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**Sermons Preached
Upon Several
Occasions. Vol.
VI.**

Robert South



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Sermons Preached Upon Several Occasions. Vol. VI.

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SERMONS

PREACHED UPON

SEVERAL OCCASIONS,

BY

ROBERT SOUTH, D.D.

PREBENDARY OF WESTMINSTER,
AND CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,

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THE
CHIEF HEADS OF THE SERMONS.

VOL. VI.

SERMON XXVI.

JOHN ix. 2, 3.

And his disciples asked him, saying. Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. P. 1.

The circumstance of this blindness, thus expressed in the words of the first verse, was the occasion of those words that follow in the two next; in which we have,

1. A question of Christ's disciples. The design of the proposal may be twofold. (1.) Simply and positively as their opinion, really judging all maladies of the body to come from the antecedent demerit of sin, as past and actually committed, or as future and foreknown by God, 2. (2.) Only for argument sake, 3.

2. The answer or rejoinder of Christ, in which, by a reprehensive shortness, he both clears the man's innocence, and vindicates God's proceedings, 4.

The words thus cleared briefly exhibit to us the erroneous curiosity of the disciples, in their inquiry into the reason of God's judgments, and the state of another man's soul: the design of them is prosecuted in three propositions, 7.

I. That men are prone to charge God's judgments upon false causes. And,

1. These false causes are shewn; which are. (1.) Sin on his part that suffers, 8. (2.) Hatred on God's part, 9.

2. The principles are shewn, inducing men to make such false references: and these are, (1.) The fallibility of the rule, and the falseness of the opinion by which they judge, 11. (2.) Their inability in discerning, joined with their confidence in pronouncing, 13. (3.) The inbred malice of our nature, 15.

II. That not always the sin or merit of the person afflicted, but the will of God that afflicts, is sometimes the sole, but always the sufficient reason of the affliction, 17.

In support of which, God's own testimony, [Job xlii. 7](#), is produced; a distinction is made between punishments and afflictions, 18. and God's proceeding herein cleared from injustice upon these reasons: 1. His absolute, unaccountable dominion and sovereignty over the



creature, 18. 2. The essential equity of his nature, 20. 3. His unerring, all-disposing wisdom, 23.

III. God never inflicts evil upon men but for the great end of advancing his own glory, and that usually in the way of their good.

This is sufficiently clear in the present instance, 24. and expressed in those words of the text, *that the works of God might be made manifest in him*. The works that God intends thus to glorify, usually are, 1. The miraculous works of his power, 25. 2. The works of his grace, 27.

The use and improvement of the doctrine thus discussed is a confutation and reproof of the bold, uncharitable interpreters of God's providences; whose peremptory way of judging is peculiarly odious to him for the cursed cause of it, *curiosity*; which may be properly accounted the incontinence of the mind, and is but one remove from the rebellion of it, 30.

SERMON XXVII.

PSALM cxxx. 4.

But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. P. 33.

After man had once sinned, and so was for ever disabled to stand before God upon terms of the law, which spoke nothing but irrevocable death to him who transgressed in the least iota, had God continued this inexorable sentence, it would of necessity have wrought in man these two things:

1. Horror of despair, 33.
2. Height of malice, 34.

God therefore assumes to himself the most endearing description in these words; which consist of two parts, 37.

I. A declaration of mercy in these words, *There is forgiveness with thee*; and the greatness of it is displayed in the consideration of three things.

(1.) The principle from which it flows. It is from the free, spontaneous motion of God's good pleasure, 37. This evinced by sundry reasons, 38. His mercy shewn to be consistent with his justice, 40. and the former to be made glorious, first, In the relaxation of the law, which required of every sinner a satisfaction in his own person; second, That, as he was pleased to be satisfied with a surety, so he himself found and provided this surety, 41.

(2.) The sins that are the subject-matter of it: and the greatness of the pardon advances upon considering them, as they are heightened by these two properties; 1. Their number, 45. 2. Their greatness, 47.

(3.) The persons on whom this pardon is conferred, who are men; that is, very worthless and inconsiderable creatures, in comparison of those to whom the same pardon is denied, 49.



II. The end and design of such a declaration, which is fear and obedience; under which head are shewn,

1st, What that fear is, which is here intended. Now there are three sorts of fear. 1. An anxious, distracting, amazing fear; such as Moses felt upon the sight of God, 51. 2. A slavish and servile fear; such an one as is called *the spirit of bondage*, 52. 3. A filial, reverential fear; such an one as is enlivened with a principle of love: which is that alone that is designed in these words, 52.

2dly, How God's forgiveness may be an argument to enforce this fear. As, (1.) because the neglect of the fear of God, upon supposal that he has forgiven us our sins, is highly disingenuous, 54, (2.) Also most provoking and dangerous, 55.

Hence we learn, 1. The different nature of Christ's spiritual kingdom from all other kingdoms in the world, in respect of the fear of the subject, 56. 2. Upon what ground every man is to build the persuasion of the pardon of his sins, namely, the effects this persuasion of God's mercy works upon their spirits: for he, that from God's mercy gathers no arguments for his fear, may conclude thus much, that there is indeed forgiveness with God, but no forgiveness for him, 57.

SERMON XXVIII.

PREACHED JUST AFTER CROMWELL'S DEATH.

DEUT. xxix. 4.

Yet the Lord has not given you an heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear unto this day. P. 59.

God's miraculous favours to the children of Israel are shortly enumerated, and their invincible hardness, strange unbelief, and frequent rebellion under them. An interchange of mercies on God's part and murmurings on theirs being the continual custom and manner of their whole life, Moses might well accompany the repetition of the covenant, with this upbraiding reprehension, 59-61.

From the several phrases of the same signification in the text, we may collect the exceeding stupidity and total ignorance of the Jews, in apprehending the divine dispensations; or refer them to those several means which God suited to every apprehensive faculty of their soul, that he might force his convictions upon them, 62.

The words afford us these observations.

1 *Observ.* That the heart may remain unaffected and unconvinced in the midst of convincing means; so termed, (1.) Because they do actually convince some, though they miscarry in others. (2.) Because they have a fitness or aptitude to convince all, 62, 63.

2 *Observ.* That a perceiving heart is totally and entirely the free gift of God: free, 1. in respect of the motive; 2. in respect of the persons on whom it is conferred, 63.



3 *Observ.* That God's denial of such a perceiving heart does certainly infer (but not cause) the unsuccessfulness of all the means of grace, 64. In handling of which is shewn,

I. What is meant by God's giving to the soul a perceiving heart; which is here set out by such acts as are properly acts of knowledge, as understanding, seeing, hearing; not because grace is placed only in the understanding, as some imagine; but, 1. Because the understanding has the precedency and first stroke in holy actions, as well as others, 65. 2. Because the means of grace are most frequently expressed by the word of truth, and the understanding is that faculty, whose proper office it is to close in with truth as such, 65.

To have a perceiving heart is not, 1. To understand and receive the word according to the letter and notion, by a bare assent to the truth of it, 67. But, 2. To have a light begot in the mind by an immediate work of the Spirit, whereby alone the soul is enabled to apprehend and discern the things of God spiritually, and to practise them effectually, 67.

II. Whence it is, that without this gift the soul cannot make any improvement of the means of grace. It arises from two reasons;

1. From its exceeding impotence and inability to apprehend these things, 70.
2. From its contrariety to them, which chiefly consists, (1.) In carnal corruptions, 73. (2.) In carnal wisdom, 75.

III. That although, upon God's denial of a perceiving heart, the soul remain unprofitable under the means of grace, *so as not to hear nor perceive*; yet this unprofitableness cannot at all be ascribed to God a the chief author of it, 77.

God's denial of a perceiving heart admits of a double acceptance.

(1.) It implies only a bare denial of grace. Now it is not this denial that causes us to reject the means of grace, but the immediate sinfulness of the heart, 77.

(2.) It includes also a positive act of induration. Now God, without begetting any evil disposition in the heart, may harden it to sin; first, By affording a general influence or concurrence to the persuasions or suggestions of Satan or sinful men, so far as they are natural acts, 79. Secondly, By disposing and offering such objects and occasions, which though good in themselves, yet concurring with a corrupt heart have a fitness to educe that corruption into act, 79. Thirdly, By affording his concurrence to those motions that such objects and occasions stir up in the soul, so far as they are positive and natural, 80.

IV. How God can justly reprehend men for not hearing nor perceiving, when upon his denial of an heart there is a necessity lying upon them to do neither, 81 .

For clearing this, it is already shewn, that God's denial of an heart is not the cause of the necessity of the soul's not perceiving, but its own native hardness. Now this hardness is the immediate product of the sin of Adam, which was most free and voluntary; and every man is as really guilty of this sin, as he was really represented in Adam, 81.

Application. Use 1. This doctrine speaks refutation to that opinion, that states a sufficiency of grace in the bare proposal of things to be believed and practised, 82.



Use 2. is of exhortation; that in the enjoyment of the means of grace we should not terminate in the means, but look up to God, who alone is able to give an heart to improve them, 85.

SERMON XXIX.

PREACHED MAY 29.

JOHN xv. 26.

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. P. 87.

These words contain two general parts.

I. The promise of sending the Spirit: wherein we have a full description of him,

1. In respect of his person; he is said to *proceed from the Father*. There has been great controversy between the Latin and Greek churches concerning his procession: the former holding that he proceeds equally from the Father and the Son; and the latter, that he proceeds from the Father only by the Son, 87.

2. In respect of his office or employment in these two things. (1.) That he is a Comforter, 89. (2.) That he is the Spirit of truth, 92.

He is a *Comforter*, because he is *the Spirit of truth*: and truth has this comforting influence upon the mind; (1.) From the native congenial suitableness that it has to man's understanding, 93. (2.) From the sovereign virtue it has to clear the conscience; first, from guilt, 95. secondly, from doubt, 96.

II. The end of his being sent, which was to testify of Christ.

In which are considered,

1. What the Spirit was to testify of Christ; which was, that he was the Son of God, the Messiah, and Saviour of the world, 97.

2. By what ways and means he was to testify this of him; which were the gifts conferred by him upon the disciples; three of which seem more eminently designed for the great purpose of preaching the gospel. (1.) The gift of miracles, 97. (2.) The gift of tongues, 98. (3.) That strange, undaunted, and supernatural courage he infused into the disciples, 98.

A full reflection upon what has been said will furnish an infallible rule for trying men's pretences of the Spirit. If they find not only comment, but text also, and plead the spirit in defiance of the letter; it is not God's Spirit that acts them, but the spirit of darkness and desolation, that ruins government and subverts kingdoms. But thankfully and forgetfully to accept our oppression, the king's restoration is commemorated as the work of the Holy Ghost, carrying in it such bright testimonies of a supernatural power, so much above, nay against the means and actors visibly appearing in it, that it may properly be expressed in those words, *Zech. iv. 6. Not by might, nor by strength, but by my spirit, saith the Lord*, 100.



Trinity Sunday.

Now, though the chief subject of the text was the Holy Spirit, yet it seems to point both at the Pentecost and the Trinity; for in the words we have,

1. The person sent, which was the Holy Ghost.
2. The person sending him, which was the Son.
3. The person from whom he is said to proceed, which was the Father. All employed in man's salvation: the Father contriving, the Son ordering, and the Spirit performing, 102.

From the whole passage may be collected two things:

1. God's gracious love and condescension to man, 104.
2. The worth of souls: the salvation of which is never left to chance; all the persons of the Trinity being solicitous to comfort them in this world, and at length to waft them to a better, 104.

SERMON XXX.

PROV. xviii. 14.

But a wounded spirit who can bear? P. 106.

Few men being kept from sin but merely by the check of their fears representing to them the endless, insupportable torments of another world, as the certain, consequent, and terrible reward of it; atheists, who shake these fears off, are admonished, that God can antedate the torments they disbelieve, and, by what he can make them feel, teach them the certainty of what they refuse to fear, 106.

By way of explanation of the words is premised, 1. That by *spirit* is meant the soul, in which there is a lower or inferior part, the sensitive faculties and appetites; and a more noble portion, purely intellectual in operation, as well as in substance, perfectly spiritual, 108. 2. By being *wounded* is to be understood, its being deeply and intimately possessed with a lively sense of God's wrath for sin, 109.

The sense of the words then lies full and clear in this one proposition, viz. That the trouble and anguish of a soul, labouring under a sense of God's displeasure for sin, is in expressibly greater than any other grief or trouble whatsoever, 109. which is prosecuted under the following particulars; shewing,

I. What kind of persons are the proper subjects of this trouble, viz. both the righteous and the wicked, but with a very different issue, 110.

II. Wherein the excessive greatness of this trouble doth appear; which may be collected, 1st, From the behaviour of our Saviour himself in this condition, 112. 2dly, From those raised and passionate expressions that have been uttered by persons eminent in the ways of God, while they were labouring under it, 114. 3dly, From the uninterrupted, incessant continuance of it, 119. 4thly, From its violent and more than ordinary manifestation of itself



on outward signs and effects, 120. 5thly, From those horrid effects it has had upon persons not upheld under it by divine grace, 122.

III. By what ways and means this trouble is brought upon the soul: four ways instanced, 1st, By dreadful reflections upon divine justice, as provoked, 124. 2dly, By fearful apprehensions of the divine mercy, as abused, 125. 3dly, By God's withdrawing his presence, and the sense of his love from the spirit, 127. 4thly, By God's giving commission to the tempter more than usually to trouble and disquiet it, 129.

IV. What is God's end and design in casting men into such a perplexed condition, 131. 1st, For the wicked or reprobate, it is but the first-fruits of hell, and the earnest of their damnation, 132. 2dly, For the pious and sincere. God designs it, 1st, To imbitter sin to them, 132. 2d, To endear and enhance the value of returning mercy, 133.

V. The inferences to be drawn from the whole are,

1st, That no man presume to pronounce any thing scoffingly of the present, or severely of the final estate of such as he finds exercised with the distracting troubles of a wounded spirit, 135.

2dly, Let no secure sinner applaud himself in the presumed safety of his spiritual estate, because he finds no such trouble upon his spirit for sin, 136.

3dly, Let no person exclude himself from the number of such as are sincere and truly regenerate, only because he never yet felt any of these amazing pangs of conscience for sin, 137.

SERMON XXXI.

PSALM *xcv.* 11.

Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest. P. 139.

By this expression, *I swear in my wrath*, is meant God's peremptory declaring his resolution to destroy the murmuring and rebellious Jews, 139. The word *swearing* is very significant, and seems to import,

1. The certainty of the sentence here pronounced, 140.

2. The terror of it; if the children of Israel should say, *Let not God speak to us, lest we die*, 140. As for the word *rest*, we must admit in this scripture, as well as in many others of the like nature, a double interpretation; 1st, A temporal rest in Canaan the promised land, 141. 2dly, An eternal rest in the heavenly Canaan, 141.

The words thus explained are drawn into one proposition, viz. That God sometimes in this life, upon extraordinary provocations, may and does inevitably design and seal up obstinate sinners to eternal destruction, 142. The prosecution is managed under these particulars:



I. Shewing how and by what means God seals up a sinner to perdition. There are three ways by which God usually does this:

1. By withholding the virtue and power of his ordinances, 142.

2. By restraining the convincing power of his providences, 144. And there are three sorts of providence instanced, in which God often speaks convincingly. 1st, In a general, common calamity, 145. 2dly, By particular, personal, and distinguishing judgments, 147. 3dly, By signal, unexpected deliverances, 149-

3. By delivering up a sinner to a stupidity or searedness of conscience, 151.

II. Shewing what sort of obstinate sinners those are that God deals with in this manner: which are, 1st, Such as sin against clear and notable warnings from God, 154. 2dly, Such as sin against special renewed vows and promises of obedience made to God, 156.

III. Answering and resolving two questions that may arise from the foregoing particulars:

1. Whether the purpose of God passed upon an obstinate sinner (here expressed by God's swearing against him) be absolutely irrevocable? Concerning which it is affirmed that the scripture is full and clear for it, 158.

2. Whether a man may know such a purpose to have passed upon him antecedently to its execution? In answer to which, from a consideration of the ordinary ways by which God imparts his will to men, namely, 1st, By his word, 160-162. 2dly, By men's collection of it from its effects, 162. It is affirmed, that no man in this life can pass any certain judgment concerning the will of God in reference to his own final estate, 162. But here is observed a wide difference between the purpose of God hitherto discoursed of, and that which the schools call God's decree of reprobation. 1st, Because that decree is said to commence upon God's good pleasure and sovereign will, but this purpose upon the provocation of the sinner. 2dly, Because that decree is said to be from all eternity; but this purpose is taken up after some signal provocation, 163. from all which,

IV. We are exhorted to beware of sinning under sin-aggravating circumstances, 164. and shewn the danger of dallying with and venturing upon the Almighty, by a daring continuance in a course of sin, 166.

SERMON XXXII.

PSALM xiv. 1.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

In the words we have two particulars, wherein we may consider,

I. An assertion made, *There is no God.*

1. The thing asserted, which may be understood, 1st, Of an absolute removal of the divine being and existence, 169. or, 2dly, Of a removal of God's providence, by which he governs



and takes account of all the particular affairs of the world, and more especially of the lives and actions of men, 169.

2. The manner of the assertion, *The fool hath said in his heart*, it wears the badge of guilt, privacy, and darkness, 169.

By the *fool's saying in his heart*, *There is no God*, may be implied,

1. An inward wishing that there was no God, 171.

2. His seeking out arguments to persuade himself that there is none, 172.

3. Not only a seeking for reasons and arguments, but also a marvellous readiness to acquiesce in any seeming probability or appearance of reason, that may make for his opinion, 174.

4. Another way, different from all the former: for a man to place his sole dependence, as to his chief good and happiness, on any thing besides God, is (as we may so speak) virtually and by consequence for him *to say in his heart*, *There is no God*, 176.

II. The second particular considered is, the person who made this assertion, *the fool*, whose folly will appear from these following reasons:

1. That in making and holding this assertion, he contradicts the general judgment and notion of mankind, 177, 178.

2. That he lays aside a principle easy and suitable to reason, and substitutes in the room of it one strange and harsh, and at the best highly improbable, 179.

3. His folly appears from the causes and motives inducing him to take up this opinion, which, amongst others, are, 1st, Great impiety, and disquiet of conscience consequent thereupon. 2dly, Great ignorance of nature and natural causes, 181, 182.

4. From those cases in which such persons begin to doubt and waver, and fly off from their opinion, instanced, 1st, In the time of some great and imminent danger, 182. 2dly, In the time of approaching death, 183.

The modern and more thoroughpaced sinners affect a superiority in villainy above their ancestors; therefore this discourse against atheism is supposed to be of some use; and if so, the most proper use is, to give every one of us a view and prospect into his own heart: and such as are willing to watch over that, so as to prevent this monstrous birth, are advised to beware,

1. Of great and crying sins, such as make the conscience raw and sick, 184.

2. Of discontents about the cross passages of God's providence towards them, 184.

3. Of devoting themselves to pleasure and sensuality; there being nothing in the world that casts God out of the heart like it, 185.



SERMON XXXIII.

PREACHED ON THE 29th OF MAY, AT WESTMINSTER-ABBEY.

PSALM cvi. 7.

Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea. P. 187.

The resemblance between the transactions of Providence with the children of Israel in their redemption from Egypt, and with ourselves in the restoration of the royal family, being briefly considered, 187. to shew how like we are to them for their miraculous ingratitude, we must observe three things in the text:

I. The unworthy and ungrateful deportment of the Israelites towards God upon a most signal mercy and deliverance; *they provoked him*; which expression seems to import an insolent, daring resolution to offend; and, as it relates to God, strikes at him in a threefold respect:

1. It rises up against his power and prerogative, 190.
2. It imports an abuse of his goodness, 191.
3. It is an affront upon his longsuffering and his patience, 192.

II. The second thing to be observed is, the aggravation of this deportment from the nature and circumstance of the deliverance, *They provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.* The baseness and ingratitude of which God casts in their teeth, by confronting it with the glorious deliverance he vouchsafed them; a deliverance ennobled with these four qualifications: 1st, Its greatness, 193. 2dly, Its unexpectedness, 195. 3dly, The eminent seasonableness of it, 199. 4thly, Its absolute undeservedness, 201. Our case is severally shewn in the above particulars to be parallel to that of the Israelites, and likewise in the return made to God for his goodness.

III. The third thing observable is, the cause of this misbehaviour, *They understood not thy wonders in Egypt.* Now in every wonderful passage of Providence two things are to be considered, 205.

1. The author by whom it is done, 205.
2. The end for which it is done: neither of these, in the cases before us, were understood by the Israelites, nor have been attended to by us as they ought to have been, 206.

SERMON XXXIV.

MATTH. xvii. 21.

Howbeit, this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. P. 208.

It was a general received command, and an acknowledged rule of practice in all ages and places of the Christian world, that we are *to hear the church*; which, being acted by the



immediate guidance of the Holy Ghost, hath set apart the time of our Saviour's fasting in the wilderness, to be solemnized with the anniversary exercise of abstinence, for the subduing the flesh and quickening the spirit, 208.

As for the words, among other expositions, they are more judiciously interpreted of an evil spirit having had long and inveterate possession of the party out of whom it was cast, and the sense of them, as improvable into a standing, perpetual precept, is this; that there are some vices which, partly by our temper and constitution, partly by habit and inveterate continuance, have so firm an hold of us, that they cannot be thoroughly dispossessed but with the greatest ardour and constancy of prayer, joined with the harshest severities of mortification, 211.

In the text are two parts:

1st, An intimation of a peculiar duty, *prayer and fasting*.

2dly, The end and design of it, which is to eject and dispossess the unclean spirit. The entire discussion is managed in three particulars:

I. In taking a survey of the extent of this text, 212.

This duty of fasting admits of several kinds and degrees: The 1st kind is of constant, universal exercise; universal, both because it obliges at all times, and extends to all persons, 212. The 2d, is a fast of a total abstinence, when for some time we wholly abstain from all bodily repasts, 214. The 3d, is an abstinence from bodily refreshments in respect of a certain sort or degree, and that under took for some space of time, 216. This head is closed with a caution, that the observation of fasting in this solemn sea son should be so strict, as not to bend to any man's luxury; so dispensable, as not to grate upon his infirmity of body, 219.

II. In shewing what are the qualifications that must render this duty of fasting acceptable to God, and efficacious to ourselves, 222.

There are four conditions or properties, a joint concurrence of all which is a necessary qualification of it for this great purpose. 1st, That it is to be used, not as a duty either necessary or valuable in itself, but only as an instrument, 222. 2d, That it be done with a hearty detestation of the body of sin, for the weakening of which it is designed, 227. 3d, That it be quickened and enlivened with prayer, 229. 4th, That it be attended with alms and works of charity, 231.

III. In shewing how this duty of fasting comes to have such an influence in dispossessing the evil spirit, and subduing our corruptions, 233.

It does not effect this, either, 1st, by any causal force naturally inherent in itself, 233. neither, 2dly, by way of merit, as procuring and engaging the help of that grace that does effect it, 234. But it receives this great virtue, 1st, From divine institution, 234. 2dly, By being a direct defiance to that disposition of body and mind, upon which especially the Devil works, 234. But when we have taken all these courses to eject the evil spirit, we must remem-



ber that it is to be the work of God himself, whom the blessed spirits adore, and whom the evil obey, 236.

SERMONS XXXV. XXXVI.

REVEL. ii. 16.

Repent; or I will come unto thee quickly, and fight against them with the sword of my mouth. P. 237. 268.

It is wonderful upon what ground a rational, discerning man can satisfy and speak peace to his conscience in the very career of those sins, which, by his own confession, lead him to assured perdition, 237. One would think that the cause of it must of necessity be one of these three:

1st, That he is ignorant of the curse attending his sin, 238. Which cannot he here the cause.

2dly, That he may know the curse, and yet not believe it, 239.

3dly, That though he knows and believes the curse, yet perhaps he relaxes nothing of his sin, because he resolves to bear it, 239.

But it is shewn that it can proceed from neither of these reasons; therefore the true one is conceived to be a presuming confidence of a future repentance: other reasons indeed may allure, this only argues a man into sin, 241. Now the face of these words is directly set against this soul-devouring imposture of a deferred repentance. In the prosecution of them it will be convenient to inquire into their occasion. In the [12th verse](#) we find, they are part of a letter to the church (here collectively taken, as including in it many particular churches) of Pergamos, indited by the Spirit of God, and directed to the angel, that is, the chief pastor of that church, 242.

The letter contains a charge for some sinful abuse that had crept in, and was connived at, [ver. 14](#). This abuse was its toleration of the Nicolaitans, whose heresy consisted in this, 1st, That they held and abetted the eating of sacrifices offered to idols to be lawful. 2dly, That they held and abetted the lawfulness of fornication, 244.

It likewise contained the counsel of speedy and immediate repentance in the words of the text, in which are two parts:

1. The first stands directed to the church itself; *Repent, or I will come unto thee quickly.* God's *coming* is shewn to mean here his approach in the way of judgment, 245.

2. The other part of the words relates to those heretics *And I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth*; that is, with the reprehending, discovering force of the word, and the censures of the church, 248. From this expression these two occasional observations are collected:



1. That the word of God powerfully dispensed has the force and efficacy of a spiritual sword, 249.

2. When God undertakes the purging of a church, or the reformation of religion, he does it with the weapons of religion, with *the sword of his mouth*, 250.

The general explication of the words thus finished, the principal design of them is prosecuted by enforcing the duty of immediate repentance; which is done,

1st, In shewing what that repentance is that is here enjoined, 252.

Repentance in scripture has a threefold acceptation.

1. It is taken for the first act, by which the soul turns from sin to God, 253.

2. It is taken for the whole course of a pious life, from a man's first turning from a wicked life to the last period of a godly: which is the only repentance that Socinus will admit. But this is not the proper notion of repentance; 1st, Because then no man could properly be said to have repented till his death, 253. 2dly, Because scripture, no less than the natural reason of the thing itself, places repentance before faith, 254. 3dly, Because scripture makes all those subsequent acts of new obedience after our first turning to God, not to be the integral, constituent parts, but the effects, fruits, and consequents of repentance, 254.

3. Repentance is taken for a man's turning to God after the guilt of some particular sin, 255.

II. Arguments are produced to engage us in the speedy and immediate exercise of this duty, which are,

1. That no man can be secure of the future, 256.

2. That supposing the allowance of time, yet we cannot be sure of power to repent, 259.

3. That, admitting a man has both time and grace to repent, yet by such delay the work will be incredibly more difficult, 263. And the delay of this duty is most eminently and signally provoking to God, upon these reasons:

1. Because it is the abuse of a remedy, 269.

2. Because it clearly shews that a man does not love it as a duty, but only intends to use it for an expedient of escape, 270.

3. Because it is evidently a counterplotting of God, and being wise above the prescribed methods of salvation, to which God makes the immediate dereliction of sin necessary, 271.

After the general nature of this subject, follows a consideration of it in particular. The grand instance of it is a death-bed repentance; the efficacy of which, having been much disputed in the world, is here discussed under two heads:

I. This great case of conscience is resolved, whether a death-bed repentance ever is or can be effectual to salvation, 273. Several arguments against it being stated and answered, 273. six positive arguments are produced to prove and assert it.

1. That such a repentance, commenced at the last hour of a man's life, has *de facto* proved effectual to salvation, 283.



2. Is taken from the truth and certainty of that saying, owned and attested by God himself, that *if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted, according to that a man hath, and not according to that a man hath not*, 284.

3. Because repentance saves not, as it is a work, or such a number of works, but as it is the effect of a renewed nature and a sanctified heart, from which it flows, 286.

4. If to repent sincerely be a thing at the last moments of our lives impossible to be done, then, for that instant, impenitence is not a sin, 287.

5. That to deny that a death-bed repentance can be effectual to salvation, is a clear restraint and limitation of the compass and prerogative of God's mercy, 287.

6. That if a death-bed repentance cannot possibly be effectual to salvation, then a sinner upon his death-bed, having not repented before, may lawfully, and without sin, despair,

II. Supposing a death-bed repentance may prove effectual, yet for any one to design and build upon it before hand is highly dangerous, and therefore absolutely irrational; which appears from these considerations:

1. From the exceeding unfitness of a man at this time, above all others, to exercise this duty, 290.

2. That there can be no arguments, from which either the dying person himself, or others by him, can certainly conclude that his repentance is sound and effectual, 292.

In fine, this alone can be said for it, (and to a considering person no more need to be said against it,) that it is only not impossible, 295.

SERMON XXXVII.

ROMANS i. 3, 4.

Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. P. 296.

Where the construction of the text lies so, that we cannot otherwise reach the full sense of it without making our way through doubts and ambiguities, philosophical discourses are necessary in dispensing the word, 296.

The present exercise therefore consists of two parts.

I. An explication of the words: for the scheme of the Greek carries a very different face from our translation, which difference renders the sense of them very disputable, 296.

The explication is comprised in the resolution of these four inquiries:

1. Whether the translation rightly renders it, that Christ *was declared to be the Son of God*, since the original admits of a different signification, 297.

2. What is imported by this term, *with power*, 299.



3. What is intended by the following words, *according to the spirit of holiness*, 300.

4. How those words, *by the resurrection from the dead*, are to be understood, 301.

II. An accommodation of the words to the present occasion, which is in shewing, first, how Christ's resurrection may be a proper argument to prove his divinity and eternal sonship, 303. next, that it is the greatest and principal of all others, 306,

And for this we may observe, that it is not only true, but more clear and evident than the other arguments for the proof of the truth of Christ's doctrine, when we consider them as they are generally reducible to these three:

1. The nature of the things taught by him, 307.

2. The fulfilling of prophecies in his person, 309-

3. The miracles and wonderful works which he did in the time of his life, 310. And though these were undoubtedly high proofs of Christ's doctrine, yet his resurrection had a vast preeminence over them upon two accounts.

1. That all the miracles he did, supposing his resurrection had not followed, would not have had sufficient efficacy to have proved him to be the Messiah. But his resurrection alone, without relation to his preceding miracles, had been a full proof of the truth of his doctrine; which appears upon these two accounts: 1st, That considered absolutely in itself, it did outweigh all the rest of his works put together, 311. 2dly, That it had a more intimate and near connection with his doctrine than any of the rest, 311.

2. Because of the general opinion and judgment that the world had of both, 311.

The Jews and unbelievers never attempted to assign any causes of the resurrection besides the power of God, so as by that means to destroy the miraculousness of it; though they constantly took exceptions to Christ's other miracles, still resolving them into some cause short of a divine power; which exceptions may be reduced to these two heads:

1. The great difficulty of discerning when an action is really a miracle, 313.

2. Supposing an action is known to be a miracle, it is as difficult to know whether it proves the truth of the doctrine of that person that does it, or not, 314. But neither of these exceptions take place against the resurrection. For,

1st, Though we cannot assign the determinate point where the power of nature ends, yet there are some actions that at first appearance so vastly transcend it, that there can be no suspicion that they proceed from any power but a divine, 317.

2dly, Should God suffer a miracle to be done by an impostor, yet there was no necessity hence to gather, that God did it to confirm the words of that impostor: for God may do a miracle when and where he pleases, 317.



SERMON XXXVIII.

ECCLES. i. 18.

In much wisdom there is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.
P. 320.

This assertion is taken up upon Solomon's judgment, who, by the very verdict of omniscience itself, was of all men in the world the most knowing. After premising that, in speaking to the text, the patronage of ignorance, especially in things spiritual, is not intended; but if any thing is indeed said against knowledge, it is against that only that is so much adored by the world, and falsely called philosophy; and yet more significantly surnamed by the apostle, *vain philosophy*, 320.

To rectify the absurd opinions of the world concerning knowledge, and to take down the excessive estimation of it, in the prosecution of the words, it is demonstrated to be the cause, or at least the inseparable companion of sorrow in three respects, 323.

I. In respect of the nature and properties of the thing itself, 324. Under this head a question is started, whether or no there be indeed any such thing as true knowledge in the world? And three reasons advanced, which seem to in sinuate that there is none, 325. And then the uncertainty of knowledge, its poorness, and utter inability to contribute to the solid enjoyments of life, is shewn in several theological and philosophical problems, 327-

II. In respect of the laborious and troublesome acquisition of it: in setting forth which, the scholars labour is considered with that of the soldier and the husbandman, and a view is taken of those callings to which learning is necessary, the physician, the lawyer, and the divine, 329.

III. In respect of its effects and consequents, three whereof are instanced.

1. The increase of knowledge is an increase of the desire of knowledge, 333.

2. Knowledge rewards its followers with the miseries of poverty, and clothes them with rags, 333.

3. Knowledge makes the person who has it the butt of envy, the mark of obloquy and contention; which considered, men are advised to make him that is the great Author, also the subject of their knowledge. For though there is a vanity, a sorrow, and a dissatisfaction in the knowledge of created, inferior objects, yet we are assured, *that it is life eternal to know God, and whom he has sent, his Son Christ Jesus*, 335.

SERMON XXXIX.

PSALM lxvi. 18.

If I regard Iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. P. 338.



The resolution and model of this whole Psalm, which is David's grateful commemoration of all God's mercies, together with a retribution of praise being given, and therein the occasion and connection of these words, 338. They are considered two ways; 1st, As they have a peculiar reference to David and his particular condition, and so they are a vehement asseveration of his integrity, 340. 2dly, Absolutely in themselves, and so they are applicable to all men, 341. And being resolved, as they lie in supposition, into a positive assertion, they afford this doctrine; *Whosoever regards iniquity in his heart, the Lord will not hear him*. In prosecution of which is shewn,

I. What it is for a man to regard or love sin in his heart, which he may be said to do several ways.

1. There is a constant and habitual love of sin in the unregeneracy and corrupt estate of the soul, 34.

2. There is a regarding of sin in the heart, that consists in an unmortified habit or course of sin, much different from the former, because even a child of God may thus regard sin, 345. Which may be evinced, 1st, From example, 346. 2dly, From scripture-reason, which is grounded upon those exhortations that are there made even to believers for the mortification of sin, 347. And the soul may thus love sin two ways; 1st, Directly, and by a positive pursuance of it, 347. 2dly, Indirectly, and by not attempting a vigorous mortification of it, 348.

3. There is another kind of regarding sin in the heart, and that is, by an actual intention of the mind upon sin, 348.

II. What it is to have our prayers accepted with God: and this is to prevail with God for the obtaining the good thing we desire, by virtue of an interest in Jesus Christ, and in the covenant of grace, 350. Several objections to this doctrine stated and answered, 351.

III. Whence it is that a man's regarding or loving sin in his heart hinders his prayers from acceptance with God.

1. Because in this case he cannot pray by the spirit, 355.

2. Because he cannot pray in faith; that is, he cannot build a rational confidence upon any promise, that God will accept him, 356.

3. Because he cannot pray with fervency, which, next to sincerity, is the great qualification of prayer, to which God has annexed the promise of acceptance, 358.

By way of application, the duty of sincerity in our worship is pressed from these two motives: 1st, By praying to God with insincere, sin-regarding hearts, we incur the certain frustration of all our prayers, 360. 2dly, In such prayers we are not only certain not to gain a blessing, but also we incur the danger of a heavy curse, 360. And to direct us how to pray with sincerity, this rule is laid down, to endeavour first to prepare our hearts by a thorough and a strict examination, 362.



SERMON XL.

1 JOHN iii. 20.

God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. P. 363.

The words are plain, and need no explication; therefore, after premising some things concerning God's attributes in general, 363. this doctrine is drawn from them, not much different from the words themselves, viz. *That God is an all-knowing God*, 366. This is indeed a principle, and therefore ought to be granted; yet since it is now controverted and denied by the Arminians, 366. and the Socinians, 367. it is no less needful to be proved. In prosecution of this,

I. The proposition is proved, and that both by scripture, 368. and by reason, 369. tunder this head we are exhorted to the knowledge of God in Christ, 369.

II. Is shewn the excellency of God's knowledge above the knowledge of men or angels, 371. And this appears,

1. From the properties of this knowledge. Now its first property is the exceeding evidence, and consequently the certainty of it, 371. Its second property is this, that it is a knowledge independent upon the existence of the object or thing known, 373. For God beholds all things in himself, and that two ways; 1st, By reflecting upon his power, and what he can do; he has a perfect knowledge of all possibilities, and of things that may be produced, 373. 2dly, By reflecting upon his power and his will; he knows whatsoever shall be actually produced, 373.

2. The excellency of God's knowledge appears in respect of his objects, which are all things knowable; but they may be reduced to three especially, which God alone perfectly knows, and are not to be known to men or angels. 1st, The nature of God himself, 374. 2dly, Things future, 374. 3dly, The thoughts of men, 379.

III. Is shewn, by way of application, that the consideration of God's omniscience may serve as an argument to press several duties upon us. 1st, It must be a strong motive to bring us to a free confession of all our sins to God, 380. 2dly, It may enforce us to an humble submission to all God's commands and directions, and that both in respect of belief, 382, and of practice, 383. 3dly, That as we are commanded *to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect*, we should endeavour to resemble him in knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, that we make a true judgment of every thing relating to our temporal or eternal happiness or misery, 385.



SERMON XLI.

A FAST SERMON, PREACHED IN 1658.

JONAH iii. 8, 9.

But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? P. 387.

We are called this day by public authority to the work of humiliation; and the occasion of this work is the deplorable eruption of a sad distemper in sundry parts of the nation; and the cause of this, we are to know, is sin.

In this chapter we have the example of a fast celebrated by heathens, (the men of Nineveh,) but worthy of the imitation of the best Christians, 387.

Here are several things considerable.

1. Jonah's denunciation of a judgment of God impendent upon them.
2. Their humiliation upon the hearing of this judgment; in which fast or humiliation there is considerable,
 - I. The manner of it; which consists in two things: 1st, The external humiliation of the body, 388. 2dly, An internal, spiritual separation from sin, 388.
 - II. The universal extent of it, and the particular application of it, [ver. 8](#).
 - III. The motive of it, which was hope of mercy, and a pardon upon the exercise of this duty.

The words will afford six considerations, which are here discussed.

1st *Observation*. The consideration of a judgment approaching unto, or actually lying upon a people, is a sufficient argument for fasting and humiliation: 1st, Because in every judgment God calls for humiliation; they are the alarms of the Almighty, by which he terrifies and awakens sleepy souls, 389. 2dly, It deserves our humiliation: though this be an unpleasing duty to the flesh, yet it is abundantly countervailed by the greatness of the trouble it does remove, 390.

2d *Observation*. The affliction of the body is a good preparative to the humiliation of the soul: 1st, Because the operations of the soul do much follow the disposition and temper of the body, 391. 2dly, Because afflicting of the body curbs the flesh, and makes it serviceable to the spirit, 391.

3d *Observation*. The nature of a fast especially consists in a real, sincere separation from sin. The truth of this will appear from these considerations; 1st, That fasting is a spiritual duty, 394. 2dly, The nature of a fast chiefly consists in a separation from sin, because this is the proper end of it, 395.



4th *Observation*. National sins deserve national humiliation, 397. 1st, Because a general humiliation tends most to solve the breach of God's honour, 398. 2dly, Generality gives force and strength to humiliation, 398.

5th *Observation*. The best way to avert a national judgment, is for every particular man to inquire into and amend his own personal, particular sins. This is proved, 1st, Be cause particular sins oftentimes fetch down general, universal judgments, 398. which God sometimes inflicts upon that account, 1st, To shew us the provoking nature of sin, 399. Or else because, though the sin is particular in respect of the subject and cause of it, yet it may be general in respect of its contagion. 2dly, Because if there were no personal, there could be no national sin, 400. 3dly, Because God takes special notice of particular sins, 402. 4thly, No humiliation can be well and sincere, unless it be personal and particular, 403.

6th *Observation*. Upon our serious humiliation for, and forsaking of our sins, there is sufficient argument in God's mercy to hope for a removal of the severest judgment, 405. which will appear, 1st, Because God has promised it, 405. 2dly, Because God has often removed judgments upon a sincere humiliation, 407. 3dly, Because in this God attains the ends of his judgments, 407.

SERMON XLII.

MATTHEW v. 3.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. P. 411.

Our Saviour begins his sermon in the mount with seven or eight such propositions as are paradoxes and absurdities to the maxims and practices of the carnal world; and these he ushers in with the text, in which we have two things considerable.

1st, A quality, or disposition recommended by our Saviour, which is *poverty of spirit*, 411. In treating whereof,

I. The nature of this poverty of spirit is declared,

(1.) Negatively, by shewing what it is not; as,

1. A mere outward indigence, and want of all the accommodations of common life, 412.

2. A sneaking fearfulness and want of courage; there being nothing base in nature that can be noble in religion, 414.

(2.) Positively, by shewing what it is; and it may be said properly to consist in these two things:

1. An inward sense and feeling of our spiritual wants and defects, 417.

2. A sense of our miserable condition by reason of such want, the wretchedness whereof appears from these two considerations: (1.) That we are unable, by any natural strength of our own, to recover and bring ourselves out of this condition, 420. (2.) That during our continuance under it we are exposed, and stand obnoxious to all the curses of the law, 423.



II. The means are shewn, by which this poverty of spirit may be obtained, 425. Now there are three ways by which, through the concurrence of the Holy Ghost with our endeavours, we may bring ourselves to it:

1. By a frequent, deep, and serious considering of the relation we stand in towards God, 426.

2. By being much in comparing ourselves with the exceeding exactness, perfection, and spirituality of the divine law, 431.

3. By making a due and spiritual use of all those afflictions and cross events, that the providence of God is pleased to bring us under, 434. The

Second general head considered is, the ground and argument upon which this poorness of spirit is recommended; namely, that it entitles him who has it to the kingdom of heaven, 436. In the words, *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*, two things are worthy remark. 1. The thing promised, *the kingdom of heaven*; which here signifies not only the future state of glory allotted for the saints in the other world; but that whole complex of blessings, that is exhibited to mankind in the gospel, 437. 2. The manner of the promise; which is in words importing the present time; not *theirs shall be*, but *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

SERMONS XLIII. XLIV.

JOB viii. 13.

The hypocrite's hope shall perish.

Sincerity and hypocrisy are the two great things about which the whole stress of the gospel is laid out; namely, to enforce the one, and to discover and detect the other, 440.

Two things explained, to clear the words. 1. What is meant by the *hypocrite*: all hypocrites may be comprehended under these two sorts. (1.) The gross dissembler, who knowingly pursues some sinful course, endeavouring only to conceal it from the eyes of men, 440. (2.) The formal, refined hypocrite, who deceives his own heart, and is the person spoken of in the text, 441.

2. What is meant by his *hope*, which is, those persuasions a man has, that he is now in a state of grace, and consequently shall hereafter attain to a state of glory: and this hope may be distinguished into two degrees; 1. A probable opinion, 442. 2. A peremptory persuasion, 442.

After these premises, the words cast themselves into two propositions, 443.

First, That an hypocrite may proceed so far as to obtain an hope and expectation of a future blessedness. The prosecution whereof lies in three things:

I. Proving that the hypocrites have such hopes. This evinced by two arguments:

1. From the nature and constitution of man's mind, which is vehement and restless in its pursuit after some suitable good, 443.



2. From that peace and comfort that even hypocrites enjoy; which are the certain effects, and therefore the infallible signs, of some hope abiding in the mind, 445.

II. Shewing by what ways and means the hypocrite comes first to attain this hope; which are four:

1. By misapprehending God, 448. in his attributes of justice, 450. and of mercy, 451.

2. By misunderstanding of sin, 452. and from undervaluing the nature of sin in general, he quickly passes into a cursed extenuation of particulars, 453.

3. By mistakes about the spiritual rigour and strictness of the gospel, which he looks upon to be all mercy without justice, 454. Several texts instanced, which he first misunderstands, and then draws to his own purpose, 455.

4. By his mistakes about repentance, 457. conversion, 459. and faith, 459. Whence a caution is given to such as *think they stand, to beware lest they fall*, and still to fear, that that hope is scarce sure enough that can never be too sure, 461.

III. Shewing how the hypocrite continues and preserves his hopes. Three ways particularly instanced:

1. By keeping up a course of external obedience, and abstaining from gross, scandalous sins, 465.

2. By comparing himself with others, who are openly vicious, and apparently worse than himself, 469.

3. By forbearing to make a strict and impartial trial of his estate, 470.

Second proposition. That the hypocrite's fairest expectation of a future happiness will in the end vanish into miserable disappointment, 472. For the prosecution of which,

I. The proposition itself is proved, 1. From scripture, 473. 2. From the weakness of the foundation upon which his hope is built, 476.

II. Those critical seasons are shewn, in which more especially his hope will be sure to fail him. As, 1. In the time of some heart-breaking, discouraging judgment from God, 478. At the time of death, 480.

III. An application is made of the whole discourse, by displaying the transcendent misery of the final estate of all hypocrites, 482.

SERMONS XLV. XLVI.

PSALM xxix. 9.

I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it. P. 486. 515.

All the duties of a Christian are reducible to these three; faith, obedience, and patience: and the vital principle that animates them all is submission. This great virtue is here recommended to us by a great pattern, 486.

In the text are these two general parts:



1. David's submissive deportment under a sharp affliction, 487.

2. The reason of such his deportment, which was the procedure of that affliction from God, 487.

The words being a full lecture of patience, and designed to argue us into an absolute submission to the divine will in our most severe distresses, are prosecuted in two things:

I. In declaring the nature and measures of this submission. This is done,

1st, Negatively, by shewing that it does not consist in an utter insensibility of, or unconcernment under an affliction, 488. for he who is so insensible, 1. robs God of that honour he designs to himself from that afflicting dispensation, 489. and, 2. renders every affliction befalling him utterly useless to all spiritual purposes, 489. Nor,

Secondly, does this submission restrain us from praying against any calamity inflicted or approaching, 490. Or,

Thirdly, exclude our endeavours to prevent or remove an affliction, 491.

2dly, Positively, by shewing what this submission is; namely, a quiet composure of the whole man under any calamity, distress, or injury; and requires,

(1.) A submission of the understanding to God, 493.

(2.) A perfect acquiescence of the will, and resignation of it to God's will, 495.

(3.) A composure and serenity in our passions and affections, 497.

(4.) A suppressing of all hard and discontented speeches, 499.

(5.) A restraint of all rage and revenge against such as are the instruments of God, 502.

By way of deduction are inferred three things:

(1.) The worth and excellency of such a submissive, composed frame of spirit, 506.

(2.) The difficulty of attaining to it: which appears, 1. From that opposition which a man is to conquer, 508. 2. From that mean opinion which the generality of men have of such a temper, 509.

(3.) The necessity of an early and long endeavour after it, 511.

II. In shewing the reasons and arguments for this submission, as the suffering person stands related to God, 515.

Every thought which a man can possibly conceive, either of God or of himself, aright, will strongly enforce this duty: but six things in God are particularly instanced for this purpose.

(1.) His irresistible power, 516.

(2.) His absolute, unquestionable dominion and sovereignty over all things, 519.

(3.) His infinite and unfailing wisdom, 521.

(4.) His great goodness, benignity, and mercy to all his creatures, 524.

(5.) His exact and inviolable justice, 527.

(6.) His gracious way of treating all patient and humble sufferers, by turning every thing to their advantage at last, 528.



This submission has three noble qualities, as it stands related to the foregoing considerations.

1. The necessity, 531.
2. The prudence, 533.
3. The decency of it, 536.

The foregoing discourse may teach us an art that all the wisdom of the world cannot teach; which is, by acquiescing cheerfully and entirely in the good pleasure of Almighty God, to make ourselves happy in the most afflicted, abject, and forlorn condition of life, 539.



SERMON XXVI.

JOHN ix. 2, 3.

And his disciples asked him, saying; Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

THE evangelist here presents us with a signal miracle, done by Christ upon a blind man. To advance which in the esteem of believers, and to confirm it against the cavils of atheists, he remarkably sets down that he was blind from his birth: so setting forth the greatness of the cure, from the circumstance of the malady.

A blindness accidentally contracted, as by over much watching, excessive rheums, or a film growing over the eyes, or the like, may sometimes find a remedy from art; but to cure such a blindness as is born with a man, (as one well observes, and as properly expresses it,) *non artis, sed potestatis est*; it is not a work of skill, but an effect of power; not so much the removing of blindness, as the creating of sight. Which did not, as some may atheistically imagine, shew Christ's knowledge in physic, but prove the divinity of his call.

For as it is in the [32d verse](#), *Since the world begun was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.* And, I think, that may be pronounced naturally impossible to be done, of the doing of which, from the very first beginning of nature, there has been no instance.

Now the circumstance of this blindness, thus expressed in the words of the first verse, was the occasion of these words that follow in the two next: in which we have,

1. A question of Christ's disciples.
2. The answer, or rejoinder of Christ.

The disciples' question is contained in these words, *Did this man sin, or his parents, that he was born blind?* The scope and intent of which interrogatory is not agreed upon by all; but the design of the proposal of it may be twofold.

(1.) That they simply and positively proposed it as their opinion, really judging all maladies of the body to come from the antecedent demerit of sin: according to which supposition, looking upon all men's sufferings as the effects of their personal sins; and seeing here, in this man, the evil inflicted before the sin could be committed; they were much gravell'd in resolving how this man's blindness could relate to sin as the meritorious cause. Hereupon they asked, whether God inflicted it *for his own sin, or for the sin of his parents?* which words may be understood two ways.

First, Of sin considered by God as past, and actually committed: and so if we understand it of the parents sin, we know that God sometimes avenges the sin of the parent upon the child; as we find in David, and his child, who died for his murder and adultery.



But if we understand it of sin already committed in his own person, so it savours of the opinion of Pythagoras, then common amongst the Jews, as also at this day, that there is a metempsychosis, or trans migration of souls from one body to another successively; and accordingly as the soul had behaved itself in one body, after the death of it, it was disposed of into another, suitably to its former behaviour: that is, if it had done virtuously, into a body fair and healthful; if viciously, into a body maimed and deformed, as here. So that the soul of this man, for some fault done in that body in which it was before, might be condemned to such a blind habitation as it enjoyed at present.



Secondly, It may be understood of his sin, not as past and committed, but as future and foreknown by God: so that the sense of their question would be, Whether God inflicted this blindness upon him for some offence of his parents, or for some sin of his own, which, while he was yet unborn, God foresaw he would afterwards commit; and for the merit of which foreseen sin he inflicted this severe judgment upon him, as to send him blind into the world, even from his nativity? If they proposed this question as their opinion, it might indifferently be grounded upon either of these acceptations.

(2.) Some think that they did not propose this as their opinion, but only for argument sake; and that, occasioned by a former passage recorded in [John v.](#) where Christ, having healed a man, *bid him go and sin no more, lest a worse evil befall him.* Where upon they collected, that it was Christ's judgment, that every such evil or distemper befell men meritoriously for their sin; but not being able to reconcile this instance with the reason of that opinion, they argued the case with Christ in this dilemma: If every evil befalls men for their sin, then how could this man be blind? for if it were for sin, it must be either for his own sin, or for the sin of his parents: but not for his own sin, because it befell him before his birth, and consequently before he could commit sin; nor yet for his parents' sin, because God had said that the child should not suffer for his father's sin, *but the soul that sinned should die.* Therefore certainly sin is not always the cause why men are sick, afflicted, or unfortunate; but there must be some other cause to which these evils ought to be ascribed, as appears from the example of this man.



Now this sense is also probable, were it not for this, that the argument is founded upon the impossibility of God's punishing the children for the parents; the contrary of which is positively asserted in scripture, as in [Exod. xx. 5](#); where God says, that *he would visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation.* Besides that this way of arguing seems but little agreeable to the modesty and distance becoming disciples, thus to dispute with their master upon the catch; as also too artificial for their abilities, it being well known that they were never bred to the niceties of logic, either in making syllogisms or dilemmas.

The next thing to be considered is Christ's rejoinder, in these words, *Neither did this man sin, nor his parents:* which words must needs be elliptical; and therefore the foregoing

sentence is to be repeated with it, *Neither did this man nor his parents sin, that he was born blind*. Otherwise the words, barely considered, would contradict those scriptures that affirm all men to be sinners. But howsoever words may appear, it is certain that the sense of one scripture cannot contradict the sense of another: besides, the words, *neither did he sin, nor his parents*, can not be understood simply, that he did not sin, but that sin was not the cause of his blindness. Otherwise the answer does not reach the scope of the question, which inquires, not barely whether he sinned, but whether his sin procured him this malady; which Christ, in this answer, appositely denies.

But you will say, Is not the fall of Adam, and our original sin emerging from thence, the cause of all the miseries and diseases that are incident to man kind?

I answer, It is indeed the remote and general cause, or rather the *causa sine qua non*; for were it not for Adam's fall, and for original sin, there would be no such maladies or distempers. But the question here is not of the remote and general cause, but of the proper, particular, and immediate cause of this blindness. And this cannot be original sin; for so, wheresoever it was, it would have this effect; and consequently all men would be born blind, inasmuch as all have original sin; which is absurd, and contrary to experience.

Christ, therefore, having removed the false cause, subjoins the true, *that the works of God should be wade manifest in him*. Some lay an emphasis upon the plural word, that it is not said, *work*, but *works*: for first, in his blindness, God had manifested a work of absolute power; and then, in his restitution, a work of mercy. Some also from hence draw an argument for Christ's divinity, that his *work* is called *the work of God*. But I shall not insist upon these, as neither being very firm in themselves, nor relating to my purpose.

But it may be of some concernment to state the import of the particle *that*, in the Greek ὅτι; whether it denotes the cause, or only the event and consequence of the thing, as in the [39th verse of this chapter](#), *I came into the world, that seeing they might not see*. Where we cannot say, that the hardening of any was the cause or end why Christ came into the world; but an event or consequence, that, through the pravity of their hearts, happened upon his coining. So the manifesting the works of God might not be the cause why this man was born blind, but a thing that occasionally fell out upon his being so.

But still, the common reason of discourse does compel us to measure the sense of the answer by the nature of the question. Now the disciples' question was about the cause of this man's blindness, and therefore Christ's answer must be so too; and not, when they asked him about the cause, to answer them about the consequent of it. This would have been to make them ask Christ one thing, and Christ to resolve them in another: which if he had, though what he said might have been a truth, yet it could not have been an answer. I conclude, therefore, that Christ means, that the manifesting of God's power in this miraculous cure, was the final cause moving God to inflict this blindness upon him from his birth.



And thus there is a way cleared through the exposition of the words, which briefly exhibit to us the erroneous curiosity of the disciples in their pragmatistical inquiry into the reason of God's judgments, and the state of another man's soul. And on the other hand, they shew both the divine knowledge and excellent strain of charity that shined in Christ's reply; in which, by a reprehensive shortness, he both clears the man's innocence, and vindicates God's proceedings, and so states them both upon a right foundation.

I shall now draw forth and prosecute the design of the words in these three propositions.

I. That men are prone to charge God's judgments upon false causes.

II. That not always the sin or merit of the person afflicted, but sometimes the will of God, who afflicts, is the sole and sufficient reason of the affliction.

III. Though God's will and power be a sufficient reason of any evil inflicted upon man, yet he never inflicts it, but for the great end of advancing his own glory; and that usually in the way of their good.

In the prosecution of these it will appear, how each of them is deduced from the text.

I. For the first of these, though it be an universal, drawn from a particular instance of the disciples, yet the reason and principles inducing them thus to judge being common to all, I think the case, though particular, may not illogically yield an universal deduction. Besides, it amounts to an argument drawn *a fortiore*, that if the disciples, who were continually under the nurture and instruction of Christ himself, were yet apt to lash out into such extravagant censures, then certainly other men will be so much more, who have not the advantage of so near an access to his person, nor of such familiar acquaintance with his precepts.

In the handling of this proposition, I shall shew,

1. The false causes to which men are apt to refer God's judgments.
2. The principles inducing them to make such false references.

The causes, in short, are these two.

(1.) Sin on his part that suffers. There is a generation of men who have built their faith upon the ruins of charity, and wholly cried up one, while they sufficiently acted down the other. These, upon the hearing of any judgment or disaster fallen upon any man, immediately second it with these censures; *As for this man, we know that he is a sinner*: for does not God single him out, and expose him as a spectacle to men and angels? Does he not punish him as he did Cain, so as to *mark his sin in his very forehead*?

As soon as ever the blow is given, then they fall to judge and guess at the cause: first they kill, and then condemn; first do execution, and then pass sentence. Certainly such a man is rotten at the heart; otherwise do you think that God would have thus thrown him away? He has not *the power of godliness*; for if he had, would God have seen him stript, plundered, and imprisoned?

And if, perhaps, such an one had been severe to advance discipline and suppress the factious, then, to be sure, they worry him home. Do you not remember how he persecuted



such and such a precious man, such a saint, such a gospel-preaching minister? Now, I think, the vengeance of God has overtook him. Thus, when Cicero, the preserver of his country, was banished by a prevailing faction, then the rabble and rascality of Rome cried out, that the gods revenged his cruelty to Catiline and his companions.

And moreover, according to the example in the text, they will arraign even the dead also, and charge upon a man the sins of his ancestors. Thus the curse must lineally descend from the father to the son, as part of the inheritance: one must be condemned in the other: if the son is miserable, the father, no doubt, was very sinful. Does his estate perish and moulder away? Questionless it is because his father got it by bribery, or extortion, or the like.

Thus the name of the dead, which should be sacred and revered, but always spared, is unchristianly, inhumanly torn and traduced: the poor father, in the mean time, as it were, suffering in his son, and in a manner being executed *in effigie*; and the afflicted son having this further load added to his affliction, to hear the defaming of his deceased father.

But then, when they come also to charge a man's miseries upon his personal sins, how many surmises, presumptions, and whispers, shall there be of his supposed guilt! charging him with such and such secret sins; and those indeed oftentimes so secret, that God himself knows not of them. In short, they do the most unjust thing in the world; they argue what a man has done, by what he suffers.

(2.) The second false cause, on which men charge God's judgments, is hatred on God's part. They argue as Gideon to the angel. If God loved them, how could it be thus with them? For can God torment in love? can he kill with kindness? does the noise of his strokes and the sounding of his bowels speak the same thing? Certainly an enemy's behaviour must needs import an enemy's heart; and the violence of his own actions are caused and influenced by the hatred of his affections.

But such disputers should know, how remote their argument is from the truth: for God may strike, and yet not be angry; and further, he may be angry, and yet not hate. The hand of a father may do the one, and his heart may entertain the other; but to hate a son consists not with that relation. God may smite his creature, and yet tenderly love him at the same time. The air may be clear and wholesome, and yet very sharp. God may register the same name in the book of his eternal election, which he suffers to be proscribed here in the course of his providence: and eternal salvation in another world is very fairly consistent with certain destruction in this. While nothing but storms and tempests encounter a man in these lower regions, there may be a perfect calm and serenity in the mansions above.

But let us sift this argument a little further: we will not from God's outward, earthly favours collect his love, and from the mercies of the left hand argue a title to those of the right. Why then, on the contrary, do we not use the same argument where there is the same reason; and from the severity of God's outward dealings, not conclude the certainty of his hatred?



Solomon argues equally on both sides, *Ecclesiastes ix. 1*; *No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before him*. And he that shall make God's outward, promiscuous providences the marks of his inward affections, will spell that meaning out of them, that neither they signify, nor God intends.

This therefore is the second mistaken cause upon which men are apt to charge the divine judgments; namely, God's hatred of the person whom he so afflicts. If a man is signally brought low, he is presently a reprobate and a castaway, an abomination to the Lord, one whom God has laid aside, and will never use more; which were the terms and language by which many excellent persons were not long since treated by a generation of men, who, by rapine and reformation being possessed of their places and estates, were as bold to promise themselves as sure a perseverance in temporals, as they did in spirituals.

Such persons, when God has done execution upon any, then in a preposterous way they pronounce the sentence, and after he is executed, then set upon him, and condemn him. But blessed be God that he is not forced to write after their dictates, and that man's hatred is not God's. Wherefore we may take shelter in the word of truth, from all such wandering, roving, and impertinent censures. *Prov. xxvi. 2*, *As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying*, and I may add, as such men by judging; *so the curse causeless shall not come*, unless perhaps upon the head of those who thus pronounce it; but then it ceases to be causeless.

2. The second thing is, to shew the principles inducing men thus to charge God's judgments upon false causes; and these are three.

(1.) The fallibility of the rule, and the falseness of the opinion by which they judge. The rule is providence, and the opinion is, that God's providence is an evidence of his love. For the first, in this they lay the ground of necessary error: for he must equally err who follows a false rule, and who follows none. Now a rule, in the nature of it, implies certainty; and certainty in actions consists in a perpetual infallible repetition of the same instance, at least supposing the same circumstances.

But now God's providence, though it is certain to him, all the windings and varieties of it being clearly and infallibly represented to his omniscience, yet to us it is uncertain, as not always producing the same instances in the same cases. Such an one is in a strait, and prays, and is delivered: but is this a rule for me to judge, that whosoever is in the same strait, and prays, shall meet with the same deliverance? Experience shews the contrary, and there is no confuting of experience. In short, providences cannot be brought under any general rule, except only this, that they are according to God's will; which will is not revealed, and therefore cannot be known till the event declares it.

And as for the opinion that is founded upon this rule, that God's love and hatred are writ upon his providential dealings; it is not only to be denied as false, but to be detested as impious and uncharitable, as that which tends to extirpate brotherly love and civil converse out of the world.



For since even nature will convince us, that our love ought to follow God's love, and our hatred to second his, wheresoever he is pleased to fix it; then collecting God's love where I see a man prosper, I must love him too, which indeed is profitable; and on the other side, concluding his hatred where I see any low and afflicted, I am engaged to hate him too, which indeed is safe; but neither of them is Christian, humane, or indeed tolerable.

Besides, those that are the most liberal in judging by this rule, when the instance comes to be made in themselves, they will admit it only by halves, and cut off one half by exception. For if they prosper, then it is an argument of God's love; but if those whom they hate prosper, they will ascribe that to chance. If their enemies are afflicted, then God's judgments argue his hatred; but if themselves are brought low, judgments then are but only chastisements, or at the most casual contingents.

