentiment as they have been apprehended; yet the things that are in themselves necessary, must needs be but few. And if the Christian religion ever return to itself, and be what at first it was, simple, pure, plain, and unmingled, undoubtedly the sum and substance of it will be found to lie in very little compass. It hath sadly degenerated in point of efficacy, and vigour, and power, as it hath been increased and augmented in point of necessary doctrines: men rendering such doctrines necessary, or bestowing that notion upon them arbitrarily as they have thought fit. And indeed the



state of Christian religion hath never been flourishing since (as one very accurately observes in the last age) it became *Res Ingeniosa fore Christianum*: a thing of wit to be a christian. So much at present for the kinds and sorts of these principles. But now,

II. For the necessity of their being taught; as to that, little needs to be said.

1. That the things themselves are necessary is out of question. If any religion be necessary, it's principles must be much more so, especially if first principles. And

2. This doth plainly infer therefore the necessity of their being taught: else how should we come by them? And though there is somewhat pre-supposed to our religion that is natural, it is but pre-supposed as fundamental to all that was necessary to be super-added, for there is not enough within the compass of nature to lead men to blessedness, if there be not great superadditions. And what we have not by nature, how should we come by it, if we are not taught it? if we do not learn it? We read of great promises in Scripture of being taught of God. "Every one that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me," as it is in that, [John vi. 45.](#) quoted from the prophet [Isaiah liv. 13.](#) "Thy children shall be all taught of the Lord." And "It is written in the prophets, they shall be taught of God:" and then it followeth, "Every one that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me." And so we read, [Jeremiah xxxi. 34.](#) as that which is foretold to be the great blessing of a time then future (and for ought I see, yet future) that there should be no saying "Know the Lord." They should not need to teach one another saying, "Know the Lord: for they shall all know me from the least to the greatest:" quoted by the apostle [Heb. viii. 11.](#) But even such teaching is teaching still. He is the great Teacher: and whole acheth like him? But as to subordinate teaching or human teaching there is nothing in all these promises that can exclude it. And when it is said "They shall all be taught of God:" and that they shall not need any to teach them, the meaning is, that there shall be a greater inclination in men's spirits to learn. Not that they shall know it without teaching, but that an aptitude to learn, shall be given them more generally than had been given, and (so far as we can observe) than is yet given. Men shall not need to be urged and pressed to know the Lord. No, there shall be a greater promptitude in men's minds to learn, and to use, and improve the means of knowing him, than had been before. But that there shall always, to the end of time, be use of human teaching, our Lord's own words just before his ascension plainly enough speak. [Mat. xxviii.](#) and the close: "I am with you to the end of the world." In this work it must be, "to assist you in this teaching through all successions of time, to the very end of the world." But if there should be any such time or state of things on earth, wherein men should no way at all need to be taught the knowledge of God, supervening and coming; that is not yet come, we are sure we see no such time: and if any such time should come, and we should see it, I verily believe there are none of those that now are intent upon the business of teaching, but would be glad in those times to resign their office. And in the mean time nothing is plainer than so it is, and indeed nothing is plainer than so it will be to the end of the world; that there is and will be





need and use of human subordinate teachers, to teach and instruct men in the principles, even the first principles of faith in Christ. But,

III. I would say somewhat concerning the way of this teaching. And there be several ways about which we might distinguish and speak to you in distinct heads: there is private teaching and public teaching; and teaching from house to house, and teaching in public assemblies: there is teaching by continued discourse, and teaching in a way of interlocution, by way of question and answer, that to which the name of catechising is now generally appropriated, though indeed without ground from the word itself, or the proper significancy of the word. And this is indeed, in the account of many, a very formidable and frightful work, the work of catechising. I do not know why it should be so formidable a thing for one person to converse with another, to put questions and return answers; for is not this the usual way of common conversation? And why should it be more formidable to us to converse thus about the things of God, than about other things, that we count necessary, and about many things that we cannot so much as count so? But there can be surely nothing more necessary than religion and the things that concern it. I am for my part very far from that imperious and terrifying way of managing such a work as this, to affright people and make them afraid of it. And indeed were I engaged in such work, I should as leave they should catechise me as I them, if questions could be so judiciously put as to draw forth a full explication of the matter proposed. It would be all one to me, who were the questionist and who the answerer, supposing the question be aptly put so as to draw forth the explication most fully. I should like well it should be said, Pray how is such a thing understood, or what help may be given to understand that point more distinctly and more clearly?

And some considerations I shall give you, at present, about this way of teaching by familiar interlocution; and which indeed the exigency of the case doth require to be in a public assembly, where many meet and are convened together for that very purpose and upon that account. I would not insist upon the word, though it is a very significant word, that serves the purpose for which it is used well enough, but we find divers passages in Scripture where this word is used that fully refers to that way of teaching. And

1. Let that be considered, [Gal. vi. 6](#). "Let him that is taught in the word, communicate to him that teacheth." The word there is catechised. Let him that is catechised in the word communicate to him that catechiseth: this implies it to be a stated business, that there must be continued catechising, and being catechised. The apostle, in [1 Cor. xiv. 19](#). useth the same word when he tells us "I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I may teach others also, (the word is catechised and he speaks of doing it in the church) than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."

2. That though another sort of word be used in that other language, when Abraham is so highly commended for instructing his household, (in [Genesis xviii.](#)) yet we are to consider what his household was, an household out of which he could draw forth (as we find upon



occasion) three hundred fighting men. How vastly numerous must that family be? And when they met together for the worship of God, that must be a greater assembly than our's usually are: and his instructing was so that they should be all brought to know God and the principles of religion; which must be supposed and (as the thing speaks) must mostly be when he had them together, though there might be occasion for private instruction and admonition too.

3. There ought certainly to be a very great deference given to usages in the Christian church in the purer and primitive times of it, when Christianity was most of all itself; and we find very ancient records, even of teaching by this way of interlocution, and in public too. Origen lived very early, and it is matter notorious that he was eminent under the notion of a catechist in his time, whose business it was to teach and instruct in a catechetical way, and we are informed of divers catechists that they had in the church of Alexandria at the same time, that being, it is true, a numerous, great church, and requiring the help of many to that purpose. And all along, in the best times of the Christian church, (before popery was born into it) we find hereupon that there were these two distinct orders of Christians, the *catechumini* and the *fidelos*: those that were catechetically instructed and those that having been for a competent time so instructed, were found fit to be admitted into full communion: and hereupon there were particular places appointed them in the assemblies, wherein they were to stand apart by themselves in a sort of inclosure, but in the view of the rest of the assembly. And the nature of the thing doth speak, that there must always be these two orders within the compass of the Christian church, those that are under instruction are *catechumini*, and those that as they are fit, are taken out of them and received into full communion. A thing that nature and common prudence will so much dictate, that long before the Christian name was ever heard of in the world, we read that Pythagoras's school had the same orders, where the business was principally to teach and instruct in virtue. There were those that were Extra-synonem and those that were Intra-synonem; there was a *septum* or inclosure that did receive those that were looked upon to be thoroughly virtuous. His school indeed was like a church, upon that account, and commonly there were kept seven years expectants without the inclosure, not to be received (as it were) into full communion till they were very well confirmed in virtue and goodness. And thereupon, if any of those that had been received within the inclosure should afterwards degenerate and be guilty of any crimes, there was as solemn an excommunication of them as we read of any among Christians, and a funeral besides held for such a person; that is, a coffin was brought into the auditorium and lamentation made over it as over one dead, dead from among them; and so such were to be humbled that way and wrought upon. And there can be no such thing as the continuance of Christianity in the world, on other terms than that there must be two such orders. And I add,

384

385

4. That it is very apparent that our Saviour's way of teaching when he was here on earth was very much in a way of interlocution, and that often in great public assemblies, as it is obvious for yourselves to take notice in evangelical history. And,

5. That Christians generally are under an express charge to be ready to give an account of the reason of their hope and faith, to any one that shall ask it, with meekness and fear: as in that, [1 Pet. iii. 15](#). And if they were to do it (as that direction hath more especial reference) even to enemies, to persecutors, and when it was to cost them their lives, much more to instructors and teachers, when they desire it, only in order to their own help and to the promoting and furtherance of knowledge among men. And,

6. It is very plain that they who by office are to make it their work and business to instruct others, are obliged to use all the most apt and likely means that may be most profitable and most conducing to that end and purpose. How solemn a charge is that the apostle lays on Timothy! [2 Tim. iv. 1, 2](#). "I charge thee, therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word, be instant in season, and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine." With all doctrine, (as it is referred undoubtedly to both the things that go before and that follow the long-suffering) must in all reason intend, not merely the matter of doctrine, but the manner also, for there may be matters of doctrine materially to be considered, that are not so necessary to be so very much inculcated and urged. But that same all-doctrine is every way a teaching that is likely, or by which it may be more probable that good may be done; and if there be such an obligation upon teachers, there is a correspondent obligation upon hearers to attend thereto: yea, and that not only implied, but expressly required: "Obey them that have the rule over you." [Heb. xiii. 17](#). Hereupon no doubt they are obliged to comply with, and to concur to, set on foot all such means and methods of instruction as may be most conducive to this end. And that this is a means proper to this end may be manifest upon several considerations. As,

(1.) That it most evidently tends to engage the minds of them that are immediately dealt with in this way, to be intent on the matter in hand, as when a question is put to me I am bound under a kind of necessity to consider it, that I may know how to make one answer or another as it is particularly and personally directed to me. There are many things that pass us by in a continued and transient discourse, that a wandering mind takes little notice of, gives little heed to; but when it is called by a particular question to this particular point, it cannot but make the mind intent upon it. As when the apostle, in the midst of his apologetical discourse before king Agrippa, applied particularly to him with that question, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" the king thought himself obliged to consider his question, and you see what kind of answer he gives, so as he never else would have thought, if that question had not been directed to himself. Such an impression did that question make on his mind.



(2.) It tends manifestly very much to engage the attention of all that hear, at such an exercise as that we are now speaking of. Every body presently gives his ear when there is a question put, "Come what will be answered to this question?" and if it need explication, "What will be said in this case?" It makes men exert their minds, and engage their spirits a great deal more, as every one's reason and experience must tell him.

(3.) It tends very much to fix things and make them continue with those that hear and do attend on such a kind of exercise, for that very reason, because it hath set the animadversive faculties so much the more on work; and if the matter be considered, nothing is plainer, than that people do many times blame their memories very causlessly, when it is really the animadversive faculty is not used; for things that once are earnestly attended to are much more likely to be remembered, but people find fault with their memories because they do not mind what they hear at first. If they earnestly minded what they heard, and considered things, and took them to heart, it would contribute a great deal towards the fixing of them in their memories, towards their retention of them. I believe, for the much greater part, when the badness of the memory is complained of, the fault lies elsewhere, that they did not seriously attend at the first, for things will be retained longer that have been well considered at first.

(4.) Hereupon, through the blessing of God, much more may be done towards the conversion of souls by the gospel dispensation, when the things needful to be understood in order hereto, are well understood for it; for while they are not so, we speak in the dark and people hear in the dark, and what we say to them hath an uncertain sound, as the apostle speaks. [1 Cor. xiv. 17](#). They cannot tell what we mean when we speak of the weightiest and most important things belonging to the kingdom of God, but if such things be well understood at first (as it is to be hoped they will be in this way) then there is one great step made, one main difficulty is got over: and so it obtains in discourses that have more directly that design, to make men intend this business, and impress things upon men's hearts to the utmost, which had passed through their minds before or were received clearly and distinctly there before. Again

(5.) It is likewise, by consequence, likely to be the means of introducing a much more fruitful Christianity among us, for undoubtedly, religion is more lively by how much the more it is well grounded: they that do believe this or that doctrine without a ground, they commonly believe it too without fruit. If it have not a good ground it is proportionably inefficacious, and a languid thing; as seed that is sown and hath no depth of earth, (as our Saviour speaks) brings not forth fruit unto perfection. Therefore is that charge given unto the Colossian Christians: "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk ye in him." [Col. ii. 6](#). One notion under which we are said to receive him is as a teacher, and to receive him (though that be not all) is to receive his truths, his doctrines. "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built, up in him, and established in the faith as



ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” And therefore, so rationally doth the apostle pray for them in that chapter, that they might be “fruitful in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God.” And in 1 [Phil. ix. 10, 11](#). those Christians are there prayed for after the same method, that they might abound in judgment and in all knowledge, (that they might become knowing and judicious Christians) and then, that they might abound in all the fruits of righteousness that would be through Christ, to the praise and glory of God. And,

(6.) This would be a very great and likely means to bring Christians generally to a great deal more of seriousness in the temper of their minds and spirits, that is, to exclude and shut out vanity, replenishing their minds with great and weighty things, things that deeply concern them: for in this way, undoubtedly, such things would come to be more inwrought into their hearts and to have a more settled abode and residence there. Then it would be as ordinary a thing when Christians did meet, to catechise one another about the things of God and about the eternal kingdom (if I may use that phrase) as to catechise one another about news, or about the state of the times: what is doing now in the country, or in the court, or in this or in any other nation or kingdom: the kingdom of heaven surely would look as great as any earthly kingdom or country, or greater, if we were more taken up about the things that relate thereunto. And so might the ancient Christianity come to be restored in some measure among us, wherein (as antiquity tells us) it was so ordinary a thing when Christians did meet, presently to fall upon the matters of their religion: and it was usual in their families, even all the day long, when people were about their affairs either in the shop or at the distaff, to mention the great things of the Christian religion, from morning to night mingling discourses of that kind with all their affairs, as they could admit of their being mingled. This was primitive Christianity, and it was in these early days that this course that I now speak of did obtain, even when such familiar interlocutions for the instruction of candidates to Christianity were carried on in their assemblies. And,

(7.) It were much to be hoped that by this means, that faulty shyness would be overcome which doth appear too generally of discoursing at all about the things of God and the matters of religion, and what men find in their own spirits of savour and impression of such things. It is very strange and unaccountable that there should be so peculiar a shyness in reference to the matters of religion, to take discourse of them, especially as to one’s own sentiments about them, what one apprehends and what one feels in himself, in one’s own breast. There is not such a shyness in reference to things of any other concerns besides, as there is in reference to those concernments that relate to men’s souls and their state Godward and for eternity. Nobody is shy to speak of his own or other’s ails, for the most part, nobody is shy to speak of an aching head, or an aching tooth: but what a shyness is there to speak of spiritual maladies, a bad heart, a blind mind, and the like? If discourses were in this way more frequently introduced, so as to become familiar, this shyness would be gradually overcome.



We find in public assemblies it is usual to give an account of things that are of another concernment, of a most inferior concernment; as in courts of judicature, where persons of the meanest capacity are called frequently to speak their knowledge, to tell what they know about such and such a matter that doth concern *meum* and *tuum*, this or that man's right; or concerning a question depending between the government and any particular person concerning a criminal matter. Nothing more ordinary than to have persons catechised about such things as these in public assemblies, and it is not thought strange. And why should there be a particular shyness, strangeness, and aversion to give an account of things relating to the kingdom of God? As if it were a criminal thing to have one's mind engaged and taken up about matters of that nature, or as if persons were afraid to be thought guilty of religion, as if it were a dreadful thing, a thing to be dreaded, to be thought guilty of minding God, and the concernments of another world. And

(8.) It would surely be a very likely means to prevent apostacy, especially in a difficult and trying time: indeed there is continual danger of apostacy: there is much danger from daily conversation with this world, there is much danger especially in a prosperous state and condition in it, least there should be heart apostacy, a heart secretly departing from the love of God. And there is great danger in times of persecution for religion's sake, for Christ's sake, and for the gospel's sake. But there is nothing (in point of means and in subordination to the grace and Spirit of Christ) likely to be a better security against it, than in such a way as this, to be once thoroughly instructed in the great "principles of the oracles of God." to have them well inlaid. They that are so instructed at first are not like to be as "children, tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine," or entangled by the cunning craftiness of them that lie in wait to deceive. Some are withdrawn by seduction, some by persecution: there will be the same fence against both in such a way as this. "Nay," will such a one say "I have (through the goodness of God) understood the grounds of my religion well: I did not trifle when I took up this profession;" as the apostle speaks concerning his trust in God, "I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him until that day." So for a christian to say, "I know what I have believed, and I mean to abide by it through the grace of God," this will preserve him under suffering. It is a very uncomfortable thing in point of suffering to be called to suffer for that I never understood and which I never savoured or relished. To suffer for what I never had any clear understanding of, and to suffer for what I never had any taste or relish of in my own soul, though it is possible to suffer upon such an account, yet it is uncomfortable. A man may "give his body to be burned" without love, but it is very uncomfortable so to suffer. And the one of these things is the way to the other; I am likely to savour what I understand in those things that have a real bottom and are in themselves substantial. There are some things indeed that have so little in them, that the more I understand them the less I shall mind them; the

more I understand them the more I shall despise them, but it is not so in the great things of God and that do relate to his kingdom. And,

(9.) It is that which will certainly be a great ornament to the Christian church, and an honour to it, when there is a succession coming up, a rising generation of them that do understand themselves and appear to do so, make it evident that they do understand themselves in the great things of religion; that they receive them and take them in. As it was the reproach of the Christian church (as it was still called) when that barbarous age was upon it, and so great and gross darkness and ignorance did cover the face of it, so will the contrary be it's honour. And when times of greater knowledge do come, then in one sense (though these words have more meaning than that) it may be said to Zion "Arise, shine; for thy light is come; and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." [Isaiah lx. 1](#). Light signifies holiness too, and a prosperous state, but it signifies knowledge as that which is inchoative of all the rest. And,

(10.) Lastly. It is one of the most comfortable presages that can be, when once the spirits of those that are to be learners (as it were) in the school of Christ, come to be engaged and intent upon getting in the knowledge of Christ, and have their souls impressed thereunto. I say it is one of the most comfortable presages of the approach of that time and that season drawing on, when one shall say to another, and even people to people, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will shew us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." [Micah iv. 2](#). It is a comfortable pre-signification of the approach of that time when "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased:" when there shall be very much of inquiry and concern to know God and the things of God, then the time will be drawing on, when the knowledge of the Lord shall abound and cover the earth as the waters cover the seas. [Isaiah xi. 9](#).

IV. But to make some brief use of all this. There are principles of religion, or of the oracles of God, which are needful to be taught. Then here,

1. Let us consider and adore the goodness of God towards a wicked and apostate world. How strange a sound should such a word carry with it to us. "The oracles of God!" How transporting a sound, for the oracles of God to be mentioned and spoken in such a world as ours is! when it would be thought that it's so universal revolt from God, should everlastingly have cut off all intercourse between him and it, that he should never have regard for this world any more; not more than for the angels that fell and kept not their first station. Do we hear of any oracles of God sent down into those infernal regions? Oh! how great thing then is it, that there should be among us the oracles of God! Indeed it argues very great stupidity, if there be not a mighty sense of this upon our spirits. Pagans have had the most grateful sense that could be imagined but of a mock pretence hereunto, the very notion of oracles carries a sacredness and venerableness in it; any thing that is divine, any thing that is of heavenly descent, and so such things, though but feignedly such-, have been



reckoned of among pagans. Oh! what veneration had those poor Ephesian idolaters for that thing (we read it image, but there is no such thing in the greek) that dropped down from Jupiter, how mighty a zeal was there among that people, so as that the city, is said to be a whole *neochoron*; “All Ephesus is a worshipper;” so it is expressed, as if that mighty city were but one worshipper of the great goddess Diana. So great was their zeal, so high their veneration for a thing that their deluding priests made them believe dropped down from heaven. And we know how high their value was, of how much they did magnify themselves for the diabolical oracles they had among them in former days before Christ’s time; and how mighty a concern there was among them when these were silent at his coming. So as that some of their wisest men (Plutarch for instance) was fain to write discourse upon discourse to qualify their minds thereupon. Two treatises we read of, written by that author, one why they ceased, which he wrote in verse: the other why they did so totally cease as upon the matter they did.

And when the privilege of having the oracles of God, was a more confined and limited thing, Oh! how did the Jews (to whom they were so great a treasure) magnify themselves upon them, how did they glory in it! And it was acknowledged that they had a mighty advantage, “What advantage had the Jews? Much every way, chiefly as that to them were committed the oracles of God,” [Rom. iii.](#) beginning. Oh! we do not enough consider the kindness of heaven towards our world! that there should be any beams of divine light (whether by natural or super-natural revelation) shining in it. We do not enough consider that we are quite cut off from God. He doth hereby shew he hath yet a desire to the work of his own hands, in that he will have his oracles known to men upon earth; as elsewhere it is said of his tabernacle: “the tabernacles of God are with men;” and in what a transport doth Solomon break forth ([1 Kings 8.](#)) in that seraphical triumph of joy: “Will God indeed dwell upon earth?” Oh! that there should be any abode of the divine presence upon earth; and these are some of the most expressive tokens of such a visible presence vouchsafed; his placing these oracles among us and diffusing the most impressive light that reveals him, and that reveals the great things that relate to his kingdom. And,

2. We may collect hence, that it is a very apt method and accommodated unto intelligent creatures, that God doth make use of, in conveying to them the necessary knowledge of the doctrine of Christ; for there are principles that are to be begun with; (first principles as you see) you had need to be taught which are the first principles of the oracles of God. There are .the oracles of God, there are principles of these oracles, and the first of those principles. God doth apply himself to us suitable to our nature, he aims to draw us by the “cords of a man and by the bands of love,” to make reason and love, engines by which he would take hold of us, sanctify the one principle and the other, that we may be brought nigh to him and held in with him.





And it ought deeply to be considered that there are (as you see) principles wherewith we are to begin, and by which we are to be led on (as the apostle's expression here is) towards perfection. Principles of truth, principles of doctrine, such as a "form of sound words," wholesome words may be expressive of. Though (by the way) I am against being tied to a form of words; in matters of this nature I would have words used for helps, not for bonds. And if I were to inquire how any have profited in the things of God, even in this very respect; in respect of their knowledge relating thereto, if they could express a sound and good understanding about these things, in their own words, in words of their own choosing, and not which they found in this or that book, I should like it a great deal better. It would argue them so much the more understanding and knowing christians, and likely to prove more stable ones. As I said before, I would have you to make use of other men's words (as you may any good book you read or sermon you hear) for helps but not for bonds; to help your understandings, not to limit them. Again,

3. This lets us see the presumptuous and preposterous rashness of such persons as do at random, at all adventures take up the Christian profession, when they never as yet understood the principles of Christianity, and so they really profess they know not what: as if the name christian were a name of nothing, a name that had no signification, a name that did import no real thing. Those that can give no account of their knowledge of principles, and yet will be christians, call themselves christians, what an usurpation is this! How groundlessly and presumptuously do they usurp a glorious name! a title that carries with it a great deal of glory! and I would have you understand it so. A christian is a glorious title, and they will be made to understand it to be so another day, who have usurped it they know not why, who have prophaned it, and could never justify the pretence. It is a far greater presumption than for any man to call himself king or emperor, who is a mean peasant, an ordinary fellow and can have no such pretence. "I will bring them to worship at thy feet (it is spoken to the Philadelphian church [Rev. iii. 9.](#)) who say they are Jews and are not, but do lie." For a man to take up a profession that is a mere lie, what a presumption is it! a man to call himself a christian! but he lies, and must do so upon one account, if he live in the continual violation of the Christian precepts, and upon another, if he understand nothing of the Christian principles. It is a lie: it is to suppose that *christian* is a name without a meaning, a name that means nothing. And,

4. We may collect hence, that it is very stupid folly for men to live all their days under this profession, without ever concerning themselves to understand the principles of Christianity. It is very presumptuous rashness to take up that profession, when a man will commence Christian all of a sudden without ever having understood its principles. But it is far more stupid folly if a man will all his days, live under the Christian profession in continued ignorance of the principles of the Christian religion. How ridiculous doth that man make himself that will all his time go under the name of a merchant, and yet never understand

any thing of merchandize? or if a man will be called a philosopher, when every one that knows him, knows that he understands not any of the principles of philosophy? But,

5. It is of so great importance to understand well the principles of Christian religion, that they need to be taught. Is there so great weight laid upon the teaching of them? are they hereby represented to us to be matters of absolute necessity? then by the importance of the principles judge of the excellency of the end of the Christian religion. And so consider, Hath God thus brought it about that we should be all of us in one degree or other under the Christian institution? What is it for? That which hath so very important principles must have a proportionable end. Then let us see what that is. Religion is a thing that terminates upon eternity, that runs into another world: they therefore that are under the Christian institution (as we all are to be in the church of God while we are here in the world) are to look upon themselves as so many candidates for the blessed eternity. Here in this world we are training up for heaven, for everlasting glory; and hereupon are the principles of religion, of the Oracles of God, represented as the most important things, that have their final and determinate reference to another world, the glories of the heavenly and eternal state. This were a great thought for us to carry about with us, whensoever we are under gospel teaching, to think that God hath provided and taken care that I should be trained up for heaven and fitted for the eternal kingdom, and for an everlasting abode in that blessed glorious state. And when you are training up your child, Oh! how great a thing is it to be training it up in the knowledge of God! for there are some steps that must be taken with it, to make it meet for partaking “of the inheritance of the saints in light.” You know there is great care taken about the education of great heirs. The very children of the church are God’s children. He calls them so, ([Ezekiel xvi. 20, 21.](#)) “Is this a small matter that thou hast slain my children?” speaking of Jewish parents making their children pass through the fire to Moloch. In the degenerate state of that church and people, he calls them his children: now I say, great care is wont to be taken in the education of great heirs. Those that are the children of God and are really so, if children they are also heirs; and they are begotten to a lively hope, to an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled. And they are, by “the sincere milk of the word” which they receive from time to time, to grow up to a fitness and capacity to partake of that inheritance. We should never think of the principles of the Christian religion, but it should put us in mind of the end of it, and what it refers to. And yet again,

6. We may further learn from hence, that since there is such need that such principles should be taught, men should take heed of neglecting, and much more of opposing any fit methods wherein they may be taught. And why do they so? Why they think themselves too wise to learn, they understand too much already to need being taught. But while they account themselves so very wise, see how the Spirit of God counts them, what notion they pass under with him; “fools despise instruction.” [Prov. i. 7.](#) And that is certainly a very ill character, that the contempt of instruction brings upon persons: they think themselves wise, and God



thinks them fools; and certainly his judgment is the most discerning and true: and as it draws on a bad character, so it is very likely to draw on a bad end and issue. To hate instruction is to hate knowledge: and he is said to love knowledge that loves instruction. [Prov. xii. 1.](#) But to be brought in under the notion of a hater of knowledge, divine knowledge, Oh! how dreadful a thing is that! “They shall call but I will not answer, they shall seek me early but they shall not find me.” Why what is the matter? what is all that resolved into which you read to that purpose in the 1. Prov? Why in the [29th. verse](#) it is said, Because they hated knowledge and would not choose the fear of the Lord; therefore he would be deaf to all their cries and importunities, when destruction was coining upon them as a whirlwind. Why is God so inexorable towards them? Because they hated knowledge, they would not endeavour to learn. And

7. Lastly. If there be so absolute a necessity of being taught Such principles of religion or such “Oracles of God,” there surely ought to be a very peculiar temper and disposition of spirit in order to learning. And that I would have you to take an account of in a few heads which I shall only name. We are all to be learners here in this world, we must learn as long as we live. And if it be of so absolute necessity that we learn such things we should,

(1.) Apply ourselves to them with very great reverence, for they are “the Oracles of God” that we have to do with: it is something sacred and divine, that we are conversant and taken tip about. When any thing of these oracles was to be first given in writing, though it was but a little, to a peculiar and select people of his, we see what an awful business was made of it. God comes down; manifests his glorious presence in the mountain that he had selected for that purpose, the people are there assembled and cast about the foot of the mountain; the mountain is enclosed, and they are forbidden, on pain of death, to approach the borders; “Touch not the borders; for whosoever toucheth them shall die.” [Exod. xix. 20, 21.](#) In that assembly of that people, on purpose to hear the divine oracles that were to be preached among them, there was a glorious revelation that came from heaven. And do we think the gospel revelation that we have is less glorious? No, saith the apostle “The glory wherewith the law was given upon Mount Sinai, was no glory in comparison with this glory that so much excels.” Oh! we should be learners with the greatest reverence imaginable, as having from time to time the divine oracles to be opened among us. Here is the most glorious appearance of God. When there was comparatively an unspeakably less appearance even than that on Mount Sinai, that is, when some of the divine glory shone in one bush, it is charged upon Moses (to strike his mind with a due awe) presently to put off his shoes. This was to be significant to us, with what great and profound reverence we are to have our souls impressed and possessed upon an appearance of God; and these are the brightest and most glorious appearances, in the kind, that we know above any besides.

(2.) We should apply ourselves to learn the things of the kingdom of God with very deep humility; with a most humble sense of our own ignorance, and that we know so little.

395

396

“He that thinks he knows any thing knows nothing as he ought to know,” saith the apostle. And nothing was a more ignominious brand upon a sort of men that did start up early in the Christian church, that affected to be called by the name of gnostick, than that they so much valued themselves upon that knowledge to which they pretended, and but pretended; as that name did signify. Whether they were so soon called by that name, as some imagine, is a matter of doubt, but the genius and spirit of the men undoubtedly appeared early; and many passages in the epistles of the apostles have a direct reference thereunto, as particularly that (1 Cor. viii. 2.) “Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth.” But (I say) it was the ignominy and reproach of that sort of men that they did so highly glory in an airy kind of knowledge, that they were never the better for, nay, that made them undoubtedly upon the whole matter much worse men: it doth always so where there is not great humility, which doth accompany and go with knowledge. That is, they who are learners ought to consider themselves as such, as we must all of us always be while we are here in this world, such as “know but in part.” Here we are to have very self-diminishing thoughts of our own knowledge. Surely it is but little that we know, as we find Agur speaks concerning himself; k( I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man.” And so the Psalmist speaks of himself (73. Psalm) “So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee.” Such diminishing thoughts it becomes us to have of ourselves, as to look upon ourselves, under such a self-despising notion, (as I may so speak) that while we are here we are but in a state of learners, and must be so as long as we are in this earthly state. But then,

(3.) We should be learners still with fervent desire of learning more and more; and this agrees well with a humble sense of our yet knowing so very little. It hath always been mentioned concerning one eminent heathen, as an honourable character he went under, that he was known by that motto, “*Hoc tantum seio, me nihil scire:*” *this only I know, that I know nothing:* though he was one of the greatest and most learned men of his age. If there be a sincere desire of increasing knowledge, nothing better agrees with it than such a sense as this, Alas! it is little I know and I am to be still aiming to know more and more, in reference to things wherein I am so much concerned “I opened my mouth and panted,” saith the psalmist, “for I longed for thy commandments.” Psalm cxix. 131. We are to be continually desiring that which is to be the means of our growth in knowledge. “As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby:” and these principles are called “milk,” as you see in the close of this 5th. chap. of the epistle to the Hebrews, where the text is.

(4.) It ought to be with a continued pleasant savour and relish of divine knowledge, that we should be driving the design to increase: to increase and grow in it. “Grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;” labour to have a continual intermixture of grace with knowledge that may give it a pleasant savour. There is very little delight in dry notions that never influence a man’s heart, “When wisdom enters into the

heart and knowledge is pleasant unto the soul" (saith the wise man) "then understanding shall preserve thee, discretion shall lead thee." Knowledge doth its office effectually, to guide and lead us in our way when once it becomes of a grateful taste and relish to our souls; if it be taken and digested, and we relish a sweetness and pleasantness in it, then it will have power to do it's work, that is, to be our guide and director in our way and course, as you have it [Prov. ii. 10](#). And then,

(5.) It ought to be with continual gratitude, adoring and blessing God that he makes any of his light to shine in this dark world; especially that it should shine to any of us; that we have this "sure word of prophecy" put into our hands that makes up the "Oracles of God" in an eminent sense; "till the day dawn and the day star arise in our hearts." And

(6.) Lastly. It must be (or else we do nothing) with a serious design of getting a holy impression in our hearts by the truth we know, or else all is lost. There are too many, (the Lord knows) that if they take pleasure in knowing, and increasing knowledge, they do yet know but for the knowledge' sake, and aim no further. It is a fine thing to know much, to understand more than one's neighbour, more than such and such; and so be able superciliously to look down upon them as comparatively very ignorant. But to know on purpose, that I may be accordingly and do accordingly, is the true end of Christian knowledge. "I desire to know more that I may have a better heart, and that I may be able to love God more, that I may be more like God, more fitted to serve him, and walk with him in this world and enjoy him in the next:" if this be not the design we drive at, in aiming to know, in all our desire of knowing much of the things of God, and Christian religion we do but labour for the wind and shall at length reap the whirlwind. In what a transport is the apostle (in that [3. Phil.](#)) in the thoughts and estimates that he expresseth there of the knowledge of Christ, "I count all things loss and dross and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord!" Well but what sort of knowledge was it he aimed at? See what it was in what follows, such a knowledge as by which he might be transformed into his likeness, whereby he might be conformable to his death and to his resurrection, such a knowledge as to have the image impressed by it of a crucified and glorified Jesus. And no other knowledge would serve his turn, "I count all things but loss and dross and dung in comparison of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord," so to "know him" as to "be found in him," as to have "the fellowship of his sufferings and the power of his death," and to attain with him the resurrection from the dead.