Nay, by this prevarication with their own opinion, they will elude and slip out of any argument that can be brought against them from providence. For when they flourish in the world, they say, this is the witness of providence sealing to their saintship and the justness of their doings: but if things go cross, why then they say, it is the lot of the saints to suffer affliction. So that you see it is impossible to lay hold of them either way.

There is no reason therefore, if they cannot bear the inconvenience of the utmost latitude of their own rule retorted upon themselves, that it should be admitted to bind others. For if it do not hold in all, the obligation cannot reasonably be forced upon any. But besides the apparent folly of it, if the external procedures of God's providence be the rule to measure his love or hatred by, then it cannot be avoided but that the rich and powerful have the fairest plea for heaven, and the martyrs the shrewdest marks of reprobation.

(2.) The second principle, inducing men thus to misplace God's judgments, is their inability in discerning, joined with their confidence in pronouncing. For can those that are slow to apprehend, and hasty to give sentence, be imagined likely to pass a right judgment? But the latter temper is usually attended with the former; forwardness to speak, with slowness to apprehend: for indeed it is not only attended with, but caused by it; rashness being the effect of shallowness; and because men understand not the intricacies of a providence, they are bold and sudden in their sentence. *Qui ad pauca respicit, de facili pronunciat.* Where they cannot untie the knot by severe scrutiny, they presently cut it asunder by a sharp censure.

Men who arrogate to themselves an apostolic spirit, and look upon themselves as dictators in religion, and think they see through all God's dealings, whereas they have the same infirmities and weakness of understanding with other men, and have no greater supernatural helps and revelations; yet joining the former confidence with this weakness, no wonder if they mangle God's dealings, and fling about blessings and curses at random; often blessing where God curses, and cursing where he blesses.

But let us see into what ridiculous censures ignorance acted with rashness betrays men. In [Acts xxviii. 3](#), the barbarians, who doubtless looked upon themselves as no ordinary

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persons in judging of such things, when they saw the viper fastening on Paul's hand, after that he had escaped shipwreck in the fourth verse, see how judiciously they interpret that strange accident! They said amongst themselves, *No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.* Here they quickly found out the matter; Paul *was a murderer*; the case is clear, for the viper fastened upon his hand; and it seems all that are seized upon by vipers must of necessity be murderers. But now, what if Paul shakes off the viper without any harm, as it fell out that he did, why then in the [sixth verse](#), when they saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, *and said that he was a god.* And this as wisely as the other.

A strange turn, you will say, both of their opinion and of Paul's condition; from one that deserved not to live, to one that could not die. This is like the heathens deifying of Mars, from a murderer to make him a god. Thus we see how they interpreted providences; and the truth is, those that interpret them alike, will also judge like barbarians, not like Christians, but make a man a god and a murderer the same hour; a saint to-day, and a reprobate to-morrow. We see, therefore, that this proceeding is both impious and ridiculous; and those who take this course, do not so much interpret God's judgments, as shew the defect of their own.

(3.) The third principle, inducing men to misplace God's judgments, is the inbred malice of our nature. There is a spice of brutish envy in most, and a sordid jealousy for their own good upon the sight of another man's, which causes them to make morose, unpleasing reflections upon all events, and even to lose truth while they pursue their humour. This temper, mixed of jealousy and malice, is that which makes these two odious actions so familiar to men, to suspect and misjudge.

Now what an unhandsome face must be set upon God's providences, measured by an understanding so weak, that it cannot, and a temper so partial, that it will not judge rightly, is apparent. It bends them to its own obliquity; and that which passes through a crooked thing, must needs contract a crookedness in the passage. This temper of mind causes men, in all their censures of providence, not to speak God's actions, but their own wishes. They desire, that every affliction of their adversary were sent by God in hatred, and therefore they will vote it so in their apprehensions. When a man's professed enemy is his judge, whatsoever his cause is, you may foresee the sentence.

The will has prejudged the case, before ever it comes to the understanding; and when there is any malicious averseness in that, as it is seldom but there is, judgment cannot be committed to a worse hand. For the will is both a blind and a commanding faculty, and therefore has the two worst of qualities in conjunction, not to discern, and yet to domineer. And certainly, when this interprets providences, they cannot but be direful; and he who is censured, very unhappy, when God must be angry with him as often as his adversary is pleased to be malicious.



There is scarce any thing in the world so entirely bad, but may be much qualified by a fair acceptance; and nothing so absolutely good, but may be detorted and soiled at least by a malign interpreter. What can be more beautiful, perfect, and equal, than the ways and works of the omnipotent, all-wise God? And yet what more harsh, unequal, and destructive, when they are in the dispensing of men, and distributed to each man by his enemy! They are like the rain, which falls pure from heaven, but arriving to the earth, turns into mud. Even the divine dealings are not privileged from the prejudices of malice; but God's works are like his words, liable to be wrested: malice is the bias of the soul, that sways it in all its operations.

To judge properly is to apply a rule, and a mind possessed with malice is under great disturbances; so that a malicious person is as fit and able to make a right judgment of things, as a shaking hand to take exact measures; or a person that is drunk, to study the mathematics, and to resolve problems.

And when the decrees of Heaven shall be examined by the partiality of perverse, malicious, and discontented persons, we must expect nothing else, but the ugly issues of passion, darkness, and confusion.

And thus I have shewn the principles inducing men to pass false and uncomely sentences upon God's judgments. For the first inevitable foundation of this erroneous judging, is the uncertainty of the rule by which they judge: but supposing the rule were certain, yet there follows weakness in the understanding attended with rashness, that makes it unable to apply the rule. And lastly, though both the rule were certain, and the understanding apprehensive and steady; yet there being malice in the will to pervert the intellect in its sentencing God's judgments, it follows, that we have always almost false and deformed reports made concerning God's dealings with men. Whence it is, that there never happens any calamity, but the suffering is by this redoubled; men suffering by the uncharitableness, God by the falseness of the censure.

And thus much for the first proposition.

II. I proceed now to the second, viz. That not always the sin or merit of the person afflicted, but the will of God that afflicts, is sometimes the sole, but always the sufficient reason of the affliction.

That this is so, is apparent from several scriptures; and to produce one instead of all, see the whole series of Job's sufferings resolved into this, and that by the impartial determination of God himself. His friends charged him sometimes with the sins of his life, sometimes with the hypocrisy of his heart; but still they rested upon this as a certain maxim, *that God never smites, but for sin*; which was the sum of all their discourses. But God confutes this strange divinity, declaring withal his severe anger against them, [Job xlii. 7](#), because *they had not said that which was right of him, as his servant Job had*. So that we have the testimony



of the Father in the Old Testament, ratified by the testimony of the Son in the New, that God does not always afflict for sin.

And here we must observe a necessary distinction between punishments and afflictions. Punishment is properly the evil of sufferance for the evil of sin: and therefore is always founded in the merit of some precedent sin, inherent or imputed. But affliction is only God's bringing the evil of pain upon the creature, whatsoever the cause may be for which he does it. So that we see, though every punishment include in it affliction, yet every affliction is not convertibly a punishment.

Now, since this may seem to grate hard upon human nature, which cannot but love itself; I shall clear this proceeding of God from injustice, upon these reasons.

1. The first shall be drawn from his absolute, unaccountable dominion and sovereignty over the creature. God is an absolute lord over all things: and we know, even in earthly kingdoms, as here in ours, it is a received maxim in the law, *regem nec errare posse, nec cuiquam injuriam facere*. God has as much power over his laws, as over his subjects; and he that has a right over all things can do no injury: and he that cannot go against a law, can do no wrong; as he that cannot tread out of his own land, can commit no trespass. So that the creature, upon no suffering whatsoever, can implead his Maker. He that *can* do what he will, *may* do what he will: for the supreme law is the will of the supreme power.

Let not therefore any think, that God must fetch a licence for his actings from our merit or demerit. *Sic rolo, sic jnbeo*, howsoever tyrannical and intolerable from men, yet, uttered by God, is the greatest reason in the world. As God's truth is the reason of our faith, so his will is the reason into which we must resolve our obedience. Those, who can stand upon terms with God, and question and arraign his proceedings, manifest but low and unworthy thoughts of the infinite, essential majesty of his nature, and too arrogant apprehensions of their own.

Do we not see, amongst ourselves, the owner use his cattle as he pleases, employ them as he thinks fit, keep what he will alive, kill what he will, and in what manner he will; and all this without any injury to them, only by virtue of a grant and charter from both his and their Maker? And yet they are his fellow-creatures, and the distance between them is not considerable; neither is the good of man the utmost end of these creatures, which he makes such a free use of. What shall we then say of the power of God himself to dispose of men? little, finite, obnoxious things of his own making? Is not his right over them inconceivably greater? May he not, as an absolute monarch, pull down whom he pleases, and whom he pleases set up? And who can tax the reason of his proceeding in all this?

That which has its being only for another, may be used, preserved, destroyed, as may best advance that thing, to which, both in being and well-being, it is subservient. Were I as free from sin as Adam in his innocence, and had never in the least provoked the curse of the law, and God should be pleased to smite me with all the pains and plagues that torture

the body, and should divest me of all livelihood, and reduce me to hunger, nakedness, and the rage and scorn of my enemies, and fill my mind with as much horror and despair as could consist with a being, and after that throw me into eternal flames; I might say indeed, I was ruined, but not injured: neither could I therefore be charged as sinful, because God is pleased to deal with me as if I were. And these dealings of God, if you would give them their right and proper name, cannot be called cruel, but strange; unusual indeed, but not unrighteous. Now this consideration may regulate the behaviour of one man to another, and of all towards God: for if the dealings of God do not presuppose the merit of our sin, then we cannot charge any man as sinful, because he suffers. And then also, since God has an absolute dominion, he, who suffers, cannot charge God, who afflicts, as unjust; for God's laws are intended for the rule of our actions, not his own.

2. The second reason may be drawn from the essential equity of God's nature. The practice of justice, on man's part, is indeed at the free choice of his will; but God's is fixed in the necessity of his being. And though God cannot be subject to any positive law, as springing from the sole determination of his own will, yet his nature is to him instead of a law: that is to say, as the creature is, by a law, both obliged and directed to do well; so the native rectitude of the divine will necessarily determines him to the exactest proportions of justice in all his actions.

An absolute power in men is, for the most part, sinful and injurious; because of the imperfection of their will, which is not able to bound the exorbitances of that power: and if it does not prove actually the cause of sin, yet it is always a temptation to it. But God's dominion is so absolute, as to be also infinite; and to be infinite in one perfection, of necessity draws after it an infinity in all others. And therefore, having proved an infinite power, by that very thing we prove an infinite justice: wherefore we are not necessarily to seek for the reasonableness of God's transacting with man, from any thing that man has done well or ill; but to place the ground of his actions within himself.

It is confessed there are some astonishing passages in Providence, and such as are above the weak logic and narrow maxims of the creature; so that to reconcile them to justice has nonplused the wisest and most sanctified persons. [Jeremiah xii. 1](#), *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? &c.* And David, we read, stumbled against the same stone; *his foot had well nigh slipped*, [Psalm lxxiii. 2, 3](#). And parallel to the prosperity of the wicked has been the affliction of the righteous, which has always been a problem of as hard resolution as the other.

This is certain, that God is infinitely just, whether or no we apprehend how he is so. It is impossible for God to do any thing but what is right; but it is very possible for us, who are weak and fallible at the best, not always to discern it. When we think his ways are imper-

fect, we should remember, that the imperfection is only in our understanding. It is not the ground or the trees that turn round; but the truth is, we are giddy, and think so.

For us, in all God's dealings, to acknowledge the undoubted equity of his principles, and our ignorance of his methods, is not only humility, but philosophy; for it shews that we have arrived to the top of knowledge, even to understand both God and ourselves. Much to contemplate in God, frequently to consider him, and study his nature, though we do it but as philosophers, is a sovereign way to be satisfied and resolved about the reason of all his actions. Because I cannot see the light, shall I say, that the sun does not shine? There may be many reasons that may hinder me. Something may cover the eye, or the clouds may cover the sun, or it may be in another horizon, as in the night; but it is impossible for the sun, as long as it is a sun, not to shine.

Now this tends to compose men's doubts, and to confute their murmurings, and to set God clear in their esteem, upon supposition of any of his dealings whatsoever. For although God's ways are intricate and unsearchable, yet we may undertake to give a reason of them so far, as to take off the cavil and the reprehension, though not the wonder.

Wherefore, when such difficulties occur, we should remember to cast one eye upon God's absolute power, and the other upon his essential righteousness; through the former of which, he may do what he will, through the latter he cannot will any thing but what is just.

3. The third reason is from the unerring, all-disposing wisdom of God. Though God's actings may seem confused, and his judgments misplaced; yet they are managed by such an infinitely wise contrivance, that, could we take a view of them as they lay disposed in God's counsel, and compare the design with the proceeding, we should confess, that they were put into the most beautiful, exact, and orderly frame that could be. Sometimes the destruction of particular natures tends to preserve and advance the universal. As a monstrous, misshapen thing is, in itself, most deformed; but could we have a sight of the whole universe, and see how this ugly thing stood related to -those which were perfect and comely, we should acknowledge, that how soever it did misbecome itself, yet it did adorn the world.

We see God's judgments pursuing and overtaking a man in his righteousness: let us now murmur, and say, How can God justly afflict the up right? lint let us acquiesce in the rational acknowledgment of this, that God's wisdom may outreach ours. We see the dispensation, but we do not see the design of it; and therefore let us suspend our censure.

If we should see a goldsmith cutting, breaking, or filing a piece of gold, and come and say to him, Friend, what do you mean to spoil your gold? Do you not know the value of what you thus cut and file away? What a ridiculous question would this be to him, who knows that in what we call *spoil*, he pursues the rational purposes of his own art; that to the excellence of the metal, he may also add the curiousness of the figure? But now is it not, think you, much more ridiculous for such blind, silly worms as we, to call God's works to

an account? and to censure whatsoever thwarts our humour, or transcends our apprehensions?

God has put darkness under his feet, that we can not spy out his ways; but his wisdom gives us good security for their reasonableness. The greatest artificers, we know, will often, even in the day-time, immure themselves in a dark room, and work by a candle: and what wonder is it, if God is more careful to conceal the arts and mysteries of his providence from the inquisitive eye of those, whose duty is to admire, rather than to understand them? It is one great piece of art, to conceal art.

God delights to pose and baffle the bold reasons of men with the riddles of his actions; to try their humility, where their discernment fails; and to lead them, by an implicit faith in the wisdom of the doer, where they see not the reason of the work. Let therefore the consideration of the divine wisdom be a third ground to warrant the righteousness of God's strangest actions, beyond all human exception. And this naturally introduces the third proposition, viz.

III. Though God's will and power be a sufficient reason of any evil inflicted upon men, yet he never inflicts it, but for the great end of advancing his glory, and that usually in the way of their good.

This is sufficiently clear in the present instance: for God inflicted a native blindness upon this poor man, not only because he might, and because he would, but that afterwards, by this wonderful removal of it, both the Messiah should be discovered, and himself and others should have a pregnant occasion of being converted to him, the advantage of which was infinite. And questionless, the man had cause to congratulate himself this fortunate affliction: for had it not been for this blindness, he might have been like the rest of the Jews, *having eyes*, but *not seeing* nor *perceiving*, but remaining spiritually blind and obstinate. And to have open eyes, but a sealed heart, would have been like a window opened in the night-time, which, however it was open, would have let in no light. But by this unusual providence, Christ takes occasion to dart a beam of saving light into his understanding, and so gave him cause of ever blessing God for that bodily affliction, which was the happy occasion of such a spiritual deliverance.

Now this glorious design of God, in bringing these calamities on men, is expressed in those words of the text, *that the works of God might he made manifest in him*. And the works that God intends thus to glorify are usually these.

1. The miraculous works of his power. Had not God suffered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to be cast into the furnace, he had not had that opportunity to have convinced the heathen of that power, which was able to overrule and control natural agents in their most necessary operations; to countermand the burning in the midst of the flame; and when the furnace was seven degrees hotter, to cause it to operate below the degree of four. God sometimes by his power inflicts a sickness, that he may shew a miracle in the cure. That



God decreed so many years cruel bondage to the Israelites, it was the absolute, entire resolve of his own will, not their merit: for it was foretold by God to Abraham, long before they had any being, and therefore before they could merit any such doom by their sin. But then it was to usher in those stupendous miracles, by which God professed to get himself a name, and transmit a never-dying awe and renown of his power to all posterity. He was (as I may so say) now building himself a pyramid in the midst of Egypt: and what if he was so long afflicting his people, and took so great a compass of time to prepare himself a name, that was to last to eternity!

26

Now what man is there, that can arm himself with reason and submission, who would refuse to be miserable, when his misery is matter of God's glory? He is made by this a kind of sharer with God; for as long as God's action shall be spoke of, he also shall be mentioned as the subject of it. For in all curious works, the matter upon which they are wrought wears some of the glory of the artificer; and there is no admiring the image, but you must also see the wood, stone, or metal upon which it is carved.

Besides, in the things that we are discoursing of, it is not pain that is misery, but the sting of sin that envenoms it; for sin is not only the sting of death, but also of every affliction; and take but away this sting, the serpent may bite, but he cannot poison us. It is rare to see the notions of the very heathen about this. Cicero, speaking of Regulus, who, I think, suffered as much as man could well suffer, says, that in the midst of all those torments, Regulus could not properly be called miserable; because he neither procured nor bore them sinfully. Hence brutes are not properly capable of misery, because not of sin. The poor beast or fowl that is torn, hunted, and slaughtered, is not miserable; but he that slaughters and devours him for his luxury and his sin, he is properly and truly miserable: he has the misery, though the other has the pain.

27

And there is as much difference between a man's suffering for God's pleasure, and for his own sin, as there is between burning upon the altar, and burning in hell. So long therefore as the creature suffers barely from God's will and for his glory, he is only made to quit his own pleasure, to serve a greater and a better; and this is not his misery, but his privilege.

2. The other works that God manifests are the works of his grace. The word *ἐν* signifies not only *in*, but *upon*, or *about*. And I have thought good to husband the sense so, as to take in both acceptations. In the former I shewed, that God took such strange courses, to glorify his miraculous works *upon* men. I shall now shew, that he takes these ways sometimes to glorify his gracious works *within* them. We know the bowels of the earth are rent and torn, before the riches of the earth can be discovered.

Grace would lie dormant and concealed, did not God sometimes employ as strange a power to discover, as he does to infuse it. How could that excellent spirit and ruling wisdom, that Joseph was endued with, have shined forth to the world, had he not been led through such a maze and compass of troubles and distracting afflictions by the special disposal of

Providence? God's power might have warranted the whole proceeding; for when he sold him to the Egyptians, he only sold what, upon the best terms of propriety in the world, was his own. When he put him into prison, and the dungeon, we know, that even the supreme power amongst men may, for some causes, imprison those that are not guilty: and who knows but this imprisonment of Joseph was not so much intended for a punishment as a preservative; for a temptation may be repulsed once and again, and yet rally and return, and prevail at last.

28

But God, in all this, drove at a divine purpose. He had conferred great gifts, illustrious faculties upon Joseph, and therefore was resolved not to lose the glory of their discovery. And was it not worthy his being hated of his brethren, and being sold out of his country, to give such a noble example of fidelity and chastity, as to stand a monument of it in holy writ, for the admiration and imitation of all following ages? Was not the iron and the dungeon tolerable, when it was a means to shew forth that spirit to the world, which made Joseph the possessor of it, next to Pharaoh; and declared the God of Joseph, the giver of it, to be above him? The truth is, neither those that sold, nor those to whom they did sell him, but Joseph who was sold, had the best bargain.

We have shewn, that it was not for Job's sin that God afflicted him; but because he was freely pleased to do so: yet there was a reason of this pleasure, which was, to discover that grace of patience, given him by God, to the astonishment of the world, and the confutation of the Devil; whom we find so impudent as to bear God down to his face, that he had never a servant in the world who would suffer such things from him, without sinning against him. And was it not worth the sitting upon a dunghill, and seeing his substance scattered, his children struck dead, and himself mocked in his misery, to vindicate the honour of that God, who gave him all these things, from the Devil, the true common enemy? and to be recorded as a mirror of patience to all posterity? and to convince the world that there is something in virtue better than possessions, truer than friends, and stronger than Satan? Though this dealing was not an effect of God's vindictive justice, but of his absolute power; yet it equally served both God's glory and Job's advantage.

29

For had it not been for this, he had lost that experience of his own temper, and of the malice of the Devil, and the baseness of his friends, and of the goodness of God, and the uncertainty of the world: he had lost also that overplus of wealth that he had in the end: and lastly, if nothing else, he had lost the pleasure of being freed from such sorrows.

Thus God suffered Moses to be unworthily dealt with by his brethren, and oftentimes afflicted by the unruly rebellions of the Israelites; not to punish his sin, but to manifest his meekness, and consequently to glorify the power that gave it. For we must know that there are some graces which cannot be exercised, at least not manifested, but in calamities: as we cannot see a man's patience, unless he is afflicted; nor his meekness, unless he is affronted.

No wonder therefore, if every afflicting dispensation cannot be ascribed to sin; for sometimes it is so far from this, that it comes from the contrary. And I think I have made it appear, that though sin only can be the cause of punishment, yet even grace itself may be the occasion of an affliction.

The use and improvement of the doctrine hitherto discussed, shall be a confutation and reproof of the bold, uncharitable interpreters of God's providences. A reproof cannot be better bestowed than upon an unjust reprover, nor charity more shewn, than in a just reprehension of those who have none.

What strange reports have we had in these late times about prodigies, in which indeed nothing was so prodigious as the falseness of the report! What monstrous births has the world lately seen, begot by discontent, brought forth by malice, and fostered by credulity! What unreasonable, unchristian censures! Such an one for being of such a way, that is, perhaps, for following his conscience and the church, is fallen sick, another dead, another struck suddenly; in most of which, the very matter of the report has been contrary. And if people talk of judgments, I think it is a great judgment to be delivered over to report lies, and yet a greater to believe them.

But suppose things were really so, and that the very curse of Egypt were come upon us, even so far as to have one struck dead in every family; yet who art thou, O man, that durst to pry into the secrecies of thy Maker's proceedings? or condemn another's servant, who stands or falls to his own master? How dares any man put his own sense upon God's actions? which, though it may happen to be true in itself, yet is certainly uncharitable in him; and that man will one day find it but a poor gain, who hits upon truth, with the loss of charity.

Let us rather apply this resolve of Christ, in the words of the text, to all the rugged instances of Providence. Does God think fit to banish and afflict a Joseph? and yet it is not for his own or his father's sin, but for his own honour, and his father's sustenance, and to fit him to rule, and to save a kingdom. Do we see Providence send a blast upon our neighbour's estate, or a fire upon his house? Perhaps that fire is not so much to consume the house, as to try the man; to destroy the possession, as to refine the owner.

God, peradventure, thinks fit to afflict a Job, and to exalt a dunghill; but what reason have I to descant upon the action, when I am ignorant of the purpose which directed it? Let us leave God to himself. It is possible that, though we judge never so right, God may not approve our judgments; and it is certain that he cannot need them. Or shall we confess God's ways to be *unsearchable* and *past finding out*; and yet, at the same time, attempt to give a reason of them, and so to the arrogance add a contradiction?

Cur bonus male, et malis bene, was the grand old difficulty that has exercised the learned men and philosophers of all ages; and if experience or reason could have decided it, they had as great a share of both, as we can pretend to. But now we, having the superadded light

of God's word, cannot excuse ourselves, if we inherit their doubts, and seek for any other reason of the dispensation besides the will of the dispenser.

But that I may reduce a general reason to a particular instance, I would have those seraphic masters of reason, who think themselves able to bring all God's providences even under demonstration, clear up and demonstrate to me this one passage of it, viz. Why the best of kings, and the most innocent, virtuous, and truly religious, that we find in history ever sat upon a throne, was yet rebelled against, imprisoned, mocked, tried, and condemned, and at last cut off by his own subjects before his own palace: and his murderer, who had violated all laws human and divine, broke all oaths, oppressed the state, torn in pieces the church, defied God and disturbed his neighbours, should reign in his stead peaceably and successfully, and at length die in his bed; and, for a conclusion of all, be magnificently interred. Let them, I say, give a competent reason for all this, and if they cannot, let them stand and adore, and not pretend to interpret.

In the mean time this peremptory way of judging, as it is highly odious to God upon many accounts, so more peculiarly is it so for the cursed cause of it, curiosity; for it is this which, above all other qualities, makes men presume to look into the ark, and therefore will be sure to provoke God to strike. Curiosity, in the true nature of it, is and may be properly accounted the incontinence of the mind, and but one remove from the rebellion of it; as breaking through all the bounds God has set about the secrets of his counsel. So that, next to the disputing of God's revealed will, the greatest invasion, doubtless, that can be made upon his royal prerogative, is to intrude into his secret.

To whom be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, &c. Amen.



SERMON XXVII.

PSALM cxxx. 4.

But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

AFTER man had once sinned, and so was for ever disabled to stand before God upon terms of the law, which spoke nothing but irrecoverable death to him who transgressed in the least iota, and so carried more thunder in its curse, than it did in its promulgation; had God continued this inexorable sentence, and held man irreversibly under the doom which he incurred; since there is in every thing by nature an indelible principle of self-preservation, and consequently a love to all things that advance its being and comply with its happiness, and an hatred to whatsoever would destroy it: such a remorseless behaviour in God, meeting with such a principle in man, would of necessity have wrought in him these two things.

1. Horror of despair.
2. Height of malice.

1. For the first of these, it would have reduced him to horror of despair. When a man sees an omnipotence against him, and knows that an unchangeable God has sworn his destruction, nature must needs despond, all the doors of hope, all the avenues of comfort, being stopped; so that his misery admits no possibility of the least relief, no, not so much as of a reprieve.

The thoughts dwell, and as it were brood upon those sad representations of a punishment not to be borne, and yet not to be avoided. He knows the sin to be committed, and that therefore it cannot be recalled: he also sees God implacable, and that therefore it cannot be forgiven. Hereupon he throws up all, and sinks under the burden.

He is like a man in the midst of the sea: which way soever he looks, he sees nothing but air and water before him, no land upon which to save or repose himself. And in this case we have the verdict of God himself, [Isai. lvii. 16](#), *That if he should always be angry, if he should contend for ever, the spirit would fail before him, and the souls which he had made.*

Now, in this condition of despair, man would have been utterly unserviceable to God, as being wholly incapable of those motives by which the creature is drawn to his service.

For every man is brought to duty, either by the engagement of some reward, some good that is to follow his performance; but this has no influence upon him, who believes that his condition shall never be better: or he must be moved to duty by the fear of some evil, that will pursue the omission of it; but neither can this work any thing upon him who knows his condition can never be worse.

Hereupon he is utterly careless, obstinately regard less of his happiness or salvation; inasmuch as no man either does or can seriously intend or endeavour what he apprehends an impossibility.



2. Together with this horror of despair succeeds also height of malice. God indeed is infinitely amiable in himself, made up of a confluence of the most endearing perfections; there is nothing in him but what is the object of love and the allurements of desire.

But inasmuch as we cannot view him here by an immediate inspection of his nature, but as he readies us by his works and effects; which as they either gratify or afflict us, do accordingly move in us suitable affections: it is impossible for any man to apprehend God his irreconcilable enemy, and at the same time not to hate him. Whatsoever is destructive is also odious. What makes the devils prosecute God with a direct hatred, but that they apprehend their destruction remediless? And put man in the same condition with them, and his malice will be the same with theirs.

For this is not an affection that depends upon the freedom of man's will, but it streams from him by a necessary egress of nature; it is as unconquerable as antipathy. When a man sees a thing evil and hurtful to his being, he hates it not by choice, but by the constraint of his first inclinations. As it is impossible for a man not to disbelieve what he knows to be false, so it is equally impossible for him not to hate and abhor what he apprehends to be hurtful. *Thou shalt love thy friend, and hate thy enemy*, is a principle writ and engraven in every heart by the finger of nature. And God, as a Creator, has put that into the heart of man which will force him to hate God himself as an enemy.

Clothe God with vengeance, arm him with terror, and represent him implacable, and at the same time shut all the passages of escape, by which a guilty person may run from him, and secure himself; and you shall see, that, with the forced fortitude of despair, he will defy him, curse him, and fly in his face, and proportion his hatred, not to the finiteness of his own nature, but enlarge it to the infinity of God's, whom he hates. In [Revel. xvi. 11](#), we read of those who blasphemed God, because of their pains and their sores.

That God is to be served, and virtue to be loved for themselves, sequestered from all consideration of advantage to the persons that do so, is a maxim, I am afraid, more glorious in the notion, than true in the experiment. For it is the voice of human nature in all man's actions, *Who will shew us any good?*

And if a man finds himself ruined or tormented, he considers only the evil that he feels, and not the hand from which it comes. And he hates as heartily for the execution, whether his father or the hangman be the executioner.

Now the case standing thus, that God might not eternally lop off so great and so worthy a part of the creation, nor for ever bereave himself of the service of mankind, by keeping them, like the devils, in eternal defiance of himself, and under a necessity of abusing an immortal soul and an excellent nature, to the dishonours of sin and the certainty of damnation:



He was pleased to relax the rigours of justice, and, after the terror of the sentence, to issue out the promulgation of pardon; not only amiable in itself, but made so much more, by the vicinity of destruction.

Thus the darkness not only gives place, but also commendation to the day; the horrors of the night setting off the returns of the morning; and despair itself quickens the relish and heightens the fruition of an after-deliverance.

Here therefore, in these words, we have God assuming to himself the most endearing description, arrayed with the robes of mercy, and holding forth the golden sceptre of pardon; the terrors of majesty being swallowed up in the sweetness of mercy, and justice disappearing in the abyss of compassion.

The words consist of these two parts.

I. A declaration of mercy in these words, *There is forgiveness with thee.*

II. The end of such a declaration, which is fear and obedience; *There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*

I. We shall begin with the former of these, *God's forgiveness*; which being here so signally attributed to God, certainly must needs carry in it something very great and notable. And the greatness of it we shall display in the consideration of these three things.

(1.) The principle from which it flows.

(2.) The sins that are the subject-matter of it.

(3.) The persons upon whom it shews and lays out itself.

(1.) For the first of these, the cause and principle from which this forgiveness proceeds. It is from God's εὐδοκία, from the free, spontaneous motion of his good pleasure. Which that we may make out the more clearly, it will require something a larger discussion.

We must here observe in the words of the text, that though some read it *condonatio*, *forgiveness*, yet others read it *propitiatio*, which signifies *atonement*; and indeed the Greek is ἰλασμός, which signifies properly *propitiatio aut placatio*. And so the word imports both forgiveness itself, and the cause of it; which is an atonement through the satisfaction of a mediator.

It has been much disputed, whether God punishes sin freely, or by the necessity of his nature; so that he cannot, by a free act of pardon, pass it over with out satisfaction.

And here the question is not concerning God as he lies under the present obligation of his own decree and word, by which he has positively declared that he will not acquit the guilty without satisfaction; for this engages him to do so upon the score of his veracity. But the question is, whether God, considered barely in his nature, without any engagement from his own word or decree, but merely by virtue of his justice, be so forced to punish sin, that, without the interposal of a satisfaction, he cannot pardon it; or whether the exercise of his justice be so free, that, by his absolute prerogative, he may pardon it without any atonement.



There are arguments on both sides: but the best of the school-divines, and the greatest masters of controversy, so assert God's justice, as also to maintain his prerogative, by which he may at his pleasure either punish, or, without satisfaction, pardon the sinner.

And for this, amongst many other reasons, these may be given.

1. If it be free to God to remit the degrees of punishment, then it must be free for him also to remit the whole punishment. But the former all grant, and the consequence is evident, because every degree is of the same nature with the whole; and justice not only exacts punishment, but exacts it also in the very utmost degree: so that if God may dispense with one, he may by the same reason dispense with the other.

2. If God could shew the highest act of mercy to the sinner, before any satisfaction was given him, then he might also pardon sin without it. The consequence is clear, because the highest act of mercy (if any thing) is sufficient for the pardon of sin: and that he could do the former is evident from this, that God first found out and provided a satisfaction for the sin of man, than which there could not be an higher instance of his love and mercy. Nay, it is greater goodness, upon his own free motion to provide the sinner with a satisfaction, than to pardon his sins, that satisfaction being made.

3. If God punished sin by a necessary egress of his justice, then he must punish it to the utmost that justice requires, and the utmost that the sin deserves. But this is evidently false; for so every man, upon the commission of his sin. without any delay or respite, must immediately be damned. The reason is, because sin deserves, that immediately, and upon the very first moment after its commission, execution be done upon the sinner.

4. Add to this, in the fourth place, that our sins are debts; but every creditor has absolute and free power, without any payment being made, to remit the debt, and discharge the debtor.

Besides, God being absolute sovereign, has power over his own law, to pardon any breach or violation of it. Neither as a governor is he bound to see the injury done to the community by the sin revenged by the punishment. For though earthly governors are obliged to this, yet God is not, because he is not, as they are, only a trustee, but also the proprietor of all things under his government; so that there is no right of community distinct from his own. For, as both the schoolmen and civilians most truly affirm, *in Deo sunt jura omnia*. And then nature asserts this freedom to every one, that he may quit and recede from his own right: for indeed he is sole and absolute lord and owner of it.

And thus I have proved God's natural freedom, either in punishing or forgiving sin; but yet, as to the economy of God's present proceedings, we must know, that God, by his own word and decree, having tied up his liberty, he cannot now forgive sin with out a satisfaction. And therefore, according to the various readings of the text, *propitiatio* must go before *condonatio*; and there must be *atonement* before there can be *forgiveness*.



But now there is a sect of men who peremptorily deny, that Christ satisfied God's justice for the sins of men: and, amongst other arguments, much insist upon this, that God is said freely to have forgave us our sins. And they say, that a free forgiveness of sin, and a satisfaction for sin, are inconsistent, inasmuch as one excludes the other; for no man can be said freely to remit, or pardon a debt, when the debtor, either by himself or his surety, has made him full payment.

In answer to this, it must be confessed, that the reconcilement of these two is not so easy as some may imagine. But all that either is or can be said in this matter amounts to this:

That the forgiveness of our sins is not totally and in every respect a free pardon and remission. But only in respect of those from whom this satisfaction is not in their own persons exacted: now, inasmuch as they pay nothing to God's justice for their discharge, it is a free remission to them.

If it be replied, that it cannot be called a free remission, since, as to the nature of a payment, it is all one, whether it be made by a man in his own person, or in the person of his surety: to this I answer, that it is so, when a man provides himself of a surety, and by his own means procures the payment. But here, since God freely of himself, and by his own contrivance, provides a surety for man, all that is done or paid by that surety is in respect of man a free remission. In short, when the creditor provides himself of a payment, without the least recourse or trouble to the debtor; it is as to the debtor a free absolution, at least equivalent to it.

And therefore, though God, in the pardon of sin, would so fairly comport with all his attributes, as to do it without injury or detriment to his justice; yet even in the satisfaction of that, he shews forth the glory of his other attribute, his mercy, in these two respects.

First, in the relaxation of the law, which required of every sinner a satisfaction in his own person. It did not only denounce death to sin, but it ran thus: *The soul that sinneth shall die, and every man shall bear his own sin.* But then God, by the prerogative of his mercy, was pleased to transfer the obligation, and to receive satisfaction from a surety. This was the first great instance of mercy.

The second was, that as he was pleased to be satisfied by a surety, so (as I have already shewn) he himself found and provided this surety.

And certainly this was a glorious and unspeakable piece of mercy, a thing beseeeming an infinite goodness.

For put the case; When man had sinned, and upon that sin stood obnoxious to the sentence of the law, and the fatal stroke of God's vindictive justice; had God stood forth, and according to the first degree of mercy made this agreement and capitulation with the sinner; and told him, that notwithstanding he had broke the law, affronted his justice, and so became liable to death, the punishment that the law awards to all transgressors, and that in their own persons: yet out of his free goodness he would recede from the rigour of that



law, and accept of a satisfaction from the hands of a surety. And therefore, if he should provide such an one, he should be discharged; otherwise he must expect to lie under the execution of that inexorable sentence.

What would man have done in this case? Here was mercy indeed, but infinitely short of his necessity. What should he do, whither should he go for some to bail him, much more to rescue and save him from the curse of the law, and the severity of his judge?

As for any thing that he could do himself, he could never be able to bribe or buy off an infinite justice. *Should he come before God with burnt-offerings., with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Should he give his first-born for his transgression, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul?* Why yet all this would be as short of satisfaction, as it is of infinity.

He must therefore be forced to look abroad, and implore aid from some others; but from men he could have none: for as it is in [Psalm xlix](#). *None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.*

No creature had such an overplus of righteousness, as to lay it out for another, lest, as the wise virgins said to the foolish, in [Matth. xxv. 9](#), *they have not enough for themselves*. For all that they have is required of them; and so being due from themselves, they could not produce it to merit for another.

It would have passed the wisdom of men and angels, to have found out a mediator that might have paid the full debt to God's justice. For could any created invention have ascended up to heaven, and fetched the only begotten Son of God out of his lather's bosom?

Could a finite understanding have contrived, much less brought about the incarnation of a Deity? clothed the Almighty with flesh and blood? and abased the King of kings to the form of a servant?

Could we ever have thought of such a mediator, as might be both man, to enable him to suffer for us, and also God, to give an infinite value to his sufferings? as might have an human nature to undergo God's wrath, and also a divine, to keep him from sinking under it. Such an one as might not only by his passive obedience loose the bands of death, and rescue us from hell, but also by his active righteousness entitle us to the joys of heaven.

Assuredly none but God, whose wisdom was as immense as his mercy, could have found out such a miraculous, stupendous means of our redemption.

But now, since God has been pleased to satisfy his injured justice, shall we therefore upbraid and detract from the freedom of his mercy? Cannot he vindicate one attribute, without eclipsing the glory of another?

See how the whole scripture almost sets forth and commends to us God's mercy and forgiveness, under this one endearing property of its freedom. In [Rom. iii. 24](#), we are said to be *justified freely by his grace*. [Ephes, i. 7](#), we are said to *have received forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace*. And in [Matthew xviii](#). in the parable where the servant

is brought in unable to pay a vast sum, in which he was indebted to his lord, it is said in the [27th verse](#), that *his lord, being moved with mere compassion, loosed him, and forgave him the debt.*

And in Isaiah Iv. 1, where the graces and spiritual benefits which God confers upon his saints are set forth by wine and milk, and men are called upon to buy them, yet it is by a strange and a new way of purchase; *Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.* Now if his very selling be so free, what then must be his gift?

And thus much for the first thing, in which the greatness of God's mercy in the forgiveness of sin shines forth; that the principle of it is his own free inclination; that no impulsive cause from without engages and induces him to it by any external impression. There can be no other reason assigned why God is merciful, but because he will be merciful. His mercy is like a fountain, which, though it flows freely and continually, yet there is no other cause of its flowing but its own fulness.

(2.) The second thing from which we are to take an estimate of the greatness of this forgiveness, is the sins that are remitted.

Now the greatness of a pardon, as it relates to the sins and offences that are forgiven by it, is advanced according as they are heightened by these two properties:

1. Number.
2. Greatness.

1. For the first of these, they so far partake of this property of number, till they even contradict it, and become numberless. David, who was none of the greatest sinners, yet finds the account of his sin in [Psalm xl. 12](#), to amount to *more than the hairs of his head*; and certainly that is more than the head itself can number.

In [Matthew xviii. 22](#), we shall find our Saviour stretching an human forgiveness to an offence *seventy-seven times repeated*. And certainly then the pardons that issue from an infinite mercy must needs keep the distance of a suitable proportion.

And truly, if we come to compute the number and to audit the account of our sins, from [Gen. vi. 5](#), where *the thoughts of man's heart* are avouched to be *evil, and only evil, and that continually*; the sum total must swell to such a vast, enormous multitude, that none can number them, but the same in finite God that forgives them.

In [Proverbs xxiv. 16](#), *the justest man living falls seven times a day*, a small proportion compared to the licentiousness of some sinners, who lash forth into criminal acts every moment. Yet to what an high reckoning will even this small proportion grow in the space of threescore years and ten, the common period of man's life!

Yet when God comes to forgive, he cancels the entire bill, and by one act of grace dashes the whole handwriting that is against us.

The soul of man is naturally restless, always doing something, whether in the retirements of thought and desire, or upon the open stage of practice; and where the heart is unsanctified,



unrenewed by grace, (as in most men in the world it is, for some considerable part of their lives,) there, so long as the soul is doing, it is doing evil: and that natural activity of the mind is as sinful as it is restless.

There is a tinder of concupiscence in all our natures, apt to catch at every spark that is struck from sinful objects. And we are surrounded with these, so that the constant emissions of the one, falling upon the ready receptions of the other, must needs make the flame continual.

Now where the faculty of sinning is restless, the opportunities to draw it forth perpetual, must not the sinful actions flowing from that faculty needs be innumerable? If there be a fire burning, and a bellows always blowing, certainly the sparks flying from it will be numberless.

We may be able to *number our days*, but not the sins committed in those days. This would baffle all our arithmetic, all our ciphers, and arts of computation. And I am afraid that we should stand at an infinite, eternal distance from forgiveness, if God should promise to forgive us our sins only upon this condition, that we should first reckon them.

But now must not that forgiveness needs be glorious, which rises not only to the remission of talents, but of ten thousand talents? that multiplies itself beyond what is numberless? that even out does our thoughts and outruns our desires?

We may well fail in our expressions of it. But surely, when our sins are for number like the sands of the sea or the stars of heaven; the mercy that forgives them must needs be deeper than the one, and higher than the other.

2. The second property of sins that heightens their forgiveness is their greatness. We have compared them to stars for number, and they may equal them also for magnitude.

We have them painted out to us in their colours, [Isaiah i. 18](#), with a *crimson tincture* and a *scarlet dye*; with a redness and a blushing; sin thus wearing the colour of shame. Yet in the same verse we have *forgiveness*, changing their hue to the whiteness of snow and the innocence of wool.

There is not usually any thing more provoking, or so hardly pardoned, as the contumely of words, and reviling language; and yet we have the divine mercy enlarging itself, even to a total remission of this in [Matthew xii. 31](#); *All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, except the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*. Now blasphemy touches God in his honour, that is, in the apple of his eye, in that of which he is jealous, and in which he admits of no rival. And when God will put up such blows at our hands, such affronts, and such wounds inflicted upon his good name; it is a pardon peculiar to a divine nature, and which men may enjoy indeed, but seldom imitate.



Again, in [1 Corinth. vi. 9, 10](#), we have a muster-roll of as vile sinners as sin could make, or hell receive; *Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards, extortioners*. And yet the rear of all brought up with this in the [11th verse](#), And such were some of you; but ye are washed., but ye are sanctified.

And if so, you may be sure that they are also pardoned; for grace never purifies, but where it also pardons. Sanctification and justification are inseparable.

Now one would think that a milder punishment were a sufficient act of favour to such notorious criminals; and that a mitigation might pass for a pardon, where the sin seems too great for a total absolution.

Yet, as if God seemed to take advantage from our baseness, and by his providence permitted men to be such wretched sinners, that they might be fit materials for an infinite compassion, he passes over all, receives them into favour, and by his pardon makes them as free as those who never needed pardon: thus considering, not what was fit for them to obtain, but what was glorious for himself to do.

But now further to demonstrate the greatness of the sins which God remits, we must take the dimensions of them from the greatness of their object, which is no less than an infinite majesty, the Lord of the universe, the glorious maker and governor of all things. And every affront to a king greatens and enlarges, according to the condition of the person that is offended; a blow given to majesty, an injury done to the throne, it is presently stamp'd with a new superscription: every offence is treason, and every stubbornness becomes rebellion.

Take in also the aggravations of the sin, that it was against the endearments of a creature, against him that gave the sinner a being, brought him out of nothing, gave him life and reason, a rational soul, and a free will; yea, to whom the sinner is beholden, even for this, that he is able to sin against him.

But this is not all: it is also against the more obliging relation of a preserver; against him, who continued and upheld that being, that he might have took in forfeit for the breach of his law: against him that causes his sun to shine and his rain to fall upon his professed enemies; that sows their fields with plenty, and spreads their table's with abundance; and returns them one increase for another, the increase of blessing for the increase of sin.

So that now every sin which is committed by man, puts on the nature of that quality which comprehends in it all other instances of baseness, which is ingratitude. And if the sin be so great, the forgiveness must needs be proportionable.

And thus much for the second thing, in which is displayed to us the largeness of God's pardoning mercy; namely, the number and greatness of the sins pardoned by it.

(3.) The third thing in which it appears is, the persons on whom this pardon is conferred, who are men; that is, very worthless and inconsiderable creatures, in comparison of those to whom the same pardon is denied.



Those excellent and glorious spirits the angels, they fell without recovery: those glistening sons of the morning, those more lively representations of the divine nature, they are set under a perpetual night, never to rise and return again to their former lustre. As it is in the [6th verse of the Epistle of Jude](#); *They are reserved under everlasting chains of darkness, to the judgment of the great day.* And in [Heb. ii. 16](#), *Christ took not upon him the nature of angels, to be a mediator for them; but he took upon him the seed of Abraham.*



Now that God should pass over the glory of the creation, and cast the skirt of his pardoning mercy upon poor vile creatures, that lay wallowing in their blood, to the loathing of their persons; that he should prefer *dust and ashes* before *principalities and powers*; and choose *vessels of honour* out of the lowest objects of contempt: this is an act of forgiveness, mixed of mercy and prerogative, and of which no reason can be assigned, but the good pleasure of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will.

It is as if a man should pass over and trample upon pearls, and in the mean time stoop down to take up pins: for the distance of the angelical and the human nature is as great, and their perfections fall under the same disproportion.

Certainly, God could not intend the advancement of his service in this unequal proceeding; for correspondent to the creature's abilities, such will be the measure of his service. And could the narrow compass of human wit and power do as much for God as the activity and intellectuals of an angel, who had none of these clogs of flesh and blood to allay their fervours, and to slack their devotions, God would have been served without lassitude or weariness: for, as it is in [Psalm civ. 4](#), *he has made those ministering spirits a flaming fire*; and therefore they can be no more weary of serving him, than a fire can be weary with burning.

It remains, therefore, that this difference of God's dealing with men and angels is entirely from the differences of his own purposes, by which he was pleased to design mercy for one, and to deny it to the other; and since he was free to have denied it, it enhances the kindness of the gift.



And thus I have done with the first general part of the text, viz. the declaration of the divine forgiveness; the greatness and latitude of which we have laid open, from those three several respects and considerations, by which all pardons are to be measured.

II. Pass we now therefore to the second part of the words, the end and design of this forgiveness, the fear of God: *there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*

In which we are to do these two things:

1st, To shew what that fear is, which is here intended.

2dly, To shew what there is in this forgiveness, by way of reason or argument, to enforce this fear.

For the first of these, we must distinguish of a double fear.

1. An anxious, distracting, amazing fear; in respect of which, Moses, upon the sight of God, in the terrible and fiery promulgation of the law from mount Sinai, in [Heb. xii. 21](#),

said, *I exceedingly fear and tremble*. In respect of this also, David says, in [Psalm cxix. 120](#), *I am afraid of thy judgments*. Such an one also was it that possessed Christ in his agony, and in the time of his dereliction, when he cried out upon the cross, [Matt. xxvii. 46](#), *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* In short, it is such a kind of fear as possesses those who lie under the tortures of a guilty, troubled conscience; such an one into which is infused all the malignity of this afflicting passion. It is the first-fruits of despair, and may, with more significance, be called horror and distraction.

Now this cannot be the fear intended in the words; for the motive of this cannot be forgiveness, but the divine wrath and anger. Besides, the proper effect of this fear is not duty, but despair; not obedience, but affrightment; not an adherence to God, but a flight and a departure from him. But now we shall presently shew, that the fear spoken of in the words, is to be a sovereign means of duty, an argument of piety, and an instrument of obedience.

2. There is a slavish and servile fear; such an one as, [Rom. viii. 15](#), is called the *spirit of bondage*; and in respect of which, John says, [1 John iv. 18](#), that *he that fears is not perfect*: and in the same verse, that *love casts out fear*. As, on the contrary, where this fear is predominant, it expels and casts out love: for there is so direct a contrariety between these two affections, that the increase of one is always built upon the decrease of the other. And indeed fear, for the most part, is the cause of hatred, but always the concomitant.

Now this cannot be the fear that is meant in the text; for God hates that his service should proceed from this principle. Fear properly, both in a natural and a spiritual sense, contracts the heart: but it must be an *enlarged heart, that runs the ways of God's commandments*. Fear ties up the spirits, checks the freedom, and dulls the motion of a more active devotion.

3. And lastly; therefore there is a filial, reverential fear, such an one as is enlivened with a principle of love, quickened and acted with that contrary affection, that is in [Romans viii. 15](#) styled *the spirit of adoption*.

Now there is this difference between these three sorts of fear; that the first is properly the fear of a malefactor, the second of a slave, and this last of a son.

Which is that alone that is designed in these words; and indeed there is good reason that God should require it, since he intends to turn all his servants into sons. And is it not equal to require a son's affection, where he resolves to bestow a son's inheritance?

Besides, this affection is of all others the most sedulous, diligent, and serviceable, and therefore there is a more than ordinary significance in those words, [Mal. iii. 17](#), where God is said *to spare and pity those that fear him, as a man spareth his son that serveth him*. There is a great deal of difference between the service of a son, and of a slave or hireling; it is done with more accurateness, more concernment and activity.

And if we consider well the scope of the words, we must acknowledge that the word *fear* is used here by a metonymy of the cause for the effect, and signifies rather that obedience

which is the effect and product of this fear; God therefore manifesting his forgiveness, that he may gain the creature's service and obedience.

For it is this only that God regards, this alone, by which the creature owns and confesses his homage and subjection to his Maker. All other pretences vanish into air and nothing, as being neither available to God's glory nor man's salvation.

And thus I have shewn of what stamp, what kind, that fear is, which is intended in the words. It is such an one as is qualified with a prevailing mixture of love; such an one as does not shake, but settle the soul; not terrify, but compose the mind. And lastly, it is such an one as does not cramp and restrain our operative faculties; but shines in duty, and displays itself in performance.

Having thus shewn what the fear is that stands mentioned in the text;

2dly, I come now to the second thing proposed, which is to shew, how God's forgiveness may be an argument to enforce this fear. And it does it in these two respects.

(1.) Because the neglect of the fear of God, upon supposal that he has forgiven us our sins, is highly disingenuous.

Forgiveness is an after-game of mercy; a thing that the first rigours of the law neither knew nor admitted. It stood upon the narrow precipice of exact obedience or certain damnation. It was all severity, without the least alloy of mercy. It was a thunder without lightning. Mercy was a miracle that Moses never shewed; and pardon, an absurdity in the documents of mount Sinai.

But man not being able to come up to the command, the gentle compliances of mercy were pleased to bring down the command to us, and to allow *tabulam post naufragium*, repentance and forgiveness to stand in the breach, and to supply the impossibilities of in defective obedience.

But shall we now turn our table into a snare, and offend because we may be forgiven, and so make the sinner's asylum an argument for the sin? Shall we kick at our father's bowels, only because they can relent?

This is impiety heightened into inhumanity, such a behaviour as even good-nature would detest between man and man, in which we treat our Redeemer below the endearments of a friend.

The sum of all must be this: Had not God been merciful, he had not been dishonoured; and sin had not abounded, but by the antiperistasis of grace. Pardon is made a decoy to the crime, and a possibility to be saved traptans into a certainty of being damned.

(2.) The second reason is, because the neglect of God's fear upon the account of his forgiveness, besides the disingenuity of it, is also most provoking and dangerous.

There is nothing that any person disgusts with so keen and tender a resentment, as the rejections of his love, and the abuse of his favour.



There is something in God's greatness, majesty, and justice, that may indeed terrify and command, but it cannot endear: but the caresses of love and pardon should make a closer insinuation, and attract the very heart; whereas the other perhaps only tie the hands.

Justly therefore does God's jealousy burn where his love is despised; and one flame kindle, to revenge the contempt of another.

Because God has shewn himself so much a father, shall he therefore cease to be a master? Shall his condescensions to us take away our honour to him?

Truly, he that sins against the first Mosaical dispensation of an inflexible law, and he that takes heart to offend because of the gracious allowances of forgiveness and restoration, differ as much as he who sins against a prince's justice, and he who sins against his acts of indemnity.

The economy of God's attributes is such, that from some of them we may appeal to others; but there are some again, from which there lies no appeal. As when the divine power and justice threatens us, there is yet a refuge in his mercy; but he that is bankrupt upon the score of mercy, has no other relief to rest upon. He has sinned against his last remedy: he has poisoned himself with a cordial: he has stumbled at that stone upon which he should have built. When compassion condemns us, who shall be our advocate?

Now from the words hitherto discussed, we may make these two deductions.

1. We may learn hence the different nature of Christ's spiritual kingdom, from all other kingdoms in the world; and that not only in respect of the external administration of it, that it is not bolstered out with pomp and shew, and other little assistances of grandeur and secular artifice; but chiefly in respect of that which is the main instrument and hinge of government and subjection, the fear of the subject.

Where there is no fear, there can be no government, that is certain. But how does Christ work this? Why, not by the rack, the prison, or the sword of justice, but by new, strange, and supernatural methods of pardon and compassion. His goodness shall bind our hands; and his very forgivenesses shall make us fearful to offend.

But how incongruous an argument would this be to an earthly potentate. *There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared?* Who ever was formidable for his pardons? And who ever was great and secure, that was not formidable?

Such is the baseness of men, that from impunity they take occasion rather to insult than to obey; and being forgiven, look upon their prince's forgiveness rather as a spoil extorted from his fear, than as a favour issuing from his goodness.

Guilt is eternally suspicious; and suspicion, even after a pardon, will be still standing upon its guard, still in a posture of defence; neither will it ever think itself sufficiently defended, till it has ruined and removed the injured person, whom its own unworthiness makes it fear. he that receives an injury may pardon it; but he that first does the injury is irreconcilable.

But how comes Christ then to state so sure a subjection upon so different a ground? And why do not men, when they have offended him, for ever after hate him; and having once presumed, for the future despair? Why, it is because he is God, the great Creator of the heart, and so at his pleasure can change it: and by the secret energy of his Spirit, conquer it in its strongest notions and inclinations. This is the only way by which he reconciles the sinner to himself. And so may any earthly prince make his enemies become his friends, when he can get the power of changing man's nature, but hardly before.

2. We may learn from hence, upon what ground every man is to build the persuasion of the pardon of his sins. It is the temper of most persons, to be more busy about their assurance than their obedience; and to be confident of their reward, while they should be solicitous about their duty.

But now to discover whether such men's confidence be sound and rational, or vain and fallacious, I should recommend to them this one criterion and mark of trial; namely, to reflect upon and consider what effects this persuasion of God's mercy works upon their spirits.

Do they find that it begets in them a greater tenderness to displease God, a greater caution and circumspection in their behaviour? a greater abhorrency of sin, and a more ardent inclination to virtue? Do they find that the more confident they are of God's mercy, the more fearful they are to offend the pure eyes of his holiness?

If so, they have great cause to conclude, that these persuasions are not mere delusions, but the attestation of God's Spirit to their spirits, transcribing the decree of Heaven upon their hearts in the great designs of their salvation.

But if men, from the persuasions of mercy, grow impudent and bold in sin, presume upon God's patience, and venture far upon the stock of a supposed forgiveness, they must know that they are under the power of a destructive infatuation.

Mercy was never intended to serve any man in his vice, to smooth him in his sin, and, by abused hopes of pardon, to strengthen the hands of his corruption. And therefore he that from God's mercy gathers no argument for his fear, may conclude thus much, that there is indeed forgiveness with God, but no forgiveness for him.



SERMON XXVIII.

PREACHED AT ST. MARY S, OXFORD, SEPT. 12, 1658.

A FEW DAYS AFTER CROMWELL'S DEATH, WHO DIED ON THE THIRD INSTANT BEFORE.

DEUTER. xxix. 4.

Yet the Lord has not given you an heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear, unto this day.

TO complete the sense of the words, we must have recourse to the two precedent verses; which being compared with the text, present us with a description of such a brutish and irrational temper, such an invincible hardness, as is not to be found in any people mentioned throughout the whole book of God, or any history whatsoever. Israel, the peculiar inheritance of God, the darlings of heaven; yet by their strange deportment under God's dealings, may leave this report of themselves, that they were the greatest enjoyers and the greatest abusers of mercy that ever lived. The whole story of the transactions between God and them is a continued miracle. On God's side there is strange unheard of power and goodness, on theirs a prodigious unheard of stupidity. Here we have miracles of strength and wisdom, there we have miracles of disobedience. None ever possessed mercy so much to the reproach of mercy as they did. Miracles are the rarities and the reserves of Heaven, kept to bear testimony to the power of God, and to convince men, when a contemplation of his works in the ordinary course of nature will not serve turn. Yet God was pleased to make these common with his people, that he might engage their hearts to him beyond all plea of unbelief. He delivered them by miracles, in [Exod. xiv. 29](#). He led and guided them by miracles, [Exod. xiii. 21](#). He fed them by miracles, [Exod. xvi. 13, 17](#). He clothed them by miracles, [Deut. xxix. 5](#). And, what was the greatest and the crowning miracle of all, he did not consume them in the midst of their frequent rebellions. Yet they had hardness and unbelief enough to encounter all these dealings: they still remained the same, a perverse, obstinate people, whose neck (as the Spirit's expression is) was an *iron sinew*, and their *brow brass*. In short, the bare report and fame of those miracles made many proselytes and converts, the very sight whereof could not convert them. It will not be amiss, to take a short survey of their strange, unreasonable unbelief in some particular passages of it. When God had delivered them out of Egypt by an outstretched arm, by such wonders as never were before, nor ever since; and while the memory of these was yet fresh upon their mind, even then, upon the pursuit of Pharaoh, they distrust and murmur, [Exod. xiv. 11](#). Hence David puts such a repeated emphasis upon this, in [Psalm cvi. 7](#), *They provoked him at the Red sea, even at the Red sea*. As if the same power that could deliver them from an enemy, when he actually possessed them, could not rescue them from him when he only pursued them. After this deliverance they murmur for



meat: *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?* Psalm lxxviii. 19. *Can God?* They question not only his will, but his power, of which they had an immediate experience. Well, God gives them meat, even the bread of angels, and then they murmur for flesh: Psalm lxxviii. 20, *Can he provide flesh also for his people?* Still they doubt of his power; they live upon it one day, and they question it the next. An interchange of mercies on God's part, and murmurings on theirs, was the continual custom and manner of their whole life. But the most horrid, and almost incredible passage of their unbelief, was when, after all the wonders, both in Egypt and out of Egypt, when Moses had but only turned his back; as if in Moses they had lost their God, as if he had been the only Deity they acknowledged; and all their worship and religion had been directed to his person: in his absence they address themselves to Aaron, with this impious, absurd argument; *Moses is gone, therefore make us gods*, Exod. xxxii. 1. I am confident, if an intelligent infidel should read this history, the miracles here mentioned would not seem so improbable to him, as their carriage and behaviour upon these miracles. From the consideration of this, Moses might here very well proem the repetition of the covenant with this upbraiding reprehension; *The Lord hath not given yon an heart to perceive, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear*. Which words are only an increpation of them, not any reflection upon God, as shall appear afterwards.

As for the explication of the words, I suppose I need not tell you, that they cannot be understood strictly according to the letter: for if God had given them no bodily eyes to see, nor ears to hear, they had not had sin: but because they saw bodily, and were blind spiritually, herein the sin of their obstinacy did consist.

We have here several phrases, but they all centre in the same signification. *A heart to perceive, eyes to see, and ears to hear*. It is a pleonasm, a figure usual in scripture, by a multiplicity of expressions, to signify some one notable thing: so that from this congeries of similiary words, we may collect the exceeding stupidity and total ignorance of the Jews, in apprehending the divine dispensations.

Or, secondly, we may refer these several expressions to those several means which God suited to every apprehensive faculty of their soul. He proposed an excellent law to their understanding or their heart: he declared himself in prodigious miracles visible to the eye. He spoke to them in a wonderful manner from mount Sinai in thunders, and a voice audible to the ear. He did (as I may so speak) lay siege to every faculty, if through any one of them he might force his convictions into the soul. He proposed that which might win the eyes and inform the ear, and that which might strike the understanding through both; but nothing could find entrance, where the doors both of sense and reason were shut through gross unbelief.

And thus we see the words have no difficulty in them. They will afford us these observations.

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1 *Observ.* That the heart may remain unaffected and unconvinced in the midst of convincing means.

That this is so, scripture and experience leave it beyond dispute. But the reason why it is so, is this: because the clearness and perspicuity of the object does not at all supply or repair the defects of the faculty. The goodness and excellency of the things proposed to be understood and embraced do not give any ability to an hard heart to apprehend or embrace them; as the most visible, conspicuous thing contributes no power to a weak, indisposed eye to discern it.

Now I term these means convincing,

(1.) Because they do actually convince some, although they miscarry in others.

(2.) Because they have a fitness or aptitude to convince all.

2 *Obsevr.* issuing from the words is this:

That such a frame of spirit, such a perceiving heart, as enables the soul to apprehend and improve the means of grace, is totally and entirely the free gift of God: *Yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive.* It is a product of that mercy which has no argument but itself.

I say, it is a free gift; and that,

1. In respect of the motive, which is the mere compassion of God: there is nothing in man that could engage God to bestow grace upon him. We are by nature wholly in a state of sin and enmity against God; and how these qualifications should merit grace at his hands, I know not, unless, by an unheard of, strange antiperistasis, the most hateful object should excite an act of the greatest love.

2. It is free, in respect of the persons upon whom it is conferred. When God comes first to work upon us, we are presented to him in the lump, all equally odious, equally desirable. And that God gives grace to one, and denies it to another, it is not from any precedent difference in them; for it is only the gift and grace of God which makes them to differ. But as God's decree in choosing Jacob and rejecting Esau is most free, and without relation to any good or evil done by them; so the execution of that decree in conferring grace upon one, and withholding it from the other, is equally free and irrelative.

3 *Observ.* arising from the words, which I intend more fully to prosecute, is this:

That God's denial of such a disposition of soul, such a perceiving heart, does certainly infer the unsuccessfulness of all the means of grace.

I say, it does infer it, not cause it, as I shall demonstrate by and by.

In the handling of this, I shall shew,

I. What is meant by God's giving to the soul a perceiving heart.

II. Whence it is, that without this gift the soul cannot make any saving improvement of the means of grace.



III. I shall shew, that although, upon God's denial of a perceiving heart, the soul does inevitably remain unprofitable under the means of grace, so as *not to hear nor perceive*, yet this hardness or unprofitableness cannot at all be ascribed to God as the author of it.

IV. I shall shew, how God can rationally reprehend a soul for not embracing the means of grace, when he denies it a heart, by which alone it can be enabled so to do. The necessity of clearing this I take from the strain of the words, which run in the nature of a reprehension; and this always supposes a fault as the ground and foundation of it. But if God denies a hearing ear and a perceiving heart, it may seem not to be the soul's fault, if it does not hear nor perceive.

Having despatched these in their order, I shall proceed to the uses that may be drawn from hence.

I. Concerning the first; what is meant by God's giving to the soul a perceiving heart. We have grace here set out by such acts as are properly acts of knowledge; as *understanding, seeing, hearing*; not because, as some imagine, grace is placed only in the understanding, which, being informed with such a principle, is able to govern, and practically to determine the will, without the help of any new principle infused into that. For grace is an habit equally placed in both these faculties, but it is expressed by the acts of the understanding.

1. Because the understanding has the precedency and first stroke in holy actions, as well as in others; it is the head and fountain from whence they derive their goodness, the leading faculty: and therefore the works of all the rest may, by way of eminence, be ascribed to this, as the conquest of an army is ascribed to the leader only, or general.

2. Because the means of grace are chiefly and most frequently expressed by the word of truth; [1 Tim. i. 15](#), *This is a faithful (or a true) saying, that Christ came into the world to save sinners.* And in [John iii. 33](#), *He that believeth hath set to his seal that God is true.* And in [John xvii. 17](#), *Thy word is truth.* Now, since the understanding is that faculty whose proper office it is to close in with truth as such, the receiving or embracing the means of grace, which are called *truth*, is most properly set forth by the acts of the understanding.

I shall now endeavour to shew, from some places in scripture, what is to be here understood by a *perceiving heart* and an *hearing ear*. [John vi. 45](#), *Every one that hath heard, and learned of the Father, cometh unto me.* Such an hearing of God's will as is attended with the learning of it, such a learning of it as powerfully brings the soul to God, is that alone which Christ esteems effectual. [John v. 25](#), *The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.* Such an hearing as enlivens a dead soul, as conveys into it a spiritual vigour, declaring itself in spiritual operations; this only, in God's account, is hearing. Again, in [Acts ii. 37](#), *When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?* To hear, so as to be thoroughly and deeply affected with a sense of sin; so as to be put upon an immediate inquiry and endeavour for the securing our eternal state; this is properly *to hear and to perceive*. To hear, so as in practice to follow and

prosecute the things we hear; this only is hearing in a scripture sense. Thus Moses is said to have hearkened to his father-in-law, because he followed his counsel; and Rehoboam is said not to have hearkened to his old counsellors, because he never practised their advice. In short, in [Matthew xiii.](#) we have an account of the nature of hearing, which then only is true and genuine, when it ends in *the bringing forth of fruit*. Wherefore so to hear God's will, as spiritually to understand it; so to understand it, as to be really affected with it; so to entertain it in our affections, as to manifest it in our actions; and so to act, as to continue in a steady, fruitful perseverance, is that alone that can justly be reputed hearing; otherwise, upon a defect of these, it is all one to the soul, as if it had not heard at all; nay, in some respects much worse.

From hence, therefore, I collect,

1. That to understand and receive the word, according to the letter and notion, by a bare assent to the truth of it, is not to have an heart to perceive, nor an ear to hear: because it is evident, both from scripture and ordinary observation, that such a reception of the means of grace is not always attended with these spiritual effects: as for instance, the Jews heard Christ, and admired him, but afterwards they rejected his doctrine, and crucified his person. Who more versed in the law and the oracles of God than the scribes and pharisees? yet we may easily gather from the whole course of our Saviour's carriage to wards them, that he looked upon them as men ignorant of God. The papists indeed make saving faith to be only an assent of the understanding to gospel-truths; according to whose tenets a man may believe like a saint, and practise like a devil. In short, there is nothing more common than to see men of rare knowledge and raised speculations in the things of God, yet not at all to have any relish and savour of them upon their hearts and affections. So that their practices oftentimes bid defiance to their knowledge; for they never knew God, so as to obey him; and therefore, in effect, never knew him at all. To hear the word of God, and to hear God speaking in his word, are things vastly different.

2. Therefore, in the second place, to have *a perceiving heart* and *an hearing ear*, is to have a spiritual light begot in the mind by an immediate, overpowering work of the Spirit, whereby alone the soul is enabled to apprehend and discern the things of God spiritually, and to practise them effectually: and without this, we may see and see, and never perceive, and hear again and again, and never understand. Christ may discourse with us as he did with those two disciples going to Emmaus, and in the mean time our eyes may be so held, as not to discern him. For, as the apostle says, *the natural man cannot apprehend these things, because they are spiritually discerned*. And the reason of this is clear, even from nature; because, in order to apprehension, there must be a peculiar suitableness between the object and the faculty. Things sensible must be apprehended by sense; things intelligible, by the understanding and the reason: and so things spiritual, by some spiritual principle that is infused into the soul from above. And look, as the inferior faculty cannot apprehend the



proper, formal objects of the superior, sense cannot reach up to the things of reason; so neither can reason take in or perceive those objects which properly belong to this spiritual principle. Hence it is, that some souls can discern that spiritual, secret, persuading force in the word, that shall strongly engage and almost constrain the affections to embrace and follow it: so that the whole man is insensibly fashioned and moulded into it, while others, void of this spiritual, discerning faculty, feel no such force and power in it. Some also, from the help of this, spy out that true loveliness and beauty in the ways of God, as to enamour them to a practice of them, and that even with delight: while others, void of this power, do indeed see and behold those ways, but see *no beauty in them why they should desire them*. Hence two sit together, and hear the same sermon; one finds an hidden, spiritual virtue in the word, by which he lives, and grows, and thrives: another finds no such extraordinary virtue in it; but if it be rationally and well composed, it pleases his reason, and there is an end. And this proceeds from the want of a spiritual, perceiving heart. As for instance, whence is it that a man is so affected with music, that all the passions of his mind and blood in his body is moved at the hearing of it, and the stupid brutes not at all pleased? but because in man there is a principle of reason concurring with his sense, which discovers that sweetness and harmony in those sounds, that bare sense is not able to discern. Thus it is proportionally between mere reason, and reason joined with a spiritual discernment in respect of spiritual things. And so I have endeavoured in some measure to display the nature of *a perceiving heart* and *an hearing ear*. But the truth is, when we have spoke the utmost concerning it that we can, yet those only can know what it is who have it: as he only knows what it is to see, who can see. As the groans, so also the graces of the Spirit are unutterable. Grace is known by its own evidence. It is the white stone shining to him only that does possess it; for a man is no more able to express this work, so as to convey a full notion of it to the mind of him that has it not, than by words and discourse to convey an idea of colours to him who was born blind, or the proper relish of meats to him who has no taste.

II. Whence it is, that without this gift of a perceiving heart, the soul cannot make any improvement of the means of grace. It arises from these two reasons.

1. From its exceeding impotence and inability to apprehend these things.
2. From its contrariety to them.

1. It cannot close with the means, because of its impotence to apprehend them. Reason attended with the highest improvements of art and endowments of nature, is not able to search into the things of God; it may indeed dive into them so as to drown itself, but never so as to find and apprehend them. For if it be so posed and nonplused, in pursuing the knowledge of natural causes, that the greatest philosophers, after all their search into these things, are forced to sit down in confusion and disagreement; I say, if nature thus falter in earthly things, how will it be able to reach heavenly, between which there is a greater distance than between earth and heaven? If it be also so much to seek in the disquisition of moral

truths, that few can agree in stating what is the greatest good, but one says virtue, another pleasure; I say, how then can it be able to comprehend truth spiritual, which as far surpasses the most elevated morality, considered as such, as that transcends the gross dictates of the most swinish sensuality? Every spiritual truth, as spiritual, so far it is also mysterious. Nature is weak, and feeble, and blind, when it comes to the mysteries of faith; it never appears so weak, as when, by its own strength, it attempts the understanding of these. Nature prying into spirituals, is like Pompey, an heathen, looking into the ark of God; seeing indeed, but not understanding. There is a certain *secret of the Lord*, locked up from the view of bare reason; and it is only *with them that fear him*. See in what a posture of weakness the Spirit presents a natural understanding, [John i. 5](#), *The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not*. Let the light shine round about him who is blind, yet the darkness, which he carries about him, hinders him from perceiving it. Sooner may a dark room enlighten itself, without the irradiation of a candle or the sun, than a natural understanding work out its own ignorance in matters of faith. The Spirit says expressly, that a man in this state *cannot know the things of God*, [1 Corinth, ii. 14](#). There is an impotence rising into an impossibility. Again, in [2 Corinth, iii. 5](#). *We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing*. A good thought is the lowest strain of piety, but the first step to grace; yet we see it is higher than nature can rise unto. How is a natural understanding towering, and pleasing itself in the ornaments and riches of its own notions! yet represented by the Spirit as *poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked*. [Revel. iii. 17](#). Come to Nicodemus with a gospel-mystery, make it out to him by the most obvious similitudes in nature, yet how is that great doctor void of an heart to perceive, and an ear to hear! Instead of understanding and assenting to it, he will reply upon you, *How can these things be?* They seem to him absurd, irrational, impossible: and whosoever searches into the great things of the gospel by the bare strength of reason, he will find that, like Nicodemus, he comes to Christ in the dark. Wherefore, if, in the judgment of the Spirit of truth itself, the best of human knowledge, when it ventures upon the things of God, is no more than weakness, insufficiency, and wretched blindness, then for ever let it sit down in its own darkness, and deplore its impotence and inability, and not wonder that it is unable savingly to perceive, hear, or see, the great depths of the gospel. Those expressions usual amongst us, *strength of parts, force of reason*, since the ruins of a broken, crippled nature, are solecisms in divinity, no where the language of the scripture. It was Adam's doom to return to the earth, and his soul fell to the ground first. But now that our not perceiving nor discerning the things of God proceeds from the impotence of our own hearts, and not from any obscurity or unfitness to be understood in the things themselves, is apparent, and that from the forementioned [John i. 5](#), where these things are called *a light, a shining light*, and therefore most easily to be seen, if it was not for our own darkness. The most refined and the sublimest beings are the most intelligible. It is God's nature to dwell in light, but it is our weakness that makes that light inaccessible: as the fruit

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that grows upon the top branches, the highest boughs of all, is the fairest and the sweetest, if we could but reach it.

The great disproportion between our intellect and these things, is the cause that we cannot apprehend them. Every such truth has a brightness to dim, and a largeness to exceed the understanding; as the sun is both too bright and too great for the eye. What master of reason or subtlety is able to unriddle the mysteries of the gospel? to track the mysterious workings of the Spirit in conviction and conversion? Sooner may we spy out the motions of the wind, from whence it comes and whither it goes; and view the first conception, and observe the growth of an infant in the womb, which the Spirit mentions as a thing impossible; than to comprehend these wonders: things fitter to amaze, than to inform a natural understanding.

2. The second reason why the soul cannot make any saving improvement of the means of grace, without this special gift of a perceiving heart, is because of its contrariety to these things. And there are two things in the soul, in which this contrariety chiefly consists.

(1.) Carnal corruptions.

(2.) Carnal wisdom.

(1.) Concerning the contrariety that arises from carnal corruption, it is expressed in the scripture by the greatest that can be, namely, that contrariety which is between enemies; yea, and such an one as breaks out into an open war: *I have a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and leading me captive into the law of sin*, [Rom. vii. 23](#). Paul speaks this in his own person. Now if concupiscence is so strong as to captivate him at some turns, who was truly changed and sanctified, how then will it reign and rage, by a strong opposition of the things of God, in such a person as is yet unchanged and un sanctified? Concupiscence domineers in most men, and it is lively in the best. As for the seat of it, it is placed in the sensitive part of man, and therefore, according to the regular tenor and state of nature, was made to serve, and to be subject to reason: but we know that since sin entered into the world, it has got the dominion over it; and hence, as from a ruler, we read of its laws, *the law of the members*. Now there is no such tyrant as a servant, when he steps into dominion. Hereupon the sensitive appetite, with so much fury, commands the whole man to fulfil its lust; it outfaces and tramples upon all the commands of reason to the contrary. Whence we argue for the truth in hand thus: If concupiscence so much opposes the dictates of human reason, which are much inferior in purity and strictness to the spiritual injunctions of the gospel, then with how much stronger a prejudice must it resist these? For if the yoke that reason puts upon sin be heavy, that which the gospel puts upon it is much heavier. If reason prohibits the actions of concupiscence, upon the score of inconvenience, the gospel does it upon pain of eternal damnation. As for the works of carnal concupiscence, the apostle gives us a catalogue of them in [Galat. v. 19, 20](#), *The works of the flesh are envyings, strife, and emulation; uncleanness, drunkenness, and the like*. Now let us make a particular accommod-



ation of gospel precepts to each of these, and see what an entertainment they are like to find, in an heart that is held in captivity under such lusts. Christ in the gospel says, *Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart*, [Matt. xi. 29](#). *Bless them that curse you., do good to them that hate you*, [Matt. v. 44](#). Can we now imagine that this can suit the humour of a wrathful, contentious person, who is so far from blessing those who curse him, that he is often ready to curse those who bless and befriend him? Again, Christ says, *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?* [John v. 44](#). And, *Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant*, [Matt. xx. 26](#). Is it possible for an envious, emulous man, in his heart to approve, or in his practice to follow this precept of humility? Could he by a voluntary condescension stoop to be a servant, whose continual desire and restless endeavour it is, to be great in the world? Again, Christ enjoins *watching and praying* to such as are his disciples, [Matt. xxvi. 41](#). For it is clear that this command is general, though delivered to particular persons, because the reason of it was general, *that ye enter not into temptation*, which equally concerns all. But can the unclean, sensual epicure brook the excellency of this precept? can he like the rigour of these duties? will he break his sleep, or spend any portion of the night in reading and wrestling with God in prayer, who never watches but to serve his cups and his intemperance? Every such precept proposed to concupiscence is a pearl cast before a swine: it can find no admission with such a man as is led and ruled by his corruption. It is above his principles, and so he cannot apprehend it. It is contrary to his appetite, and so he cannot receive it.

(2.) The second thing from whence this contrariety arises is carnal wisdom, which carries in it a greater opposition to the means of grace than the former; inasmuch as there is more hope of the conversion of a sensualist, than of a resolved atheist. For since the notions of carnal wisdom are more refined, and always seem to wear the face of reason, which has more to say for itself than concupiscence has or can have; hence it is, that one thus principled is more hardly convinced than another. In this chiefly are reared those strong holds and principalities which stand out against the workings of the Spirit: *The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*, [Rom. viii. 7](#). The subtlety of the world loathes the simplicity of the gospel: hence, in the number of those who are to be saved, we have *not many wise, not many great, not many noble*, [1 Cor. i. 26](#). And for the most part these are the men who are so much acted by this carnal wisdom. Such men are usually too wise and politic to be saved. *The cross of Christ is to the Greek, to the learned Athenian, foolishness*, [1 Cor. i. 23](#). He can not find any convincing reason, why a man should prefer duty before interest; despise the splendor of worldly enjoyments, to assume a cross. Policy, the great idol of a carnal reason, is that which insensibly works the soul to a despoliation of religion. We have an exact account of that temper of mind, that indifference in things spiritual, that it usually begets in the minds of its worldly-wise followers, [Acts xviii](#). When a controversy about religion was brought before Gallic, a Roman deputy, it is said in the



17th verse, *But Gallio cared for none of these things*. Now that in which carnal wisdom and religion stand at an eternal distance is this, that the design of religion is continually to urge a denial of self; but all the maxims of carnal wisdom tend to and terminate in the advancement of self. It is this alone that is more amiable than either the practice or the rewards of holiness. Purity must here give place to profit: love of present possessions out weighs the hope of future felicity. From this principle also proceed those hideous maxims; that religion is only a politic invention, a lackey to government; that the appearance of it is advantageous, but the substance hurts. Hence are these expressions of a known author in his heathenish politics; that good men, advanced to government, must of necessity defend themselves, and those they govern, by deceit and violence: that a Christian, living under an heathen magistrate, may deny Christ in word, so he does acknowledge him in his heart; the nature of faith being internal, and lodged in the mind, and not at all depending on outward professions. These pestilent sayings, issuing from the fountain of carnal wisdom, sufficiently shew what a cursed abhorrence it has to a submission to spiritual gospel-truths. Now this principle is more or less in all men; every man is naturally wise to catch hold of any present enjoyment, rather than venture his happiness upon expectation. There is none that will forsake father or mother, the least piece of the world, the most inconsiderable profit or pleasure, that he may secure an interest in Christ, and in the great things of the gospel, if he should be ruled by the guidance of his carnal wisdom. From hence it is clear, that there is such a fixed antipathy in nature against the spirituality of the ways of God, that unless it be wrought out by the Spirit's giving us *a new heart to perceive, and eyes to see*, there is no possibility of ever reconciling these together.



111. I proceed to the third thing, which is to shew, that although, upon God's denial of *a perceiving heart*, the soul does inevitably remain unprofitable under the means of grace, so as *not to hear nor perceive*; yet this hardness, or unprofitableness, cannot at all be ascribed to God as the author of it. In order to the clearing of this, we must know, that God's not giving *an heart to perceive* may admit of a double acceptation.

- (1.) As it implies only a bare denial of grace.
- (2.) As it does also include a positive act of induration.

(1.) Now as for the first, God cannot be said to cause our rejection of the means of grace, that ensues upon the denial of *a perceiving heart*; because this denial is not the cause of that rejection, but the immediate sinfulness of the heart that resists grace. This rejection, this *not hearing*, follows indeed upon the denial of grace, certainly, and of necessity; but then it follows only by way of certain consequence, and not of causal influence. As when a thing is falling, if nobody reaches forth, and stands to catch it, and stop the motion, it must of necessity fall to the ground; yet the not reaching out of the hand, is not the cause of its falling; it adds no impulse to it, but the inherent gravity of the thing is the only cause of the motion, which, if not hindered, will certainly carry it so far. In short, God's denial of grace gives the



same necessity to our *not hearing, not perceiving* the word of God, that the divine prescience, or foreknowledge, gives to free actions; that is, a necessity in respect of the event and future existence of the action, not in respect of the power producing it. That is, there is a certain connection between God's denial of *an heart to perceive*, and our *not perceiving*: if he gives us not such an heart, the event and issue will certainly be, that we shall not perceive nor understand. But in the mean time, it puts no necessity upon the power, it does not by any physical influence determine that to a necessary suspension of the acts of perceiving and understanding. Wherefore, since the denial of grace does only infer, not cause the soul's unprofitableness; God, who is the cause of this denial, is not also the cause of this unprofitableness.

(2.) And herein the chief difficulty does consist, how God can by a positive act harden the heart, and yet not be the cause of those sins that issue from that hardness. I shall here premise that for a truth, that a learned divine, in his treatise of predestination and the grace of God, lays down as a previous consideration to that work; That God is just, even when we are not able to comprehend the manner how he is just. His infinite justice is not to be measured by the standard of those frail shallow notions, which men have of justice; but it transcends them as far as his nature transcends ours. But to the matter in hand, we must here first note, that the *not hearing, not perceiving*, mentioned in the text, are not bare sins of omission, and a mere privation of these acts; but they are rather positive sins, implying an active resistance, a disapprobation, and a rejection of the means of grace. Now we are to shew, how the righteous God can actively harden the heart to a producing of such actions. Certain it is, that he does not infuse or beget any evil disposition in the heart, which may incline or determine it to such actions. We may observe therefore, that there are three ways, whereby God may be said to harden the heart to sin.

First, God affords a general influence or concurrence to those persuasions or suggestions, whereby Satan or sinful men may endeavour to bring others to sin, so far as those persuasions or suggestions are natural acts; there being no positive thing, in the production of which the first cause has not a share.

Secondly, God in his providential rule of all things disposes and offers such objects and occasions, which, though good in themselves, yet, concurring with a corrupt heart, have a fitness to educe that corruption into act. As his putting David into such a condition of misery, and by his providence causing him to pass that way where he should meet with Shimei. His low condition was a fit occasion to cause Shimei to vent his inveterate hatred in curses and railings. So by his providence disposing the children of Israel under such straits, where sometimes their enemies pursued them, and sometimes they wanted food; these calamities gave occasion to their infidelity to exert itself in murmurings and disregarding the testimony of God's miracles; so as *not to hear, nor see, nor perceive* what God spoke in them.

Obj. But it may be objected here, if God propose such objects to men, as are fit to provoke and actuate their corruption, then God persuades to sin, and so is the moral cause of sin; since he that persuades only acts *per modum objecti*, by proposing such objects to the mind, as are apt to entice and gain upon it.

Ans. To this I answer, that God cannot be said to persuade to sin; because though he proposes such objects, yet he does not withal interpose his authority, so as to desire or command the soul, which carries a greater weight and moment with it to induce to sin, than the provocation of any sinful object whatsoever. In short, for one to work in the nature of a moral cause, there is not only required a presenting of a suitable object that may affect a man's mind; but there is required also that he who persuades, should so far own that object, as to desire or command him to comply with it, wherein the chief nature of persuasion consists; and it is far from the righteous God to do thus.

Thirdly, God hardens to sin by affording his influence and concurrence to those actions and motions, that such objects and occasions stir up in the soul, so far forth as they are positive and natural. And these ways concurring, God is said to harden the heart, not by creating any sinful dispositions in the heart, nor yet by affording a special influence to any sinful action as such; but by disposing of objects, and affording a general influence to the material part of the action, which is the subject-matter of that obliquity. It is not to be hoped, that these things can be so explained as to take off all cavils; but this may suffice to those who desire to be wise to sobriety, and had rather embrace than dispute the truth.

IV. The fourth thing is, to shew how God can justly reprehend men for not hearing nor perceiving, when, upon his denial of an heart, there is a necessity lying upon them to do neither. Now there can be no just reprehension, but for sin; and nothing can be sin, but that which is voluntary and free: and how can that be free for a man to do or not to do, which from necessity he cannot do?

For the clearing of this, I have already shewn that God's denial of an heart is not the cause of the necessity of the soul's not perceiving, but its own native hardness. But here then the question will be, how it can be blamed for this hardness which is not voluntary, but lies upon it by a necessity of sinful nature? Some here restrain that maxim (*whatsoever is sinful is also voluntary*) only to sinful actions; but it may be also true of sinful habits, which, though congenite with our natures, may be yet said to be free and voluntary. For a thing is said to be free, either formally, as an action produced by the free will; or by interpretation, as that which is consequent upon such an action. Now this general and native hardness upon all men's hearts is the immediate product of the sin of Adam, which was most free and voluntary; and every man is as really guilty of this sin, as he was really represented in Adam. So that although at present he be naturally under a necessity of rejecting the means, yet this necessity is in effect voluntary; and therefore sin, inasmuch as it follows upon that which was properly so. If Jephthah by a rash vow bring himself under a necessity of one of these two sins, either

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to break his vow or kill his daughter; yet, inasmuch as he himself procured this necessity by his own voluntary vow, it is virtually, and by consequence, no less voluntary. He that freely brings upon himself a disability of embracing the means of grace, is liable to that reprehension and punishment which is due to a voluntary rejection of them. And thus much concerning the fourth thing.

Application.

Use 1. This doctrine speaks refutation to that opinion, that states a sufficiency of grace in the bare proposal of things to be believed and practised, with out a new, powerful work of the Spirit upon the heart, that may determine and enable it to believe and accept of these things. The assertors of this opinion hold, that the mind of God clearly revealed, and urged with due persuasions, is a suitable object to a rational understanding, which has power enough to close with every object agreeable to it. If this were true, why does the Spirit here give this as a reason of their *not hearing nor perceiving*, because God has denied them *an heart to perceive, and an ear to hear*. Certain it is, that the Israelites had the same abilities of a natural understanding and a will that others had; and if this had been able to do the business, they could not have been said to have wanted *an heart to perceive*. How hardly is proud nature convinced of its own weakness! Assuredly, if those scriptures, that so frequently inculcate the total blindness and darkness of a natural understanding, and the impotence of the will in things spiritual, be true, then this opinion must be false. Whatsoever in these things is attributed to mere nature, so much is derogated from God. Those who espouse the defence of nature in this particular, present their opinions, as to the manner of expression, variously; but the thing they drive at is still the same.

(1.) Some say, that nature of itself indeed is not able to apprehend or close in with these things; but there is an universal grace, that does generally repair and make up the breaches of nature, and enlightens every man that comes into the world, as they misapply that scripture. So that as Adam's sin brought upon his posterity a total disability to apprehend the things of God, so Christ's death, which was of an equal latitude, purchased that general assistance of the Spirit that should take off that utter disability, and recruit nature so, as again to put it in a capacity of apprehending the things of God when discovered to it; of which things also there is a general discovery made in the sun, moon, and stars, preaching the gospel. But this opinion also directly contradicts the text: for if there was such an universal ability in men to conceive aright of things spiritual, why does the Spirit here say, that God had not yet given these men *an heart to perceive*? Therefore there was either no such universal grace bestowed upon all men, or the children of Israel were exempt from this general corporation of mankind. But that such men, when they use the word *grace*, intend not the *thing*, is clear, as from all their writings, so more particularly from a late author, who, in this case, expresses his mind to this effect: that when he says, reason is able to comprehend and comply with the things of God, reason is not to be understood as abstracted and separate

from the concurrence of God, but as seconded and assisted by it: as the sun is said to know the time of its rising and going down; not that the sun abstracted from God's concurrence can do this, but as directed by it. And he adds, that as this assistance never fails to direct the sun in his course, unless by a miracle, so neither does God ever fail to vouchsafe that assistance to reason, whereby it may be enabled to apprehend things spiritual. From hence it is clear, that the word *grace* is here used to express nature, as Pelagius used it, *ad frangendam invidiam*; that an opinion equally venomous might appear the less odious. For according to this assertion, it is no more supernatural for a soul to believe, than for the sun to rise and set in his appointed time.

(2.) There are others who say indeed, that it is not in the power of man's will to believe; but they explain their meaning thus, that it is not in man's power to believe when he will; that is, a man engaged and hardened in a way of sin, cannot immediately in that condition advance into such a spiritual act as believing, till he has gradually disposed himself to it. So that they hold, that a man, in the most sinful condition, may dispose himself to be better, and from thence arise to be yet better; and so lay such a series or train of good dispositions, that shall at length end in belief. And I think it is apparent to any ordinary reason, that, to assert this, is to strike in with the known enemies of God's grace, who, by pretending to enlarge it, do indeed really subvert it.

But now, beside the conviction that these men might meet with in the clear current of the scriptures, certainly their own experience may convince them, that a *perceiving heart* is a new and special gift of God: for although at present they may find it in their power to believe, yet, if they reflect upon the former part of their life, they will find a time when they lay bound hand and foot; when they were no more able to get their heart throughly affected with the sense and hatred of sin. nor to believe and fasten their reliance upon Christ in the promises, than for a dead man to rise from the grave. And if they never found that it was thus with them, I believe there are few who understand these things, that for all the world would venture the eternal concernment of their souls upon such a faith. lint if their own experience will afford them no light, let them view the condition of some of God's saints, who, when they have been in a state of grace, and the seed of faith has remained within them, yet, when God has hid his face, and suspended the fresh influence of his Spirit, they have been no more able to act, nor exercise that grace, nor excite their faith, when the promise has lain before them, than to remove mountains. Now hence we may argue thus: If holy men, endued with the principle and seed of faith, without a new gift from the Spirit, have lain as it were dead, not able to act suitably to that principle; how then will those, that are in a state of nature, and void of this principle, be able *to hear or perceive* the mind of God in the gospel?



Use 2. is of *exhortation*; that in the enjoyment of the means of grace, we should not terminate in the means, but look up to God, who alone is able to give an heart to improve them. This should make us not only pray, but also hear, with our eyes lift up to heaven. The greatest persuasions, the most melting and affectionate expressions, that can drop from man, cannot give an heart; every such gift is a little creation. But certainly, when we have got our hearts wrought upon and heated by the external preaching of the word, then we should be chiefly importunate with God to preach the same word over internally, that then he would strike the stroke, then he would make such an impression as should abide. For with out this, after the most powerful preaching of the word, nature will return to itself. Happy those, who do not only hear the report of the gospel, but *to whom also the arm of the Lord is revealed*. When we have heard the word, read the scriptures, and enjoyed the richest means of salvation, yet, in order to our believing, we should as much depend upon God, as if we enjoyed none of these at all. Still addressing ourselves unto him, as Jehoshaphat did upon another occasion; *Lord, us for us, we know not what to do, but our eyes are upon thee.*



SERMON XXIX.

PREACHED AT WORCESTER-HOUSE,

MAY 29.

JOHN xv. 26.

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.

THESE words contain in them two general parts.

- I. The promise of sending the Spirit.
- II. The end of his being sent; which was to testify of Christ.

In the words containing the former of these, we have a full description of the Spirit; and that,

1. In respect of his person.
2. Of his office or employment.

The account of his person we have in this, that he is said *to proceed from the Father*. And his employment, in these two things:

- (1.) That he is the Comforter.
 - (2.) That he is the Spirit of truth.
- Of all these in their order.

1. And first concerning his procession from the Father. There has been a long and a great controversy between the Latin and the Greek church concerning this: whether the Holy Ghost proceeds equally from the Father and from the Son; which the Latins, and all the other western churches, hold: or whether he proceeds from the Father only by the Son, which alone the Greeks admit; and for this cause stand utterly unchurched by the church of Rome, as erring in a prime and fundamental point of faith.

But here I cannot but think, that in articles relating to such things, of which the reason of man can frame no explicit apprehension, it is a daring, uncharitable, and perhaps a very irrational thing, to condemn any one for expressing the same thing in different terms. And that the Greek church does no more, seems probable from hence.

1st, That they deny not the Spirit to be consubstantial with the Father and the Son.

2dly, That they acknowledge that he is as properly the Spirit of the Son as of the Father. And if, when we say, that the Spirit proceeds from the Son, we intend no more but that he is the Spirit of the Son, which they grant and profess; what is it more than a difference in the expression, where they seem to be very near a perfect coincidence as to the thing?

I am sure some of the most reputed authors in the Latin church avouch so much. Peter Lombard, in the first of the Sentences, 11th distinction, declares his mind thus: *Sane sciendum est, quod licet in praesenti articulo a nobis Graeci verbo discordent, tamen sensu non differunt.*



And Scotus upon the same place of Lombard speaks to the same purpose: *Antiquorum Graecorum a Latinis discrepantia in voce potius est, et modo explicandi emanationem Spiritus Sancti quam in ipsa re*. The like is to be found in Aquinas, Bonaventure, and others, concerning this difference between the Greek and Latin church, in expressing this article.

Besides, it is observable, that after *Patre* the word *Filioque* was added by the Latin church: and since the Greek church may allege this in their defence, that it is no where in scripture expressly said, that the *Spirit proceeds from the Son*; this may be further pleaded for them, that in things, the belief of which can have no foundation but the testimony of scripture, it is there safest, precisely and strictly, to adhere to bare scripture-expression.

And thus much briefly concerning the person of the Spirit. The next thing is his employment, represented to us under a double notion.

1. And first of a Comforter. Christ suits his gifts to our exigences and occasions. Nothing so opportune to the sorrowful as a comforter. And as for Christ's disciples, we know that upon the very prediction of his departure, *sorrow had filled their hearts*. But then, this being actually come to pass, those clouds began to gather over their heads thicker and blacker, and at length to break forth into violence and persecutions: and therefore, under so many discouragements from without, they must needs have sunk, had they not had some supporter within. And their support was to be internal, that so it might be above their adversaries power to bereave them of; [John xvi. 22](#), *Your joy no man taketh from you*. It is out of their sight, and therefore out of their reach; like a fountain lurking in the bowels of the earth, secret, plentiful, and continual.

It is a sad and a poor condition, when there is provision made only for being, not for comfort; for life, not for refreshment. And therefore in the spiritual, as well as in the natural life, there are sublimer fruitions, as well as bare sustenance. For such is the nature of man, that it requires lucid intervals; and the vigour of the mind would flag and decay, should it always jog on at the rate of a common enjoyment, without being sometimes quickened and exalted with the vicissitude of some more refined pleasures.

But what kind of comfort is this, that the Spirit of God conveys to believers? Why, it is very strange and peculiar, but most significantly set forth in that place, in [Mark x. 29, 30](#), *There is no man that hath left house, or brethren., or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life*. What! receive all these things with persecution, when it cannot be persecution, unless it deprive us of all these? Why, yes; God will give us the comfort of these things, even without the enjoyment of them. He can extract the spirit of these things from their bulk, and convey it single without the possession.

For as in the food that we take into our bodies, it is but very little that passes into nutriment, and so is converted into our substance; so in the greatest affluence of plenty, it is not

the mass of the enjoyment, but the elixir or spirit that is derived through it, that gives the comfort.

Now it is a standing rule even in philosophy, that whatsoever God does by the mediation of second causes, he can do immediately by himself, and without them. And therefore it is no wonder, if God can torment where we see no tormentor, and comfort where we behold no comforter; he can do it by immediate emanations from himself, by continual effluxes of those powers and virtues, which he was pleased to implant in a weaker and fainter measure in created agents.

They indeed do all things by gross conveyances and material assistances; as an earthly parent can not refresh his son without the means and instruments of refreshment, as meat, clothes, money, and other such accommodations: but whatsoever we do by the help of these, that God does by a plenitude and all-sufficiency flowing from himself. Thus the impure sublunary fire conveys neither heat nor light, but as it kindles upon some earthly materials of wood, stubble, or the like; but the nobler and celestial fire in the body of the sun, that works all these effects by a communication of its own virtue, without the interposal of those culinary helps: it affords flame and light, and warmth and all, without fuel.

Now this certainly should compose the murmurs and distrusts of infidelity. Men are apt to confine God to their own thoughts, and not to allow him a scope of acting beyond the measure of the visible means; nor to think that he can be a comforter, any longer than they have those things about them, by which they may be their own comforters. If God should promise plenty in a dearth, and fulness of bread when the earth denies her increase, would not unbelief presently presume the impossibility, and laugh at the promise in that question of the doubter, [2 Kings vii. 2](#), *If God should make windows in heaven, how could this thing be?* Yet the objector, we see, was answered with a full, though a sad confutation.

Sometimes we see no means by which God may comfort; but can he not therefore do it without means? There are no wagons nor conduit-pipes to bring down the influences of heaven to us; yet at their stated seasons we find, that they visit us certainly and universally. And thus much for the first part of the Spirit's employment, namely, that he was to be a Comforter.

2. The second was his being the Spirit of truth; upon which account it is said of him, [John xvi. 13](#), *that he should lead the disciples into all truth*. He is the great guide of souls, and discoverer of the mysterious depths of the gospel. Christ indeed had sufficiently preached these divine truths to the world by an external promulgation: but the Spirit was to preach them over again, by the inward illuminations of the mind.

Hereupon also the grand property of truth is ascribed to the Spirit, which is conviction. It is said of him, [John xvi. 8](#), *that he shall convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment*. Now conviction is not only truth, but the predominance of truth; the triumph of a well-managed argumentation. The meaning of those words being this, that the Spirit of God



shall bring home those concerning truths to men's understanding, with such a prevailing sway and evidence, that they shall not be able to deny their assent to them; which way soever their corruptions may force their practice.

Nay, truth is such a peculiar characteristic note of God's Spirit, that this gives it one great discrimination from the evil spirit, who is properly the spirit of falsehood, the deceiver and the seducer; and a liar from the beginning, both the parent and the patron of lies. Yea, and as if he had the monopoly of all fallacy and falsehood, it is said of him, that when he speaks a lie, he speaks it of his own. It is his peculiar, his inheritance; and the whole race of liars is said to descend from him, as their grand original, and head of their family. Justly therefore does God exhibit his Spirit to us, under the noble denomination of truth.

But here, since these two titles given to the Holy Ghost, viz. of the *Comforter*, and of the *Spirit of truth*, seem to have some emphatical relation one to another, so as to found a mutual dependance between them; I shall here endeavour to shew, that his being a *Comforter* depends upon his being the *Spirit of truth*; and particularly, how truth comes to have this comforting influence upon man's mind. I conceive it derives this virtue from these two things.

(1.) From the native, congenial suitableness that it has to man's understanding. And from the application of a suitable object to a well-disposed faculty, there naturally arises comfort. If you now demand, how truth comes to be so suitable to the mind; I answer, that there can be no further reason given, but that it is the nature of it so to be: and of the nature of things there is no reason to be assigned, but the will of the Creator, who was pleased, in ordering the great economy of the world, to plant an agreeableness between some natures, and a disagreeableness between others.

There is that agreement between truth and the mind, that there is between light and the eye; which is the sense of pleasure, of the purest and the most sublime pleasure. And surely, of all the creatures that have issued from the workmanship of omnipotence, there is none so pleasing, so refreshing, or rather so enlivening as the light; which is that, that gives a seasonage to all other fruitions, that lays open the bosom of the universe, and shews the treasures of nature; and, in a word, gives opportunity to the enjoyment of all the other senses.

It is reported of a certain blind man, that he yet knew when a candle was brought into the room, by the sudden refreshment that he found caused by it upon his spirits. Now give me leave to shew, that truth is as great a comfort to the soul. For what makes the studious man prefer a book before a revel, the rigours of contemplation and retirements, before merry-meetings and jolly company? Is it because he has not the same appetites with other men, or because he has no taste of pleasure? No, certainly; but because a nobler pleasure has rendered those inferior ones tasteless and contemptible.

For is there any delight comparable to what reason finds, when it pursues a conclusion into all its consequences, and sees one truth grow out of another, and by degrees rise out of

obscurity into evidence and demonstration? Do you think that the intent speculations of Archimedes were not infinitely more pleasing than the carouses of Epicurus? And if the embraces of natural truth be so transporting to a philosopher, what must the discovery of the supernatural revealed truths of the gospel be to a Christian? where the pleasure is heightened according to the different worth of the object; where every truth comes recommended to the soul with a double excellency, its greatness and its concernment.

(2.) Truth comes to have this comforting influence upon man's mind, from the peculiar and sovereign virtue it has to clear the conscience; and that, from the two great annoyances and disturbances of it, guilt and doubting; which two are the causes of all the trouble and perplexity of man's mind.

First, It clears it from guilt. Sin is the standing and eternal cause of sorrow, and that not only from those outward, penal effects that it draws after it, but from the very reflection of the mind upon it. It is troublesome, offensive, and opposite to the principles of nature. The conscience shrinks, and feels a kind of horror within itself, when it thinks of a vile action. Every sin upon the apprehensive conscience is like a dust falling upon the ball of the eye; how pungent, sharp, and afflicting is it to that tender part!

Now truth discharges the conscience of the trouble of guilt, by being the great means to prevent the sin. Hence the way of holiness is frequently in scripture called *the way of truth*: and it is worth our observation, that there is no sin ever committed, but it is ushered in by some error of the mind, and a false judgment passed upon things. For notwithstanding that in most sins the mind has a general judgment of the evil of the thing that it is about to do, before the sin comes to be actually committed: from all circumstances and particulars put together, as the present gratification, and yet withal future safety upon repentance, the mind passes a particular practical judgment, that it is better for it to do that sin, than not to do it. And here is the deception, after which follows the sinful action. But now, did the mind proceed by the unerring rules and informations of truth, it would judge otherwise, and consequently do otherwise; and thereupon be secured from that trouble, horror, and anguish of conscience, that God by an irreversible decree has entailed upon the commission of sin.

Secondly, Truth clears the conscience of doubt; and this frequently exerts its perplexing quality, where there is no other foundation but a mere surmise of guilt. For how come the consciences of the most pious and the strictest persons to be often times in such plunges of horror and amazement, but from misgivings about the safety of their spiritual estate? And what is the cause of doubting but the disappearance of truth? How comes the mind to be frightened and amazed, but because it is in the dark? When truth wraps itself in a cloud, and shuns the eye, then the reason of man is in suspense, and under various fluctuations which way to determine; but it is certainty alone, that is the bottom of all rational determinations.

There is no weariness like that which rises from doubting, from the perpetual jogging of an unfixed reason. The torment of suspense is very great; and as soon as the wavering,

perplexed mind begins to determine, be the determination which way soever, it will find itself at ease. But now it is the Spirit of truth that gives assurance, assurance that cashiers doubt, and consequently restores comfort.

And thus much for the first part of the text, in which is contained the promise of sending the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. I proceed now to the

Second, viz. the end of his being sent, which was to testify of Christ.

In which we are to consider two things.

1. What it was that the Spirit was to testify of Christ.
2. By what ways and means he was to testify this of him.

1. For the first of these, the Holy Ghost was never sent to testify any thing of Christ, but what he had testified of himself before; as that he was the Son of God, the Messiah, and Saviour of the world. In all that the Spirit was to do or speak, he was but to act the part of an ambassador: in [John xvi. 13](#), *Christ says, that he should not speak of himself*. And again, in the next verse, *He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you*. All the suggestions of the Spirit in this case were not invention, but repetition.

2. As for the ways and means by which the Spirit testified of Christ, they were the gifts conferred by him upon the disciples, to enable and fit them for their apostolic employment; of the memory of which action, this day is the solemn celebration. Now, though it is not to be doubted, but the gifts of the Spirit were so universal, as to reach and cure all their unfitness; yet there were three that seemed more eminently designed, and more peculiarly effectual for the great purpose of preaching the gospel.

(1.) The first was the gift of miracles. Every miracle is the suffrage of Heaven to the truth of a doctrine. And as Christ had done *greater miracles than any before him*, so he promised his disciples a power of doing greater miracles than himself. The acts of the apostles were so many demonstrations of the truth of Christianity; for all those signs and wonders were done in Christ's name, which retained a surviving efficacy, even after his departure. His name was enough to supply his presence; a name to which every knee bowed, either by way of adoration or submission. The devils confessed him, his enemies oftentimes acknowledged him, even when their interest denied him; [Acts iv. 16](#). Yea, every malady and disease proclaimed the truth of Christ's doctrine, while they felt the curing influence of his power. Every preacher was then a physician, with out changing his profession.

(2.) The second was the gift of tongues. That a man should learn all tongues in a day's space, one would think it impossible; yet we have seen it done when the Spirit was the teacher: so easily can God in an hour's time outdo the acquisitions of human industry for many years. And this surely was a convincing, amazing argument of the truth of the Christian religion to all its adversaries: and the tongues by which the apostles spoke were a sufficient demonstration of the truth of what they spoke; neither was it any more than suitable to the nature of this doctrine, that what was to be known to all nations should be proclaimed

in all tongues, should speak an universal language. The wisdom of Heaven did not think fit to bespeak men in an unknown tongue; nor, what had been more miraculous than all miracles, that men should be saved by what they could not understand.

(3.) The third and great means by which the Holy Ghost testified of Christ, was by that strange, undaunted, and supernatural courage that he infused into the disciples. Truly so great, that, upon a due consideration of man's nature, I look upon it as a proof of Christianity, so far as that religion depends upon matter of fact, comparable to the highest miracle.

Every lie is weak, and he that promulges a lie, knowing it to be so, is naturally diffident and fearful. But so invincible a persuasion possessed the disciples of the truth of what they asserted, that it bore them above the highest contumelies, the greatest hardships, and the sharpest persecutions. [Acts iv. 20](#), *We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*. They spoke, as it were, by a necessary impulse, whether they would or no.

Neither were they naturally such resolute persons, that this hardiness of theirs might be reputed an effect of their temper and complexion: for it appeared, upon several occasions before, that they were men of a timorous and a poor spirit. How did they cry out when they saw Christ walking upon the sea! *thinking that they had seen a spirit*. [Matt. xiv. 26](#). And last of all, when Christ was apprehended, *they all forsook him, and fled*, [Matt. xxvi. 56](#). And Peter, who was the boldest of them, yet how cowardly did he deny his master! for the baseness of that action could be resolved into nothing but his fear.

But after the diffusion of the Holy Ghost, we find that no opposition could quell them; no terror affright, nor any prison or torment silence them. And therefore when Christ commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, and expect the gift of the Holy Ghost, [Luke xxiv. 49](#), he very properly tells them, *that they should be endued with power from on high*; that is, with such a gift of resolved constancy and courage, as should make them superior to all fears within, or oppositions without.

In a word, the Holy Ghost so furnished and enabled Christ's disciples to *testify of him*, that they were the most qualified witnesses of the truth of what they avouched, that ever appeared upon the stage of the world; nor was any doctrine or religion besides the Christian ever attested with such illustrious proofs, and such unexceptionable reasons of credibility.

I suppose a full reflection upon what has been delivered cannot but furnish us with an infallible rule, by which to try men's pretences of the Spirit. It is comprised in this short interrogatory: Do they testify of Christ? Does their doctrine only transcribe what stands already written in the word? Otherwise, if they invent and substitute something in the room of gospel; if they find not only comment, but text also, and plead the spirit in defiance of the letter; it is not the Spirit of God that acts them, but the spirit of darkness and desolation, that ruins government and subverts kingdoms: and if it had not been for such a kind of spirit, this day had not been by a third part so much a festival as it is.

For had not the king been driven out of his do minions, he could not have been so gloriously restored; and had it not been for the furious spirit of enthusiasm, those confusions, the fatal cause of his expulsion, had never happened. For was not the prime leader and artificer of this successful villainy the professed father of enthusiasts? Did he not still plead inward instigations, in opposition to express commands? And were not all his legions possessed by the same spirit; by whose teachings they thought themselves sufficiently discharged from the abrogated precepts of allegiance? But since it is our duty not to violate the memory of our oppressors, but silently, thankfully, and forgetfully to accept the oppression; we will commemorate only the king's restitution.



And this I think may not improperly coincide with the very business of the day, which is to celebrate the sending of the Holy Ghost; who also must be acknowledged the cause of this great transaction: so that we may with a peculiar emphasis and propriety express the king's restoration in those words of the prophet, [Zechar. iv. 6](#), *Not by might, nor by strength, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.*

For the king returned not a conqueror, but a conquered person, borne upon the backs of his conquerors; and brought in by a body of men, who at that very time wanted neither force nor will to have devoured him; but by a strange surprise and infatuation upon their spirits, were prevailed upon to do they knew not what, nor why.

It was an action, that carried in it such bright testimonies of a supernatural power, so much above, nay against the means and actors visibly appearing in it; that I know no argument from metaphysics or natural philosophy, that to my reason proves the existence of a Deity more fully, than the consideration of this prodigious revolution: which, if it does not leave lasting impressions of gratitude in men's minds, manifesting itself in the returns of a pious life, truly the delivered persons will be yet a greater wonder than the deliverance.

But whether or no it has had this effect, and whether many have not returned rather hardened than reduced by their afflictions, and brought out of the furnace with them that dross which first cast them into it; God knows, and their own consciences know, and their lives in a great measure testify.



It is a sad and a fearful consideration, but too obvious to escape any observing mind, that atheism, obscenity, and a professed scorn of religion, has so wrought itself into the behaviour, the discourse, and the very genius of the times, that if God can be provoked again, they carry in them the threatening presages and dismal prognostics of an impending national judgment, which God of his infinite mercy avert. And since nothing less will do it, may he continue to preserve us by a greater miracle of goodness, than that by which he first restored us.

Trinity Sunday.

Now, though (as I have already shewn) the chief subject of the text was the Holy Spirit; yet, as if it carried in it a conjunction of two great festivals, it seems to point both at the Pentecost and the Trinity.

For in the words we have,

1. The person sent, which was the Holy Ghost.
2. The person sending him, which was the Son.
3. The person from whom he is said to proceed, which was the Father.

So great a mystery have we lying in so small a compass; that which neither the heaven of heavens can contain, nor the grasp of human reason comprehend, we see here wrapt up and represented in one period of this sublime evangelist.

But you will say, Does not our creed tell us, *that the three persons of the Godhead are coequal?* How then comes the Son to send and employ the Holy Ghost, which argues a distance and superiority?

I answer, that their equality is to be understood only in respect of their nature; and an equality of nature hinders not an inequality in point of order and office, especially being voluntarily undertook: in respect of which, the Spirit may be properly said to be sent by the Son, though otherwise as to the divine nature they are absolutely coequal.

We have here the three persons, as it were, met in council about the grand affair of man's salvation. The Father contriving, the Son ordering, and the Spirit performing. One would almost think, that it were lawful for man to be proud, when it is thus made the interest of Heaven to look after and to promote the concerns of his happiness. It is like the sun, that vast and glorious body, wheeling about the earth to give warmth and influence to a poor plant or a little flower.

God is pleased to make it his business that we should be saved. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are all employed, and every person has shared out to himself a distinct office in the management of that great action; and that with such a stated order, that the manner of doing is as admirable as the thing done. The Father could have transacted the whole business of man's salvation by himself; but he was pleased to honour the work with a mystery, and by allotting to each person his part, to recommend order to our imitation.

In short, from this whole passage, by way of deduction, we may collect and learn these two things:

- (1.) God's gracious love and condescension to man.
- (2.) The worth of souls.

(1.) For the first of these, was it not wonderful that the whole Trinity should thus stoop down to regard and advance us? It is, as if a king should call his parliament to invent ways and means how to prefer a few beggars.

Twelve poor fishermen were those to whom the Father and the Son first sent the Holy Ghost to be their comforter. And were not these worthy persons, to whom God should send



an embassy from heaven! Yet the love of God thought all this little enough to carry on the good of mankind. The Trinity is indeed a great mystery, yet it is a question, whether God is not yet more wonderful in his love, than in the way of his subsistence.

(2.) We learn hence the worth of souls. Though the divine nature is so glorious, that there is room enough for condescension, even in his treating with the most excellent of his creatures; yet surely the Lord of the universe does not busy himself about trifles, nor lay designs and use great counsels to pursue the air and the wind.

We can quaff away a soul, swear away a soul, and squander away eternity upon brutish and sense less gratifications of the flesh; but the omniscient, all-wise God has another judgment of souls; he looks upon them as worth his own taking pains upon. Shew me so much as one footstep in scripture, where God with such solemnity expresses a design to make any man rich or honourable; those things he scatters abroad with a looser, a promiscuous, and more careless hand.

But the salvation of souls is never left to chance, nor to any thing like contingency. All the Persons of the Trinity are ready (as I may speak with reverence) to wait upon us in our way to heaven; solicitous to secure us in our passage, and by all ways, methods, and encouragements, to comfort us in this world, and at length to waft us to a better.

To which, God of his infinite mercy vouchsafe to bring us.



SERMON XXX.

PROVERBS xviii. 14.

—*But a wounded spirit who can bear?*

THE corruption of man's nature is, by sad experience, found to be so great, that few are kept from sin, but merely by the check of their fears, representing to them the endless, insupportable torments of another world, as the certain consequent and terrible reward of it. Which fears, if men arrive to such a pitch of atheism as to be able to shake off, (a perfection nowadays attained to by many, and aspired to by more,) there seems to be nothing left further to work upon such persons, in the way of fear, nor consequently to control, and put a stop to the full career and fury of their lusts.

Upon which account it will (I conceive) be no ill service to religion, to let such profligate wretches know, that their infidelity cannot set them so far out of the reach of vengeance, but that, while they endeavour to cast off all dread of future damnation, God can antedate the torments they disbelieve, and convince them of the possibility of such miseries hereafter, by an actual foretaste of the same here; that he can kindle one hell within them, before they enter into another; and by what he can make them feel, teach them the certainty of what they refuse to fear.

It is indeed none of the least of God's titles and prerogatives, that he is *the God of the spirits of all flesh*; and that, as he first made the soul, so he retains an immediate, irresistible power over it, so as to be able to turn the inclinations, and to dispose of the comfort and the sorrows of it, as he pleases; and all this independently upon any of those objects, which by the ordinary course of nature it converses with. The usual materials, of which the soul makes up its comforts and satisfactions here on earth, are the felicities of this world; and the ordinary cause of its sorrows are the adverse and cross accidents of the same: nevertheless, God can infuse comfort into the soul, in spite of the sharpest earthly calamities, and on the other hand, smite it with the severest anguish and bitterness, in the midst of the highest affluence and prosperity.

The text presents us here with a short but full comparison between the grief that afflicts the outward man, and that which preys upon the inward; together with the transcendent greatness of the latter above the former, as shall be made out presently in the grand instance of both these sorts of sufferings, even our blessed Saviour himself. For let this outside, or shell of nature, the body, be under never so much pain and agony, yet a well-settled and resolved mind will be able to buoy it up, and keep it from sinking; the spirits will bear, and by bearing will at length master all these infirmities. But when the spirit itself is wounded, and struck through, the grief presently becomes victorious, and intolerable. The soul in this case being like a bird wounded in the wing, the proper instrument and natural engine of its



support, this immediately puts an end to its flight, and makes all striving vain; for fall it must to the ground.

In the words there are two things to be explained.

I. What is meant by *spirit*.

II. What is imported by its being *wounded*.

1st. For the first of these, we are to observe, that both scripture and philosophy hold forth to us in the soul of man an upper and a lower part; not indeed in respect of its substance, for that is indivisible, but in respect of its faculties. And as this lower, or inferior part, consists of those sensitive faculties and appetites, whose operations being wholly tied to the organs of the body, do accordingly converse only with bodily and gross objects; so there is an higher and more noble portion of the soul, purely intellectual; and in operation, as well as in substance, perfectly spiritual. Which is called by philosophers τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν, that is, the leading, ruling, and directing part of the soul; and by the scripture, *the spirit of the mind*; that is, the most exalted, refined, and quintessential part of it, in [Ephes. iv. 23](#), *Be ye renewed in the spirit of your mind*. For that the soul is a spirit, that is to say, a substance void of matter and dimensions, I suppose none will deny, but those who (with your oracle, Hobbes, in the head of them) admit of no substance, but body; and having fully subdued faith to senses, and so (like Thomas) resolving to believe no further than your eyes and hands can reach, will perhaps in religion, as well as natural objects, make the tube, the still, and the telescope, the sole measure of their creed. In defiance of which atheistical notions, I affirm, that there is a certain noble and refined part of the soul expressed to us in the text by *spirit*, and here said to be *wounded*. Which is the

Second thing to be explained by us; and, I suppose, is so far and fully explained by us already, from the very nature of the subject to which it is here ascribed, that every one presently apprehends it to be an expression purely figurative; and that the soul being wounded, signifies nothing else, but its being deeply and intimately possessed with a lively sense of God's wrath for sin, dividing, entering, and forcing its way into the most vital parts of it, as a sword or rapier does into the body. I say possessed with a sense of God's wrath for sin; forasmuch as there is no grief, but meritoriously presupposes sin as the cause of it: not that I deny, but God by his absolute prerogative, without any violation of his other attribute, could and might grieve and afflict an innocent person, if he so pleased; but that by the stated rule of his transactings with men, he has resolved the contrary, and never afflicts or torments any rational creature that is not a sinner, either by actual commission, or at least by imputation.

Now this brief explication of the words being premised, the sense of them lies full and clear in this one proposition; viz.

That the trouble and anguish of a soul labouring under a sense of God's displeasure for sin, is inexpressibly greater than any other grief or trouble whatsoever.



The prosecution of which I shall manage under these following particulars.

I. I shall shew what kind of persons are the proper subjects of this trouble.

II. I shall shew wherein the excessive greatness of this trouble doth appear.

III. I shall shew by what ways and means it is brought upon the soul.

IV. What is God's end and design in casting men into such a perplexed condition: and,

V. and lastly, I shall draw some useful inferences from the whole.

Of each of which in their order.

1st. And first for the persons who are the proper objects of this trouble. These I affirm to be indifferently both the righteous and the wicked, both such as God loves, and such as he hates; but with a very different issue in one and in the other. The reason of which assertion is, because these troubles and spiritual terrors are not, as such, either acts or figures of grace, by which alone persons truly pious and regenerate are distinguished from the wicked and degenerate; but they are properly effects of God's anger, striking and afflicting the soul for sin, and consequently are alike incident to both sorts, forasmuch as both are sinners; and even the most pious person in the world has fuel enough in his guilty soul for the wrath of God to flame out upon in all these terrible rebukes. Nay, where there is no inherent guilt, these effects of wrath may take place: as in the case of our Saviour, who, without the least personal inherent guilt, suffered the utmost that an angry God could inflict upon him in this world. And therefore nothing certain can be concluded of any man's spiritual estate, in reference to his future happiness or misery, from the present terrors and amazements that his conscience labours under: for as Cain and Judas, and many more reprobates, have suffered, so David and many other excellent saints of God have felt their shares of the same; though the issue, I confess, has not been the same in both; but that alters not the nature of the thing itself.

Nay, I shall add further, that according to the present economy of God's dealing with the souls of men, persons truly good and holy do more frequently taste of this bitter cup than the wicked and the reprobate; who are seldom alarumed out of their sins by such severe interruptions; but, for the most part, remain seated up in ease and security, to the fearful day of retribution. And therefore I should be so far from passing any harsh or doubtful sentence upon the condition of a person struggling under the apprehensions of God's wrath, that I should, on the contrary, account such an one a much fitter subject for evangelical comfort, than those sons of assurance, that, having been bred up in a constant confidence of the divine favour to them, never yet felt the least doubt or question arising in their secure hearts about it: and consequently should think the balsam of pardoning mercy the only proper infusion for such *wounded spirits*, while the gall and vinegar of the curse, the caustics and corrosives of the law, were the fittest applications to be made to such brawny, unrelenting hearts, as never yet smarted under any remorse, nor experimentally knew what it was to be



troubled for sin. And thus having shewn upon what kind of persons this trouble of mind may fall, I come now to the

Second particular; which is to shew, wherein the strange, excessive, and sometimes supernatural greatness of it does appear. In which though I may seem to contradict that in the prosecution, which I had asserted in the doctrine; namely, that this trouble was beyond expression; it being of the nature and number of those things that are rather to be felt than described; yet, so far as the dimensions of it can be taken, we may collect the surpassing greatness of it from these following discoveries.

1. First, from the behaviour of our Saviour himself in this condition. It was indeed a sense of God's wrath for sin that he was under; but for sin never committed by him, for guilt that was none of his, but only by imputation, and account of law, founded upon his own free act, in the voluntary assuming of the person of a surety, undertaking to discharge that vast debt of mankind to the divine justice, in his own body upon the cross. Upon which account alone, the wrath of God for sin could have any thing to do with him, who in his own person and actions was absolutely, perfectly, and entirely innocent, or rather even innocence itself.

Now I think I may with great truth affirm this; in all the sufferings that sin can possibly bring upon the sinner, there is, without all peradventure, some thing more grievous and corroding to the mind of man, from his being conscious that he has actually committed the sin he suffers for, than in all the sharpest and most afflicting impressions of pain, of which that suffering, as to the matter of it, does consist. Otherwise surely the voice of reason, in the bare discourses of nature, could never have risen so high, as to affirm that a wise or dexterous man could not be miserable; that he was unconcerned in all bodily pain, and might sing in Phalaris's bull. But scripture, which is the best, and experience, which is the next philosophy, have put the matter past all doubt; the first telling us, that it is *sin only is the sting of death*; and the other perpetually ringing this sad peal in every suffering sinner's conscience, *Perditio tua ex te*; that his misery is but the due and just consequent of his own actions, the genuine fruit of his own free, unconstrained choice. And this is that, that even-oms the cup of God's fury, and adds poison to the bitterness of that fatal draught.

But now this part of suffering *for* sin, or rather *from* sin, Christ neither did nor could undergo; it being a contradiction, that he, who never committed sin, should feel in his conscience those stings and remorse that can spring only from a sense of having committed it. No; these are the natural, essential results of a sinful act, and so rest wholly within the person of the agent; the primitive rewards of sin, which consist properly in those pains which by positive sanction of law are adjudged to every sinful action, and to which alone Christ did or could subject himself.

And yet we see the sense of the divine wrath exerting itself upon Christ only in these latter, and stripped of the poison of all personal guilt, was so direful and intolerable, that it

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made him, who was God as well as man; *him, to whom all power in heaven and earth was given; him, by and for whom God made the world, and in whom the very fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily*; even this in finite, mighty person, this *man of God's right hand*, (as the prophet David calls him,) did it make to crouch and languish, to roar and to despond, and at length to sink and die under the overpowering, confounding pressures of it.

And surely a greater argument of the force and fury of this sense of God's wrath for sin could not be, than that it should have such dismal effect upon one, who personally was no sinner; but only lay under a borrowed guilt; one who had all the advantages of strength, and the supports of innocence, to keep his mind firm, serene, and impenetrable. But all this availed him little, when the deadly in fusion had once got into his soul, seized the main arsenal and strong hold of his humanity; and, in a word, cut the nerve of its great and last supporter, the spirit. And in this case, human nature, though advanced to a personal union and conjunction with the divine, yet was but human nature still; that is, a poor feeble thing, forced to confess its native weakness, and after a short conflict with the divine wrath, to break, and fall under its own ruins. So that it may justly put that high and doleful exclamation into the mouths of all who shall consider Christ upon the cross; *Lord, who knoweth the power of thine anger?* God only can know it; and he only, who was much more than man, could endure it.