And I desire in the close of this discourse to leave this with you. It is a dreadful thing to trifle with sacred matters. If at any time we open this book, or any thing out of it be opened to us, and we have not that serious design before our eyes and upon our hearts, that we would know more of divine things, that we may be made more like God, and be more fitted for his service and communion both here and hereafter, we shall be found guilty of trifling with that which is sacred: and though in this world the punishment may not be so visibly



severe, yet the guilt is undoubtedly great with, (and indeed incomparably greater than,) what Uzzah lay under when he rashly laid hold on the ark, and the Bethshemites when they opened and would be curiously prying into it. And what! do we therefore make light of God, and the sacred things of God, because in the gospel-days there are not so terrible examples set in view before our eyes? But if we look into the great mysteries of the divine kingdom, with a slight mind and a vain heart, without any serious design of the same thing that these discoveries, these truths, these doctrines that are brought to our knowledge are designed for, we are all that while deserving that, which will be worse in the issue and end, than to have the name put upon the place "*Perez-Uzzah, the breach that Uzzah made,*" and it will be a more dreadful thing than if he did signalize the place by a terrible stroke from heaven upon us. When a man meddleth with the great things of God and can give no account for what, but only to satisfy his own curiosity, and the idle fancy of a vain mind; this will have a sad issue. But let it be for this, and my heart bear me record that it is for this, that I may become a serious, holy, knowing christian, a useful christian; that I may live up to Christianity through the whole of my course while I am here upon earth, and then shall I be fitted at length for the heavenly inheritance with the saints in light, who shall possess that glorious inheritance.

Our next great work will be to fall upon the first principle, the very first of these principles, that which is the principal of principles; and that is concerning the Deity; the deepest foundation of all our religion.

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## LECTURE III.<sup>2</sup>

Rom. i. 20.

*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and God head; so that they are without excuse.*

OUR business (as we have proposed you know) is, with God's gracious assistance, to open to you the principles of religion. Christian religion (which we finally intend) is founded in natural: and the principles of the former must be understood, therefore, to comprehend the latter, as things at least necessarily pre-supposed unto the doctrine of Christ. Now it being our design, in the general, to open to you the principles that do any way belong to that doctrine, we choose (as it is most fit) to begin with HIM who is the beginning of all, the principle that is most firstly first, *primo primum*, as they use to speak. Such is the Deity whether we speak of principles of being or of knowledge: for there is no being that depends not upon the Divine Being, and no knowledge, rightly so called, which some way or other depends not upon divine knowledge. He is not only the first being, but the first and primary known, the *primum esse* and the *primum cognoscibile*, as he is justly to be reckoned.

Now this text shews us the true method of arriving to the knowledge of him, the unmade Being, by the things that are made; and not only to the certainty of his existence, but of the excellency of his nature; both discoverable by the same light, by the same evidencing mediums, which that you may see, let us view the contents of this text briefly. We have in it

First, What is revealed concerning God, expressed *first* of all more indefinitely, "the invisible things of him." This must not be understood distinctively, as if some things of God were visible and some invisible; that is, of things belonging to the divine nature; but it must be understood adversatively, that is, though they are invisible, and notwithstanding their in visibility, they are yet clearly demonstrable by the things that are made. And then, *secondly*, they are declared to us more expressly, first, in one great instance of his eternal power, the effects whereof we see (as is here said) in the things that are made. But the cause itself is still invisible. And this is most fitly instanced in reference to the creature and the creation, which is said to be demonstrative thereof. All this vast creation, with that great variety of creatures that do compose and make it up, having lain in that, as in the pregnant womb thereof, from all eternity; out of which it is at length produced by it as its mighty creative cause. And then, *secondly*, besides this instance of one peculiar excellency of the Divine Being, (his eternal power) to save a long and a particular enumeration, all the rest of the divine excellencies,

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2 Preached December 5, 1690.—The preceding discourse was, doubtless, preached in two Lectures: but the division, and the time when the 2nd was delivered are not noticed in the manuscript. Edit.

are summed up in that one expression, "Godhead:" his eternal power and Godhead, comprehending all his other excellencies and perfections besides. This is the first thing we have to note to you from the text what is revealed concerning God, even the invisible things of him, particularly his eternal power, the immediate cause of all things, and his Godhead which comprehends all his excellencies together. And,

Secondly: We have to consider here the revelation hereof, these things "are clearly seen," seen, and clearly seen. This indeed looks like a riddle; invisible things seen! and clearly seen! things seen that are invisible, or that cannot be seen! But the next words solve it, "being understood by the things that are made." Seen! How are they seen? Not ocularly, but intellectually, they are seen as being understood. They are seen by the eye of the mind, though they cannot be seen by the bodily eye. God, and every thing belonging to the nature of God, being in that respect by the excellency thereof invisible. But it may be said, How are they so seen and clearly seen by the minds and understandings of men? when the complaint is concerning men generally, even in the very context, "their foolish hearts are darkened," and "the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not;" as it is in the beginning of John's gospel. How then are they intellectually seen? Why nothing is more usual than to express a matter of right (where that right is most evident) by matter of fact, and by such forms of speech as signify the fact. "No man liveth to himself:" that is, no man should. It is so plain a case that no man should live to himself, that when the design is to speak the reason of the thing, this is the expression of it, "no man liveth to himself," that is, is allowed to do so; and indeed in common language it is usual to express the passive future by the present or the preterit, as we say, *vir spectatus*, for *vir spectabilis*, or *spectandus*; *one that is very much regarded*, for one that *ought to be or deserves to be so*. And a thing that we say is *indubitatae fidei*, of *undoubted faith* and certainty: we mean by it *indubitande*, that ought not to be doubted, or that there is no reason why it should be doubted. So "clearly seen" here, is clearly to be seen and understood, that is, such as might be understood, that ought to be understood, and there is no reason, why they are not understood, but because men will not understand; shut their eyes and are willingly blind and ignorant, "not liking" (as it is afterwards expressed in the context) "to retain God in their knowledge." Or, there are here things so clearly to be understood, that they are manifestly left (as the close of this verse is) without all excuse who understand them not. And upon that account, in the words presently following, "that which may be known:" (so we read it) the expression is, that which is known of God; but the meaning is, that which may be known of God, as we translate it. Then,

Thirdly: We are to consider the evidencing medium in the text, "by the things that are made:" the made things that are visible, are clearly demonstrative of their unmade Cause, of the excellency of the power and Godhead of that invisible Being, who is the unmade Maker of them. And





Fourthly: You have the constancy and continuedness of this concealment and revelation, “from the creation of the world.” It is not *εκ out of*, but *αποfrom*; and notes the term of time and not casualty, which is expressed in the other phrase of speech, we noted to you before, “the things that are made.” But all along, ever since the world began, ever since there was a world in being, the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead: they have been concealed and revealed: concealed in one respect; that is, they have been invisible to mortal eyes: and revealed in another respect; that is, have been visible to mortal minds. And then you have

Fifthly: In the last place, (which will be fit to be considered as the use of all,) the inexcusableness of those that receive not this revelation; so that they are without excuse, that do not acknowledge and adore the invisible Godhead, so demonstrating himself by the things that are made.

As to what we intend, you may take the ground of the whole discourse from this scripture thus,

That the sundry, excellencies of the Divine Being, all-comprehending Godhead, are clearly demonstrable by the things that are made. And you may take in (as that which gives the greater lustre to the truth) that which is put adversatively, if you please, notwithstanding their invisibility in themselves.

In speaking to this, these two things are principally to be insisted on:

I. They shew you what the Godhead comprehends, as far as is needful or possible unto us, or what are the excellencies that belong to the nature of God. And then,

II. To shew how these are demonstrable of him by the things that are made.

I shall not dispute the reasonableness of that method in Speaking to other subjects, first to inquire about the *an sit*, and then about the *quod sit* or rather the *quid sit*; to inquire first whether such a thing be, and then to inquire what it is. There may, indeed, as to some confused knowledge of a thing, be an inquiry concerning it's existence, and afterwards a descent made to inquire more particularly into its precise nature. But simply speaking, it would be the most absurd thing in the world to inquire first whether this or that be, before there is any apprehension at all what it is: for then we inquire about a shadow; and neither he that demonstrates, nor he to whom the demonstration is made, can do other than beat the air; the one understands not himself, nor can the other understand what he goes about. But it would be much more absurd in this case, to follow such a method as that, because by universal consent, the divine nature includes existence in it, which some therefore rely upon as sufficient demonstration of the existence of God, that is, that his very idea doth include existence, so that it is impossible to conceive of the Divine Being, but we must conceive of it as existing, inasmuch as the very idea and notion of it is inclusive of all perfections, whereof existence cannot be but one. and a very fundamental one too to all the rest. And



therefore it must be a manifest contradiction, so much as but to suppose, that the most perfect Being must not exist, because a possibility of not existing is a very great and manifest imperfection.

But that is not the method of demonstration which I choose, but that which the text lays before us, that is, to demonstrate by that which is made, both the certainty of God's existence, and the excellency of his nature. But the latter we must have some understanding of first, otherwise neither do I nor you know what we are doing, if we have no apprehension among us, who or what a one he is, whose existence we speak of.

I. This therefore comes to be considered and inquired into, what excellencies we must suppose the Godhead or divine nature (which is all one) doth comprehend. And here it must be acknowledged, we enter into a vast and most profound abyss; and you and I have all of us great reason to apprehend our need of much forgiveness, that after so great opportunity as we have had to learn better, we understand and know little yet of what we are to speak and hear of; and we have great need to supplicate and look up, that we may be enabled to speak and hear worthily concerning the blessed and eternal God, and to speak things of him fit to be spoken, and to hear them as it is fit to hear such things.

Why, in general it is certain the name of God doth import a Being absolutely perfect, a Being comprehensive of all perfections.

And now here it may be said, This throws us into a sort of despair; for certainly a Being comprehensive of all perfections, must be to us altogether incomprehensible; we can never comprehend what doth itself comprehend all things.

I answer, Very true indeed: and yet there is a knowledge of this incomprehensible and all-comprehending Being, which is necessary as our first step, not only in what we are now about, but in reference to whatsoever else we have to go about to do, or to enjoy in all time, or in all eternity. But to relieve our thoughts here a little, you must know that we are not to treat of this incomprehensible and all-comprehending Being, in the way of metaphysicians and philosophers, who must have notions of things, ideas of them (it is that which they profess and pretend to) adequate to the things themselves whereof they treat; but our business is to speak of this ever-blessed Being as persons professing religion; not as philosophers, but as religionists; and so we are to consider him as the Object of our religion, the first thing to be considered in all religion; and so the name of our inquiry comes to this: Have we an object for our religion, yea or no? And if we cannot reach to comprehend (as it is impossible we should) all that doth belong to the Godhead, if yet we can reach to apprehend, so much as will represent and recommend him to us, as a worthy, deserving Object of our religion, our business is done: that is what we design, and we may know so much concerning him as to know him to be a fit Object, or worthy of religion, without knowing all of him, which is impossible: and if it were possible it would undeify him. He could not be God if we could comprehend him. He could not be a Deity if a finite mind were comprehensive of him.

404

405

And that you may a little understand the reasonableness of what I now say, do but consider what knowledge of man it is necessary for you to have in order to your conversing with men. Is it not possible for one man to converse with another, without having a full and entire knowledge of the full and entire guidity (as I may so speak) of human nature? must a man know all the properties and attributes of human nature, or he cannot converse with men? I hope there are many men converse one with another besides philosophers. And so, I say, it is equally possible for you to converse with God, without knowing every thing belonging to his nature. It is enough in order hereunto, and that so you may be in a possibility of conversing with him by religion, as the great Object of your religion: the only Object of your religion, that you know him to be more perfect than any thing else, or all things else, though you do not fully know how excellent or perfect he is, or ever can. But this our conception of him in the general, that he is a Being absolutely perfect, or universally perfect, must comprehend all that can be thought, and all that can be said concerning him. Yet, in the mean time, this is too general to denote to us the Object of our religion. We must have more particular and more distinct thoughts of him whom we are to worship, to whom we are to pay all duty, and from whom we are to expect all felicity, than only this one general notion doth furnish us with. That is, that he is one that is universally or absolutely perfect; we must necessarily descend and come down to particulars; and think what particulars are necessary to constitute and make up for us the object of our worship and religion. And so you may take this more particular (though yet short) account.

When we inquire, What doth the idea or notion of God include? what are we to conceive of the nature of God, as he is the Object of our religion? we must have such a representation of him as this in our minds; that he is an eternal, self-subsisting Being, himself unmade, and the intelligent and free Author and Original of every thing that is made. Conceive him so, and you have before you the Object of your worship, the Object of religion, one that claims by a natural right that you fall down and adore him. This is some answer to the former of these inquiries, What we are to conceive by that name of God as represented and held forth to us under that name, or what is it that the Godhead doth comprehend, so far as is answerable to our purpose, that is, of stating before you an object of religion.

II. And now the second thing we have to do, is to demonstrate all this concerning God, by the things that are made: which is that method of demonstration that the text furnishes us with, and directs us unto. If such a Being as this doth exist in reality, have actual existence in such a Being, or he doth exist such and as such, then we can be in no further doubt, whether we have an object of worship, an object of religion yea or no. But now the demonstration of the existence of such a Being, by things that are made, must be done by parts, according as there are parts, that this representation of the object of religion is made up of, and so we shall proceed gradually part by part. As

1 We have this to demonstrate to you, that there is existing an ETERNAL BEING, that was of itself, depending upon nothing for its being or existence; and this we have to demonstrate to you by the things that are made; that is thus; though that eternal Being is invisible; you see him not with your eyes; it is a Being of too high an excellency ever to be seen of mortal eyes, or by the eyes of the flesh, or by external sense; yet there are things in being that are visible, and of the existence whereof you can be sure. You are sure that yourselves are, and that you are some of the things that are made; for you very well know, that you began to be, that you have not been always, and that you have been but a little while; then I say, from that which you may be sure of, that it is a being, you may be likewise sure, there is an eternal Being that was from everlasting of itself. And I would not have you herein to debase your own minds and understandings, as if they could not be at a certainty about such a thing as this, though the matter falls not under the sight of the eye. As to what is to be inferred, to be collected and concluded, it would be too great a debasement of human nature and the mind and spirit of a man, to suppose or imagine that this mind and spirit cannot be as certain of its object, as external sense can be of its object. You think you are very sure of what you see with your eyes, and you have reason to think you are so: and you are so. But I would have you to apprehend too, that you may be as sure of something that you only know with your mind as you can be of any thing that you see with your eyes: and you wrong your own understandings if you will not think the one sort of things to be as certain as the other sort. You think (for instance) we are all very sure that we see one another, and are here present together at this time: you see me and I see you. No man but will think this a very absolute certainty of what falls under sight. But let me appeal to you now, whether you cannot be certain of something that only falls under the view of your mind, and not under your sight at all. Are you not as sure that two and two make four, as you are that you and I see one another? the one as an object of the mind only, the other as an object of sense. And pray is not the one of these as certain as the other? Am I not as certain that two and two make four, as that we see one another? Have you not as much satisfaction of the truth of the one as of the truth of the other? Well, that being now laid, I doubt not but if you will use your understandings, you will see and confess that you are as certain, that an eternal Being is, which you see not, as you are that any being is, that you do see.

Why! How can we be as certain? you will say.

Why, plainly and shortly thus, from this consequence, If any thing is, something hath always been. Do but consider and weigh in your own minds the clearness of this consequence. If you can be sure that something now is, you may be as sure that something hath ever been, been from eternity, or (which is all one) that there is an eternal Being. Well but how will this consequence be made out? Why, plainly, by taking the reverse of it. Do but suppose with yourselves, nothing more is; then the manifest consequence will be, that to eternity nothing can ever be, and of this (if you will think) you may be as sure, as you can of this,



that two and two make four. That is, do but lay down this, and suppose it: there is nothing now in being no where, or any where; whatsoever there was, there is now nothing of one sort or another in being; you then may be sure, that to all eternity nothing can ever happen to be: for nothing can spring, or start up out of nothing into being of itself. Can you be surer of any thing than of this, that if you could suppose the whole universe of being not to be, or that from eternity it was not, to all eternity it would never be, it could never be. Then how plain a consequence is this, if something now is, something hath always been: if there be any being, there is an eternal Being. For if there had been any time, or any moment, in all conceivable eternity wherein there was nothing in being, nothing had ever come into being, or could possibly have done so. This then is the first step, there is an ETERNAL BEING, and nothing can be plainer. But now,

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## LECT. IV.<sup>3</sup>

2. We come in the next place to prove to you the *self-existence* of such a Being. There is such a Being first, and now secondly, that eternal Being must be of itself, could no other way be, but of and from itself. Now here you must conjoin these two things in your own thoughts, that so (as you will see in the sequel) every thing that is thus proved, may be found to be proved of one and the same being. Now then it is evident, that this eternal Being is the first of all beings, there can be nothing before it, and therefore it cannot have its existence from another, there being nothing before it, from whence it could have its existence, and therefore it must have its existence from itself: not by once beginning to exist, for we have shewn already, it is impossible, that if there were nothing in being, any thing should of itself rise up out of nothing into being. And therefore this is such a Being, as must be understood by the excellency of its own nature, to have been always in being without beginning, and so it will appear to be an eternal Being, and to be a self-existing Being both at once: or (which is all one) a necessary Being, a Being that doth not depend upon will and pleasure, as all made things do. All made things depend upon will and pleasure; “for thy pleasure they are, and were created.” But the unmade Being must needs be self-existent, no way depending upon the pleasure of another, there being nothing before it, and so (which is the same thing) itself necessarily existing, as that excellency, that peculiar excellency of its own nature, to which it was simply repugnant not to exist. And so for the same reason if there have been an eternal self-subsisting Being, there must be still an eternal self-subsisting Being, for it is upon these terms, and for that reason for which it was impossible to it ever not to be. And so that nature which he is pleased to assume to himself is most admirably expressive of this peculiarity of his nature, “I AM THAT I AM,” or simply “I AM.” [Exod. iii. 14](#). All beings besides, being but (as it were) shadows of being in comparison of this. And

We are further to conceive and to prove concerning this Being, its causation of all things else, this is an attribute of the Divine Being as it is itself without cause, so to be the Cause of every thing. Itself unmade, but the Maker of all things that are made. A thing the blessed God doth justly and often glory in, in sundry parts of Scripture: “The Maker of heaven and earth.” The first as well as the last. He of whom and from whom all things are; and we are told again and again how, in the beginning of Genesis, and the beginning of the gospel of John and elsewhere, to wit, by a word’s speaking. He spake and they were made. He commanded and they stood forth. That there are made things is a proof to us that he was their Maker. A made thing and a maker are relatives one to another, and there can be no maker of that which was of itself. Whence should that which was made not of itself come, but from that Being that was of itself?

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<sup>3</sup> Preached Dec. 12, 1690.

4. We must conceive and may clearly prove from what is made, the vast *power* of the Eternal Being. The things that are made prove that he is a Being of the greatest conceivable power, the greatest that we can conceive, and indeed unspeakably greater than we can conceive. This appears in that, first, he hath made all things out of nothing: as nothing can of itself arise out of nothing, so it is the greatest power that is conceivable to bring any thing out of nothing: if all the contrivance and all the power of this world were put together to bring the least thing out of nothing, you would easily apprehend it impossible to all. If all the force that is in this whole earth, and even in the whole creation, should be exerted together to bring a grain of sand out of nothing, you would easily apprehend it would never be, and therefore how vast is that power of this Eternal Being! he to whom the eternal Godhead belongs, (as the text speaks) to bring things into being that were not; that were nothing immediately before. But then, secondly, consider also the vastness of the creation. To bring the least thing out of nothing must require the greatest power, but to bring so great a creation as this out of nothing, is that which doth render the power of the Creator, both perspicuous and admirable at once. To have such a frame of things as we behold with our eyes “from day to day made to rise up out of nothing, and only by a word speaking, how perspicuous and admirable doth it evidence his infinite power! But

5. We are to apprehend, and may prove the admirable beneficence of him that made them. If we cast our eye through the universe, and consider, that the first order of creatures that have life are made capable of pleasure; some kind of satisfaction to themselves, that is, that are capable of the meaner life, the sensitive life; and that the creatures beneath them are made to afford the matter of that pleasure, when it was very easily possible for a Being of vast, immense power to have made creatures only for self-torment; upon this account it appears that the whole earth, the whole creation is full of his goodness. So that rising a little from the meanest sort and order of creatures, you immediately ascend to such a sort and order of creatures as hath, every one, its suitable delectation. That all the repasts of that life that are given to the several orders of creatures, are mingled and sweetened with so much delight, speaks all to be full of his goodness. Whatsoever is necessary for the support of it, is generally taken in with delight and complacency. If this Being who is the Author and Spring of all other beings, were not a being of admirable goodness and beneficence it had been as easy a thing to him, that what should have been necessary for the support of inferior beings should always have been accompanied with torture as well as pleasure. That whereas we and the creatures beneath us find it needful in order to the support of life to eat and drink, he might have ordered it so that there never should have been eating and drinking without torment: now we find it is with continued pleasure, for the greater part, with all sorts of creatures whose case doth require it. And again,

6. We must understand from the things that are made, this Eternal Being to have been their *intelligent* and *designing* Maker. We are to prove this intellectuality from the things



that are made; that he is an intellectual Being, that he did not give rise to this creation by an effort of vast and resistless power alone; but by a power that was guided and governed by wisdom, so as to know and design all his work throughout. And (as I have told you) it being our business in speaking to this head, to evince and make out to you an object of religion, to give you a plain and satisfactory answer to this first question, Have we an object of religion yea or no? this is most absolutely necessary to the resolution of it. We have not an object of religion without this, that is, without the supposition of an intellectual designing Maker of all things. If we should suppose only an Almighty Maker of things, who made them without wisdom, without design, intending no such thing; if the effort of such a power as we could not resist, and it could not of itself withhold, had thrown up such a creation as this is, out of nothing into what it is, if that had been possible, here had been no object of worship, no object of religion, that is, there would have been nothing that would either deserve or could receive religious homage from us: nothing that could deserve it, because the thing was altogether (upon this supposition) without design. If a mighty violent storm had thrown in upon the coast some vessel full of rich treasure, and I was passing by it, and (it being without an owner, no one laying claim to it) it were thrown into my lap, would I fall down and worship the storm? though I might him that guided and directed it. Nor indeed as an undesigning cause of all things could not deserve religious homage, so neither could he receive it. It would be an absurd thing to pay a religious homage where there could be no reception of it, where no notice could be taken of it. But nothing is more evident from the things that are made, than that the Maker of them hath done all with most profound and wise counsel; he hath therein displayed an infinite understanding and thereby made known that his understanding is infinite. By wisdom are the heavens stretched forth and the earth established and founded. Which appears several ways:

(1.) In the order which is every way observable in the creation of God. Wisdom only is the parent of order, and order the product of wisdom. It cannot be, that there should be accurate and continued order by chance. When the letters of the alphabet are put into such an order as to express such and such sense, will any man say this was by chance, and this was without design? especially when this is continued, when they are repeated over and over again, in such order as to make a volume: the very thing (I remember) that the pagan, Cicero takes notice of and urgeth for the proving of a Deity; the creating of the world by a wise and designing cause, against the epicureans who would have it arise only out of the fortuitous jumble of several particles of matter, called atoms. "You might as well (saith he) suppose that the letters of the alphabet in great numbers shaken together in confusion, and thrown out, should fall into the order of Ennius's poems, so as of themselves without design to compose such a history as his, all in verse." When we consider the order that is between things and things, how exact a course and motion, the sun, moon, and planets and other stars do hold, so as that a man of weak understanding can tell you at what hour, in such a





month and such a day of the month, the sun will rise and set, and so of the moon; and so (those that do observe them) of the planets and other stars besides; and then to see the constant succession of summer and winter, spring and autumn, day and night amongst us: whence comes all this order? What! from no designing cause? And again,

(2.) Consider the aptitude of things to their end, the several ends they are appointed to serve for, #s, who can comprehend that such a thing as our eye was made for any thing else but to see with, and our foot but to walk with, and our hand but to work with, and such a thing as the ear was made for any thing else but to hear with? Who can comprehend that there should be that strange and exact aptitude in every thing for the ends and purposes that they do serve for, without a design that they should serve those purposes? And this would be a great deal more convictive, if it were so obvious to every one to take notice of, and observe many things that are more latent, and lie out of common view: to think how the several veins and arteries do receive and distribute and return back again the blood from its fountain, the heart, so as continually to renew strength and vigour in the body as the matter doth require: to think of the admirable variety and suitableness of those things that we have in our bodies, called muscles, and all the several sorts of motion that are to be performed; about six (as is observed) belonging to the eye itself, without which it were impossible it should move in the several ways it doth: and about four hundred and thirty of these in one human body. If any man did by chance see a watch, who had never seen one before; but he finds upon observation, what uses and purposes it serves for in the general, and what purposes the several parts it was composed of do serve for, in order to that general end, will he not with the greatest confidence imaginable pronounce, “this was made with a design:” or would a man blame him for his confidence? Or if a man take upon him to pretend to such an excessive measure of wit as to say, “these things serve to such a purpose, for this general end, the measuring of time; and the several parts serve for several ends, this and that motion by which the whole is made useful to that common end: but this was never made by any human art or with a design, but the several parts of which it is composed being agitated variously by the wind, or motion of the air were thrown by mere chance into this figure, and so there resulted out of the whole such a little engine as this, that now you see serves these purposes;” who would not think that man with his pretences to wit, a madman that should give such an account as this, how a watch came to be made, when he sees what it serves for, and what its several parts do serve for, in subserviency and reference to the common end? And which way would you judge and pronounce with confidence that such a thing was made with a design, but by having so manifest characters upon it of a designing cause? so as that every one but a madman would presently say, this was done with a design and for such a purpose. But there is no one that hath given himself but to look a little into the composition of a human body but could see a hundred times more curiosity in so many hundreds of things that go to the composition of it. As I have told you, in each several muscle



of a human body there is as much curiosity as can be taken notice of in a watch, and much more in the fabric and structure of the eye and of the ear. So that nothing can be imagined a greater absurdity than to suppose such things as those that we see are made, were made without design or otherwise than with design, and by a wise cause that was first productive of them and continues to be productive of them in the stated way that he hath set for them. And,



(3.) We may conclude an intellectual designing cause of the things that are made, from very many of the things themselves, that not only have characters of a design upon them, and so thence appear to be made with design, but are made capable of design themselves; that is, the whole order of intelligent reasonable creatures. We are all of us convinced that we are not of ourselves, that we are made things, that our minds and spirits which we carry about with us are made things by one unmade. It is but a little while ago that they were not. But besides, they are things themselves capable of design: you know we lay our designs this way and that, we have our contrivance what we will do to-day and to-morrow and (it may be) the third day. And whence should a designing effect proceed but from a designing cause? If there be such a thing as wisdom among the things that are made, there must certainly be a wise maker; otherwise that wisdom being itself a made thing, was made by that which had nothing in it, out of which it could arise. But (as I told you before) it is altogether impossible for something to arise out of nothing itself. Therefore wisdom being somewhat and a made thing, it doth not arise of itself out of nothing, or that is of late beginning. A little while ago they were not, how comes wisdom into such a created kind of being? Why it shews the wisdom of an uncreated Being from whence it came. And,

7. We may further hence collect the spirituality of this Being, that this Being is a Spirit, an eternal Spirit, an eternal mind; otherwise it were not capable of design. There are but two sorts of beings in general that we can so much as conceive of. These are mind and matter. Since we have proved to you, this Being is a designing Being, a wise intelligent Being, that proves it to be a mind, and spiritual Being, because matter is capable of no such thing as design: some indeed may apprehend that though gross matter cannot design, (a clod of clay we know can design nothing,) yet perhaps some finer sort of matter, pure and defected matter may. But I would have it considered what nearer approach to wisdom and reason there is in a flame of fire, than in a clod of clay. Can any man conceive that there is any greater disposition to reason or the exercise of wisdom in a blast of wind or a flame of fire than in a piece of dirt? Therefore we are here to attribute to the Deity that, that God is pleased to attribute to himself; to wit, that he is a Spirit, which further represents him to us as the Object of worship, and of suitable worship, forasmuch as he is to be worshipped, and worshipped in spirit and in truth. [John iv. 24](#). And indeed, otherwise it had been altogether impossible that this world should be made by a cause that were not purely mental, in its own being a mental and spiritual thing: for most manifest it is; matter as such is altogether



inactive; and if you could suppose never so vast a collection of mere matter it would always remain a mere dead lump, as even the light of more intelligent and considering heathens could dictate to them: *Mens agitat molem*; it is the mind that doth actuate, and did at first this mighty *moles* of matter, so as to bring things out of it, appearing in such an order as we do behold, and that we may not go on further in particular enumerations, which we see the apostle, in the text, cuts much shorter, summing up all in the word Godhead,

8. In the last place we may collect from the things that are made that this Being is absolutely *perfect*, or such as wherein all excellencies do concur in their highest perfection whether they be natural, intellectual, or moral, or those that we may conceive under these distinct notions.

(1.) Natural, as life, original self-sprung life in the highest perfection of it, as it imports both a self-active and self-fruitive principle. And again, pure simplicity and uncompoundedness; the necessary exclusion of all composition that may import any thing of diminution or debasement, to that Being we are speaking of. And again, most absolute immutability and unchangeableness, as that mentioned name; “I AM THAT I AM” imports. Arid again, immensity, unconfinedness to any space whatsoever; so that “heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain” this Being. These are natural perfections that we must understand do belong to him. And then,

(2.) All sorts of intellectual perfection that are truly such; as perfect knowledge of all things, even of minds and spirits themselves; and of future things that no eye can look into, but the divine eye. Most exact wisdom in all things else, as well as what appears in the making of this world, there is also requisite what doth appear in the continual government of it in changing the times and seasons, ordering things so as that they shall hit into their proper juncture, and meet in all their necessary circumstances that were needful to concur for such and such purposes. And then,

(3.) Those that are called moral excellencies, such as truth and righteousness, and holiness and the like: these must be understood, upon the same grounds, all of them to meet and concur in their highest perfection in this Being. And the demonstration whereof is still too, from the things that are made, because there are ideas, images, vestiges of these things to be found up and down in the creation among the things that are made. We find that some things are more fickle than others, and some things more steady. And we find (as I said before) there is such a thing as wisdom, as knowledge, as holiness, as righteousness, to be found among the creatures; and this shews all these things must be in the highest perfection in the unmade Being.

And I might add hereupon (as that which will be most necessarily consequent) that this Being must be infinite in all these perfections, because there is nothing in being, and nothing supposable ever to come into being, that doth not result and proceed from it. And that which comprehends all being and all perfection and all excellency, actual and possible, cannot be

less than infinite; for there can be nothing more than all: but it is altogether impossible that there should be any thing, either that is in actual being now, or that can hereafter come into being, that comes not from this radical Being. This Being; therefore, which must virtually comprehend all that is actual and all that is possible, within the compass of its own power, cannot be less than infinite, because there can be nothing more than all, nothing beyond all.

And for the same reason it will be most evident that this Being can be but *one*. But that I shall not now insist upon: it will fall into the discourse most suitably when we come to shew, though it be essentially but one, it is personally three, and that is only to be shewn from the Scripture. The *unity* of the Deity is indeed demonstrable from reason, but that there should be a *trinity* in it, is only to be known from his saying so who best knows his own nature. As “the things of a man” are only to be known by “the spirit of a man that is in him,” so the things of God, and what is in his holy nature (otherwise not revealed) can only be known by the Spirit of God, as he shall think fit to reveal and make it known to us. But first, it will be needful to lay the foundation thereof in revealed religion, which is the great superstructure that is raised upon natural religion, or the natural notices of God, to wit, to evince to you that the Scriptures are of divine revelation which will fee the next work we have to do.

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## LEC. V.<sup>4</sup>

Before we come to evince to you the authority of the Scriptures, I reckon nothing can be of greater importance than to enlarge somewhat in the USE of that we have been upon: for if we let what God is pleased to make known concerning himself, his own nature and existence, slightly pass without improvement, and lose that, we lose all. All our time is lost, and all our labour is lost if we can let so great a thing slide away without some proportionable improvement and impression: and here in lies the proper improvement of it. The state of things is sad among us, upon this account, that there is so little knowledge of God in the land: for this it hath cause to mourn, and I doubt will be made to do so: but if we had ten thousand times more of the knowledge of God than we have, if it be not a lively and impressed knowledge, it is all to no purpose: the increase of our knowledge would be but the increase of our sorrow, as it is said upon another account. You have heard from this scripture, that the existence and nature of God (though invisible) are clearly demonstrated by the things he hath made. The improvement I desire you to make of it, will be partly by way of information in some particular truths that may be deduced from it: partly by way of expostulation, touching sins repugnant hereunto: and partly by way of exhortation to agreeable duties.