2dly, The strength and greatness of this trouble of mind for sin appears from those most raised and passionate expressions, that have been uttered from time to time by persons eminent in the ways of God, while they were labouring under it. For a notable instance of which, instead of many, let us hear David, a person frequently in these deep plunges, roaring out his spiritual grievances in most of his Psalms. And I single him out before all others, because he was certainly and signally a type of Christ, both in respect of many things belonging to his person, and many passages relating to his life; and particularly that dolorous part of it that contained his sufferings, and immediately before his death. Which sufferings we have him with great life and clearness representing, in several of his divine hymns; which, howsoever uttered by him, in the first person, as if he were still speaking of himself; yet, without all question, in the principal design and purport of them, pointed at the Messiah, as their most proper subject. The [22d Psalm](#) is very full, as to his bodily sufferings; but in none of all the Psalms is the spiritual part of his passion set forth to that height that it is in the [77th Psalm, from the first verse to the 10th](#): in which it will be well worth our while distinctly to consider some of the most remarkable expressions.

As in the [third verse](#). *I complained, says he, and my spirit was overwhelmed*. Which is the language of a sorrow much different from that of a common worldly grief; a grief that would have expressed itself far otherwise; as, *I complained*. I vented a few sighs and a few tears, and the cloud was presently over; when the shower was fallen, all was clear: sorrow perhaps lasted for a night, but it broke with the day, and the return of joy came quickly in



the morning. But the spiritual sorrow here mentioned was still making a progress, still upon the advance, from the tongue to the spirit, from outward expressions to more inward apprehensions. Every sigh and groan rebounded back to the heart, from whence it came. The penitent eye, like the widow's cruse, the more it pours forth, the fuller it is; finding a supply (as it were) in every effusion.

But this sorrow stops not here; it does not only alarm his complaints, but also break his natural rest. In the fourth verse, *Thou holdest mine eyes waking*. Just as in that black night before our Saviour's crucifixion; in which it is said of him, that *he began to be sorrowful, and very heavy; nay, exceeding sorrowful, even unto death*; we find that he continued watching, from the beginning to the end of it, without any sleep, when yet the disciples were not able *to hold their eyes open*. Now this is an undoubted argument of an overpowering grief: for when Darius was excessively troubled for Daniel, it is said of him, in [Daniel vi. 18](#), *that he passed the night fasting, and his sleep went from him*. And then for Job, in [Job vii. 13, 14](#), *When I say, My bed shall comfort me, and my couch shall ease my complaint; then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me with visions*. When a man's sleep is his torment, what can be his rest? The time of sleep is the only season in which an afflicted person does (as it were) seal some little reprieve from his cares, and for a while deceives his sorrows. But in this case, the workings of the soul become too potent for the inclinations of nature. For though sleep be designed by nature to repair and make up the expense of a man's spirits; and withal, nothing spends the spirits comparable to sorrow; yet here we see the anguish of this spiritual sorrow joins two contrary effects, and at the same time both exhausts the spirits and hinders all repose; forcibly holding up the eyelids, and by a continual flow of tears keeping them still open. A watchful eye and a mournful heart are usually companions.

But neither is this the utmost effect of this sorrow; it comes at length to swell to that excess, as to be even too big for utterance; as appears from the following words in the same verse; *I am so troubled, that I cannot speak*. Words, to none more applicable than to him, *who, when he was led as a sheep to the slaughter, was, like a sheep also, dumb before his shearer, and opened not his mouth*, [Acts viii. 32](#). Which is yet an higher declaration of an overpressing grief, than the loudest outcries. For nature has not only given a man a voice, but also silence, whereby to manifest the inward passions and affections of his mind. And such a silence speaks the heart so full of sorrow, that, like a vessel, its very fulness sometimes hinders all vent. It is a known saying, that ordinary, slight griefs complain, but great sorrows strike the heart with an astonished silence. Thorns make a crackling blaze, and are quickly gone; but great wood lies a long time, and consumes with a silent fire. A still grief is a devouring grief; such an one as preys upon the vitals, sinks into the bones, and dries up the marrow. That wound is of all others the most deadly, that causes the heart to bleed inwardly.

Thus we have seen this sorrow, both in its greatness and variety; sometimes sallying forth in rest less clamours and complaints, and sometimes again retreating into a silence,

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and (if you will admit the expression) even proclaiming itself in dumbness and stupefaction: though, whether rising in one or falling in the other, like a man whether standing up right or lying down, it loses nothing of its proportion and greatness; as the sea when it ebbs, no less than when it flows, has still the fulness of an ocean.

But neither does it continue long under this amazed silence; but we have it presently again rising up, and boiling over in complaints much more vehement and passionate than the former; as appears from the [seventh to the tenth verses](#): *Will the Lord cast off for ever, and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever; and doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious, and hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* And what was all this, but a prophetic paraphrase upon those words of our Saviour upon the cross; *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Certainly there is some thing in them more than ordinary. For could a common grief have indited such expressions? Every word is a strain above nature; every sentence is the copy of such a sorrow, as rather would express itself, than either does or can. And surely he that shall duly ponder the weight, relish the paths, and consider that spiritual vigour that sparkles in every period of them, will find them greater and higher than any expressions that the sense of an external calamity could suggest. They are the very breathings of despair, and the words of a soul scorched with the direful apprehensions of God's wrath, and a total eclipse of his favour. The truth is, they sound like words spoken at a rate or pitch above a mere man, and I doubt not were dictated by the Holy Ghost, to set forth the sufferings of him who was so.

3dly, The excessive greatness of this trouble of mind appears from the uninterrupted, incessant continuance of it. It does not come and go by fits, or paroxysms: it has no pauses, or vicissitudes; for then the respite of one hour might lay in strength to endure the troubles of the next. From the very first minute of our Saviour's passion, from the first arrest and seizure of his righteous soul, the anguish of this sorrow never left it, till it had forced that to leave his body. Nothing could make the *powers of darkness* quit their hold of so great a prize. As David again has it, (and still, no doubt, prophetically of Christ, in this his last and great scene of misery,) in [Psalm xxii. 2](#), *I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not, and in the night season, and am not silent.* he seems here to describe this *man of sorrow* at his night-agonies and devotions in the garden, as well as groaning out the inward pangs of his soul on the day of his crucifixion. There was no distinction of night and day, during his sufferings; but, without any lucid intervals of comfort, he was under one continued darkness of desertion. Hence we have the like pathetic outcry again in [Psalm xxxix. 13](#), *O spare me a little, that I may recover my strength.* He begged of God but to grant him so much as a little breathing-time, and for a while to intermit the strokes of his fury. For when there is no release to be had from wrath, the next mitigation is to have some respite under it: the nature of man being

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so very impotent and feeble, that it is not able to bear a continual pleasure, and much less a continual sorrow. This it was that made Job's affliction hardly to be paralleled or expressed, that so many killing mischiefs and disasters came thronging (as it were) one in the neck of another. No sooner was one sad story ended, but another presently began. So that his heart was so employed and taken up in admitting and drinking in the sorrow that still came flowing into it, that it had no truce or relaxation to utter or discharge it: like a man receiving money faster than he can tell it; his incomes nonplus his accounts. In which and the like cases, God's hand does not only strike, but, as it is emphatically in [Psalm xxxviii. 2](#), it also *presseth the soul*. And what is pressure, but the continuation of a blow? nay, what is hell itself, but sorrow without intermission?

4thly, The height and greatness of this spiritual trouble appears from its violent and more than ordinary manifestation of itself on outward signs and effects. A strange and supernatural instance of which we have in our Saviour, in the sad preliminaries of his passion. The inward chafings and agitations of his struggling soul forcing a way through his body, by a sweat even of blood, and opening all his veins, by an inward sense of something sharper than the impression of any lance or spear from without. And generally, in the very course of nature, when a thing, lodged or enclosed any where, breaks forth, it is because it finds no room for an abode within. Outward eruptions are the undoubted arguments of an inward fulness. Nor does this at all contradict what I had said before of such a vehement sorrow's manifesting itself in silence and astonishment; for that is only at sometimes, and at some certain degrees, from which it often varies: as even our Saviour himself, while upon the cross, was not yet always crying out. But, besides, even in the midst of this silence, there are other ways by which such a trouble will sufficiently declare itself to the discernment of an ordinary eye. For while the tongue is silent, the countenance and conversation may speak aloud; and when we cannot hear sorrow speak, yet we may hear it groan; and when it is not to be known by its voice, it may be traced by its tears. Shame and sorrow, those twin children of sin, are seldom deep in the heart, but they are apparent in the face. It is hard to stifle or suppress any natural affection. But this trouble of conscience, as it is above a man's strength to conquer, so it is beyond his art to conceal it. It is scarce possible for a man to lie under the torments of the gout or the stone, without roaring out his sense of them; but the torments of conscience are as much sharper and more affecting than these, as the perceptions of the soul are quicker than those of the body. It is the load upon the heart that gives vociferation to its grief, like the weights of a clock, that cause it to be heard.

Add to this the drooping paleness and dejection of the looks, the mournful cloud upon the brow, the damp and melancholy covering the whole face; all of them the infallible signs of such a grief as will be sure to discover its abode by its effects; and such as made Christ himself so doleful a spectacle of misery, as to draw that compassionate exclamation, even from Pilate, [John xix. 5](#), *Behold the man! My moisture*, says David, who (as we have observed

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already) spoke most of these things typically of our Saviour, *is turned into the drought of summer*, [Psalm xxxii. 4](#). His grief had sucked up all his radical juices, and reduced him even to a skeleton. So that he might well say, in [Psalm xxii. 17](#), *I may tell all my bones*; while one might not only stand staring and looking *upon him*, but *through him* also. Such impressions will trouble of conscience make sometimes even upon the body; all which outward symptoms will be found undeniable arguments of the surpassing greatness of it, even upon this account, that they are sure indications of the excess of any worldly trouble. For how easily may the loss of a friend or an estate be read in the countenance! When we are bereaved of our earthly contents, *prorumpunt lacrymae*; and it is not in our power to stop those floodgates of sorrow.



Now, though I must confess that the spiritual sorrow that we have been discoursing of does not always work over in such sensible, passionate signs as worldly grief uses to do, and consequently is not certainly and universally to be measured by them; yet sometimes it has them all, and, if genuine and true, can never be wholly without some of them. And that man who has tears to spend at the memorial of a lost friend, but none to shed at the thoughts of a lost innocence, a wasted conscience, and a provoked God, has but too much cause to suspect the truth of his sorrow and the goodness of his heart.

5thly and lastly, The transcendent greatness of this spiritual trouble may be gathered from those horrid effects it has had upon persons not upheld under it by divine grace. This indeed could not be the case of our Saviour; no, not in the greatest height of his passion; God (as I may so speak) supporting him with one arm, while he was smiting him with the other. But the force and activity of every cause is to be discerned and measured only by its utmost effect. And this trouble of mind actually does its utmost only upon such persons as are abandoned of the forementioned supports of grace. For in others, whom Heaven deals with upon different terms, as soon as it has worked itself almost up to its fatal crisis, mercy steps in, stanches the bleeding wound, and will not suffer it to destroy, where God intends it only to prove.



Now both history and experience testify what tragical ends men deserted by God, under the troubles of a *wounded spirit*, have been brought into. One man, after he has been grappling with these terrors for some time, has at length drowned himself. An other has been so pursued and wearied with the tormenting thoughts of his sin, that he has sought for an antidote in poison, and even chose to end his grief with his days. Which, surely, are proofs clear enough to evince the insufferable torments of a guilty, inflamed conscience in persons finally forsook by God. Nor are those troubles at all less in persons truly pious, during a state of desertion: as may appear from those near approaches that even such persons, in such a condition, have made to these dismal outrages upon themselves. For some have been so far left to themselves, as even to intend and resolve upon self-murder; and nothing has been wanting but the last execution. Though they have not actually drowned themselves, yet they have stood pausing upon the brink of destruction; and though they have not used

the fatal knife, yet they have prepared it. From whence it is evident, that, for the time, they suffer the same troubles of mind that the wicked do: and that one do not perish under them, as well as the other, it is not because some lie under a greater measure of these terrors, and some a less; but because, under the same equal proportion, God powerfully upholds some, and lets others fall.

And thus I have done with the second thing proposed; which was to shew, wherein the excessive greatness of the trouble of a *wounded spirit* manifests itself; I proceed now to the Third; which is to shew, by what ways and means this trouble is brought upon the soul. I shall instance in four.

1st, The first is by dreadful reflections upon the divine justice, as provoked. As soon as ever the soul has eaten of the forbidden fruit of sin, the flaming sword of vengeance presently appears; for sin being, properly, a breach of the law, and the law being under the defence and tuition of God's justice, the soul cannot reflect upon its sin, but it must also cast its eye upon that which it does essentially relate to, the law; and in a violated law it cannot but see an affronted lawgiver. And in this case the divine justice does as naturally catch hold of and prey upon sin, as a devouring flame does upon flax or stubble. *If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity*, says David, [Psalm cxxx. 3](#), *O Lord, who could stand?* Justice is a plentiful argument of terror, considered by any one that has guilt and understanding too: for all the calamities in the world, which so afflict and pester mankind, are but the products of justice. Justice, meeting with sin, is a word comprising all the evils that God can afflict or man endure. For when we view prisons, dungeons, hospitals, those habitations of misery, the general motto and superscription upon them all ought to be, *Justice*. It goes about the world, like God's destroying angel, with a sword in its hand. Read over all that long, black catalogue of curses in [Deut. xxviii](#). and they are all but a short essay, or specimen, of that vengeance that divine justice has in reserve for sin, and but a slight foretaste of those pains that this life, indeed, may begin, but extremity and perpetuity must complete.

But neither can the miseries of this world or the next, or both together, represent the justice of God half so terrible to any apprehensive minds, as the sufferings of our Saviour upon the cross. For if, when justice called for satisfaction, God spared not his only Son, the Son whom he infinitely loved, [Matt. iii. 17](#); the Son who pleased him in all things, [John iv. 34](#); but gave him up to the most barbarous treatment that rage and malice could invent, and, after that, to a cruel, ignominious death: what can the conscience of a sinful man find out to skreen itself by from the same justice appearing against it in vindication of a transgressed law, calling for nothing less in recompence than the soul of the transgressor? Not only conscience, but common sense, must and will make this dreadful inference; If these things were *done in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry?* The flame that could but scorch that, must inevitably consume this.



2dly, Those wounds are inflicted upon the spirit or conscience by fearful apprehensions of the divine mercy, as abused. God's justice, we have seen, is of itself sufficiently terrible; but when mercy, the only thing that should interpose, and ward off the fiery blows of it, is gone, it must needs be intolerable: it must break in upon the soul like a mighty, over bearing torrent when the bank is down; nothing can oppose or hinder the fury of its progress. Offended justice ministers abundant reason of fear; but abused mercy seems to cut off all ground of hope. For a man to affront him who is to be witness in a cause against him, justly renders the success of it dubious; but to injure his advocate, who alone is to stand between him and his accuser, must, of doubtful, make it desperate and deplorable. To sin against mercy is to sin against our last remedy. For is there any third attribute in the divine nature, that can save him, who has God's justice for his enemy, and his mercy not for his friend? Is there any thing that can restore that person who stands lost and bankrupt, both upon the score of law and gospel too? If mercy condemns, what can pardon? But, above all, if the mercies and tenderness of a Saviour, bleeding, suffering, and at length giving up his very life a sacrifice for sin, and a ransom for sinners, cannot speak comfort to a wounded spirit, must not the wound prove deadly and incurable? And yet, since the benefit of all those sufferings is dealt forth only upon certain conditions, may not the remembrance of some sins justly render the conscience very doubtful, whether a man may plead any interest in them, or not? For what is Christ upon the cross to one that will not be crucified with him? or what is a Saviour dying for sins, to a man that delights in them? Can he claim any benefit by that blood which his conscience is charging him with the guilt of?

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These are such considerations as cannot but wound and terrify a thoughtful conscience: next to which, in the present case, came in also the stings and remorse of natural ingenuity; a principle that men scarce ever wholly shake off, as long as they carry any thing of human nature about them. And when this shall appear as a second to conscience in God's quarrel, and upbraid a man for all his backslidings and apostasies, telling him, with the greatest bitterness of taunting reproach, These are- the compassions thou hast abused, these are the bowels thou hast kicked against, these the wounds thou hast renewed upon thy Saviour, and this the blood that thou hast trampled upon; reminding him also of the most signal and eminent deliverances vouchsafed him throughout his life by the same hand of mercy: how that at such a time, under such a distress, when his sin mocked him, and the world despised him, when his heart failed him, and his friends forsook him, yet the goodness of God still stood by him to comfort and support him: how that it delivered him from such a danger and such an enemy, such a sickness and such a plunge, from which all his own act and reason could never have contrived his escape: how, I say, when the Spirit of God shall enliven and stir up those remainders of natural ingenuity in the sinner's breast, thus to expostulate and debate the case with him in the behalf of abused mercy, every such word will pierce like

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a dagger to his heart, and strike like a dart into his entrails. Common humanity will be his judge, and conscience his executioner.

3dly, The spirit comes to be wounded and brought under this extreme anguish, by God's withdrawing his presence and the sense of his love from it, as he does sometimes for a season even from the best of men; hiding himself from those whom it is impossible for him to forsake; which was the very case and condition of our Saviour, making that vehement outcry under a present apprehension that God had forsook him, and cast off all the tenderness of a father, while he was inflicting upon him such exquisite torments as one would think it too much for a father but to look upon. *Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled*, says David, [Psalm xxx. 7](#): for all the joy of created beings streams by natural and immediate efflux from the divine presence, as that vital heat and warmth, that animates all things here be low, comes by direct emanation from that plentiful fountain of it, the sun. And consequently, when a cloud shall interpose between us and the presence of God, the terrors of the law, and the fears of provoked justice and affronted mercy cannot but rush in upon the conscience with a much greater force than at other times. As malignant vapours that infect the air have, after the sun is set, and the light withdrawn, a much more powerful influence upon it, than they can have in the day, God's suspending the light and beams of his countenance will cause such *a darkness as may be felt*: and even the strictest livers and most improved Christians are forced to feel the heavy, dispiriting damps of it, when God deserts them. The ways by which God discovers himself to, and hides himself from the souls of men, are strange and unconceivable; but whensoever he does either, the soul is so nearly and sensibly affected with it, that it presently and certainly understands its condition: indeed, as certainly as a man finds and feels in himself, when he sickens and when he recovers.

God sometimes writes bitter things against a man, shews him his old sins in all their terrifying, crimson circumstances, leaves him in the sad deeps of despair to himself, and his own pitiful strengths, to encounter the threats of the law, the assaults of his implacable enemy: in which forlorn estate is not such a one much like a poor traveller losing his way at midnight, and surprised with a violent storm besides? He has darkness round about him, hears nothing but storms and thunder above him, and knows not one step of his way. Such an one is a man deserted by God, whether he looks inwards or upwards; nothing but horror and darkness, confusion and mistake, attends his condition.

It is reported to be the custom in some countries, that when a judge sits upon the condemnation of a malefactor, there is a curtain drawn before him, so that the condemned person cannot see his judge. And thus it is often between God and a *wounded spirit*: it hears indeed from him a condemning voice, but cannot see his face; and this is horror upon horror; it heightens the condemnation, and makes the sentence of death sharper than the infliction.

4thly and lastly, These wounding perplexities are brought upon the soul by God's giving commission to the tempter more than usually to trouble and disquiet it; for Satan is truly



and properly the great troubler of Israel. He was so even to him *who knew no sin*: for as in our Saviour's very entrance into his ministry he tempted him, [Matth. iv.](#) so, towards the close, both of that and his life too, he troubled him: for all that was done by the cruel instruments of his bitter passion, was done by his direct instigation, in [Luke xxii. 53](#), *This is your hour, (says Christ,) and the power of darkness.* There is a certain hour, or critical time, in which God suffers the powers of darkness to afflict and vex those that are dearest to him. And if it could be so with one perfectly innocent, how much worse must it needs be, when this mortal enemy of mankind has to deal with sinners? whom it is as natural for him to trouble for sin, as to tempt to it: and as it is common with him, before sin is committed, to make it appear less in the sinner's eye than really it is, so, after the commission, if it be possible, he will represent it greater. When God shall leave the computing of our sins to him, where the law writes our debts but fifty, this unjust steward will set down fourscore. If the malice of hell, the wit, industry, and importunity of the tempter, having such a theme as the guilt of sin, and the curse of the law, to enlarge upon, can do any thing, then shall the sinner find, by woful experience, that he could not with more art and earnestness allure to presumption, than he can now terrify into despair. He that so fawningly enticed the soul to sin, will now as bitterly upbraid it for having sinned. The same hand that laid the bait and the corn to draw the silly fowl into the net, when it is once in, will have its life for coming thither.

Satan never so cruelly insults and plays the tyrant as in this case. If God casts down the soul, he will trample upon it. He will set a new stamp and name upon every sin. Every backsliding shall be total apostasy. Every sin against light and knowledge shall be heightened into the sin against the Holy Ghost. The conscience shall not be able to produce one argument for itself but he will retort it. If it shall plead former assurance of God's favour, from the inward witness of his Spirit, Satan will persuade the soul that it was but a spirit of delusion. If it shall argue an interest in God's promises from former obedience, as a fruit of that faith that never fails, Satan will tell the soul, that it cannot prove its former obedience to have proceeded from such a faith, since even an hypocrite may go very far. And lastly, if it would draw comfort from that abundant redemption that the death of Christ offers to all that are truly sensible of their sins, Satan will reply, that to such as, by relapsing into sin, have *trampled under foot the blood of the covenant, there remains no further propitiation for sin.* Now with these and the like rejoinders will he endeavour to baffle and invalidate all a sinner's pretences to pardon. And when God shall not only permit, but, what is more, judicially bid him use his diabolical skill in troubling and vexing a wounded spirit, those arguments, that of themselves were able to amaze the heart, being urged home by such a sophister, will ever break and confound it.

And thus I have shewn four several ways by which the spirit comes to be thus wounded and afflicted; which was the third thing proposed to be handled. Pass we now to the



Fourth, which is to shew, what is God's end and design in casting men into such a perplexed condition.

Concerning which, as we are to remember that I shew at first that the subject of these excessive, heart-wounding troubles were both the elect and the reprobate, both the godly and the wicked; so we are to know further, that God has a very different design in bringing these terrors upon each of them. And

1st, For the wicked or reprobate. It is evident, that whensoever God brings these into such a condition of horror, it is to them but the beginnings of sorrow, and an entrance into those torments which shall abide upon them for ever. It is but the first-fruits of hell, and the earnest of their damnation. But then,

2dly, For the pious and sincere. God sometimes brings this anguish upon their spirit for a twofold end, very different from the former. As,

1st, To embitter sin to them. Nothing does or can leave a more abiding impression upon the mind than misery escaped. He surely cannot but remember the battle, who is always looking upon his scars. A man, by revoking and recollecting within himself former passages, will be still apt to inculcate these sad memoirs to his conscience. This is that sin that cost me so many doubtful, distracting thoughts about my eternal condition: this is that sin that nailed my Saviour to the cross, that forced the thorns into his head, and thrust the spear into his heart; and shall I now, after all this, cast a pleasing eye upon a mortal, known, experimented mischief? Shall I take that fire into my bosom that was so likely to have consumed me? Shall I again parley with that ser pent that has so often beguiled me?

If the sight of other men's calamities will add a caution where it finds consideration, should not the remembrance of our own do it much more? Propriety in misery notes it with a lasting character. And this let every one, who wears the name of a Christian, know, that he does but usurp that name, that can look upon Christ's sufferings otherwise than as his own, or pretend to any benefit from them, without first owning a propriety in them. And then, if all those sufferings were but the final consequents of sin, with what heart can that man, who accounts himself really a sharer in them, fall afresh to the commission of those sins, of the direful effects of which he stands convinced by so terrible a demonstration? Certainly such an one (unless deserted by humanity, as well as religion) cannot but continually carry about him arguments enough lying close at his heart wherewith to answer and repel either the most furious or most plausible temptation. he would baffle and cast off the tempter from the very topic of his own malicious methods, and stab and fling back the base proposal in his own face; from this very consideration, that he himself would be the first and fiercest to accuse him for that very sin which he was now enticing him to.

For if God has implanted such a principle of caution in the very brutes, from a mere suggestion of nature, that the net or the snare, once escaped and got out of, will not easily be entered into again, certainly these mere animals must not be presumed to act more



warily from a bare natural instinct, than a regenerate person shah 1 from a principle infused from above. Though the truth is, one would think, bare nature might be enough to preserve a man in this case: for he who has but a memory cannot possibly want arguments against his sin. To consider and reflect will secure him from a relapse.

2dly, God's other end in wounding the spirit of a truly pious and sincere person, is to endear and enhance the value of returning mercy: for nothing can give the soul so high a taste of mercy as the consideration of past mercy. When a man stands safely landed upon the desired haven, it cannot but be an unspeakable delight to him to reflect upon what he has escaped; they are the dangers of the sea which commend and set off the pleasures and securities of the shore. The passage out of one contrary estate into another gives us a quicker and more lively sense of that into which we pass; for as when the wicked perish, the remembrance of their former pleasures and enjoyments mightily heightens the apprehensions of their present torments; so when the righteous are readmitted into fresh assurances of God's favour, all the former sad conflicts they had with the dreadful sense of his wrath serve highly to put a lustre upon present grace. A reconcilment after a falling out, a refreshing spring after a sharp winter, a glorious and triumphant ascension after a bitter and a bloody passion, are things not only commended by their own native goodness, but also by the extreme malignity of their contraries; things that raise enjoyment into rapture, and common pleasure into transport and ecstasy. As that which put a peculiar honour and circle of glory about the head of Christ, was not so much God's exalting and giving him *a name, at which all things in heaven and earth should bow*, as that he should rise to such a stupendous height of royalty by a wretched, infamous, and accursed death; that from being the scorn of men, he should command the adoration of angels; and from suffering amongst felons and malefactors, ascend *far above principalities and powers*. Such are the astonishing methods of divine mercy, where God afflicts with the mind of a father, and kills for no other purpose but that he may raise again.

In [Psalm cxxvi. 1, 2](#), *When the Lord turned the captivity of Sion*, (says the Psalmist,) *then were we like to them that dream*. So here in this spiritual deliverance, when a man passes from the agonies and distresses of a wounded spirit into a condition of joy and sereneness of mind, grounded upon a rational hope of God's reconcilment with him, he is so overcome and ravished with delight, that he doubts al most of the reality of what he sees and feels, and even questions the truth of actual fruition.

And thus much for the fourth particular proposed from the words, which was to shew what God's ends and designs are in casting men into such a perplexed condition. Pass we now to the

Fifth and last, which was to draw some useful inferences from the whole. And for this, to prevent both the mistakes of the weak, and the misconstructions of the reverse, we shall, from the foregoing discourse, infer these three things by way of caution.

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1st, Let no man presume to pronounce any thing scoffingly of the present, or severely of the final estate of such as he finds exercised with the distracting troubles of a wounded spirit. Let not all this seem to thee but an effect of thy brother's weakness or melancholy: for he who was the *great and the holy One*, he whom God is said *to have made strong for himself*, he who was *the Lord mighty to save*, and he who must be thy Saviour if ever thou art saved; even he passed under all these agonies, endured all these horrors and consternations; and to that extremity, that wrath, and death, and hell itself seemed all with one united force to have poured in upon, and took absolute possession of his amazed faculties.

We live in an age of blaspheming all that is sacred, and scoffing at all that is serious: God forgive us for it, and revenge not upon us those uncontrolled blasphemies and lewdnesses, which, in the sense of all wise and good men, proclaim us ripe for judgment. But surely, to scoff in this case, over and above the impiety of it, is cruel, barbarous, and inhuman; indeed, more cruel by far than to jeer a man upon the rack, or under the last executions of the most remorseless justice: it is indeed to act over the execrable malice of the Jews, mocking and flouting at our Saviour upon the very cross. Besides that, it may chance to prove a dangerous piece of raillery, to be passing jests where God is so much in earnest, especially since there is no man breathing but carries about him a sleeping lion in his bosom, which God can, and may, when he pleases, rouse up and let loose upon him, so as to tear and worry him to that degree, that in the very anguish of his soul he shall *choose death rather than life*, and be glad to take sanctuary in a quiet grave. But then, further, as this dismal estate of spiritual darkness is a condition by no means to be scoffed at, so neither ought it to represent the person under it to any one as a reprobate or castaway. For he who is in this case is under the immediate hand of God, who alone knows what will be the issue of these his dealings with him. We have seen and shewn that God may carry on very different designs in the same dispensation; and consequently that no man, from the bare feeling of God's hand, can certainly understand his mind.

2dly, In the next place, let no secure sinner applaud or soothe up himself in the presumed safety of his spiritual estate, because he finds no such trouble or anguish upon his spirit for sin. For as the best and most beloved of God's saints have lain under this doleful and desponding condition, so, for the most part, the vilest persons breathing have passed their lives freely and jocundly, without the least misgiving or suspicion about their eternal concerns, who yet at length have met with a full payment of wrath and vengeance in the other world for all their confidence and jollity in this.

It is a common saying and observation in divinity, That where despair has slain its thousands, presumption has destroyed its ten thousands. The agonies of the former are indeed more terrible, but the securities of the latter not at all less fatal. And he who is carried off by a lethargy or an apoplex, though he dies more easily, yet he dies as surely as he, whose soul is forced and fired out of his body by the ragings of a burning fever.



The most confident sinner living knows not how soon God may deal with him in this manner; and then the sins that lie still and quiet in his mind for the present, when the tire of God's wrath comes to be applied to them, will be found to be quite other things. It is the very same water that cools and refreshes at one time, and that is made to scald and kill at another.

All which considered, if any one can be secure in his vice, let him be secure still; only let him know, that if ever God thinks fit to wound his spirit, and to set the sense of sin home to his conscience, it will, of the most profane, daring, and resolved debauchee, make him the most pitiful, abject, broken-minded creature under heaven; and take too fast an hold of his stout heart, to be either hectored, or drunk, or drolled away.

3dly and lastly, Let no person on the contrary exclude himself from the number of such as are sincere and truly regenerate, only because he never yet felt any of these amazing pangs of conscience for sin. For though God, out of his unsearchable counsel, is sometimes pleased to bring these terrors upon his saints, yet in themselves they are not things necessary to make men such. God knows the properest ways of bringing every soul to himself; and what he finds necessary for one, he does not always judge fit for another. No more trouble for sin is necessary to salvation, than so much as is sufficient to take a man off from sin. And if that be once done, he who is troubled for this, that he is not, as he thinks, troubled enough for his sins, gives an infallible proof that he is not in love with them.

And therefore let such persons rather acknowledge the goodness of God towards them, and not quarrel with the great physician of souls for having cured them by easy and gentle methods. It is the same God who speaks in *thunders and earthquakes* to the hearts of some sinners, and in a *soft still voice* to others. But whether in a storm or in a calm, in a cloud or in a sunshine, he is still that God who will in the end abundantly speak peace to all those, who with humility and fear depend upon him for it.

To whom, therefore, be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON XXXI.

PSALM xcvi. 11.

Unto whom I swear in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest.

IN these words we have an account of the severest proceeding of an angry God against sinners. What Calvin says of reprobation, that it was *decretum horribile*, a dreadful, amazing decree, the like may be here said of this sentence pronounced against Israel. For certainly, if such decrees are so terrible in the constitution of them, they cannot but appear much more terrible in the promulgation.

We have, in the precedent verses, a narrative of the Israelites provoking sins, like a black cloud gathering over their heads, and here we have it breaking out into this dreadful thunder; a thunder much more dreadful than all those that sounded in their ears at the promulging of the law from mount Sinai: for if the terror of the Almighty was so great in giving the law, no wonder if it was much greater in pronouncing the curse.

The words in themselves seem very plain and easy; and by this expression, *I swear in my wrath*, is meant God's peremptory declaring his resolution to destroy those murmuring and rebellious Jews. The word *swearing* is very significant, and seems to import these two things.

First, The certainty of the sentence here pronounced. Every word of God both is and must be truth; but ratified by an oath, it is truth with an advantage. It is signed irrevocable. This fixes it, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, beyond all possibility of alteration, and makes God's word, like his very nature, unchangeable.

Secondly, It imports the terror of the sentence. If the children of Israel could say, *Let not God speak to us, lest we die*, what would they have said, had God then sworn against them? It is terrible to hear an oath from the mouth but of a poor mortal; but from the mouth of an omnipotent God, it does not only terrify, but confound. An oath from God is truth delivered in anger; truth (as I may so speak) with a vengeance. When God speaks, it is the creature's duty to hear; but when he swears, to tremble. As for the next expression, *that they should not enter into my rest*, we must observe, that the word rest may have a double interpretation.

1st, It may be taken for a temporal rest in Canaan, the promised land; or, 2dly, for an eternal rest in the heavenly Canaan.

Concerning which, some, who interpret spiritual truths according to the model of their own carnal conceptions, will have the whole sense of these words to be no more than God's excluding that generation of the Jews that murmured from a temporal possession of the land of Canaan, by destroying them in the wilderness. But this does not reach the matter. For since the church of the Jews, as to the whole economy and design of it, was in every thing typical; (so that it is observed by all writers, that there was no dispensation that befell



them from God, in respect of any temporal blessing or curse, but it did signify and couch under it the same in spirituals;) from the warrant of this rule we must admit in this scripture, as well as in many others of the like nature, both of a literal and of a spiritual, or mystical sense. And,



1st, Considered according to the literal meaning of the words, as they are an historical passage relating to God's cutting off that murmuring generation of the Jews in the wilderness, set down in [Numb. xiv. 21, 22, 23](#), so questionless they signify only God's denying them an entrance into the temporal Canaan. For to affirm, that all those that fell in the wilderness were excluded from heaven, would be both an harsh and an unwarrantable interpretation. But then,

2dly, Considered according to the spiritual or mystical sense of the words. So the meaning of them runs thus: as God in his fierce anger destroyed many of the children of Israel for their murmurings in the wilderness, and so denied them an entrance into the promised land of Canaan; so he will eternally destroy all obstinate unbelievers, and for ever exclude them from an enjoyment of a perpetual rest with himself in heaven. This I pitch upon as the prime intendment and sense of the words, though not so as wholly to exclude the other; and I ground it upon the apostle's own interpretation of these words in [Heb. iv. 5](#), compared with [Heb. ix. 11](#), where he interprets this word *rest*, of such a rest as a man may fall short of through unbelief. But now unbelief does not so much exclude from a temporal, as from an eternal rest. He applies it also to the Jews his contemporaries, living in the same age with himself; and those could not possibly be said to miss or fall short of the earthly Canaan, since they and their ancestors had possessed that long before. It is clear, therefore, that it is to be understood chiefly of the heavenly.



The words thus explained I shall draw into this one proposition, viz.

That God sometimes in this life, upon extraordinary provocations, may and does inevitably design and seal up obstinate sinners to eternal destruction.

The prosecution of which I shall manage under these following particulars.

I. I shall shew how and by what means God seals up a sinner to perdition.

II. What sort of obstinate sinners those are that God deals with in this manner.

III. I shall answer and resolve one or two questions that may arise from the foregoing particulars. And,

IV. and lastly, Draw some uses from the whole.

Of these in their order. And,

I. For the first of these. There are three ways by which God usually prepares and ripens a sinner for certain destruction.

1st, By withholding the virtue and power of his ordinances: and when God seals up the influences of these conduits, no wonder if the soul withers and dies with drought. For, alas! what is a conduit by which nothing is conveyed! The ordinances of themselves can do

nothing but as they are actuated and enlivened by a secret, divine energy working in them. Now God, while he freely dispenses them, can suspend the other; and as he can give rain, and yet deny fruitfulness, and even send famine with an harvest; so he can fix such a curse upon the means of grace, that a man may really want them, while he enjoys them; that is, he may want them in their force and power, while he enjoys them in the letter: as a man may eat, and yet not be nourished; for it is not the bread that nourishes, but the blessing. Thus the Israelites had leanness in their bones, together with their quails; the hidden, nutritive power of the divine benediction being withheld. So in spirituals, a man may have an unthriving soul in the midst of the greatest evangelical provisions, because unblest; and in the midst of such plenty, suffer a real scarcity and famine.



The truth of this will appear from those different effects that are ascribed to the same word in scripture. For is not that which is a *savour of life* to some, that is, to those that are within the purpose of God's love, and whom he intends effectually to call, and to convert to himself; I say, is not the same termed a *savour of death* to others? that is, to the obstinate and impenitent, and such as God leaves to themselves. That which God uses as an instrument to save, meeting with /the corruption of some obdurate hearts, is made a means to ruin: as it softens some, so it hardens others. The chosen of God are qualified by it for glory; the reprobates prepared for wrath. So contrary are the workings of the same principle upon different subjects. As the same rain, that, falling upon a tree or plant, makes it grow and flourish, falling upon wood cut down and dried, makes it rot and decay. By this means God does very powerfully fit the *sons of perdition* for their final sentence. For when men grow worse and worse by sermons and sacraments, and under the continual droppings of the word preached produce nothing but the cursed fruits of sin, like *the earth, that, drinking in the rain that cometh often upon it, beareth nothing but briars and thorns*; what can be expected, but that, as they resemble the earth in its barrenness, so they should be like it also in its doom, which is, *to be nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burnt*, Heb. vi. 8. The apostle draws a peremptory conclusion concerning this, in 2 Cor. iv. 3, *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*. When the word shall be exhibited to the soul, like a dark lantern, not to display, but to conceal the light, no wonder, if seeing, we do not see, but wander through the darkness of a soul-destroying blindness, to such a darkness as is perpetual. God can order even his word and precepts so, and turn them to the destruction of the unprofitable, unworthy enjoyers of them, that, as it is in Isaiah xxviii. 13, *they shall go backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken*. And certainly we have cause to conclude him, who receives no benefit at all by the word of life, a lost person. He whom the very means of salvation do not save, must needs perish.



2dly, God seals and prepares a sinner for destruction, by restraining the convincing power of his providences. God's providences are subservient to his ordinances: they are (as it were) God's word acted and made visible to the eye. For God speaks, not only in his word,

but also in his works. And as Christ says of his miraculous, so we may say also of God's providential works, that *the works that he does, bear witness of him*. There are such fresh marks and signatures of the divine will in the many occasional passages of our lives, that such as have *their senses* in any measure *spiritually exercised*, do not only see the hand, but also hear the voice of him that sent them. And it would not be difficult to draw forth sundry instances from history, shewing how several persons have been converted by a serious reflection upon some strange passages of providence, that have so directly thwarted, and even melted them in their sin, and withal carried with them such undeniable evidence of the divine displeasure, that the persons concerned have been forced to cry out, that it was the apparent *finger of God*; and so to submit to it by a conscientious reformation of their lives. Now I shall instance in three sorts of providence, in which God often speaks convincingly.

1st, In a general, common calamity. In respect of which it is said, that *when God's judgments are abroad in the land, the inhabitants will learn righteousness*, [Isaiah xxvi. 9](#). Now that which concerns all, concerns every particular; as in a general rain every twig, every single spire of grass shares in the influence. Judgments, that are general in the sending, are to be made particular by a distinct application. Thus Ezra and Nehemiah made the common desolation and captivity of the Jews the subject-matter of their personal sorrow. Thus also Jeremy, [Lament. iii. 1](#), considers all the words and griefs that were diffused here and there in a common, universal calamity, and then makes them all centre in his own breast: *I am the man*, says he, *that have seen affliction*. And what is the whole book of the Lamentations, but the doleful expression of the sorrows of one man for the misery of all? The convincing sense of a calamity should spread wider a great deal than the actual endurance of it, and the terror proceed further than the smart. As the sun beams, though directly and immediately they may strike only this or that thing, yet they are sure to reach many others in the rebound. But now, when God, as it were, blunts the edge of a common calamity, so that it makes no impression, or hardens the heart, so that it admits none, this is a pregnant sign of a soul fitted and prepared for destruction. See the truth of this exemplified in one or two particulars. And first, could any thing be imagined more impious and absurd, than that which we read in [1 Sam. xv](#). of Agag king of Amalek; that immediately upon the conquest of his kingdom, the slaughter of his subjects, and the captivity of his own person, like a man wholly unconcerned in all these distresses, he should venture to adorn and trick up himself, and conclude presently, that *surely the bitterness of death was past*? But behold, even then, in that very moment, sudden destruction rushes in upon him; which (by the way) is then usually nearest to our persons, when furthest from our thoughts. But, to proceed to an higher example of villainy; could there be a more prodigious, horrid instance of incorrigible lewdness, than that in [Numb. xxv. 6](#), of one Zimri, of whom it is said, that in the very midst and height of a plague from heaven, raging over the whole camp of Israel, *he brought into his tent a Midianitish strumpet in the sight of Moses, his prince, and in the sight of all the*

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congregation of the children of Israel, who stood weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation? Neither any touch of common humanity, upon the sight of his brethren's mourning and misery, nor any awe and reverence of that great lawgiver, could give check to his fury; but that, in defiance of the plague, and of the wrath that sent it, in spite of all shame and scandal, and in the face of God and of the world, he charges on resolutely and audaciously, to the satisfaction of his impure desires. But wheresoever we meet with such a rate of sinning, we may be sure destruction cannot be far off, but even at the door. And accordingly here, in [ver. 8](#), we find the vengeance of God over taking this vile person, by a sudden and disastrous death; a death that carried away body and soul together. For when men are killed in their sin, flagrante crimine, death temporal is by consequence eternal. But now, had these two daring wretches duly and rightly considered these dreadful, public dispensations of God, they would quickly have reflected upon their own personal danger, and cried out, with surprise and horror, as those sinners of Sion did, upon the sight of God's judgments round about them, in [Isaiah xxxiii. 14](#), *Who among us shall dwell with devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?* This, together with the fears of mature repentance, had been the only sure way to have extinguished them. But persons that will not be concerned, nor moved, nor wrought upon by the loud alarms of God's judgments upon others, are ripening apace for perdition.



2dly, The second sort of convincing providences is by particular, personal, and distinguishing judgments. When a man is singled out for misery, in the midst of a general prosperity, this, surely, cannot be accounted accident. When God hits one in a company, you may very well conclude that he aimed at him. Distinction and discrimination was never yet the effect of chance. Now in every such judgment the voice and command of God is, that we should either begin or renew our repentance. And when God speaks with his hand, certainly he speaks most forcibly. But when he binds up, and with holds the healing force of this also, and inflicts the rod, but denies jurisdiction; and uses that to kill, that was first made to correct; this is another speedy and effectual way to destroy.



Those many rubs and crosses that befell Saul, both in his persecution of David, and his other affairs, were certainly the voice of God, audible enough to any spiritual ear: and though God answered him not by *Urim and Thummim*, yet he spoke aloud to him in vocal blows; which were both reprehensions of what he had done, and admonitions what, for the future, he should do. But we know, none of all these things had any effect upon him, unless only to make him worse. It appeared to be God's purpose, all along, by a continual increase of guilt and hardness, to train him up for destruction. The event did still demonstrate what God designed him to. The same judgments that in the hand of God are sovereign means to polish and improve a well-disposed mind, are as efficaciously used by him to inflame the accounts of the wicked and the obdurate; who take occasion from thence, to make themselves ten times more the sons of reprobation than they were before. As in bodies, those that are

solid and excellent, as gold and silver, the more you beat them, the brighter and better they grow: but in flesh, that is presently subject to corrupt, the more you strike it, the blacker and nearer it is to putrefaction. See the desperate resolve that a wretched king of Israel made under a pressing judgment, incumbent upon him from God, in [2 Kings vi. 33](#), And he said, *Behold, this evil is of the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?* When a man, instead of being humbled by an evil, is enraged; and, instead of lying at God's feet, flies in his face; we may be sure that his final *judgment and damnation lingers not*. For if such works of God, as have in them naturally a convincing quality, do not actually convince; but that the sinner can account *all God's arrows as stubble, and laugh at the shaking of his spear*; we may look upon that man as one that *hardens himself against God*. And what will prove the issue of such a behaviour is not difficult to conclude, from that in [Job. ix. 4](#), *That none ever hardened himself against God, and prospered*.

3dly, The third sort of providences, in which God often speaks convincingly, is by signal, unexpected deliverances. These are both the strongest and the sweetest ways of conviction: they are properly God's *drawing us with the cords of a man*: all persuasion, without any mixture of terror or compulsion: by these, God does, as it were, allure, and even court us into subjection.

Now all deliverance, in the nature of it, presupposing some evil, from which we are delivered; God first brings us under an evil, that we may see our sin, and then rescues us from perishing by it, that we may repent. He shews us death in the punishment, to affright, and afterwards removes it in the deliverance, to endear the soul. And surely, upon all the accounts of reason and common humanity, it should be natural from hence to draw an argument for repentance. For to sin against mercy, shining in a deliverance, is disingenuous; and, since it provokes the judgment to return, equally dangerous. The most proper and genuine deduction that is to be made from God's mercy, is his *fear*, in [Psalm cxxx. 4](#), *There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared*. But now, if any man, from a deliverance from punishment, shall draw a consequence for boldness in sin; and if, from compassion, he shall argue himself into presumption, this is not the discourse of his reason, but the sophistry and baseness of his corruption. And such a way of arguing as God reproached the children of Israel for, as equally wicked and irrational, in [Jerem. vii. 10](#), *Will ye stand before me, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?* For can we imagine that the great and just God should concern himself to deliver us, and to knock off our shackles, only that we may sin against him so much the more freely? When God has got the sinner upon the advantage, and is making him feel, in some measure, the evil of his sin, in the smart of his punishment, what is it that makes God, after all this, let him go, and choose rather to release, than to despatch him? Is it because he could not destroy him in justice? or because it would not stand with the reputation of his goodness? No, assuredly; it was wholly out of free, spontaneous, undeserved mercy, to see whether or no he will improve such an act of favour



into a motive and occasion of amendment. But if, for all this, the sinner will not hear what God speaks in such a dealing; but shuts his eyes and stops his ears, and, after so many endearments, loves God never the better, nor his sin at all the worse, (as this frame of spirit often befalls sturdy, overgrown sinners,) we may assuredly conclude, that God is taking another course with such an one; and fairly fitting him for the final stroke of his revenging justice.



And thus much for the second way, by which I shew, that God seals and prepares a sinner for destruction; namely, by restraining the convincing force of his providences. The

3d and last that I shall mention is, by delivering up the sinner to a stupidity, or searedness of conscience. And here it will be requisite to shew what this searedness of conscience means: which I shall endeavour to explain from that place of scripture in [1 Tim. iv. 2](#), *having their consciences scared with a hot iron*; κεκαυστηριασμένων τὴν ἰδίαν συνείδησιν. Where some, by a *seared conscience*, understand a prostitute, branded, filthy conscience; alluding to such notorious criminals as are branded for their villainies: which, though it be in itself a truth, yet others, I think, more significantly, make it an allusion to the practice of surgeons and physicians, who use cuttings and burnings for the healing of corrupt flesh: which being once thus cauterized, or seared, becomes afterwards insensible. And like such flesh are the consciences of some men; which are, as it were, seared into a kind of insensibility.

Now for the nature of conscience, we must know that it is God's vicegerent in the soul, placed there by him, as superintendent over all our actions, severely to examine and supervise them, and impartially to excuse or accuse, according to their conformity or inconformity to the rule prescribed by God's law. And it is, withal, naturally of the tenderest, the quickest, and the most exact sense of any of the faculties; impatient of the least irregularity, and not conniving at the smallest deviation from the rule a man ought to act by.



But now, when this becomes gross, stupid, and insensible, the soul may sin on as it pleases: for what can hinder sin from reigning, when conscience is hardened, and cannot so much as check it? If, when the watchman is but asleep, the city or castle committed to him is in danger of a surprise from the enemy, how much more must it needs be so, when he is blind! When there is a benumbedness, or searedness, upon the grand principle of spiritual sense, so that, as it is expressed in [Ephes. iv. 19](#)? we come *to be past feeling*, no wonder then if sin and Satan inflict blow after blow, in the most fatal manner, upon the soul: for this is most certain, that unless we feel the evil of sin, we shall never resist it. Such a conscience will brook and digest the foulest sins. As when a man has lost his taste, any thing will go down with him.

But still we must here note, that it is not at once, but by degrees, that the conscience comes to be trained on to this insensible, obdurate temper. As first, if a man's conscience will serve him to be worldly, from thence it shall allow him to proceed to ambition and covetousness; and then, following the scent of gain through thick and thin, he shall be able

to mould and cast himself into any kind even of the wickedest and the basest compliances; and from thence, at last, if need be, he shall not stick at perjury itself. And now, when conscience, by going this cursed round, is become hardy, and the man made an experienced, thoroughpaced sinner; what sin will he not dare to commit? Any lie, any oath, any treachery, shall be readily swallowed and digested by him.

How dangerous, and even desperate, is such a frame of mind! and yet God sometimes delivers up sinners to it; as he did Pharaoh, to *hardness of heart*. But how? not by any positive infusion of such an evil habit into the conscience; but by subtracting his grace, as also providentially administering occasions, by which the sinner, thus deprived of grace, is more and more hardened. And further than this, I see not how any evil or sinful disposition in the creature can be said to be from God. It is sufficient that God effectually works his end upon sinners this way. As the sun is the cause of night and darkness, not by any causal influence producing it, but only by withdrawing his light; the corruption of a man's heart, unrenewed by grace, is the cause of its own hardness: as, when you melt wax, remove but the fire, and the wax will harden itself. But now, there is no way so sure and dreadful, by which God binds over a sinner to death, as this. For thus God dealt with the Jews: *He gave them eyes, that seeing, they might not perceive; and ears, that hearing, they might not understand: but made the heart of that people gross, that they might not be converted, and healed; that is, that they might be hardened and ruined; as it is in Isaiah vi. 9, 10.*

The same appears also from that opposite way that God takes to save. Because God had thoughts of mercy for king Joshua, therefore he gave him a tender heart, to relent, upon the hearing of the law, *2 Kings xxii. 19, Because thine heart was tender, &c. therefore have I heard thee, saith the Lord.* This hardness growing upon the conscience, is like a film growing upon the eyes; it blinds them. And that which makes the conscience blind to discern its duty, makes it bold to venture upon sin. But, whosoever it is that God shuts up under such a frame of spirit, that man carries the mark of death about him, and the wrath of God (in all likelihood) abides upon him.

And thus I have done with the first thing proposed; which was to shew, how, and by what means, God seals up a sinner to perdition. Come we now to the

Second, which is to shew, what sort of obstinate sinners those are, that God deals with in this manner: I shall instance in two.

1st, Such as sin against clear and notable warnings from God. Before a sinner comes to have finished his course, if he can but reflect upon and trace over the several dealings of God's special providence, he will find that there have been many stops and rubs thrown in his way; which might have given him fair warning to make a stand, at least, if not to retreat. For God sometimes hedges in a sinner's way, so that it is really very difficult for him to proceed, and not only more safe, but also more easy for him to return. How many men have gone to church, with their hearts fully engaged in a resolution to pursue some secret, beloved

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sin; and there have been strongly arrested with the convincing force of some word, so seasonably, and, as it were, purposely directed against that sin, that they have thought the preacher to have looked into their very hearts, and to have been as privy to their most inward thoughts and designs, as their own consciences! Now this is a manifest admonition and caution, cast in by God himself; which to balk, or break through, greatly enhances the sinner's guilt. Sometimes God warns a sinner from his course, by making strong impressions upon his mind of its unlawfulness, and contrariety to the divine will: which impressions are so strong and cogent, that they over bear all the shifts and carnal reasonings that the subtilty of a wicked heart can make in the behalf of it. Again, sometimes God meets the sinner with some heavy, threatening sickness, lays him upon the bed of pain and languishing, and scares him with the fears of an approaching death, and the weight of an endless confusion. And then he pleads with him, opens the book of conscience, and sets before him his sins, represented with all their killing circumstances and dismal appearances, together with their hideous, destructive consequences in the ever lasting endurance of an infinite wrath, in which case, as the condition of sickness and danger is usually a relenting condition, so no doubt but at that time glorious designs of repentance are took up by the sinner. But as soon as he is released of his sickness, he quickly grows sick of his repentance; and, as the Roman orator says, *Timor non diuturni magister officii*: nothing is more common, than for the violences of fear to return to the inclinations of nature. Possibly, after all this, God meets the sinner again, scatters his estate, makes a breach upon his reputation, and so disciplines him with poverty and disgrace, till, at length, he resumes his forgot repentances, and recovers himself into soberer thoughts and severer principles.



These are the methods that, for the most part, God takes to reduce obstinate sinners. But yet there both have been and still are men in the world deeply engaged, and, as it were, fixed and riveted in their sins, notwithstanding all these and the like admonitions. But whosoever they are that can frustrate and defeat all these arts and attempts of grace for the recalling of sinners, you may write them hopeless: for, where admonition cannot enter, nothing but death and destruction can.



2dly, The other sort of sinners are such as sin against special renewed vows and promises of obedience made to God. This is not only to break God's bonds, laid upon us in conviction, but also those bonds and ties that we have laid upon ourselves, by our own voluntary protestations. A vow, or promise, is the most binding thing that can limit or restrain a free agent. And from mere natural principles, men generally bear such a reverence to them, that they must be far gone in a contempt of nature, as well as religion, before they can wholly break, or cast them off. For if these cannot bind, corruption must needs be boundless. Solomon gives us an excellent admonition in [Eccles. v. 4](#), *When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for God hath no pleasure in fools*. Where we may observe, that he supposes that men are not of such prostitute consciences, as wholly to deny the performance of a vow;

and therefore he fastens folly and wickedness upon the very delay of it. And if so, what can we think that he would have said to a downright breach of a vow? and that in a matter of such indispensable necessity as obedience? To break it here, is therefore so transcendently wicked, because this was due upon the account of God's law, before, and without our promise. It obliged, of itself, as a duty; but a vow, or solemn promise, superadded, sets home duty with a further obligation.

Moreover, the violation of these is more than ordinary sinful; not only from the necessity of tin 1 matter to which they oblige, but also from the occasion upon which they were made. For men seldom make such vows, but upon extraordinary cases; as upon the receipt of some great endearing mercy, or some notable deliverance; which causes them, by way of gratitude, to bind themselves to God in closer and stricter bonds of obedience. Whereupon, such as make a custom of affronting God, by a frequent and familiar breach of these, are justly very odious to him, and, from odious, quickly become unsupportable.

Where sin is grown inveterate, and the sinner unconquerable, so that he can endure no restraint, nothing can hold him; but, like the man possessed with a legion of devils, he breaks all chains and fetters that have been cast upon him; we may be confident that evil is designed for him: he stands as a condemned person before God already, God has pronounced his doom. And though he has frequently broke promise with God, yet hi this thing he shall find, that God will certainly keep his word with him.

And thus much for the second thing proposed; which was to shew, what sort of obstinate sinners those are that God seals up to destruction. I come now to the

Third, which is to answer and resolve two questions that may arise from the foregoing particulars.

1st, Whether the purpose of God passed upon an obstinate sinner, (here expressed to us by God's *swearing against him*,) be absolutely irrevocable?

2dly, Whether a man may know such a purpose to have passed upon him antecedently to its execution.

For the first of these, I affirm, that the scripture is full and clear for it. As for instance; God unalterably proposed the taking away the kingdom from Saul: of which purpose Samuel speaks thus, in [1 Sam. xv. 29](#), *The Strength of Israel*, says he, *is not a man, that he should repent*: where, by *repenting*, is meant only God's altering his counsel, or reversing his purpose.

And now, if God may pass such a purpose upon a man with reference to his temporal estate, why may he not also with reference to his eternal? Since the motive inducing God to one (which is the high malignity of sin) may be advanced to such a degree of provocation, as equally to induce him to the other; especially, since the difference of the subject, viz. that one is about a temporal, the other about an eternal estate, does not at all alter the nature of the action. For is it anyways strange in reason, absurd in divinity, or, indeed, in any respect derogatory even to the divine goodness itself, for God, upon unusual sins, frequently repeated,

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pertinaciously continued in, and beset with circumstances of the highest aggravation and defiance, to take up a purpose concerning such a person, certainly to exclude him from salvation? This is so suitable, even to the most just and equal transactions between man and man, that I find no paradox to assert it, in respect of God's dealings, at all.

But some perhaps will urge; suppose such an one should repent, change his life, and break off his sins by a sincere and constant devoting of himself to the duty of piety and mortification, would the purpose of God stand still in force against such an one?

I answer, no; but I add, withal, that this in the present case is both an improper and an impossible supposition; for supposing that God once commences such a purpose against any sinner, he always with holds and denies that grace which should render the means of repentance effectual, after that: so that it is certain, that such an one will never have a will or an heart to repent and turn from his sins. And therefore in the foregoing discourse, I shew, that God puts this purpose in execution chiefly by with drawing the secret converting energy of his word: for to me it seems clear, that the word does not convert by any mere suasive force naturally inherent in it; but by a divine power concomitant to, and cooperating with it. It being otherwise hard to imagine how a man can be barely persuaded out of his nature, or, at least, out of that which sways him as strongly. I shew also, that God took away the convincing edge and impression of his providences; so that they never became effectual to reduce such an one.

From all which it follows, that upon these grounds the foregoing question is impertinent. For though God promises salvation upon a certain condition; yet if he alone, by his grace, is able to effect that condition, and upon great provocation refuses to effect it; it is evident that he may, upon failure of that condition, irreversibly purpose to condemn a sinner, and yet stand firm to the truth of his former promise.

This is most certain; that both these propositions may, and are, and must be unalterably true; namely, *That whosoever repents, and leaves his sins, shall be saved*; and yet, *That he, whosoever God has sworn shall never enter into his rest, can never enter into it*: and all pretences to the contrary are but harangue and declamation, and fit to move none, but such as understand not the strength of arguments, or the force of propositions. And thus much in answer to the first question. The second is, whether a man may know such a purpose to have passed upon him antecedently to its execution?

In answer to which, we must observe, that the ordinary ways by which God imparts the knowledge of his will to men are only these two:

1st, God's declaration of it by his word.

2dly, Men's collection of it from its effects.

Now, for the first of these, I shall lay down this assertion: That every peremptory and absolute declaration of something to be done by God, does not always infer God's absolute purpose to do that thing, as to the event of it.



The due consideration of which is of so great moment, that without it we cannot rightly understand many of the promises and threatenings of God, which run in terms absolute and peremptory, and yet never come to be fulfilled. As for instance; in that first great threatening made to Adam in [Gen. ii. 17](#), *In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die*; we find that the execution did not reach the letter of the denunciation: forasmuch as Adam long survived the violation of that precept to which this threatening was annexed.

And then, in the next place, for promises. Let us take that eminent one made by God to Elijah, in [1 Sam. ii. 30](#), where God repeats his own promise in terms very absolute: *Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever*; yet he adds in the very next words, *Far be it from me*. Strange! that when God had promised a thing absolutely, he should add afterwards, *Far be it from me* to perform it. How are these things reconcileable to, and consistent with his immutable truth and veracity? For the explication of which,

1st, We must observe, first particularly, concerning God's threatenings; that frequently they do not signify the event of the thing threatened, but sometimes declare only the merit of the action and the will of God, that such a punishment should be due to such an offence; not that it should be eventually inflicted for it: so that those words in Genesis signify only thus much, *In the day that thou eatest*, thou shalt certainly be obnoxious and liable to death: and so Adam really was, and might have been proceeded against according to the tenor of that sentence, had God been pleased to take him upon the advantage.

2dly, We must observe jointly both promises and threatenings, that they often run in absolute terms, when really they imply a condition. So that the promise made to Eli and his family implied the condition of their obedience and pious behaviour towards God; which failing, and the promises thereupon not being performed, it appeared, that however in words it was absolute, yet in sense and design it was but conditional. From all which I affirm, that promises and threatenings, though expressed in never such absolute terms, yet cannot be known to be absolute or conditional, till such time as they are put in execution. And yet therefore upon this ground no sinner can conclude that God has took up such a purpose against him, till he finds it actually fulfilled upon him. To which I add further, that God nowadays makes no such declaration of his purposes to any particular persons.

In the next place then, if any will pretend to gather the knowledge of such a purpose of God against him, it must be from some effects of it. Such, as I shew, were God's withdrawing his grace, and that secret, convincing power that operates in his word and in his providences: but this cannot immediately be known by any man; since it is (as we here suppose it to be) altogether secret. Or, further, he must gather this knowledge from some qualifications or signs, accompanying those persons that are in such a wretched condition. Such, as I shew, were sinning against particular warnings and admonitions from God; as also against frequently renewed vows and promises of amendment and obedience. But these I mentioned

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not as certain, infallible marks of such a forlorn estate, but only as shrewd signs of it. For besides that the scripture declares no man absolutely and finally lost, as soon as these qualifications are found upon him, unless they continue so till his death; so it is further manifest, that the grace of God is so strange and various, in its working upon the heart of men, that it sometimes fastens upon and converts old overgrown sinners, such as to the eye of reason were going apace to hell, and al most at their journey's end.

From all which it follows, that no man, in this life, can pass any certain judgment concerning the will of God in reference to his own final estate; but ought, with fear and trembling, to attend God's precept and revealed will; and so gathering the best evidence he can of his condition from his obedience, with all humility to expect the issue of God's great counsels and intentions.

But here, to prevent all mistakes about what has been said, you must observe, that there is a wide difference between the *purpose* of God, that I have been hitherto discoursing of, and that which the schools call God's *decree of reprobation*; concerning which I shall only remark this by the way. That there is so much to be argued, both from scripture and reason, grounded upon the actuality and immutability of the divine nature for it; and so much, on the contrary, from the difficulty of its seeming to some to make God the author of sin, and to cross some received principles of morality, to be urged against it, that had not authority most wisely and justly restrained all discourses of it from the pulpit, I think none could shew a better understanding of it, than by not presuming to determine any thing about it. And therefore my business rather is only in a word or two to shew that the purpose of God, that I have been hitherto speaking of, is quite another thing from that decree considered according to the hypothesis of the schools, and that in a double respect.