I. For truths that may be collected and *inferred* hence for our information, you may take such as these:

1 That the mind of man is capable of arriving by way of argument unto the knowledge of God; it is capable of attaining in a way of argumentation to the knowledge of God's existence and in great measure of his nature too. For we are told, the eternal power and Godhead are to be clearly seen by the things that are made. Things in themselves invisible, and while they are in themselves invisible, if we are to come to the knowledge of them by the things that are made, how can that be but by way of argument? In themselves they are said to be invisible: those visible things that are beheld are not the eternal power and Godhead themselves, therefore we can come to the knowledge of the former by the latter no way but by intervening arguments, not immediately, for the things that are made are the medium. Therefore it is by way of argumentation formed from this medium, that we come to this knowledge of God's eternal power and Godhead, and this is that which concerns us very deeply to consider, that if in such a way as this we are to arrive at the knowledge of God, then it is of much importance to us to make a reflection upon ourselves, and understand that from hence, much is to be learned of our own nature. If in this way we are to understand any thing of God's nature, we must by consequence understand so much of our own nature: that is, that it is a reasonable nature, that it is an intelligent nature, that it is a nature capable of improving itself in point of knowledge, by ratiocination and discourse; and even of



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4 Preached Dec. 19, 1690.

knowledge concerning the highest and greatest, and first knowable, that is God and the very nature of God. Indeed here the foundation lies of all obligation that can be upon us to be religious, to be obedient, to be subject, to the common Ruler of this world; that is, that God hath given us a nature capable of knowing him, and of arriving to this knowledge of him by this way of ratiocination, as the text implies: that is, to collect that there is an eternal power, and an essential Deity, from things that are made and extant to view. If we are to come by it, so we are to come by it in a reasoning way, and it is impossible for us to receive conviction concerning our own duty towards God, if we have not a right apprehension of our own natures, and what they are susceptible and capable of. God will deal with us at the last day, according to the nature that he hath given us; and therefore we ought to consider ourselves too according to that nature. There will be a judgment-day for men, when there will not for brutes; and if God will difference us in the final judgment, and doth difference us in the way of his present government, from inferior brute creatures, it concerns us to understand the difference too, and to know that we have natures capable of being so dealt with, and as God will finally deal with us; that he doth not deal with us unsuitably to the natures he hath first given us. "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty hath given him understanding." And if so, then he is to be dealt with accordingly; not like a stock or a stone, or a brute creature. It is a great signification to us of the capacity of the nature of man, that it should be said here, to all those that will use their understandings, the eternal power and Godhead are clearly seen, by the things he hath made. And that is one thing we have therefore to collect and infer for our own information, that the mind and understanding are capable of arriving by ratiocination and arguments to the knowledge of God. Indeed it would be a strange kind of perverseness to hesitate at the reception of this, because it is plain, that even lower things than our mental capacity are subservient to our reception of divine knowledge; for faith (that hath to do with the same kind of objects) comes by hearing; and if external sense is to be subservient to our reception of the knowledge of divine things, then certainly much more our understanding, which is a thing far nobler than our external sense, and therefore it is a higher and greater talent that we are to be accountable for. We are to be accountable for all our faculties, as so many talents that God hath intrusted us with; the faculty of seeing, the faculty of hearing, the faculty of remembering and the like. And what do we think, among the rest, the faculty of understanding in so plain and important a case as this, is to be exempted and left out? that God should have distinguished us by this in so great a measure from the beasts that perish, and we take no notice of the difference and not think ourselves accountable for it? No, if we are in this way capable of coming to the knowledge of God's eternal power and Godhead, certainly this ability of coming this way to this knowledge, is that which must be strictly accounted for another day; that we have such a power and use it not, such a capacity and endowment belonging to our

natures and never use it, let It lie asleep, never exert and put it forth to so high and to so great a purpose as this is. But,

2. We may further learn hence, that none who have the use of their understandings can ever be innocently ignorant of God. No, saith the text, there is so cleat a representation of the eternal power and Godhead in the things that are made, that if men will not yet know God they are left without excuse, without apology, the case admits of no apology. That there should be so clear a representation to an apprehensive creature, and he will not know God; there is nothing to be said for it. There is nothing to be said why they do not know him, why they do not live in the eternal adoration of him. The matter will be resolved entirely and only into this at the last, they have not known, because they have not liked to retain God in their knowledge, as it follows after, in the 20th. verse; and into that which we see in that of [Ephes. iv. 18.](#) that men are “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them and the blindness of their hearts. “Pray what kind of blindness is the blindness of the heart? That can be no blindness but voluntary blindness, affected blindness, chosen blindness; that men are blind because they will be blind, because they will not see. A blindness of the mere speculative understanding is quite another thing, but such a blindness as is referred to the heart, as having its seat and subject there, must mean a blindness that men voluntarily do continue themselves in, as he that stifly and resolvedly winks that he may act see the light.

3. We may further infer hence, that the clearest rational knowledge of God is by no means so acquiesced in, as if that would serve the turn, and be answerable to the saving purposes and necessities of our souls. The rational knowledge of God; it may be had and it must be had, but it must not be rested in; for even this knowledge that doth in the means, the objective representation, lie so fairly compassable, (for the discovery is clear) is supposed to be clear; the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead, are clearly seen, clearly to be seen, and there may be a reception in some measure, and proportionable to the representation of the object. Besides the objective representation, there may be a subjective reception; it is a supposable thing, and it is frequent (though not universal) that these things here spoken of under the notion of invisibles, are not only clearly to be seen, but seen: and yet, though this knowledge do lie so fairly compassable and may be actually obtained and received, men, for all that, may be left without excuse, for the reason referred to in the verse next but one foregoing, that is, that the truth that is received is held in unrighteousness. “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” And by this truth (it is plain by what follows) is principally and chiefly meant the truth concerning the existence and nature of God, “that which may be known of God” (so it immediately follows) “is manifest in them: for God hath shewed it unto them:” for the invisible things, such truths as these, may not only be represented but received; and being so, yet held in unrighteousness, defeated of their proper design;



so that such are left without excuse; it not attaining the end that such a representation doth finally aim at. Indeed God would never be angry without a cause, therefore if they be under wrath, if the wrath of God be revealed from heaven, and flame against a wicked, atheistical world, it is plain they are without excuse.

But now, will that knowledge of God serve our turn that will only leave us inexcusable? will that answer the purposes and necessities of our souls? It is a supposable thing that the clearest merely rational knowledge of God, may but leave men without excuse, therefore somewhat more is necessary, another sort of knowledge. That which is rational, may be had and ought to be had, and we shall most dearly answer for it, if we have it not: but then when we have it, that is not enough, it is necessary, but not sufficient.

But then it may be said, What more is there wanting than to know clearly the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead? Why I shall tell you in one word: To have that clear knowledge made vital. It is not the mere clearness, but the vitality, of the knowledge of God that must do the needful work in our souls, in order to our present serving of God, and walking and conversing with him in this world, and our final felicity and blessedness with him in the other world. Light there must be, but it must be the light of life, otherwise we shall never be the better for it. A light that is not vital will serve to condemn, but only a light that is vital will serve to save. There is, it is true, a light universally shining in every intelligent mind, in every conscience of man, but it is a light so little profitable to the necessity of an immortal soul, that that light is said to be but darkness, as in that [6 Mat. 23](#). "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" That is, serves for the advantage of souls (if they do acquiesce and take up their rest there) no more than mere darkness would have done. It is but equal to darkness, as to any thing of fruit, emolument and profit to them. And therefore, that light which is truly salutary and finally saving, is the light of life, such is the light which comes by Christ: "He that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." [John viii. 12](#).

But you will say, What is the difference? One man knows God, that is, he is well assured and able rationally to prove and demonstrate to another man, the existence of God and many particular things concerning his nature; and perhaps can speak more rationally to such a purpose than many another man that carries the reputation of a pious man, whilst perhaps this man is not so: Pray what is the difference?

Why truly, this is a thing (because I must not insist in such a course as I am in, upon particulars) that may (I should think) be easily understood by any one. One, he knows the kind or nature of this or that food, or this or that drink, he is able to discourse rationally of it, and give an accurate description of the kind and properties of this or that sort of meat, or drink: another, he eats and drinks of it. Let the former, discourse as long as he will and never so understandingly and knowingly, and not eat or drink, he will be famished for all his knowledge: the other, he knows this is good meat, and this is good drink: and he eats





and drinks heartily and is refreshed, and lives by it. Is not here a plain difference? Why here is the very difference as to the knowledge of God. One, he can discourse rationally and learnedly about many invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead, but he never closeth with them, his soul never inwardly unites with him as his best good, never subjects to him as his highest Lord, never fears him, never loves him, never trusts in him, nor delights in him as the other doth. Do you not begin to apprehend, here is a vast difference between knowledge and knowledge; one sort of the knowledge of God and another? How plain is it that with many men, the clearest and truest notions of God are only dead notions; lie dead in their minds, operate nothing there, make them no other sort of men than they would be, if they knew no such thing; or if they thought or believed quite the contrary? Take out all those notions of God which some men have in their minds, and put in the room of them quite contrary notions; a scheme of mere atheism, and the men are found not at all to differ. That man whose head before, was full of theism, is just the same man as when his head was full of atheism. There is knowledge, but no vitality: all his notions of God lie dead, and so are as if they were not. But here is the great difference when the light of life concerning God and the invisible things of God comes into the soul of a man, when these vital beams strike into the very centre of a man's heart, that the man not only hath light about these things, but is light. A wicked man hath light, but it is said of a good man, a regenerate man, he is light. "Ye were darkness but now ye are light in the Lord:" it hath quite altered his temper, begot a new frame and habit in his soul: that is, the knowledge of God hath begot an impression of godliness; and this is that you are to be driving at, and not to take up with any knowledge of God short of this. "He hath given us an understanding to know him that is true, and we are in him that is true." [1 John v. 20](#). We know him, and by that knowledge are wrought into a vital union. "We are in him, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."



But it may be said, If such a further super-added knowledge of God be so necessary, what is the former rational knowledge worth? what doth it signify? and what doth it serve for?

Why let me bring you back to the former illustration that I gave you before, about the knowledge of meat and drink. You see a plain difference between barely knowing that this is good and useful food, that would be proper and suitable drink; and knowing the same thing by taste and reception in order to nutrition: there is a very plain difference. But what! is the former knowledge therefore useless? that is, to know that this is good meat and drink, is it useless? Is it not a very necessary knowledge that a man should know what is fit to be eaten and drank and what not? If you had not so much knowledge of the former sort as to be able to say, "this is good food which, being duly received, may do me good; and that is

poison; if I meddle with it, it will destroy me;” you could not distinguish bread and a stone: you could make no distinction. In what a case were that man in, that did not know bread and a stone asunder? So here, without such a rational knowledge of God, you cannot understand why one ought to be worshipped more than another, why more to be trusted, more to be loved than another. If you had not that former knowledge of God you would not be able to distinguish between a proper object of adoration But what can be plainer than this, that many things may be necessary for such and such a purpose, that yet are not sufficient for that purpose? We must distinguish between necessity and sufficiency. A rational knowledge of God is necessary, it doth not therefore follow that it is sufficient. If one of you did design, incoming hither, to come to the seat where you use to sit, it is necessary that in order to your coming to the seat, that you come to the door. But is therefore coming to the door sufficient? No, you cannot come to your seat unless you come to the door, but it doth not therefore follow that you had nothing more to do when you come hither to hear a sermon than only just to come to the door. Pray apprehend this, that many things are necessary that are not enough. It is necessary that you have this rational knowledge of God as the door, as an intermission into that vital unitive knowledge of him which is also necessary and which only is sufficient. And if the former of these be aimed at, with a design for the latter, with a humble dependance and sense of our own nothingness, blessing God that he is pleased, in that natural way, to reveal so much of himself, but also humbly craving, “Lord do not leave me here, let this vital light shine into my dark soul:” where his further communications are not despised, they will be had; where they are valued, where they are sought, an inquiring soul will not be left destitute. If indeed you think that your case is well already, and that you need no more of God, and that all is well enough, you may sit still and perish till you sink into perdition. But know that the benignity of his nature, and the methods he hath set on foot for the recovery and saving of lost sinners, will not let him throw away any soul that doth cry after him; will not hide himself from them that value the vital efficacious transforming knowledge of him as life itself, and beyond this natural life, which is the true sense of every sincere soul.

422

4. We may collect hence, that the objection against the acknowledgment of a Deity, from his invisibility, must be most absurd, and contemptibly weak and silly. Nothing can be more so; “for the invisible things of him are clearly seen by the things that are made.” Therefore, nothing can be more foolish than for one to say “I will believe there is no God, because I see him not: I see not the brightness of the appearance of his glory that should make me apprehend such a Being perfect, superior to, and more excellent than, all other that I have had, the knowledge of:” nothing can be more childish than this, for it is very plain that if God could be seen, he could not be God. The thing carries a repugnancy in itself; so mean a nature as can be visible cannot be the divine nature. As a heathen said, We are not to ascribe unto God, body or colour or quantity, or any such thing that belongs to objects

423

that fall under our sense. "If we know (saith he) that there is a corporeal nature, and if we know that there is an incorporeal nature, in which of these shall we place the Divine Being? Certainly (saith he) in the incorporeal nature, which is higher and more excellent than to be seen with eyes, or to be heard with ears, or felt with hands, or expressed with human voice." It was the saying of Maximus Tyrius, the heathen philosopher. And I pray you, why should we be so averse to the entertainment and reception of invisibles in our minds? For which is nearer a kin to our minds, invisible things, or visible? Are not our minds invisible? He thinks with himself, "I am not to acknowledge a Deity unless I see him," Pray what is it in you that thinks so, that is so sensible: and capable of thinking at all? Did you ever see your own souls? Did you ever see your own minds? Are not we, as to the most noble and excellent part of ourselves, rather to be accounted ourselves among invisibles than among visibles? It was the saying of a poor pagan, when the season of his dying approached, and his friends about him were discoursing of his burial: "Bury me" saith he "Do you talk of burying me? what do you think this body is to me? Do with it when I am gone what you please: if you can catch me, bury me, but you shall never do that, for do you think this body is me?" And pray will you think so basely of yourselves as that this body is you? If it be not, it is a mind, a spirit, a soul in you, that is you: and is not that nearer of kin to invisible things than visible? That there should be an averseness and shyness to entertain in our minds invisible things because they are in visible, when our minds themselves are invisible, nothing can be more unaccountable and unreasonable than this. It shews us to be very low sunk, that the minds and spirits of men are become strangely degenerate things, when any thing because it is invisible is therefore reckoned unsuitable to them, for a reason for which they should be reckoned most of all suitable. And alas! how little things are we capable of comprehending by our sight, in comparison of the things that we cannot see? Is our sight fit to be the measure of all realities? How small a part of this universe can we measure with our eye! and must all the rest because we see it not, go for just nothing? Surely there are unspeakably greater things which we see not, than there are that we see. Therefore, a thing should not be reckoned less real, or less considerable, or less excellent, because it is invisible to us, that is, to the eye of our flesh: but unspeakably the more excellent and great for that very reason, for its not being seen.

5. We may hence learn the unjust and mad presumption that is in sin. When the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead are clearly seen in the things that are made, that is, they are clearly to be seen by the things that are made, that they have an invisible Maker, and the eternal power and Godhead of this their Maker is clearly to be seen, then how unjust and mad a presumption is it to sin! For is not that an affront to thy Maker? What doth sin signify but ungovernableness to him that hath power to govern me? And who hath a right to govern you, if not he that made you out of nothing? Are not you one of the things that were made? and who therefore shews the eternal power and Godhead of your Maker?

How unjust a presumption then is it to sin! But how mad a presumption is it besides! That is, to consider a world of sinful creatures in an apostacy from God and a rebellion against him: from whom have they revolted? against whom have they rebelled? They are things that are made, that have rebelled against him that made them. An amazing thing, to consider the inhabitants of this world, the intelligent inhabitants of it! They are a company of made things, and this world that they inhabit is a made thing. A made thing! what doth that signify? Why a thing depending upon will and pleasure: a thing that may be, or not be; a thing that may continue in being or be thrown into nothing, thrown into destruction the next moment. Why here is a company of creatures, that have taken upon them to revolt from their Maker, to rebel against him that made them. A strange thing! they have not (as the expression is) a footing for their feet; they are made things, and this world a made thing; all which may be swept away with a breath. For men to take upon them to rise up against the authority of him that made them, when they cannot command a breath, not so much as a breath: for that which hath been made, how presently can he unmake it! That which hath been made by him can be unmade by him in a moment: all this world gone in a moment: how easily may that be done by him! Therefore sin, considered in its general nature, is the most unjust and mad presumption that ever could enter into the mind of a rational creature; unjust towards God, and mad as to ourselves. Oh! think whither we are sunk, and what a sort of creatures we are become, and how admirable the divine patience is, that lets such a sort of creatures as we are, live in this world: a world which we did not furnish, which we did not make, and which he can in a breath blow away into nothing, as he raised it up out of nothing, by a breath the other way.

6. See here the admirable greatness of God. Oh! how we should hence apprehend and adore the divine greatness! The things that are made clearly demonstrate his invisible power and Godhead: and do but consider these two things—the greatness of the things that are made and—how little they yet represent God. And then see what cause we have from hence to admire his most adorable greatness.

(1.) How great the things are that are made. Alas, what a spot, a point is this earth of ours in comparison of the universe! If our thoughts should go no further than our own vortex, in which the sun and moon and planets have their course, how much more unmeasurable to our thoughts is that vortex than this earth of ours! This earth, in comparison of that vortex, is no more than a spot to the universe. It is a far less considerable point to the whole universe than this earth is to our vortex, or that circle that doth immediately encompass it. And then to think of the vastness of this universe; all which, and all that it contains are but things that are made. How mighty a One then is their Maker, their invisible Maker! The greatness of the creation gives us a great representation of the greatness of the Creator. But it adds unspeakably more if,



(2.) We consider, that yet all which creation can represent unto us of the Divine Being, is a mere nothing in comparison of what it represents not: for there is a whole infinitude of being besides, that was from eternity, everlasting of itself. And it is but a minute effort of the divine eternal power that is seen in this universe: for all the universe is but a finite thing, as great as it can be supposed to be, it is still but a finite thing: but then, there is an infinity of being besides, that is from all eternity, the being of the invisible God. Take this whole created universe and it is but a shadow in comparison of "I AM." That Being that claims to itself the name of "I AM," and there is nothing besides ME; nothing fit to be called being besides my own: for all made being is but at will and pleasure, raised up by a breath and capable of being reduced to nothing by a breath. The whole creation, the whole universe but a bubble created by the breath of the Almighty; and may be let to sink again, if he please, by the retraction or withdrawing of that breath. If then the things made, clearly demonstrate the invisible things; even the eternal power and Godhead of their Maker, how great a one is HE, first, that could make so great a world as this, and yet, secondly, when that is done, it can represent so little of him! There is yet an infinitude of being appropriate to himself. Besides, how little a portion do we take up of him, as it is said, [Job xxvi. 5-14](#). when we view his ways, take notice of such and such things in the course of nature, (as he there speaks of) how "hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering;" how "he stretcheth the north over the empty place," how "he collects the waters into the clouds, and the clouds are not rent under them: these (saith he) are part of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him?" Oh! how great a thing were it, if we did but once learn to apprehend the difference between beings unmade and made, between made beings and the eternal unmade Being, And again,

7. We may learn hence the impudency of the tempter, the deceiver and the destroyer (as much as in him lies) of the souls of men; that he should ever go about to make any one believe that there is not a God. How strange impudency is it, that he should ever presume he can make an intelligent mind apprehend that there is not a God, when the invisible things of God even his eternal power and Godhead are so clearly seen in the things that are made! Think of this if any of you are vexed at any time (as perhaps many of you may) with malicious injections from that wicked one, that would fain make you believe there is no God; why turn upon him with disdain: "Thou impudent liar, wouldest thou make me believe against my own eyes, against the clear apprehensions of my own mind? What doth not every thing I see, doth not every thing I hear, proclaim the Godhead to me, could there be any thing of being, any thing of motion, any thing of life through this whole creation, if there were not an original Author of all this? Doth not every being speak a first being, and all wisdom speak the first wisdom, and all love the first love, and all goodness speak the first goodness? Can any thing of itself come out of nothing? Nothing is more obvious to a considering mind (as hath been urged before) than that we can be surer of nothing than we are of this—that



suppose nothing at all were in being, to eternity nothing could ever be in being. But something is in being now: and if that be the account that is to be given, how there comes to be any thing in being; that is, that there hath been something eternally in being, then that which was eternally in being is the cause of all things that are in being. The cause that was eternally in being, must bear proportion to the effect. If wisdom and goodness are to be found amongst made things, they are not nothing, you cannot say that wisdom is nothing, and knowledge nothing, justice nothing, for then there would be no difference between a wise man and a fool. If they are something, they could not of themselves come out of nothing; therefore there must have been eternal goodness, wisdom and life; that, that in itself lived, and lives to all eternity: for you see there are such things as these among what is made. Why then it is fit to retort upon the tempter with disdain, "Dost thou go about to make me believe, against the clear light of my own mind, that there is not a God, when it is clearly seen from the things that are made?" If there were nothing else, this proves the eternal Being, that there must be an eternal Cause that hath in it something proportionable to the visible effects that are to be seen, impressed even upon the things that are made. Characters appearing in the effect must have something correspondent to them in their cause, otherwise something must come of itself out of nothing, which is simply the most impossible thing that can be thought. I would only add this in the last place,

8. Whosoever they are that do terminate their thoughts upon this visible world, and look no further, they resist (nay as much as in them is) defeat and destroy the very design of the creation. Why hath God made such a world as this, and set such creatures as we in it? It is, that this world may be an extant, continual standing representation to us, an evidence, a proof of his invisible eternal power and Godhead who made it. We have our concerns and business lying here, within this visible world from day to day; here we are too apt to take up our thoughts, our desires, our designs; they terminate upon this visible world. If we let them do so, if we tolerate ourselves in such a course as this, it is (as much as in us is) to defeat and destroy the design of the creation. God hath designed this visible frame of things to be to us a continual monument and representation of himself, but we look to the things that are made, and there we let our eyes stay and terminate, and never look through them to that which is unmade. This would be a like case, as if one should have a very curious perspective put into his hands, that was very much adorned and beautified with every thing of external ornature that art could confer upon it, and holds it in his hand, turns it this way and that, and views it on every side for a long time together, and then lays it aside, never looks through it: he would see a vast country that now appears to him nothing else but a dark shadow; just so men deal with this visible creation and frame of things; they look upon it, take notice of the variety of creatures that are in it, they look on every side of this visible world, as it doth apply itself to them and as they have opportunity to view the things therein: but whereas it was intended as a perspective, that they might look through it into the invisible

427

428

eternal power and Godhead of him that made all: this never comes into their minds. How preposterous a course is this! It is little apprehended how guilty we make ourselves in this kind, every day, when we let our minds stay upon any creature of God, this or that man or woman, or house or star, (if we should go so high) and never think of God; while they are all made things, that tend to represent to us their Maker. Oh! how little is the end answered and considered, why we have such a frame of things set in view and kept in view continually before us, that we might look through them and adore, look up and adore, that we might through all, view and behold the great Author of all, and bow our heads before him. When we eat and drink, and never think of God, commend the food and drink, and never think of God; here we take up with the creature, the made thing, and never consider the unmade Maker of it and of us. The end is defeated and lost, for which this world was made and we placed in it, while we look not through things visible and made, unto him that is invisible and unmade.

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## LECTURE VI.<sup>5</sup>

II. There are hereupon most apparent and very blamable things, about which it is needful that we should be expostulated with, and that we do expostulate with ourselves concerning them: otherwise it would be in vain that another should reprove us, if we be not brought by it to reprove ourselves; or that another should expostulate with our own souls. And this we should do upon that which hath been opened and improved in respect of such things as these: as

1. Why are we yet so much in doubt concerning what is so clearly demonstrable? the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead, which are things so clearly seen (though they are in themselves invisible) by visible effects, by things that are made. Why are our minds yet pendulous and in suspense about so very plain and demonstrable things? For what, can it enter into our minds to think this world rose up out of itself, without a Maker, out of nothing? Who of us can endure (if he consider) the gross absurdity of such a thought? And since we may so easily be at a certainty, why are we not at certainty in so plain a case? why do not our minds come to a settlement? why are they so off and on? why do we hover and halt between two opinions, as we did not know whether God be God yea or no? or whether he were to be stuck to as such? as the prophet deals with that people so much divided in opinion between God and Baal. But indeed ours would be a worse division and more absurd for if we are divided in our own minds in this case it must be between a God and no God. There was no question among them, but there was and must be some God or other, but only the question was, whether that God the people owned, or another were the God; that was all the doubt, but this is a much wider case, when the question is between a God and no God; and nothing can be more evident than the things that are made, must have had some maker and author; it is a comfortable thing to ourselves to feel the ground firm under us as to this first and deepest fundamental; a very comfortable thing for us to feel that it shakes not. But know withal, it is a very dutiful thing towards our Maker to be at a point, and not to be always disputing, or to have perpetual disceptations within ourselves about that which is prerequisite to our duty; for that suspends all duty, and lays a restraint upon every thing of duty towards him; while we waver and hover in our spirits about so plain a thing as this. Let us be all at a certainty, when we may be so easily at a certainty; as certain (as I have urged to you) about this as we can be of any thing whatsoever: for we can not be more certain of any thing than we can be of this, that we ourselves are made things; for whatsoever is unmade must have been from everlasting, inasmuch as nothing that is made but it hath received a beginning of being. Whatsoever i unmade must have no beginning of being, must have been from everlasting. But can you be surer of any



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5 Preached December 26, 1690.



thing than that you have not been from everlasting? You know you have not been from everlasting, therefore you are made things. And again; you cannot be surer of any thing than you are of this, that you are such a sort of made things as can think, as have a power of thought: you are not more sure that you can see, than you are that you can think, and therefore you do know and are sure, that you have minds and spirits about you; for you are sure that flesh and blood and bones cannot think: you cannot be surer of any thing than you are of this, that this bulk of a body of yours, cannot exercise a thought. Well then, if you be a made sort of thing, and you find you have a power of thought belonging to you, and therefore that you have a mind and spirit belonging to you, you must then have proceeded from an unmade mind and Spirit, an unmade self-subsisting mind and Spirit: and this is God, and can be nothing but God, this is all as plain as any thing is that we see with our eyes, therefore do not pretend to be uncertain in a matter wherein it is so easy to you to be at a certainty, when so much also doth depend upon it. And blame yourselves for this, if you have been pendulous in so plain a case hitherto. Why am I in doubt when I should have been loving, serving, fearing, and adoring this invisible Deity all this while? Why have I suffered doubts to hang on my mind in so plain a case? And,

2. Let us expostulate with ourselves about this, that our apprehensions of the eternal God are so feeble and languid and ineffectual as they have been hitherto, and for the most part (the Lord knows) yet are: that our minds have not only been in a dubious uncertainty, but that the apprehensions we have had, have had so little of vitality and efficacy and power in them, to form our spirits and govern our way and course agreeably thereunto. For (as was told you by way of inference) there needs not only clear knowledge, but vital knowledge of the Deity. And now let me a little further insist upon it, that is, that there is something more requisite, than certainty, some what besides a certainty of apprehension and knowledge about it. Such things as there are to be superadded thereto; that is efficacy, energy, and operative power. I may be certain of those things that do concern me Godward, or that do concern me in reference to my soul, and yet feel little of efficacy and power in the most certain and undoubting thoughts that I can have about such things: that is, though I may have as great a certainty about the objects of my mind as I can have about the objects of sense; yet the objects of sense do always strike with more efficacy than the objects of the mind do. Experience speaks this plainly, and I need but appeal to every one's experience about it. I might illustrate it to you by a very plain and obvious instance or two, how much more the things that fall under present sense do affect us, than the things do that fall not under sense. Though we are not more certain about the one than we are about the other. As in reference to these bodies of ours, we are not more certain that we do at present feel any thing whether it be grateful or ungrateful to our sense than we are certain that at one time or other we shall die. But is there any one that doth sensibly fear death, and set himself thereupon to prepare for it, as he doth feel pain when that is upon him? Therefore I say, we

do need something to be superadded to our certainty to enliven our apprehensions, a power and energy is needful to be superadded to them. As I told you before, we are as certain we can think, as we are certain we can see; we are not more sure we can see with our eye than we are sure that we can think with our minds: yet the things we do see with our eyes, do affect us more than the things we only apprehend with our minds: therefore do we need to have a great deal of efficacy and power superadded to the apprehensions of our minds concerning the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead. And since it is plain we do need it, that is, that such apprehensions often lie in our minds, and work nothing; but the case is with us as if we had them not, as if our minds were vacant of such apprehensions; surely we should not lie still patient in such a case as this; when these apprehensions of God are -the most important that can have place in our minds. Why are we so pleased with ourselves and so much at ease concerning this thing, that our apprehensions of the Godhead should have so little efficacy with them as they have to command our spirits? It is a relievable case as well as there is a necessity there should be relief sought and had in it. If he is pleased to shine into our minds himself, then there will be efficacy go with our certainty; when he is pleased to strike through the consistent darkness that doth inwrap our hearts, and to shine into our hearts by giving us the light of the knowledge of his own glory, then there will be power in our apprehensions of the invisible God, and then in his light we shall see light, as in that [Psalm xxxvi. 9](#). Therefore, for this should we supplicate every day more earnestly than we do for daily bread; "I need thy delivering influence, O Lord, to quicken dead notions of things that lie in my mind, that they may have power and be operative in me, as much as I need daily bread, and momentarily breath." This should be our sense, and with waiting and craving eyes should we be looking up daily and continually: for it is dutiful, that this should be the posture of made spirits towards the unmade Spirit, of produced spirits towards their great Parent, the original universal Spirit that is the Parent of all; that they may be continually maintained and held in life by vital communications from him? self, this he would take well: it is childlike, it is filial deportment towards the supreme, original, eternal Spirit, whose offspring their spirits are. A parent is pleased to have a child express and own his dependance upon him. When we cut off these spirits of ours that are made from the unmade eternal Spirit, this is apostacy, disloyalty; this is to set up ourselves and for ourselves, and no wonder if we languish and perish by it. And,

431

3. We should expostulate with ourselves about our so frequent unmindfulness of the invisible eternal God, when we have so much occasion to mind him every hour; for the things that are made, reveal him to us continually: we cannot open our eyes, but we must see something or other that should put us in mind of God: we shall behold some of the made things, that should be still putting us in mind of their Maker, theirs and ours. And,

432

4. Why are we so little conversant with God, so unconvertible towards him, when he is continually surrounding us, compassing us about before and behind, in all the made

things which do encompass us? God is in them, or they are all in him, all living, and moving, and having their being in him. This conversableness with God, or a disposition of spirit to converse with him, it imports more than bare minding of him, thinking of him; it carries in it an application of faith towards him. It is a thing that involves complacency in the nature of it, as you can any of you easily apprehend. I converse electively with whom or what I converse with, out of choice, and for a complacential inclination of my own mind. Oh! why is there no more of this with us towards God, the unmade and eternal Being, while he continually besets us in the things that are made, and who is nearer to us than we are to ourselves! He is in us if we would but look in, and meet with him, and apply ourselves to him. It was first the saying of a heathen, (taken up since and improved by many in the Christian church, both ancient and modern writers) "God is more inward to us, than we are to ourselves, and yet we will not converse with him." It was Plato's saying first. But will we not converse with him? How inexcusable a thing is this, his own creature to be a stranger to him; a creature that he made! "I that have made thee, (may he say) and made thee as thou art, given thee a reasonable, intelligent, apprehensive, immortal mind and spirit, and wilt thou not know me? wilt thou not converse with me? wilt thou not acquaint thyself with me? wilt thou not lead thy life with me?" What have we to say to this?