1st, Because that decree is said to commence entirely upon God's good pleasure and sovereign will, and not upon any compulsive cause from without him: but this purpose commences upon the provocation of the sinner, as an impulsive cause moving God to make such a determination against him.

2dly, Because that decree is said to be from all eternity; but this purpose is actually took up in time; namely, after some signal provocation. And because the schools will not admit of any new immanent acts, new purposes or decrees in God, therefore I call it a *purpose* only in a large and popular sense: for indeed, in strictness of speech, it is properly but *an effect of God's will*, actually disposing the sinner under such circumstances, as, meeting with his corruption, will certainly end in his perdition.

And thus having cleared these two questions, which was the third thing proposed to be handled, I descend now to the fourth and last, which is, to draw some uses from the whole. And the

First shall be of exhortation, to exhort and persuade all such as know how to value the great things that concern their peace, to beware of sinning under sin-aggravating circum-

stances. What those are, you may know by recollecting, in your meditations, what has been delivered. It is wonderful to consider what weight a bare circumstance gives to sin, and what a vast and wide disparity it makes between actions of the same nature. What is the reason that the same sin does not actually fetch down wrath upon one, when it strikes another with an immediate vengeance, but because in one it is empoisoned with more killing circumstances than in the other? Now we are to know, that the things that chiefly provoke God to swear against men, are judgments, mercies, means of grace, warnings, and convictions; these are the things that, neglected, double and treble the guilt of sins, and of damnable, make them actually condemning. These are the fair days that ripen us apace for the sickle of sin-revenging justice. It is said of the times of heathenism, in [Acts xvii. 30](#), that *God winked at them*: what was the reason? Certainly their sins, as to the nature and kind of them, were as black, hideous, and provoking, and struck as high as the highest improvement of natural corruption could reach. Why then cannot God wink also at the same sins now under the gospel? Why! because, as the gospel offers grace to sinners, so it adds guilt and greatness to sin. A dunghill under the hot sunshine is much more offensive than under the shade.

As men therefore fear falling under that terrible sentence expressed in the words; as they dread a final, unappeasable anger; let them shun these sin-heightening aggravations, and beware of sinning against judgments and deliverances, gospel light, clear warnings, and strong convictions. For can we in reason imagine, that that great and universal Providence, that takes cognizance of every the least accident, and reckons *every hair that falls from our head*, should not have some great and particular designs upon the souls of men in the several strange and unusual passages of their lives? Neither God's words nor his works can be frustrate. He neither discourses nor fights with the air. And therefore, in the strength and evidence of what I have laid down, I must affirm, that that person, whosoever he is, whom the continual returns of the word preached does not alter, but that his old sins continue firm, entire, and unbattered; the baseness of his inclinations unchanged; so that after all his attendance upon the word, his tongue and thoughts are as loose to all filthiness, to all levity of discourse and behaviour, as before. He also whose former distresses, hardships, and disasters have not laid him low in the valleys of humility, nor circumscribed the lashings out of his luxury, but that his past miseries and restraints give only a relish instead of a check to his present pride and intemperance. And lastly, he whom all the caresses and embraces of Providence have not been able to win upon, so as to endear him to a virtuous strictness, or to deter him from a vicious extravagance; I say, every such person, (unless the great God be trivial and without concern in his grand transactions with our immortal souls,) during this condition, is (so far as we can judge) a fashioning for wrath. He is a probationer for hell, and carries about him the desperate symptoms and plague-tokens of a person likely to be sworn against by God, and hastening apace to a sad eternity.



The other use and improvement of the foregoing particulars shall be, to convince us of the great and fearful danger of a daring continuance in a course of sin. The counsel of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar carries an equal aspect upon us all, that *we break off our sins by righteousness*, and change our lives by an immediate repentance: for who knows what dreadful things may be forming in the mind of God against us during our impenitence? Who knows what a day may bring forth, and what may be the danger of one hour's delay? This is most sure, that every particular, repeated act of sin sets us one advance nearer to hell. And while we are sinning obstinately, and going on audaciously in a rebellious course, how can we tell but God may *swear in his wrath against us*, and register our names in the black rolls of damnation? And then our condition is sealed and determined for ever.

It is dangerous dallying with and venturing upon the Almighty. God is indeed merciful; but we know mercy itself may be angry, and compassion provoked may swear our destruction. Every sinner, upon his return to God, should repent and believe with that confidence, as if God were nothing but mercy; but having once repented, it would be his wisdom to live with that caution and exactness, as if God were nothing but justice. For none certainly can be too exact in acquitting himself to God, or too cautious in the business of eternity. And therefore, when the tempter shall dress up any beloved minion sin, and present it to our eager, inflamed appetites, let us not look upon it as it paints and sparkles in the temptation, but let us rather demur a while, and debate with ourselves, what may be the issue of that sin, if committed by us, in the court of heaven; whether it may not provoke God to protest that we shall never come thither: and then, believe it, God will say, as he does in [Isaiah xlv. 2, 3](#), *I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and it shall not return*. What God absolutely purposes and declares, God himself cannot (because he will not) disannul. Still, therefore, let us keep this consideration alive upon our spirits, that, before the sentence of death pass upon us, it may fairly be prevented; but when it is once denounced, it can never be recalled. God in mercy give us a right understanding of these things.

To whom be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON XXXII.

PSALM xiv. 1.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

THAT any one should degenerate to that degree of unreasonable baseness, as to deny that being and power by which he breathes, is not easy to imagine, did not some force us to believe so much of them upon their own word; such as, history tells us, were Diagoras Melius, Theodorus Cyrenaicus, and the like: and we have no cause to have so much better an opinion of the modern age, as to doubt that it has those who are ready enough to let fly and vent the same impiety. Though, let them affirm it never so much in words, there are not wanting arguments to persuade us, that their mouth belies their heart; and that they have an inward, invincible sense of what they outwardly renounce, holding them under the iron bands of a conviction not to be stifled or outbraved, or hectored out of their conscience; as shall be discoursed of afterwards.

In the words we have these two particulars:

I. An assertion made; *There is no God.*

II. The person by whom it is made; *the fool.*

As for the assertion, we may consider in it two things: first, the thing asserted; second, the manner of its assertion.

As for the thing asserted, *that there is no God*, it may be understood,

1. Either, first, of an absolute removal of the divine being and existence; that there is no such spiritual, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent nature, as we call God: but that the world is of itself; and that there is nothing else distinct from it. This is the highest degree of asserting that *there is no God*.

2. It may be understood of a removal of God's providence, by which he governs and takes account of all the particular affairs of the world; and more especially of the lives and actions of men, so as to reward or punish them, according as they are good or evil. This is a lower degree of atheism; but has altogether as masculine an influence upon the manners and practices of men as the former; and perhaps, upon a due improvement of consequences, will be found to end in it. Epicurus was of this opinion. He confessed that there was a God: but as for his interposing or concerning himself in our affairs here below, this he utterly denied; and that for a reason as absurd as his assertion was impious; namely, that it would disturb his ease, and consequently interrupt his felicity, to superintend over our many little and perplexed businesses.

Now, I suppose, the text may be understood equally of both these senses: and accordingly I shall so take it in the ensuing discourse.

2dly, The next thing is the manner of the assertion, *The fool hath said in his heart*. It wears the badge of guilt, privacy, and darkness; and, as if it were sensible of the treason it



carries in its bowels, it hides its head, and dares not own itself in the face of the sun and of the world. Atheism is too conscious to be venturous and open: that is the property of truth, the daughter of the light and of the day. It is not the nature of this ill thing to display itself in words, and to summon proselytes upon the market place. It will not hang up a flag of defiance against God, and cry out, *Hear, O heaven, and hearken, O earth*; there is no such thing as a maker and governor of the universe; it is all but a crafty invention of statesmen, priests, and politicians, to bring mankind to their lure, and to bind the bonds of government faster upon societies.

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No; the atheist is too wise in his generation, to make remonstrances and declarations of what he thinks. His tongue shall keep the track of the common and received way of discouraging; and perhaps his interest may sometimes carry him so far, as to disguise his behaviour with zeal for the assertion of those things which his belief is a stranger to. It is his heart, and the little council that is held there, that is only privy to his monstrous opinions. There it is that he dethrones his Maker, and deposes conscience from its government and vicegerency. For here, he knows, he may think, and think freely and uncontrollably; since there is no casement in his bosom, no listening hole in his heart, from which the informer may catch and carry away a guilty thought.

He that would see the stage upon which human liberty acts entirely and to the utmost, must retreat into his heart, and there he shall see a principle absolute and unshackled, and not framed into any demureness and assumed postures of virtue and gravity, from the awe of men's eye and observation, which, instead of the man, exhibits only a dress to the spectator. He shall find his heart bold enough to question the laws he bows to; to examine the first principles, that in his profession lie sacred and untouched; to ransack and look into foundations; and, in a word, to think as he pleases, while he speaks and does as he is commanded.

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It will now concern us to inquire a little, what is meant and implied by the fool's saying in his heart that *there is no God*.

I conceive it may imply these following things.

1st, An inward wishing, that there was no God. There is nothing more properly the language of the heart, than a wish. It is the thirst and egress of it, after some wanted, but desired object. The atheist first pleases his contemplation, with the supposition of that free range that he might take in all the gardens of pleasure, if there were no superior eye to supervise and judge him. And how brave a thing it were to have the entertainments of a feast every day, and no reckoning brought up in the rear of them! To be voluptuous, and yet unaccountable! To be lord and master, and supreme in his choice, and to obey nothing but his own appetites!

These reflections fill his fancy with glistening imaginations: and the man cannot hold, but wish that troublesome thing, the Deity, that so sours and thwarts his contents, removed and wholly took out of the way; than which there cannot be a thought of an higher malignity,

and a more daring venom. For he that wishes a thing, would certainly effect it, if it were in his power. He that would have no God, is full of indignation that there is one; and, according to the poet's fable of the giants attempting to scale heaven, and to fight with the gods; so would he ascend, and ravish the sceptre from the hands of Omnipotence, nestle himself in the government of the world, and, like Lucifer, place himself higher than the Most High.

Now it is probable that God punishes the wish, as much as he does the actual performance: for what is performance, but a wish, perfected with a power: and what is a wish, but a desire, wanting opportunity of action; a desire sticking in the birth, and miscarrying for lack of strength and favourable circumstances to bring it into the world. Certain it is, that wishes discover the most genuine and natural temper of the soul; for no man is more heartily himself, than he is in these.

They are indeed the chief weapons with which atheism can strike at the Deity: for the wickedness and malice of man cannot make any change in God. It cannot shake any of these solid felicities that the divine nature is possessed of. The atheist can only wish, and would, and desire; that is, with the snake he can hiss, and shew his poison; but it is not in his power to be mischievous any further.

2dly, The fool's saying in his heart that *there is no God*, implies his seeking out arguments to persuade himself that there is none. Where the heart is concerned, it will quickly employ the head; and reason shall be put to the drudgery of humouring a depraved mind, by providing it with a suitable hypothesis. The invention must be set a work to hammer out something that may sit easy upon an atheistical disposition.

Hereupon the mind begins to boggle at immaterial substances, as things paradoxical and incomprehensible. It brings itself, by degrees, to measure all by sense; and to admit of nothing, but as it is conveyed and vouched by the judgment of the eye, the ear, and the touch. A being purely spiritual shall he flouted at, as a chimera, and a subtile nothing.

Besides, men see all things still continue in the same posture, and proceed in the same course; which makes them question, whether there be any overruling, governing being, distinct from that visible frame of things that is always in their view. As those scoffers in St. Peter questioned the future judgment, upon the sight of the constant, unchanged tenor of things, [2 Peter iii. 4](#); *Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.*

They will declaim against a Deity also from this, that they think all human affairs proceed by chance and accident, and great disorder; and consequently are not under the disposal or management of any superior understanding, that may be presumed to regulate and take cognizance of them. They see pious men afflicted, and the wicked exalted; the oppressor triumphing and clothing himself with the spoils of oppressed innocence and humility. They observe, that virtue is no step to wealth or honour; and that conscience is but an hinderance, and a stop to greatness. And perhaps also they find by experience in themselves, that they



never thrived so well, as when they acted freely and boldly, and without the control of rules; when they unshackled themselves from the niceties and punctilios of that fruitless, unprofitable thing, called *sincerity*.

And these considerations may well be thought so much the more prevalent working in a corrupt breast, since we read, that they have made no small impression, even upon the most excellent and sanctified persons: they staggered such heroes in the faith as David, Jeremy, and the like: they engaged them in a dispute with God himself about the justice and equality of his actings: they changed them, from believers, into disputants; and made them undertake their Maker for their opponent. Now, what the pious and the faithful may doubt of, the atheist may well be thought to deny. And no question but he puts his wits upon the rack, and uses all the art, learning, and industry he is master of, to rid himself of the belief of a God; a God that governs, and will hereafter judge the world. The thought of which cannot but be a perpetual check and allay to the revels of the epicure; and consequently must needs put him to relieve himself by the best shifts he can, to conjure down the terrors of his mind, and to drown the clamours and threatenings of his conscience; which, as long as he acknowledges a Deity, will be sure to torment him with a secret, unsupportable sting.

3dly, For the fool to say in his heart, *There is no God*, implies not only a seeking for reasons and arguments, but also a marvellous readiness to acquiesce in any seeming probability or appearance of reason that may make for his opinion. Which is a sure demonstration of a mind desperately in love with a notion, and yet suspicious and indifferent of the truth of it. It is a sign that a man is falling, when he catches at straws, and every little nothing, to support him. The atheist, who is so rigid an exactor of evidence and demonstration for the proof of those points that he rejects, yet with the most impudent and unreasonable partiality produces no such thing, but only remote, pitiful, precarious conjectures, for the assertion and defence of his own in fidelity.

As for instance, how weak and slight were all the foregoing exceptions alleged in his behalf! His first cavil, produced against immaterial substances; concerning which, can the atheist prove that it implies any contradiction or absurdity, that there should be such substances, such natures as fall not under the cognizance of outward sense? Is there any solid argument to overthrow this? If there be, whence is it, that none of the philosophers have been hitherto able to assign such an one; and solidly to evince, as well as magisterially to assert, that all substance includes in it the dimensions of quantity; and consequently, that *substance* and *body* are but terms equivalent?

And then, for the other exception, drawn from the prosperity of the wicked, and the present afflictions of the godly and virtuous: is there any such disorder or injustice in this, when the assertors of Providence assert also a future estate of retribution in another world? where the present sense of things shall be vastly and universally changed; and the epicure shall pass from his baths, and his beds of roses, into a bed of flames; and the poor, distressed



saint be translated from his prison and his oppressors, into joys, pleasures, and glories that are unspeakable. It may be replied, that the atheist believes no such thing; but, whether he does or no, it is not material as to our present business, which is only to prove the reasonableness of God's dealing with the wicked and the just, in this world, upon supposition of the truth of this principle; which it has not been in the power of any atheist yet to shake or to disprove; and, for the present, falls not under this discourse.

4thly and lastly, To mention yet another way, different from all the former: for a man to place his sole dependence, as to his chief good and happiness, on any thing besides God, is (as we may so speak) virtually, and by consequence, for him to say in his heart, *There is no God*. It is indeed the voice of a man's actions, the direct affirmation of his life: for while a man expects that from the creature, which every created being can only have, and consequently ought only to expect, from its creator, it is a practical, and (in its kind) a loud denial of a God; inasmuch as in this case a man so behaves himself, as if really there were none: and therefore in scripture is most emphatically styled, *a living without God in the world*.

Which, though it does not always include a direct denial of the divine existence, yet, so far as the acknowledgment of that ought to influence the life, the impiety of it is the very same, and the absurdity greater. For grant but the speculative atheist his supposition and principle, that there is no Deity or Providence, and he cannot be charged with any great unreasonableness of proceeding, for his giving way to all his appetites and lusts in the prosecution of their respective excesses and irregular gratifications. But for a man, who has not paved his way to such a licence of acting, by a life of the same principle, but who owns in his mind a clear and a standing persuasion of the being of a supreme maker, judge, and governor of the world, yet to trample upon all rules and laws prescribed for the regulation of his behaviour towards this his Maker, and to give himself wholly over to the dictates of his unbridled passions and affections; this assuredly is the height of folly; it is the granting of the antecedent in the judgment, and the denial of the consequence in the practice.

That man who places all his confidence, hope, and comfort, in his estate, his friend, or greatness, so that upon the failure of any of these his heart sinks, and he utterly desponds as to all enjoyment or apprehension of any good or felicity to be enjoyed by man, does as really deify his estate, his friend, and his greatness, as if in direct terms he should say to each of them, *Thou art my God*; and should rear an altar or a temple to them, and worship before them in the humblest adoration: nay, it is much more; since God looks upon himself as treated more like a Deity, by being loved, confided in, and depended upon, than if a man should throng his temple with an whole hecatomb, sacrifice thousands of rams, and pour ten thousand rivers of oil upon his altars.

Let every man, therefore, lay his hand upon his heart, and consider with himself, what that thing is that wholly takes it up and commands it as to all its affections; and let him



know, that that thing, whatsoever it be, is his God; and that God really so accounts of it: and consequently, that it is possible for a man to *say in his heart, that there is no God*, though he neither blasphemes, or denies his being, nor divests him of his providence, and government of the world.

And thus much for the first thing, the assertion *that there in no God*. I come now to the second, namely, the author of this assertion, who, the text tells us, is *the fool*; and his folly will be made to appear from these following reasons.

1st, That such an one, in making and holding this assertion, contradicts the general judgment and notion of mankind. He opposes his drop to the ocean, his little forced opinion to the torrent of universal, natural instinct, that infused this persuasion into every one before his first milk. It is a notion, that a man is not catechized, but born into: his mother's womb was the school he learned it in. It sticks to him like a piece of his essence, and his very being is the argument that enforces it.

Hereupon it has possessed and spread itself into all nations, all languages, all societies and corporations: nor was it ever known, that any company of men constantly owned the denial of a Deity. Many nations have indeed foully erred, and abused their reason in the particular choice of a God, or rather of the worship of God. For I verily believe, that when the Egyptians, and others, worshipped this thing or that, they designed to worship the Supreme Being, as manifesting some effect of his power or goodness by that thing. I say, though the nations perverted themselves by idolatry, yet the general notion and acknowledgment of a Deity remained entire amongst them. So that the contrary opinion of the atheist is not so much confuted as overwhelmed. And there is no man that can rationally profess himself an atheist, but must also profess himself wiser than the whole world, oppose his single ratiocination to the ratiocination of all mankind: but surely, the match will be found marvellous, unequal; and the vast disparity of the very number will be an unanswerable presumption against him. For what can he be thought to find out, or discern, more than so many millions of the subtlest and most improved wits, every one of which was perhaps of a quicker apprehension and a further reach than himself?

It is morally impossible for any falsity to be universally received and believed, both as to all times and places; and therefore an atheist appears in the world as a strange, unusual thing, as an irregularity, and exception from the standing rules of nature; like a man born without legs or arms, or, indeed, rather, without an head or an heart.

2dly, The folly of such a person appears in this, that he lays aside a principle easy and suitable to reason, and substitutes in the room of it one strange and harsh, and, at the best, highly improbable. For is it not most suitable to reason, there being a necessity of a first mover, a thing granted by all, that an intelligent nature of a substance above the grossness of body, infinite in wisdom, power, goodness, and all other perfections, should first of all contrive and give being to this fabric of the world, and afterwards preserve, govern, and

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order every thing in it to his wise and righteous purposes? Is there any thing, I say, in this, that an unprejudiced reason does not immediately close or fall in with, as that that is fairly consistent with all its principles, and grates upon none of them?

But the atheist that puffs at this, and lays it wholly aside, what does he resolve the phenomena of nature into? How come we by this world, according to his philosophy? Why, he either tells us, that it was from eternity; a strange (though much the most rational) hypothesis that he can frame. For if it has existed from all eternity, whence is it that we have no history or record of any thing beyond a little above five thousand years? How come the transactions of so many myriads of years to be swallowed up in such deep silence and oblivion? And as for the story even of those five thousand years, we are beholding to the scriptures for it; for all profane histories set out from a much later date: so that this hypothesis is hugely improbable, and unfit for any rational man to build his discourse, much less to venture his salvation upon.

But if this will not do, we are told, that there was an infinite, innumerable company of little bodies, called atoms, from all eternity, flying and roving about in a void space, which at length hitched together and united; by which union and connection, they grew at length into this beautiful, curious, and most exact structure of the universe.

A conceit fitter for bedlam than a school or an academy; and took up, as it were, in direct opposition to common sense and experience. For, let any one take a vessel full of sand or dust, and shake it from one end of the year to the other, and see whether ever it will fall into the figure of an horse, an eagle, or a fish: or, let any one shake ten thousand letters together, till by some lucky shake they fall at length into an elegant poem or oration. That chance and blind accident, the usual parent of confusion and all deformity in men's actions, should yet in this outdo the greatest art and diligence in the production of such admirable, stupendous effects, is contrary to all the rules that human nature has been hitherto accustomed to judge by; and fit for none to assert but for him, who with his God has also renounced his reason.

3dly, The folly of such a person appears from the causes and motives inducing him to take up this opinion; which, amongst others, are two.

1st, Great impiety, and disquiet of conscience consequent thereupon. Some have sinned their accounts so high, and debauched their consciences so far, that they dare not look the persuasion of a Deity in the face; and therefore they think to convey themselves from God, by hiding God from themselves; by suppressing, and, as much as they can possibly, extinguishing all belief and thought of him. They are so hardened in sin, and so far gone in the ways of sensuality, that to think of retreating by repentance is loathsome, and worse than death to them; and therefore they cut the work short, and take off all necessity of repentance by denying providence, and a future judgment of the lives and actions of men.

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2dly, The second cause of this opinion is great ignorance of nature and natural causes. It is a saying of the lord Bacon, that a taste and smattering of philosophy inclines men to atheism, but a deep and a thorough knowledge of it directly leads men to religion. And if the assertor of the world's eternity, or of its emerging out of the forementioned coalition of atoms, would consider how impossible it is for a body to put itself into motion, without the impulse of some superior immaterial agent; and what an unactive, sluggish thing that is that the philosophers call matter, and how utterly unable to fashion itself into the several forms it bears, he would quickly fly to a spiritual, intelligent mover, such an one as we affirm to be God.

4thly and lastly, The folly of such persons as say in their heart, *There is no God*, appears from those cases, in which such persons begin to doubt and waver, and fly off from their opinion. I shall instance in two.

1st, In the time of some great and imminent danger. As it is reported of the Persians in Æschylus, that were routed by the lake Strymon; and thereupon, being either to pass the ice then ready to thaw, or to be cut in pieces by the enemy; though before they held, or at least pretended to hold, that *there was no God*; yet then they fell upon their knees, and prayed to God, that the ice might bear them: nor is this to be wondered at, since all men by nature seem to have a secret acknowledgment of a certain invisible power, that is able either to help or to hurt them, which perhaps is the first rude draught and original seed of the persuasion of a Deity. And it is this secret acknowledgment that naturally makes men, in a great strait and extremity, willing to rely upon more assistances than they see, and to extend their hope further than their sense.

But now, is not every such person most ridiculous, who shall owe his religion to the disturbances of his fear, which he cast off in the settlement of his reason? Shall a little danger and confusion make him quake out his atheism, and be able to enthrone God in his mind, who by his being and constant preservation, and the exact frame and order of the universe, could never yet be convinced of any such thing? But this is an evident sign, that the judgment of such persons lies not in their understanding, but in the lower region of man's nature, their affections.

2dly, The other time in which the atheist usually deserts his opinion, is the time of approaching death. What a different way of reasoning and discoursing has the mind then, and needs must it have so! for atheism is not any real persuasion, but a vain pretence and affectation, by which some would seem to be greater wits and higher speculators than other men.

But alas! affectation expires upon the death-bed. No man then has any designs to deceive or impose upon the reason of other men, much less upon his own. All his thought and desire then is, to be as safe as he can; he knows that it has been the judgment of all the wise men in the world, that there is a supreme judge, and a future estate for men's souls; and he perceives his reason too light and too little to lay in the balance against them.

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But now it is a most righteous thing with God, to let such, as have striven to free themselves from this belief, be able to overrule and bind up their conscience so far, as to keep it down for a long time; and then, at length, to let conscience loose upon them, with this terrible persuasion quick and awakened upon it: for God has not put it into any man's power to extinguish this witness that he has left of himself in the minds of men; he has not left men so much at their own disposal, as to obliterate and rase out what he has wrote in their hearts, and to be atheists when they please. And therefore, wheresoever I have hitherto made mention of atheists, I understand not such as have absolutely shook off the notion of a Deity, but such as have endeavoured and attempted so to do, by arming themselves with arguments and considerations against it; and accordingly have proceeded so far, as to weaken and eclipse the present actings of this habitual persuasion; otherwise, I fully believe that there are some lucid intervals, in which, maugre all the art and force used to suppress it, it breaks forth, and shews its terrifying, commanding majesty over the guilty hearts of such wretches, but especially when they are to bid adieu to those little worldly supports, that for awhile bore up their spirits in their profaneness and contempt of God.

I have now finished what I first proposed from the words; namely, the assertion that *there is no God*, and the author of it, *the fool*.

But here, after all, is it not a sad thing, that it should be pertinent for any preacher to make a sermon against atheism? a sin, that does not only unchristian, but unman the person that is guilty of it! But we have great reason to judge that the corruption of men's manners is grown to that enormous height, that men are not as they were heretofore. Those awes of religion and a Deity, that a less improved debauchery left still untouched upon the conscience, the modern and more throughpaced sinner endeavours to efface and throw off as pedantry and narrowness, and the foolish prejudices and infusions of education.

What this will come to, and whether God and nature will suffer men to be as bad as they strive to be, I cannot determine; but surely, they generally affect a superiority in villainy above their ancestors; and it is not enough for a man to approve himself a laborious drunkard, and a dexterous cheat, or a sly adulterer, unless he can set off all with the crowning perfection of passing for a complete atheist.

I suppose the foregoing discourse may be of some use to us; and if so, what can that use be so properly as to give every one of us a view and prospect into his own heart? None knows how much villainy lodges in this little retired room. The prophet tells us *that the heart is desperately wicked*; and we need no other argument to prove his words, than that it is the soil where this detestable weed grows. There are few who believe that they can be atheists, (even in the sense that I have declared,) but it is because they have not studied the workings and methods, the depths and hollownesses, of that subtle principle within them, their heart. But as for such as will set themselves to watch over and counter work it, so as to prevent

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this monstrous birth, let them be advised to beware of three things, as, I think, the most ready leaders to atheism.

1st, Great and crying sins, such as make the conscience raw and sick, and so drive it to this wretched course for its cure.

2dly, Let them beware of discontents about the cross passages of God's providence towards them. A melancholy, discontented mind, by long brooding upon these things, has at length hatched the cockatrice's egg, and brought forth atheism.

3dly and lastly, Let men especially beware of devoting themselves to pleasure and sensuality. There is no one thing in the world that casts God out of the heart like it, and makes the heart by degrees to hate and be weary of all thoughts of him.

These things cannot here be insisted upon. It remains, therefore, that we endeavour to preserve a constant fear and love of the great God upon our spirits; that so we fall not into the fatal, devouring gulph of either of their sins; as, namely, *to deny the Lord that bought,* or to renounce the God that made us.

To whom therefore be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON XXXIII.

PSALM cvi. 7.

Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; out provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea.

PROVIDENCE, in all its parts and methods of acting, seems to carry on this great design, not to leave itself without witness in the world. And for this cause it gives greater or less manifestations of its superintendency over affairs here below, those especially relating to the church, according to the proportion of the church's exigencies and occasions. Which when they are so great and arduous, that they seem even to call out for help from Heaven, and to exceed all possibility of redress but by the interposal of a miracle, why then miracles come in season, and shall be shewn, as being the rarities and reserves of Heaven, designed to recover upon men's hearts a belief of that Providence that the constant, uninterrupted course of natural causes is apt to obscure and to render the less observable.

But in no passage since the creation did Omnipotence ever so eminently make bare its arms and shew itself, as it did in those stupendous proceedings in Egypt, following miracle with miracle, till at length, even in spite of power, and malice, and obstinacy itself, it brought out the armies of Israel free and victorious from amidst the iron-grinding jaws of a long, a cruel, and unsupportable bondage and subjection.

And that the world may see that the hand of divine power is not yet shortened, nor the bowels of divine goodness straitened, but that God is as able and ready to save his church as ever; succeeding ages have not been wholly without some declarations of it, in several transcendent and miraculous instances of help and deliverance; when once the straitness and vast difficulty of affairs has baffled and laughed at all assistances of created power, and so made the omnipotent author of the deliverance visible and conspicuous.

And amongst these supernatural instances of temporal mercy, vouchsafed to mankind in these latter ages of the world, there is none certainly superior, if any parallel, to that glorious masterpiece of Providence, to the commemoration of which we are called by this day's solemnity. For if ever the miracles of Egypt were reacted, it has been upon the scene of England; which stands, as it were, a copy and a lasting transcript both of the bondage and the deliverance. Both church and state were under the yoke and lash of remorseless tyrants and taskmasters. Tyrants resolved to have bound the bonds of their captivity for ever, and never to have let them go: nor was there any hope or likelihood of it, till God himself undertook the business, and plagued the nation, by shaking the threatening sword of a civil war over it, that had so lately turned all into blood; by blasting it with the hail and stones of several insulting governments, then as changeable as the weather; also pestering the land



with the frogs of this sect, and the lice of that, and the locusts of another: likewise confounding our English Egyptians with the thick darkness of faction and ignorance; and lastly, snatching away that firstborn of tyranny, perjury, and rebellion, and blowing him out of the world, as he did the locusts out of Egypt; till at length breaches and divisions amongst themselves, like the dividing of the Red sea and the parting of the mighty waters, both swallowed up them, and became as a wall of brass on both hands to our king and his loyal, exiled subjects, to convey them safe into a possession of those rights, which, both by the gift of God and the laws of men, were so undoubtedly their own.

Thus we have seen some resemblance between the transactions of Providence with Israel and with ourselves. We have seen how like we are to them for their miraculous deliverances; and, which is the worst, though perhaps the nearest part of the resemblance, it will appear also presently, how like we are to them for their miraculous ingratitude.

In the text we have these three things observable.

I. The unworthy and ungrateful deportment of the Israelites towards God upon a most signal mercy and deliverance: *they provoked him*.

II. The aggravation of this unworthy deportment from the nature and circumstance of the deliverance: *they provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea*.

III. and lastly, The cause of this misbehaviour and unworthy deportment, which was their not understanding the designs of mercy in the several instances of it: *they understood not thy wonders in Egypt*.

I. And first for the first of these, the Israelites' ungrateful and unworthy deportment towards God: *they provoked him*.

To *provoke*, is an expression setting forth a peculiar and more than ordinary degree of misbehaviour; and seems to import an insolent, daring resolution to offend. A resolution not contented with one single stroke of disobedience, but such a one as multiplies and repeats the action, till the offence greatens and rises into an affront; and as it relates to God, so I conceive it strikes at him in a threefold respect.

1st, Of his power. 2dly, Of his goodness. 3dly, Of his patience.

1st, And first it rises up against the power and prerogative of God. It is, as it were, an assault upon God sitting upon his throne, a snatching at his sceptre, and a defiance of his very royalty and supremacy. He that provokes God, does in a manner dare him to strike, and to revenge the injury and invasion upon his honour. He considers not the weight of God's almighty arm, and the edge of his sword, the swiftness and poison of his arrows, but puffs at all, and looks the terrors of sin-revenging justice in the face. The Israelites could not sin against God, after those miracles in Egypt, without a signal provocation of that power that they had so late and so convincing an experience of: a power, that could have crushed an Israelite as easily as an Egyptian; and given as terrible an instance of its consuming force



upon false friends, as upon professed enemies; in the sight of God perhaps the less sort of offenders of the two.

And can the sins of any nation in the world more affront God, in the grand attribute of his power, than the sins of ours; which has given such flaming, illustrious experiments of itself, as have dazzled our eyes and astonished our hearts! For have we not seen a flourishing state and a glorious church broke in pieces, and as it were extinguished in a moment? and a prince, as great as good, torn out of his throne, stripped of his power, and at length disastrously cut off by the hand of violence? And dare we now sin against that power that has thus shewn us how easily it can confound and overturn all the glories of worldly grandeur? and which, after all this, has, by a miraculous exertion of itself, called up a buried church and state from the grave, and given them a stupendous resurrection from the confusion and rubbish of a long and woful desolation: and this by bringing back the banished son of a murdered father, even over the heads of his enemies armed and potent, and rather amazed than conquered into their former allegiance. A work so big with miracle and wonder, so apparently above, nay even against the common methods of human acting, that were there no other argument to prove a Providence, this one passage alone were sufficient; and that such an one as carries in it the force and brightness of a demonstration.

2dly, Provoking God imports an abuse of his goodness. God, as he is clothed with power, is the proper object of our fear; but as he displays his goodness, of our love. By one he would command, by the other he would win and (as it were) court our obedience. And an affront to his goodness, his tenderness, and his mercy, as much exceeds an affront of his power, as a wound at the heart transcends a blow on the hand. For when God shall shew miracles of mercy, step out of the common road of providence, commanding the host of heaven, the globe of the earth, and the whole system of nature out of its course, to serve a design of goodness upon a people, as he did upon the Israelites; was not a provocation, after such obliging passages, infinitely base and insufferable, and a degree of ingratitude, higher than the heavens it struck at, and deeper than the sea that they passed through?

3dly, Provoking God imports an affront upon his longsuffering and his patience. The movings of nature, in the breasts of all mankind, tell us how keenly, how regretfully, every man resents the abuse of his love; how hardly any prince, but one, can put up an offence against his acts of mercy; and how much more affrontive it is to despise mercy ruling by the golden sceptre of pardon, than by the iron rod of a penal law. But now patience is a further and an higher advance of mercy; it is mercy drawn out at length; mercy wrestling with baseness, and striving, if possible, even to weary and outdo ingratitude: and therefore a sin against this is the highest pitch, the utmost improvement, and, as I may so speak, the *ne plus ultra* of provocation. For when patience shall come to be tired, and even out of breath with pardoning, let all the invention of mankind find something further, either upon which an offender may cast his hope, or against which he can commit a sin. But it was God's pa-

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tience that the ungrateful Israelites sinned against; for they even plied and pursued him with sin upon sin, one offence following and thronging upon the neck of another, the last account still rising highest, and swelling bigger, till the treasuries of grace and pardon were so far drained and exhausted, that they provoked God to swear, and what is more, *to swear in his wrath*, and with a full purpose of revenge, *that they should never enter into his rest*.

And thus I have given you the threefold dimension of the provocation that the Israelites passed upon God; and it is to be feared, that our sins have been cast into the same mould, they do so exactly resemble them in all their proportions; for we are as deep in arrears to Heaven, and have as large a sum of abused goodness and patience to account for, as ever they had; and so much greater is our account than theirs could be, that we had the advantage of their example to have forewarned us.

II. I proceed now to the second thing proposed from the text; which is, the aggravation of the Israelites unworthy deportment towards their almighty deliverer, set forth in these words: *they provoked him at the sea. even at the Red sea*.

The extraordinary emphasis of which expression, in the repeated use of the same words, shews what a particular and severe observation God passed upon their behaviour. The baseness and ingratitude of which he casts in their teeth, by confronting it with the eminent obligation laid upon them, by the glorious deliverance he vouchsafed them; a deliverance heightened and ennobled with these four qualifications.

1st, Its greatness. 2dly, Its unexpectedness, 3dly, Its seasonableness. 4thly, Its undeservedness.

Of each of which in their order.

1st, And first for the greatness of the deliverance. Very great surely it must needs have been, comparing the contemptible weakness of the persons delivered, with the strength and terror of the enemy from whom they were delivered. What were a company of poor oppressed bricklayers, inured to servitude as to an inheritance, for four hundred years successively, and consequently whose very soul and spirit was even lost in clay and rubbish, and made poor, and low, and grovelling by the disciplines of a long captivity. How were these able to have looked Pharaoh and his armies in the face, who had so long trembled under the frown and lash of the meanest of his taskmasters! What could their trowels have done against the Egyptian swords; their aprons against the others' armour and artillery! They could be confident of nothing, but of sinking under the inequality of the encounter.

And could there be a greater deliverance than thus to fetch a lamb out of the jaws of the lion, to wrest weakness out of the hands of power, and the captive from the clutches of the strong! This was the case of the Israelites.

And surely we shall find that it was our own too. For could there be a greater disproportion than there was between us and our oppressing enemies? Were they not, even in the very day of our deliverance, as strong, as mighty, and well armed as ever? Were their hands

at all weakened, that they could not strike, or their swords blunted, that they could not wound? Naturally speaking, I am sure they were not: but whether their hearts were for the present changed by an immediate impression from heaven, or their hands overruled by the art and conduct of that great restorer of his country; certain it is, they were like men in amaze, and not able to act the habitual villainy of their principles and dispositions. So that we saw our king returning to his own triumphantly, at the head of that army by which he had been driven and kept out; an army with their swords in their hands, and, for the most part, with their old principles in their hearts. And had not this deliverance all the marks of greatness and prodigy, that (he it spoke with reverence) almightiness itself could stamp upon it? Search the annals of story, run over all the records of antiquity, and give it a parallel, if you can. It could be none *but the Almighty's doing*, and therefore ought to be *marvellous in our eyes*. It carried its author in its front, and every circumstance of the transaction was noted with the traces and signatures of a divine power and contrivance. It was too great for the measures of any finite, created agents.

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2dly, A second property of the deliverance vouchsafed to the Israelites at the Red sea, was its unexpectedness. Their wits failed them to contrive an escape, as well as their power to make good a resistance. The enemy was behind, and the sea before them; that is, death both faced them and pursued them too: and could they expect, that either the hardened heart of a Pharaoh should relent, and bid them return, or the devouring element forget its cruelty, and turn their sanctuary to protect them?

It is true, indeed, that if any people in the world might have expected such miraculous countermands upon nature, they were the Israelites, to whom custom and frequency had made miracles so familiar, as even to offer them to their expectation. Yet we know they were far from inferring their future preservation from their former deliverance, and that the God of their fathers would act as miraculously in one, as he had done in the other; and thereupon we read these worthy expostulations of their infidelity, striking directly indeed at Moses, but tacitly reflecting upon God himself: *Exod. xiv. 11, 12, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us out of Egypt? Did we not say to thee in Egypt, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? for it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.* Death was their belief, death their fear, nothing but death their expectation. But now how welcome, how sweet, and even transporting must such a deliverance needs be, as steps in between a great mischief and a great fear; as disappoints and confutes the terror of a man's expectations, and (as I may so say) baffles him according to his heart's desire? For the expectation and hope of a good fulfilled, is not so pleasing as the expectation and fear of a great evil defeated. It does not affect the mind with so sensible, so quick, and so exalting a delight. The reason of which is, because enjoyment in this state of mortality does not so much gratify, as misery does afflict us; and consequently nature more desires

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to be delivered from one, than to be possessed of the other. If ever there is a *picture of silver*, to set forth *an apple of gold*, it is when the mercy of the deliverance is set forth and enhanced by the precedent fears and despairs of him that is delivered: for can any delight be greater, than for a man to set his foot upon the neck of that enemy, by whom but three minutes before he expected certainly to die? To behold that sea opening itself as a bosom to embrace, which he could not expect to be any other than a grave to swallow and consume? With these circumstances of endearment did God deliver the Israelites.

And with the very same did he advance the mercy of our deliverance: for it was a thing so much beyond men's expectation, before the doing of it, that they could scarce believe it when it was done; the astonishing strangeness of the thing made men almost question the reports of their own eyes and ears, and disbelieve the information of their very senses, so that we might in that day have took up those emphatical words of the prophet David: *Lord, when thou didst turn the captivity of thy people, then were we like unto those that dream*. The matter and subject of our joy was so strange and unlikely, that, like men in a dream, we seemed to enjoy it rather by the flattering representations of fancy, than to possess it by any reality of fruition.

For so improbable was it, a little before it happened, that foreign princes and nations began to lay aside all hope of the king's restoration; and our next neighbours, together with their hope's of that, began to give over also their respects to his person, banishing him out of their territories, without any consideration of his near alliance of blood, and (which ought to have been the warmest argument in the breast of kings) the distress of majesty by such an act of inhospital barbarity, as before was unheard of, and perhaps never practised but by themselves. And as for affairs here at home, factions and animosities grew higher and higher, clashing indeed amongst themselves, but unanimously conspiring against the royal interest. Nay, and did not the wonted fidelity and courage of many begin to warp and decline, while they were willing to buy a settlement under any usurped government, with the price of their allegiance to the right and lawful: so that the title of the just heir was looked upon as forlorn and desperate, and the restitution of it exploded as a thing impracticable; and that by many virtuoso's who now enjoy so much under it, that they forget what formerly they deserved from it. And so far did things then seem to settle upon another bottom, that as the Israelites said, *Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians*; so all parties, but the royal and episcopal, were recognising and courting the new puny protector, and adoring that rising ignis fatuus as the Persians do the sun, comparing him (forsooth) to a peaceable Solomon, succeeding in the throne of his warlike father David; and there is no doubt, but the father was just as like David for his piety, as the son was like Solomon for his wisdom; much at one.

But so little did their covenant put them in mind of their king, that his highness's most loyal and obedient subjects, especially of the schismatical preaching order, desired no change,



nor ever thought of any, till the ministerial maintenance (so much as remained of it) began to reel and totter, and be made a prey to those whom they themselves had preached into such principles, as would in the issue have certainly devoured them.

And as these persons desired no change, so the hearts even of the loyal and the faithful began to fail, and scarce to expect any; at least in such a manner as it came to pass. For who could have believed, that so many parties, whom both their guilt and interest had made so inveterate against their prince, could ever have fallen down at the feet of offended majesty, but in the field? That those whose blood boiled so high against him, could ever have been brought to receive him, keeping the same blood still in their veins? None could have expected any other restoration of his majesty but by dint of sword, by *the battle of the warrior, with confuted noise, and garments rolled in blood*; or, in a word, that he should return any other way, than by which he was driven out. Let this, therefore, be the second commending property of our deliverance, that while it met with our desires, it transcended our expectations.

3dly, The third commending property of the Israelites' deliverance was the eminent seasonableness of it. God delivered them at that very nick of time, when they were but one remove, one hair's breadth from destruction. One hour's delay might have made the deliverance for ever impossible. So that it was a mercy in season, and therefore in its prime. The hand of the enemy was already lift up, and then it could not be long before the blow. But God, that interposes between the purpose and the action, even then when it is ripest for it, and immediately passing into it, diverted the enemy's rage, and took from him the power of revenge almost in the very midst of the opportunity. A rescue from death, though but threatening at a distance, is a mercy; but to rescue from it when it hovers over a man, and is even grasping him in his talons, is the most endearing circumstance of mercy.

And now, if we pass from the Israelites to ourselves, (as very easily and naturally we may,) we know how seasonably the day of our temporal redemption sprang in upon us. Our long-dying liberty seemed then taking its last gasp, and God knows what mischiefs were then hatching in the breasts of those tyrants. For that the furnace was heating, might be known by the sparks that flew out. A massacre was often spoke of and urged, and, it is like, not far from being intended; the ministry and the law were then professedly struck at; new oaths of abjuration invented and imposed, to ensnare the nation; and, if it were possible, to plunge it deeper in perjury than it was before. Religion was so unhinged, both as to the discipline and doctrine of Christianity, that there was nothing certain but change, nothing constant but variety; till, having run the round of all other alterations, they were passing into direct atheism, and casting off that Deity, whom, having so notoriously disobeyed, it was their concernment also to deny. In a word, the nation was then involved in an universal confusion; its government, its laws, its religion, were then following their prince into banishment, and resolved not to return till he did.



And surely, now it grew high time for the English nation to think of recovering itself from some of that infamy and loud reproach, that the spilling of innocent royal blood, and the profane invasion of all that was sacred or civil had brought upon it, in the opinion of all the nations round about, that stood as spectators and detesters of those religious barbarities, those villainies cloaked and sanctified with the name of reformation. Time it was also for God to shew himself, upon the account of our exiled, distressed sovereign, lest the taunts and triumphs of a too long successful villainy might have took away either the hearts of his subjects, that they would not, or their abilities, that they could not have ministered to the necessities of his royal person. For, for ought we know, had the rod of usurpation lain any longer upon us, the fountains of relief had been quite stopped both at home and abroad, and the heir and lord of three flourishing kingdoms have wanted bread, and the common supplies of human life: for to hear, (as we may from some,) to how low an ebb the barbarous tyranny of his enemies had sometimes brought him, might even melt the hardest of our hearts, till they ran out at our eyes: but I shall for bear the rehearsal of such stories so full of tragedy, that they must needs spread a cloud upon the joys and festivities of this blessed day. And I would not willingly contradict my subject, and make an unseasonable discourse upon so seasonable a deliverance.

4thly, The fourth and last crowning property of the deliverance vouchsafed by God to the Israelites, was its absolute undeservedness. The entire cause of it was the divine goodness, but none of theirs. And therefore, Moses knowing the innate arrogance and pride of that insolent, as well as undeserving people, most particularly cautions them against such flattering thoughts: *Think not*, says he to them, *that God has done these great things for thee, for any righteousness of thine; for thou art a stiff-necked people*, Deut. ix. 6 . And again, in [verse 24](#), *You have been rebellious against the Lord, from the day that I knew you*. So that, if there was any merit in obstinacy, any worth in ingratitude, then indeed their claim stood full and high, and of all other people upon earth they were the most meritorious.

And now, bating these good qualifications, can we allege any thing more for our deserving the deliverance here acknowledged by us, than the ungrateful and rebellious Israelites could plead for theirs? Did we so well improve ourselves under God's judgments, as to be fit for such a mercy? We saw a civil war reaping down thousands and ten thousands of our countrymen; but has it cut off so much as one of our public sins? Have not our vices grown under the sword, like trees under the pruning-hook, gathering thence only a greater luxuriance and fertility? Have we mourned and humbled ourselves, according to the greatness of the occasion? And if, peradventure, any of us have mourned, has it not been more for the effects of the war, than for the causes of it? for the ruin and the waste that it has brought upon our families and estates, rather than for the crying sins that first blew the trumpet, and drew the fatal sword to revenge God's quarrel upon us in the field?



Even self-love might fill the eyes with tears, and cover the back with sackcloth, for the untimely loss of a father, an husband, or a brother; but how many of us wept or sighed to see majesty trampled upon, religion abused, or the sacred houses of God profaned? No; these things were but little settled in most men's thoughts; they scarce sighed or groaned for any thing but for taxes and impositions. All which considered, we were so far from meriting such an incomparable deliverance, that had God treated us according to our merits, we had never been delivered.

We have now seen the four several properties that commended and gave a value to the deliverance of the Israelites; every one of which contributed to inflame their account, and to stamp their ungrateful, provoking behaviour with an higher aggravation. And we have seen also the parallel between their deliverance and our own so exactly made out, that there is not one of these properties failing in it: for our deliverance was altogether as great, as unexpected, as seasonable, and as undeserved, as theirs could be: it might vie with it in every particular.

And if that charge can be now made good against us, that the text draws up against them, of provoking God; surely our guilt must be as great as our deliverance, and every way equal the vast measures of theirs. It cannot be pleasing to rip up old sores, even to those who desire to cure them. But whether the preacher does it, or no, our ingratitude will lay open and proclaim itself. Ingratitude, I say, the crying, crimson sin of this delivered nation: a sin of an universal comprehension, and (as I may so speak) the generalissimo of sins, having an influence upon all the particular sins and irregularities of our practice. And if we ask, in what the nation has been so ungrateful, it is a question best answered by another: In what has it not?

We have been harassed by a long civil war; and by a peace, under several sorts of usurpers, worse than a war. We have seen a general confusion, of all ranks and degrees: and as if the floodgates of popular insolence had been opened, we have seen an inundation breaking in upon all, and subverting every thing above it; even from the king to the meanest gentleman; from him that commanded three kingdoms, to him that had the command but of one servant: and with the confusion of order and degree, we have seen the same also in point of property; no man was able to call any thing his own, but slavery. The honour went first, and the estate stayed not long behind. This is a summary account of the mischiefs we then groaned under.

And a merciful Providence was pleased to deliver us from every one of them. For we have had a peace at home, a peace, enabling us to make war abroad; and this under a prince of an undoubted title, and an unparalleled goodness: a prince, representing God, not only in point of majesty by vicegerency, as all princes do, but eminently, and beyond example, in that his beloved attribute that must save the world, his pardoning mercy: which he has imitated so far, even towards his bitterest enemies, that he has pardoned more and greater offences, than they themselves could, with any face or modesty, have expected.



But how has this goodness been answered? Have not pardons been followed with plots? the blessings of peace and settlement been entertained with murmurings, repinings, and reflections upon his government, not to say, upon his person also, under whose shadow they enjoy all this? Have those who have been restored to the privileges of their birthright and nobility, behaved themselves with that gratitude to him, that, under God, is the fountain of honour? And have they pursued those courses that must give a lustre to titles, and ennoble nobility itself? Have those that have been restored to their estates, stretched out their hands, and opened their bowels to their indigent fellow-sufferers, who served the same master, and whose fortunes fell sacrifices to the same cause; who fought with them, or rather for them: but have not these been rather neglected and scorned for their poverty, the effect of their fidelity; and, at length, been even ground to powder, by that which was designed for their relief? I am afraid, if we come to be arraigned with these questions, we must be forced to plead guilty to them all.

Having thus despatched the two first things proposed from the text, to wit, the Israelites unworthy and ungrateful behaviour towards God, upon a great deliverance, together with the aggravation of it; as also shewn how much their case has been made ours, in both respects; I proceed now to the third and last thing proposed from the words, namely, the cause of this unworthy behaviour, which was their not understanding the designs of mercy in the several instances of it: *they understood not thy wonders in Egypt*. Now in every wonderful passage of Providence, two things are to be considered; first, the author, by whom; second, the end for which it is done: neither of which were understood by the Israelites, as they ought to have been.

1st, And first for the author of it. It is more than probable, that many of the Israelites ascribed most of those wonders to the skill of Moses transcending that of the Egyptian magicians, or to his working by the assistance of an higher and more potent spirit than that which assisted them. Or in case they did believe them to have been the effects of a divine power, yet they did not inure their minds seriously to consider it, so as to have a standing awe of that power imprinted upon their hearts by such a consideration: and he that considers great and concerning matters superficially, in the language of the scripture, does not understand them.

Now I believe this will be found to have been most particularly the sin of this nation: for how many, who think atheism a piece of ingenuity, ascribe the whole passage of the king's restoration to chance and accident, or to this man's prudence, or that man's miscarriage; not considering how impossible it was for any human contrivance to lay a train of so many causes, so many accidents, so exactly, and to make so many opposite interests and cross circumstances fall into a direct and perfect subserviency to the composing this one grand work: a work so incomparably great, that to adjudge the entire accomplishment of it to any creature under heaven, would be to rob God of the honour of one of his greatest ac-

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tions, and to take the crown off from Providence, and to set it upon the head of human counsels. And then, no wonder if ingratitude for a blessing follows, where the author of it is neither understood nor acknowledged.

2dly, The other, and the chief thing to be considered in every wonderful deliverance, is the intent and end of it. Which surely is not, that men should forget it as soon as it is done, or turn it into wantonness, and make it minister to the excesses of pride, luxury, and intemperance. God neither dried up the sea, to bring the Israelites into a land flowing with milk and honey, that they might debauch, revel, and surfeit upon that mercy: nor did he, by a miracle as great, reinstate a company of poor, distressed exiles in the possession of their native country, that they should live at that rate of vanity and superfluity, that the world nowadays cries out upon them for. God did not work wonders to clothe and feed a few worthless parasites with the riches of a kingdom, to fill their cups with the blood of orphans and the tears of the widows. God did not intend that so universal a blessing, big enough for us all, should be diverted under-ground, into the obscure, narrow channel of a few private purses; leaving so many loyal, suffering, undone persons, to sigh and mourn over their destitute condition, in the day of a public joy. God did not restore us to scoff at religion, and to malign his church, as if the nation and the government might stand well enough without a church, but not without plays. No; surely, this was not the intent of this miraculous deliverance, whatsoever has been made the event of it. The voice of God in it calls us to humility, to industry, to temperance, to public-mindedness, to great and generous actions, for the good both of church and state. And if, instead of these, we resolve to spit in the face of mercy, by still pursuing a vain, luxurious, profane course of life, we shall find, that he who *rules in the kingdoms of men, and appoints over them whomsoever he will*, can turn the stream of our happiness, and destroy us after he has done us so much good.

To whom be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON XXXIV.

MATTHEW xvii. 21.

Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

IT was a general received command, and an acknowledged rule of practice in all ages and places of the Christian world, that we are *to hear the church*; except only of late, since we began to be wiser than the world, and holy above the scripture; from which this text has been, as it were, disanonized, and its authority struck out of date. But no wonder if the church then had no jurisdiction, when it had scarce so much as a being; and that men did not use to hear it, when it grew almost impossible for them to see it; and if the disciples of those days regarded not much the casting out of evil spirits, who were chiefly busied about rejecting God's ministers.

But heretofore, when men were led by the written word, and not by the *ignis fatuus* of a bold fancy, styling itself divine revelation, the church was always recognised as Christ's court here upon earth, fully empowered and commissioned from him to decide all emergent controversies, to interpret doubtful commands, and to make wholesome sanctions and institutions, as particular occasions and the circumstances of affairs should require; that so it might appear, that the assistance of the Spirit promised to the church was not a vain thing or a mere verb.

Now it seemed good to the primitive church, acted by the immediate guidance of the Holy Ghost, to set apart the time of our blessed Saviour's fasting and temptation in the wilderness, to be solemnized with the anniversary exercise of abstinence, and other holy austerities, for the subduing the flesh, quickening the spirit; that so we might conform to Christ, and worship the author of our religion with the devotions of imitation.

Thanks be to God, our church is lately come out of the wilderness; yet let it not cease to imitate what our Saviour did when he was there. I confess the blessed Jesus is a pattern above the imitation of mortality; fitter to terrify than to excite our endeavours; a copy to be admired, not to be transcribed.

His whole life was a continued miracle; in every instance of behaviour his divinity beamed through his humanity, and every action was a cast of his omnipotence; and miracles, I acknowledge, were never intended for precepts; nor is any man bound to be omnipotent, divine, or an angel, nor to do such things as are only the effects of such perfections.

Yet even this strange, high, inimitable fasting of Christ may be stripped of the miracle, and, by due, qualified proportions, found a moral duty: for though to fast forty days were miraculous, and so not at all concerning us, yet the ends of Christ's fasting, which were to enjoy a more immediate converse with God, the better to fortify himself against the temptation of the Devil, and to fit himself for the execution of a great work laid upon him by the Father; these are all common to us, according to the due abatement of degrees; and

therefore, where there is some proportion in the duty, there ought to be the same in the use of the means.

Nay, we may advance the argument further, and dispute thus: That if he who had no corruption or disorder in his nature, to weaken or betray the motions of the spirit, found it yet fit to undergo these austerities and violences to the flesh; how much more ought we, who find a continual rebellion in all our appetites against the spiritual inclinations of the mind, to endeavour, by such religious arts, to subdue those luxuriances to the obedience of reason and the dictates of the spirit?

Let us therefore follow Christ, though at a distance; for if we may but touch the hem of our great exemplar by the small beginnings of a faithful imitation, we shall find a virtue coming out from him, to the curing of the flux of sin, and the bloody issue of the most deadly, threatening corruption.

We are commanded to be like Christ; but in every likeness philosophy teaches that there are some degrees of dissimilitude, because no likeness amounts to an identity: and when he bids us *be perfect*, he still intends it according to that economy of perfection that is incident to an imperfect nature. Wherefore let us not distinguish ourselves out of duty, nor make our ease our religion, but suspect that those arguments are very likely to proceed from the flesh, that tend to the flesh's gratification. Though we cannot reach Christ in the miracle of the performance, yet we may follow him in the sincerity of the attempt.

Certain it is, from the united testimony of many of the most experienced followers of Christ, that these abstinencies and sour rudiments of self-denial have a signal influence, both to the procuring of mercies, and to the removal of impending judgments.

He that thus hungers is sure to be filled. Fasting may prevent starving, and wearing sackcloth for a while keep us from wearing it all our days. It is able to reverse a decree, and to remand the word out of God's mouth. Ahab himself found it so; and what rewards may we hope for to a true, when so great did attend even the forced abstinencies of an unsound repentance?

As for the words: it is much doubted by expositors, what kind of evil spirit is here intended by our Saviour, which he affirms not to be dispossessed but by *prayer and fasting*.

Some understand it generally of all evil spirits, contrary to the express letter and sense of the place. Others, of an evil spirit of a peculiar and extraordinary fierceness. But others, more appositely and judiciously, interpret it of an evil spirit having had long and inveterate possession of the party out of whom it was cast; which appears from the ninth of Mark, where the spirit is said to have possessed him *παιδιόθεν*, *even from a child*.

I shall now, by a parallel application, improve the words beyond this particular occasion, to their general reason, and extend what was here spoke of, the casting out the Devil as to his person, to an ejection of him as to his works. And whereas the duty of fasting is extraordin-



ary, and a proper instrument to advance the heights and fervours of prayer, the sense of the words, as improvable into a standing, perpetual precept, is this:

That there are some corruptions and vices, which, partly by reason of a strong situation in our temper and constitution, partly by habit, custom, and inveterate continuance, grow so sturdy, and have so firm an hold of us, that they cannot be subdued and conquered, and throughly dispossessed, but with the greatest ardour and constancy of prayer, joined with the harshest severities of mortification.

This, therefore, is the genuine sense of the words; in which there are these two parts:

First, An intimation of a peculiar duty; prayer and fasting.

Secondly, The end and design of it; which is, to eject and dispossess the unclean spirit.

These are the parts of the text, the entire discussion of which I shall manage in these three particulars.

I. To take a survey of the extent of this text.

II. To shew the due qualifications of it, that render it both acceptable to God, and efficacious to ourselves.

III. To shew how it comes to have such an influence in dispossessing the evil spirit, and subduing our corruptions.

I. For the first of these: this duty of fasting admits of several kinds and degrees; for in fasting as well as feasting we may find variety.

1st, The first kind is of constant, universal exercise; universal, both because it obliges at all times, and extends to all persons. And this is nothing but a temperate, sober, and restrained use of the creature; in abridging the appetites of nature for the designs of religion; in bringing liberty to the love of reason, and contracting the latitude of things lawful into the narrower compass of expedients.

He that ventures to the utmost verge of his Christian liberty stands upon a precipice; the utmost bounds of lawful are the borders and immediate confines of unlawful. And when the Devil thus sets a man upon the pinnacle, he may be sure that he hath designed him for a temptation. To dwell near the sin, without sometimes stepping into it, is very hard. Neighbourhood is still the occasion of visits.

Upon this cause Christ has placed the spirit and soul of his religion in self-denial and a renouncing the pleasures, softnesses, and caresses of worldly delights; as knowing, though pleasure and a full enjoyment is in itself not evil, yet such is the weakness of our nature, that it fails and melts under the encounter, and by its very enjoyments is betrayed into the snares of sin and the regions of death.

It is lawful for us to feast with Job's sons, yet feasting may sometimes pull the house about our ears. When Amnon's heart is merry with wine, then the ambush is ready to rise and strike him. Fulness of bread was the occasion of Sodom's sin, and Sodom's sin was the



occasion of its destruction. Temperance, therefore, the only easy and constant fast, is the great duty of a Christian life; a sure and sovereign instrument of mortification.

And whosoever struggles with any unruly corruption will perhaps find, that the constant turn of a well-guided abstinence will, in the issue, give a surer despatch to it than those extraordinary in stances of total abstinence and higher severities, only undertook for a time. As a landflood, it carries a bigger stream, and comes with a mightier force and noise, yet presently dries up and disappears; but the emissions of a fountain, though gentle and silent, yet are constant and perpetual; and whereas the other, being gone, leaves nothing behind it but slime and mud, this, wheresoever it flows, gently soaks into verdure and fertility.

This constant temperance, therefore, is by all means intended by the rules of Christianity; the constancy of which, running through our whole lives, makes abstinence our diet, and fasting our meat and drink.

We used to say, A good conscience is a continual feast; but surely it is in a great measure the effect and product of such a continual fast. Wherefore let us still secure ourselves by the guards of a temperate and reserved sobriety; remembering, that it was the sop that slid the Devil into Judas, and the glutton that ushered in the traitor; and that, in all spiritual surprises, it is the bait that is most likely to betray us to the hook.

2dly, The second kind of fast is a fast of a total abstinence, when for some time we wholly abstain from all bodily repasts. This is the highest kind, and therefore, in ordinary speech, has engrossed the name of *fast* only to itself, as the name of the whole kind is not unusually confined to the principal member of the division.

We have instances of this frequently in the Old Testament and in the New; in the disciples of John, in Cornelius, and others. And it is not to be questioned, but that this is the fast chiefly intended in the words of the text; that great instrument to exorcise and drive out the evil spirit from a defiled and a possessed heart.

Every remedy is successful according to the proportion it bears to the distemper: and certainly a cure is not likely to be wrought, where an ordinary remedy encounters an extraordinary disease; where the plaster is narrow, and the wound broad.

Temperance is good, but that is to be our continual diet; and surely that man is not like to recover, who makes his food his physic. Where the humour is strong and predominant, there the prescription must be rugged, and the evacuation violent. We must leave the road of nature, when nature itself is disordered, and the principles of life in danger.