5. Why do we not more frequently do him homage, when we dwell in a world that is all his? Every thing that we can use and enjoy in it, are all made things, and made by him, and this world that contains and inwraps them all, itself a made thing, and we are made things; why are we not more frequently doing him homage? We can take up nothing, we can use nothing, we can enjoy nothing in all this whole world but what he hath made. And what! not do him homage, deep, inward, profound homage, how inexcusable is this! We know we did not make or furnish this world, we were brought into it, placed in it, and we find ourselves supplied with all things necessary for our support and for our accommodation, suitable to that sort of being that God hath given us. And shall we not do him frequent homage? Suppose a man should rush into one of your houses and set himself by your fire-side, and make use of such and such provisions of your house, as he can lay his hands on, and take no notice of you, would you lone; bear so barbarous a usage as this? And is not this the very case? You come here into this world that God hath made, and not you; and every thing is his that you can lay your hands upon, or make any use of, and to take up and use this and the other thing, and never look up, or not often look up to him; or not look up with a more delightful sense of your obligation to him, than (God knows) is too common with us; how can we defend ourselves against our own thoughts, against our own reasonings in this case? And further,

6. Why do we drive designs here in this world, apart from him, without reference to him? This, and that, and the other thing I do to please myself, or to advance myself without any thoughts of God, without any referring to him. I lay my designs without him; I will go

to such and such a place, I will abide there so long, I will there do so and so, I will “buy and sell and get gain,” when we “ought to say, If the Lord will, I will do so and so.” He that is the Author and Lord of all this made world, what! do you think to move to and fro in it without reference to him, and drive designs for yourselves apart from him? Sure, the forming of a design should always be accompanied with an act of worship, there should still be a dedicating of our designs to him, as well as of ourselves: for what is plainer, than that he that is the Alpha, must be the Omega too? Hath he not made himself known to us by those conjunct titles, the first and the last? “Of him, and by him, and to him are all things,” that he alone might have the glory. There should be a tribute of glory paid him, in every thing we design, and more especially in reference to his design. When we come to take notice of that great design of his, Oh! how it might make our hearts shake within us, to think what sort of acknowledgments God hath in this world, even in that part of the world that is called Christian, in reference to some of the great things, and even the greatest thing that ever was done since there was such a world in being. That is, that extraordinary descent of God into the world, in the person of his own Son, taking upon him human flesh, becoming the Emmanuel, the divine nature, the invisible Godhead, in the second person, uniting itself with the manhood. Here are acknowledgments of this made amongst us; but it might make our hearts shake within us, to think of what kind. That is, according to the usage of too many, the descent of our blessed Lord, the eternal Word in human flesh, they seem to think (that their practice expresseth) that the nativity of our Lord is not to be celebrated fitly, but by a debauch; they cannot fitly celebrate the nativity of Christ, but by being drunk. Monstrous wickedness! To think that the great God is to be worshipped so unsuitably to himself; when he is to be made the end of all things. The Former of all things; how is he made the end, otherwise than as he is glorified? But to glorify him, to pretend to glorify him by breaking his laws, by violating his known and most sacred precepts! By breaking the law, dishonourest thou God? [Rom. ii. 23](#). That was bad enough: but it is much worse, by breaking the law, to dishonour God under the pretence of doing him honour, to think that [ honour him by so palpably dishonouring him. And,

7. Why are we so prone to blame and censure the methods of his government over this world, which he hath made, and when by it, and the things in it that he hath made, he is proclaiming to us his eternal power and Godhead? Is he not able wisely and well to govern his own creation? Could he bring such a world as this out of nothing into being, and doth he not know what to do with it, now he hath made it, and how to order the concerns of it? Oh! how little is God revered as the Creator and Former of all things, when we take upon us to censure, and blame, and tax his doings? Why do we strive with him, when he gives not account of any of his matters? [Job xxxiii. 13](#). He is far above it. And like it, is that [xl. 2](#), “Shall he that contends with the Almighty, instruct him? He that reproveth God let him answer it.” What! for man to take upon him to reprove God, to say he might have ordered things



better, so and so, things might have been brought about in a fitter season, might have been done sooner, they might have been compassed by fitter methods, by more suitable instruments, and the like. Sure we forget ourselves when we consider not, that “the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead,” are all testified by the things that are made. And what! cannot “the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead,” guide and manage things more wisely than we? “Woe to him that strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth.” [Isaiah 45](#). 9. Let them choose their match. And those many expressions we have from himself in the latter end of the book of Job; “Canst thou do so and so?” doth intimate this all along to them and to us, that unless we could do such and such things, unless we could lay the foundation of such a world as this; unless we could stretch out such another heaven, and form and establish such another earth, unless we could span the heavens with our hands, and measure the dust of the earth, and gather the winds in our fists, and set bounds and limits to the sea as we please, “You are not my match (saith God) unless you can do such and such things. And if you are not my match, why will you strive with me? why will you contend with me? why should your wisdom vie with mine, and your will with mine, and your interest with mine?” And again,

8. Why do we so little covet him for our portion, who is plainly proved by the things that are made to comprehend, in himself virtually, all the perfections of this world, and formally, infinitely more? For there must be infinitely more in himself than is laid out on creation. Do you think he did exhaust himself in making such a world as this? The world when all is done is but a finite thing, all that is made is but finite, but that which is unmade is still infinite. He that comprehends in himself all excellency, all goodness, all perfection, created and uncreated, must certainly be a sufficient portion for us. The absolutely perfect Being, or (which is all one in Scripture) God all-sufficient, must be a competent satisfying portion (one would think) for any one. Why then do we not covet him more for our portion? why is this not more the sense of our souls, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and who is there on earth that can come in comparison with thee?” “When heaven and earth are all made things and made by thee, there must be in thee infinitely more than in both.” But when we take up with so mean and little things in our thoughts, inasmuch as we know it belongs to the Deity to be the portion and blessedness of a soul) let us hereupon think with ourselves, what an affront we put upon the infinite eternal Godhead, to think it possible for any creature to fill up his room. It is a most insolent affront to the infinite eternal God, to think that any creature can be to you instead of God: an affront that you can never expiate with your blood. This is to undeify him. Him, whom in all your thoughts you should deify, you nullify, for make him any thing less than God and you make him nothing. And,

9. Why do we no more fear him as an enemy, when he hath demonstrated his eternal power and Godhead by the things that are made? and all the invisible things that belong to



his nature besides, are all demonstrated by the things that are made? Why do we not more fear to have such a one for our enemy? “Fear ye not me (saith the Lord) who hath bounded the sea that it cannot pass: and though the waves there of toss themselves they cannot go over,” (giving that one instance when he could have given thousands as great in that; Jeremiah) “what stupid creatures are you that you will not fear me, when ye have such an instance as this and thousands more always in view before you, of my invisible eternal Godhead, that hath in time displayed and shewed itself forth? And,

436

10. Lastly: Why are we so prone to fear men, the creatures of God, while we so little fear and stand in awe of him? It is still a wrong to our Maker, a wrong done to God, considered under the notion of Creator. Look to that [Isaiah li. 12.](#) “Who art thou, that art afraid of a man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be as grass? and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, who stretched forth the heavens?” inasmuch as he is the Maker and Lord of all. This shews that it is an insolency against him and the rights of his Godhead, to place your supreme fear on any thing besides him. Therefore the form of speech there is very remarkable, “Who art thou, that art afraid of a man?” The form of speech is reprehensive and expostulatory, “Who art thou?” When people find themselves seized with any immoderate fears, they are wont to pity themselves, and to look upon it as an infelicity: but they forget it is a crime; and those words represent it as a crime, “who art thou that art afraid—who art thou?” what doth that signify? Why it signifies thus much, Thou takest too much upon thee, while thou thinkest thou art only to be pitied, thou dost little consider how faulty thou art, thou dost transpose the government, thou deposest the Lord thy Maker, and settest up a mortal thing upon his throne. Who art thou that takest upon thee at this rate, to undeify God and deify the creature, a mortal worm? Who art thou that turnest all things upside down, to depress the Maker and to exalt a little piece of animated clay into his place? This is very deeply to be considered, that to have our spirits more liable to be awed by a man, a mortal thing, than by the eternal immortal God. is a doing violence and a wrong to, and encroaching upon, the rights of the eternal Godhead. Well now, about such things as these we should expostulate with ourselves.

III. I shall shut up all with some particulars of most apparent duty, to which we need to be exhorted in reference to what hath been hitherto said. As,

1. Since “the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead,” are so clearly demonstrable by the things that are made, let us learn more to contemplate these invisible things of God, in the visible things that we have before our eyes: and know that it is an argument of very great spirituality so to do. Let the examples we have in Scripture engage our minds more this way. To look over such psalms [as psalm the 8th. the 104th. and the 148th.](#) all full of admiration of the works of God: and a great many more, with multitudes of passages of Scripture besides in other places; shewing how much the spirits of the saints of old have been exercised and taken up in admiring God upon those conspicuous appearances, that

437

have been of his glory in the creation. I doubt there is altogether a fault among us that we so little apply our minds this way. But know it is our duty to be exercised in it, to take times on purpose to contemplate God in the creature, to behold and view the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead, in the things that are made. And,

2. Hereupon joyfully acknowledge this God for your God; considering the case of the blinded besotted pagans, who worship stocks and stones for deities, or the sun, moon, and stars; who pray to a god that cannot save: the generality of the more besotted of them; though it be true indeed, among pagans there have been those that have been much wiser and of more refined minds. But since it hath pleased God more expressly to manifest himself to you, joyfully acknowledge it, as his people of old have been wont to do. "Their gods are idols, the works of men's hands; but our God made the heavens." And as it is in that [Jer. x. 11](#). "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens." When there are such multitudes of fictitious deities under a doom to perish, all the idols of this world, and this world itself, that great idol, that is most set up and exalted against God; Oh! do you joyfully acknowledge this God for your God, that you are sure is the only living and true God. Our God that made the heavens; own your relation to him, walk in his name, as "all people will do, every one in the name of his God."

3. Resign and devote yourselves absolutely to him, for you are made things, and he is your Maker. And can one have a greater right in any thing than that which he hath made, and made out of nothing? not given it an external accidental form only, but given it its whole being. And so is the matter between him and you. Wherefore it is to God you must give yourselves: give him your whole being, body and soul and all that you have: for it is all but made, and it is the right and property of him that made you.

4. Trust in him with all your hearts, commit yourselves entirely and cheerfully to him. Who would scruple to do so to so kind and benign a Maker? for was it not in his choice and power once, whether he would have made you or not? was it not determinate by him? by his pleasure, whether you should be or not be? If you have devoted yourselves to him, so as to be his by choice and consent, as well as by natural right, know then that you have all the encouragement in the world to in trust and commit yourselves to him as to a faithful Creator; as the expression is [1 Pet. iv. 19](#). This is a thing not enough understood, the obligation that lies upon us to own God more frequently and solemnly, under the notion of our Creator, We think the notion wherein we should own him, more to be that of a Father, and as in Christ he hath been a Redeemer to us: but these things are not to exclude one another by any means. It is very true indeed, that all the interest we had in him as Creator, was lost and forfeited by the apostacy: but that matter being, by the Redeemer, made up between him and all those that, in the Redeemer, accept him and take him for their God, we are not now to think his Creatorship is to be absorbed and swallowed up in any other supervening notion, by any means. We are now, by redeeming grace and mercy, brought to that state and pass,



that we may own him comfortably as a Creator again. So that whereas, we had lost all right and interest in him, as such, by our apostacy: a restitution being made, now we are to commit ourselves to him, as a faithful Creator. Faithfulness hath reference to a promise, and a covenant. We are to commit ourselves now to him as a Creator, under obligation. There was a covenant made at first, between himself and his innocent creature; that covenant was broken by the apostacy; so that he could be challenged upon faithfulness no longer. But now, that matter being composed and made up by the Redeemer, by a Mediator, there is a new covenant made, and now faithfulness hath place in reference to him as a Creator, and we are to own him as such, and trust in him, and commit ourselves to him as such. And,

5. You should hereupon, cease from solicitude about the issue of things in reference to yourselves, or in reference to the whole community that you profess to be of, even that people that he hath in this world. Solicitude should cease about private and more public concerns; you should reckon that yourselves and all things, are in the best hands in which they could lie, or into which they could be put. In reference to things devoted yourselves, intrusted yourselves to him upon invitation; not presumptuously, but as being warranted and encouraged by himself. Then it is a wrong to him to be anxious what he will that relate to yourselves, you have committed yourselves to him, do with you. What! will he not shew mercy to the soul he hath made? Indeed, his having made it, if there be no expiation of sin, would have availed nothing; for there is a case when “he that made them would not have mercy on them, and he that formed. them will shew them no favour:” [Isaiah xxvii. 11](#). That is, when they are in rebellion against him and will not be reconciled to him; but when a reconciliation is brought about, and you have surrendered to him the soul that he hath made, it is a great iniquity and wrong to him to suppose, that he will not now deal with you as a faithful Creator. Therefore, though now you know your soul is lodged in flesh, and within a little while this mortal frame must drop in pieces and fall into the dust, yet never be solicitous what he will do with your soul, or what will become of it after all: you do betrust, you have committed it to him, who is the most absolutely perfect God, and the most absolutely perfect Being. All things that he hath made demonstrate him to be so: and who would be afraid to let his soul rest in the midst of infinite, immense goodness? “His soul shall dwell at ease:” (as it is said of one that fears God) but very faintly, and beneath the significancy of that expression it is rendered, [Psalm xxv. 13](#). “His soul shall dwell in goodness (that is the expression) who feareth God,” shall take up its rest, sweet and pleasant rest as men are wont to do at night. Who would be solicitous when he is to commit and put his soul into the midst of immense and boundless goodness, as his must be who is the Author of all made things? for they all spring from goodness, goodness that would diffuse itself and flow arbitrarily and freely in such a creation as this. And,

6. Live more adoring lives. Let us labour to habituate ourselves, our spirits more to adoration, seeing the invisible things of God, his eternal power and Godhead are continually





seen in things that are made. Let that sentence be engraven as a motto upon each of our hearts and inwrought into our souls: "Come let us worship and bow down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker." Let every thing that serves to put us in mind of him, prompt us immediately to worship, and bow down the head before him, upon such apprehensions of God, such demonstrations of his love, of his power, and goodness and greatness as offer themselves to our view. Let us presently bow and worship, take notice and adore.

7. Let us subject ourselves most absolutely to his government, both legal and providential. Doth it not belong to him to give laws to his creatures that are capable of government by law, that have been entirely and wholly made by him? Should not he give laws, even to our minds and to our spirits, and lay them under the obligation of his laws? This is sure the most reasonable thing in the world. Why should he not prescribe to my mind, who is himself an unmade mind, while mine is but a made mind? Why should not he prescribe to me how my spirit should work this way or that, while he is an eternal Spirit and Mind. My spirit that sprung from him, why should not he direct it, even by a law, how to think, how to dispose of my thoughts this way and that, when he hath given me a power to think? Why should I not use my apprehensive power and knowledge for him from whom I received it? He that knows my mould and frame, and hath given me that intelligent spirit that I have, shall I not keep it in perpetual subjection to him, receive laws from his mouth, never think my self at liberty, and in an indifferency to use my thoughts as I will, and let out my affections as I will; but all under his law? And then, as to his providential government, shall not he do what he will with his creatures, with the thing that he hath made? How reasonable is it, how just towards him and how good for itself to be subject to him? Then I am quiet if I can live under his government, to be disposed of by him as he pleaseth: otherwise there is a continual war between him and me: and so a continual war between me and myself; affection against conscience, passion against judgment: for there will al ways be something in me as long as I live, as long as I have a reasonable intelligent being, that will take the part of God against unreasonable rebellious passions, and I shall be a self-judged creature before him in his sight. And,

8. Lastly: Let us always propound him to ourselves as the Object of our religion: and take pleasure in the thought of this, that we have found out an object of religion, which we have revealed to us, that he hath himself, revealed to us himself as the great and only Object of religion: the one indisputable One, so as no controversy remains now concerning it. And whereas, it is the business of all religion, to pay all duty to God and expect and seek all relief and felicity from him, let us demean ourselves towards him accordingly. And consider with ourselves, that in making his mind known to us, giving us to know himself, he hath given us to know ourselves also, so as to understand that being creatures, made things, we are made for another. That which cannot he by itself, must not be for itself: what more reasonable thing in all the world? Therefore, our business must be with him as the final, ultimate, an-



imative Object of our religion; and that designing duty to him and felicity to ourselves, we have to do with him as the Object of religion under that twofold notion, as one that we are to glorify, and as one whom we are to enjoy for ever. And this now shews us much of ourselves. That is, shewing us what our nature and state are, it shews us what our end of business must be, and that is a very great thing. And this is, we must understand, what we were made for. And this being the first head of Christian religion, (indeed of all religion) it resolves the first question that every one is concerned to make to himself: What was I made for? What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and to enjoy him: to pay all duty to him and to expect all felicity and blessedness from him; and to seek it. It is thus only that you can come to know what you are here in this world for: and it were a lamentable case, to know the several powers and faculties that belong to our natures, and not to know what all these are for. To know I am such a creature, of such a mould and frame, and not to know what these are made for! This would be a very sad consideration to a serious and considering mind, if it were not to be collected and found out what they were made for. As if one that never saw a watch in his life before he finds it by casualty and chance, and sees a great deal of curiosity in the workmanship, yet cannot imagine what it is intended for, what it was made for; it stands still and he knows not how to set it going, or if he did, he doth not understand the use of it. Here is the case with an intelligent creature, a man if he should contemplate himself, and not contemplate his Maker, his end. Here I have a strange kind of being, I have a body and I have a soul inhabiting that body; but I do not know why such a creature as I came to have a place in the world, why I have such a being, what I am to do, and what I was made for. But now by this you come to know what it is you were made for. If you know you have a Maker, you must know you were made for him, to glorify him and to enjoy him for ever: and it is a great thing to have made this step; when we have taken notice of our own faculties and powers, and what our structure and frame are. Now to know whose we are, what satisfaction is it to the mind of man! to know this, that I am made to glorify and enjoy him that made me. But when you come to be at a loss, (as all in the fallen state are) “what course shall I take to glorify and enjoy God?” Why, we that are here wandering in such a wilderness as we are in, and so benighted, so bemisted as we are: if we have no instruction, no guidance, no rule, we are at a sad loss. Therefore it is the greatest joy in the world to a considering mind to have it plainly evidenced to him, that there is a discovery come forth from God, suitable to the forlorn state of the creature, a word from heaven, a written word that he himself hath delivered down to us, to teach us how we are to glorify him, and how we are to enjoy him which will be the next thing we shall come unto.

442

443

## LECTURE VII.<sup>6</sup>

2 Tim. iii. 16.

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.*

YOU have had an Object of religion; the only competent and deserving Object (I hope) with some efficacy presented to you; an absolute perfect Being, an eternal infinite Mind or Spirit, self-existing and unmade; demonstrating himself to be so, by the things that are made. And now the business of that religion that is to be exercised towards such an Object (the glorious and blessed God) is continually to render to him a due homage, and to expect from him blessedness for our own. souls. Religion stands in serious endeavours (as the learners among us are taught to speak and understand) “to glorify God und enjoy him for ever.” Under this twofold notion, we are to go and act towards him as our chief end: as one to whom we owe all the duty we are capable of performing, and by per forming whereof we glorify him; and from whom only we must expect all the felicity we are capable of partaking of, and in, the participation whereof we enjoy him; so we are to consider and move towards God as our end, in such a motion of heart and spirit. This is present religion, that is, the religion of our present state. The religion of the way (as it is cal led) or the religion of *viatores*; those that are travelling, and yet short of their final perfection. And therefore is the whole of that religion, to wit, the religion of the present state in contra-distinction to that of the eternal state, expressed by a term that denotes continual motion; that is, a coming to God. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is.” We are to be continually in this motion all the while we are in this world; coming to God. In order whereto that great fundamental is to be forelaid—the belief that God is; as that which is prerequisite, upon which we have been insisting already. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” But now, whoso ever have it in design thus to come to God, and move towards him, they will find that they need a rule to guide those motions by which they may direct and steer their course: there is no coming to God but as he is pleased to render himself accessible, but as he will be approached; and therefore our religion which consists in this motion, in this coming to God, cannot be a self-devised thing, or an invention of our own; we cannot come to God as we please, but as he pleases, as he will have us come: we can never glorify him, but by doing his will, nor can we ever come to enjoy him but by compliance therewith. Therefore, this must of course be the next inquiry, with any considering person, any one that doth seriously design to do any thing in the business of religion: “What course shall I take to know God’s will, concerning my approach, my coming, my tending towards him through the whole course of my life in this world?” It is a very rational inquiry, and that which the exigency of the case must urge every one to,



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<sup>6</sup> Preached January 9, 1691.

that doth intend seriously and in good earnest to be religious. For admit, that there be internal principles, from the very reason and nature of things, truth and false hood, good and evil, right and wrong, yet besides that such as are needful are taken into the constitution, or among the determinations of the divine will, so there are other things super-added with respect to the varied state of our case: and it is the divine will that doth determine and constitute what we shall do in this course of our motion towards him, and consequently what shall be required of us to believe and know that we may so do, and so we do need a signification of his will concerning our faith, and concerning our practice. Though it is true, that the determinations of his will are riot (as to the most principal things that do concern us) arbitrary, but they are determinations of his will, according to most excellent wisdom, most perfect judgment, and counsel, for he “worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will;” and so doth will such things concerning us, and in reference to us, as the state of our case doth require and need, and without which there could be no commerce restored, and brought about between him and us. And now, whatsoever will express and signify to us the divine will about such things as will be our fit and useful rule to guide our motion towards God as our end, we are to seek after. And concerning this, the inquiry must needs be made by every serious person; “What is there that I may look upon, as such a sufficient signification to me, of the divine will touching my great concernments with him? “Now we have a book among us, that calls itself, and is commonly styled THE WORD OF GOD. This very book, if it be not the word of God, truly, to call it so, and to attempt and endeavour to spread it as such, is one of the boldest cheats that ever was attempted to be put upon the sons of men. But if really and truly it be so, then it doth our business: you find it doth so, by looking into it, for this is the business it doth profess, and the intent which it doth own and avow, to acquaint us with the divine will and pleasure in order to our serving and glorifying him, and being finally happy and blessed with him. If it be his will indeed, it will most undoubtedly serve for this end and purpose; that being all the end that professedly it hath to serve. Nothing can so well serve this purpose as his word, if there be such a word: for who can so well tell us what God’s will is, as he himself? Sure he best knows his own mind, and what judgment he hath made of things, and which (after him) he will have us to make, in order to our practice.

I might (indeed) have driven the inquiry a great deal further into the principles of religion, upon a merely rational ground, or according to the ducture of natural light; as it was necessary to be done, upon what hath been clone already, in representing and evidencing to you an object of religion: which was necessary first to be proved, before we could with any colour of reason go about to assert the divine authority of this book. It would have been a very absurd thing to go about to prove from this book, the authority of it, that there was such a thing when he which should give that authority, and from whom that authority should be derived, should be unknown to us; or it should be a matter of doubt with any,



whether there was such a one, yea or no. But that being once proved and out of question, now it comes in the proper and natural method, and next of course to be considered: Is there such a revelation from this God, as this book doth pretend to? hath it really that divine stamp upon it from him, which by those who do profess and own themselves christians, it is apprehended to have? And if that can be found, it supercedes any need of following the line of natural light (as such) further; because there is nothing more now to be discovered that way, which is not more clearly and fully contained in this hook. And therefore all other things that might be referred thither, I shall rather satisfy myself to deduce and insist upon as they come in our way from thence. In order whereto, our first business must be to assert the authority of them. And for that purpose it is, I have pitched upon this passage of Scripture, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” All Scripture is θεοπνευστος. It is only that one word that is said of it, *God-breathed*. All Scripture is (as it were) the breath of God. That indeed is the very literal sense of the word here used, *breathed from God*.

446

And so the words are a formed proposition to our hands, we need not vary them in any other phrase, but take them as they lie. Our business must be to assert, from them,—The Divine Authority of the Scriptures. In order whereto, I shall premise,

First: That I design not herein to meddle with divers lesser collateral questions, as touching the Hebrew points, and Hebrew translations, the various readings, etymological and other differences, which are things much fitter for the schools than for the pulpit. And therefore,

Secondly: My main design must be to evince to you, that this book doth contain it; it a sufficient revelation of the divine mind and will, touching what we are to believe and do in order to our glorifying God as our supreme Lord, and our enjoying him, and being happy in him as our best and only satisfying good. And in order hereunto, the course that will be fittest to take, will in short be this—To state the subject to you that is spoken of under the name of Scriptures, with its universality, “*all Scripture*.” and then—To prove to you from that subject, the thing affirmed of it, that it is God-breathed, that it is inspired from God, or (which is all one) that it is of divine authority, and that God is the Author of it.

I. For the stating of the subject here spoken of, Scripture, with a universal term, “*all Scripture*.” that universal term can not be absolutely universal, (as you may be sure) cannot signify all writing. Every writing cannot be pretended to be God-breathed, or of divine inspiration; therefore the limitation of this universal term is to be taken from the immediately foregoing words, “From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures.” It is therefore holy Scripture that is here spoken of. All holy Scripture, the whole of that which is called holy Scripture; it is of divine inspiration. Well, what is that, that is here called holy Scripture? Undoubtedly it must be that which in those days was immediately known by the name of the Scripture, and many times the Scriptures: nothing was more familiar with our Saviour, when he was conversant here on earth, than to speak of this book by the name of Scripture,

447

and sometimes the Scriptures as being so in the most famous and eminent sense, according to the account that went of that part of them, among the Jews, of whom he was one, and among whom he conversed. Every one knew none could be ignorant what was meant by the Scriptures at that time, or in those days: "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life:" (saith our Saviour, [John v. 39.](#)) And this and that was done (as you often find in the evangelist historians) that the Scripture might be fulfilled. And the Scripture cannot be broken, saith our Lord, in one of his contests with the Jews. [John x. 35.](#) Now it is very evident here,

1. Therefore, by the Scriptures, that is, holy Scriptures (as the apostle's words in this place do expound themselves) must be meant the books of the Old Testament. That (I say) in the first place must be meant by it, which then by universal consent among that people, went under the name or notion of the Scriptures. That is, those books of the Old Testament which go with us at this day under that notion, and come into that censure and account, without the apocryphal books which never came into that account among the Jews, and therefore are justly left out of that account with us. They never took them. The ancient christians did not take them into that account at all, nor the Jews before our Saviour's time, or at any time: they were not written in the Hebrew tongue (unless some little parts) as the books of the Old Testament were; and have many things very fabulous in them, that shew them to have proceeded from human authority; though divers of them (some of those books at least) proceeded from very pious writers. After that, the full compute of these books of the Old Testament was gathered up and digested by Ezra since the captivity. It was very plain the Jews never took any writing into the account of canonical Scriptures from the time they took in the prophecy of Malachi; never after that, did they add any thing to the sacred canon, and so much we find Josephus against Appion most expressly to tell us. And therefore the apocryphal writings could be none of the books that went under the name of the Scriptures here, when the apostle saith, "all scripture is given by inspiration of God:" nor indeed, did they come into that account in the Christian church in the purest times. The account that is given us of the Scriptures by Origen and Athanasius leaves these books quite excluded: though we have an account too in ancient records of some use made of them as certain ecclesiastical books, but not as the holy Scriptures; they were not accounted the holy books. That then is part of this subject here to be spoken of, when it is said, "all scripture is given by inspiration of God," that is, the books of the Old Testament, which was the Scripture in the eminent sense at that time. But,

2. There comes within the compass of this subject too, the books of the New Testament. For we must consider about what time this was written by the apostle to Timothy; this was the second epistle you see; and that was most certainly written a considerable time after the greatest part of the New Testament was written. You may take notice in the next chapter, ([2 Tim. iv. 6.](#)) that he speaks of the time of his departure being near at hand. He had once

appeared before Nero already, and we are told that this was written near about the time of his appearance before Nero the second time: so we have it in the conclusion of this epistle, that is, in the adjunct to it. And though those subjoined adjuncts to the epistles, are not always of unquestionable authority, yet the matter of this epistle leading so much thereto, it puts this thing out of doubt that this was written very near the close of the apostle's life, "I am ready to be offered," saith he, "and the time of my departure is at hand." Now it is evident that all the gospels were written a considerable time before this. The last of them, undoubtedly, was the gospel of John, and that he is supposed to have wrote about the eighth year of Nero, whereas the apostle suffered (as we are told by history) in the last year of Nero about seven years afterwards. So that in all likelihood this was the last, or the last save one, that he wrote of his epistles; Paul here speaking of the time of his departure as near at hand: and we find that what was written by him, is elsewhere referred to, under the name of Scripture: as by the apostle Peter (2 Pet. iii. 15, 16.) where he speaks of his "beloved brother Paul" who had "many things in him hard to be understood, which," saith he, "ignorant and unstable minds wrest, as they do other scriptures to their own destruction," and we find the apostle [James in his 4 chap. 5 ver.](#) refers, under the name of Scripture, to another passage of his "the spirit in us" (as saith the Scripture) "lusteth to envy." You find nothing any where to answer this but that [Gal. v. 17](#) There, having spoken of envy, particularly before, he addeth, "thefk-sh lusteth against the spirit." And whatsoever was to come within that character and sacred stamp must come within the compass of this subject too. The book of the revelation plainly shews it was written by the apostle John when he was in Patmos: and after his return from thence, history informs us, that upon the request of the Asiatic churches, he did collect and gather together and put into order all the books of the New Testament, and so (as it were) did seal up the canon. And a considerable time after that, we are informed of his taking a journey to——<sup>7</sup> on purpose to collect the Sacred Writings he found among the churches there, with whom, he conversed: and he there found the books punctually as we have them, and in the same order wherein they now stand in our Bibles. And in the fourth century, they were all recognised by the council of the Laodiceans; therefore at this time, when this epistle to Timothy was written, there must be understood to be a reference had to all the books of the New Testament already written, and any to be written by inspiration of the same Spirit. And so this makes up together, the subject here spoken of, when it is said "all Scripture," all holy Scripture "is given by inspiration of God." All God-breathed, (as it were) breathed from heaven, the issue of divine breath, for those great and glorious purposes that it was to serve in this world. And now,

449

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7 This is blank in the manuscript: and after examining every document to which he could gain access, the editor has not beensuitablee to ascertain the place alluded to, nor the authority on which the author states this circumstance. The fact, it must be admitted, is extremely doubtful.

II. We come to prove the thing affirmed concerning this subject—that these Scriptures were inspired from heaven, by God himself, or are of divine authority; which is the import of this assertion, as to the way of God’s communicating his mind to those that delivered them. The expression is large and extensive enough to comprehend any, wherein there might be a certain signification of the divine will, whether he did communicate it by voice, (as he did divers things we find upon record in Scripture) or whether it was by dream, or by vision, to the penman, that is, asleep or waking: or whether it were (as the Jews distinguish) by immediate irradiation of the intellect, the understanding faculty: or whether it were by impression or signature upon the imagination or fancy, as a thing intervening between the divine mind and the intellect; which way so ever it was, the expression will reach it. It was of divine authority; it proceeded from him, be it one or the other of these ways. And in order to the evincing of this by argumentation, I shall briefly say somewhat to justify the undertaking, of proving the divine authority of these Scriptures by that argumentative way: and then shall proceed to the proof thereof, in that way which the case itself doth best admit of.

1. Something may be needful to be said to justify the undertaking to prove the divine authority of these writings, in a way of argumentation. In order to it, do but note these two things.

(I.) That undoubtedly there can be no effectual believing of the things contained in the Scriptures, unto salvation, without the special operation of the divine Spirit. It is only the Spirit that makes the sanctifying impression of these Scriptures upon the soul. The apostle expresses his great thankfulness to God, on the behalf of the Thessalonian churches ([2 Thes. ii. 13](#)) that “God had chosen them to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” There is no sanctifying belief of that truth but by the divine Spirit; that is out of all question: “Sanctify them by thy truth, thy word is truth:” [John xvii. 17](#). “Do thou sanctify them by it: the sanctifying them by this truth, or by the truth of this word of thine, must be thine own work.” There is that vicious prejudice in the minds of men, against the design and tendency of all sacred truth, and that power of corrupt inclination, to comply and comport there with, that it must be a great power that must overcome; and none is great enough that is inferior to the power of the Almighty Spirit. It is by a certain spirit of faith in the soul that men do believe to the saving of their souls. “We, having the same spirit of faith, believe and therefore speak.” There is none can arrive to this belief, a divine belief of the Scriptures, without the operation of that Spirit. This very notion, in general, that the Scriptures are the word of God, is a dead and insipid and ineffectual thing: as all other notions of truth comprehended in that general are also. But,

(2.) I must add, that the operations of the divine Spirit are not necessary to bring men under an obligation, or to make it become their duty to believe the Scriptures to be God’s word, or of divine authority: which therefore certainly doth infer, that there is a way of proving this by argument, that these Scriptures are of divine authority, so as to hold men





under an obligation to believe them to be God's word; that it becomes their duty to believe them so, so that they are culpable if they do not, if that light that may shine into them that way about this matter be not received and comported with accordingly. And to evidence this briefly to you, do but consider these things:

[1.] If there be not enough to be said by way of argument to prove the divine authority of this sacred book, without the special immediate operation of the divine Spirit, then every one that hath not the operation of the divine Spirit, would be innocently an unbeliever under the gospel. Then it would be an innocent thing to be an infidel under the gospel, notwithstanding the clearest light that can be supposed to shine amongst us, supposing only the absence of the special influence of the divine Spirit: and then the mere retraction or withholding of that influence, would be enough to justify the infidel and to make him therefore not guilty of a crime in his infidelity, barely because he hath not that Spirit; than which, nothing can be supposed more absurd or more prejudicial to the Christian cause and interest.

[2.] This is to be considered too, (to the same purpose) that if the special operations of the Spirit, were necessary to make it become a man's duty to believe these Scriptures to be the word of God, then they must be necessary in reference to every particular thing which he shall be bound to believe. But you know, the whole is made up of all the parts: and when we speak especially of the necessary parts, it is plain, that if the operation of the Holy Ghost be necessary to make it a man's duty to believe these Scriptures, it must be necessary in order to his believing every more principal part, every sentence that doth more immediately and directly, concern the salvation of his soul; and then upon that supposition, every person that should be under an obligation to believe these Scriptures to be the word of God, must himself be an inspired person or a prophet. And then, this would be the consequence, that these Scriptures would be of no use at all, one way or another; not to them that have the Spirit of faith to enable them to believe them; because every thing that is contained in them, and necessary for the end for which they are written, must be supposed to be suggested and dictated to them by that Spirit, and therefore the believer would have no need of the Scripture; and to the unbeliever they would be no use at all, because while the Spirit doth not give his influence to make them believe, they (upon this supposition) never could believe. And therefore, consequently, the Scriptures would be of no use, do no good, either to believer or unbeliever. And therefore, as I have asserted in the first place, that there can be no effectual believing of these Scriptures unto salvation, without the sanctifying influence of the divine Spirit, so I further do assert, that such an influence of the divine Spirit, is not necessary to make it become a man's duty to believe these Scriptures; but it will be his duty to believe them upon such light about this matter, as may in an argumentative way be supplied and furnished unto any that will make it their business attentively to consider. And now,



2. In the second place, I shall proceed to tell you in what way this proof must be attempted and undertaken, that is, inasmuch as the subject here, Scripture, all Scripture, is so complete as you have heard: that is, is made up of the books of the Old Testament and the New. The method that is reasonable to be taken, is to endeavour to evince these two things to you, that there were Scriptures in our Saviour's and the apostles' time, and many of them a great while before, which were certainly of divine authority: and that the books which we now have among us, in our time and in our hands, are the self-same books, in substance, (without any material corruption or alteration) that those were, which went for the holy Scriptures, of divine authority at that time. These are the two things that are to be evinced and made out to you, and with such evidence as may leave little ground or pretence of cavil to the understanding and honest christian: which I doubt not (through the blessing of God) may be done.

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## LEC. VIII.<sup>8</sup>

(1.) Now to prove that these books in the days of our Saviour and his apostles, even unto the last of them, went into the account of those Scriptures that were of divine authority: and within this compass, must come the books of the Old and New Testament. We shall give some considerations in reference to this; and shall afterwards in the close of all, (having spoken to the latter proposition too) give you some additional considerations concerning this book as now we find it.

[1.] For the divine authority of the books of the Old Testament, I shall not trouble you here with the various divisions that the Jews made of these books. And here, whereas, they reckon no more of them, than there were letters of their alpha bet, two and twenty, which most apparently excludes the apocryphal books. It would be tedious and trifling to trouble you with the account how they did severally refer all those to the several letters; only it is plain that the minor prophets they made all but one book. But this division only will serve our turn (though they did not strictly hold to it, but varied from it commonly, making a third member which we find no mention made of in the evangelists, or the writings of the New Testament,) that is, the division of the books of the Old Testament into those of Moses and the prophets. The Jews indeed made the Hagiographia, or third class, that is, accounting none prophetic, but those which were sent by special mission from God. And so all those books (besides the five books of Moses, and those written by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets,) they called Hagiographia, that is, other holy writings, sacred writings; such as the historical parts of Scripture, the books of Job, Proverbs, Canticles, Ecclesiastes and the like. But our Saviour comprehends all under the name of the law and the prophets, or sometimes, Moses and the prophets: ([Mat. xxii. 40.](#)) “On these two hang all the law and the prophets:” and that other place ([Luke xvi. 29.](#)) “they have Moses and the prophets.” Now take here the books of Moses first, and there can be no doubt at all but he was an inspired person, and that his books were written by very peculiar inspiration. If you do but admit the truth of the historical relation, as to him, and that people he had the conduct of, I say, supposing that there can be no doubt of his having written those books by special inspiration of God, for (admitting the truth of the history) you find how familiarly conversant he was with God, from time to time; that he did nothing of any concernment in reference to that people, but always by divine monition. Nothing then is more un-supposable than that he should do so great a thing as this, digest such records, and stamp them with the name of sacred and divine, and call them the word of the Lord, and the law of the Lord; and all this, without special instinct from God. Do but think how manifest and observable and adorable a divine presence, shewed himself to that person. How peculiarly God took him nigh to



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8 Preached January 16, 1691.

himself, sustained him forty days and forty nights together, (whether once or twice I will not here dispute) in the sacred mount, by miracle; supporting him by his own glory, speaking to him from time to time, giving him free recourse to him, directing him to consult him, and take his responses from him, upon all occasions. And that the history that relates to him, as to the matter of fact, must be true beyond all exception is evident if you consider, such things as these:

First. The very honourable mention that is made of this Moses, and some of the most remarkable things relating to that people (the Jews) whom he had the conduct of, by some of the most ancient and celebrated pagan writers, magnifying him as a most wise and prudent legislator, and a very great man; and remarking very considerable things with reference to this people. I need not trouble you with them; it is known to scholars, what of this kind is written by Diodorus Siculus and others. And,

Secondly. That which is above all demonstration: it is notorious to all the world that the people of the Jews were under the government of a Theocracy for several centuries of years successively, which puts the matter out of all doubt, that the history of that fact must be unquestionable upon which they became so. They were continually directed by God himself; their laws were made by God himself. He appointed the means of being consulted in every place, and it was through a long continued series of time: and so these records in all that time were known to be sacred things, having a divine stamp all along upon them. And again,

Thirdly. It is to be considered that the very matter of the history itself (considered in its circumstances) doth speak its own truth: considered, I say, in its circumstances, that is, the bringing of the people of Israel out of Egypt, and bringing them out by so strong a hand, inflicting so many miraculous plagues upon that Egyptian people and their prince, till they were forced to a manumission of them: the dividing of the red sea, the most stupendous way of giving the law upon mount Sinai, which (with the additional precepts that were given to Moses in the mount itself) make up (you know) the most considerable parts of the Pentateuch. The very matter of itself speaks, (if you consider it clothed with its circumstances) that there could be no fiction as to these things; for there is nobody but must grant, upon an ordinary view and judgment of those characters that do appear of Moses, that he was a prudent man at least, a very prudent man. But certainly he must needs be a madman that would report a fiction of things said to be done by, and before six hundred thousand men. When men do feign and forge things, they do it with the greatest privacy imaginable. As the portentous stories about Mahomet, there are no witnesses quoted, but all goes upon the credit of his word. It is not said, there were such and such thousands that saw such and such things, for then, if it were false, it were the easiest thing in the world to be disproved. Now when the law is said to be given from such a mount, clothed with so terrible and august a glory at that time, and the voice heard uttering those ten words, as they are called, by six



hundred thousand men, at once, besides women and children, (for these words are said to be heard spoken from the mount, by all the people; whereupon they could not bear that God should speak to them any longer. "We die," say they to Moses, "if God speak to us any more, but do thou speak and we will hear,") no man that hath but the ordinary understanding of a man, can think, that one of common prudence would inform of things that he saith were done in view of so many thousands of witnesses, if they were not done; if there were any design in saying so, that design were presently blasted, and lost out of hand; especially if it be considered that among those ten words there are so express precepts against idolatry; and that people had so marvellous propensions to idolatry, as their frequent relapses into it, and their running into it, even in Moses' absence, when God ceased to speak with an audible voice, do testify, It had given them the most gladsome opportunity they could have wished for, could they have detected a fraud in the case. When it is said there were such and such, and so many thousand witnesses, they could have said, there was no such thing. Could not this have been transmitted to posterity for a notorious cheat? by a people so prone to idolatry as they were. And when they were urged by the prophets (in a time of great degeneracy) with the authority of the divine law, how easily could they have replied, "No, there was no such law, it was a fiction, and what is said to be given by God's voice; and our fathers are said to be quoted as witnesses to, they all renounced it, said there was no such thing?" And then,

Fourthly. That holy men succeeding this time, (and unto whose inspiration it hath been sufficiently attested, as we shall see afterwards,) did attest unto Moses, still calling that law written by him, the law of the Lord, and the word of the Lord, and the testimonies and statutes of the Lord. With what reverence and with what delight and complacency do you find them so mentioned in the book of Psalms, in multitudes of places, when there was little else of Scriptures yet extant, besides those books of Moses? Would such a man as David, with adoration have called these writings, the law of the Lord, and the word, and statutes and judgments and testimonies of the Lord, if they had not been most certainly so? And would he have expressed so high delight in them, and veneration for them as such, counting them more precious than thousands of gold and silver, and expressing the heart-breakings and longings of his soul after them from time to time upon all occasions? And then, for what was written by him (David) and other holy men, (besides the prophets) though it is not known who wrote every book, yet there is no doubt but all may (as our Saviour did design they should) be comprehended under the name of the prophets; Moses and the prophets. And for the prophets, that they were reckoned prophets speaks their inspiration; the distinguishing character of true prophets and false, being so well known among that people. And for the things themselves that they prophesied, the accomplished events did from time to time prove the inspiration of the prophets.



But then take the whole Old Testament together, and that hath received its confirmation abundantly from the New: so that if the New can be proved to be of divine authority, all our business is done, the matter is out of question. The whole Old Testament, it is most expressly owned and proved by the New. For,

What is the New Testament, but a commentary upon the Old? it is an application of the religion of the Old Testament. The Old was nothing but a veiled gospel. The New is nothing else but the same gospel unveiled. And again,

It is plain, that our Lord himself doth frequently and expressly confirm to us the whole Old Testament, taken together under the name of Scripture, or the Scriptures, Moses and the prophets, and the law and the prophets. As when he saith “I am not come to destroy the law: no, I am not come to destroy but to fulfil:” ([Matth. v. 17](#)) and in the next verse “Heaven and earth shall pass away before one jot or one tittle of the law pass”—so that he hath confirmed the whole Old Testament to a tittle, to a very tittle, not one tittle but is sacred, it cannot be lost, cannot pass away, it is a more stable thing than heaven itself, and therefore now,

[2.] We pass to the books of the New Testament. And how will it appear that there were such books written by divine inspiration, so as we ought to reckon the authority of them is stampt thereon by God himself? Why,

First. Much of what we find in these writings was delivered by our Lord himself. The most material things contained in the gospels, that is, the doctrinal parts, were his own words still from time to time, upon all occasions.

Secondly. It is very plain that he did inspire his apostles, that were to be witnesses of him, and whose business it must be to be planters and propagators of the Christian faith after wards in the world. He did purposely inspire and direct and authorise them to publish those very things that make up the substance of those books; and therefore, no doubt, did direct them to write those very books themselves; for who can suppose, he having a design that the Christian religion should obtain and take place in all succeeding times to the end of time, but that he should intend that it should be wrote, it should be put into writing, and therefore when he laid that charge upon his apostles, upon whom he breathed at parting, or a little before, saying “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” and to whom he gave this charge, “Go and teach all nations this doctrine;” certainly within the compass of that charge must be comprehended the charge of writing these things, as -one means of publishing them to all nations, and so necessary a means, as that all besides (as to succeeding ages) must be ineffectual. And then,

Thirdly. For the authority of what was contained in these books, or the divinity thereof, he did endow those he made use of, as his apostles and first planters of the Christian faith



after him, (even their very inspiration itself, their very mission as well as the several parts of that message upon which they were sent) with a power of working stupendous miraculous works: that it might be seen by all men, that a divine power did at test to divine truth, as it was published by those men. And upon this you find that mighty stress laid, that these first propagators of the Christian faith, “preached the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven,” And the same Holy Ghost that did assist them in preaching, did prompt too, to write the whole New Testament. And that it was the Holy Ghost that did actuate them in all this, was shewn by that power of working miraculous works, which God gave at the same time; because the Holy Ghost is entitled to those works by our Saviour himself, saying, “If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come unto you,” then is that religion true, and it is the kingdom of God that I am here setting up among you, and hereupon is that great weight laid upon this matter, (Heb. ii. 2. 3. 4.) “If the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?” This was the divine seal, the seal of heaven affixed to these writings and what was contained in them: that is, that when men should come abroad upon such an errand, into strange countries and other nations besides their own, and speak things that such and such people had never heard of before, hereupon, suppose it should be inquired of them, “What shall induce us to believe, that what you say is true and comes from God?” Why immediately they do such and such works that could only be done by divine power, and so they testify to men, that this was a divine truth that they uttered to them. They preached such a gospel, and at the same time they healed the sick, by the speaking of a word, and sometimes raised the dead to life, as our Saviour himself did, who had so confirmed the truth before, by that and other most wonderful things that referred to his own person, by his death especially, and by his resurrection. Here was the greatest question among the Jews: he gave himself out to be the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God; all the question was, “Is this the Christ, or is he a deceiver or impostor?” He must be one of the two: either the Christ as he said he was, or one of the most notorious impostors that ever was upon the face of the earth: all the dispute rested upon this one thing: “Whereas, he gave himself out to be the Son of God, is he the Son of God or no?” The means by which many were wrought upon before his death, to believe in him, were his most miraculous works; but I say they were but the means: and to bring any effectually to believe in Christ, there must be something more than external means. When he preached to the multitude, he confirmed his word, sometimes by feeding thousands by very improportionable means; by healing the sick, by opening the ears of the deaf and the eyes of the blind, loosening the tongues of the dumb, and raising up the dead to life and the like: and when at length he came to die, you know with what

457

458

circumstances his death was accompanied; all the powers of heaven and earth were shaken, the sun withdrew his head, the veil of the temple was rent, the dead arose; and a poor pagan centurion, (who was appointed to guard the execution) upon sight of these things gives up the cause; “Verily this was the Son of God, I see he was in the right, the Jews persecuted him wrongfully,” (for here was the question between them, Was he the Son of God or no?) “They crucified him for a blasphemer, in saying he was the Son of God, which they denied him to be, but now I see he was the Son of God.” And he was afterwards “declared to be the Son of God with power, by the Spirit of holiness by which he was raised from the dead.” Now his apostles’ going forth, in the authority of this divine Person, to testify nothing but what they saw with their eyes, and what they heard with their ears, and being appointed by him to be witnesses of what they saw and heard, and to preach the doctrine which he had preached and delivered to them before; and they themselves working so miraculous works to prove the truth of what he did assert; this proves the matter out of all question, that what was written concerning all this, must be by divine inspiration. And further too,

Fourthly. It manifestly appears how the prophecies of the Old Testament (the greatest and most important of them) did receive their confirmation that they were divine, by the events that fell out in the time wherein the books of the New Testament were written, and which came to be reflected on after wards, by the wisest and most considering, the suitablest and most competent judges the world had in those days. Many of them were hereupon converted to the Christian faith: and some others that were not so, merely as wanting that opportunity to be informed of matters of fact which the others had had, who yet did acknowledge the convictiveness of the Mediator: as for instance, those prophecies concerning Christ, and that one express one, among the rest, of Daniel, about the seventy weeks: that great pagan, (and one of the most considerable enemies for reason and learning that ever the Christian cause had in the world) Porphyry, having opportunity to view over this prophecy said, it must needs have been written after the event, it was so very punctual. So that he only wanted an opportunity to know, that this prophecy had been written above five hundred years before his time, and was four hundred and twenty years before its accomplishment, in the hands of the Jews, and kept so safe that it was impossible to be a fallacious thing. And therefore, that being his case, (he being a heathen and not a jew and not having opportunity to know) that must (by his own confession) be the only reason of his not being a believer, upon that one single prophecy, so punctually accomplished by the coming of our Lord; and his being cut off at such a time as the prophecy did say concerning the coming of the Messiah, the Prince, and that he was to be cut off at such a time. Well, upon all this there is little doubt to be made as to the *first proposition*, that is,—that those books that went under the name of Scripture, or the Scriptures, in our Saviour’s and the apostles’ time, to the last survivor of them, were certainly of divine authority.





(2.) But now to the second proposition—that this book that we have now in our hands, containing such and such writings in it, is the same, or those Scriptures are the very same that were so owned and acknowledged for the Scripture, in those days. It may be said, and no doubt will be, by any that shall consider, that if this IDC out of question, the whole business is out of question: for nobody can think, if all that hath been said be true, about these books of the Old and New Testament, (said to be extant together at least within the time of the evangelist John) as to matter of fact, as Was reported, but these books must unquestionably be of divine authority. But how should we do to know that we have the matter of fact rightly deduced and drawn down to us, and so that we have reason to believe the books that we now have are the same? If we could be sure they are the same, it would be unquestionable: now as to that, there is one thing that I must premise to you, and it carries its own evidence with it. That is, that that knowledge that men may “have of any thing by ordinary means, we are never to expect should be given us by extraordinary. Pray do but take this, and weigh it well, as a thing needful here to be forelaid. Whatsoever may be sufficiently evidenced by ordinary means, it is very unreasonable to expect, that God should afford extraordinary means for the evidencing of that thing. If you do but observe the constancy of his methods of government, over this world, how sparing lie hath been of doing extraordinary things, that ought to come by just account into the class of miracles, of miraculous works, you would see, that the divine wisdom and power have been always very sparing of doing such things, unless where the exigency of the case did require it, and where the end was not otherwise attainable. But it is foolish, to think that the wisdom of God and the power of God should be exerted upon no necessity: what is it for? only to please curiosity? That which is done not to answer necessity, can only be supposed to be done to please and gratify curiosity. Now to think that the wisdom of God, should make infinite power, ever and anon, to stoop to do miraculous works, only to please and gratify a vain and curious humour, without any need, this were the most unworthy of God of any thing we could suppose: and therefore, this is never to be looked for. If then there be sufficient ordinary means to beget a certainty concerning this, it would be a very foolish thing to expect that miracles should be wrought to prove it to us at this day, that these books we now have are, for substance, the same that those were, which were owned for divine, in Christ’s and the apostles’ days. For if any one would assert, that it was needful a miracle should be wrought to this purpose, to assure us that these books were the same they were in former times; I would know who it is that should have opportunity of seeing this miracle? Must every one that should be obliged to believe these books to be the same, see such a miracle wrought himself? That were to make miracles more necessary than ever they were, for even in Christ’s and his apostles’ days, it was never thought necessary that every person should have the sight of a miracle himself, but it was enough that it was notoriously known that such and such miracles were done. But if it were not thought necessary in Christ’s and his apostles’ days, that miracles should be wrought in



the sight of every person, that every one for his own satisfaction should have the sight of such a miracle himself, then the testimony of such persons must be relied upon in this case, as it would be supposed could have no inclination or design to deceive others, by misrepresenting things to them: and that is such a testimony as upon which all matters among men do depend. "It is said in your law, (saith our Saviour to the Jews) the testimony of two witnesses is true;" that is, is credible, is not to be doubted: the whole frame of government depends upon witnesses. There would be no law, no justice, no society kept on foot in the world, if the testimony of credible witnesses were not to be respected and attended to. Now if in this way, there must be reliance on credible witnesses somewhere, that is, if some few should in our own time see a miracle done, and they make report of it, and their testimony is to be believed, why may we not believe as well the credible testimony of former times, as believe the credible testimony of persons in our own time? If the sober reason of men be yielded to in this case, no man can imagine what reason of difference is assignable, but that we may as well rely upon the testimony of our forefathers, concerning matters of fact, as upon the testimony of those that live in the same age with us; but have seen with their own eyes, what we have not seen with ours. And do not we know that most of the estates in which persons do claim property, do depend upon the testimony of witnesses that are dead a hundred years ago? Certainly, men would have very bad titles to their estates, if the testimony of witnesses, dead many scores of years or some hundreds of years ago, were not to be relied on even now. This is plain, that we have the same rational way and method of knowing these books to be the same they were, that is, by such testimony as is the very means of setting on foot all property, and all the administration of law and justice, in civilized nations, all the world over. And we have the same means to know this, as by which we come to know, that any other writings are theirs whose names they bear: such as the writings of Seneca, Aristotle and the like. We have the same means to know this by, as we have for other things that are of greatest importance to mankind in this world, and by which we come to know, other men's works that we have now in our hands, are the same which were written so many hundred years ago. And if so, then it were the most unreasonable thing, that miracles should now be reckoned necessary to be wrought to prove this thing to us, and if a miracle were now to be wrought, there must be a relying upon present witnesses, upon the testimony of this present age; and why might we not as well rely upon witnesses of the former age, as on witnesses of the present age? No reason can be assigned. Therefore, it would be absurd to expect God should extraordinarily prove this to us, when it could be sufficiently proved otherwise. That is the first thing to be forelaid.

And being forelaid, this one general consideration will prove, that these books are the same that they were in Christ's and his apostles' time, and cannot be otherwise; that is, that material alterations of them were altogether impossible. When I say material alterations, I only mean this, that there may have been some very minute undesigned alteration in tran-

scribing of copies; a word may have been mistaken, or a letter may have been mistaken, somewhat here or there left out. But this can be no material or hurtful alteration, because they had always other copies to correct such mistakes by, but there could be no material alteration with design, that is the thing I deny to be possible, and assert to be impossible. There could be no designed alteration either of the books of the Old Testament, or of the books of the New Testament, since the time of Christ and his apostles. And,

[1.] Not of the books of the Old Testament.

First. It is impossible they can have been altered, since it is plain they were preserved before, and for a considerable time afterwards, with the greatest care imaginable. And that it is one of the great wonders of providence that God, for the preservation of these books, should make use of that scrupulous, and I might say, almost superstitious care that was among those Jews, whose office it was to keep the books of the Old Testament. As,

It was known, they used to count all the letters of the Old Testament, that they might be sure never to miss a letter. Again,

In transcribing copies, (which was frequent) every copy was always examined by an appointed number of their wise men, as they termed them. Further,

If any copy should have been found, upon examination, to have four or five faults in it, in one copy of the whole Old Testament, that book was presently adjudged to be buried in the grave of one or other of their wise men. And lastly,

For those books that, upon examination, were found to be punctually true, it was very plain from the history of those times, that there was the greatest reverence paid to them imaginable. They never used to touch those perfect copies (taking them into their hands) without kissing them solemnly; nor to lay them down again without solemn kissing of them. They were never used to sit upon the place where one of those books were wont to be laid. If one of them by casualty fell to the ground, they appointed a solemn fast to be kept for it, as an ill-boding thing, that such a thing should happen. So that it is most plain that these keepers of the books of the Old Testament could never have it in design to corrupt any of them; but it was that which they did abhor above all things. And it was a principle (as Philo tells us, and Josephus much to the same purpose) instilled into the youth of that nation, and even those of the best quality, that they should run the utmost hazard and incur a thousand deaths, rather than they should suffer, to the utmost of their power, any alteration or diminution of any of those books: or that any of them should be lost any other way. And then, besides all this scrupulous care of the keepers of the books of the Old Testament, (with which a design of corrupting would no way consist) we may add,

Secondly, That the thing itself was afterwards impossible, simply impossible. If they would before, when it was in their own hands, they could; but afterwards, if they would, they could not; because that in Christ's, and his apostles' days, a great number of them were (you know) converted to the Christian faith, who knew all the books of the Old Testament

as well as themselves. Therefore, it was impossible now, for the infidel Jews, those that were not converted, to make any alteration, but it must be presently spied and exclaimed against: therefore it was a vain thing for any to attempt it, after so many were converted to the Christian religion. And there upon we may further add,

Thirdly. That the testimonies that were contained in these books against themselves, and with which contained in them, they are transmitted to us, do shew that they never went about to corrupt them. The many testimonies against idolatry, contained in these books, whereby their forefathers from age to age, for many ages, were witnessed against, would have induced them to expunge all things that were therein contained against idolatry, (so tender were they of their reputation) if there had not been a great awe upon their minds, never to attempt the corrupting or the alteration of any thing in those books. The wickedness of their forefathers was, in these books, so highly remonstrated against, in respect of the testimonies they so often give against their idolatry, and yet these books we find in their own hands, with these testimonies in them, against the Jews and their forefathers, for many foregoing ages through sundry times and divers intervals; though we do not find after the second temple, that people relapsed into that crime. And then, there is the fullest testimony against their infidelity in these books that can be. Who would not wonder that these books should come out of the hands of the Jews, with these testimonies, in the great controversy between the Christians and them? that is, of Christ being the Messiah, in which you have so punctual assertions against them, that nothing can be more. Those many testimonies that do concern the Messiah, particularly that famous prophecy, that the sceptre should not depart from Judah till Shilo should come: and those numerous presages in many of the latter prophets, (Isaiah especially and sundry others,) make it one of the greatest wonders of providence, that such a book should come, with these things in it, out of these men's hands, against whom they are a continual remonstrance. But however, this proves that they did never design any alteration: either they saw it impossible for one while, and before that, they had no inclination or inducement that would be prevailing with them to go about it, that is, that there should be an alteration with design. And then,

[2.] For the books of the New Testament; that they cannot have been corrupted is most evident too. It is impossible they can, for you must consider in what time they were written: they must be written in Christ's time and the apostles'; now within the compass of that time, things were brought to that state, that such a corruption was impossible upon two accounts, upon account of the distance of places into which the gospel was spread, and upon account of the divisions that were so early fallen out among christians.

First. Upon account of the distance of places whereinto, in the first century of years, the gospel was spread. That is, into a vast part of Asia, and some considerable parts of Africa and Europe; some think into Britain itself, into our land. There are not very improbable grounds of conjecture, that it was so, even within the compass of Paul's own age. That made



it impossible there could be any designed corruption or alteration in the writings of the New Testament; so considerable a number of men at such a distance from one another, could not agree to make such an alteration; and if they could not agree in it, one part must remonstrate against the other. And,

Secondly. The divisions that so early appeared in the Christian church made it likewise impossible. That passage of the apostle (it may be) is not greatly enough pondered according to the weightiness of the expression, that there must be heresies, there should be heresies, there must be heresies. This great use that hath been of the divisions in Christian churches is not (it may be) considered as it should be by many. But nothing can carry a clearer evidence and demonstration with it, than that, because of those divisions, any depravation of the said records, (that is, any material, general, successful, continued depravation,) is altogether impossible: because the one party would be continually declaiming and crying out against the other: and then how soon would it be espied? So for that particular instance, [1 John v. 7](#) “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one.” It is true it hath been found to be wanting in some few copies; and what an outcry was against it in the Christian church? So that if that alteration was made by the design of the arians, (and if it were by any design at all, it must be by their design) the very supposal of it brings the greatest blot upon them and their cause, that could be imagined; it being very plain that it was to be found in equally ancient copies. But it seems more likely, it was never left out by design at all. But because the matter at the beginning of the [8th verse](#), was just the same with that of the beginning of the [7th verse](#), a more negligent transcriber, having his eye on the beginning of the [8th verse](#), might write on and slip over merely casually the whole [7th verse](#). This being more likely that a verse, beginning as the following verse does, and ending like it, should be left out, than that a verse more than ought, should be put in. And thus, the design of making such an alteration would be defeated upon the attempt; so that upon that consideration it is altogether impossible, that there should be any alteration at all. And therefore that this be stuck to, that there is no designed alteration in these books, and so can have been no material alteration in them.

It is true that in translations, persons have laboured to serve their own purposes, by translating this way and that, as they thought fit. But for alteration of copies, that is what never entered into the mind of any body to attempt; which is a thing so easily spied out, that nothing is more so; and so must needs blast and disserve the cause and interest of that party it was designed to serve, and therefore could never be. And the impossibility of any such alteration, it is easy for any man that useth his understanding, to apprehend from a familiar instance. As thus, do but take any one people that are under the same government, and that have their laws by which they are governed, digested into some system or other; as for instance, our statute book; why suppose any ill-minded men in the nation should have a design to corrupt and alter the statute book; every one would see it to be impossible.



Which way should they go to work to impose a false statute book upon a nation, where in every man's right and property is concerned? And if any such should have such a design, they would soon give it up, as finding it impossible, and a thing not to be done, and therefore a vain thing to attempt. But the difficulty is a thousand times greater, of making any designed alteration of these sacred books and records, that are spread so unspeakably further than a nation, and wherein the concernments of all that have them in their hands are recorded, not temporal only, but eternal. Here is their all for eternity, and another world: so that it must be altogether impossible that there could have been such a thing effected; and therefore it is the most unlikely thing, that such a matter should ever be attempted. And then, I say, if there be that plain evidence, that for that reason, these books must be the same, that they cannot have been altered with design, and consequently not materially, then it were the most unreasonable thing in all the world, to expect, that God should confirm it to us otherwise than he hath done, or that the nature of the thing doth admit of: because otherwise, there must have been miracles wrought for every one to see, and take notice of; nay, that would altogether lose the usefulness and significancy of miracles themselves, because it would make miracles so common in such a case. If every man must have a miracle to prove to him, this is God's book, it would take off that particular thing for which they are only significant with men, that is, because they are rare and extraordinary things: and then they would cease to be so. It might as well be expected that every man should have a Bible reached him down by an invisible hand from heaven, as that there should be a miracle wrought to prove to him, that this was the same book that was so and so confirmed and sealed in our Saviour's, and his apostles' time. And therefore I reckon, that upon the grounds that have been laid, it is very plain, both that these books, that were extant, under the name of the Scripture, in our Saviour's and his apostles' time, were of divine authority: and that the books that we now have in our hands, are the same with those books, and therefore are of divine authority.

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## LEC. IX.<sup>9</sup>

Now what we shall further say, as to the two things laid down before, will be to answer an *objection* which possibly may arise in the minds of some: to wit,

That this way of being ascertained of the divinity first, and then secondly, concerning the identity and sameness still of these books, doth seem to resolve our faith, at length, into a human testimony and so, at length, to make only a human faith. That is, that all rests upon this—that we have been truly told, and by such as lived before us in the world, that there were such books in their time, and we are led by testimony in following ages, to collect, that these are the same books. Is not this (may some say) to resolve our faith into a human testimony, and so to make it only a human faith? In answer to this I have several things to say.

I. That it is very plain, that a human testimony must be depended upon *aliquatenus, some way or other*, in reference to all the concernments of religion. That is a point out of doubt, some dependance there must be upon human testimony. Suppose a preacher came among a company of illiterate men, men that could never so much as read; or if any of them were so, (which is a thing not unusual in Christian congregations) and he takes a text and produces (it may be) many more parallel ones out of the Bible for the doctrine which he preacheth; how can these men know that this is a Bible he preacheth out of, but by a human testimony? And even for those that can read, they must depend upon a human testimony, that what they read is a true translation: supposing them not to be learned themselves in, or not having opportunity to consult the originals, they must depend upon the testimony of the learned, who have viewed those books in the originals, such as lexicographers, and the like, for the true signification and translation of the words they read. This therefore is plain and out of question, that some use there must be of a human testimony in reference to the concernments of religion. And I add,

2. It is no more strange that God should state our case, so as to oblige us to some dependance upon human testimony, than that he should state it so as we must have a necessary dependance upon our own sense. We are told that “faith comes by hearing;” we can have no ordinary way to come to the knowledge of the things contained in these books, but by the use of our eyes, and the use of our ears. And I could fain know why there should be a greater sacredness in these organs of our own, than in those of other men. Why should mine eye or ear be thought a more sacred thing than the voice or tongue of another man? And again,

3. It is one thing to use a human testimony, in a case where in God hath ordained and appointed to do it, and another thing to do it besides, or against his ordination and appoint-

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<sup>9</sup> Preached January 23, 1691.

ment. Here we are to distinguish between matters of fact, and matters of right. We are to make use of the testimony of men, even by God's own appointment, in reference to matters of fact; to inform us only of mere matter of fact. This is an institution of God. "It is written in your law (saith our Saviour) that the testimony of two or three witnesses is true." "I come unto you in the mouth of two or more witnesses," saith the apostle, "and in the mouth of two or three witnesses, shall every word be established." This is a divine ordination: it is not an arbitrary thing taken up by men at random, and of their own choice and pleasure; but it is God's stated medium and way, wherein he hath appointed, that persons are to be informed concerning matters of fact, which they are concerned to know, and of which they have not the immediate knowledge themselves. "It is written in your law (saith Christ to the Jews) that the testimony of two men is true." What law was that? It was the divine law. God hath enacted, that the testimony of a competent number of witnesses should be relied upon, to assure us of the truth of those matters of fact, that they do testify, and you do well know, that upon this ground (so material a thing this is) depends all the administration of justice throughout the world. Otherwise, no judge would determine in reference to any case, which came not under the sight of his own eye, or whereof he was not an ear-witness. And so this would subvert the very foundations of all human society. There could be no such thing as human society in the world, upon these terms, and therefore we must look upon this as a holy, wise constitution of the great Ruler of this world, who hath ordained and appointed, that in reference to such matters of fact, as we are concerned to have the knowledge of, and have not the immediate knowledge of ourselves, we are to depend upon the testimony of others. And this is not an arbitrary thing that we take up of ourselves, but a thing that the wisdom of heaven hath constituted and set for the preserving of common order here, among men in this world. And

4. The difference is unspeakably great, between relying upon men's testimony, as to mere matters of fact; and relying upon it, as to matters of right. We may have a difference upon the authority of one or two credible witnesses, reporting to us such matters of fact, when as to which is right and wrong, we will have no dependance upon them at all. As now suppose any of you receive a letter from some person of very great authority and quality, and for whom you have great deference and duty, this letter "comes to you by the hands of a foot man; do you pay a deference to the man, in believing what is contained in the letter? No, all the belief of what is contained in the letter, is resolved into the authority of him that wrote it, and from whom it comes. Only you may look upon this as a fit medium to convey it to you; and you rely (if there be occasion to do so much) no more upon the footman, as to matter of fact, but that he received this letter from his lord or master to deliver to you; but his testimony hath no influence upon the contents of the letter, one way or other.

And this therefore, leads you sufficiently to understand how to answer yourselves, if any should further inquire—Pray how doth this differ from the notion that runs among





them of the Romish church, that is, that we are beholden to their tradition for the Scriptures we have, and for our Christianity, and for all that we have any knowledge of in the things of God and religion?—Why it differs the most that can be. For,

(1.) The papists do not only claim to be witnesses in the case, but they claim to be the only witnesses: which they most pretencelessly and injuriously assume to themselves: for we do not rely upon them as the sole witnesses, nor as witnesses at all, but only as they join and fall in with the concurrent testimony of the rest of the Christian churches, that have the same books among them that we have. We are no more beholden to them, than we are to other Christians. Nor,-

(2.) Do we rely barely upon the testimony of Christian churches, as to the matters of fact contained in these books, but we rely upon the concurrent testimony of the rest of the world, Jews and pagans themselves, as to the truth of matters of fact, which we need to be informed about, in the matters of our religion. The papists do engross to themselves to be the only witnesses, most falsely, and without the least colour of pretence. But we reckon the testimony of an enemy, an avowed, professed enemy is of the greatest strength in such a case imaginable. That is the testimony we have from the Jews, and the testimony we have from the pagans, of matters of fact, when the matter of fact is against, plainly against them. This we think we have a great deal of reason to lay much stress and weight upon. Now it is very plain as to mere matters of fact, pagans themselves have owned the truth of those matters of fact, upon which the christian doth depend: to wit, the wonderful works wrought by our Saviour and his apostles to prove the doctrines that they preached, and that are contained in these books. Pagans do not deny these matters of fact, we have them in divers of their own writings. For as to those miracles wrought by Christ, in his own time, to prove the truth of Christianity, (which was done on purpose that they might know that Jesus was the Son of God: that men might believe this and that by believing it, might have life through his name,) Celsus, that great enemy of the Christian religion, never goes about to deny the matter of fact: he knew that would be vain. All the world knew the truth of the matter of fact; only he takes a great deal of pains to shew how it was possible that such things might be done by other invisible powers. Just the same conceit that the Jews had among themselves, when they tell our Saviour, that he cast out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. That is, they did suppose the devil to have fallen out with himself, and that all his business was industriously to destroy his own kingdom. Indeed, the greatest and most momentous matters of fact, by which Christianity was confirmed at first, are freely granted by the most considerable pagans. We find in their writings, an acknowledgement of those things that filled the world with so much wonder, and they labour partly to turn off all by referring the great wonders to other causes and agents; and partly by pretending, that as strange things have been wrought by their own hands: as the setting up of Apollonius Tyanaeus, that great magician; whereas, the disparity is so great that nothing is more so, nor can be to any, who

469

470

consider, that those tricks wrought by him, were easily detected of fraud and imposture, and were pretended to be wrought to no considerable purpose. But the others were frequent and often repeated, and in common sight, and without any design of hiding; so as that when men that have been concerned have canvassed and searched as much as possible, to know whether they were true or no, the light hath shone into their faces, and they have been forced to yield and own that a great and notable work hath been done, “and we cannot deny it.” And with great dread and consternation they beheld the world running after Christ and his apostles, these works carrying so great a light in them, that were wrought for that design. And,

(3.) There is this difference besides, in what the papists do arrogate to themselves about this matter of testifying, from what we admit and assert; that is, that they assume to themselves the making of doctrines that shall be of equal authority with these books. And one of their greatest men among them, is known to have used that blasphemous saying, that this book hath no more of authority than Æsop’s fables, other than what it hath derived from their church. And if it were not for the authority it fetcheth from their church it were no more to be regarded than Æsop’s fables: which is so great an insolence that indeed one would wonder, (but that divine patience will magnify itself till the time of taking vengeance upon that apostate church come,) that a thunderbolt from heaven should not have vindicated such a blasphemy, with all things else that are of the same piece among them, and carry the same import and signification: for we know they take upon them to say and unsay, to do and undo, to maim and mangle this book, and set up contrary institutions to it; as is particularly known in that great ordinance of the sacrament of the Lord’s supper. And then,

(4.) As to the business of being mere witnesses of matter of fact, there they have proved themselves false and unfaithful; that is, in foisting in the apocryphal books into the canon of the Scripture, against the authority both of the Jewish church and the ancient church, as the world may judge at this day that read them.