Possibly a man may have a transient disrelish and loathing of his sin; but have these loathings rested only in thought, or have they improved into contrary resolutions? Suppose they have, and a man has fully resolved against his sin, yet has he watered those resolutions with prayers and tears, the great conveyance of that strength which alone can actuate the resolutions? Admit also, that he may have prayed and humbled himself before God, yet still perhaps his corruption is vigorous, and snaps asunder all his resolutions, tramples upon his

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prayers, and triumphs over his tears and repentances, upon the periodical returns of a temptation, or the critical workings of a bad temper.

Why now the reason of this unconquered activity of his sin, after all these courses taken against it, may be because the place of its strength is yet untouched. Its lock is only hampered, and not cut off by a thorough removal of the fuel and materials of concupiscence in a severe abstinence from things sometimes necessary: for a distempered stomach will digest aliment into poison.

To eat and to drink is necessary; but even necessity must give place to extremity. And the physician is merciful, if he pines his patient into a recovery. In this case we encounter sin in the body, like a besieged enemy; and such an one, when he has once engarrisoned himself in a strong hold, will endure a storm, and repel assaults: you must cut off his supplies of provision, and never think to win the fort, till hunger breaks through the walls, and starves him into a surrender.

3dly, The third kind of fast is an abstinence from bodily refreshments, in respect of a certain sort or degree, and that undertook for some space of time; such as is this quadragesimal solemnity; in which, for the space of some weeks, the church has, in some select days, enjoined a total abstinence from flesh, and a more restrained use of other refreshments.

I am not ignorant, that the same obligation conies also from the civil magistrate, and that for secular ends; yet I see not why there may not be a friendly correspondence between both these; or why one should be thought to exclude the other, which it only confirms: certainly a law ought not to be the weaker for being enacted by a double authority.

I know also, that the celebration of this solemnity is much controverted; but then it is by those who doubt as much whether they ought to obey the magistrate, and to renounce the principles of religion. But just as in the apostles times, so in ours also, the church has been troubled with disputes concerning meats; and whether it be lawful to oblige men, under the gospel, in the use of things in their nature indifferent.

Some, who would be reforming while they should be obeying; who are too holy to need fasting; have too much of the spirit to stand in fear of the flesh; and who still express God's mercies by *marrow* and *fatness*, and such other expressions as please their palate, and leave a relish upon the tongue that speaks them; so that they cannot be so properly said to preach sermons as dinners; of which they put their auditors in mind long before they have done:—these, I say, will hear of nothing but of liberty; they must have elbowroom at their meat: and as for Lent, they defy it; it is popish, antichristian, and idolatrous: and so, their conscience being fallen into their stomach, what one finds troublesome, the other easily concludes superstitious.

But who shall be judges and arbitrators in this case? The scripture, which is to be the rule, is the same, and open to the allegation of both parties. But who shall interpret and apply this rule? Now, in every science and profession, the most rational way to resolve doubts

arising in it has been, either to consult with all or most of the professors of it, or with some that are most eminent for their skill and knowledge in it.

Of the first sort, in matters of Christianity, we have the church of God congregated in councils: of the second, we have those ancient writers, famous in their ages for their profound acquaintance with evangelical mysteries, whom we call *fathers*: let us therefore see the judgment of both these in this particular.

For councils, I shall mention one for all; the council of Nice, in which we find both mention and approbation of this quadragesimal fast. Add to this the canons of the apostles; in the sixty-eighth of which we read the institution of the same: which canons, though they were not writ by the apostles themselves, yet they are of great, undoubted antiquity, and consequently of no less authority in the several ages of the church.

As for the suffrage of the fathers; I could bring St. Basil and St. Chrysostom, of the Greek church; St. Austin and St. Jerom, the two great luminaries of the Latin.

Of which, St. Austin, in his 119th epistle to Januarius, has these words: *Quadragesima sane jejuniorum habet auctoritatem et in veteribus libris et in evangelio*. And St. Jerom, in his epistle to Marcella, delivers his mind to the same purpose: *Nos unam quadragesimam, secundum traditionem apostolorum, toto anno, tempore nobis congruo, jejunamus*. Also in his Comment upon the fifty-eighth of Isaiah, he speaks to the like intent: *Dominus diebus quadraginta in solitudine jejunavit, ut nobis solennes jejuniorum dies relinqueret*.

I do not desire to multiply quotations, but had rather weigh than number them; and therefore these shall be sufficient.

And now let any one judge whether it is fitter for us to steer our practice according to the ducture of the universal church, or the broken voice of a particular faction, compared to that, both small in number and inconsiderable in qualification? Must the gray hairs of antiquity bow down to the upstart appearance of novelty? especially since the same faction that decry fasting in Lent have publicly kept a national fast upon the day of Christ's nativity, in the year 1645; the first fast that was kept by Christians on that day since Christianity saw the sun: but it seems, Christianity and reformation are two things.

They talk of reforming, and of coming out of Egypt, (as they call it;) but still, though they leave Egypt, they will be sure to hold fast to their flesh-pots. And the truth is, their very fasts and humiliations have been observed to be nothing else but a religious epicurism, and a neat contrivance of luxury; while they forbear dinner, only that they may treble their supper; and fast in the day, like the evening wolves, to whet their stomachs against night.

But these principles and practices are too rank for the strict, pure, and mortifying severities of Christianity. Let us, therefore, poor mortals, who dare not be perfect above our example, content ourselves to follow our great Master, and not be- ashamed to be deceived with the universal church.



And truly, he that with spiritual design and prudent usage shall manage this religious solemnity, as with Christ he may be said to fast, so with Christ also he may conquer the tempter. And let all schisms and factions, and pretended reformers, ring about his ears peals of popery, will-worship, and superstition; yet still, like Christ in the wilderness, he may converse with God, though his abode be amongst such wild beasts.

And thus I have despatched the first general head of this discourse; which was to shew the extent and latitude of this duty of fasting, in the several sorts and kinds of it: I must now close up what I have spoke upon this subject with this cautional observation:

That in the whole economy of the gospel, mercy is predominant; and therefore the rigour of every precept is to be sweetened and reduced to this standing rule, as the vital reason running through every evangelical institution. We cannot but allow the great legislator of the new law to carry things with so much equity and evenness, as to fix upon the same law a different proportion of obligation, according to different tempers and occasions.

Now what Christ said upon another occasion may be said also of fasting; *Every one cannot receive this saying*. There may be a poison in abstinence, as well as in meats: and when natural weakness and infirmity will not reach the sweetness and perfection of the precept, it is the genius of the gospel to relax, and not to urge sacrifice, standing in competition with mercy.

Certainly he, that would make the rigours of the sabbath give way to the pulling of an ox or a sheep out of the ditch, would not now ruin a man, for whom even the sabbath was made, only to spare one of those. Where the performance depends upon a power rare and singular, it is there hard to make the duty universal. We know the body is subservient to the uses of the soul: but Christ never destroys one to save the other; nor bids any one *put the knife to his throat* so as to kill himself. We must distinguish between murder and mortification.

Christ commands no man to be a skeleton, or a walking ghost, or to throw away his health, in order to his salvation. A catarrh or a consumption is no man's duty: self-denial may be a duty; but I am sure self-murder is a sin.

A potion may be sovereign and excellent, but not therefore to be equally administered to all. No application can be successful, but what is managed with caution: and where there is caution, there must be distinction. Every vessel is not alike fit for new wine: an old, crazy cask betrays its burden, and sinks under the vigour and spirituous emanations of too generous a liquor.

There is no soul but may pray, and be pious; but there are many bodies that cannot fast. It were a sad thing, if a man should be forced to make his tablecloth his windingsheet, and his poison his religion. No, undoubtedly: all the injunctions of Christ carry in them nothing but sweetness, convenience, and a tender compliance with the necessities and frailties of human nature.

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The weakness of some tempers perform upon them the very same effects that fasting works upon others; and therefore those severities, which in others would be only an abridgment of their luxury, would in them be an intrenchment upon their being; and not only cut short their pleasure, but their very existence.

As soon as Jesus Christ had raised one from the dead, we read that *he commanded something to be given her to eat*, [Mark v. 43](#); and, I am confident, the severity of no institution could have induced him, at that time, to have bid her fast; unless he only raised her from the state of death, that he might send her to it again.

The height of prudence is, in all precepts, laws, and institutions, to distinguish persons, times, and occasions, and accordingly to discriminate the obligation; and upon the same exigence of justice to dispense with it in some, upon which it confirms it in others. And prudence is but one part of Christianity, which takes in all moral virtues with advantage and addition; and what is absurd in the sanctions of right reason, will never be warranted by the rules of religion. Wherefore, as to the matter in hand, I shall comprise all in this one word: let the observation of this solemn time be so strict, as not to bend to any man's luxury; so dispensable, as not to grate upon his infirmity.

II. I come now to the second general head proposed for the discussion of this subject; which is to shew, what are the qualifications that must render this duty of fasting both acceptable to God, and efficacious to this great purpose.

To give men a right information concerning which, I think to be a matter of very great moment; as perceiving that men egregiously abuse themselves in the practice of this duty, spoiling it with strange apprehensions, and loading it with many foreign and preternatural strictnesses, for which they will one day receive but small thanks, either from God or from themselves. The truth is, the sum of all their miscarriages about it seems to lie in this, that they depress it into a *bodily exercise*; which the apostle affirms *to profit little*; while they acquiesce barely in this, that they have fasted so long or so often; not at all considering in what manner or to what end: whereas, indeed, the former is but the mere bulk and rude draught of this duty; and these latter only stamp it divine, and make it spiritual.

Wherefore I shall lay down four conditions or properties, without a joint concurrence of all which, this duty of fasting can neither be pleasing to God, nor effectual to dispossess the unclean spirit, in the mortification of any strong corruption.

1st, The first is, that it is to be used, not as a duty either necessary or valuable for itself, but only as an instrument. There are some duties that carry in them an absolute necessity; as being founded upon the necessary relation that the creature bears towards God, in respect of its being created by him, and its depending upon him; as also upon the relation that one creature bears toward another, arising from their natural equality and cognation.

Of the first sort are our loving God, adoring him, adhering to him, with the utmost exertion of all the powers and faculties of the soul; demeaning ourselves with that humility

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and prostration of spirit, that becomes poor shadows before self-sufficiency, weakness before omnipotence; a creature of yester day, and but for a day, before him who is *from everlasting to everlasting*. In short, as it becomes a man to behave himself towards that divine power, from the arbitrary disposals of whose pleasure he first received his breath, and still holds his being.

Of the second sort are all the duties we owe to our neighbour, in the rank and condition our creation has placed us. As, that we bear a benign affection towards him; entertain a concernment for him; upon all occasions advance his good and emolument; by no means intrench upon his happiness, by defrauding, slandering, defiling, or any ways circumventing those, whom God has joined with us in the society and common ligaments of nature and humanity.

Now all these actions, with their respective 1 branches and further improvements, are indispensably requisite, as parts of God's image in us; and without which the decorum and offices of that station which every man holds both towards God and his fellow-creatures, cannot be sustained.

These, therefore, are the principal duties, and chief pillars of morality; and whatever becomes necessary over and above these, it is so only by way of supply and assistance, as helps and arts to promote the soul's progress in these grand instances of duty.

For we must observe, that there is not only in the mind of man an ingenite sense of *turpe* and *honestum*, that constantly inclines him to the practice of such virtuous actions, but also a strong inclination of appetite, that, like a constant *remora*, stops and impedes the virtuous principle; and withal, like a bias, sways and carries him to what is vicious and irregular.

Upon this ground it is, that, to quicken the soul in a course of virtue, we must *removere prohibens*, and weaken the contrary principle of the sensitive appetite, which clogs and oppresses the other in all its due operations.

Now, since the seat of this appetite is the body, according to the various disposition of which, that becomes either lively or faint in its workings, it follows, that we must lay siege to this, and begin the assault here, as that great apostle and artist in the ways of holiness did before us, [1 Cor. ix. 27](#)? *I keep under my body, lest, having preached to others, I myself should become a castaway.*

How this can be effected surer and better than by fasting, not only Christianity, but reason itself is yet to seek. It is this that curbs nature, circumscribes appetite, restrains the gaiety and exorbitance of desire, stops the career of luxury, by taking off its wheels.

He, whose nature is reduced and kept low by the disciplines of religion, is neither a slave to the suggestions of lust, pride, or idleness; their innate fuel is extinguished; and so all their



proposals easily vanish, finding nothing to fasten upon. They are so far from being victorious, that to such an one they are scarce troublesome. He is so far from being subject to their tyranny, that he is not so much as vexed with their importunity.

Now, by all that has been said it appears, that fasting is required, not as a virtue, but as a help to virtue; and that, by controlling its hinderance, removing its impediments, subduing the emulations of a contrary principle, and so enabling it to act with freedom.

Otherwise, were there no reluctancy from the inferior appetites against a virtuous and a pious course, these arts and stratagems against the flesh would be superfluous, and we should have no more need of fasting, than the angels or the blessed spirits have of eating. Could the mariner sail with as much ease and safety in a storm, as he does in a calm, he would never empty or unlade his vessel.

Would a full, luxuriant body subserve the ends and execute the commands of the spirit, with as much readiness and agility as one that is disciplined to such compliances with hunger and hardship; God, who takes no delight to afflict the children of men, you may be sure, would not command us to afflict ourselves; certainly no abstinence would be then more our duty, than to abstain from fasting.

For is there any excellency in the thing itself to commend it to God? Does fasting perfume our sighs, or add a fragrancy to our prayers? Are the *jejunia sabbatariorum* sacrifices of so sweet a savour to the Almighty, that the offerings of justice, piety, and mercy, would be nothing valued by him, without the mixture of such incense?

Nay, let me add this one consideration, that fasting, as such, considered barely in itself, is so far from being of any value in the sight of God, that it is indeed an evil; not morally, I confess, but naturally; for whatsoever grieves or afflicts nature is an evil to it, and consequently fasting, being such an one, would never be allowed, much less commanded by God, if it were not sanctified by its subserviency to a moral good.

Let this therefore be fixed upon, that fasting is neither commanded, nor to be used, but merely as a spiritual instrument. And since it is the nature of all instruments to receive their value and worth from their fitness to produce those effects to which they are designed, I believe it would be no hard matter to unravel and run through most of the pompous austerities and fastings of many religious operators and splendid justiciaries.

Some of which neither know or design any other religion in this duty, but only that at such and such a time they forbore flesh, and made their meal of fish, which perhaps also they loved better. This, they think, is a notable piece of service to God; and so they rise from the table with their blind, besotted consciences as much applauding them, as if they had rose from a well-performed prayer.

But may I not say to such an one, Thou hypocrite! does God receive any honour at all from this? or does it at all discriminate thee from the epicure in his account, or in the final sentence that he shall pass upon both hereafter? May not he that eats fish and he that eats

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flesh go to the same place of damnation, as well as the fish and flesh that they eat be served up to the same table?

Is there any spiritual design carried on in this abstinence? Is the min of any vice drove at; the working of any corruption undermined and defeated by this means? These are the things that God looks at and requires, and which the very nature of the duty suggests; and without which it is but the carcass of a duty; dead and noisome; detestable before God, and irrational in itself.



2dly, The second condition of a religious fast is, that it be done with a hearty detestation of the body of sin, for the weakening of which it is designed. Whosoever duly undertakes a fast, by the very nature of the duty is actually engaged in a war against his sin; and who ever fought valiantly against him whom he did not first hate heartily?

If we have not first wrought our minds to a settled dislike and a bitter disgust of sin as our mortal enemy, all our attempts against it will be faint and heartless, our mortifications treacherous, and our fastings frustraneous; much like David's sending an army against Absalom, with a design to save him, and to deal with him gently.

It will be only an alarm to sin to put itself into a posture of defence, to retreat further into the soul, and there to rally together its strengths, and to se cure itself by a firmer possession.

It is most certain, that in the same degree that sin is amiable to us, our fast is odious to God, and looked upon by him only as a more solemn mockery and religious provocation.

It is not a mournful expression, a solemn dress, or a thin table, that God so much regards. It is the heart, and not the stomach, that he would have empty; and therefore, if a man carries a luxurious soul in a pining body, or the aspiring mind of a Lucifer in the hanging head of a bulrush, he fasts only to upbraid his Maker, and to disgrace his religion, and to heighten his final reckoning, till he becomes ten times more the son of perdition, than those who own their inward love of sin, by the open, undissembled enmities of a suitable behaviour.



Let us not deceive ourselves, nor take an estimate of our duty by false measures and fallacious judgments. He that obeys the injunctions of the church, that executes upon himself the afflicting rigours of external abstinences, he does well; but he has not therefore done all. Let him not count himself to have fasted to any purpose, if by it he has not got ground of his corruption, in some measure supplanted his sin, and estranged his affections from the beloved embraces of sinful objects.

But if, after all these spiritual arts and severities, the love of sin continues yet active and entire, let him assure himself, that his fasting will have no other effect upon him, than to send him back to the repeated practice of what he loves with a fiercer and a keener appetite. The vicissitudes of restraint will only endear the returns of the enjoyment, and draw forth the desires with a quicker and more inflamed inclination.

He, therefore, that would manage this duty to his great and spiritual advantage, let him draw his eye from his table, and turn it unto his soul: let him overlook the spare furniture of one, and see whether there be not large provision laid up for lust in the other. Does he find any vile, unmortified desire in his heart? let him extinguish it: any sin in his hands? let him remove it: any blot upon his conscience? let him wash it out in the great laver of souls, the blood of Christ, conveyed to him by a true repentance.

But if these things are not the matter of his care, if he only forbears his meat, and not his sin, let such an one know, that the beasts of Nineveh kept as good a fast as he.

Add to all this, that the love of sin cherished in the heart makes fasting not only an impious, but also an unseemly practice. A man's behaviour contradicts his designs: the duty does not set well upon him; it neither suits nor squares with his condition. In short, it is as improper and absurd to come to a fast with a foul heart, as to a feast with foul hands.

3dly, The third condition of a duly qualified fast is, that it be quickened and enlivened with prayer. The truth is, one of the greatest designs of this duty is, to be an opportunity of prayer, which is never performed with greater fervency, activity of spirit, and restlessness of importunity, than when nature is abridged, the humours of the body low, and consequently the avocations that it suggests to the mind small and conquerable.

Prayer is a duty running through all the periods and offices of our lives, but the days of fasting are properly the time of its solemnity. They are (as I may so say) the festivals of devotion. Prayer, joined with fasting, is like *an apple of gold set off with a picture of silver*. Now we have it at its best advantage; it shines bright, and it flames pure, like fire without the incumbrances of smoke, or the allay of contrary blasts.

And in the management of so great a duty, to be silent and obstinate, to have no petition to prefer, what is it but to transact the whole religion of the fast with our teeth? With a temper inferior to the ox and the brute animals, who low in their hunger, and speak aloud their wants to the hand that feeds them.

Nay, the very reason of a fast seems to require the society of prayer, for it must needs be undertook either for the procuring of some good, or the deprecation of some evil: and is there any way appointed either by God or nature, to represent the wants and grievances of our condition to heaven but by petition? by the solicitations of prayer, a duty whose strange and never-failing successes in all its holy contests with the Almighty have rendered it not only acceptable, but also invincible?

And, to add example to reason, what saint almost do we find in scripture, whose prayers did not attend their fasts? Ezra and Nehemiah, David and Daniel, took this course; and, doubtless, while *David's knees were weak through fasting*, as he expresses it in [Psalm cix. 24](#), they were also employed in kneeling.

One would think, that in this performance the actings of grace might imitate the workings of nature; for is there any thing so proper to hunger as craving, or to a fast as supplication?



But where I enforce the conjunction of prayer with fasting, people must not think, that by prayer is meant a formal, customary attendance upon the offices of the church, undertook only out of a sordid fear of the eye of man, and then performed with weariness and irreverence, with seldom access, and more seldom devotion; of the duties of which persons I may say this, that if filth could be defiled, their prayers would defile their fastings, and their fastings their prayers; so that the joining of one to the other would be nothing else, than the offering up of carrion with the fumes and incense of a dung hill.

4thly, The fourth condition of a truly religious fast is, that it be attended with alms and works of charity. Amongst our other emptinesses, the evacuation of the purse is proper to this solemnity; and he that inflicts a thorough penance upon this, stops the fountain of luxury, and the opportunities of extravagance.

Charity is the grand seasonage of every Christian duty: it gives it a gloss in the sight of God, and a value in the sense of men; and he fasts properly, whose fast is the poor man's feast; whose abstinence is another's abundance.

In [Isaiah lviii. 4, 5, 6](#), God roundly tells his people what was truly a fast, and what was no fast in his esteem: not to abstain from bread, *but to deal it to the hungry*; this is properly to fast: not to wrap ourselves in sackcloth, but to *cover and clothe our naked brother*; this is to be humbled.

To what purpose did the Pharisees fast twice a week, when they stayed their stomachs with devouring widows houses? solemnizing all their humiliations with the poor man's groans and the orphan's tears? To what spiritual intent did our zealots so much exercise themselves in this duty, when, as the prophet's expression is in the same [58th chapter of Isaiah](#), *they fasted for violence, and to fight with the fist of oppression*, only that they might plunder and pillage with success; that they might make poor for others to relieve, and so provide objects for other men's charity, instead of exercising their own?

But if the constant practice of the church may have any weight with us to determine our practice, we shall find, that works of charity were always looked upon as a proper appendage, if not also an integral part of this duty. In the same place that we read of Cornelius's fasting, we find it ushered in with its two great supporters, prayers and alms.

And the truth is, if we may compare these two together, alms have so much the preeminence above prayer, that one is a begging of God, the other is a lending to him.

I have now assigned those conditions that I think are both necessary and sufficient to render our fastings effectual to this great end of dispossessing and throwing out the evil spirit.

I confess I have not mentioned the popish austerities of whippings, pilgrimages, and going barefoot, with twenty other such tricks (for they are no better) which they prescribe and use upon these solemnities.



For if they were indeed of such sovereign force to help the soul in the practices of virtue, what is the reason that the scripture affords us not one instance of any saint that ever took this course? The Pharisees indeed disfigured and mangled themselves, and treated their bodies much after the same manner, till they made themselves more deformed in the eyes of God, than in the eyes of men.

Other examples besides these I know none; neither will reason supply the defects of tradition, or afford any solid argument to prove, that the evil spirit may be drove out of the soul, as the money changers were out of the temple, with whips and scourges. The Devil does not always go, when such weapons drive.

Those, indeed, whose religion lies no deeper than their skin, may whip themselves holy, and owe their progress in virtue to the slash and the whipcord: but surely there are none, who have not enslaved their intellectuals by an implicit faith, and tamely resigned themselves first to be deceived, and then to be ruled by impostors, who do not look upon all these carnal assistances of the spirit, as no better than the mortifications of the galleys, or the devotions of the whipping-post.

III. I come now to the third and last general head, which is, to shew how this duty of fasting comes to have such a peculiar influence in dispossessing the evil spirit, and subduing our corruptions.

And here, first by way of denial, we must observe, that it does not effect this work upon the soul.

1st. Either, first, by any causal force naturally inherent in itself; for if it did, fasting would certainly and constantly have this effect upon every man that used it; the contrary of which is undeniably manifest from experience. For how many thousands, after all these abridgments, find their corruptions recoil upon them with as great a force and fury as ever, their sinful appetites being not at all abated, but rather exasperated and renewed? Which shews, that the bare performance is in itself but a weak, unactive thing, and affects nothing but in the virtue of a superior power, which sometimes cooperates with, sometimes deserts the exercise of this duty.

2dly. Neither, secondly, does fasting effect this great change upon us by way of merit, as procuring and engaging the help of that grace that does effect it: for besides that, it is upon irrefragable grounds of reason evident, that it is impossible for a created nature to merit any thing from God by way of reward. So there is over and above a peculiar poorness and vileness in this action, that degrades it to infinite distances and disproportions, from being able to challenge, at the hands of God, the dispensations of that grace upon which so much depends the weight and moments of eternal glory.

In the next place, therefore, to shew positively from whence this duty derives this great virtue.



1st, It receives it from divine institution. What soever God ordains by his word, he usually owns by his assistance; and therefore, in every thing made a duty by his command, if we bring but endeavour, he will undertake for the success. It is the concernment of his honour, to make his ordinances considerable; and this is done by making them conduits and conveyances of such a power, as may advance them above themselves to be instrumental to great and spiritual purposes.

Thus, when Moses fetched water out of the rock with a stroke of his rod, we are not to imagine that the rod did it by any force inherent in itself; but God having appointed it for such a work, was pleased to attend it with a miraculous effect, and so to credit his institution with the exercise of his omnipotence.

2dly, Fasting comes to be effectual to dispossess the evil spirit, by being a direct defiance to that disposition of body and mind upon which especially he works.

1st, For the body. The Devil never finds it so pliable to his motions, so instrumental to his designs, as when it is pampered and luxuriant. It is then like a strong liquor, it receives the infusions of poi son more intimately and deeply, and diffuses the same with stronger and more insinuating communications.

But a body subdued with abstinence, it is to the evil spirit like an unfurnished house; and then we know, that though there is no violence used to drive out an inhabitant, yet bad accommodations will make him dislodge.

2dly, For the mind. This is a singular corrective of that pride and garishness of temper, that renders it impatient of the sobrieties of virtue; but open to all the wild suggestions of fancy, and the impressions of vice.

Now, I say, lasting gives a wound to this disposition in a double respect.

1st, That it is a notable act of self-revenge; and self is the only lawful object of revenge. Paul reckons this amongst the heroic performances of an extraordinary repentance: [2 Cor. vii. 11](#), *What care, what zeal has it wrought, nay, what revenge?*

A man by this docs as it were retaliate an evil to the author, and by defrauding himself, he does *fallere fallentem*, which certainly is a pious fraud. It speaks a man hugely in earnest, and intent upon the work of mortification: for of all things in the world, revenge is never in jest; but in returning an evil, it always repays the principal with interest and advantage.

2dly, Fasting corrects and brings down this ill temper of mind, by being an act of self-abasement and prostration. A man by this in a manner awards upon himself the very judgments which he deprecates. He acknowledges a forfeit of all God's creatures, and therefore he neither touches nor tastes, lest in every morsel he should thieve and usurp; being by sin, as it were, an outlaw to the common issues of Providence.

Now the end of God's judgments is not so much to revenge as to convince, and to lay a man low in the apprehensions of his own wretchedness. Wherefore, if a man thus judges



himself, and not only kisses the rod, but also inflicts it with his own hand, he by this takes the work out of God's, and makes an affliction superfluous, by anticipating its effect.

Much more might be spoke of this subject; but when we have took all these courses to eject the evil spirit, we must still remember, that it is to be the work of God himself, whom the blessed spirits adore, and whom the evil obey.

To whom therefore be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON XXXV.

REVELATION ii. 16.

Repent; or I will come unto thee quickly, and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

REFLECTING upon these many and strange methods by which sin prevails upon man's will, collected from an ordinary experience and survey of the practices of the world, compared with the infallible verdict of the scriptures; and amongst the rest, of that signal place in [Deut. xxix. 19](#), which presents to us one blessing himself, and saying, *I shall have peace, though I walk in the imaginations of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst*: I have, upon such reflections, not without some amazement, considered what should be the ground upon which rational, discerning men can satisfy and speak peace to their consciences in the very career of those sins, the commission of which, even by the confession of those that commit them, leads to assured perdition.

As for that peace that springs from a refined, well-contrived hypocrisy, that is wholly of another nature; for where there is some restraint of sin coloured over with some superficial varnish of duty, considering the weakness of man's understanding, and the treachery of his will, it is no wonder that such a peace is easily attainable; nay, that it is very hardly avoidable. But here, where sin is let loose to its full, uncontrolled course, so that men lie and wallow in a free and palpable perpetration of it, even arising to the height of this expression, *to add drunkenness to thirst*; that is, as some expound it, the outward commission of sin to the inward desire; or as others, a perpetual, continued glut and surfeit in sin. As the abused satisfaction of thirst causes drunkenness, and drunkenness again provokes thirst, men never more liberally call for their cups, than when they have too liberally taken them already.

I say, that any one should find peace in such a course, this seems prodigious, and, did not scripture and experience overrule the disputes of reason, almost incredible. But since there is no human action or course without some cause, it will be expedient to inquire what may be the cause of this. And one would think, that the cause that any man can be jocund and fully satisfied in the eager pursuit of known sins, must of necessity be one of these three.

1st, That he is ignorant of the curse that attends his sin; and so no wonder, if blindness produces boldness: for he that is blind may not only accidentally fall, but soberly go into the ditch. But this cannot be here the cause; for he that thus blesses himself, is said in the former part of the verse to do so, after he had heard the *words of this curse*. A curse plain enough and large enough, filling all the foregoing chapter, one of the longest in the Bible. So that if terror set home with evidence, or evidence edged with terror, could convince, ignorance was here unpleadable. The broad light of the word beat full in his face, the discovery was clear, and the conviction unavoidable; and therefore ignorance could not be the cause.



2dly, A second cause might be unbelief: he might know the curse, and yet not believe it; and so, not being believed, it could not control his comforts. For though apprehension brings the object to the mind, yet it is belief only that lets it in. But neither can this be always the cause: for certainly, no man is so improved in sin, as to transcend the Devil, who, as the schoolmen say, stands *confirmatus in summa malitia*: and yet he *believes*, and that even to *trembling*. He knows and believes that he shall be tormented to the utmost extent of the very least tittle and jot of all God's threatenings, and yet he sins with a most resolved, implacable purpose; nay, he therefore sins, because he knows and believes it. Wherefore audacious sinning is not always founded upon infidelity.

3dly. But thirdly, though he knows and believes the curse, yet, perhaps, he relaxes nothing of his sin, because he resolves to bear it; and has wrought himself into that hardness and courage, as to think that he can weather out the storms of God's wrath, and stand the shock of eternal vengeance; and, like Scaevola, with the same hand and sturdiness endure the flame with which he committed the sin.

But, alas! where lives that man that can thus reason, either sober or in his wits? The principles of our nature will not bear it. Belshazzar had as much of power, and of drink withal, to raise him to bid defiance to God, as any ruffian under heaven; and yet when God, as it were, lift but up his finger against him, how poorly did he crouch and shiver! how did his joints loose, and his knees knock together! So that if he felt God's hand so intolerable when it did but write, what would he find it when it should inflict the sentence! And therefore neither can this be the reason.

But now, if men both apprehend the curse, and believe the truth of it, and withal confess their utter inability to contest with it; what can be the reason that any man can, with a contented mind and a daring hand, proceed in such a strain of rebellion; believing, and yet despising the curse, fearing its weight, and yet defying the event? Why, the reason, I conceive, in short, is a presuming confidence of a future repentance.

This is the great mysterious engine of sin, that turns about the world, that reconciles all the contradictions of interest and religion, that solves all doubts, cuts off all demurs, that can assure a Balaam he shall *die the death of the righteous*, though he lives upon *the wages of iniquity*. It is this only that presents sin in some respect rational; that can make even conscience itself sign and seal the petitions of the basest appetite. In short, it works wonders: it unites the joys of heaven and the pleasures of sin; the promises of God and the precepts of the Devil.

I shall not enforce this by any other probation, but by appealing to every man's own conscience; sending him to reflect upon himself, and to consider the temper of his spirit, the inward reasonings and debates of his mind, when he is allured to do any thing, of the unlawfulness of which he stands clearly convinced, whether he is not drawn forth to the

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actual commission of it by presuming upon impunity, through the interposals of an after repentance.

For if conscience startles and flies back, and dreads the apple of the temptation, because God's word is peremptory, *He that eats shall die*; future repentance stands forth and supplies the room, and retorts the answer of the Devil, *Thou shalt not surely die*; nay, thou mayest repent, and surely live. So that repentance being now stamped as cur rent as perfect obedience, this argument is heightened much beyond what that of the Devil was then capable of; because indefinitely, without any restriction of time or person, God's promise of life to the penitent stands clear and irreversible.

Now what can speak more home and full to a man's desires, and, in a great measure, to his reason, than that which encourages him to crop the present sweets of sin, by giving him security against the future smart? Let the wine be never so poisonous, a man may safely drink it, when he has not only an appetite for its sweetness, but also an antidote against its poison.

This, this therefore is the very hinge upon which the whole persuasive force of sin turns and depends; the only temptation that seems unanswerable. Others indeed may allure; this alone argues a man into sin. And I desire to leave this with you, as an observation infallibly true, that were it not for the persuasions of a future repentance, a knowing man could scarce ever be brought to sin against his conscience.

But now if this be overthrown, and proved to be both absurd and dangerous, as I hope some part of the ensuing discourse shall do, with dear, undeniable evidence, then all other temptations, that are but the mere appendices of this, will fall and vanish of themselves: as by confuting the main hypothesis of an opinion, all other arguments by consequence drawn from thence, are also by consequence confuted.

Now the face of these words is directly set against this soul-devouring imposture of a deferred repentance. The words are short and cutting, full of a smart and reprehensive vehemency; the word and the blow seems to go together.

In the prosecution of them, for a more methodical proceeding, it will be convenient to inquire into their occasion. For since they are a command, and every command respects some person to whom it is directed; and since this command is of repentance, which always relates to some sin to be repented of; this inquiry will give us a fair insight and introduction into both.

First of all then, for the occasion of these words: if we have recourse to the [12th verse](#), we shall find that they are part of a letter to the church of Pergamos, indited by the Spirit of God, and directed to the angel of that church.

And here it will not be amiss briefly to consider what the angel of that church was. It is evident, that the church of Pergamos must be taken collectively, for many particular churches included in it; for that it should be but one particular church, considering the number of

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the persons, and the extent of the place, cannot with any colour of sense or reason be affirmed. By *angel* therefore must be understood that chief pastor, who had the supervisal and government of those particular churches, and the pastors of them contained within the compass of Pergamos; correspondent to a bishop among us, ruling over the particular churches and ministers of his diocese.

And the denomination of *angel* shews the divine justification of the office, it being in [Eccles. v. 6](#) given to the priest, the chief ruler of the Jewish church. Neither can any instance be given of the name of *angel* ascribed to any person employed about the church; but it imports a messenger from God. So that, I say, it is probable, that the word carries in it divine institution. But, however, both the word and the usage of it here imports Christ's owning and approbation of the office: and confirmation is a kind of after-insinuation; at least, it is no less authentic, lint some reply, that the word *angel* may be applied here to some one pastor or presbyter, equal to the rest. To which I answer, that it is highly improbable that the Spirit should address a message to one minister, who was but equal to the rest, and no more concerned in it than the rest, and that about a matter relating to all their churches.

But I add further, that this could not be; for one pastor over a particular church has nothing to do to interpose and correct the abuses of other particular churches, which are severally under their own pastors and governors.

But now the minister here spoke of is blamed for the abuses of all the churches in Pergamos, and charged to rectify them; which clearly imports, that he stood invested with a more general and extended jurisdiction. And this by the way, though yet it is no digression.

Having thus shewn who the person was to whom this letter was directed; in the next place, we are to consider the subject-matter of the letter itself; which contains in it these three things: 1st, Commemoration of the virtues and graces that were eminent and resplendent in this church, in [ver. 13](#). 2dly, A charge for some sinful abuse that had crept in, and was connived at, in [ver. 14](#). 3dly, An advice upon the whole matter, which was speedy and immediate repentance.

In our present discourse we shall only be concerned in the two latter of these: and first, for the sinful abuse or scandal here charged upon this church; it was its toleration of that vile and impure sect of the Nicolaitans. These Nicolaitans, as their name imports, took their rise and denomination from one Nicholas, one of those seven deacons who were first ordained by the apostles, [Acts vi. 5](#). Now their heresy consisted of these two branches: 1st, That they did assert the eating of sacrifices offered to idols, and that even in honour to those idols, to be lawful: 2dly, That they held and abetted the lawfulness of fornication. So that their heresy was a complete system of all impiety; the first part containing the greatest spiritual, the latter the greatest carnal pollution.

In the [14th verse of this chapter](#), the Spirit calls this heresy *the way of Balaam*; who, when he could not curse, fell to counsel; that is, to do a greater mischief; and advised Balak



to cause the women of the Moabites to entice the children of Israel to the feasts of Priapus; *in which the people sat down to eat and drink, and afterwards rose up to play*; that is, they first feasted upon the idol-sacrifices, and then finished the solemnity with the impurities of lust. It seems something of this nature was revived and practised by these impure heretics; a strange thing, one would think, that so filthy an heresy should get ground in the very beginnings and first dawns of the church, and in the purest times of Christianity!

Yet thus it was. The brightest day may begin with a mist; and the best of churches is not privileged from corruptions: but it was not so much the churches having, as not animadverting upon these pests, that is here reprehended. They had their meetings by public toleration and connivance: and this is that for which the Spirit rounds them up with this short advice, armed and seconded with a severe commination.

Come we now to the next thing; which is, the counsel of speedy repentance, given upon this scandal, and contained in the words of the text; in which are these two parts.

1st, The first stands directed to the church itself: *Repent, or I will come unto thee quickly*. By God's *coming*, is meant his approach in the way of judgment; for so the word coming frequently signifies, both in the Old and New Testament. [Isaiah xxx. 27](#), *The name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger*. And in [Psalm l. 8](#), *Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence*; that is, he shall come to judge and punish; or, as the usual phrase is, he shall come with a vengeance: for so the following words explain these; *A fire shall devour before him*.

In the same sense also is the word *coming* frequently used in the New Testament; which is well worth our observation, as being of signal use to rescue sundry places of scripture, that have been hitherto held under false and perverse interpretations.

In this sense is it taken in [Matth. xvi. 27](#), where it is said, *that the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his holy angels, to reward every man according to his works*; which place though many understand of Christ's coming in his own person to judge all men at the end of the world, yet indeed it only signifies his coming in the ministers of his wrath, to take vengeance of the Jews in the destruction of Jerusalem.

That this is so, I evince by another parallel place, in [Matthew xxvi. 64](#), where Christ, speaking of his coming, says, *ἀπ' ἄρτι ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ*, which word ἀπ' ἄρτι, though we translate *hereafter*, yet it properly signifies from now; that is, within a very short time.

But yet more fully from that forementioned place in [Matth. xvi.](#) whereas in [verse 27](#), he had said, *You shall see the Son of man come with the glory of his Father, and the holy angels*, he subjoins in the very [next verse](#), *And verily there are some standing here, that shall not taste death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom*.

What! did he mean that they should not die till the day of judgment? No; this was evidently false and impossible: but his meaning was, that some of the younger sort of his

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auditors should live to see the execution of his wrath upon the Jews, in the destruction of Jerusalem.

And this seems excellently to interpret a place that will hardly be understood without it, in [John xxi. 22](#), where Christ says to Peter, concerning John, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* Here now the apostles' minds running upon the last judgment, presently concluded that John should not die. But now take the word *coming* in this sense, and it gives a clear and apposite interpretation to the place; John being the only disciple who both saw and survived the destruction of Jerusalem.

But the only doubt that may occur here is this: how Christ could be said *to come* in the destruction of Jerusalem, which was effected by the Roman armies, lint the solution is easy. For when God, by his peculiar providence, raises up any instruments to execute his decrees or purposes upon any people or place, the actions of those persons are both usually and properly applied to God, as if he had done them immediately himself.

And for his coming with his holy angels, it is very probable, that when God brings a public ruin and destruction upon a nation, he uses the ministry of angels, as well as the weapons of men. This seems clear to me from that place in [Dan. x. 20](#), where the angel says to him, *Now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come.* In like manner Christ might send his angels out to fight against Judea, before the coming of Vespasian's army.

And lastly, for his coming in the clouds; he that shall read Josephus and others concerning the Jewish history, will find what strange, prodigious appearances there were in the sky, of armies fighting, and a flaming sword hanging over Jerusalem, a little before the Romans sacked and ruined that city. So that, all things being laid together, I cannot but conclude it more than probable that this is the sense of the place.

A learned author, considering this sense of Christ's coming, judges that the whole book of the Revelations, in which that is so often spoke of, relates to things immediately to happen after the delivery of that prophecy; and consequently, that it had its completion within two hundred years. And certain it is, that the very beginning of the book says, that it was *to deliver things shortly to come to pass*; and the last concluding chapter emphatically repeats this three times, *Behold, I come quickly.*

Now if the judgment of this learned man stands, as it hath both the countenance of reason and of the express words of the text, then what must become of the bloody tenets of those desperate wretches, who for these many years have been hammering of blood, confusion, and rebellion out of this book, from a new fancy that they have of Christ's coming. Thus ruling their lives, not by precepts, but prophecies; and not being able to find any warrant for their actions in the clear and express word of law or gospel, they endeavour to shelter their villainies in the obscurities and shades of the Revelation; a book intricate and involved, and for the most part never to be under stood; and upon which, when wit and industry has

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done its utmost, the best comment is but conjecture. And thus much for the first part of the words that stands directed by the church, *Repent, or I will come unto thee quickly.*

2dly, The other part of the words relates to those heretics; *And I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth;* that is, with the reprehending, discovering force of the word, and the censures of the church; where, for the credit and divine authority of the ministry, Christ owns that for the sword of his own mouth, which was only delivered by theirs.

Now we must observe, that as the Spirit had called this heresy *the way of Balaam*, so the judgment here pronounced is still with allusion to that of Balaam; whom as the angel of God met with a drawn sword, to divert him from his course, so God here threatens to meet these heretics with the curse and terrors of the law, and the spiritual sword of his word.

And every obstinate sinner must know, that it is God that meets him face to face; that withstands and pleads with him in the word, as with a drawn sword; and therefore, if he is resolved to persist and hold on his course, he must of necessity run upon the sword's point, the very pike of divine vengeance, and resolve to fight it out with God and all his judgments, or, by a penitential prudence, fairly consult his safety in his duty, and retreat.

Now, from this expression here used, *I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth*, I collect these two occasional observations.

1st, That the word of God, powerfully dispensed, has the force and efficacy of a spiritual sword. For as a sword has both a glittering radiance and brightness to strike and terrify the eye, and also an edge to pierce the flesh; so the word, being drawn forth and brandished by a skilful hand, darts a convincing light into the understanding, and with an irresistible edge enters the heart and the affections.

It is not like the song of one that has a pleasant voice, that only strikes the ear, gratifies the fancy, and courts those affections which it should command. But when the word comes from God, it comes with such a searching, invincible quickness, such a spiritual keenness, that it shall cut and make its way through the hardest heart, and not find admittance by mere petition or precarious suasion; for a sword never enters by entreaty.

And for men's encouragement to attend upon this ordinance, take the proudest and the stoutest sinner upon earth, and God is able, with his word alone, to fetch him upon his knees, and to lay him in the dust. Take the stubbornest and the knottiest corruption of the most depraved heart, and God is able, with *the sword of his mouth*, to hew it asunder. And when Providence shall place a man under the dint of such a ministry, he will find the work short and speedy; it will quickly send him away converted or inexcusable.

2dly, From hence I observe, when God undertakes the purging of a church, or the reformation of religion, he does it with the weapons of religion, with *the sword of his mouth*. Shew me any one text in the whole book of God, especially since the spirit of meekness took place in the introduction of Christianity, where God commissions any man, at least any subject, to correct the abuses of religion with fire and sword, and to dispute the articles of



his faith in the high places of the field. For in such cases, if his conscience will not suffer him to obey, the same conscience will as strongly oblige him to suffer. And therefore, though the truths, the worship, nay, the person itself of Christ should be invaded, yet let Peter put up his sword, and let Christ employ his own, even this *sword of his mouth*, which is sharper and better, and able much more powerfully to reach and affect the ear, without cutting it off.

And I am persuaded that the great reformation that God intends to bring over the Christian world in the last and best days of the church, shall not be effected with *confused noise and garments rolled in blood*, with fire and fagot, but Christ shall do it silently, yet powerfully, by the *brightness of his coming*. As the rising sun chases away the darkness without noise indeed, but yet without resistance.

So that whatsoever trash or stubble shall be built upon the foundation of the eternal word of God, swords and spears, weapons heterogeneous to these things, shall not be employed for their removal, but they shall insensibly vanish and moulder away before the prevailing efficacy of the everlasting gospel. As a skilful disputant does not cut off the fallacious argument of his opponent by fretting and fuming, and speaking loud, but by a calm, sedate reducing it to the rules of argumentation, just so it is here, where Christ shall subdue his enemies, not by combat but discovery. And then, the promises being fulfilled, in the universal propagation of the gospel, Jesus Christ shall reign as *King of kings, and Lord of lords*, and that without deposing of other princes. And if God be true, and Christianity no imposture, whensoever this is brought about, it will be in this manner; for the whole dispensation of the gospel, whether offensive or defensive, must needs be entirely spiritual.

And thus having finished the general explication of the words, I shall now descend to a more particular prosecution of the principal design of them, which is, to enforce the duty of immediate repentance; and this I shall do in these two things.

1st, I shall shew what that repentance is that is here enjoined.

2dly, I shall produce arguments to enforce the necessity of its immediate exercise.

1st, For the first of these: since divinity has been so much spun into disputation, repentance is a thing almost as difficult in the notion as it is in the practice. There are three words in scripture to express it by, μεταμέλεια, μετάνοια, and ἐπιστροφή; though this last rather signifies *conversion*. The first, which is μεταμέλεια, denotes an anxiety or displeasure of mind upon something done amiss, to which answers the Latin *poenitentia*; the second, which is μετάνοια, signifies a total change or transmutation of the mind, to which answers *resipiscentia*.

Now between these two, some make this difference; that the former signifies either the whole of an ineffectual repentance, or only the beginning of such an one as, in the issue, proves saving and effectual; and that the latter signifies the whole work of such an one as is sound, and effectual to salvation.



It must be here confessed, that, according to the strict and rigid acceptation of the word, μεταμέλεια is only that trouble, regret, or anxiety of mind for the evil of past actions, which is rather a preparative to repentance than the work itself, and consequently, being rested in, cannot save; and on the other side, μετάνοια signifies strictly a change of mind, which, in the matter of sin, proves to be saving.

This, I say, is the proper and strict signification of the words; but since we can determine nothing of them in a scripture way from their literal meaning, but only from their use and acceptation there, which in several instances may be easily shewn to be promiscuous, we cannot make their native, literal force any solid ground for such a distinction. Wherefore, leaving all weak and unwarrantable deductions from the first signification of the Latin or Greek words, you may observe, that repentance, in scripture, has a threefold acceptation.

1st, It is taken for the first act by which the soul turns from sin to God; the first dividing stroke that separates between sin and the heart; the first step and advance that a sinner makes to holiness; the first endeavours and throes of a new birth.

2dly, It is taken for the whole course of a pious life, comprising the whole actions a man performs from first to last inclusively; from his first turning from a wicked life to the last period of a godly. This is the only repentance that Socinus will admit; and some others, who would pretend to bring something new, but only transcribe from him in this particular.

Now such as own this assertion find themselves under a necessity to assert also, that faith and repentance are the same things, and differ only in the manner of our conception.

So that the whole obedience of our lives, as it is a turning from sin to God, properly bears the name of repentance; but then, as this obedience and turning to God proceeds from a belief of the promises and precepts of Christ, so they say, it is properly styled faith. Whence repentance and faith, according to them, are only two different denominations fixed upon the same thing, as it sustains different respects.

But that this is not the proper notion of repentance is clear from these reasons:

1st, Because, if repentance be properly the whole entire course of gospel-obedience, from the first to the last of a man's life, then no man could properly be said to have repented, till such time as he had actually finished such a course of obedience; that is, not till his death; which to assert, is a strange paradox, and contrary to the general apprehensions of men upon this subject.

2dly, The scripture, no less than the natural reason of the thing itself, places repentance before faith, [Matt. xxi. 32](#), *And ye, when ye had seen it, repented not, that ye might afterwards believe in him*. Here we see repentance is made the antecedent condition of faith: but now, should repentance grasp in the whole series and course of gospel obedience, to the last period of our lives, how were it possible for faith to follow repentance, unless we should begin to believe in another world?

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3dly, The scripture makes all those subsequent acts of new obedience after our first turning to God, not to be the integral constituent parts, but the effects, fruits, and consequents of repentance. [Matt. iii. 8](#), *Bring forth fruits meet for repentance*. But to make the fruit part of the tree itself is certainly a thing very preposterous.

I conclude therefore, that repentance is not formally the whole course of new obedience, but that first act by which a man turns from sin to God. But then this I also add, that though it is not formally, yet it is virtually and consequentially so. That is in plain terms; repentance is not itself this course of new obedience, but it does infer and produce it, and that as its inseparable effect or consequent: so that if this new obedience does not follow in the course of a man's whole conversation, after his first turning to God, he must conclude that that act was spurious and unsound; and that indeed it never truly and thoroughly brought him oil from sin, whatsoever solemnity of sorrow, tears, and confession it might be attended with.

Let him fast, and whip himself, and run barefoot, and mumble out a thousand *miserere mei's*, like some ignorant formalists, who, the truth is, know not what repentance means, as being utterly strangers to the spirit of the gospel; or let him pray and weep, and hang down his head like a bulrush, go softly, and look sourly; yet if a change pass not upon his life and actions, so that instead of his accustomed wickedness, the whole tract of his conversation is drawn forth in a constant, equable practice of the contrary virtues, that man must know that he has not repented. He has perhaps deluded himself, and deceived others, stopped the cries of conscience and the clamours of men; but repented he has not; and fearful were his case, should God snatch him out of the world in that condition.

3dly, Repentance is taken for a man's turning to God after the guilt of some particular sin. It differs from the former thus; that the former is from a state of sin; this latter only from a sinful act. No repentance precedes the former, but this supposes a true repentance to have gone before. Thus Peter is said, after his denial of Christ, *to have been converted*, [Luke xxii.](#) that is, to have repented; not but that Peter was a true penitent and convert before: but upon so sad and notorious a fall, he was, by a renewed exercise of repentance, to disentangle himself from the guilt of that particular sin of denying his master.

This repentance therefore builds upon the former; and it is that which is here intended in the words. For the church of Pergamos was in favour with God, and consequently must needs have repented before, as is clearly collected from that elogy the Spirit gives it in [Luke xxii. 13](#), *Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith*. But by reason of this scandal permitted and connived at, it was to cleanse itself from this stain by a renewed fresh act of humiliation.

The distinction, therefore, between these two kinds of repentance is carefully to be observed. The first passes but once upon the soul, the latter is to be frequent, indeed continual. Naaman washed off the leprosy of his body but once, but the soil of his hands every day.



And thus much concerning the nature of the repentance here spoke of; which being enjoined under pain of a speedy judgment, in case of omission it follows, that the command was not indefinitely of any kind of repentance, but only of such an one as was present and immediate.

Come we therefore to the second thing proposed, which is to produce arguments to engage us in the speedy and immediate exercise of this duty.

1st, The first argument against a deferred repentance shall be taken from this consideration, that no man can be secure of the future. Neither, indeed, will men act as if they were in things that concern this life; for no man willingly defers his pleasures.

And did men here well compute the many frailties of nature, and further add the contingencies of chance, how quickly a disease from within, or a blow from without, may tear down the strongest constitution, certainly they would ensure eternity upon something else than a life as uncertain as the air that feeds it. Do you not think, that that young man that brought David that feigned traitorous message, did not set forth in good hearty plight in the morning? and yet before sunset the vengeance of God overtook, and slew him in his sin.

God tells the sinner, he must repent to-day; he now thinks with himself, that he can contrive the matter more wisely, and defer his repentance to some of those years into which his present health seems to give him a long prospect.

And now is it not just with God to smite such an one in the infatuation of such counsels, and to convince him, that God spoke good reason when he told him, that immediate repentance was necessary?

And indeed the providence of God, for the most part, orders the matter so, that such are snatched and hurried away to judgment on a sudden, when they have power to repent of nothing but this, that they had not repented before. See how God deals with that servant, that deferred his repentance upon a supposed delay of his master's coming. [Matt. xxiv. 50, 51](#), *The lord of tit at servant shall come hi an hour that he looked not for him, and cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites*. God's grace will not always dance attendance upon obstinate, resolved hypocrites; for this were, as if the sun of mercy should stand still over their heads, at their beck and command, while they are fighting against heaven.

Should God open the book of his decrees, and give a man a prospect into the secrets of futurity, and shew him his death sealed and appointed at such a day and such an hour, he might then indeed, with some more reason, enjoy the present, and set apart some few days to make his peace with God, and set his soul in order before he died. But this is a privilege that God vouchsafes to none, and that upon the highest reason; for if he should, it would destroy religion.

Wherefore, since this is a secret, like God's dearest attributes incommunicable, locked up from the curious, prying inspection of all created knowledge, with what reason can any



man build his life, his happiness, his eternity upon such a repentance, as hovers upon the uncertain, slippery conjectures of a supposed futurity?

Ordinary experience observed would unbewitch men as to these delusions. Did you ever see any man arrested, but it was before he was aware? A man would not willingly have his friend take him in a surprise, much less then his greatest enemy, death and judgment. Possibly God may strike him in the very eagerness and perpetration of his sin. Thus he sent Corah, Dathan, and Abiram, in the heat of their schism and rebellion, quick into hell. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead with a lie in their mouths. Zimri and Cosbi, in the very act of uncleanness, were despatched into another world.

And let that man, who promises to himself a future repentance, and upon that confidence proceeds to sin, shew me any solid satisfactory reason, why God may not, in the same manner, cashier him in the very commission of that sin that he is designing. And then, whether it would not be the grimmest dispensation that ever befell him, to be thrust out of the world with his sins about his ears; and so to be brought, as it were, in the very heat and steam of his offence, to render up an account for it at God's tribunal, before he had scarce finished the commission.

The events of to-morrow are neither within the compass of our understanding to know, or of our power to dispose of: wherefore the advice of the Spirit, concerning the time of our repentance, is the same with that of St. Austin, who counselled his friend to repent a day before he died; which, proceeding upon terms of rational certainty, is to repent to-day.

2dly, The second argument shall be taken from this consideration, that supposing the allowance of time, yet we cannot be sure of power to repent. It is very possible, that by the insensible encroaches of sin a man's heart may be so hardened, as to have neither power nor will to repent, though he has time and opportunity. He that is unwilling to-day, will undoubtedly be more 1 unwilling to-morrow. And the reason is evident, because his present unwillingness proceeds from that hold that sin has got upon his will already: but this every hour increases, and gets further ground upon it; so that sin being increased, unwillingness to repent, the proper effect and consequent of sin, must needs be increased in an equal proportion.

The longer the heart and sin converse together, the more familiar they will grow; and then, the stronger the familiarity, the harder the separation. Docs any one think he has his heart so in his hand as to say, Thus far will I sin, and there will I leave off? Such an one shews indeed that he neither understands the nature of sin nor of his heart.

How that that which now creeps and begs for entrance, having once got admission, will command and domineer; and like that emperor, though it gets into power like a fox, yet it will manage it, and reign like a lion. Neither does he know those many windings and turnings, the sly excuses and glossing apologies, that the heart will suggest to rescue its sin from the summons of repentance, being once endeared and bound fast to it by inveterate continuance.

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The commission of sin is like the effusion of water, easily contained in its bounds, but uncontrollable in its course. We indeed may give it vent, but God alone knows where it will stop. Is not that man therefore stupidly ignorant, who chooses to encounter his sin by a future repentance? Reason would argue and discourse thus: If I find that I have scarce power enough to resist my sin at present, shall I not have much less when time shall give it growth and strength, and as it were knit its joints, and render it unconquerable?

It is here as with a man in a combat; every blow his adversary gives him, disables him for the very next resistance. A man at first finds the beginnings and little inconveniences of a disease, but physic is unpleasant; and withal he finds himself in a good competence of strength at present, and therefore he resolves to wear it out; but in the mean time his distemper eats on its way, and grows upon him, till at length he has not so much as strength to bear physic, but his disease quickly runs him down, and becomes incurable.

A man at first is strong, and his sin is weak, and he may easily break the neck of it by a mature repentance; but his own deluding heart tells him, that he had better repent hereafter; that is, when, on the contrary, he himself is deplorably weak, and his sin invincibly strong.

Commission of sin may indeed wound, but it is continuance of sin that kills. A man by falling to the ground may perhaps get a bruise or a knock; but by lying upon the ground after he is fallen, he may chance to catch his death.

And now does not that man's heart give him wise and wholesome counsel, that bids him balk the present, and fix upon the future? But still, as the desires of sin are impious, so its discourses are irrational. And what a dreadful thing is it for a man, in the grand concernment of his repentance, in the great deciding cast for eternity, to relinquish the word, and to consult his heart? whereas the word cannot, and his heart cannot but deceive him.

The prophet Elisha, [2 Kings viii. 12](#), told Hazeal, knowing his design to murder his prince, that his villainy would not stop there, but that he would proceed so far as to wreak his fury upon sucking infants, and to rip up women with child. But his heart in the mean while, which possibly at that very time, together with the sin, had designed its repentance, that persuaded him another thing, and makes him reply with resent and wonder, *What! am I a dog, that I should do these things?* And questionless, at that time, he little believed that he could be so wicked; but we know that the event shews whether Elisha or his heart were the truer prophet. For as soon as he had committed his first great leading sin, and his hand was well in, and hot in the work, his corruption rages and swells higher and higher, and his heart serves him for the utmost execution of all those villainies that at a distance he himself abhorred, and judged incredible.

And how does that man know, that has built all upon his resolves of repentance hereafter, but that he, who now trembles at the first approach of a temptation, and can discern the insensible progress of his corruption, so that, upon the very first rising and moving of the heart to sin, his conscience smites him, remorse pursues, troubles, and disquiets him; the

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same, within a while after his conscience has worn off those restrictions, and becomes hardened and steeled with custom in sinning, may lash on furiously and audaciously, with an high hand and bare face, against the grudges of conscience, the terrors of God, and the shame of the world; till at length he ends a wretched course in irrecoverable perdition; unless God in mercy steps in, and by a potent overruling hand of conviction rebukes the rage of his corruption, and says, thus far it shall come, and no further.

But now, as in the very course of a natural cause, continuance in sin hardens against repentance; as a man that is out of his way, if he be far gone, will be hardly brought to return, but will venture over hedge and ditch, and wade through any difficulty rather than endure the irksome, ingrateful trouble of a retreat; so we must further know,

That repentance is entirely in God's disposal. This grace is in the soul from God, as light is in the air from the sun, by continual emanation; so that God may shut or open his hand, contract or diffuse, set forth or suspend the influence of it as he pleases. And if God gives not repenting grace, there will be an hard heart and a dry eye, maugre all the poor frustaneous endeavours of nature. A piece of brass may as easily melt, or a flint be water itself, as the heart of man, by any innate power of its own, resolve itself into a penitential humiliation. If God does not, by an immediate blow of his omnipotence, strike the rock, these waters will never gush out. The Spirit blows where it listeth, and if that blows not, these showers can never fall.

And now, if the matter stands so, how does the impenitent sinner know but that God, being provoked by his present impenitence, may irreversibly propose within himself to seal up these fountains, and shut him up under hardness of heart and reprobation of sense? And then farewell all thoughts of repentance for ever. See this sadly exemplified in Pharaoh. He had time enough to repent, day after day; but yet he never did repent: for it is expressly said, that *God hardened his heart*; that is, he withheld his grace. See the children of Israel in the same case, in [Psalm lxxxi. 11](#), *My people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me*; that is, they peremptorily refused God's present call to repentance. What follows? Why in the [next verse](#), *So I gave them up to their own hearts' lusts; and they walked in their own hearts*: that is, they would not repent, and therefore God in effect tells them, that they should not repent; but leaves them to the delusions of a besotted mind, and the desperate, incorrigible estate of a final impenitence.

3dly, In the third and last place, the duty of immediate repentance may be enforced upon this reason; that admitting a man has both time and grace to repent, yet by such delay the work will be in credibly more difficult. The longer a debt lies unpaid, the greater it grows; and not discharged, is quickly multiplied. The sin to be repented of will be the greater, and power and strength to repent by, will be less. And though a man escapes death, the utmost effect of his distemper, yet certainly he will find it something to be cut, and scarified, and lanced, and to endure all the tortures of a deferred cure.



And is it not better for a man, in the business of repentance, to rise up early, and take the morning of his years before him, while these heavenly penitential dews fall kindly and naturally, than when his day is far spent, and the heat of temptation has scorched them off from his heart, and they are gone; and he must be forced to struggle for every tear, to pump for every drop, to recover and refresh his languishing, and otherwise dying soul? I say, is it not much better, while his conscience is tender, and apt to relent under every motion and impression of the word, while his wound is green, and his heart bleeds yet afresh, to stop the bloody issue of sin with the healing balsam of a bleeding Saviour, applied quick and warm, by a speedy humiliation?

By a single commission of sin, a blot falls upon the soul; but by continuance, it soaks into it. And when once sin comes to have that desperate symptom of being inveterate, an ordinary repentance will not serve turn. The stain must lie and steep a great while longer; the brine must be sharper, and the repentance severer, before the soul can be recovered to its first whiteness and integrity.

God, who at first might have been won by entreaties, must now be wrestled with; and a man suffer many foils and repulses in his spiritual conflict, endure many bitter agonies, pass under much darkness and doubt, as to the whole matter of his eternal condition, before he can recover upon his heart a sense of God's lost favour. And perhaps when at length it does return, it is but weak and imperfect, mingled with much fear and spiritual dissatisfaction. As when the clouds have spread themselves thick and dark over the face of the whole heavens, the showers must fall, and it may continue raining for many days before you can so much as see the sun; and when at length he shines forth, yet it is but waterishly, and through the cloud, with a dim, uncomfortable brightness: just so is it with a sinner in his deferred repentance.

O remember David, his roarings and cryings, his broken bones, his mournful days, and his sleepless nights. Why, what was the cause of all this? In [Psalm xxxviii](#). *My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness*. They festered and grew noisome, only by his foolish deferring of the cure. For all agree, that it was near a year, that David lay in his two great sins, before he repented.