So that there is no parity at all in these two cases, the relying by God’s institution and appointment upon a human testimony, but as a medium to convey and transmit to us our knowledge of bare matter of fact, and their assuming to themselves to be the only one to be relied upon, not only as to matter of fact, but as to the authority by which right and wrong, and the truth and falsehood of doctrine are to be finally decided and judged of. And thus far then we think, that the way of proving the sameness of these books with those that bore the character of sacred books, or books of divine authority, is altogether unexceptionable, and so strong, as that there can lie nothing against it to the common reason and understanding of men, when we have such a way of being assured of this matter, as must be convictive to any that do allow themselves the liberty and use of their understandings. And it would be a very foolish expectation, to think that God should gratify the fanciful curiosities of men, by working wonders among them continually and repeatedly to no purpose.



Upon all this I shall superadd some considerations that may give strength to all that hath been said before. As,

1. By common consent of all mankind, some divine revelation or other is necessary to the ends of religion, besides mere natural light. We do not find or read of any sort of people under heaven that have pretended to any thing of religion, but have likewise also pretended to somewhat or other of divine revelation, besides what was natural and common to men as men, as necessary for the conduct of the affairs of religion, or for which such a thing as religion was to be kept on foot in the world. Look back amongst any sort of people as to the most ancient accounts we have in the world of any thing of religion and we shall find it so: as for instance, if we go to the Egyptians of old, the Phoenicians, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Grecians, the Romans, the ancient Gauls and Britons; nay, if we carry it as far as China: for such accounts as we have of their religion and what it hath been for some hundreds of years past, nay, and some thousands of years backwards. All these people have pretended to somewhat of divine revelation, over and besides natural light, none of them but have had those among them whom they always took to be inspired persons. I am not considering now, whether their pretensions be right or wrong, true or false, but all have agreed in this sentiment, that there did need some other revelation besides the light of nature, in order to the ends and purposes of religion. They always had some sacred persons among them. Their priests, their magi, gymnosophists, their brahmins, their bards, their druids, whom they always took for inspired persons; and received dictates and directions from them still in reference to matters of religion: yea, and in reference to other matters too, as so many inspired persons: thus still by their own confession, owning mere natural light insufficient for the purposes of religion. Famous it is, (besides all that hath been intimated before,) concerning those several sorts of sacred persons, that the several nations had amongst them, that when Numa began to settle religion at Rome, in the first forming of that people he pretended to have all his directions from his goddess Egeria whom he conversed and met with in the woods, and consulted of those affairs from time to time. And the people of the Chinese are reckoned to have all their methods of religion and all their notions of it from that Confucius for whom they have the greatest veneration, that ever any people could be supposed to have of one as an inspired person, so as that deference was never paid by the Turks to their Mahomet, which is paid by these Chinese, to their Confucius whom they had their religion from, at least one thousand years before ever the other was known in the world.

Now this, to me, is a very great thing, that by the common consent of mankind in all the known and noted nations of which we have any record or notices among us; they should pretend constantly to somewhat or other of divine revelation, in reference to the affairs of religion; thereby giving us, as the common sentiment of mankind, that mere natural light was not enough, but some divine revelation was further to be superadded, for the conduct and management of the affairs of religion in the world. And to that is to be added,



2. That as this would be *argumentum ad hominem*, (it being the common sentiment of mankind,) so it is very apparent from the nature of the thing, that really and truly it is a matter of plain necessity in itself, that there be some superadded revelation to the mere light of nature. For notwithstanding the pretence of it, (that pretence of it to be sure, can never do the business or answer the end for which the thing itself is necessary) yet it is plain, that the very thing, that is, a real and divine revelation is necessary over and besides mere natural light, as that lies now so much corrupted, depraved and obscured, among the sons of men, if you do but consider into how miserable delusions, men have generally fallen, where such a real divine revelation was wanting, in reference to the greatest and most important things of religion. As what can we suppose greater or of more importance to religion than these two, the object of it, and the end of it? The Object of it is the God we are to worship, and the end of it is the felicity that we are to design and aim at in all the exercises of that worship, and in the whole course of our religion. Where there is not a real divine revelation, what monstrous conceits have been taken up concerning the object of religion! The polytheism of the gentile and pagan world, is a plain and pregnant proof what a necessity there was, that over and besides the mere light of nature, God should reveal himself as the peculiar and sole Object of religion, according to what he is in himself. For though it be true indeed, that many of the wisest philosophers among the pagans, have had right sentiments of the one Deity, the supreme *Numen*, God; yet for the generality of the people how much otherwise hath it been? And with whom those wiser men have been forced to comply and fall in, temporising with them whose own wicked and gross conceptions have led them to worship for deities, the sun, moon and stars; or heroes, the souls of men departed from among them, and sometimes to come so low as to worship dogs and cats, weasels, apes, serpents, onions, leeks and garlic, fountains and rivers and the like, for gods. So apparent need was there for a divine revelation to inform men about the object of their worship, above that light that is common to men as men. And then as concerning the end of religion, felicity, the great diversity of opinions among the pagans, (and even the wiser of them) no less than two hundred, eighty and eight, about the *summum bonum*, *chief good*, shews how great need there is of a particular divine direction, as to what that is which we are to design for ourselves as our final and eternal felicity. To these I add,

3. That supposing the necessity of a divine revelation about matters that relate to religion and our future blessedness, it must some time or other have become necessary that it should be a written revelation, put into writing upon record. Some time I say, I do not say always necessary. It is plain it must be less necessary in former ages of the world, when by reason of the vast longevity and length of life, about three or four persons might see through two thousand years and upwards, and so give an account but by three or four hands, of the most material and important things, that were of common concernment for men, as such, to know about the beginning of the world and the like. And no doubt there was great care

taken to preserve the memory of what was necessary to be known, by monuments and the like, as Seth's pillars were, of which Josephus gives a particular account in his time. But I suppose there were only oral traditions, for that time, passing from hand to hand; and that of things of so apparent, common importance and necessity, that none can imagine but if the person? were persons of tolerable prudence, (and we have no reason but to apprehend they were persons of great prudence, some at least that were more especially concerned, as Adam himself, Enoch, Noah and Shem,) there could not but have been very distinct accounts transmitted from such hands, of what was necessary to be known concerning the original of the world, and what the pleasure of him that made it was, concerning the affairs of his worship in those days. And we may easily apprehend ourselves if, in any family among us, any thing of great concernment to the nation, (much more to all mankind,) should have come to the notice of an ancestor of ours; as, suppose any of you could say, "My grandfather or my great grandfather had certain notices, some way or other, conveyed to him of such and such matters of fact, of the greatest importance imaginable to the whole nation," Do you think that that would be forgotten in three or four ages in that family? And as little supposable is it, that in three or four ages of so long a duration, all that concerned the original of the world, and revealed will of its Creator, how men ought to live, and order their course in the world y would be forgotten.

But afterwards, when the lives of men grew shorter, it is most apparent, there was a necessity that such things as were most requisite to be known, and were of most common use, should be digested into records in writing. And so we find first, the books of Moses written; and afterwards, there was an addition of more and more made, as God thought fit, in following ages, till the fulness of time, when we have the clearest light of an entire gospel revelation handed to us from our Lord himself, who came from the bosom of his\* Father to reveal and make him known, and his whole mind and will to men. And indeed, for them that would substitute tradition, and particularly that of oral tradition in the room of this sacred written rule, they do it with the greatest absurdity that can be imagined: and indeed with the greatest immodesty, in them that now a-days pretend to it. It is true, we read the apostle did take order with Timothy that some particular things which he had seen and taken notice of, and heard from him, he should commit to faithful men that might besuitablee to teach and instruct others. There were many useful things that were not presently put into writing. But as for these men, under the notion of faithful witnesses, they have the least reason of any men in the world to lay claim to that office and dignity, of being the conveyancers to us of the things that concern us, in reference to our salvation and our eternal well-being: for when they take upon them to be authors, they cannot be looked upon to have done the part of faithful witnesses. How strangely have they innovated upon that religion which they boast to have been the conveyers of to us! How much another thing have they made it, to what it was, in doctrinals and worship, and even in reference to the affairs of

474

475

common conversation itself? So that we may see, even by the insolency of this pretence of theirs, enough to assure us of the necessity of such a written rule to resort unto. And indeed, in what case had the Christian religion been at this day and the professors of it in the world, if we had not had this written rule in our hands, to correct and discover plainly wherein they have prevaricated and corrupted the Christian religion? So that we may seek Christianity in the Christian world, as was said of old concerning the City of Samium, it was so altered that Samium was to be sought in Samium itself; so we would still be to seek Christianity among christians, if we had not these records to set us right, and let us know what Christian religion was at first.

And upon the whole matter, as to those that would so officiously substitute their traditions in the room of the clear light of this written word, it is much a like case as if any of you should fall in with one travelling on the way, and he offers himself to be your companion and guide, and tells you that you have eyes that you make use of in choosing your way, but these eyes are only troublesome to you, they represent to you diversities of objects that draw this way and that, so that you cannot mind your path. “And pray (saith he) let me put out those eyes of yours and submit yourself to my conduct;” and all that he may guide you into a pit. Or a like case it would be, as if you should have writings in your hands, any of you, that were ancient, and did concern the title to an estate of yours from ages past, and one should say to you “These writings have a great deal of obscurity in them, pray let me have these writings and dispose of them as I see good, and you need not doubt but that there will be witnesses enough to prove your title if there be occasion; and you do not need to question but I will take care to defend you and make out your title;” and to think to rob you of them by such a fraudulent artifice. Just thus would they deal with us about the sacred records, in which our all for eternal life do lie. But very plain it is upon all these grounds, that it was necessary there should be some what of divine revelation superadded to mere natural light; and was also necessary, some time, that it should be a written one.

4. Supposing this, that it is necessary there should be a written revelation of the mind of God, about matters that do concern our present religion and future felicity, then we have none at all extant in the world that can come in any plausible competition with this book, unless you will bring the Mahometan Alcoran into competition with it. Nothing else doth pretend to be a rule of faith and light to men. And for that Alcoran, (besides what it hath borrowed, or stolen, rather from the Bible) it is a book full of so gross absurdities, that they who have but common sense, would soon discern the difference between them; and how little of pretence there could be to bring that in to competition with this, much less to carry it against this upon such a comparison. There are things in it so manifestly contrary to the common light and reason of men, as there would be ground enough for a most contemptuous rejection of it upon that score:—such as its asserting the corporeity of the divine nature; and that the felicity of the future state in the other world doth consist only in bodily pleasures



and the like; things manifestly refutable by common natural light. And besides the contradiction that there is to the common reason of men in so great things as these, it is made up of contradictions and repugnancies to itself. For it doth say even that concerning him, upon whom, you know our great hopes depend, which it doth, in the most substantial things, afterwards gainsay and contradict, for it owns him to be a great and a holy prophet, sent by God into this world. But if their religion should be true, he must be the falsest prophet (one of them) that ever was upon the face of the earth, or that ever pretended to prophesy; for did not he avow and give himself out to be the Son of God? If he were a true prophet he did truly say this, that he was the Son of God, and that he and his Father were one: and if he were a true prophet he did truly say this also, that the religion he taught and the professors of it, should continue, and he with them, to the end of the world; and then the Mahometan religion was never to subvert and root out the Christian.

It is plain therefore, that nothing under the name of a divine revelation can with any, the least plausibleness be brought into competition with this book. And therefore, if a divine revelation were necessary, and a written revelation were necessary, this must be it and there can be no other. It is true indeed, some enthusiastical persons have pretended to inspiration as to this or that particular thing; but none have undertaken to pretend, that they are so inspired of God as to give a full, particular, perfect system and model, of all that is to be believed and done, in reference to worship and religion. So that this book hath really no plausible pretender or competitor against it.

5. Whereas, it doth pretend and avow itself to be divine, and of divine original; it hath those inimitable characters of divinity upon it, which most plainly justify that pretence: I shall, before I instance, only forelay this That we must consider, when we would make a judgment upon this thing, whether this thing be a godlike thing, yea or no, and carries visible characters of divinity stamped upon it, we are, in making our judgment about this matter, to consider, not barely what is spoken or contained in this book, but also to whom such things are spoken, whose use this book was designed to serve, and what use it was intended for. We are not to consider, in this case, how God should speak if he were to publish an edict, or make an oration from the throne of glory to the innumerable company of angels, those glorious creatures that surround him above. That is none of the case that we are to consider. But we are to consider how we would expect him to speak, or how he would direct things to be written, that were intended for all sorts of men, here in this world, from the highest to the lowest, of all capacities and of all conditions, that have any exercise of reason and understanding. We are not to expect that one sort of Bible should have been written for learned men, and another for unlearned; or that one sort of Bible was written for citizens and another for country people; but we are to suppose that there was to be a book written that should suit the capacities of all sorts of persons from the highest to the lowest. And what could have been more Godlike, more suitable to his wisdom and goodness, and more



agreeable to the capacity and necessity of men in general, than what we have here in this book? And consider the use that it was to serve, what it was indeed to be written for. It was for the saving of miserable creatures that were in a lost perishing state. It was never intended that such a book should be written, only to please men's fancies or gratify their humours, or tickle their ears. It was intended for saving lost miserable souls, from perishing for ever; and those of all sorts, of all capacities, from the highest to the lowest: and so nothing could have been imagined more worthy of God, than the composure of this Book, for such persons and for such uses. And now to particularize a little, as to such divine characters which are conspicuous in it, and which I call inimitable, that could have proceeded from none but a divine Author.—As,

(1.) The majesty of the style: How great, how august and Godlike it is! in the whole of it: take it entirely in the whole frame, and nothing could appear, in respect to the style, more majestic or more worthy of God. Though the case must be considered with a diversity, that is, that he did make use of human penmen, and it is never to be supposed, that he should direct every word and every phrase, by an extraordinary immediate inspiration: for then it were impossible there should have been a diversity of style, but all the parts must have been in one and the same style. But there was that influx of the divine Spirit that did most certainly guide the writers, as to all the substance, of what was to be written and recorded by them; which did attemper itself to the natural genius of those that were made use of as the penmen, so that the communication of the Holy Ghost, received by such and such men, of such and such a constitution, temper and genius, comes to be diversified in that manner, as if one come to pour a quantity of water in to such and such a particular vessel, the water in its form will resemble the figure of the vessel: if the vessel be round, the water falls into a round figure; if the vessel be square, the water is formed into that figure unavoidably. And so the same communication of the Holy Ghost, being poured into such a vessel as this or that man was, comes to be accordingly diversified. That very communication to such a one as Isaiah, for instance, receives one sort of figure there, and a communication to such a one as Micah, receives another figure there; when yet all these communications are from one and the same Fountain, and serve for one and the same common purpose. And indeed upon the whole, it doth appear, that the greatness of the way of speaking it, doth so suit the majesty of God as nothing could do more, when men have come forth and spoken and written in the name of the Lord; and have from time to time pronounced, "Thus saith the Lord;" and when they have been directed to personate God, "I am the Lord; do so and so, I am the Lord," this is so becoming the greatness, the grandeur of the Author of this book, that it is not a supposable thing that there should be any, that would assume the confidence, in reference to things of this nature, to take upon them at such a rate; that is, comparing the confidence of such a pretence with the matter that is spoken of; and nothing is more evident than that this is agreeable to God only, or to one immediately directed by God only, and none else. And





upon what was noted to you concerning the difference of styles, for such parts of this book wherein God is represented to be the immediate Speaker, himself making this use of man, it is evident in such cases, when he hath appeared more immediately as the Author of what was said, nothing beneath God can be supposed to have spoken like him. As now to instance, there is that song called the song of Moses in the [32. of Deuteronomy](#); God doth give immediate directions to publish the words of such a song to this people, and to keep it as a record among them. It seems most likely that every word there, was dictated immediately by God himself. And who did ever read any thing so great and so august as the words of that song are? And so when we find God immediately speaking to Job, in some of the latter chapters of that book, Who can imitate the majesty of what is said? which is there spoken unto him, when God speaketh to him himself out of the whirlwind. And,

479

(2.) Consider the sublimity of the matter: How mighty, great things are contained in this book! As in that [Hosea viii. 12.](#) “I have written unto them the great things of my law.” To take such a summary as that, [1 Tim. iii. 16.](#) “Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in. the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” How mighty things are these, of how sublime a nature! And these make the principal contents of this book. And then,

(3.) Do but consider again, the comprehensiveness of this Sacred Volume, of how vast extent it is. And what mind, but the mind of God could have comprehended and collected together so great a variety of things as we find in this book? So as that nothing can be pretended to be wanting; not one thing can be so much as alleged is wanting that is requisite to be put into such a book, to serve the end it pretends to serve, and that it avows itself to be designed for. Things that suit all states of men from the highest to the lowest, all ages and each sex. Things we have that make up the system of what we are to believe, and things that compose and make up the system of what we are to do, and what makes up the system for us of what we are to desire. Do but look to the *credenda*, and the *agenda* and the *petenda* or *speranda*: where we may have the collected *digesta* of the one kind and the other, and who can pretend any thing to be wanting here? The comprehensiveness of this book speaks the divinity of it, having that in it which suits every case and every purpose for which such a book can be desirable, or can be pretended to be so. And then,

(4.) Consider too, its correspondency to the spirit of man, which it was designed to rectify and set right, and be a mea sure unto, if you look upon the spirit of man under a threefold capacity. That is, look upon it as merely rational, or look upon it as corrupt and depraved, or look upon it as regenerate and renewed; and the contents of this book do most admirably suitit every way, Look upon it as merely rational, and nothing so adequate to the mind and reason of a man; so as that, though things in it there are indeed, that the reason of man could not have found out; there is nothing in it which the reason of man would not

480

approve, being represented and laid before it. If we consider the condition of man as corrupt, what delineations have we of the corrupt frame and temper of the spirit of man in this state? And nothing, to me, is a greater argument of the truth of our religion in general, than to find such exact descriptions of the state of man, suiting the temper in which he is now to be found upon the original depravation in all his conditions in this world. So that just such a thing as a carnal man was, and was represented to have been five thousand years ago, just such a one he is now; all the imaginations of the thoughts of the heart of man are evil, and continually so. And when God looks down from heaven upon man, to understand who it is that seeks after God, there is none that is found doing good, no not one; none seeking after God; for that good must be chiefly meant: as if all the world did agree in that one common sense, to say unto God "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways: let not God molest or disturb us in our course." Just so is the degenerate spirit and temper of man represented, and how true a representation is it! And then look upon the spirit of man as renewed, and how lively a description is there of the regenerate man, the renewed man! just so desiring after God, the living God, as this book doth express; there placing its sole felicity and highest delight, there reposing its treasure, there placing the study of the heart, to be sincere and upright in his sight: who but God could have made such a representation of man? And that I take to be a further consideration which shews the divinity of this book, even those most inimitable characters of its divine Author that are most conspicuous to every discerning eye. But I add,

(5.) The wonderful efficacy this word hath had upon the souls of men, from age to age. It hath shewn itself to be "the power of God, through faith unto salvation." What multitudes has it subdued! This sword of the Spirit, and arrows taken from hence, how "sharp have they been in the hearts of the King's enemies," by which multitudes have been thrown down and made subject! what conquests hath it made! Though indeed there have been sad dark intervals: but no more but what have been foretold long ago, wherein the progress of the Christian interest and religion should be slow and little: no other was to be expected, according to what was long ago foretold of. But if you consider the vast increases that were within the first and second centuries, so that some of the ancients have taken notice, and one particularly, by way of apology, to the emperor that then was, "we grow so numerous" (saith he) "that were it not for the peaceableness of our spirits and principles, you could not subsist in opposition to us. It were easy for us to overturn the empire: and were it possible for us to retire and draw from the world, the world would wonder at its own emptiness." And Pliny writing to Trojan, another of their emperors, tells him, that rigorous and severe practices against the Christians were now altogether impracticable and might be dangerous: for he tells him, every where the way to the temples was overgrown with grass, and there were none to buy up their sacrifices, and there was no way in the world to keep peace in the empire, but to be very benign to the Christians. And he did procure by that epistle, a great



suspension of the rage, and cessation of the persecution that was at that time. And then, all this was done, not by the power of arms, (as the mahometan religion hath spread itself in the world,) but only by the power of this very word, the doctrine of Christ; whereby it appears to be “the wisdom of God and the power of God.” I have discoursed to you at large before, of the strong and irrefragable evidence that is given to the truth of this book by the prophecies, and by the miracles we find recorded in it; the punctual predictions of the former, and the obsignations given to divine truth, given by divine power in the latter. But this seal, set upon the souls of men by the sanctifying Spirit, (whereof this word hath been continually the instrument) carries to seeing and discerning persons, the greatest evidence imaginable in it. It was the saying of Plato, that “the world is God’s epistle to men; the characters of his invisible power and goodness being so visible upon it.” And how raised would his thoughts have been, and how much transported would he have been beyond the transport in which he was on this occasion, if he had but known and viewed this divine and sacred book! But then, to find it again, copied out and transcribed in men’s hearts! “You are,” saith the apostle, “the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart. [2 Cor. iii. 3](#). What a demonstration is here of the divine Author that hath made work, even by his word, upon the hearts and souls of men? So as that the same apostle speaks in that, [2 Cor. xiii. 3](#). “Do you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but mighty in you?” “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith,” “Do you seek a proof of Christ speaking by me?” See him in this book, and look into yourselves, such of you as have been converted and turned by my ministry; see if you be not Christ’s epistle? See if he hath not written out the greatest and most necessary things about him and his religion, out of this book into your own hearts. And I add,

(6.) That the high complacency that the best men take in this book, must needs prove it to be divine to their own sense. It is true, that there wants not rational evidence to demonstrate the divine authority or divinity of this book, to any that shall at leisure impartially consider the thing. But it is a far more lively proof that any one hath of this in himself and in his own soul, when he is made to taste, in the word, how gracious the Lord is, when he hath the pleasant relish of it in his own spirit: when he can say by his own experience, “Oh, how sweet are thy words to my mouth, yea sweeter than honey to my taste!” when it is to him a recreation to retire and set himself to think and consider and study upon these great and deep things of God; when once he comes to experience this, that the law of God is his delight, and that therein he can exercise himself night and day. So it was, when much less was writ ten of this book than what we now have. If David had seen all the writings of the New Testament, and of the prophets that succeeded himself, and had had the complete, entire volume in his hands that we have, with what transports would he have spoken of the ravishing pleasures of this book! how delectable a study must it have been to his soul! I hope

(though it is much to be lamented indeed that there are no more) there are many at this day that find it thus: "We approve it ourselves, in our own hearts; this must be, this cannot but be the divine word, it is so delectable, so refreshing to our souls." And,

(7.) Lastly. Take this by way of addition, the plain and manifest design it hath to make men holy and good; and consequently to make them blessed and happy at length, proves it to be divine. It hath manifestly this design; and can have no other. This is a thing that speaks itself to every conscience of man that doth consider, that is, that this book in the general composure of it hath a design to make men good and holy; and consequently to make them blessed and happy; and can have no other design. Every one must suppose that such a book as this, came not by chance into the world; if not by chance, then it came by design; and if it came by design, then something or other must lie designed in it. It doth serve this end manifestly, aims at this, to make men holy and pure, and fit them for heaven and a blessed eternity; and it hath no other design, it aims at nothing else. This then must be of God; this must either have been a divine revelation from God himself, (as it avows itself to be,) or it must be one of the most horrid forgeries that ever was contrived under heaven, ever since the creation of the world. But I would appeal to any man's conscience, whether it is likely any one would be guilty of so audacious a wickedness, to entitle the holy God to be the Author of an imposture, for no other end than to make men holy and good? would men be so wicked as this, for no other end but to make the world good? Their own fact would fly in their faces. Here is a design to make the world holy and happy; and if the world were thus, as this book would make it, if it were suitable to it and the contents of it, if there were that love to God and Christ and our neighbours, that holiness, that righteousness upon earth that are expressed in, and designed to be promoted by this book, what a blessed world were this! The very image and idea of heaven itself. But to think that men should be guilty of the greatest wickedness that ever was done under the sun, with so good a design, is the most inconsistent and unimaginable thing that can be.

These considerations, superadded to what was largely spoken to before, I reckon will prove the matter out of doubt, (with all that impartially consider and weigh things,) that these Scriptures are of divine authority.

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## LEC. X.<sup>10</sup>

That which we have further yet to do upon this subject, is only to say somewhat by way of answer to an objection or two; and then to conclude and shut up all in some use.

Objection 1. Some such thought may possibly arise in the minds of some, that if these books be indeed of divine revelation in order to the salvation of souls, as you have heard they are, it may seem strange that they have been confined to so little a part of the world, to so small a portion of mankind. As for the books of the Old Testament, while they only were in being, that they should be shut up in so narrow limits as Palestine, a very little, inconsiderable spot, compared with the rest of the world. In Judah, it was said God was known, as being unknown to the rest of the world. [Psalm lxxvi. 1.](#) And he gave his word to Jacob, and his statutes and judgments, to Israel; and did not so to any nation. [Psalm cxlvii. 19, 20.](#) To the Jews were committed the oracles of God, as the apostle speaks. [Rom. iii. 2.](#) And afterwards, when Christianity came, in the fulness of time, to obtain in the world, how little a way, in comparison, did the Christian records reach, or have reached hitherto? According to common computation, the world being divided into thirty parts, nineteen do yet remain totally paganish in the grossest sense, and the other eleven, between mahometans and christians, and not above a sixth part of the world that are so much as christians in name, and of them how great a part have the Bible reserved and locked up from them, they not being permitted the use and knowledge of it? All this may seem very strange, if we consider these Scriptures as a divine revelation purposely vouchsafed in order to the salvation of the souls of men.

Why in reference to this I shall offer you some considerations that I hope may not be unuseful. As,

1. Suppose that there had been no saving design at all, set on foot in reference to the apostate sons of men, but that they had been left under the same remediless condition with the apostate angels, what wrong had there been clone? who could have had whereof to accuse the righteous Lord and sovereign Ruler of all this world? Why might not he have left all to sink without remedy or hope, into so deserved, yea, and a self procured ruin? It is therefore apparently, not a matter of right, but of free favour, if God afford any apt and suitable means in order to the saving of any. And what is not matter of right may surely be withheld without wrong. But,

2. When upon the fall of Adam it pleased God so graciously to reveal to him his saving design and the means of it by that eminent seed of the woman, whereof (though those words do carry but an obscure intimation, yet) undoubtedly, he did not leave Adam ignorant of the meaning and intendment of them. And it is as little to be doubted, but that Adam did transmit the knowledge of what he knew himself, in so important a matter, to his more



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<sup>10</sup> Preached February 20. 1691.

immediate posterity. If then they had not been wanting to themselves and their posterity, it must necessarily have been, that there would have been some sufficient knowledge of a Saviour diffused all the world over, wheresoever his posterity had spread itself. But if men have herein been wanting to themselves, is the holy merciful God to be charged with this? If some very bountiful person should confer some great estate, and settle it upon some particular family, and they embezzle and lose it, is this to be charged upon the bountiful benefactor? And again,

3. Men did not only by their voluntary neglect, lose the notices that were first thus given to Adam, concerning a Saviour, but they lost the very notions of God himself. So that by their own negligence and malignity, they gradually and universally sunk, even into the grossest idolatry, and so by this means, not only lost the opportunity that they had of knowing somewhat how man might have been saved out of his lost and lapsed estate, but they provoked divine displeasure against them in the highest degree. And so their negligence herein, is not only the natural means of their being without such knowledge as they otherwise would have had, but the provoking cause of God's deserting the world in so great a measure, and so generally as he hath deserted it. And thus doth the apostle plainly state the case, that because they have not been true to that light that was natural and common to them, did not follow the conduct, even of the notices of God that they had, therefore they have been abandoned and given up: "The wrath of God hath been revealed from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness." What truth was that? or what men were these? It was natural truth, the natural knowledge of God, that men had as men; and this was the pagan world that was here chiefly spoken of. And for that very reason, because that which was to be known of God in them was so manifest to them, even the invisible things of God from the creation of the world, his eternal power and Godhead, sufficiently to leave them without excuse: yet (as it after follows) they liking not to retain God in their knowledge, therefore he gave them up; as we see [Rom. i. 18, 28](#). Here is nothing but *Nemesis, just punishment*, and so no cause at all to complain of any injury done to men. But,

4. When yet it pleased God, in order to the revival of the lost state of religion in the world, to form a peculiar people to himself, and there to set up an eminent light, (as it were,) upon a candlestick, to vouchsafe an express revelation of himself to that people, and to commit to them his oracles, they were so committed to them, not to be confined and hid, but preserved and kept: and that thence, light might be transmitted all round about, which accordingly must of course (if men had not been wanting to themselves) have spread further and further. It was not from any divine appointment; but from the ill spirit that ruled amongst that ill people, and from the prejudice and negligence of their neighbours, that the light they had, did not spread and extend further and further and still further and further, to circulate from nation to nation. It proceeded (I say) from the ill spirit that was among the Jews who



did envy to the rest of the world the knowledge of God, which now, for the present, was peculiar to them: and to the negligence and prejudice of the rest, that they looked after no such things. Of that ill spirit that ruled among the Jews, that is a sad instance, (which I have upon some other occasion told you of) that when there was one translation of the Old Testament by the seventy elders, enjoined to be made by Ptolemy and they could not tell how to hinder it, they appointed a solemn fast universally wherever they had any thing at all to do, to lament that the knowledge of God should be so diffused amongst others; and go beyond their own bounds. Wherein, as they were guilty, no doubt, so the rest of the world were accessory too, by their negligence and disaffection to the true knowledge of God, to their own continuing ignorance. And further,



5. That when the Christian records, the books of the New Testament came to be added to those of the Old, how should it come to pass but only through the general ill temper of men, that Christian knowledge might not be as far extended as commerce was between nation and nation, kingdom and kingdom &gt; Why might not that commodity have been carried as far as gold and silver and precious stones? the price whereof is far above all these, “more precious than rubies,” or thousands of gold and silver. And (as I told you formerly) it was never to be expected, God should do that by extraordinary means, that might have been done by ordinary. And this being the case, it is little to be expected that God (when men might so easily have transmitted such notices from nation to nation, and those that were of a greater distance, and might have heard, more obscurely, of such and such things might have inquired and sent and laboured to inform themselves) should give remedy to such an evil as this, by an extraordinary course; that when in an ordinary way such knowledge might have been conveyed from country to country, he should have sent an angel from kingdom to kingdom, and from nation to nation to carry them Bibles. It might have been as well expected that, in Christian countries, where the Bible is come, but a great many persons being illiterate, and can make no use of it, an angel should be sent from house to house to teach their children to read. Again,

6. Where there hath been both a loss of that Christian knowledge that once did obtain, and those very records do (it may be) cease from some parts of the world where they have been, this is still to be imputed to the same cause, the carelessness and negligence of men about their own concernments, even about their greatest concernments, as we are told. It is true, that of latter days, in some parts of the world, where there have been thirty christians for one pagan, there are now nearly thirty mahometans for one christian. Whence is this, but from the wilful degeneracy and revolt of those, amongst whom the Christian name was sometime professed? It would not have been imposed upon any, whether they would or no, to forego their religion, and to let these sacred records cease from among them, and substitute a foetid, fulsome, ridiculous Alcoran in the room of them. We are not to charge upon God these gross negligences and wickednesses of men. And again,



7. Where these holy books are shut up from people, (as they are generally in the romish church,) to what is that to be imputed, but to their own carelessness and indifferency and coldness in the concerns of their own souls and of the future state? This is a punishment, a just punishment upon stupid besotted princes and people, that they would be so imposed upon; so absurdly and without pretence; that their priests must lock up all from them, that so they might have the leading of them, the blind leading the blind into the ditch. We are to consider a penal hand in this, as is expressed, [2 Thes. ii. 11.](#) that where the truth is not received in the love of it, there God, in judgment, should “send strong delusions that they should believe a lie that they all might be damned.” This is righteous and holy displeasure, and the act and effort of punitive justice for very gross and most provoking wickedness, that a greater value hath not been had and expressed of things so sacred, so precious and of such concernment to men’s souls; that the greater part of the Christian world should suffer itself to be so grossly imposed upon, and cheated out of the very things wherein their very salvation is concerned. Their wickedness in this, did punish itself. And God hath most righteously permitted it to be so. And then,

8. That according to human measures, and even amongst ourselves, the government is not concerned when laws are made, to provide that every particular person should have the particular knowledge of them. Such laws as are of common concernment men are obliged, under penalties, to observe: they are to look after them themselves. The government is not to take care that every particular person, or family, or parish, or town, or country hath this or that particular act of parliament sent to them, or a statute book lodged in every such place. That is not their care, but it is expected, people should so far concern themselves and mind their interests as to acquaint themselves with things, upon which the safety of their lives as well as the common peace doth depend. And yet further,

9. Where ignorance of those great things that are contained in the Holy Scriptures is altogether invincible; and where it was impossible, in a natural way, that such knowledge should come, undoubtedly God will deal with men accordingly. He will only proceed with them according to that light they had; he will never punish them for not having that light which they never had, nor could have. “As many as sin without the law shall perish without the law: and as many as have sinned with the law shall perish by the law:” as [Romans ii. 12.](#) And,

10. In the last place, if any such were any where to be found, that did to their utmost improve the light and means of knowledge which they had, (supposing them never to have had what we have from these holy writings,) we do not know what God would have done for their further help in that case. But I doubt instances will not be found of such as have improved the light they had to the uttermost. How far are we from improving as we should and might, that greater light which we have? But God hath his ways open to him. We do not know how he did convey light of old to those that had it before the Scriptures were



written: how Job came by his knowledge, and how his friends came by theirs, we do not know. But this is undoubtedly the ordinary, stated means of knowledge where it is vouchsafed; where God doth afford it. If God doth not afford it, he proceeds then by other measures of his own which we know nothing of. But certainly he will always walk punctually according to that rule, that “whosoever hath, to them shall be given, and they shall have more abundantly;” that is, whosoever hath so as to improve what he hath, that useth and enjoys what he hath, and God is pleased to trust him with, God will never be wanting to such. He will always be beforehand with them, as he is never behindhand with any, according to that known and generally approved saying of that ancient: *Homini facienti quod in se est, Deus non deest: God is never wanting to them that do improve what they possess.* Though he owes them nothing, and whatsoever he doth for them is of grace, he is never wanting to those that with serious diligence trade with, and improve their present talents. And I think more needs not to be said to that objection.