But on the contrary, in Peter, who followed his sin close at the heels, who rose betimes to his work; as soon as ever the cock crew, and the alarm was given, we find that the matter of controversy was quickly taken up between Christ and him: and being thus converted, he had the honour to strengthen his brethren, and to be the great leading man and captain of the apostles.

Consider therefore, that the speedy penitent has a much fairer reception and easier discharge from God, than he that lingers; whose repentance, though it may prove sincere, yet it still comes with this degrading circumstance, that a delayed courtesy does, *diu noluit*.



We know, he that brings ready money has a thing much cheaper than another, together with an overplus of more credit and esteem into the bargain. In like manner the late penitent, like the late paymaster, though by such a repentance he may secure himself from the final arrests of damnation, yet still it is something sordid and degenerate.

Consider also, that God is so much pleased with an early penitence, that he is ready to accept that which is in itself a duty, as a gift; at least, to reward it for such. Besides, he that is slow to attempt this great work, though his repentance may be real and sincere, yet he will scarce be able to know that it is so; and then, though his condition may be sure, yet his comfort cannot be entire; but though he is at peace with God, yet he will hardly be at peace with himself: in the mean time the early penitent has repentance, with these two in credible advantages, he repents with facility and with certainty. I have now done: you have heard the duty, and the arguments to enforce it; how that the neglect of it is a bold venture upon God's justice: and that no man can be sure of time and opportunity to repent; nor, admitting this, can he promise himself grace and ability to execute this work: and lastly, supposing that he has both, yet the work will be trebly more difficult and laborious, and at the best uncomfortable and dubious. Add to this, that God may thunder out his judgments; which will overtake and force us to mend our pace: and, because we would not repent upon a fairer invitation, force us to lie down and repent in shame, poverty, and sickness; and to heighten spiritual desertions with temporal afflictions.

Since this is so, I shall wrap up all in that advice of the prophet Amos to Israel, in the fourth chapter, [verse 12](#), *Thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, therefore prepare to meet thy God, O Israel*. As for any other application, since deductions from the words are natural and easy, I shall leave it to your own thoughts; and indeed these truths are of that nature, that he that really believes them cannot but apply them.



SERMON XXXVI.

REVELATION ii. 16.

Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

AS before I enforced the duty of immediate repentance, and disputed against the deferring of it, by arguments drawn from the unreasonableness of such a course; so now I shall further proceed against it, from a consideration of the strong, peculiarly provoking nature of this sin above all others; though indeed, in propriety of speech, impenitence cannot be called a sin, but rather a collection and combination of sins, or a sinful state and condition.

But certain it is, that there is nothing that kindles the divine wrath to such a flame, as the delayed exercise of the great duty of repentance. We find not such fierce expressions of vengeance against any sinner, as the Spirit of God, in [Deut. xxix. 20, 21](#), discharges against him that obstinately delayed his repentance. It is said, “that God will not spare him: that the anger of the Lord, nay, his jealousy, which is the very sting and poison of his anger, shall smoke against that man; that all the curses of the law shall lie upon him; that God shall blot out his name from under heaven; and lastly, that he shall even separate him to evil, according to all the curses of the covenant.”

Now what could have been said so fully, with such a copiousness of terror? every word almost carrying in it fire and brimstone; every period being as it were pregnant with death, and breathing out destruction: and yet we may be sure that every tittle shall be verified. God rather overdoes his words, than underspeaks his actions: and his performances are always commensurate to his expressions.

But both, we see, light heavy upon the lingering penitent; whose sin, I conceive, is so eminently and signally provoking to God upon these reasons:

1st, Because it is the abuse of a remedy. Since sin entered into the world, there is nothing but repentance can stand between the sinner and certain destruction. It is the only asylum and place of refuge that God has provided for malefactors. If mercy had not found this expedient, every man had been the deplorable object of a remorseless, vindictive justice. Now for a sinner to neglect this, to slight and trample upon the conditions of pardon, what is it else, but as if a man, that lay gasping under a mortal wound, should both throw away the balsam, and defy the physician?

Certainly it cannot but be the highest provocation, to see guilt kick at mercy; and presumption take advantage merely from a redundancy of compassion, he that will fight it out, and not surrender, only because he has articles of peace offered to him, deserves to feel the sword of an unmerciful enemy. A delayed repentance is a downright defiance to mercy. And every moment a man spends under such a delay, he falls under that character of Babylon.



Jerem. li. 9, that God would have healed him; but yet he was not healed: and that for no other cause, than that he pursues, chooses, and even woos death, and solicits his own destruction.

2dly, The reason why God is exasperated by our delaying this duty is, because it clearly shews, that a man does not love it as a duty, but only intends to use it for an expedient of escape. It is not because it is pleasing to God, grateful to an offended majesty, or because he apprehends a worth and excellency in the thing itself; for then he would set about it immediately: for love is quick and active; and desire hates all delay.

But a man is enamoured with his sin, and resolves to take his full course in the satisfaction of his lusts, to consult his pleasure, and to sacrifice the vigour of his years to the gratification of his appetite, the lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life, and all those other sinful vanities that are apt to bewitch the heart of man.

This, I say, he resolves; but in regard the rear of such a course is brought up with a sad and fatal account at the last, all ending in eternal wrath and damnation; that he may now escape this, and come off clear, he will repent just at the last; and so, by that means, as this life has given him the pleasures of sin, repentance shall interpose and rescue him from the fruits and effects of sin.

And is not this a neat design, to live with pleasure, and yet die with peace? To provoke God's justice all the time of one's life, and then fairly to slip from it, by repenting some minutes before death?

But it is not to be wondered at, if God's fury rises at such a course; for it evidently turns his grace into wantonness, and makes it drudge and subserve to the design of sin. For he that resolves only to secure himself by repenting at the last, at the same time also resolves to continue sinning all the mean while. Which is nothing else but an endeavour to put a trick upon God; to affront him to his face; and yet to despise him under the protections of his own mercy.

Though the allowance of repentance be an infinitely gracious concession, yet we are mistaken, if we think that the entire design of it is only the sinner's interest, and not God's glory, as well as his salvation. God intends repentance to be a means to purify the heart from that corruption that renders it utterly unserviceable. Repentance, though it can not deserve, yet it must qualify the soul for heaven. And this penitential cleansing, though it merits nothing, yet it is a necessary condition to fit a man to be a vessel of honour. In short, repentance is chiefly valued by God, because he loves the fruits of repentance.

But now, he that declines the present exercise of it, and throws it back to the future, he evidently shews, that whensoever he takes it up, he does it solely for the interest of his own safety, and not to pay any retribution of honour to God; and that he repents, not to cleanse, but to secure, not to sanctify, but to defend himself.



3dly, A third reason that God's displeasure so implacably burns against this sin is, because it is evidently a counterplotting of God, and being wise above the prescribed methods of salvation, to which God makes the immediate dereliction of sin necessary.

But he that defers his repentance makes this his principle, to live a sinner, and to die a penitent.

But to what purpose does God command repentance, if it must be in the power of man to choose the time of it, and so to elude the duty itself, by the circumstance of its performance? It is to no end for God to give a law, if a man may interpret the sense, and so shuffle off the obligation. He that is commanded to repent, and defers it to the future, declares that he will be obliged by that command only when he thinks fit, and not before. He also looks upon it as a refined, subtle piece of policy, to choose such a repentance as has a longer consistency with sinful pleasure, and yet no less efficacy as to the procurement of salvation, than such an one as is present and immediate.

And now may we not imagine that such a course is highly offensive? in which a poor weak man shall endeavour to vie wisdom with his Maker, to outwit and outreach an omniscience?

When he shall thus find a new and a shorter way to heaven, cutting off those austerities of life as superfluous, which God has vouched necessary, and so derogating from God's knowledge; withal, making those allowances and indulgencies lawful which God has denied as destructive, and so upbraiding his goodness.

Briefly, a deferred repentance is a contradiction to God's word, and an impudent affront to all his attributes. He that hears God's counsel but follows his own, that repents at his leisure, and so makes his practice overrule his belief; he has changed his deity, and though he confesses a God, yet he adores himself.

And thus I have shewn the grounds upon which the delay of this duty is so highly provoking to God; which ought to serve for another invincible argument against it, to all those that value his love, and tremble at his wrath.

But now to descend from the general nature of this subject to a consideration of it in particular. The grand instance of it is a death-bed repentance; concerning the efficacy of which, since there are so many disputes, and since the right stating of it is a matter of so high consequence, we will enter into a more exact and particular discussion of it; which I shall endeavour to manage under these two heads.

I. I shall resolve this great case of conscience, whether a death-bed repentance ever is or can be effectual to salvation.

II. I shall shew, that supposing it may prove effectual, yet for any one to design it, and to build upon it beforehand, is highly dangerous, and therefore absolutely irrational.

And when I shall have despatched these two things, I suppose there can be nothing considerable in this subject that will be left unspoken to.



I. And first for the first of these, whether or no a death-bed repentance may be effectual.

There are some who absolutely deny it, and explode it as the very bane of piety, and utterly destructive of an holy life; and therefore by no means can be brought to open the doors of heaven to such penitents. The reasons why such a repentance can not be effectual are these:

1st, Because a good life is all along the gospel required by Christ, as indispensably necessary to salvation; but a death-bed repentance cannot be productive of this, and therefore it cannot save. The first is evident from sundry places of scripture; as in [Matth. vii. 21](#), *Not every one that says, Lord, Lord, but he that does the will of my Father shall be blessed*; and [John xiv. 21](#), *If ye love me, keep my commandments*; and [Phil. ii. 12](#), *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling*; with several other places; which proclaim aloud, that there can be no admission into glory, without the obedience of an holy life.

And the assumption, that a death-bed repentance can produce no such thing, seems no less evident. For is it possible for a man to lead a new life when he is even ceasing to live? Can he work out his salvation when the fatal night of death is seizing upon him, and he cannot work?

Now since this is the condition upon which salvation depends, and since this condition cannot be performed upon a man's death-bed, it follows that all repentance that is acted there must be utterly ineffectual, as to all purposes of salvation. And thus much for the first argument.

2dly, The second is this, which though it may be brought under the former, yet, for the more perspicuity, I shall propose it distinctly and by itself. You may take it thus:

The only thing within the power of a dying penitent is a sincere purpose of a good life, and a resolution to amend; but this is not sufficient to save, and consequently, being the utmost that he can do, it follows that he can do nothing effectual to salvation. For the clearing of this we must observe, that whatsoever is only purposed, is for that very reason as yet not done, but to be done hereafter, and then the argument proceeds in this manner: Either the leading of a new life, here purposed by the death-bed penitent, is necessary actually to be done, or it is not necessary. If it be not necessary to be done, then neither is there any reason why it should be necessary to be purposed; inasmuch as action is both the cause, the end, and also the measure of purpose: but if it be necessary to be done, then it follows, that barely to purpose it cannot be sufficient.

And thus, from these arguments, they infer and conclude the absolute nullity of a death-bed repentance.

But, for my part, I cannot be yet convinced that there is an absolute necessity to reprobate all death-bed penitents, and to exclude them from all possibility of being saved. It is an assertion harsh and inhuman, and at the very first sight seems to carry in it a contrariety to



the merciful and tender spirit of the gospel; and therefore ought not to be admitted, but upon most clear and unavoidable reasons, and such as yet I see none to enforce it.

For the first general exception; that it naturally undermines the necessity of a good life, and takes away all strictness and holiness of conversation, and so turns the gospel into a doctrine of licentiousness; making it to warrant and patronize a continuance in sin, from the assurance it gives to men, that upon such a repentance they shall be saved at the very last.

To this I answer, first, by concession; that if we state all a man's actions in things spiritual, upon a perfect, entire freedom of will, by which it is in his power to repent when he will, after he has persisted in his sin as long as he pleased; so that he is so perfect a master of his choice, as to be able to determine it to sin, or to the practice of holiness, at any time whatsoever: I say, upon this principle I confess, that it does in a great measure untie and unravel all obligations to an holy life. And supposing that a man were sure of the time of his life, and that it should not, by any unexpected accident, be snapped off suddenly, the doctrine of the efficacy of a death-bed, or indeed of any future repentance, would in its nature tend to encourage such a man to a presumptuous perseverance in sin. But then, considering that (as I have evinced already) no man has his life leased to him for any set time, nor secured from casual, fatal accidents, but that he may lose it unawares; even this principle itself, of a free, entire power in man to repent when he will, cannot, upon a rational account, warrant any man either in the delay of a pious, or in the pursuit of a virtuous life.

But then I add, that repentance is not to be stated upon the power of man's will, but upon the special grace and power of God, by which it is wrought upon the heart, whereby the will is advanced to exert those acts of repentance which of itself it is utterly unable to do. Now upon this principle I affirm, that to hold that a death-bed repentance may be effectual, neither cuts off the necessity of a good life, nor indeed encourages any one to defer his repentance till that time.

For, as I shall venture to tell any man, that if in the very last period, the last expiring instant of his life, he shall sincerely repent him of all his past sins, he shall assuredly find mercy; so I shall tell him also, that it is entirely in the pleasure and hand of God, whether he shall be able to repent or no; and that he has no certainty in the world that God will vouchsafe him such a measure of grace at that hour; but much, on the contrary, to make him suspect and doubt that he may deny it him, and revenge the provocations of a wicked life with impenitence and obduration at the time of death.

And thus I think that the exception against the efficacy of a death-bed repentance is clearly removed, by stating the exercise of it upon this principle. For though I say, that a man shall be saved whensoever he repents, yet I deny also, that a man can repent whensoever he pleases.

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Having thus made our way through this general objection, we are now to look back upon those two arguments that were brought against this doctrine.

1st, The first was; That no repentance can be saving, but such an one as produces an holy life, and is attended with it; but how can a man upon his death-bed begin an holy life, when he is even ceasing to live?

To this I answer, that the space between the first act of repentance, by which the soul is turned from sin to God, and between a man's death, be it never so short, even to but one minute, it is reckoned in the accounts of the gospel for an holy life; that is, any time that a sanctified person lives, is an holy life.

Now that this is so, I thus evince; for either this is sufficient, or there is required some determinate space of time, under the compass of which no man can be said to have lived holily: if this be asserted, let that fixed, determinate compass of time be assigned.

Either it must be the major part of a man's life, or a just half of it, or some set number of years or days.

If the first; then he that repents and is converted in the fifteenth year of his age, and dies in the thirtieth, cannot be said to have lived an holy life, and therefore cannot be saved, inasmuch as the major part of his life does not come under the accounts of repentance. In like manner, he that is converted in the twentieth year of his age, and dies before he reaches his fortieth, must come under the same doom, as not being able to bring the just half of his life under this reckoning.

But this is evidently false and absurd; we must therefore seek for this stinted time in some set number of years or days; and here let any one shew me, whether it be twelve, ten, six, or four, or one year; or, to descend to days, whether it be an hundred, sixty, thirty, ten, or seven days, that a man must have completely spent in the practice of holy duties, before he can be said to have lived an holy life; but I believe it would puzzle any one to make such an assignation, or to find warrant for it, either in scripture or reason.

Wherefore we must reckon that time indeterminately which a man spends in this world after he has sincerely repented, be it long or be it short, for an holy life; and consequently I see not why, in those few days, hours, nay minutes, that a sincere death-bed penitent lives, he may not be as truly said to live holily, as he that dates his holy living from twenty years' continuance; and why the widow's two mites were not as true, though not as great an offering, as his that consisted perhaps of an hundred or two hundred shekels.

2dly, To the second argument: That the death-bed penitent can only resolve upon leading an holy life; and that if the actual leading of such a life he necessary, then barely to resolve it cannot be sufficient; as, on the contrary, if to effect it be not necessary, then neither can it be necessary to resolve it.

To this I answer, by an absolute denial of that assertion, that the death-bed penitent can only resolve upon living an holy life. And to make out the reason of this denial. I shall here

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first lay down what is properly an holy life. In short, it is the doing of all those actions that a man is obliged to do in the condition in which he is; to which I add, that a man is obliged to do no more than he is capable of doing in such a condition.

Now a person upon his death-bed is only capable of doing such duties as are wholly transacted in the mind and in the will; as, loving of God, hating of sin, sorrowing for it, forgiving enemies, and the like; and these he is not only able to resolve, but also to perform.

But to go to church, to fast and pray, kneeling, with other such actions of duty, these are naturally not within his power in that state of weakness, and therefore he is not obliged to them. Yet, however, though he cannot perform these, he must not therefore be said not to live holily; forasmuch as he does perform other holy duties, which his condition is capable of doing, and in the doing of which an holy life equally consists.

I answer therefore to the second part of the argument, that an holy life is both necessary to be resolved on, and also to be performed, but both still in the same manner.

That is, a penitent, upon his repentance, is to resolve to live holily for that whole course of time that he is to spend in the world, and this resolution he is faithfully to perform. But he is not to resolve upon living an holy life, for such or such a determinate number of years, inasmuch as it is not in his power to dispose of the time of his life so long.

But both resolution and performance as to this particular, is to respect a man's whole life for the future, whether that life fall out to be long or short. And if it chance, by God's providence, to last but one hour, yet still it is his whole life from that time, as much as if it were spun out to many years.

From which it follows, that a death-bed penitent may both resolve and perform as much as is required to complete the nature of an effectual repentance.

Having thus answered the arguments brought to disprove the efficacy of a death-bed repentance, it will not be amiss to consider what kind of persons they are that are the authors of such a grim assertion.

Are they of such an unstained, unblameable life? such an angelical piety and perfection? Certainly it were but reason to expect that those that throw such great stones, that give such remorseless stabs to poor dying sinners, should be able to enter heaven themselves, though it were *through the eye of a needle*; and should be of such a sublime sanctity as to supererogate at the least, and not to need mercy themselves, who so severely deny it to others.

But I am afraid that, upon inquiry, it will appear, that they are nothing less. I should not willingly libel or defame any, especially from the pulpit: but, from the best information I can give my self, either by reading, observation, or report, those that make the way to heaven so narrow, walk in the broad themselves; take a scope and liberty in their lives, and content themselves to be only strict in their doctrine, denying to others a possibility to repent effectually on their death-bed, while they live in that manner themselves, that it seems to be for their interest to hold even a possibility of repenting after death.

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In short, they are usually such as prescribe rules and directions for other men to follow; such as, after the practices of uncleanness, tell others that they must become vestals; such as are famous for covetousness, and for preaching against it.

These are those inexorable spiritual Cato's, those parsimonious dispensers of mercy; perhaps out of a mistaken fear, upon the knowledge of their own wickedness, lest there should not be mercy enough for themselves.

Thus the late casuists of the church of Rome, what great things do they speak of man's power to merit, to fulfil, and overdo the law, to an higher, uncommanded strain of perfection; and yet what puddles, what sinks of impurity are their books of casuistical divinity; what horrid, loose maxims have they, that not only undermine Christianity, but even extinguish and cut the bands of all morality! Which licentious doctrines have already kindled such a (lame in that church, as, for aught I know, may burn to its confusion.

But to return to our subject: We shall still find, that such as are most merciless to dying sinners, in stopping up the passages of repentance and salvation against them, do yet relax this rigour, and walk by another rule themselves; unless perhaps it may more properly be said, that they walk by no rule at all.

And experience has shewn, that those spiritual guides, who are the most austere in their own lives, the greatest and most rigid exactors of duty from themselves, and of the most improved acquaintance and converse with God; yet when such come to deal with dying sinners, they handle their wounds more gently, treat them with more relentings and compassion, open the treasures of pardoning mercy to them more freely, and are glad to see any glimmerings of sincerity and contrition, that may warrant them to send the repenting sinner out of the world with a full and a free absolution.

And the reason of this is, because such, by a continual strict living up to the precepts of Christ, come at length to partake of the spirit and temper of Christ; who of all men that ever lived, or shall live in the world, was the freest even from the least stain of sin, and yet was the most boundless and enlarged in his compassion to sinners.

And certainly, should he now live and converse with us, he that raised sinners from their graves, would not now condemn them upon their death beds.

And thus, I think, that I have not only answered, but also cleared off all objections against this doctrine, so that it may henceforward pass for a gospel truth; which, that I may yet further confirm, I shall produce positive arguments to prove and assert it.

1st, The first shall be taken from this consideration; that such a repentance commenced at the last hour of a man's life, has *de facto* proved effectual to salvation; and therefore there is no repugnancy in the nature of the thing itself, but that it may do so again. The consequence is clear; for that which is impossible in itself, can never be verified so much as in any one single instance; and that if it were impossible for any repentance beginning at the latter end



of a man's life, that is, just before his death, to prove saving, no one man whatsoever so repenting could be saved.

But the falsity of this evidently appears from that eminent and known instance of the thief upon the cross; whose repentance began no sooner than his crucifixion, and yet it ended with the rewards of paradise. And who knows, but that God intended this signal instance to remain as a perpetual remedy against despair, to sinners repenting in any part of their lives? And there are some doctrines, that God does not think fit to set down and express in open terms, lest the corruption of our nature might abuse them to presumption; but rather to hint them to us in an example, and to represent them in the person of another: leaving us, by rational discourse, to apply the same to ourselves when we are in the like condition.

As for instance: should God have said in express terms, that though a man murders his neighbour, and commits adultery with his wife, yet, if he repents, such sins should not hinder his salvation: such a declaration as this, given antecedently to these villainous actions, would have been apt to have encouraged the wicked hearts of men much more boldly to have ventured upon the commission of them.

But now, should any one chance to be plunged into such enormous sins as these, that he might not here, subsequently to the act, which cannot be recalled, utterly cast off all thoughts of mercy, and consequently of returning to God for the obtaining of mercy, God has discovered so much compassion in the pardon of David, guilty of the same sins, upon his sincere repentance, as to keep such an one from despair, and to warrant him his pardon, if, upon the same sins, he acts the same repentance.

The same very possibly might be the design of the Spirit here, not to make any such declaration of pardon openly and expressly to death-bed penitents, lest by accident it might open a door of licence to sin; but rather to preach it more tacitly to our reasons, in the example of the thief upon the cross; that in case a sinner be overtook, and brought upon his death-bed, he might not yet despair, seeing one before him obtaining pardon in the same condition.

2dly, The second argument is taken from the truth and certainty of that saying, owned and attested by God himself, in [2 Cor. viii. 12](#), *That if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted, according to that a man hath, and not according to that a man hath not.* That is, it is accepted instead of the deed, when the deed, through some outward impediment, not within the power of man to remove or remedy, becomes impracticable.

Now, when a penitent upon his death-bed has wrought his repentance to the highest resolutions and most sincere purposes of future obedience, if God immediately put a period to his life, is it any fault of his, if he is took off from so full an execution of those purposes as he intended?

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Certainly God, who can pierce into his soul, and view the sincerity of those resolutions, seeing that, in case he should live many years, they would be all performed, and actually drawn forth into so many years obedience, he cannot but rate those intentions according to the utmost effect and issue that they would have had under such opportunities.

And as for the time, so also for the quality of duty: where God has visited a man with such bodily weakness, that he cannot move or stir from his bed, do we not think that God accepts his desire to attend the church, to kneel in prayer, with other acts of devotion to which the body must concur, as truly and really, as if he had strength of body actually to perform all these?

Truly, if we deny that he does, we have strange thoughts of the equity and goodness of his nature; and degrade his mercy to a pitch below the mercies of an earthly father, and the dispensations of a prudent governor.

Indeed, when God is said in such a case to accept of the will, and to dispense with the deed, it is only a further explication of that known, unalterable rule of justice, that God cannot command or require the performance of a thing impossible.

But should he exact the deed, when the weakness of a man's condition utterly disables him to perform it; should he command a bedrid person to stand or kneel, or require ten years' practice of holiness from him that is to live but an hour, what could this be but to rank his commands amongst those unreasonable, tyrannical injunctions that will and require impossibilities?

3dly, The third argument why a death-bed repentance may prove effectual is, because repentance saves not, as it is a work, or such a number of works; but as it is the effect of a renewed nature and a sanctified heart, from which it flows. But now, the renovation of our nature being the sole immediate work of God's Spirit, it may be wrought (if it so please him) in the last moment of our lives, as well as in twenty years: for, being a new creation, and the production of a quality in the soul that was not there before, there is nothing hinders, but that by an infinite power it may be transacted in an instant.

Upon which I argue thus: If God can sanctify and renew a man's nature in the last instant of his life, then a person thus sanctified is either in a state of salvation, or he is not: if not, then a man truly sanctified may be in a damnable condition, which is false and absurd: but if he is, then, inasmuch as a death-bed penitent may be thus sanctified and renewed, he may be also in a state of salvation, which is inseparably annexed to a true sanctification.

But now, on the other hand, if we say that a man cannot be a true penitent, and in a state of salvation, unless he has spent such a considerable number of years or months in the continual exercise of holy duties; what is this, but to ascribe his salvation to such a measure of works? This is evident: for a death-bed penitent may have all other qualifications, as a sanctified heart, a sincere resolution, and a direction of it to the glory of God; so that there is nothing wanting but such a number of holy actions. Now if, notwithstanding the former

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qualities, salvation must be yet denied to such a penitent, is it not most clear that salvation is stated upon the *opus operatum* of such a parcel of holy performances? So that it is not the sincerity, but the multitude; not the kind, but the number of our actions that must save us. Which assertion if we admit, and improve into its due consequences, I cannot see but that it must needs bring us back to our beads.

4thly, A fourth argument is this: It to repent sincerely be a thing at the last moment of our lives impossible to be done, then, for that instant, impenitence is not a sin. For it cannot be a sin not to do that which in its nature cannot be done. The reason is, because where there is no obligation, there can be no sin, inasmuch as sin is either the transgression or omission of something that we stand obliged to do: but I have shewn before, that no man can be obliged to impossibilities. It follows therefore from hence, that not to repent upon one's death-bed is no sin, because, according to the opinion hitherto maintained, to repent there is impossible. Which argument is of so much quickness and force, that were there no other, this alone were enough both to establish ours, and to overthrow the contrary assertion.

5thly. The fifth argument that I shall produce is this: That to deny that a death-bed repentance can be effectual to salvation, is a clear restraint and limitation of the compass and prerogative of God's mercy.

For since it is a thing that neither involves any contradiction in itself, nor yet to any one of God's attributes, it is both an impudent and an insolent thing, for any man to deny the possibility of it. For shall we prescribe to omnipotence, or set bounds to an infinite mercy, and say, that this and this it can do; but this it cannot? What, if God, *willing to shew the riches of his mercy*, calls and accepts of some at the very last hour of the day, and rewards them equally with those that came in at the first; have we any thing to reply against such a proceeding, or to carp at his justice, or to murmur at our brother's felicity? God expressly says, that his *thoughts are not as our thoughts; nor his mercies as our mercies*. And indeed, sad and lamentable were the condition of most sinners, if they were. The number of those that should be saved would be much less, and the volume of the book of life contracted to a very small epitome.

I should think it therefore much more agreeable to a pious sobriety, to acquiesce in the method of God's dealing; and, according to rule of the civil law, rather to amplify, than to limit acts of favour.

If God brings a sinner to himself at the last, and so makes his death-bed a portal and entrance to heaven; if he accepts of the purposes, and crowns the short endeavours of a late repentance with life and glory; I, for my part, have nothing to do here, but to congratulate the person that obtains, and to adore the mercy that gives it.

6thly, The sixth and last argument for the confirmation of the same truth is this: That if a death-bed repentance cannot possibly be effectual to salvation, then a sinner upon his death-bed, having not repented before, may lawfully, and without sin, despair. The reason

is clear; for where the proper object of hope ceases, which is possibility of pardon, there despair must lawfully succeed: for despair is then only a sin when there is ground of hope, of which here there is none. In short, despair cannot be sinful where it is rational; but it is most rational to despair of salvation, when the only means of attaining it, which is repentance, becomes impossible.

But now, I desire any one to shew me any thing in the gospel that admits of despair in the time of this life; nay, that docs not prescribe and condemn it as utterly sinful: it is proper only to the state of the damned, whose condition God has declared to be remediless. But God has not signified that a sinner, in any part of his life whatsoever, is out of all possibility of mercy and salvation. In deed, as a man dies, so he continues for ever; but while he lives, his condition is alterable.

And therefore that assertion that must engage a man both certainly and lawfully to despair, while he is on this side death, is surely a branch of a new, unheard of gospel and divinity.

And thus I have endeavoured to demonstrate, that it is not impossible for a man effectually to repent upon his death-bed. Which doctrine, if it be true, truth, as such, cannot be hurtful, however by accident and abuse it may.

But I shall now proceed, from these arguments, to such considerations as will be more strong to keep off the encroaches of presumption, than these can be to invite them. And so I am come to the second general head, proposed for the management of this subject, viz. that supposing that a death-bed repentance may, in the issue, prove effectual, yet for any one to design and build upon it beforehand is highly dangerous, and therefore absolutely irrational.

The truth of which will be made to appear from these considerations.

1st, The first shall be taken from the exceeding unfitness of a man at this time, above all others, to exercise this duty. Repentance is a work that will take up the whole soul; that will distend every faculty, and fill every part and power of it, even when it is in its most vigorous, fresh, and active condition.

It is transacted by the sublimest and most refined operation of the soul, which is reflection. The soul must retreat into itself, view its accounts, and summon the records of memory, to give in a faithful relation of all a man's past sins, of all the passages and remarks of his former life. And having done this, the mind must dwell upon a sad and severe consideration of the nature, degrees, and aggravating circumstances of each sin, till thought improves into affection, and opens the penitential sluices, and fills the heart with sorrow, mourning, and weeping for sin; which sorrow for sin rising higher and higher, till at length it ends in detestation of it, and resolutions against it, it becomes the first degree of a true repentance.



But is a man fit to encounter and run through all these difficulties, amidst those many impediments, both natural and civil, that clog and hang about him in his death-bed condition?

And first, for natural hinderances: his memory will be weak and treacherous, his judgment infirm, and his apprehension slow and dark. And then, perhaps, all these disabilities may be increased by the accession of bodily distempers: either lethargies may dispirit and benumb him, or some acute, painful disease divert and enrage him. So that the whole man is in a tumult and disorder; within is weakness, without is pain: his intellectuals forsake him, his fever scorches him; life is troublesome, and yet death terrible. In short, the man is very unfit to use his reason, to remember, or contemplate; and being so, how can he be fit to repent? which is a work that includes in it all these operations.

But we will suppose the death-bed penitent, by the mercy of Providence, pretty well freed from these natural impediments, and that he has a good proportion of memory, a good reserve of judgment, with a readiness to apprehend and discern, and to exercise the several functions of a rational nature. Yet then there are civil obstructions, worldly incumbrances, settling the estate, providing for friends, satisfying the craving importunities of relations. And what can a poor, dying man do, when such a swarm of troublesome thoughts are buzzing about him? How can he recollect and compose himself to a meditation of his past actions, when he is busied in settling things for the future?

Repentance is too great a thing to be wielded in such an hurry. No sooner, perhaps, is a man set ting himself to clear old scores between God and his soul, but his worldly creditors come bawling upon him for another kind of satisfaction. No sooner does he set himself to mourn and weep for his sins, but he is interrupted with the tears of those that stand weeping for him.

This is his case: and now, can any rational person in the world judge that a death-bed is the proper scene of repentance? that a dying person, racked with pain, choked with phlegm, immersed, and even buried in incumbrances before he is dead, can be fit to manage the spiritual-searching severities of this duty?

The apostle observes well, in [2 Tim. ii. 4](#), *That no man that warreth, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life*. And indeed repentance is a kind of spiritual warfare; but certainly none so unfit for a war as a dying person.

There are some duties, whose performance so properly belongs to some certain time, that they can neither with ease nor order be performed out of it. Repentance is the work of life, and the business of health. And truly, that man has mistimed his work, and misplaced his occasions, who, when he comes upon his death-bed, has any thing else to do, than the proper business of that place, which is to die.

2dly, The other reason is taken from this consideration, that there can be no arguments from which either the dying person himself, or others by him, can certainly conclude that



his repentance is sound and effectual. I speak of ordinary means of knowledge; for it is confessed, that God, by an extraordinary manner, may reveal it to a man; and as he gave him the grace of true repentance, so he may give him an assurance and certain knowledge of the truth of that repentance.

But by the ordinary, usual methods of discourse, the dying penitent cannot infallibly know it: the reason is, because he has no infallible medium to introduce him to such a knowledge.

The mediums by which he must collect it can be no other than these three: 1st, The heartiness of his present resolutions, in relation to a future amendment: or, 2dly, The great expressions of sorrow that he makes for his past sins: or, 3dly, His solicitous concernment for his estate in the next world.

But all these, according to the cognizance that a death-bed penitent can take of them, are very fallible.

For the first, his resolutions, though God, who quenches not the smoking flax, will by no means reject these, if sincere; but will own the work of his grace, though but kindled in the first true intention, as much as if it flamed out in a constant and glorious practice: yet, in regard the opportunities of performing those death-bed resolutions are in a great measure cut off, the death-bed penitent cannot be assured that his resolutions are true. For a man may think that he heartily resolves against a sin, when indeed he does not; his own heart deceiving him. As in a man's lifetime, he often finds, by experience, that when he has took up firm purposes and resolves against a sinful course, so that, as he thinks, he shall never relapse into it again; yet, notwithstanding, upon the next temptation, all such resolutions disband and vanish, and the proposal is complied with; which clearly shews that these purposes and resolutions were indeed false and deceitful.

And now, how does the death-bed penitent know, but the resolutions he makes there may be as weak and unsincere, as those that heretofore he made, and broke in the time of his health? Possibly they may be sincere; but he cannot certainly know it, but God alone, who only can foresee, whether, in case his life should be prolonged, those resolves would be made actuate in performance.

And then, for the other two things, his vehement expressions of sorrow, and his concernment about his salvation, are of as uncertain information as the other. For a man may mourn and weep for those sins, which he yet afterwards returns to, continues in, and perhaps dies under; which shews that tears, and sighs, and complaints, and all other expressions of sorrow whatsoever, are utterly fallacious. But in the state a man now is, all these may very well be presumed to issue from the fear and terror of an approaching damnation. And fear is a kind of constraint and violence upon the will; so that all school men unanimously hold, that actions proceeding from fear are of a mixed nature, and not perfectly voluntary.



Now all fear is from a principle of self-love; and therefore all religious actions, commenced upon this motive, are spurious, and rejected by God.

This supposed, I affirm, that it is more than ten to one but that all the pomp of a death-bed repentance, in its highest and most angelical resolutions, in its most sorrowful, mournful, and affectionate discoveries, moves wholly upon this false spring of fear, suggested upon the dismal apparition of the nearness of death, and the frightful thoughts of a miserable eternity.

It is highly probable that there is scarce one of an hundred in this condition, but goes off with the forced sorrows of fear instead of repentance; and so dies rather terrified than sanctified.

And would not any rational man here rather fear and suspect that his lot may fall amongst the hundred, than promise himself that he shall be that one exempted person? Certainly it is ill venturing the salvation of an immortal soul upon such huge unlikelihoods, such vast disparities.

But to conclude, and wrap up all that I have said for and against a death-bed repentance: I aver, that it is not at all in a man's power, but only in God's: and that God, being offended with a wicked life, is more likely to deny than to give it at the hour of death: that a man has all the indispositions of body and mind imaginable to unfit and disable him for it: that it is very seldom true, always suspicious; and that when true, yet it is not discernible by any certain, infallible sign to be so: in short, that it is most difficult, doubtful, dangerous, and very improbable.

In fine, I have this alone to say for it, (and to a considering person I need say no more against it,) that it is only not impossible.

To Almighty God be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON XXXVII.

ROMANS i. 3, 4.

Περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ, κατὰ σάρκα, τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει, κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης, ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν.

Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

IN these words we have an adequate and entire description of the person of Christ. For in the third verse his human nature, and in the fourth his divine, is fully and exactly represented to us.

I delight not, I must confess, to insist much upon philological or philosophical discourses in dispensing the word; but where the construction of the text lies so, that we cannot otherwise reach the full sense of it, but by making our way through doubts and ambiguities, we must have recourse to such expedients.

The present exercise, therefore, shall consist of these two parts.

I. An explication of the words.

II. An accommodation of them to the present occasion.

I. For the first of these we must know, that the scheme of the Greek carries a very different face from our translation, which difference renders the sense of the words very disputable.

The explication of which I shall comprise in the resolution of these four inquiries.

1st, Whether the translation rightly renders it, that Christ was *declared to be the Son of God*, since the original admits of a different signification.

2dly, What is imported by this term, *with power*.

3dly, What is intended by the following words, *according to the spirit of holiness*.

4thly and lastly, How those words, *by the resurrection from the dead*, are to be understood.

In all which, as the resolution will manifest the reason of the doubt, I shall be as brief as I can; for if I should give myself scope to pursue each particular through all the difficulties that might attend it, it would fill a much larger discourse than the measure of the present exercise will allow. After which explication I shall shew, that the resurrection of Christ is the greatest and the principal argument to prove the divinity of his person.

1st, And first for the first of these: that which we render *declared*, is in the Greek ὀρισθέντος, which may signify *decreed*, or *determined*; and accordingly the vulgar Latin reads it *praedestinatus*, and some other *destinatus est*. But with what propriety, or indeed with what tolerable sense, Christ could be said to be *decreed* to be the Son of God, which he was from eternity; and especially to be *decreed to be so by the resurrection from the dead*, a



thing that had happened very lately, is hard to understand, and much harder to make out. That which is the proper object of *decree* or *destination* is something future; but that which was eternal cannot be imagined in any period of time to be future.

Those indeed who deny the eternal godhead of Christ, and date his deity entirely, and his sonship principally, from his resurrection, are great friends to this exposition of the word; and well may they be so, for it serves their turn to very great purposes: for if Christ was constituted eminently the Son of God at and by his resurrection, it might very properly be said of him, that he was *decreed* so to be antecedently to his resurrection; but how this can consist with the supposition of his eternal godhead, I must profess, I cannot apprehend.

Aquinas indeed retains this interpretation of the word by *praedestinatus est*; but it was the gross ignorance of the Greek tongue and all critical learning in those days, that betrayed so great a judgment to the inconvenience of holding that, of which to give a rational account he took so much pains, and to so little purpose.

Erasmus therefore observes, (whose authority in this sort of learning is inferior to none,) that there is another proper signification of the word ὀρίζω besides *to decree*, or *determine*, and that is, *to declare*, *shew forth*, or *manifest*; hence in grammar the indicative mood is called ὀριστικὸς; and in logic the definition of a thing, which is the declaration of its nature, is called ὄρος or ὀρίσμος; all which confirm this interpretation.

And for the agreeableness of it to this place, besides the utter disagreeableness of any other signification; that is proved from hence, as that it carries a most fit and emphatical opposition to the words of the former verse, where the apostle expresses Christ's human nature by γενομένου, *he was made of the seed of David*, which word imports the constitution of something that did not exist before: but here, in this verse, expressing his divine nature, since he had from eternity been the Son of God, it is not said of him that he was *made*, but only *declared* or *manifested* to be so.

Besides, the apostle here speaks of things past and already done; which being so, with what propriety could he insist upon a thing only as *decreed* and purposed, after it had actually come to pass? especially since it was this only which here made for his purpose. His design was to prove Christ the Son of God by an argument taken from a thing known and notable, which was his resurrection; and would any rational disputer omit this, that he was actually risen, and argue only from this, that it was *decreed* that he should *rise from the dead*? According to the natural way of speaking, men never use to say that such a thing is decreed or purposed, after once that decree or purpose has passed into execution. And so much for explication of the first term.

2dly, The second inquiry is, what is imported by this term *with power*; the Greek is ἐν δυνάμει, *in power*, so that by some it is rendered *in virtue*; but it being not unusual for the particle ἐν to be put for οὐν, it is most properly rendered in our translation *with power*; which, though some understand of the power of Christ, as it exerted itself in the miracles

which he did; yet here it signifies rather the glorious power of his divine nature, by which he overcame death, and properly opposed to the weakness of his human nature, by which he suffered it. Correspondent to which is that place in [2 Cor. xiii. 4](#), *He was crucified by weakness, but he liveth by the power of God*: that is, the weakness of his humanity made him capable of the death of the cross; but the power of his divinity triumphed over that death, and raised him to an eternal life.

3dly, The third thing to be inquired into is, what is the intent of the following words, *according to the spirit of holiness*. The expression is an Hebraism, and signifies as much as the *Holy Spirit*; but what is the meaning of that here, is the doubt to be resolved.

Some understand it only as a further explication of the precedent word ἐν δυνάμει, taking both that and this for the miraculous works done by the Spirit of God to confirm the gospel: for still we shall find that the miracles of Christ and his apostles were ascribed to *the Spirit of God*; which exposition cannot stand, for these reasons:

1st, Because it ought then to have been joined with the precedent words by conjunction, καὶ ἐν δυνάμει, καὶ κατὰ πνεῦμα.

2dly, Because in right construction it should have been πνεύματι, or διὰ πνεύματος, *by the Spirit*, noting the efficient cause; not *according to the Spirit*, as it is here; for κατὰ πνεῦμα can never be brought to have an equivalent signification to διὰ πνεύματος.

In the next place, therefore, if we observe the connection between this and the former verse, we shall find that there is a certain antithesis between them; and that as κατὰ σάρκα signifies the human nature of Christ, so κατὰ πνεῦμα may most appositely signify the divine; for it is not unusual in scripture for the divine nature to be rendered by the word *spirit*; [John iv. 24](#), *God is a spirit*; and [1 Tim. iii. 16](#), it is said, in respect of Christ, *that God was manifested in the flesh, but justified in the Spirit*; that is, he was proved to have a divine nature, as well as an human. And now here, because the apostle had expressed the humanity of Christ, not by κατ' ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν, or κατ' ἄνθρωπον, but κατὰ σάρκα, namely, the better to set forth the frailty and gross substance of the human nature; by way of opposition, he renders his divinity by κατὰ πνεῦμα, a word properly corresponding to κατὰ σάρκα, and without importing the vigorous and refined substance of this nature. And whereas he annexes this qualification of *holiness*, and calls it the *spirit of holiness*, it is because he considers not the divine nature of Christ absolutely in itself, but according to the relation it had to, and the great effect that it exercised upon his other nature. For it was his divinity which sanctified, consecrated, and hypostatically deified his humanity; and in that respect it is here treated of by the apostle.

4thly, I come now to the explication of that fourth and last expression, *by the resurrection from the dead*, which is exceeding different from the original, according to the first and literal appearance of the sentence. For the words *Jesus Christ our Lord*, which in the translation are placed in the beginning of the third verse, in the Greek are the last words of the fourth;



which has occasioned great diversity in the construction. The words in the original are these, ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν. So that what we render *by the resurrection from the dead*, is word for word to be rendered *by the resurrection of the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Whereupon some interpret it not of Christ's personal resurrection; which, they say, ought to have been ἐκ νεκρῶν, not simply νεκρῶν; but either of the resurrection of those, who in Matthew are said to have rose from their graves at the time of Christ's crucifixion, or of the general resurrection of all the saints; who are therefore called the *dead* of Jesus Christ, to discriminate them from the wicked and the reprobates, who, though they shall rise again, yet bear not this relation to Christ.

Accordingly they take the word ἀνάστασις actively for the action of Christ, by his power raising them from the dead: forasmuch as otherwise their being raised from the dead would not have had so immediate a force to prove Christ to be the Son of God.

But that the words are not so to be rendered, nor consequently to be understood of the resurrection of any but of Christ himself, is clear upon the strength of this reason: that (as I have partly observed already) the apostle's design here is to demonstrate to the Romans the divinity of Christ, by some signal passage already done, and so familiarly known by them. But the general resurrection was as yet future, and the resurrection of those few, it is probable, was not so famed a thing, as to have been commonly known amongst them: especially since there is mention of it only in St. Matthew, but in none else, either of the apostles or evangelists; who, being so diligent in representing all those arguments that seemed to prove the divinity of Christ, had they apprehended this to have been so clear and immediate an argument for the proof of it, certainly would not have thus passed it over in silence.

I conclude therefore, that it is to be understood of the personal resurrection of Christ from the dead. So that the only thing that remains for us is, to solve and make out the construction: for which, though several ways may be assigned, yet the most rational is to refer the words Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν, by apposition to the precedent words in the former verse, περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ; not making it to be governed of νεκρῶν; so that, in the Latin translation, Jesus Christ is not to be rendered by the genitive, but by the ablative case; it being repeated after the intervening words by an hyperbaton; a figure usual in the writings of this apostle; whose expression must be acknowledged to be none of the easiest or the clearest.

Neither is it material that the particle ἐκ is not prefixed to νεκρῶν, to make it *from the dead*; since it is usual amongst the Greeks to omit prepositions, such as ἐν, ἐξ, and ἀπὸ; as also amongst the Latins, with whom *surrexit terrâ* is all one with *surrexit a terrâ*. But above all this, the preposition here may be so much the better omitted, since the very word ἀνάστασις carries in it the force of this preposition; forasmuch as it denotes a motion or recess from a certain place or state.

And thus I have given an explication of the words, the first thing proposed for the management of this subject; which explication has been, I confess, something large; but I hope, to those who understand these matters, is not altogether unuseful.

II. I come now to the second general head, which is, the accommodation of the words to the present occasion; and that shall be in shewing, that Christ's resurrection is the greatest and the principal argument to prove him the Son of God. Now both the foundation and sum of the gospel lies within the compass of this proposition, *that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God*: from which one aphorism spring all the other branches of Christianity. For that, which properly discriminates the Christian religion from the natural, or Judaical, is the holding of Christ's deity, and his satisfaction naturally consequent upon it: to both which together are reducible all the parts of the gospel, as appendages to, or conclusions naturally flowing from them.

But it is not here to be denied, that Christ is capable of being called *the Son of God* in several respects; as that, according to his human nature, he had no natural father, but was produced in the womb of his mother by the immediate power of God; as also for his resemblance to God, upon the accounts of his transcendent holiness: it being proper to call him the Son of God who does the works of God; (as Christ called the Jews the sons of the Devil, for doing the works of the Devil, [John iii. 44](#), *Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do*;) all great likeness, in the scripture dialect, founding the denomination of sonship. Christ might be also called the Son of God, from his having the government of all things put into his hands upon his ascension. All this must be granted: yet here we are to consider only the principal and grand cause of his being called so; which is from the eternal generation and emanation of his person from the person of the Father; that is, we are to consider him to be the Son of God upon such an account, as may also infer and prove him to be God himself.

Now this supereminent way of sonship being the foundation of his deity, as that is the foundation of our religion, ought in reason to be evinced by some great and evidently conclusive argument; and such an one we affirm to have been his resurrection.

But you will here naturally reply, How can this be a proper proof of that? How can his resurrection, which supposes him. to have been dead, prove him to be such an one as existed from all eternity, and so could not die? Is the grave a medium to demonstrate a person incorruptible? or death, to enforce that he is immortal? I answer, that this argumentation is so far very right; and that the resurrection considered only in a bare relation to the person rising from the dead, proves him only to be a wonderful man; but is so far from proving him the eternal Son of God, that it rather proves the contrary. But then, if we consider it with relation to the doctrine of that person affirming himself to be thus the Son of God, and as the seal set to the truth of that doctrine by an omnipotent hand and an unfailing veracity; why, thus it is an infallible argument to prove the real being of all those things that were

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asserted by that person. Christ's resurrection therefore proved him to be the eternal Son of God consequentially; that is, as it was an irrefragable confirmation of the truth of that doctrine which had declared him to be so.

It is much disputed, whether Christ's resurrection is to be referred to his own power raising himself from the dead, or only to the power of the Father. Those who deny his eternal divinity allow only this latter, stiffly opposing the former. To give countenance to this their opposition, they seem to make challenge to any one to produce but one place of scripture where Christ is said to have raised himself from the dead, and they will yield the cause. To which I answer; though this is no where affirmed in these very terms, representing it *in praeterito*, as done; yet if Christ spoke the same thing in words importing the future, the result is undoubtedly the same. And for this I desire to know what they will answer to that place, [John ii. 19](#), where Christ, speaking of his body, says, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up?* Does not Christ personally appropriate the action to himself and to his own power? Wherefore that exception is a vapour and a cavil, unbecoming a rational opponent.

But I add, that as to the proof of the divinity of Christ's person, it is not material whether his resurrection be stated upon his own power, or the power of his Father; for both equally prove the same thing, though in a different manner.

If Christ raised himself, it directly proves that he was God, and so had a divine nature, besides his human; for if he raised that, being dead, it must needs follow, that he did it by virtue of a power inherent in another nature, which was some divine spirit.

But, on the other hand, if the Father raised him, yet still it proves him to have been God; forasmuch as he always avouched himself to be so; and the Father would not have exerted an infinite power to have confirmed a lie, or verified the words of an impostor.

Having thus shewn how Christ's resurrection could be a proper argument to prove his divinity and eternal sonship, I come now in the next place to shew, that it is the greatest and the principal of all others.

And for this we may observe, that the arguments for the proof of the truth of Christ's doctrine, of which the sum is, *that he himself is the Son of God*, are generally reducible to these three:

1st, The nature of the things taught by him.

2dly, The fulfilling of prophecies in his person.

3dly, The miracles and wonderful works which he did in the time of his life.

Now to prove that his resurrection was an argument surpassing all these, I shall premise this one consideration; that whatsoever is brought as an argument to prove a thing demonstratively, ought to be in itself not only true, but evident and clear. Forasmuch as to prove a thing is properly to make it evident; but nothing can make another thing evident

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which is not so itself; nay, more evident than the thing to be proved by it. This being premised, let us take a brief examination of each.

1st, And first for the nature of the things which he taught. If you take a view of those which relate to practice; as, that we are to take no thought for the morrow, to take up our cross daily, and to renounce all the enjoyments of those things which were made only to be enjoyed; not to resist evil, nor to defend ourselves, but being smote upon one cheek to turn the other; and when the oppressor has robbed me of my coat, to gratify him with my cloke also; which is in effect to relinquish the grand rights of nature, and the eternal principle of self-preservation, writ in the hearts of all men with the pen of an adamant: furthermore, that for every petty anger we are responsible to the degree of murder; and that for every idle word we are liable to eternal damnation; that is, to a perpetuity of torments, not only unsupportable, but unconceivable; with several other such articles of the same nature.

Now I say, what strange, unusual, and grating documents are these to the nature and universal apprehensions of man's reason? How does this, as it were, start and fly back at the direful appearance of these severities, as much fitter to terrify than to persuade, to confound than to conquer the affections; and therefore, if these have any influence upon man's belief, (as undoubtedly they have a very great one,) we may be sure that such aphorisms shall never find any credit for their own sake, nor can it be expected that they should.

But then again; if we cast our eye upon what things Christ taught relating to belief; as, that the divine nature being most simply and indivisibly one, there are yet three persons in it, every one of which is truly and properly God. Also, that the same person should be God and man; and that person, in his human nature, should be born of a virgin; that he should die, and make satisfaction for the sins of the world; and that there should be a resurrection of all mankind with the same bodies, though consumed many thousand years since, and by infinite changes transformed into other things; and all this to a state of happiness or misery, of which there shall be no end.

Now how much stranger are these than the former? How do they look more like riddles than instructions? designed rather to astonish than to inform the man's understanding.

A great part of the world reject them all, as absolute paradoxes, and contrary to reason, and we ourselves confess them to be above reason; so that from our confession it will follow, that they are not to be believed for themselves.

I conclude therefore, that though these things are in themselves most true, yea, as true as the most evident proposition in the mathematics; yet because they are not at all evident, they are utterly unable to give evidence to the truth of that doctrine which does assert them.

2dly, The second argument of the truth of Christ's doctrine, and consequently of his divinity, is from the fulfilling of prophecies in his person. An argument no question very solid, and really conclusive; but perhaps not so clear and demonstrative as to silence very great exceptions.

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For the ways of interpreting prophecies are so various, as to be here attended with such allowances, and there again bound up with such limitations, such distinctions between the literal and mystical intention of them, and such great difficulty to prove when one is to be pitched upon, and when the other, that he who shall look into this matter will find, that this argument is not so absolutely full, nor so totally commands down the difficulty, as to render all additional arguments superfluous.

The modern Jews are so expert and versed in this particular, that there is not a text or prophecy throughout all the Old Testament, but they will readily give you such an interpretation of it as shall not at all relate to Jesus Christ. Nay, and there have not been wanting some such amongst the Christians; one I am sure there has been, who has endeavoured to shew, that all or most of those places in the Old Testament, which the Christian church generally applies to Christ, have had an actual and literal completion in some other before him, and so belong to him only by accommodation; which to a Jew (should you dispute with him, would upon another beg the question) would signify as much as nothing.

Though when such persons have shewn all the tricks they can upon the scripture, for I must needs call it shewing tricks upon it rather than expounding it; I say, still there remain some portions of it which point to Christ with such a pregnant and invincible clearness, such as the twenty-second Psalm and the fifty-third of Isaiah, that they cannot, with out an apparent force, and a visible wresting them from their genuine sense, be applied to any else. And what good design to Christian religion any one could have in giving them such an interpretation, as makes them, in the first and literal purport of them, not at all to relate to Christ, surpasses my understanding to give any tolerable account of.

3dly, The third argument is taken from the wonderful works that Christ did during his lifetime; all which were undoubtedly high proofs of the truth of the doctrine which they were brought to prove, and consequently of the divinity of Christ's person and of his mission. They were the syllogisms of heaven, and the argumentations of omnipotence.

Yet over these also Christ's resurrection had a vast preeminence, and that I prove upon the strength of these two considerations.

1st, That all the miracles Christ did, supposing that his resurrection had not followed, would not have had sufficient efficacy to have proved him to be the Messiah. But his resurrection alone, taking it single and by itself, and without any relation to his precedent miracles, had been a full and undeniable proof of the truth of his doctrine and the divinity of his person. The former part of the assertion is clear from that of St. Paul, *1 Cor. xv. 14, If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain*; and in the *17th verse, Ye are yet in your sins*. Now before Christ's death all his miracles were actually done, and yet, notwithstanding all these, the apostle lays this supposition, that in case then he had not rose from the dead, the whole proof of the gospel had fallen to the ground, and been buried with him in the same grave.

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And for the other part of the assertion, that Christ's resurrection alone, without respect to his miracles, had been a sufficient demonstration of the truth of his doctrine, that appears upon these two accounts.

1st, That the thing considered absolutely in itself, according to the greatness and wonder of it, did transcend and outweigh all the rest of his works put together.

2dly, That it had a more intimate and near connection with his doctrine than any of the rest; and that not only by way of inference, as a sign proving it, but by way of real effect, as it enabled him to give being and subsistence to the things which he had said and promised. He had promised to send the gifts of the Holy Ghost upon his disciples, to fit them to promulge the gospel; he had promised also to raise up those that believed in him to life eternal at the last day: which are two of the principal pails and pillars of the doctrine delivered by him. But for him to have done this, not rising from the dead, but continuing under a state of death, had been utterly impossible.

2dly, The second consideration upon which I ground the preeminence of Christ's resurrection above all the rest of his miracles, is the general opinion and judgment that the world had of both. For besides, that upon Christ's doing the most strange and signal of his miracles, you will find that they did not convince men so potently, but that while some believed, as many or more went away with the same unbelief of him that they brought; so we shall find moreover, that they were still resolving them into some other cause, short of a divine power; as, *that he cast out devils by the prince of the devils*, [Matt. xii. 24](#). And they generally looked upon him as a conjurer, and as one who had commerce with a more potent spirit or demon, by whose assistance he was too hard for the rest. But now observe, when they came to that great and difficult problem of his resurrection, they never attempted to assign any causes of that besides the power of God, so as by that means to depress the miraculousness of it; but they absolutely deny the matter of fact, and set themselves to prove that there was no such thing.

And to this day the modern Jews, who hold Christ to have been an impostor, do yet for all that grant the history of his miracles; that he did most of those strange, stupendous works reported of him; but still they persist in a denial of his resurrection.

All which shews, that they tacitly confess, that should they grant this one thing, *that Christ was risen from the dead*, they could have no reason to except against his person or doctrine; but must needs acknowledge, that being owned in such an immediate, undeniable way by the power of God himself, and that in the grand and crowning passage of his doctrine, all that he said was true, and consequently that he himself was the Messias, and Son of God.

But they thought his other miracles carried no such cogent evidence in them, but that they had so much to except against their being convinced by them, as to warrant their unbelief.

Which exceptions, I conceive, may be reduced to these two heads.

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1st, The great difficulty of discerning when an action is really a miracle; which difficulty lies in this: that since a miracle is properly such an action as exceeds the force and power of natural or second causes; to the discerning of it so to be, it is required, that a man knows the utmost extent and just measure of the power of those causes, how far it extends, and where it ends, before he can certainly pronounce that such an action or effect does exceed it; and consequently that it is a miracle. But now, I defy the greatest and the most indefatigable searchers of nature to give me in such an account of the activity and force of all natural causes, as to state the just boundaries and portions of their power. I cannot easily believe that any one would be so impudent, as to pretend to such an achievement.

But admit that some men, by the singular dexterity of their wit, and their profound experience, were able to do this; yet how will vulgar minds, which have neither ability nor opportunity to make these inquiries, be able to assure themselves, that such an action is above the force of nature, and therefore to be ascribed to a supernatural power?

These men, not being able to look beyond the outward bulk and first appearance of an action, determine miracles, not from the principle that causes them, but from the wonder that they find caused by them in themselves: which wonder arises from the unusualness of the thing, and their utter ignorance of the reason of it. As for instance, suppose a man should come amongst a rude, barbarous sort of people, and affirm to them strange things, as a message from God; and, to verify his words, should assure them, that he would make such a piece of iron come to him of its own accord, and cure any wound immediately, without any application made to it; and accordingly should do so; that those people, who know nothing of the force of the loadstone, or the sympathetic cure of wounds, would from hence conclude, that this man did those things by a divine power, and consequently that his message was of divine authority, I do no more doubt, than that I am now speaking.

2dly, But then, in the next place, supposing that an action is fully known to be a miracle, it is altogether as difficult, if not more, to know whether it proves the truth of the doctrine of that person that does it, or not. The reason is, because it is not certain but that God may suffer miracles to be done by an impostor, for the trial of men, to see whether or no they will be drawn off from a received, established truth. That the Jews thought so, is certain; and they took up their persuasion from these five first verses of [Deuteronomy xiii](#): *If there arise amongst you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.* And it is added, in the fifth verse, that *that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death.*

Now though I no ways question but that the main principle that acted the Jewish council in the putting of Christ to death was carnal policy, and resolution to maintain their

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own grandeur; yet I verily believe, that the more zealous and conscientious of them (of which sort there were, doubtless, some) commenced their proceedings against him upon the force of this law: for we must know that it was the judgment of the Jews, that *to worship other gods* was all one with *worshipping the true God*, in any other way, besides, or opposite to, the Mosaic institution. But this was their *πρῶτον ψεῦδος*, the first and chief error that betrayed them to all the rest.

Now supposing this to have been the sense of this law; forasmuch as they saw that Christ visibly designed an abolition of the Mosaic rites and economy hereupon, notwithstanding all the signs and wonders shewn by him, they thought they had sufficient warrant to look upon him as an impostor, and to deal with him accordingly.

But moreover, as the forementioned scripture seems to prove that God may suffer true miracles to be done by him who does not always avouch a true doctrine; so the same seems yet more clear from those miracles done by several: as Vespasian is said to have cured a blind man, by spitting on him, and striking him with his foot; and Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, was wont to cure persons distempered with the spleen, with a touch of his foot. And at this day the kings of England and of France cure a certain disease with a touch of their hand and a piece of money: all which cures can no more be resolved into the mere power of those agents, visibly employed in that action, than the curing of the lame or the deaf can be naturally effected with a word. And yet surely we neither believe the kings of England or France, upon this account, to be persons assisted by God, in all that they do or say, by an infallible spirit. I conclude, therefore, that it is not so easy to be assured of the truth of any doctrine upon the credit of a miracle done by the person who does promulge it.

For, to represent you the sum of both exceptions in short; he who will assure himself of the truth of any doctrine, upon the account of any miracle done by the author of it, must first assure himself that it is a miracle: to be sure of which, he must understand the utmost power of all natural causes: which I have shewn is very hard, if not impossible to be compassed. And then, after that he knows it to be a miracle, before he can conclude that it proves any doctrine to be true, he must know that it was done by God, with an intent to confirm that doctrine; and not for some other end, as to try whether men will suffer themselves, by such means, to be drawn from the truth: which since it is not to be distinguished by any mark of difference inherent in the actions themselves, but by a knowledge of the mind of God in them, which knowledge also we cannot have, without an immediate inspection into his counsels; it follows, that a certainty in these matters is highly difficult, and not without a very strong faith attainable. Hence it is, that the most learned writers of the Romish church, when they come to speak of the proof of the truth of any doctrine by miracles, speak exceedingly contemptibly of them: but this perhaps is no wonder, if they thought all other miracles of the same nature with those that they do themselves.

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But now neither of those two forementioned exceptions take place against the resurrection.

1st, For first, though we cannot assign the determinate point where the power of nature ends, and so cannot possibly know every miracle; yet there are some actions that at first appearance so vastly transcend it, that there can be no suspicion that they proceed from any power but a divine. As for instance, I cannot exactly tell how far a man may walk in a day, but yet I can tell that it is impossible for him to walk a thousand miles, by reason of the apparent disproportion between the natural strength of man and such a performance. Now such a thing does reason judge the raising of a dead man to life again, in reference to the force of natural causes; which in their utmost actings were never observed to do any thing like it: and certainly that is not in their power to do, which from the beginning of the world was never exemplified, or actually done by them, so much as in one particular instance.