Objection 2. And it is of less concernment, what might be further objected in the second place. That is, it may seem somewhat more desirable (at least) that these Scriptures had contained things that are of necessity to salvation in a more distinct method, that we might have had (as it were) all the several heads belonging to religion, reduced as in a common place book, to such and such distinct topics, that every one might know whither to go presently for all things that do be long to such and such a head. But,

1. I answer; It is enough to those that consider things modestly, and with that subjection and resignation of spirit that we ought to have, to take notice only that God hath thought another course fitter. And that is surely best which he thinks best. So submissive and resigned ought our minds and understandings to be to the divine mind. But,

2. Supposing the most accurate method that could be imagined were used in all things, as was suggested, yet however, there would have been a continual use and need of a stated office, to be continued through all the successions of time, purposely for the explaining and for the enforcing of things upon, the dull and sluggish minds of men. The state of this apostate world doth most manifestly require it, yea and even with the best, those that are upon recovery, who are in some measure restored out of the common apostasy, they do still need to be continually administered unto. And that being supposed, it is the business of them who are invested with such an office, to be continually searching for others, and labouring diligently to explain things to them, and to lay things together, and to apply them to particular uses and purposes as the variety of cases should need and require. And to add no more,

3. Whereas the bounty and goodness of God hath provided for the inhabitants of this earth, that the bowels of it should be replenished with things of very great usefulness and very great value, as gold, silver, precious stones and the like that are dug out of the earth, it might as reasonably be said, Why did not God so order the matter, that upon turning up of



the earth, one might have found vessels of gold, flagons and dishes of silver ready made and formed? and why have we not our rubies and diamonds ready cut and polished, as they are taken out of the earth? These Scriptures do contain all needful truths in the ore, from whence they are to be beaten out. And what! is nothing to be left to the industry and diligence of those that are to be employed here a lifetime, in reference to the concernments of their salvation and the affairs of another world? must every one expect that food of this kind should drop into his mouth when, even in reference to the support of this perishing life, it seemed a just and equal law to the universal Lawgiver, that he that would not labour should not eat?

And therefore, now to make some brief *Use* of what hath been said upon this subject. It may be improved several ways.

1 It may very reasonably put us upon *reflection*, what our temper and what our practice hath been and is, in reference to these sacred writings. And,

(1.) Let us reflect, and bethink ourselves: Are they used, are they perused as so sacred, so important and necessary things do require to be? Pray let us reflect, Are they much in our hands in our closets? do we lay it as a charge upon ourselves to search the Scriptures? You see it is given as a charge by our Lord himself, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life." [John v. 39](#). Is the reading of them in our families a common practice? You do best know. There is such a thing as family instruction charged upon family masters. They are to be accountable for those under their charge in this very thing. And certainly they that do but use a very ordinary understanding, would soon and easily apprehend, that I who am to maintain the lives of so many persons in my family under my care, by providing food for them for their natural lives, that I who am not to suffer a child or a servant to starve under my roof, must not surely let their souls starve: I must not let the necessary means of spiritual and eternal life be withheld from them. Let it be considered, Is such a course kept up? If there must be family instruction, this word must be the ground of it, it must be all fetched from hence. And how sad, how unaccountable a case is it, when it shall be more ordinary and familiar to have a news-book (not to say a play-book) in men's hands, and under their eye than this holy book. But we are to inquire too,

(2.) Not only concerning the reading and perusing of these writings, but concerning the gust, the savour and relish where with we do it. With what complacency do we look into and resolve in our hearts those great and deep things of God that are contained and unfolded to us in this book? I would fain know, who of us can assign a reason why David should have a pleasanter relish of the word of God than we? Is it not of as great importance to us, as it could have been to any saint heretofore, to take these sacred truths and doctrines that are contained in this book for our meat and drink? "I found thy words and did eat them," saith the prophet, "and they were to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." We have it given us as the common character of a good man, a fearer of the Lord of old, that the law of God was his delight, and therein he did meditate, day and night. [Psal. i. 2](#). Let us but consider, if there



be a failure and decay generally among us as to one thing, that is, the want of a savouring and relishing the word of God, the things contained in the sacred writings, whether there be not a matter of threatening abode and import to us in it, for then all our religion is proportionably languishing, and the languishment of it is a continual tendency to its being lost, and continual sickness and languishing is a tendency to death; and in such reflections as these, we should compare present time with former time, so far as it any way comes within the compass of our knowledge, either of what we could either of us have observed ourselves, or what is recorded to us by others. Sure the time was, that the word of God hath been a thing of much higher esteem (I doubt) than at present. I am very apt to think and do pretty certainly know, that the reading of the Bible in London was a much more common usage than now it is in families and closets. And truly, if there be symptoms of decay upon us in respect of so very important a thing as this is, it looks very threateningly: we may be sure if our esteem grow less of this book, God's esteem doth not grow less of it: he doth not measure by us: and if he have the same estimate and value for it that ever he had, we may fear that he will some time or other (and we know not how soon) very terribly vindicate the neglect, contempt and disregard of these sacred records. If he do come to plead his own cause, in this regard, with an untoward generation, I fear it will be a very terrible day: I know not who will live when God doth this. But,

2. This should *exhort* us to several things. As,

(1.) That we do with serious gratitude acknowledge and adore the goodness of God, in entrusting us with such a treasure as these Oracles of his are. I am afraid this is a thing wherein there is a very general neglect and defect. We do not often enough put it into our express thanksgivings, that God hath vouchsafed the great blessing of a Bible among us. I doubt we do not explicitly enough take notice of this, as a matter of gratitude to God, nor so often as we should that he hath put this book into our hands. And,

(2.) It should exhort us to more frequent and diligent reading of the Scriptures. For what have we them for? And indeed we do but mock God when we give thanks for them, if we use them not. It should be more a business with us; time should be chosen and reserved for it on purpose. We should contrive how to spare time from our common affairs for the perusal of this book. I am afraid that partly between the over-much business of the shop and the exchange, and partly through the no-business of the coffee house and tavern, little or no time is allowed for this important work, the reading and perusing diligently these holy writings.

(3.) And we should be exhorted next, to endeavour to get them written over again in our hearts: that this word may be to us an ingrafted word: that we may have this word of Christ dwelling richly in us: that we may be the epistles of Christ, written not with ink on paper, but with the Spirit of the living God on the fleshly tables of our hearts: otherwise this word cannot but be a witness against us. If there be not a correspondent word within, if

there be not an internal correspondent word, the external word must be a standing witness against the frame of our spirits and against our habitual inclination. We then have the word of Christ dwelling richly in us, when it transforms and changes us, and when we are like it, when there is something within us answerable to it, as face answers to face in the water. And,

(4.) It ought, in order to this, further to exhort us to endeavour distinctly to understand it; especially in those great things that do concern the vitals and essentials of religion. And this knowledge will be easy to them that concern themselves to understand. Wisdom is easy to him that hath understanding, that is, that sets his mind to understand, that doth aim at understanding. It must be a design driven and pursued accordingly, that we may get our minds enriched with that knowledge that is wrapt up in these holy writings. And we have greater advantages in order to it, yea much greater than our forefathers have had, though they have expressed that love to this book, which I am afraid is too little common in our time. How dear was a leaf of the Bible to some of the poor suffering martyrs! But, I say, we have much greater advantage to help us to a distinct understanding of it. How many very useful commentaries upon the Bible, are there published among us in the English tongue, which were not in the former time? As particularly the Dutch annotations, and Diodati's annotations, and those that are called the Assembly's annotations and Mr. Poole's, in two volumes, and that lesser and very useful one of Mr. Clarke, single. So that they must owe it to their own great neglect and unconcernedness, who are not furnished with help at hand whereby they may in some measure understand the Bible distinctly as they read it, and know how to refer things to their use from day to day as they go on in that course. And then,

(5.) Lastly, apply it to the several uses it was written for and was designed to serve. You see here in the context, what uses it was intended to serve, and it is said to be profitable for: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:" use it to these several purposes, as the case doth from time to time require. And we may add hereunto, what we find in another place, ([Rom. xv. 4.](#)) that the things that were written, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Oh! how many a sweet cordial is there in this book! Certainly they cannot be in an uncomfortable state, without a fault, that have such matter of consolation just at hand, and take no notice of it. They that go from day to day in darkness, and complain of their own doubts and fears; and will not be at the pains to consider what there is in this book suitable to the state of their case, and which by faithful application would undoubtedly in time I satisfy all unreasonable doubts, and dismiss all causeless fears and make them vanish, must needs be wanting to their own comfort and peace. It is in that respect a light, not only upon account of its instructiveness, but upon account of the pleasantness and consolations thereof. The Scriptures were written that we through patience and comfort of them might have hope. We that are following the conduct

of God, and the ducture of that light which shines in this sacred word of his, towards an eternal state of glory, with what erect and raised hearts, with hearts how lifted up in the ways of God should we hold on our course, as the redeemed ones of him, having that life and immortality in view which are brought to light before our eyes in this gospel.

And a little to enforce all this, it may not be altogether use less, nay, I think it may be worth our while to tell you a short passage which was not long ago told me by a person, (whose name is well known in London and I hope savory in it yet, doctor Thomas Goodwin,) at such time as he was president of Magdalen college in Oxford: there I had the passage from him. He told me that being himself in the time of his youth, a student at Cambridge, and having heard much of Mr. Rogers of Dedham in Essex, purposely he took a journey from Cambridge to Dedham, to hear him preach on his lecture day, a lecture then so strangely thronged and frequented that to those that came not very early, there was no possibility of getting room in that very spacious large church. Mr. Rogers was (as he told me) at that time he heard him, on the subject of discourse which hath been for some time the subject of mine, the Scriptures. And in that sermon he falls into an expostulation with the people about their neglect of the Bible: (I am afraid it is more neglected in our days:) he personates God to the people, telling them, "Well I have trusted you so long with my Bible: you have slighted it, it lies in such and such houses all covered with dust and cobwebs: you care not to look, into it. Do you use my Bible so? well you shall have my Bible no longer." And he takes up the Bible from his cushion, and seemed as if he were going away with it and carrying it from them; but immediately turns again and personates the people to God, falls down on his knees, crys and pleads most earnestly, "Lord whatsoever thou dost to us, take not thy Bible from us: kill our children, burn our houses, destroy our goods; only spare us thy Bible, only take not away thy Bible." And then he personates God again to the people; "Say you so? well I will try you a while longer; and here is my Bible for you, I will see how you will use it, whether you will love it more, whether you will value it more, whether you will observe it more, whether you will practice it more, and live more according to it." But by these actions (as the doctor told me) he put all the congregation into so strange a posture that he never saw any congregation in his life; the place was a mere Bochim, the people generally (as it were) deluged with their own tears, and he told me that he himself, when he got out and was to take horse again to be gone, he was fain to hang a quarter of an hour upon the neck of his horse weeping, before he had power to mount; so strange an impression was there upon him and generally upon the people, upon having been thus expostulated with for the neglect of the Bible.

And sure, if our neglect of it in our days have not been less, it is a very sad case, if our affliction and resentment of such an evil as this should be apparently and discernably less.

And nothing will signify our regardlessness of this holy book more, than if we do not strictly regulate ourselves by it as to our thoughts, and as to all our deportment. For pray,

under what notion do we own this book, but as a rule to guide us to our end? how to glorify God and how to enjoy him for ever? It will be a plain testimony against us that this book hath not the esteem which is due to it, when it hath not the use made of it that it was purposely designed for. And oh! let that be but considered, its use is to be a rule, for us. Bethink we ourselves thereupon, whether we do really regulate our thoughts, our hearts, our affections and our passions by it. "I dare not allow such and such thoughts, I dare not allow such and such motions of spirit within myself, for the Bible is against them." Let us but consider, whether we use to lay this rule to our minds and spirits and to our walkings and actions, so as to conform all to it. If not, it is impossible we can value it according to its true worth, for it is valuable but under the notion as it is a rule, and it can never regulate our external conversation as it should, if it do not regulate our spirit first. We must consider that is the great difference between the government of God and any human government whatsoever. His government is primarily mental, it is a government first exercised about minds; and this word is the instrument of his government as to them. This word of his "is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." And if we do not labour to get our spirits, our inward man, habitually subjected to the governing power of this word, it doth nothing upon us to any purpose; it is lost upon us, as to all the great purposes for which it should serve us. But is not this too apparently our common case, that if there be a strong inclination to this or that thing or way; or if there be a passion up that we have a mind to indulge, this shall signify more with us, to carry us this way or that, than a thousand texts of Scripture? You may as well, many times, oppose your breath to the Thames to turn the course of it, as to oppose the word of God to these inclinations. But is this to make use of the Scripture as our rule, when the plain design of it lies against such and such habitual inclination or against indulgence to such and such a passion, and we never apply it to such a purpose? If we did but get the authority of the great God (whose word this is) to be (as it were) enthroned within us, so as that our souls might stand in continual awe of him, the remembrance of a text of Scripture would presently allay passion, govern appetite, and check inclination, and so would come, with ease and pleasure, to be to us a governing rule of all the affairs and actions of our lives.

And so I have done, as to this great subject of the Scriptures, which was proper next, after we had asserted to you the existence of a Deity, that is, of an intelligent Ruler and Maker of this world, to whom such a word as this might certainly be ascribed as his word; that then we might come from this word of his to have more distinct apprehensions concerning him. It was necessary first, to know that there was one intelligent, perfect, all-comprehending, eternal Mind, the Original and Author of all things, without which it would have been a vain thing to speak of the word of God. We must know first, whence such a word was to proceed, and that being once understood and known, then we may look back again upon



him, and such things through the light of the word come more clearly to be revealed to us concerning him, than we can otherwise, by mere light of nature search or find out. And so to such. things we shall go on, in our intended course, as the Lord shall enable and direct.



## LECTURE XI.<sup>11</sup>

James ii. 19.

*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well:  
the devils also believe, and tremble.*

IN pursuance of that design we have had in hand, of explaining and asserting to you the principal heads and doctrines of our religion, we have (you know) already been discoursing to you about the Object of it, the eternal, ever-blessed God: and concerning the measure and rule of it, the holy Scriptures, which we have proved to be the word of God: and that method it was necessary to follow, of evincing the being or existence of God to you first, before we could reasonably go about to prove the Scriptures to be his word. For of nothing there are no predicates; nothing can be affirmed of nothing. It were vain to allege the authority of this or that prince's edict to one that should not believe that there was ever such a prince: but having evinced to you the existence of God, and that these Scriptures are his word, purposely written to reveal him more fully to us, his nature and his mind and will concerning what we are to believe and practice, in order to our pleasing and our enjoying of him, it is now highly reasonable to expect from these Scriptures, the discovery of such things further, concerning him, and our duty towards him and expectations from him, as we could not otherwise have known, as whereof we could not by other means have had, as to some things; and as to other things not so distinct or certain knowledge: for otherwise these Scriptures should not answer their avowed end, and must indeed be supposed to be written in vain. There are things that do concern even God himself, which is of great importance to us to be acquainted with, that either we should have had no knowledge at all of, without these Scriptures, or should not have known so clearly or not so easily: some of us (it may be) not at all: such as were less capable, or less inclined, or less willing to use their own reason in thought, and to discern a train of consequences and the force of them, and how to make things that are in themselves evidencable, evident to ourselves in an argumentative way. It is a great matter of advantage to have more of necessary things made known to us, and to have those things which it is necessary we should know, made known in an easy and less laborious way, without our more toilsome search: or to have it said, on the authority of the great God, this and this you are to believe, and this and this you are to do; to have that which is to be the food of our souls, not to be hunted for, but even brought to our hands; this is a very great advantage.

Now among some of those things that do concern God himself, and which it is of absolute necessity to be acquainted with, and in order whereto, we are to have a clear light, and for the most, their whole light from the Scriptures, there are especially two which I shall instance

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<sup>11</sup> Preached March 6, 1691.



in, and insist upon. That is,—the unity of the Godhead, and—the trinity therein. And for the former of these, the unity of the Godhead, we may very fitly insist upon that, as far as is needful, from this scripture. In which there are two parts. The first, approving and justifying the believing of this great truth, that God is but ONE: “Thou believest there is one God, thou doest well:” the other, reproving and condemning the ineffectual belief of it: “the devils also believe and tremble.”

I. I shall insist on the former of these—That the Godhead is but ONE, or there is but ONE GOD. “This (saith the apostle) thou believest, thou doest well in it. Thou believest truly and as the matter is.” I do not propound this to you as a Scripture doctrine, upon that account, as if it were not at all demonstrable in a rational way; but shall first, let you see how very expressly the Scripture doth testify to us this truth touching the unity of the Godhead. And then secondly, shall shew what rational evidence it admits of besides.

1. As to the Scripture testimony about this, it could be in nothing more express. “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord:” ([Deut. vi. 4.](#)) a passage quoted in the gospel as you find, [Mark xii.](#) in several verses of that chapter, in which it is enlarged upon. One of the scribes ([verse 28](#)) came to our Lord; and perceiving there were reasonings between him and some others, he asks, “Which is the first commandment?” Jesus answered him, “The first commandment is, Hear O Israel; the Lord thy God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.” The scribe said unto him, “Well master, thou hath said the truth, for there is but one God, and there is none other but he; and to love him with all the heart, with all the understanding and with all the soul and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he answered discreetly; like a man that had a mind, (as the word signifies) had a presentness of mind, an understanding, a good sound understanding about him, he highly approves of what he said, and saith, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” There are many expressions very great and august, spoken like a God about this matter, in the prophecy of Isaiah, in several chapters of it. If you look to the [43. chapter](#), “Ye are my witnesses saith the Lord, and my servants whom I have chosen, that ye may know and believe me, and that ye may understand that I am he; before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I am the Lord; and besides me there is no Saviour.” [Verses 10, 11.](#) And in the [44th chap. ver. 8.](#) “Fear ye not, neither be afraid; have I not told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are my witnesses, is there a God besides me? yea there is no God, I know not any.” “I that can transmit the beams of mine eye through this vast and boundless inane, and look round about me every where, can see nothing like another God in view: I know no such, and I know you cannot know more than I.” So you have the same thing inculcated in the [45th chapter](#), in sundry verses of it, “I am God, and there is none else; and the Saviour, and there is none beside me:” most pleasantly conjoining the notion of God and Saviour together, over and over, that when we know this one God, we may know him too under the



pleasant notion of a Saviour. No discovery of him could be more suitable, or more grateful to poor creatures sunk and lost in misery as we are. And so you know, the apostle puts both these together, the "One God and one Mediator," revealing to us this truth the unity of the Godhead in conjunction with what is most apposite and suitable with the state of our case in that [1 Cor. viii. 6](#). "To us there is but one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ. And [1 Tim. ii. 5](#). "There is one God and one mediator, the man Christ Jesus." And that place is famous, [1 John v. 7](#). "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one." That oneness can mean nothing there, but in the Deity, in the Godhead.



2. But this matter is very capable of very clear rational evidence too; which because it is not obvious to every one at first sight, I would only help you herein a little, not doubting but you will apprehend things to be very plain to you, when you hear them, which might have been out of your thoughts or sight before: both what hath been already proved, and what is otherwise evident concerning God, will prove to us the unity of the Godhead, and also what is obvious to our common notice concerning the state of the creation; It is by the creation we come to have the first notices of the Creator, as you have heard. That is, of the invisible power and Godhead by the things that are made. Now whether you look to the Maker, the Creator of all made things; or whether you look to the state of those things themselves, you will find clear rational evidence that the Godhead is but *one*, or that God can be but *one*.

(1.) Consider what hath been made plain, or is otherwise evident, concerning God himself, the very notion of God: thence it will appear, that the Deity admits not of multiplication, or that there can be more Gods than one. As,

[1.] It hath been proved, and is in itself evident, that God is a self-original, a self-existing Being. He is such a Being as that he doth not owe it to another, that he is, but only to himself. He only is in being, because such is the peculiar excellency of his being, as to which, it is altogether repugnant and impossible ever not to be. He exists, necessarily of and from himself only. Now necessary self-existing, un-caused being can be but one, for whatsoever is un-caused is unlimited, all limitation proceeding from a cause; and of unlimited being there can be no more than one, for if there were two, one must limit the other: and so neither would be unlimited. And,

[2.] It belongs to the notion of God, considered in reference to other things, to be the very first in himself. He is uncaused towards the creature: he is the first Cause. Now nothing is plainer than that there can be but one first.

[3.] To whom it belongs to be the first of all things, to him it belongs also to be the last, and it is as evident there can be but one last: and as to these things that are so plain, I do not need to insist, but just lay them before you. Therefore,

[4.] It belongs to the notion of God, as he is God, to be the best of all beings, But there can be but one best good, in the eminent and transcendent sense; and so there can be but one God, as the matter is in itself obvious, and is taken up by our Saviour, in that [18 Luke 19](#). “None is good but one, that is God,” or saving God. Again,

[5.] It belongs to the very being of God to be omnipotent, almighty, and it is most evident, that there can be but one omnipotent; for supposing another omnipotent, that could do all things, then he could cause that other not to besuitablee to do any thing, otherwise he were not omnipotent. And if he could do that, then the former were not omnipotent, but plainly impotent, absolutely impotent; that is, notsuitablee to do any thing.

[6.] And lastly, that which sums up all; it belongs to the notion of God to be the absolutely universal, perfect Being; to comprehend in himself all perfection: that is, either formally, that which is his own, or appropriate to his own being; or eminently, that which is to be found any where throughout the creation. Now universal perfection, or all perfection can have but one seat. For there can be but one all; there can not be more than all; and all perfection is comprised in the divine Being. The very notion of God, imports all perfection, signifies him to be the Fountain of whatsoever can come under the notion of perfection; and which is perpetually springing from himself, and (when it is his pleasure to communicate) communicating from himself thereof to his creatures. And,

(2,) If you look upon the state of things in the creation, you will find that most plainly to signify to us the unity of the God head. As,

[1.] In the natural world; the order that is every where to be observed and seen; that speaks the unity, oneness, and one-liness of the Agent, that had the forming and continual management of the affairs of all this creation. It was impossible there could be that order which is every where to be observed in the natural world, the heaven and earth, sun, moon and stars, with the constant succession of day and night, summer and winter; and that variety of creatures, with the due order still preserved in that great variety even here upon earth. I say it Is impossible this could be, if that mighty Agent that made, and that over-rules all, were not one, and *only* one: as the Psalmist takes notice, [Psal. cxix. 91](#). Having spoken of heaven and earth before, he saith “They continue to this day according to thy ordinance, for all are thy servants.” “They are all in a stated subserviency to thee, as the only one that dost moderate, and dispose, and order all things, according to thine own pleasure; and so they remain stedfast and settled for ever.” And,

[2.] Even in the intellectual world, the intelligent world: consider the state of things there. Indeed there, there might be an objection, or from thence; which objection will be easily improved into an argument to the purpose I am speaking to: that is, that in the intellectual world, there is so great disorder, as we see, such confusions among men, and proceeding from that which we find to have been in a higher order of intelligent creatures, the angels that fell. But this, I say, is improvable into an argument, in that they fell, and are in a fallen



state, those angels, and the generality of men, it shews, that all this disorder and confusion, hath come from their receding from the *one God*. They therefore came into that disorder and confusion, (which is the sad object of our daily contemplation, whenever we use our thoughts about such a thing,) having broken off themselves from the one God: from thence doth this disorder proceed; and, considering these two sorts of intelligent creatures, that lie under our notice, (to confine our eyes to the children of men,) they are either such as are in a state of apostasy still; or they are such as are in their return, and upon recovery, coming back to God in Christ. For those that are in a state of apostasy still, as they remain apostate and off from God, they make this world that they inhabit, a hell of confusion to themselves, which shews, that the disorder is by their breaking themselves from the one God, the centre of all virtue, and of all order thereupon. But for those, that are returning, that are coming back to God, under the conduct of Christ, that are in the exercise of repentance towards God, according as their minds are changed, according as that great work of renovation obtains, and takes place in them, so it becomes more and more their habitual sense, to own, even from their very hearts and souls, the one God. Then this is their sense, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord." To dwell with God as my only one, (as in that, [27 psalm 4](#). And as in the [73 psalm 25](#).) "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and whom on earth do I desire besides thee?" It is very true indeed, that in the apostate part of the world, very great multitudes are quite wrong in their notions about this thing, as the polytheism of the pagan world, (of the most ignorant and sottish part of it, though the wiser part, even of that too, have always acknowledged one supreme God, looking upon the rest as so many ministering gods, meaning, no doubt, the same thing that we do by angels,) doth shew. But where once the light and grace of the gospel do obtain, in conjunction, there is not only a rectitude of motion about this matter, but there is a correspondent sense of heart. "One thing have I desired, I can dwell no where, but with God, with any content: and whom have I in heaven, but thee?" All renewed senses, do presently return to this one, all are gathered back to one centre in one, in this one they all meet; they no sooner begin to live, but all their desires, and all their aims, and all their tendencies are directed the same way, to this one centre. And therefore now to make some *Use* of this.

1. We learn from it, the insupportable misery of those that have no relation to, nor interest in, this one God. God is but one. "Oh! then," may every such wretched soul say, "what shall become of me, who have no part in him, no portion in him?" There is but one God to save thee, and thou hast nothing to do with him: but one God to satisfy thee, and thou hast nothing to do with him: but one to save thee, and if he will destroy thee, who will save thee? If there be but one, and he be set against thee, if he be thine enemy; if this be the state of thy case, that thou liest open to the destructive wrath of this one God, who shall save thee? There is but one Lawgiver, who issuitablee to save and to destroy; (as it comes in after, [James iv](#).

12.) and there is but one to satisfy thee: thou was lost for want of being satisfied, by a suitable good: if thou wert never so safe from any external, any vindictive evil. There is but one good, that is God; no proportionable good, nor adequate good besides, no good that can fill up the capacity of the soul. How may such a creature go, bemoaning itself in so sad a state of its case! “There is but one good, throughout the whole universe of being, and I have nothing to do with that one; I have no part there.”

2. As the misery of such, is insupportable, so truly, their sin is as inexcusable: for there is but one God that claims obedience and duty from thee. The case is in this easy way to be understood. Let it be considered, you have not one to command, and another to countermand; one to bid, and another to forbid. There is one God: you know there is but one: you believe there is but one. No man (it is true) can serve two masters, who should both lay claim to supreme power over him. No one can serve two, but sure one may serve one, when there is but one, and his mind is express and plain; therefore the sin of such is altogether inexcusable. Thou hast but one God to worship; and what! not worship him. But one God to love, but one to fear, but one to trust: but one object for thy adoration, one object for thy expectation: and thou art to do him homage every day, in both together; both in adoring him and expecting from him. And what! to rob this one God of the glory, the service which he claims, and which thou mightest pay, and render to him! There is no exception against it, no counter claim, against this claim of his.

3. We further learn hence, how high and great is the privilege of those, that do belong to God, in that he is but one: they do not need to be divided among many, and to have their hearts distracted within them, “Whither shall I go? to whom shall I betake myself?” Their privilege is great, upon this account, with respect both to their knowledge of this one God, and their application to him, the former whereof, leads to the latter.

(1.) In respect to their knowledge of him; it is a very great privilege, that the eye of their mind and soul is called to one, directed to one: here is eternal life summed up (as it were) in one glance. “This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent;” to know him as he is revealed, and as he is to be conversed with, through his Son: and in what a transport, do we find the disciples, upon this account, it being the great business and design of our blessed Lord to reveal the Father to poor souls. “Shew us the Father and it sufficeth,” say they. Saith he, “You do know the Father, in that you have known me,” in that [14 John](#). Then saith one of them, Judas, not Iscariot, (no not he, I warrant you, he had not a heart to savour any such thing,) “How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?” Oh! how lamentable is it to think (as if they had said) of the sad state of the blinded world, how little they know, how obscure and dark their notices are and how corrupted and depraved about the one Godhead. But Christ tells them, that in manifesting himself he manifested the Father too. And “Oh! (say they) whence is this to us,



that we should have this manifestation when it is not afforded to the world, is not made common to the universality of men? And,

(2.) In respect of application to him; Oh, how great is the privilege not to be put to worship stocks and stones for deities and to pray to a god that cannot save. When we think of the inanimate, senseless gods which the blind nations do trust in and worship, we have then just cause to think with ourselves, “Oh, how unlike to them is the portion of Jacob! He is the Former of all things. Our God hath made the heavens, and doth whatsoever he will, there above and here below.”

4. We hence see what obligation is upon us to singleness of heart. The Deity wherewith we have most of all to do, finally, terminatively to do, is single, is but one. How to be abhorred a thing, hereupon, must a double heart be, a heart—and a heart! For a single God, how suitable is a single heart! There is not for us a God—and a God. And what should we do then for a heart—and a heart? The whole must go to the whole, one to one. When our Saviour had been telling us, ([Matt. vi. 24.](#)) “No man can serve two masters,” he points us back to what we find there in the same context: that if the eye be single, the whole body will be full of light. But if the eye be evil, (which implies that a double heart is an evil heart,) then all is in darkness. And saith he, “If the very light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?” When our eye looks with one direct and undivided view towards the one God, here the soul is all replenished with light, clear, and vital light, that is transfused through it. But multiplicity and darkness come all to one. If we do not look with a single eye to that one single Being, where all glory and all blessedness for poor souls reside; but are looking to other things, and departing from this one, we are presently lost in multiplicity, and see many things under that notion, as if our good lay here, or as if the prime duty lay here, it is all one as seeing nothing, as good to know nothing of any God at all, as to know many gods, or to consider many under that notion. And again,

5. We see hereupon how possible the most entire and intimate union with God is with sincere souls. To those that are sincere, if he be but one, how entire and intimate may the union be between one and one? When we bring to him a single soul, a soul full of simplicity, uprightness and sincerity, which points only at him as the one God, he being but one, and we but one in the intention and aim of our souls, how entire and intimate may this union be! That which some pagans have expressed by that nearest and closest and most intimate touch of the centre; centre to centre, so (have some of them said) are souls to apply themselves inwardly to God; the one God joining centre with them. And it is a mighty so lace to think of it: that whereas the felicity of a soul doth so absolutely depend upon the most near and intimate union with God, that which is so necessary is so possible. It is necessary to me, in order to my happiness and well being, that I be most intimately and entirely united with God; and since he is but one, if I be one in the intent and bent of my soul towards him, it is not more necessary than possible. For observe how the scribe, that puts that question to our



Lord in that forementioned [Mark xii.](#) understands this conjunction, when our Lord answered him, what was the first and great commandment; namely, “the first and great commandment is, that God is but one, and that there is no other God but he, and that therefore we should love him, with all the heart,” he replies, “Master thou hast said well, for there is but one God:” and our Lord, it is said, observed, that he answered like a man of sense, like a man of understanding, like an intelligent man. There lies the connexion, (f therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, because the Lord our God, is one God, and there is none other but he.” And,

6. We may hence collect the mighty obligation there is upon Christians, to unity with one another; to be united one with another. Those several unities you read of, [Ephes. 4.](#) are all directed to this one purpose, and this is the prime and most fundamental of all the rest, “There is but one God;” and therefore are all those related to him, and that bear his name, to be but one. It cannot be said, one christian hath one God, and another hath another God: but all have but one God; so that it is impossible there can be any so great reasons for disunion among christians, those that are sincere, that have vital union with God in Christ, as there are for their union. Whatsoever pretence there can be for disunion, or for distinct communion, the reason is unspeakably greater for union. By how much doth God outweigh all things else, in finite reason is there for oneness in communion throughout, as he, with whom they have all a common union is infinite. But the things, wherein they differ from one another, are most minutely finite, and even as nothing, in comparison of this one thing, wherein they must all (whether they will or not) agree. And thereupon indeed, there cannot be a greater iniquity in the Christian church (which is the community of living christians) than when they do usually make distinct communions. This I must tell you, is the very heart and centre of all anti-christianism, the first remarkable thing in the apostasy of the Christian church, when it began to degenerate, that is, the making of distinct communions, or making of other terms of communion, than Christ had made by the evangelical law. This was the very heart of all anti-christianity, when men would take upon them to make distinct boundaries and terms of communion, which should be larger than Christ would have made, or narrower than Christ had made: to admit men upon such terms as his rules would admit none; and exclude men on such terms as his rules would exclude none; this is the first thing, the summary and most comprehensive thing, in all anti-christianity. Then the Christian church, first began to be anti-christian, when it came to this, to make other terms of communion, than Christ had made, by his own law. And indeed, the iniquity of it, is intolerable, if it be considered; for under what notion, are any to be received into the community of Christians, but under the notion of persons visibly united to God in Christ, and so instated into the blessings of the gospel, and so entitled to everlasting blessedness in God, procured for them by the general Redeemer? Whereupon, to make new terms of communion, larger or narrower than Christ made, is to make a new covenant, to make a new gospel: it is to

505

506

make new terms of everlasting life and death; and so to overturn and overthrow all things, that are most essential to a Christian church, or to the Christian religion, or any thing of religion in the world. It would strike at all, if men may shape their communion, according to their own fancy, when they are to shape it according to the evangelical law. Those that we believe to have vital union with God in Christ, or whom we ought to believe have so; we that with a sincere mind, look upon persons by gospel measures, and consider them as those who have visible characters of true vivid Christianity upon them ought to run into communion with them as such, and only such. This is Christ's measure, and Christ's rule, and so communion can be but one, and to offer to make it diverse and distinct, is to make a new gospel, and a new Christ, and a new religion throughout. Indeed it is a bold thing; for it is to make new terms of life and death. It is presumptuous enough to put the divine stamp upon this or that truth of ours, or this or that duty (as we count it) of our own; it is a great presumption: but unspeakably greater, to make new terms of life and death: for every truth, or every duty, are not parts of the terms of life and death. There is many a truth that is not necessary for a man to believe, under pain of damnation; and many a duty a man may be ignorant of, and so not bound to do, upon pain of damnation. But the terms upon which christians are to hold communion one with another, are such, to which we are bound under that penalty, or which are to be looked upon, as entitling them to be interested in salvation, or exempted from damnation: and so to make new terms of communion, is to make new terms of life and death. But blessed be God, though this hath been too little considered for above forty years past, God is awakening his people, to consider it now. And I look upon that to be the first step towards the restitution of the Christian church, and the recovering of it, out of the terrible apostasy in which it hath lain for a thousand years, and upwards. This, I say, is the first step towards it, to make those the terms of union, and communion in the Christian church, which God in Christ hath made. And when that once comes to obtain generally, then we shall find the spirit of the body, (for there is but one body and one spirit) diffusing and influencing itself through the body, and making it lively, a kind of resurrection from the dead. It may further,

7. Be collected, that our encouragement is great, as to what expectation we may have, concerning the issue of things, since God is but one. That is, concerning the issue which things shall drive to here in this world, and concerning their ultimate and final issue in the other world, it cannot but be good and happy; for God is but one, who in his Christ is the universal and only Ruler of all this world. If the kingdom of God in Christ were divided, it would come to nothing; but it is not divided, it is all in one hand, who hath the ordering and disposing of the times and seasons, as seems good to him, and he doth every thing with that profound wisdom that cannot err, and that mighty power, that cannot be withstood. And since the most perfect wisdom, and most absolute power, do belong to that one; and all affairs do lie in one hand, the issue will certainly be good. I cannot say it will be good to



us, according to our fancy and our sense of things, but it must be, in itself, good. The kingdom is not divided, there is but one God, and one Christ, who governs this apostate world, by his own right, as God, and by a right, that he hath devolved upon him, as the Mediator. And therefore, never doubt concerning the issue of things, let them look never so horridly, and with never so confused an aspect; all will do well, for all is in the hand of one God.

And then, as to the final state, what transports should we be in, to think, when all that belongs to this one God, shall meet in this one God, the many sons brought to glory together, when God shall be all in all, one in all, one diffusing a vital, satisfying, beatifying influence through all, through the whole community, that relates to him, and is united to him, all (as it were) losing themselves in the one God, not in the natural sense, but in the moral; as morality comprehends duty and felicity both together, and the very Scripture expressions that speak of God's being all in all, doth imply this distinction, for otherwise he could not be all in all, if there were not a created all which he replenished), with his own fulness. "All in all," is not as if all being were to be reserved and swallowed up again into the fountain Being, and that the blessed should lose their individuality; no, no such thing, the very words and the nature of the thing, are repugnant to that, but when that all of holy ones shall be gathered about the central good, and be replenished continually, perpetually, fully and everlastingly from thence, Oh! how satisfyingly then shall we experience the truth and sweetness of this thing,—that the Godhead is but one.

And this is enough as to the first thing which we have to consider in the text, "thou believest there is one God, thou doest well." The belief of this is approved and justified.



LEC. XII.<sup>12</sup>

II. But then the ineffectual believing of it is reprov'd and condemn'd; to believe it with such a kind of notional faith as the devils believe it with. The former was the main thing for which I pitched upon this scripture, but this latter I shall not overlook; it having so great an aptitude with it to help and enforce the right improvement of the former. That is,—the *ineffectual* belief of the Unity of the Godhead, which the apostle doth, in this expression, designedly animadvert upon, may be easily collected from this present scope, which is to shew what kind of faith that is which must justify us; not a notion al dead faith, such as lets the soul wherein it is, remain unchanged, such as works not within, such as leaves the soul just as it was. You may see his scope fully represented to this purpose in the [14th verse](#), “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” can that idle faith, that unworking faith that effects nothing, can that save him? “I appeal to you, (as if he had said) whether it can.” He doth not say it cannot, but he doth appeal to them whether it can or no: and it is true, that manner of interrogation doth deny that it can, more pungently: that is always the intent of questions or interrogatories, put in the room of affirmations or negations, to deny or affirm more smartly or with more pungency than a bare affirmation or negation would have done. It is an appeal to the common light and conscience of the person spoken to. Can such a faith save? And then he comes at length, in prosecution of this scope, to this particular truth. I may not now run over with you the whole thread of this discourse; but immediately before the words of the text, he urgeth this, “A man may say, Thou hast faith and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works;” that is, if thou canst shew me any thing that is worth that name. But I for my part “will shew thee my faith by my works,” as knowing it can never significantly or to purpose be shewn otherwise. And then he comes to this particular case, “Thou believest there is one God, thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble.” If thou hast no other faith, in this point of the one God’s existence, but the devils’ faith; nay if thine fall short of such a faith; dost thou think it will save thee? This is the meaning pursuantly to the present scope. His great question is, what faith will finally save, and for resolving of it, his great business is to evince and make out, that there must be some intervening effects in order to that final salvation for which the faith that will save must have a proportionable efficacy. If it did not work those intervening intermediate effects, it would not bring about the end, salvation. And so the truth that now remains, to be spoken to from this latter part of the verse, you have it plainly in view thus—That the ineffectual belief of the one God’s existence, or such a belief of it as doth not be get in the soul proportionable dispositions towards God, will no more save a stupid man than a trembling devil—And to speak briefly and usefully (as much as is possible) to this,



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12 Preached March, 20. 1691.

it will be requisite to shew—what effects or dispositions our faith of the one God’s existence, should work in men—to open to you what it doth work in the devils, and—to shew, that if it do not its proper work upon men, it will no more, save men, than devils.

1. What it ought to work, what impressions the faith of the one God’s existence, should make upon men. The impressions it ought to make upon men, must be measured and judged of, by the state of their case, wherein it is different, and represented to them as different from that of the devils. That is, that though they have been in an apostasy from God, their sovereign and rightful Lord, as the devils have been, yet he is reconcileable to men, when he is not to the devils: and where the gospel comes, it shews distinctly how, and in what way, and upon what terms he is reconcileable. The belief then of the one God’s existence, you may easily apprehend what it effects upon this supposal of the case. There is but one to whom I owe obedience as my Sovereign, to him I must subject myself. There is but one, from whom I can expect blessedness: a portion and interest in him, I must seek. I have hitherto been in an apostasy from him, I have hereby violated the bounds of my duty to him, and forfeited all interest in him: but I find there is a remedy to be given to this case, and through the Redeemer, God is reconcileable: he recalls me to my duty, he offers to restore me to my interest. It is plain then, what impressions should be made, to wit, of “repentance towards God and (upon discovery made of him) faith in our Lord Jesus Christ:” a disposition to come back to God, through Christ, with a heart full of wonder, full of gratitude, full of love, ready to be devoted, and subject again: and so to do all, that can be done on our part, or to comply, with all that is required from us, in order to the reinstating of things, between God and us, and setting all right again. But,

2. What impression is there made on devils, by the belief of the one God’s existence? That one word “tremble” tells us most significantly. They “believe and tremble.” Their belief strikes them so, that they are shaken by it: just as the sea with a violent wind, that tosses the waves this way and that. The *fremitus maris* is that which this word doth express, the tumultuation of the sea, as tossed by violent winds. Such an impression doth the belief of the one God’s existence, make and leave upon devils: that is, it stirs those violent passions in them, which we must suppose the view of the one God, in his terrible majesty and glory, is apt to raise in his creatures, in their state who are apostatized, and revolted from him, and know there is no redeemer for them, that God will not be reconciled to them, and they themselves have no disposition to seek reconciliation with him; that is, such passions as these; the passion of hatred: every view they have of the one God in his majesty and glory, stirs up their enmity, and the oftener they view it, the more they hate it, and especially considered under the notion of just and holy. It cannot but stir the passion of envy, looking on him under the notion of happy: it cannot but move their dread and horror concerning him, under the notion of almighty, not to be resisted, not to be withstood. And then it stirs up the passion of despair

too, considering themselves as none of his match, and that they are never to expect that he will yield to them as they know they can never conquer him. But,

3. Why is a stupid man no more to expect salvation from the ineffectual faith of the one God's existence, than a forlorn trembling devil? That men have been in an apostasy from God, as well as devils, is plain to us all. That death, that is, eternal death is the proper wages of that sin by which they have apostatized, that is plain to us all too: why should not an apostate man therefore, lie under the just wrath of God, as well as an apostate devil? All that can be said in the case is, that Christ hath died for men and not for devils: here is all that can be alleged. And so we need do no more for the clearing of this matter further, than only to consider what alteration this makes in the case, and in order thereto, I will lay down sundry things that I reckon very plain, and such as do carry their own evidence with them.

(1.) As, that there is no natural connexion between the death of Christ and the salvation of a sinner. These two things are not naturally connected, the death of Christ and the salvation of a sinful man. It is plain and obvious in itself, that there is no natural connexion; these things do not naturally touch one another.

(2.) Therefore there can be no connexion at all, between them but such as shall be ordinate or made, there cannot be any connexion, without its being made, between the death of Christ and the salvation of any man.

(3.) There can be no pretence of any such made connexion, but such as the gospel constitution makes, that is, made between the death of Christ and the salvation of any man, but what the gospel hath made by its constitution.

(4.) The gospel doth make no connexion between the death of Christ and the salvation of any sinner, without intervening faith. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." The gospel makes no other connexion between that death to which he gave up his own Son, and our having, any of us, everlasting life, but upon the supposal of an intervening faith.

(5.) That faith which the gospel requires for this purpose, it describes and tells us what it is, it describes it by distinguishing characters; it tells us, it is such a faith as overcomes the world. [1 John v. 4](#). It tells us it is such a faith as by which the hearts of men are turned to the Lord; "many believed and turned to the Lord." [Acts xi. 21](#). It tells us, it is such a faith, as "is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen;" ([Heb. xi. 1.](#)) that faith that conquers one world, and reveals another. That faith (I say) which the gospel requires for this purpose, to wit, of the salvation of sinners, by the Redeemer, it doth also describe, and tells us what it is. Whereupon,

(6.) Not to have that faith which the gospel doth so describe is, in the gospel estimate, to have no faith. He that hath not this faith is an unbeliever, still an unbeliever. As when we speak of having any thing (whatsoever it be) that is necessary for this or that end or purpose, it is not the name of that thing, the misapplied name of that thing, that will serve the end



or purpose, but it is plain, only the thing itself will do it. It is true, you may call painted bread by the name of bread; you may call the picture of a loaf, a loaf, but it is not painted bread that will nourish you, nor is it the notion of gospel faith, or the name of that faith misapplied that will save you. They who have not the faith which the gospel requires, have no faith *quoad hoc*, that will serve *this* purpose, because that faith which is so and so described, it requires as necessary for this purpose of saving. And therefore,

(7.) Lastly; They which have not this faith, being thereupon still unbelievers, that is, they are unbelievers in reference to this faith; they have none of that faith that the gospel requires in order to salvation, they must accordingly have the unbeliever's portion, and the portion of unbelievers and devils is all one. Compare [Luke xii. 46.](#) with [Matt. xxv. 41.](#) In the first it is, "Let such a one have his portion with unbelievers:" and then consider that they who fall under such a doom and condemnation at last, are condemned to that "fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels," as it is in the latter place. So that let a man believe never so much this one thing, (which among the rest it is needful he should believe in order to salvation,) to wit, the one God's existence; but it doth not work upon his soul, impresseth him not; altereth him not, it can no more save him than it will save the devil.

Yea, and it might be added, that the gospel constitution, in this case, making such a faith necessary, doth not only speak the pleasure of the Legislator, but it speaks most consentaneously to the reason of the thing and with the greatest advantage. Here is reconciliation offered to sinful men; but there is none offered to the devil: in this respect then (though I do not say absolutely in all respects) their guilt is greatest. That one who is no way suitably affected with that discovery which is made to him of God. considered with reference to the state of his case, and the gospel dispensation under which he is, such a one as doth in this respect remain unchanged, his heart unaltered, not won, not turned to God; lies under greater guilt than the devils themselves do lie.

Therefore now to make some brief *Use* of this. Hence,

1. We learn, that it is a supposable thing, that persons living under the gospel, professed Christians, (for the apostle speaks to such here,) may be no more duly and suitably affected with the discovery that is made to them of the one God, than the very devils. This is not an unsupposable thing, that man may have the representation of God which the gospel affords, superadded to all that is natural, and be no more suitably affected therewith than a mere devil, this is a truly supposable case. And that it is a case to be supposed, a thing that may be, should strike all our hearts with just solicitude hereupon. May it be? And what! Is it not so with me? Have I not lived all this while amidst that light that reveals the one God, unaltered, unchanged, unimpressed, just as I should have been, if there had been no such light, no such discovery? And again,

2. We may infer, that persons may be in a very great measure like the devil that do very seldom think of him: nay (it may be) do think there is no such creature. It is very likely that

512

513

this sort of persons whom the apostle here speaks to, with such smartness and acrimony, might very little think of the devil till they met with this epistle, till they were so put in mind. This may very well be. Persons may be very much akin to the devil in the temper and complexion of their minds, when they very little think of him, or of any such matter. And they are most of all like him that are most positive in their disbelief of any such sort of creatures as devils are. That piece of revived modern sadduceism goes now, with many, for a great piece of wit and learning. And a very strange thing it is, that we should have had among us a clearer light than the greatest part of the world have had, to make us more ignorant and unapprehensive of things that are of very great concern to us; clearer than the pagan world have had, and yet how many things do we find discoursed concerning the devil, among their poets and philosophers, that there are such a sort of middle creatures between the gods (the supreme God at least) and men: and that these are distinguished into two orders of good and bad. Nothing more frequent in the writings of pagans than that there are the good *genii* and *cacodaemones*: some of them seem not to have been ignorant, however they came by the knowledge, of the apostasy of the devils, and of their being thrown down from their happy state above, into very great darkness and misery. But it seems, our having of clearer light, and more express discoveries of things relating to an invisible world, than pagans had, hath served only to make a great many of us a great deal more ignorant, and less apprehensive of these things and more insolent in the belief of them than they. But it is strange that they who are so very like the devil, should be of all others most unapt to own or apprehend that there are any such creatures, or any such sort of creatures. But,

3. We may infer, that it is not strange, when the cause is so very like between men and devils, that their doom should be so like also: that we cannot think it strange, that we should remain and be left under that doom and condemnation which sin did in itself subject them to: who when God hath made overtures to them, to distinguish them from these evil spirits, will not be distinguished, but rather choose to sort themselves with devils than with returning souls, souls that are willing to return to God through Christ.

We see the terrible estate of devils, that they cannot own the one God's existence without trembling. A frightful thought it is to them, to have the eternal Being always in view, that is, what he is necessarily, without variableness or shadow of turning: they cannot nullify his being, they cannot shake his throne, they cannot alter his nature: the glorious, bright, majestic Object is always in view, and they can never look towards it without dread and astonishment. Whatsoever little respite they may have, which those words imply, "Art thou come to torment us before our time?" it doth yet signify, that any thought of God was dreadful to them, as importing that state of torment that was approaching, was drawing on, wherein it will be let forth on them, wherein wrath will come upon them (as it must upon unreconciled men) to the uttermost. But,

5. How wonderful is the grace of God towards poor sinful men, that their case doth admit, and may admit of their owning and believing the one God's existence, with another sort of impression than the case of the devils doth admit of. For that is plainly implied here, and therefore I make this inference and collection,—that it is expected that men should be otherwise impressed by this belief of the one God's existence than the devils may or can. It is expected the faith of this should make other kind of work in the heart of a man that entertains this belief, than it can do in the heart of a devil. And that very intimation signifies peculiar favour and special good-will, special, if compared with them, though it be yet more special, if you compare men with one another. Such good-will is the import of those words, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will towards men." "He took not on him the nature of angels," or (as those words may admit to be read) "he took not hold of angels to save them; but took on him the seed of Abraham." His design herein spoke itself, (as in that [2 Heb. 14.](#)) "Inasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he himself did partake of the same." Saith he, "Those that I came to save, are such as have flesh and blood in them, not devils." And because they had flesh and blood in them, he likewise took flesh and blood that he might save such; that is, that he might die, that he might have somewhat mortal about him, somewhat that could die, that was capable of dying, and that dying he might overcome "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

6. We may learn hence, that there is not too great a stress to be laid upon the mere business of orthodoxy, or a rectitude of notions and sentiments, though about the greatest and most important things, things never so great: and you may suppose none greater than this, the existence of the one God, the certain existence of the unity of the Godhead. But yet, I say, a rectitude of notions or sentiments, even about so great things, or that which we generally call orthodoxy, ought not to have too great a stress laid upon them. I doubt not but that there is entire orthodoxy in hell, there is very little error in hell, very little of untrue notions, the truth of things is very clearly apprehended there, even the most terrible things; false doctrine doth not obtain there about such matters as this, to be sure: and therefore, let no man value himself too much upon this, that he understands aright, that he thinks right thoughts, doth believe that there is one God, one, and but one. He may do no more in this, than the devils do, they may be as orthodox as he; and he may therein know no more truth than they know. But we may yet further infer,

7 That it is a very dismal thing, and ought accordingly to be deplored much, that such things as we have revealed to us, concerning God, should be from time to time propounded and explained, and inculcated, and yet have no more effect upon us, than upon devils. How many a man is there, that lives under the gospel of Christ, unreconciled to God all his days? Oh, if there be any such a one in this assembly, How often hast thou been striven with to turn and live? how often invited back to God in Christ? But it hath signified as little to preach



to thee all this while, as if one had preached to a devil. Oh, wretched creature, that thou wilt make thyself a devil, when God doth, not make thee such! that thou wilt sort with the devils, when. God would deal with thee, on very distinct terms from them! He would have thee come to him: he doth not invite devils back; he saith to thee, t( Return, return:” he saith not so to them. Here is the blood of a Redeemer spilt for thee, it was not for them. And if we consider this matter generally; Oh, how dismal it is to think, that the revelation of the doctrine of the very one God’s existence, should have made no more impression than it hath, to advantage the world of mankind; that the state of things should be so very much upon earth, as it is in hell! as if there were no difference in the cases of men and devils; that there should be such enmity against God, amongst men upon earth, such rage, such contempt, such blasphemy against this one existing Deity. And indeed, in this, men are worse than the devils, for the devils do hate God, but they do not despise him: here on earth he is hated and despised too: the devils hate him, but they cannot contemn him: men hate and contemn him both together. “Wherefore do the wicked contemn God?” [Psal. x. 13.](#) But lastly,

8. We further learn hence, what this doctrine is likely to effect, if ever it come generally and to purpose, to be believed in the world, even this faith of the one God’s existence. What a blessed change will that infer and make generally among men; when the one God shall be represented and under stood and known with effect generally! if ever there shall be such a time. That is, there shall be a world of reasonable creatures, all centering in this one, all conspiring in the adoration and love of this one God; all bowing to him and kneeling before him: and no contention amongst men but who shall express most of love and duty to their universal, sovereign Maker and Lord. And therefore, men are only miserable in the mean time by not having real truth impressed and inwrought into the temper of their spirits, they are only by this miserable, that they are fallen from the one God, and apprehend him not, apprehend not the unity of the Godhead in whom they all are to unite. If men were all united in God, in the fear of him, in the love of him, in subjectedness and devotedness to him, this could not but infer universal order, peace and felicity, all the world over. Men are only miserable, only unhappy, by holding the truth in unrighteousness, and such truth; for the apostle speaks of such. This is the true ground, on which “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them.” [Rom. i. 17, 18.](#) But I shall not insist further upon this.

The next thing that comes in course, to be handled, will be the doctrine of the Trinity. Having opened the Unity of the Godhead, a Trinity therein also, will next come under OUT consideration.





**END OF THE SIXTH VOLUME.**

*Mason, Printer, Chichester.*

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# **Indexes**

## **Index of Scripture References**

### **Genesis**

9:6 9:6 12:1 15:1 18:1-33 19:14 20:11 27:2 39:9

### **Exodus**

3:14 5:2 14:25 15:11 15:11 15:11 19:20 19:21 20:3 34:6 34:6 34:6 34:7 34:7

### **Leviticus**

19:17

### **Numbers**

23:19

### **Deuteronomy**

6:4 7:7 7:8 10:12 11:13 11:16 11:17 32:1-43 32:4 32:15 32:18 32:34 32:46

### **Joshua**

6:26 24:20

### **Judges**

2:6 2:7 2:11-16 5:31 16:15

### **1 Samuel**

12:22 28:15 30:6

### **2 Samuel**

3:27 6:21 6:22

### **1 Kings**

3:27 8:27

### **2 Chronicles**

20:12

### **Ezra**

4:15

### **Job**

6:20 6:30 9:31 11:20 21:14 21:14 21:16 22:6 26:5-14 27:5 27:6 31:1 33:13 35:9  
35:10 40:2

### **Psalms**

1:2 2:3 2:4 2:8 3:2 4:8 8:1 8:1-9 8:5 9:16 9:17 9:17 10:1-18 10:4 10:4 10:13  
10:13 14:1 14:1-3 14:1-7 14:3 16:2 16:3 16:8 18:1 18:1 18:21 25:3 25:13 25:13  
25:15 27:4 27:4 32:6 34:7 36:1 36:2 36:9 37:7 42:1 42:1-2 42:10 48:13 48:14  
50:21-22 50:22 51:11 52:6 52:7 52:8 53:1-6 55:19 55:19 57:11 63:1 63:6 67:2  
67:3 67:4 67:7 69:9 69:19 73:22 73:25 73:25 76:1 76:1 81:8 81:9 81:10 84:1  
84:2 94:1-23 94:7 94:9 94:10 94:11 99:8 102:13 104:1-35 104:1-35 104:34 104:34  
109:4 111:10 116:1 116:1 119:11 119:20 119:49 119:91 119:97 119:97 119:103

119:106 119:112 119:116 119:120 119:131 119:131 126:1 126:2 127:1 127:2  
139:1-24 139:17 139:18 139:21 139:22 147:19 147:19 147:20 147:20 148:1-14

**Proverbs**

1:7 1:29 1:33 1:38 2:10 3:17 6:9-10 12:1 16:4 16:7 21:25 21:25 23:17 24:10  
24:30 24:30-34 25:21-22

**Ecclesiastes**

1:8 7:14 7:25 8:8 8:8 8:11 9:12

**Isaiah**

2:4 7:13 11:9 11:9 26:8 26:8 27:11 29:10 30:18 30:20 30:33 39:8 42:1-5 42:3  
43:2 43:10 43:10-11 43:22 44:8 45 45:1 45:22 46:8 49:23 51:12 53:1 54:13 60:1  
63:7 63:10

**Jeremiah**

4:14 10:11 12:1 14:10 15:16 31:33-34 31:34 31:34 44:16 44:19

**Ezekiel**

11:19 16:20 16:21 33:32 36:22 36:25 36:32

**Daniel**

2:45 4:17 4:35 9:3-20 9:16 9:19 9:19 9:20-27 9:24 9:25 12:2

**Hosea**

8:12

**Amos**

3:6

**Micah**

4:2 6 6:9 6:16 7:9

**Zechariah**

12:10 12:10

**Malachi**

2:17

**Matthew**

5:10 5:11 5:12 5:17 5:23 5:24 5:43 5:44 5:44 5:44 5:45 5:45 5:48 6:20 6:21  
6:23 6:24 6:24 6:34 7:1 7:7-11 7:9 7:10 7:11 7:11 7:12 7:12 7:24-27 11:21-25  
11:26 15:19 22:37 22:37 22:37 22:37-40 22:40 22:40 24:12 24:36 25:1-13 25:41  
25:41 26:41 28:18-20

**Mark**

12 12:28 12:28-32

**Luke**

2:42 9:55 11:13 12:4 12:46 16:29 17:5 18:18 18:19 21:25 21:36

**John**

1:12 1:13 1:18 1:18 1:18 2:20 3:2 3:3 3:6 3:21 4:22 4:24 5:7 5:7 5:7 5:8 5:8  
5:22 5:39 5:39 5:42 6:18 6:45 6:45 6:63 7:6 8:12 10:35 12:8 13:35 14:8-11 14:15  
14:15 14:17 14:21 14:23 17:17 21:17

**Acts**

1:6 1:7 2:37 5:41 7:51 8:22 11:21 14:17 17:11 17:27 17:28 17:28 17:28 19:35  
19:35 23:1 25:23

**Romans**

1:4 1:17 1:18 1:18 1:18 1:18 1:20 1:20 1:20 1:28 1:28 1:32 2:6 2:7 2:12 2:23  
3:1-2 3:2 3:5 3:18 5:1 5:2 5:2 5:3 5:3 5:4 5:4 5:5 5:5 5:8 6:11 6:17 7:5 8:1  
8:2 8:5 8:5 8:6 8:7 8:9 8:9 8:13 8:18 8:18 8:24 8:26 8:28 8:28 8:35 9:19 10:13  
10:14 10:17 11:8 11:22 12:9 12:20 12:21 13:7 13:8 13:8 13:10 13:10 13:10 13:10  
13:10 14:4 14:4 14:10 14:10 14:19 15:4 15:13

**1 Corinthians**

2:9 2:9 2:9 2:11 2:12 2:12 3:9 4:12 4:13 6:11 8:2 8:6 9:7 10:13 10:13 11:10  
12:26 13:5 13:7 14:17 14:19 15:19

**2 Corinthians**

2:14 3:3 4:6 4:8 4:13 4:16 4:17 4:18 4:18 5:5 5:13 5:14 5:19 11:22 13:3 13:14

**Galatians**

5:11 5:17 5:22 5:22 5:22 5:25 6:6 6:9 6:10 6:10 6:10

**Ephesians**

1:17 2:12 2:12 2:19 3:10 4:4 4:6 4:18 4:30 4:32 5:9 5:14

**Philippians**

1:9 1:10 1:20 3:8 9:10 9:11

**Colossians**

1:10-14 1:11 1:11 1:12 1:12 1:16-21 1:21 2:6 3:12-13 3:14

**1 Thessalonians**

2:12 2:13 2:16 3:12 3:13 4:9 5:4 5:5 5:6

**2 Thessalonians**

1:6 1:7 2:10 2:11 2:13

**1 Timothy**

1:5 1:9 2:1 2:5 3:16 6:17

**2 Timothy**

1:7 1:7 1:7 1:7 1:7 2:19 3:12 3:16 3:16 3:16 4:1 4:2 4:2 4:3 4:4 4:6

**Titus**

2:14

**Hebrews**

1:3 1:14 2:1 2:2 2:14 3:13 4:2 5:1-14 5:12 5:12 5:12-14 6:18 6:19 6:20 7:1-28  
8:10-11 8:11 8:11 10:29 10:29 10:34 10:34 10:38 11:1 11:1 11:1 11:6 11:6 11:7  
11:7 11:8 11:16 11:27 12:2 12:9 12:22 12:22 12:23 13:5 13:17

**James**

1:2 1:2 1:3 1:4 1:7 1:18 1:19 1:19 1:21 1:22 1:23 1:24 1:25 2:8 2:10 2:11 2:14  
2:19 2:19 2:19 2:19 4:5 4:12 5:9 5:16 11:8

**1 Peter**

1 1:3 1:8 1:22 1:22 2:2 2:2 2:9 3:15 4:4 4:14 4:19 5:10

**2 Peter**

1:3-4 2:8 3:4

**1 John**

1:3 1:5 1:5 2:1 2:5 2:15 2:17 2:17 3:1 3:3 3:14 3:15 3:17 3:17 4:12 4:13 4:16  
4:16 4:20 4:20 4:20 4:21 5:1 5:1 5:1 5:2 5:3 5:3 5:3 5:3 5:3 5:3 5:4 5:7 5:7  
5:20 5:20

**Jude**

1:19

**Revelation**

2:10 3:4 3:9 3:15 3:16 7:4 10:6 11:15 17:14

## **Index of Greek Words and Phrases**

Εμπνευστοι: 98  
εκκακειν: 223  
θεοπνευστος: 360  
κακοποιουντες: 206  
Αγαλλιασις: 175  
Ενδικησον: 216  
Καθενδωμεν: 234  
Νους χους: 55  
Χαρα: 175  
αγαπη ανυποκριτος: 129  
αθειοι: 36  
ακροαμα: 212  
ακροαματα: 212 212  
ακροαται: 212 212  
απο: 324  
εις ημας: 188  
εκ : 324  
εκκακωμιν: 223  
επιγνωσις: 31  
ηγεμονικον: 176  
ηγησασθε: 176  
θαυμαστον φως: 237  
θλιβομενοι: 166  
καταπτισαι: 185  
λοιποι: 234  
μετα πολλης φαντασιας: 236  
νομος φυσικος: 34  
παντι: 167  
πειρασμοις: 173  
ποιηται: 205  
στενοχωρουμενοι: 167  
φρισσονσι: 84  
φρισσουσι: 255

## **Index of Latin Words and Phrases**

An injuria sit referenda?: 137  
Dissoluti est pectoris in rebus seriis quaerere voluptatem: 211  
Et penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos: 270  
Heu, quam difficile est crimen non prodere vultu!: 92  
Hoc tantum seio, me nihil scire: 319  
Homini facienti quod in se est, Deus non deest: 396  
Imperator de me male meruit, sed bene judicavit.: 178  
Lex non scripta sed nata!: 34  
Mens agitat molem: 334  
Nemesis: 393  
Nemo sibi nascitur: 66  
Quae supra nos, nihil ad nos: 38  
Quod fieri potuit, potest: 43  
Res Ingeniosa fore Christianum: 307  
a fortiori: 216  
a priori: 216  
agenda: 388  
alii, atque alii: 238  
aliquatenus: 378  
alta mente reposita: 147  
an sit: 324  
arcana imperii: 157  
argumentum ad hominem: 383  
cacodaemones: 417  
caros: 235 235  
catechumini: 309 309  
census: 119  
certatim: 245  
compos sui: 66  
con: 68  
coronis: 117  
credenda: 388  
digesta: 388  
ex absurdo: 239  
felo de se: 66  
fidelos: 309



fremitus maris: 414  
genii: 417  
indubitande: 323  
indubitate fidei: 323  
ludere in humanis rebus: 158  
mensura mensurata: 116  
meum: 313  
non est mortale quod opto: 230  
petenda: 388  
primo primum: 322  
primum cognoscibile: 322  
primum esse: 322  
pro: 68  
quid sit: 324  
quoad hoc: 416  
quod sit: 324  
semina: 259  
septum: 309  
spectandus: 323  
speranda: 388  
summum bonum: 383  
tuum: 313  
veternum: 235  
viatores: 358  
vir spectabilis: 323  
vir spectatus: 323  
vultus est index animi: 92

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

i ii iii iv 5 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 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  
280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302  
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  
418 419 420 421 422 423 424 425 426 427 428 429 430 431 432 433 434 435 436 437 438 439 440  
441 442 443 444 445 446 447 448 449 450 451 452 453 454 455 456 457 458 459 460 461 462 463  
464 465 466 467 468 469 470 471 472 473 474 475 476 477 478 479 480 481 482 483 484 485 486  
487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500 501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509  
510 511 512 513 514 515 516