2dly, And for the second: should God suffer a miracle to be done by an impostor, (which I, for my part, think he never does; but have hitherto disputed only upon a supposition of the Jews;) yet, I say, there was no necessity hence to gather, that God did it to confirm the words of that impostor: for God may do a miracle when and where he pleases. So that it follows not that it must needs relate to the vouching of what the impostor says. But now Christ had so often laid the stress of the whole truth of his gospel upon this, that he would rise from the dead; and declared to those who sought for a sign, that it was the only sign that should be given to that generation; that God could not have raised Christ from the dead, but that this action must needs have related to his words, and to have confirmed what Christ had said and promised, and consequently have joined with him in the imposture.

In a word; if this does not satisfy, I affirm, that it is not in the power of man to invent, or of God to do, any greater thing to persuade the world of the truth of a doctrine. It would even puzzle omniscience, and nonplus omnipotence itself, to find out a brighter argument to confound infidelity. And I dare avouch, that he who believes not upon Christ's resurrection from the dead, would scarce believe, though he rose from the dead himself. So that if after this he continues an infidel, he does in effect give Heaven the lie, and bids the Almighty convince him, if he can. He is miracle-proof, and beyond the reach of persuasion; and not like to be convinced, till it is too late for him to be converted.

But to sum up all: he who builds the grand concern of his eternal happiness upon his obedience to the gospel, as the sure way to it; and his obedience to the gospel upon a firm belief of the same; and lastly, grounds the said belief upon a belief of Christ's resurrection, has hereby made his *calling and election as sure*, as things knit together by an absolute decree and an unchangeable law are incapable of being ever disjoined, or forced asunder. And therefore, instead of those uncouth, ill-sounding words, used by Luther upon another occasion, *Si decipior, Deus me decipit*, such an one may with equal reverence and assurance conclude, that while he believes the Christian religion true, because the great author and

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promulger of it *died, and rose again from the dead, according to the scriptures*, it will be as impossible for him, so doing, to be deceived, as it is for the God of infinite truth and goodness to deceive him.

To which God, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for ever more. Amen.



SERMON XXXVIII.

ECCLESIASTES i. 18.

In much wisdom there is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

IT is a saying usual, and of great reason, that we are to believe the skilful in their own art and profession. And therefore, if we would understand the nature, properties, and effects of knowledge, none can be so fit to inform us, as he who, by the very verdict of omniscience itself, was of all men in the world the most knowing.

Nothing indeed is more common than for every man almost to pass an universal censure upon all persons and things; but none can despise a thing rationally, but he who knows it thoroughly. Otherwise, though a man should pass a right judgment upon a thing, yet he does it only by accident; and not by reason, but luck: and therefore, though the thing spoke be truth and wisdom, yet the speaker of it utters it like a fool. None but a scholar can be a competent judge of knowledge; and therefore all the encomiums and endless praises of it that now fly about the world, must come, and be tried, and stand or fall, according to the verdict of this rule.

First therefore we shall find those that are loudest in their commendations, and highest in their admirations of learning, are for the most part such as were never bred to it themselves: hence it is, that such, of all others, are the most desirous to breed their sons scholars; so that if we take a list of the most renowned philosophers in former ages, and the most eminent divines in the latter, we shall find that they were, for the most part, of mechanic, mean, and plebeian parentage.

Upon this score also there came to be so many free-schools and endowed places for learning; because those are most apt to send their children to study, who, being poor and low, are not able to maintain them in it; and therefore need the expense and benevolence of others, to bring their imprudent designs to maturity. Let this therefore be fixed upon, as one great reason that the praise of knowledge is so great in the world, viz. that much the major part of the world is ignorant. And ignorant men are indeed very fit to praise and admire, but very unfit to judge.

I am not insensible that many will here presently be apt to stop me with those eulogies that the most learned bestow upon knowledge, still adorning it with such panegyrics, such high words and expressions, as if rhetoric was invented for nothing else but to describe and set off her praise.—But in answer to this, though I might note, that to be learned and to be wise are things very different; yet I shall produce another reason of these commendations, which in all probability is this; that learned men would not seem and be judged fools, for spending their time upon so empty a thing; and therefore, as those that have been deceived into a ridiculous sight, do yet commend it, that they may not be thought to have been deceived, but may bring others into the same cheat with themselves:



So here, should philosophers confess, that all the time they spent about *materia prima*, about *esse per se*, and *esse per accidens*, they were laboriously doing nothing; the world would be apt to hiss, and to explode them; and others would be so wise as, seeing the example, to forbear the imitation. But now, when a man finds himself to be really deceived, the only relief that remains to him, is to cover the report of it, and to get companions in the deception.

If what has been hitherto said does not satisfy, I can only take sanctuary in this; that the same was Solomon's judgment: and I desire to know, whether those philosophers, who so profusely commend learning, knew more than he, and saw that worth in knowledge which he did? As for Aristotle, who for these many ages has carried the repute of philosophy from all the rest, he certainly was not wiser than Solomon; for he is reported to have stolen most of his philosophy out of Solomon's writings, and to have suppressed them from the view of posterity.

I proceed therefore, and take up my assertion upon the warrant of his judgment, whom God has hitherto vouched the wisest of men; and therefore see no reason to alter it, till I am convinced by a wiser.

But before I make any further progress, I must premise this; that both in what has, and what shall be said by me, I design not the patronage of ignorance, especially in things spiritual: for, in this respect, we know, and are assured by the Spirit of God, that this is the condemnation of the world, that *men love darkness rather than light*; and that *the blind* must needs *fall into the ditch*: and for any man to expect to be saved, or to be happy, with out the knowledge of the revealed will of God, in things necessary to salvation, is as great an absurdity, as to expect to see without eyes: and therefore, in these matters, he that increases ignorance increases the means of his damnation; he increases the shadow of death, adds darkness to darkness, and passes by the darkness of ignorance, to the darkness of hell and damnation.

But if any thing is indeed said against knowledge, it is against that only that is so much adored by the world, and falsely called philosophy; and yet more significantly surnamed by the apostle *vain philosophy*; and that too with no other intent, than to dash the overweening pride of those that have it, and to divert the admiration of those that have it not, to some better and more deserving object.

But as for those parts of knowledge that are either instrumental to our knowledge of the will of God, or conduce to the good and support of society, in the state that mankind now is, I must not be thought therefore to speak against them, if from the text I impartially shew those infelicities, those miseries and sorrows, that, through our sin and weakness, they are attended with. It is the effect of sin that duty is accompanied with sorrow; and that, by such an unfortunate necessity of grief, we cannot attain the joy and happiness we design to ourselves in the end, unless for a time we quit it in the use of the means.

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Now the design of this portion of scripture is to rectify the absurd opinions of the world concerning the great idol of mankind, knowledge; and to take down their excessive estimation of it, by shewing that it is the cause, or at least the inseparable companion of sorrow. And, in prosecution of the words, I shall demonstrate it to be so in these three respects.

I. In respect of the nature and properties of the thing itself.

II. In respect of the laborious and troublesome acquisition of it.

III. In respect of its effects and consequents.

I. First of all then, knowledge is the parent of sorrow from its very nature, as being the instrument and means by which the afflicting quality of the object is conveyed to the mind; for as nothing delights, so nothing troubles till it is known. The merchant is not troubled as soon as his ship is cast away, but as soon as he hears it is.

The affairs and objects that we converse with have most of them a fitness to afflict and disturb the mind. And as the colours lie dormant, and strike not the eye, till the light actuates them into a visibility, so those afflictive qualities never exert their sting, nor affect the mind, till knowledge displays them, and slides them into the apprehension.

Nihil scire vita jocundissima est. It is the empty vessel that makes the merry sound. Which is evident from those whose intellectuals are ruined with phrensy or madness; who so merry, so free from the lash of care? Their understanding is gone, and so is their trouble.

It is the philosopher that is pensive, that looks downwards in the posture of the mourner. It is the open eye that weeps.

Aristotle affirms, that there was never a great scholar in the world, but had in his temper a dash and mixture of melancholy; and if melancholy be the temper of knowledge, we know that it is also the complexion of sorrow, the scene of mourning and affliction.

Solomon could not separate his wisdom from vexation of spirit. We are first taught our knowledge with the rod, and with the severities of discipline. We get it with some smart, but improve it with more.

The world is full of objects of sorrow, and knowledge enlarges our capacities to take them in. None but the wise man can know himself to be miserable.

I might now, from the nature of knowledge, pass to the properties of it, and shew its uncertainty, its poorness, and utter inability to contribute any thing to the solid enjoyments of life. But before I enter upon this, there may be a question started, whether or no there be indeed any such thing as true knowledge in the world? For there want not reasons that seem to insinuate that there is none.

1st, As first, because knowledge, if true, is upon that score certain and infallible; but the certainty of the knowledge cannot be greater than the certainty of the faculty, or medium, by which it is acquired: now all knowledge is conveyed through sense, and sense is subject to fallacy, to err, and to be imposed upon. For how often does our eye tell us that the trees and the banks run, and that the ship or the coach stands still? How does it abridge the sun



to the compass of a few spans, to a small, ignoble circumference? It follows, therefore, that we cannot be assured of the truth of that knowledge that commences upon the fallible report of sense, indeed no more than we can be certain that a thing is true, because a known liar has affirmed it.

2dly, Knowledge is properly the apprehension of a thing by its cause; but the causes of things are not certainly known: this by most is confessed, but may be proved without confession; for since none ever assigned a certain cause of any effect, but that others, with the same probability, have assigned a clear different cause, it is most evident, that we do not certainly know the causes of things, and consequently neither the things themselves.

3dly, To know a thing is to apprehend it as really it is; but we apprehend things only as they appear; so that all our knowledge may properly be defined the apprehension of appearances. But now it is undeniable, that things oftentimes appear otherwise than they are; and when they do appear as indeed they are, yet there is no certain rule to discern that they do so.

Other arguments might be brought to shew, that it is not without cause that there is such a sect of men as sceptics in the world. And though I will not say that these arguments prove that there is no such thing as knowledge, yet thus much, at least, they seem to prove, that we cannot be assured that there is any such thing.

But you will reply, that this overthrows the hypothesis of the text, which supposes and takes it for granted that there is such a thing as knowledge. I answer, it does not: for the arguments proceed against knowledge, strictly and accurately so taken; but the text speaks of it in a popular way, of that which the world commonly calls and esteems knowledge.

And that this is but a poor, worthless thing, and of no efficacy to advance the real concerns of human happiness, might be made most evident.

For, first, it is certain that knowledge does not either constitute or alter the condition of things, but only transcribe and represent the face of nature as it finds it; and therefore is but a low, ignoble thing, and differs as much from nature itself, as he that only reports great things from him that does them. If I should run through the whole series and scale of sciences from top to bottom, I am sure I could verify this assertion.

For what am I, or any one else, the better, whether God foresees future contingents from the determination and decree of his will, or from the infinite actuality of his nature, by which his existence is beforehand with all future duration?

What am I concerned, whether he punishes sin by the necessary egress of his vindictive justice, or by a freedom of choice?

Of what such great necessity is it to know, whether Christ intended his death for all mankind, or only for a select company? when it is certain on both sides, that the benefit of his death is offered conditionally to all those, and only to those, who shall believe: and that

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upon either supposition, this proposition shall surely be verified, that whosoever believes shall be saved.

And to descend to things of an inferior nature. What is it to me, whether the will has a power to determine itself, or is determined by objects from without? when it is certain that those here, that hold a different opinion, yet continue in the same course and way of action.

Is any use of human life served by the knowledge of this, whether the vegetative, sensitive, and rational soul in man be three distinct souls, or only three denominations, from three distinct operations and offices issuing from the same soul?

Or am I any ways advantaged, whether the soul wills, understands, and performs the rest of its actions by faculties distinct from itself, or immediately by its own substance?

Is it of any moment, whether the soul of man comes into the world with carnal notions, or whether it comes bare, and receives all from the after-reports of sense?

What am I benefited, whether the sun moves about the earth, or whether the sun is the centre of the world, and the earth is indeed a planet, and wheels about that? Whether it be one or the other, I see no change in the course of nature. Day and night keep the same order; winter and summer observe the same returns; our fruit ripens as soon under one hypothesis as under the other; and the day begins no sooner nor stays any longer with Ptolemy than with Copernicus.

Or what am I bettered, whether all motion is performed by faculties, powers, or inherent qualities; or in a mechanical way, by the impulse of one body upon another, the greater overcoming and moving the less?

Who in the world finds any change in his affairs, whether there be little vacuities and empty spaces in the air; or whether there is no space, but what is filled and took up with body?

What am I altered, whether colour be a quality emergent from the different temperature of the elements, or whether it be only the reflection of the light upon the different situation of the parts of the body?

I could reckon up an hundred more such problems as these, about an inquiry into which men are so laborious, and in a supposed resolution of which they so much boast; which shews, that that which passes with the world for knowledge is but a slight, trivial thing; and that men's being so eager and industrious in the quest of it, is like sweeping the house, raising the dust, and keeping a great do only to find pins.

II. Pass we now to the second thing; which is to shew, how that knowledge is the cause of sorrow, in respect of the laborious and troublesome acquisition of it. For is there any labour comparable to that of the brain? any toil like a continual digging in the mines of knowledge? any pursuit so dubious and difficult as that of truth? any attempt so sublime as to give a reason of things?

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When a man must be led a long trace from the effect up to an hidden, remote cause, and then back again, take a survey of the several virtues and active qualities of that cause, in its many and numerous effects.

Will an ordinary industry be able to break open those rarities that God and nature has locked up, and set out of the reach of a vulgar endeavour? How hard is it to draw a principle into all its consequences, and to unravel the mysterious fertility but of one proposition!

A man must be always engaged in difficult speculation, and endure all the inconveniences that attend it; which indeed are more and greater than attend any other sort of life whatsoever.

The soldier, it is confessed, converses with dangers, and looks death in the face; but then he bleeds with honour, he grows pale gloriously, and dies with the same heat and fervour that gives life to others.

But he does not, like the scholar, kill himself in cold blood; sit up and watch, when there is no enemy; and, like a silly fly, buzz about his own candle till he has consumed himself.

Then again; the husbandman, who has the toil of sowing and reaping, he has his reward in his very labour; and the same corn that employs, also fills his hand. He who labours in the field indeed wearies, but then he also helps and preserves his body.

But study, it is a weariness without exercise, a laborious sitting still, that racks the inward and destroys the outward man; that sacrifices health to conceit, and clothes the soul with the spoils of the body; and, like a stronger blast of lightning, not only melts the sword, but also consumes the scabbard.

Nature allows men a great freedom, and never gave an appetite but to be an instrument of enjoyment; nor made a desire, but in order to the pleasure of its satisfaction. But he that will increase knowledge must be content not to enjoy; and not only to cut off the extravagancies of luxury, but also to deny the lawful demands of convenience, to forswear delight, and look upon pleasure as his mortal enemy.

He must call that study that is indeed confinement; he must converse with solitude, walk, eat, and sleep thinking, read volumes, devour the choicest authors, and, (like Pharaoh's kine,) after he has devoured all, look lean and meager. He must be willing to be weak, sickly, and consumptive; even to forget when he is an hungry, and to digest nothing but what he reads.

He must read much, and perhaps meet with little; turn over much trash for one grain of truth; study antiquity till he feels the effects of it; and, like the cock in the fable, seek pearls in a dunghill, and perhaps rise to it as early. This is

Esse quod Arcesilas aerumnosique Solones:
to be always wearing a meditating countenance, to ruminate, mutter, and talk to a man's self, for want of better company: in short, to do all those things which in other men are counted madness, but in a scholar pass for his profession.

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We may take a view of all those callings to which learning is necessary, and we shall find that labour and misery attends them all. And first, for the study of physic: do not many lose their own health, while they are learning to restore it to others? Do not many shorten their days and contract incurable diseases, in the midst of Galen and Hippocrates? get consumptions amongst receipts and medicines, and die while they are conversing with remedies?

Then for the law: are not many called to the grave, while they are preparing for a call to the bar? Do they not grapple with knots and intricacies, perhaps not so soon dissolved as themselves? Do not their bodies wither and decay, and, after a long study of the law, look like an estate that has passed through a long suit in law?

But, above all, let the divine here challenge the greatest share; who, if he takes one in ten in the profit, I am sure, may claim nine in ten in the labour. It is one part of his business indeed to prepare others for death; but the toil of his function is like to make the first experiment upon himself.

People are apt to think this an easy work, and that to be a divine is nothing else but to wear black, to look severely, and to speak confidently for an hour; but confidence and propriety is not all one; and if we fix but upon this one part of his employment, as easy as it seems to be,

Expertus multum sudes, multumque labores.

But the divine's office spreads itself into infinite other occasions of labour; and, in those that reach the utmost of so great a profession, it requires depth of knowledge, as well as heights of eloquence.

To sit and hear is easy, and to censure what we have heard much easier. But whatsoever his performance is, it inevitably puts us upon an act of religion; if good, it invites us to a profitable hearing; if otherwise, it inflicts a short penance, and gives an opportunity to the virtue of patience.

But, in sum, to demonstrate and set forth the divine's labour, I shall but add this, that he is the only person to whom the whole economy of Christianity gives no cessation, nor allows him so much as the sabbath for a day of rest.

III. And lastly, knowledge increases sorrow, in respect of its effects and consequents; in three of which I shall give instance.

1st, The first effect of the increase of knowledge is an increase of the desire of knowledge. It is the covetousness of the understanding, the dropsy of the soul, that drinks itself athirst, and grows hungry with surfeit and satisfaction; it is the only thing in which reason itself is irrational.

Now an endless desire does of necessity vex and torment the person that has it. For misery and vexation is properly nothing else but an eager appetite not satisfied.

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He that is always a getting, is always looking upon himself as in want. And he that is perpetually desiring to know, is perpetually thinking of himself ignorant; namely, in respect of those things that he desires to know.

In fine, happiness is fruition; but there is no fruition where there is a constant desire. For enjoyment swallows up desire, and that which fulfils the expectation also ends it.

But while desire is active and vigorous, and the mind still a craving and reaching at somewhat, it supposes our happiness to be at a distance; for no man reaches after what he has already.

The bottomless appetite of knowledge will not be satisfied, and then we know that sorrow is the certain result and inseparable companion of dissatisfaction.

2dly, The second unhappy effect of knowledge is, that it rewards its followers with the miseries of poverty, and clothes them with rags. Reading of books consumes the body, and buying of them the estate.

The mind of man is a narrow thing, and cannot master several employments; it is wholly employed, whether in the pursuit of riches, or in the quest of learning, and no man grew either rich or learned merely by the diversion of his spare hours.

He therefore that buries his strength, his thoughts, his opportunities, in a book, can he possibly be rich, unless Providence itself should trade for him, the Exchange follow him, and the Indies travel to him? But certainly these would be vain expectations. The east nowadays affords no such wise men, that will take a long journey only to make presents, and to give of their gold and their treasures.

Hence it is that the learned man and the philosopher *omnia sua secum portat*; he numbers no flocks, tills no acres of ground, has no variety or change of raiment, and is not solicitous which, but what he shall put on: he never aspires to any purchase, unless perhaps of some dead man's study; at the same time buying the relics of another's death and the instruments of his own.

Hereupon he is put to the worst and the most discouraging of all miseries, which is, to be beholden and obliged. For what was Aristotle without his Alexander? Virgil without Augustus? Horace with out Mecaenas? And other poets, like their own wreaths of ivy, they were always creeping about something for a support. A scholar without a patron is insignificant: he must have something to lean upon: he is like an unhappy cause, always depending.

We read of the prophet's accommodation and furniture in the house of the Shunamite, [2 Kings iv.10](#), *a little chamber, a table, a stool, and a candlestick*; and perhaps, if he had lived there for any considerable time, he would have been reckoned, not so much one of the inhabitants, as part of the furniture of the house.

These are the happy effects of study and knowledge; and as most kinds of study hinder men from getting estates, so there are some that cannot be under took without an estate, nor long pursued without the loss of it. As for instance; he that follows chemistry must have

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riches to throw away upon the study of it; whatever he gets by it, those furnaces must be fed with gold. In short, I will not say, that the study of knowledge always finds men poor, but sure it is, that it is seldom or never but it leaves them so.

3dly, The third fatal effect of knowledge is, that it makes the person who has it the butt of envy, the mark of obloquy and contention. Whoever sees another more knowing than himself, he presently thinks him a reproach to his understanding; and although he himself will not undergo the labour of knowledge, yet he will not allow another the fame.

Hence come all the jars between learned men, the invectives and bitter books, the wars of critics, and the controversies of the schools, all managed with such keenness and virulence, throwing dirt, and disgorging daggers at one another's reputation; for no other injury in the world, but because the adverse party is thought to know more.

As Grotius, in one of his poems, speaking of knowledge, and the invidiousness of it, not inelegantly expresses it,

*Quam nil sit illud quod vocamus his scire,
Quo nos superbi tollimus caput caelo.
Calcamus alios, invicemque calcamur.*

To trample, and to be trampled upon, to write and to be writ against, is the lot of the learned, the effect of learning, as it lies under the malign aspect of a constant emulation.

Now one would think that envy, which like fire aspires as well as consumes, and always soars and strikes high, should not prey upon a poor, threadbare philosopher.

Yet, if a man ventures but out of the old road, and attempts to enlarge the borders of philosophy by the introduction of some new method, or the discovery of some unheard of invention, some new phenomena in nature, what a tragical outcry is presently raised against him, all the world pecking at him, and about his ears!

How are Galileo and Copernicus persecuted, and Descartes worried by almost every pen! Dreadful are the censures thundered out against them, both from the press and the pulpit, especially by those puny, systematical theologues, whose philosophy never went beyond Keckerman, nor their divinity beyond Wollebius, and who would have all things new in the church, but nothing in the schools.

Thus must a man spend his fortune, consume his time, and rack his brain, and all to produce some birth that is like to be devoured as soon as born; to have his labours stifled or trod upon, his knowledge railed down, and his person exposed to the violence of those who are never witty but in their malice, nor extraordinary in any thing but ill behaviour.

And now, if this be our lot, what remains for us to determine upon? Is there no way to get out of this unhappy dilemma, but that we must needs either dash upon the sorrows of



knowledge, or the baseness of ignorance? Why, yes, there is a fair escape left us; for God has not placed mankind under a necessity either of sin or misery. And therefore, as to the matter in hand, it is only to continue our labour, but to alter the scene of it; and to make him, that is the great author, also the subject of our knowledge. For though there is a vanity, a sorrow, and dissatisfaction in the knowledge of created, inferior objects, yet we are assured *that it is life eternal to know God, and whom he has sent, his Son Christ Jesus.*

To which God, the fountain of all true wisdom and understanding, giving freely to those that ask, and upbraiding none, he rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for ever more. Amen.



SERMON XXXIX.

PSALM lxvi. 18.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

THIS Psalm is David's grateful commemoration of all God's mercies, together with a retribution of praise, the only recompence and return that the poor sons of men are able to make for divine favours. And David, as standing in a double relation, first of a king and public parent, under which he did not only govern, but represent his people; and, secondly, of a saint of God, under which notion it was his business to regard the peculiar interest of his own soul; so accordingly he does proportion his praises to these two several conditions: first, as he was a public person and a king, he gives thanks to God for public mercies; for he whose duty it was to love his people as himself, it was also his duty to esteem all mercies shewn to his people, at a second hand, shewn to himself. And this he does from the first to the thirteenth verse; where he praises God in respect of the glory of his majesty and the greatness of his power, which he had often employed in the miraculous deliverance of his people, from the [first verse to the eighth](#). And then for his mercy and faithfulness, not only in ridding them out of adversity, but, by seasonable afflictions, securing them from the greater danger of prosperity: and this he does from the [eighth verse to the thirteenth](#). And, secondly, as one of God's saints, so he takes a more especial thankful notice of the personal favours that God had conferred upon him: and this he does from the [thirteenth verse to the end of the Psalm](#). Wherein, for the manner of the duty, we may observe, that it is praise. As prayer is an asking or craving, so praise is a giving and returning; therefore not only a spiritual, but a kingly work; and consequently most befitting David, who was in his days not only the most religious of men, but the best of kings. And it was that which gave him no less a preeminence above other saints, than his crown gave him prerogative over his people, that he was a man of praises, of all others the most frequent and earnest in this duty: which, in this sense, excels prayer; inasmuch as gratitude is more laudable than a craving desire. It was David's best, his greatest and most lasting praise, that he made it his business to praise God. Secondly, for the matter of this praise; it was not things carnal, as the establishing his crown, and the enlarging his dominions, but it was spiritual; as in the [sixteenth verse](#), *I will declare what he has done for my soul*.

Now in this acknowledgment of his we may observe, that the greatest argument of his praise was the sense of God's gracious hearing his prayer, as appears from the two last verses, where in the verse immediately foregoing, containing the words of my text, he insinuates the reason of the success of his prayers, by shewing what would have hindered that success. He says, *If he had regarded iniquity in his heart, God would not have heard him*; therefore



he implies, that his integrity, in not regarding it, was the reason that God did hear him. And thus I have given you the resolution and model of the whole Psalm, and therein the occasion of these words that I have read unto you, together with the connection they have with the foregoing and following verses.

The words may be considered two ways: 1st, As they have a peculiar reference to David and his particular condition; and so they are a vehement asseveration of his integrity. We read the words thus; *If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me.* But the Septuagint has it, *μη̄ εἰσακουσάτω μου Θεός*; that is, *let not God hear me.* And so they are David's avouchment of his uprightness, by an imprecation, or calling for a curse upon himself, namely, God's not hearing his prayers, in case he was not really so upright, as in words he did protest himself to be. Thus Job also testifies his integrity in [Job xxxi. 7, 8](#), *If my steps have turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and any blot have cleaved to my hands; then let me sow, and let another eat.* All this is an earnest protestation of Job's steadfast walking before God. And thus the words hold forth a testimony of David's uprightness; and, compared with the following verses, are not only a testimony, but a clear proof of it; and that in a perfect hypothetical syllogism. *If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me:* then it follows in the next verse, *But verily, God hath heard me:* and adding the conclusion, *therefore I do not regard iniquity in my heart.* It amounts to a full argumentation, proving the sincerity of David's heart. Here we may note, as David does evince his integrity from the success of his prayers, as a sign and consequent of that integrity; so the hypocrite, or sinner, may invert the argument, and collect the future unsuccessfulness of all his prayers from his want of integrity; and that not only as a sign, but as the proper cause of that unsuccessfulness; in this manner, *If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me:* now the hypocrite must assume, *But I regard iniquity in my heart:* therefore he must also conclude, *God will not hear me;* he will have no respect unto my prayers. And thus much concerning the first consideration of the words.

2dly, The words may be considered absolutely in themselves, and so applicable to all men. In this sense they are a positive direction laid down in negative terms, and prescribing the way of our sincere worship of God. For interpreters do generally agree, that although David in these words intends to attest his own integrity, yet he does also no less intend to give men a rule for the regulation of their holy worship. For, by telling us that God does not respect the prayers of those that regard iniquity in their hearts, he does intimate, that the acceptation of all our holy services before God is grounded upon the inward, hearty sincerity of our souls; and therefore it ought to be our duty, both in point of reverence to God, and wisdom for our own interest, never to engage in any holy performance, without this sincerity, but especially in prayer, wherein men have the nearest address to God; and consequently, upon their sincerity, may here chiefly expect a blessing; and, upon the want of it, fear a judgment. I shall consider the words in this latter general sense; and so deduce from them

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an observation, not much distinct from the words themselves: for only by resolving them, as they lie in supposition, into a positive assertion, they afford us this doctrine:

Whosoever regards iniquity in his heart, the Lord will not hear him.

Or yet more plainly;

A man's regarding or loving any sin in his heart, will certainly hinder his prayers from having any acceptance with God.

In the prosecution of this doctrine, I shall shew,

I. What it is for a man to regard or love sin in his heart.

II. What it is to have our prayers accepted with God.

III. How regarding or loving sin in the heart, hinders a man's prayers from being thus accepted.

IV. Application.

I. Concerning the first: a man may be said several ways to love or regard sin in his heart.

1st, There is a constant and habitual love of sin in the unregeneracy and corrupt estate of the soul. For a man, as considered in his pure, or rather his impure naturals, has not only a strong, but an universal love to sin. Sin was born, and lay in the same womb with every man; therefore he must needs love it as his brother. Now, as union is generally stated the effect of love, therefore, since the union between sin and our nature is so close, we may thence also collect, that the love is very great. In this sense sin and the corruption thereof is styled *the flesh*; not only by a metonymy of the subject for the adjunct, because sin has its place and residence in the flesh; but also for the tender love and affection that we bear to it: for, as the apostle says, in [Ephes. v. 29](#), *No man hateth his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it*; and withal, because we continually carry it about us. A man may as well go abroad, and leave his body and his flesh behind him, as an unregenerate man go any whither not attended by his sin. It is called sometimes the *body of sin*, and that deservedly, because it is so nearly united to the soul. The scripture has several expressions, shewing the cursed habitual love that a natural man bears to his sin. Sometimes it is called his *right eye*, [Matth. xviii. 9](#), than which nothing is more dear, God himself sometimes expresses the greatness of his love to his children in the same terms: he regards them as the *apple of his eye*. To have one's eye continually upon any thing, argues a great love of it; but to account it as the eye itself, shews a love more than ordinary. Elsewhere, sin is called our *right hand*, [Mark ix. 43](#), the member of use and execution; and therefore most carefully tendered by man, whose nature it is to be in continual action. How dear it is, the common expression demonstrates; we say of an extra ordinary and beloved friend, he is our right hand. It is also placed and lodged in the heart, [Jerem. xvii. 9](#) which in every sinner, as it is the original of natural life, so it is the principle and fountain of spiritual death. Sin, it is the *primum vivens*, and the *ultimum moriens*; life the heart itself, which harbours it in every finally impenitent sinner: so exceedingly beloved, that many unregenerate men vouchsafe even to live and die

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with their sins; which is the highest pitch of love imaginable. Again, in [Job xv. 16](#), the wicked is said to *drink iniquity like water*. No appetite so strong as that of thirst. Hence, as it is the peculiar distinguishing property of the godly to *thirst after righteousness*, [Matt. v. 6](#), so it is of the wicked to thirst after iniquity; who quenches his present desire of sin with the actual commission of it; as a man does his thirst, that is, both with vehemence and delight. It is proper only to the drunkard to make his drink his sin; but it is the nature of every carnal man (if you will admit of the expression) to account his sin as desirable as his drink. But that we may yet further see how a natural man loves, tenders, and regards his sin; there is nothing dear and lovely to us, but the Spirit of God expresses sin by that. What more to be prized than our eyes or hands? What can or ought to be more dear to us than our heart? more desired than our food, or more amiable than life? Yet sin, we see, engrosses all the affections that ought to be distributed amongst all these. This love is yet more evident from the service a carnal man does for his sin, who bears rule over him, from his own voluntary subjection. It is the nature of love, where it is excessive, to enslave a man to the commands of the party whom he loves: as Jacob did for Rachel, so a wicked man for his sin; he will serve many years for it, and they shall seem but a few days, because of the love he bears to it. What God and nature has bestowed on man, that, man has made a full and total resignation of to sin, to be commanded, used, and employed by it: the understanding is busied to contrive iniquity; the senses to purvey and bring in provender for it, in the representation of sinful objects; the will to command and govern in the name of sin; the outward powers and members to execute those commands: so that the whole frame and structure of man is principled, and, as it were, even animated by sin: for first, it has general rule and possession of all the faculties; and, secondly, of all the actions that flow from those faculties. And then, for the perpetuity and constant course of those actions, [Gen. vi. 5](#), *they are sinful continually*, and without any intermission. In short, he that regards iniquity in his heart, in this habitual way, he so regards it as he neither does or can regard any thing else. For the force and activity of man's mind is a limited force; and as it is with our attention, so it is also with our love, it cannot be vehement and intense at the same time upon two different objects. Now, from what has been said, it follows, that in this manner a regenerate person cannot love or regard sin; and all unregenerate do.

2dly, There is a regarding of sin in the heart, that consists in an unmortified habit or course of sin: this is much different from the former, because even a child of God may thus regard sin, from the relics of corrupt nature, fired and stirred up by Satan's temptations; for the model of a regenerate state is, like that of the body, mixed and compounded of contrary principles, grace and corruption, as that is of contrary elements. And as the elements, in the composure of the body, have their qualities allayed and retracted; so these habits of grace and corruption, as they are in a regenerate soul, are not in their utmost degree and extremity. For if grace were in its full height and latitude, there could be no corruption; which is a bliss

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rather to be wished for, than ever enjoyed in this life. And, on the other hand, if corruption were in its full extent or degree, there could be no grace, and so no regeneration. For it is the nature of contraries, that one arising to its highest pitch, does, by consequence, expel and devour the other. Wherefore grace and corruption are joined and contempered in a believing soul, from which conjunction arises a possibility of the entertainment of sinful habits and dispositions, even in the regenerate, though not such as are found in the unregenerate: in the one, they defile indeed and pollute; in the other, they prevail and domineer: in the one, they separate from the sense of God's love; in the other, they take away all interest in it. Now, that there may be such sinful dispositions or habits in believers may be evinced,

1st, From example. When David had committed that gross sin of murder and adultery, if we compute the time from his sin to his repentance, which was dated from Nathan's coming to him, we shall find that he continued in it for the space of a year. Now we must know, every intense and vehement action leaves a suitable disposition behind it upon the faculty, which, if seconded by actions of the same kind, or not weakened and destroyed by actions of a contrary nature, it daily gathers strength, and gets root and fixation in the mind, till it at length becomes a sinful habit, very difficultly to be removed. So that David, after the commission of so great a sin, must needs have had a further inclination to it left upon his spirit, which, by reason also of the compliance it found with his natural corruption, daily grew more and more fixed; for, although he did not reiterate it by other external actions, yet by his internal desires and approbations he did increase and confirm it; for it cannot be imagined but that he entertained those approbations of it as long as he deferred his repentance. Hereupon he found the work of repentance so hard, and his sin so hardly moveable, when he set about the penitent removal of it; so that he cries, [Psalm xxxviii. 5](#), *My wounds stink and are corrupt by reason of my foolishness*. A wound immediately cured, soon after it was given, cannot stink or grow noisome. It is clear then, that David was not only guilty of sin, but also of continuance in sin; who, notwithstanding he was a son of God, and truly regenerate, yet had his heart overrun with a sinful habit and disposition.

2dly, It may be proved from scripture-reason, which is grounded upon those exhortations that are there made even to believers for the mortification of sin; as peculiarly, that, [Rom. viii. 13](#), the apostle exhorts even those to mortify the deeds of the flesh, who were truly ingrafted into Christ; for they were such as, he said, in the first verse, *were justified*; such, to *whom there was no condemnation*: also he bids them mortify sin *by the Spirit*; but the Spirit is to be found in none but the regenerate. Now to mortify sin, is not properly to forbear one or many sinful actions, but it is the weakening or destroying a course or habit of sin. Comparing therefore the nature of the duty with the qualification of the persons to whom it was enjoined, the apostle must seem to insinuate a possibility that even believers may be entangled and overtook in a sinful course.

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This therefore is the second kind of regarding sin in the heart; and the soul may thus love or regard sin two ways:

1st, Directly, and by a positive pursuance of it; as the following of one action by another; the backing of one sinful deed by a greater; when sin reigns by a cursed kind of succession; when one wicked action expires, another presently succeeds.

2dly, Indirectly, and by not attempting a vigorous mortification of it. In the former sense, we cherish sin by giving it food; in this second, by not taking that which it has away. Not to resist sin, and that by an indefatigable watching, striving, and praying against it, is to love it. He that does not attempt the utter ruin and death of it, does not hate it: for hatred, no less than love, is an active, restless quality, and cannot quiet itself, but in the destruction of the thing it hates. Can there be hatred, where there is agreement? Can we banish sin from our hearts, and yet hold it in our bosoms? He that is not against his sin, in a lively resistance, is for it in his affections. He that does not oppose the tempter, invites him. He that hinders not the occasion of his sin, tacitly wishes the event. *Qui non prohibet cum debet, imperat.* What mortification of sin is, in the nature, causes, and means of it, is not my present business to discourse; but let it suffice to note thus much, that it is a steady, thorough course of repentance and severe humiliation: and he that does not, by a continual rigid exercise of these duties, by hacking at the root of sin, bears a secret longing to the fruit.

And thus much of this second kind of love to sin; which consists in the cherishing an unmortified lust.

3dly, There is yet another kind of regarding sin in the heart, and that is, by an actual intention of the mind upon sin; *If I regard iniquity*: the Latin renders it, *Si aspexissem iniquitatem*; If I did behold, if I cast a gracious aspect upon sin. True it is, that the most sincere, if they look upon their heart, must also look upon sin; but then they view it another way: the wicked look upon it with an eye of complacency and delight; the sincere, with an eye of hatred and detestation. The same sin, in a wicked and a godly eye, has a contrary hue; as the same colour, through different glasses, is conveyed under a different representation. Now, to look upon, signifies to be intent upon; the actions of the eye, by an easy metaphor, signifying the intention of the mind. Interpreters, in their expositions upon this place, unanimously run this way; *Si aspexissem iniquitatem*; that is, *si prava intentione illum deprecatus fuisset*, says one; *Aspicere iniquitatem est peccato intentum esse et addictum*, says another; or, as Mollerus has it, *Cum proposito perseverandi in delicto contra conscientiam*; to regard iniquity in our heart, is to address ourselves to God in prayer, with a purpose or intention of persevering in some sin, condemned and disallowed by our own conscience. And it is added, *in the heart*, to shew how little the outward duty avails, without inward uprightness. We may have clean hands, and yet a foul heart; that is, be free from the external commission of sin, yet defiled with the desires of it. We may regard it in our minds and intentions, while we declare against it in our professions; wherefore these ought chiefly to be rectified. Having



thus shewn that there are three several ways of loving or regarding sin, I conceive the words are to be understood principally in this last sense, though not exclusively to the former; for it implies and takes them in, *a fortiore*. For if the actual intention of sin will hinder our prayers from being accepted, then much more a sinful disposition, or wicked course, as long as cherished and continued in: and if a sinful disposition disannul our prayers, then much more a state of unregeneracy. We may look upon these three under this difference. The purpose or intention of sin differs from a sinful disposition in respect of the duration and continuance of it. It is confessed, a sinful intention may be improved into a sinful course; but, considered as such, it implies no more than a bare intention; and, if cast off by an immediate repentance, it will be no more. Next, a sinful disposition differs from a state of unregeneracy, inasmuch as the precise nature of it neither implies prevalence, nor a graceless condition of the party in whom it is, both of which are absolutely implied in the other.

I have now done with the first general head, viz. to shew what it is to regard iniquity in the heart. I proceed to the

Second, which is to shew, what it is to have our prayers accepted with God: and this is to prevail with God for the obtaining the good thing we desire, by virtue of an interest in Jesus Christ, and in the covenant of grace: this is clear, from that general received truth, that the acceptance of our prayers is founded upon the acceptance of our persons: and this, we know, is from an interest in Christ: here upon Christ teaches his disciples the way of making their prayers successful, [John xvi. 24](#), *Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name, he will give it you*; that is, what you ask, upon the score of that title and interest that you have in my merits. If it here be excepted, that although he indeed prescribes asking in his name, as a means of having our prayers granted, yet he does not exclude other means. I answer; that by commanding us so frequently to ask in his name, he does imply, that there is no other way of asking aright, so as to speed in the things we request; for if there was some other way, this exhortation were of little or no force. Hence, in [Rev. viii. 3](#), we read of incense that was mingled and offered with the prayers of the saints; by which incense is meant the sweet savour of the meritorious sufferings of Christ, which alone was able to give virtue and value to those prayers which of themselves had none. And thus, by shewing what it is to have our prayers accepted, by the same is also manifest, who they are who have their prayers thus accepted; namely, those alone who have a portion in him; who cannot only ask of his Father, but also demand an answer for them; who can take what comes from our polluted lips, and perfume it with the incense of his own merits. I shall further assert and prove this truth, by removing some objections, which will naturally arise from what has been already said.

Objection. If the acceptance of our prayers bears upon the foundation of our interest in Christ, whence then is it that God hears the prayers of the wicked, who. are void of all such interest? as particularly appeal's in Ahab, a sinner of the first magnitude, no where mentioned in scripture but with some distinguishing mark of impiety; yet, upon the intervention of his



prayer and humiliation, God repeals a judgment denounced against him, and, from his own days, translates it to his son. I answer; that God, indeed, often seconds the prayers of the wicked with a blessing; but he does not give the blessing with any respect to their prayers, as the procuring cause of that blessing. But it may be replied; that neither are the prayers of the righteous any way a meritorious and procuring cause of any good thing from God; since the most exact of our endeavours are tainted with imperfection; so that, after all, we have cause to sit down as unprofitable servants. I answer; that the prayers of the righteous are not the procuring cause of any blessing, by virtue of any inherent merit in them; but by virtue of the free covenant and promise of God, who has engaged, upon the fervent and unfeigned prayers of the faithful, to grant their requests. But if it be further urged, that God says, *Because Ahab humbled himself, I will not bring the evil threatened in his days*, [1 Kings xxi. 29](#), therefore it seems that Ahab's prayer had a causal influence as to the procurement of that merciful reprieve: to this I answer, that such expressions as signify causality are often applied to those things that are only occasions of such events. And so it is here: Ahab's humiliation was no ways a procuring cause of that mercy; neither by any meritorious virtue residing in it, for the prayers of the wicked merit nothing but a denial; nor yet by any virtue that it has from any covenant made by God, who is so far from making any promise of hearing the prayers of the wicked, that he has expressly promised that he will not hear them. It was therefore only an occasion of this mercy; that is, the mercy so depended upon it, as if that humiliation had not been, he had never enjoyed the mercy; however, it was no cause of the mercy, neither deserving nor procuring. As for instance: if a rich man engage to relieve some beggars, upon their coming to his door and asking; although this their beggarly address has no value in it to merit a reward, yet, by virtue of the rich man's promise and engagement, they may challenge it: now if he give the like alms to other beggars, to whom he had made no such promises, only upon their importunity; this their importunity does here neither deserve, nor can challenge an alms; yet it may be said properly to occasion it, inasmuch as, if it had not been for this, they had gone without it. And thus, I think, it is clear, that God may bestow upon the wicked the matter they pray for, and yet not hear their prayers; that he may grant them, and yet never accept them. And let me add another thing, that discriminates the prayers of the wicked from those of the faithful; that although God often gives them the thing they desired, yet he never gives it with an intent of mercy. Thus he gave the Israelites quails, but withal sent leanness into their bones. He so gives the thing, as he still withholds the blessing. When we are importuned by any one for something against our will, we at length cast it to him with anger: so I may say, God, being wearied with the restless, importunate cravings of a sinner, does not so much give, as rather angrily throw an outward blessing at him, whose very prayer is a sin; for what is it but a kind of extortion towards God himself? What we usually say amongst ourselves in ceremony, that is here verified in respect of God; that in all his bounty, not so much the substance of the gift, as the mind of the giver,

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is to be valued and regarded: yea, as God may, and often does deny some of the prayers of the righteous, out of love and mercy; so, out of anger and judgment, he grants the prayers of the wicked; whose very petitions are oftentimes their severest indictment; and their most devout requests may be interpreted into an imprecation.

It may be objected, if those that are in a state of sin regard iniquity in their heart, how then is it possible to get out of that estate? for how can they do it but by addressing themselves to God? and how can they address themselves unto God but by prayer? and we have already shewn, that the condition they are in renders their prayers ineffectual.

To this I answer; that in their first serious resolution and purpose to turn to God, they pass from the state of sinners into the state of the penitent, and are such in God's account; and so, consequently, there is a change of their condition. For although it cannot be said, that they have repented, yet they are then repenting; though, like the prodigal, they are not come home to their heavenly Father, yet they are upon their journey. We must know repentance has several acceptions: it may be either taken for the change and alteration of the corrupt qualities of our nature, and so it is the same with sanctification, and follows faith, as the effect does its cause; and in this sense a wicked man, in his present estate, is not immediately capable of repentance. Secondly, repentance may be taken for a sincere alteration of a man's sinful purposes and intentions; and so it precedes faith; and a wicked man ought and may repent; it is a duty immediately incumbent upon him in order to his salvation. Although, when I say a wicked man may repent, and thereupon his prayers be acceptable to God; we must distinguish between the instant immediately going before his repentance, in respect of which only he is to be termed wicked; and the instant of his repentance, in respect of which he is become another man. In the same sense, therefore, that the wicked may be said to repent, they may be said to have their prayers and services accepted; that is, the wicked antecedently so taken, (and, as they speak, *in sensu diviso*,) to wit, before the instant of their repentance, not concomitantly, and *in sensu composito*; the wicked as such, and while he is such, can neither repent nor pray, nor have any audience or acceptance at the throne of grace.

And thus much concerning the second general head, viz. to shew what it is to have our prayers accepted with God. I proceed now to the

Third thing, to shew whence it is that a man's regarding or loving sin in his heart hinders his prayers from acceptance with God.

1st, The first reason is, because in this case he cannot pray by the Spirit. All prayers that are acceptable with God are the breathings of his own Spirit within us. [Rom. viii. 26](#), *We know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered.* As without the intercession of Christ we cannot have our prayers accepted, so without the intercession of the Spirit we cannot pray. No prayers can find the way to heaven, but such as first come from thence. Every sincere prayer,

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it is a beam of the sun of righteousness darted into our hearts, and from thence reflecting back again. But now, as long as sin and the love of it has dominion in the soul, the Spirit of God is silent; for as prevailing corruption and the Spirit cannot cohabit together, so neither can they work together. The motions of sin and of the Spirit often struggle in the same heart, as Pharez and Zarah did in the same womb, in [Gen. xxxviii. 29](#); the motions of the Spirit put forth their hand, but those of sin prevailing, they drew it back again, and sin comes out first. Wherefore, if any one bears a love and liking to sin, let him never expect to have his prayer accepted, till sin and the Spirit concur in the same petition.

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2dly, The second reason is, because as long as a man regards iniquity in his heart, he cannot pray in faith; that is, he cannot build a rational confidence upon any promise that God will accept him. Now faith always respects the promise, and promise of acceptance is made only to the upright: so long, therefore, as men cherish a love of sin in their heart, they either understand not the promises, and so they pray without understanding; or they understand them, and yet misapply them to themselves, and so they pray in presumption: in either case they have little cause to hope for acceptance. This reason naturally issues from the former; for whosoever prays not in the Spirit prays not in faith; and every prayer made in faith is also indited by the Spirit; only with this distinction, that in every such prayer the Spirit is the principal agent, and faith the instrumental. Here we may observe, that faith may be either taken for the habit and seed of faith, or for the act and exercise of that habit. Now the unregenerate man has not so much as the habit or principle of faith, and so upon no hand can have his prayers accepted; and he that is truly regenerate, and endued with this principle, yet while he is entangled with the love of sin, cannot act nor exercise that principle, and so neither can his prayers be acceptable. Faith causes the soul fiducially and strongly to rely and cast itself upon God in prayer: love to sin causes the soul to depart and fly off from God. Faith clears up the evidence of our title to the promises; love to sin (although we have a title to the promises by conversion) yet it slurs and takes away the evidence; and when this is gone, we cannot pray with any life and vigour. But to manifest further the nature of a wicked man's prayer not acted by faith, see [Rom. xiv. 1 23](#), *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin*. No wonder, therefore, if that which is a sin, and so consequently deserves a curse, cannot prevail for the obtaining a blessing.

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Objection. But it may be objected, if, during the time of our regard and love to integrity, our prayers (as not proceeding from faith) are sins, then it is our duty not to pray, since it is the duty of all men to forbear sin.

I answer; that this consequence is very unreasonable, inasmuch as omission of prayer is of its own nature a sin, and that a greater. And for that maxim, that it is the duty of all to forbear sin, it is to be understood of those actions, that in their own kind and nature are sins, not of those that are such by accident, and the defect of some circumstance; in which case the defect is to be amended, and not the action to be omitted. Now prayer of itself and

in its nature is good, and becomes sinful only from some adherent corruption which derives a tincture and defilement upon it; wherefore it ought to be our business to endeavour the removal of this corruption, which weakens, pollutes, and defiles our prayers, and not to cease from prayer itself. And thus much for the second reason.

3dly, The third reason is, because while we regard iniquity in our hearts we cannot pray with fervency; which, next to sincerity, is the great qualification of prayer, to which God has annexed a promise of acceptance, [Matth. xi. 12](#), *The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent alone take it by force.* [Matth. vii. 7](#), *Those only that seek are like to find and those that knock, to have admittance*; all which expressions denote vehemence and importunity. Now the cause of vehemence in our prosecution of any good, is our love of it; for proportionable to the affection we bear to any thing is the earnestness of our desires, and the diligence of our pursuit after it. So long therefore as the love of sin possesses our hearts, our love to spiritual things is dull, heavy, inactive, and our prayers for them must needs be answerable. O the wretched fallacy that the soul will here put upon itself! At the same time, it will love its sin, and pray against it; at the same time, it will entreat for grace, with a desire not to prevail: as a father confesses of himself, that before his conversion he would pray for chastity, with a secret reserve in his wishes, that God would not grant his prayer. Such are the mysterious, intricate treacheries, by which the love of sin will make a soul deceive and circumvent itself. How languidly and faintly will it pray for spiritual mercies, conscience in the mean while giving the lie to every such petition! The soul, in this case, cannot pray against sin in earnest; it fights against it, but neither with hope nor intent to conquer; as lovers, usually, in a game one against another, with a desire to lose. So then, while we regard iniquity, how is it possible for us to regard spiritual things, the only lawful object of our prayers? and if we regard them not, how can we be urgent with God for the giving of them? and where there is no fervency on our part, no wonder if there is no answer on God's.

And thus much concerning the reasons, why love to sin hinders the acceptance of our prayers: they would both admit and deserve a larger handling; but I pass to the application: which shall be only an use of exhortation to all, that in their prayers they would endeavour to come with hearts free from hypocrisy and the love of sin; and, from what has been said, make that conclusion that Paul did in [2 Tim. ii. 19](#), *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ* (especially in prayer) *depart from iniquity.* The prayer will still savour of that which lies in the heart; as the putrefaction of the inward parts give a noisomeness to the breath. God, that would not let David, because he had made great wars, and shed much blood, build him a temple, if thou earnest blood and revenge in thy heart, will not let thee worship in his temple. It was an excellent speech that Homer puts into the mouth of Hector, in the sixth Iliad; and, spoken by a Christian to the true God, from a principle of faith, might savour of good divinity. When he comes from the fight, and being entreated by his mother to sacrifice to the gods; "No," says he;



Χερσὶ δ' ἀνίπτοισι Δι λεθβειν αἶθοπα οἶνον
 Ἄζομαι· οὐδέ πη ἔστὶ κελαινεφέϊ Κρονίωνι
 Αἵματι καὶ λύθρῳ πεπαλαγμένον εὐχετάσθαι.

“I dread to sacrifice to the gods with unwashed hands;” how much more should the Christian, to the true God, with an unwashed heart; “for,” says he, “it is not decent or fitting for a warrior, besmeared with blood and dirt, to present his supplication to God.” God has declared himself a jealous God, and will be worshipped in truth: but, as long as we have holiness in our tongue, and sin in our heart, we worship him with a lie: and let none think, (as Jacob did from his father) so from God also, to extort a blessing with a lie. He that under the law, for the most part, was worshipped with the offering of lambs, will, in the gospel-worship, dispense with our bringing them, so we bring their innocence.

To press this duty of sincerity in our worship, we may take these two motives:

1st Motive. By praying to God with insincere, sin-regarding hearts, we incur the certain frustration of all our prayers. And sure, to rational men, that propose to themselves an end in all their actions, it should be some trouble to make long prayers, and to be answered with nothing but disappointment: to offer a sacrifice, like Cain, and for God to have no respect to their sacrifice: *Magno conatu nihil agere*; in much labour and pains to traffick with heaven for a nothing. This is the end of all hypocritical prayers; they are only empty words, and accordingly they vanish into wind.

2d Motive. In such prayers we are not only certain not to gain a blessing, but also we incur the danger of an heavy curse. He that comes to the wedding without a wedding garment, is not only like to miss of the feast, but also to be cast into a prison. If the leprosy of sin cleaves to thy head, God has forbid thee to enter the congregation. If lust lies burning in thy heart, if pride lies swelling in thy bosom, beware and stand off: God has commanded, if any such beast dare approach his holy mountain, that he should be struck through. And he will certainly do it; for he has made ready the sword and arrows of his vengeance for the same purpose. Jacob’s argument to his mother was good, that if his father should discern his fraud, he should not only not gain a blessing, but also bring a curse upon himself, [Gen. xxvii. 12](#). So when an hypocrite makes his false, yet specious addresses to his heavenly Father for a blessing, God may say to him, Thy voice indeed is the voice of an holy Jacob, but thy heart is the heart of a profane Esau; and accordingly he will curse him, and he shall be cursed. And no wonder; for to engage in prayer, while the heart goes a whoring after sin, what is it else, but to delude and mock the great God! And God has said, that he will not be mocked: he will not endure to have a hypocrite come and affront him to his face; if we pray only in a mockery, God will curse and punish in earnest. If the heart be torn from the body, it becomes a dead body; and the heart, separated from the prayer, makes a dead prayer: and we know, as our Saviour says, *God is not a God of the dead, but of the living*. Better one sigh and



broken expression, with sincerity, than the most long, accurate, and elaborate prayer, with hypocrisy. *Gratior est qni deorum delubris, puram castamque mentem, quam qui meditatam carmen intulerit.* A man that is in conspiracy against his king, and knows that his king understands his conspiracy, would he dare come and present with a petition? He that is in love and league with sin, is a traitor and conspirator against God; and, had he the same dread of him that he has of an earthly prince, he would know, that in such a case it is death to come into his presence. When some formal hypocrites set upon this duty, with their eyes turned up, and some forced tears, not having their hearts at all affected with the sense of that which they pretend to; if we consider the vileness of the affront, and the infinite majesty of God that is so affronted, it is an argument of his unconceivable mercy and forbearance, that such are not struck dead in the place.



But, to direct us how to pray with sincerity, I shall only give this rule: before you enter upon prayer, endeavour to prepare your hearts by a thorough and a strict examination. This, if any thing, will clear the coast. Sift yourselves by examining, as Satan does by tempting. Search and shake every corner of your heart. Ransack every passage of your life. Believe it, if any one unmortified lust, one cursed action lies undiscerned, he will trouble the peace of the whole soul. Whosoever therefore is conscious to himself of any regard or love that he bears to his iniquity, and shall yet venture to make an offering of prayer to God; let such an one *leave his gift upon the altar, and go and reconcile himself to God*, in the blood of Jesus Christ; and first sacrifice his sin, and then come and offer, and the sacrifice of his prayer shall be accepted.

To whom therefore be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON XL.

1 JOHN iii. 20.

God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

GOD, the creator of all things, an object fitter for our adoration, than our curious, but yet weak inquiries, is infinite in his being, and so consequently not to be comprehended by our finite understandings: yet, since he is pleased to command us to worship him, which we cannot rationally do, unless in some measure we know him; he is therefore also pleased to aid our weak conceptions, by several expressions of himself, which we call attributes; as, that he is just, wise, merciful, and the like: all which, according to the common notions that men have of justice, wisdom, and mercy, are not strictly and properly to be found in God; so that, indeed, these words, as by us applied to him, rather testify our reverential desires of honouring him, than at all express his nature. For our words expressing only those ideas and images of things in the mind, all which were conveyed thither through the senses, it is impossible they should properly express the nature of God, which was never comprehended by the short reach of our senses; and therefore they could not report any representation of him to the mind, which might afterwards be expressed in words. And thus, by natural ratiocination, I gather, that these words, *just, righteous, and merciful*, do not indeed exactly signify the nature and being of God. It is the prerogative of his essence not only to surpass the ken of sense, but also to nonplus the most accurate and sagacious discourses of reason. He laughs at the bold and laborious attempts of our understandings, in comprehending him: and, by his excessive brightness, wards off the eyes of the beholder, and (as we may say, by a seeming contradiction, but a real truth) is like the sun, too visible to be seen. And shall we then, poor mortals, think ourselves able to express what we are not so much as able to conceive? And, if our thoughts take in a larger compass and latitude than our expressions, (for who is it that cannot think more than he speaks?) then, certainly, if we cannot reach his essence by our most elevated thoughts, much less can we do it by our words. But the same is further demonstrable from the difference of righteousness, mercy, and power, properly so called, from any thing that is in God. For these are all qualities inherent in the soul of man, by virtue whereof he is enabled to act. For the soul being unable of itself, and by its bare substance, to advance into action, there are requisite therefore these certain qualities, by the instrumental mediation of which, it may exert its several operations. So that the soul, without its respective faculties and qualities to act by, is like an artificer without his tools: but now it is far otherwise with Almighty God in his workings, whose actions immediately stream from his essence, without the auxiliary intervention of any being distinct from himself. Where upon it must be granted, that these things, justice, mercy, &c. exist



not of themselves, but as they are shouldered and propped up by the subject in which they are; and therefore are imperfect beings, and so not properly to be found in God, whose very nature it is to be perfect. And furthermore, as they are always distinct from the essence in which they are, we thence also collect that they are not in God, who is an indivisible, absolute, and un compounded being, in whom there is nothing to be found but what is really himself. But it may be said, if these things are so, that righteousness, justice, and mercy are not really and properly in God; whence is it that the scripture so often attributes these things to him? I answer, in this, as in many other things, it speaks according to the manner of men. In the same sense it attributes hands, eyes, and ears to God, not really, but metaphorically; that by the things we see, we may, in some measure, apprehend him that is invisible. In short, therefore, righteousness, justice, and mercy, are attributed, not according to the reality of the things themselves, but by the analogy of their effects. The meaning is this: God is called merciful, because some of his actions bear a proportion to those that men exercise from a principle of mercy; and powerful, because some of his actions have a similitude to those that men exercise from a principle of power: and so of the rest. Some say the like of his decrees; who affirm, that God can no more properly be said to decree a thing, than to foreknow it, to whom all things are present. Now, according to the sense of these men, God is said to decree, because some of his actions have a likeness to such actions, as men produce under a decree or resolution. But I forbear, since I am afraid that I have gone too far in these notions already. But being, in my subsequent discourse, to insist upon one of the attributes of God, I thought it convenient to premise something of them in general.

We find mention of them all in scripture, and peculiarly the words which I have at present read to you, clearly hold forth his omniscience, or infinite knowledge. The words are plain, and need no explication; therefore I shall forthwith draw this doctrine from them, not much different from the words themselves, viz.

That God is an all-knowing God.

This may seem a principle, and therefore not to be doubted, and consequently needless to be proved. But he that has looked into controversy, and especially those two which are now the most considerable, the Arminian and Socinian, will find that their grand fallacy, their *πρῶτον ψεῦδος*, is founded upon their erroneous stinting of God's knowledge: but the first of these especially, who affirm, that God's knowledge, in respect of contingent futures, is only conditional, that is, God does not absolutely fore know that such things will come to pass; but upon supposal that such and such causes meet with such and such circumstances, then he knows such things will follow. But now, if God does not absolutely and certainly know every contingent future, it follows, that he does not absolutely will and decree it; for whatsoever he wills, he also knows; and if God does not will the future existence of it, whence comes it to exist? Certainly not from God, but from itself; for if God hereafter vouchsafes a productive influence to the actual producing of a thing contingent, which we now suppose

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future, (which God must do, or cease to be the first cause of all things;) I say, if God vouchsafes his power to give it existence, it follows, that he wills the production and existence of it at that time; for God wills a thing before he does it: and it also follows, that if he wills it at that time, he always willed and decreed it before: for to affirm that God wills the existence of a thing contingent, then in the producing of it, which before, while it was yet future, he did not will or decree; this is to make a new act of willing, which is an immanent act, and therefore not distinct from God, to begin in time; that is, to make something that is the same with God, to be in God now, which was not in him before: which is hugely absurd, if not blasphemous. Thus we see the denial of God's absolute, certain foreknowledge of all things, makes the existence of many of them entirely independent upon God, and totally from themselves; which is indeed to make him an idle epicurean God, and to deify them. And herein lies the abomination of asserting God's knowledge in respect of any thing conditional. As for the next opinion, Socinus endeavouring to assert the freedom of man's will in the highest, and observing that God's absolute, certain foreknowledge did lay an antecedent necessity upon all men's actions as to their event, he makes short and thorough work, and utterly denies his prescience. *Animadvertendum est infallibilem istam Dei praeotionem, quam pro re concessa adversarii sumunt, a nobis non admitti*, Socin. Praelect. cap. viii. And that he might not seem to blaspheme without some reason, he says, as God, though he is omnipotent, cannot yet do those things that imply a contradiction; so, though he is omniscient, he cannot know things, the knowledge of which implies the same absurdity; which, he says, will follow in asserting that God has a certain infallible knowledge of those things, which in themselves are uncertain and contingent. And thus we see, that although God's omniscience be indeed a principle, and therefore ought to be granted; yet since it is thus controverted and denied, it is no less needful to be proved. In the prosecution of this, I shall

I. Prove the proposition, and that both by scripture and reason.

II. I shall shew the excellency of this knowledge of God, beyond the knowledge of men or angels.

III. From the consideration of that excellency, I shall deduce something by way of inference and application.

I. And first for the proof of it, and that from scripture. In [John xxi. 17](#), Peter says to Christ, *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee*. Divines do here generally acknowledge, that in these words Peter makes a confession of the deity of Christ, which could not be inferred, unless there was a necessary connection between the divine nature and the power of knowing all things; for in this consists the strength of Peter's argument, proving Christ to be God; in this he ascribes a property to him that agrees only to God: as Christ elsewhere proves himself to be really a man, by assuming those properties to himself which are inseparably inherent in man's nature. Another scripture proving the same truth is that of [Heb. iv. 13](#), *All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have*

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to do; that is, (by a metaphor,) to his understanding, which, by reason of the quickness and spirituality of this sense, is often expressed by *an eye*, and knowing by *seeing*: so that the words import thus much, that God most clearly discerns and knows all things and actions, as the eye manifestly beholds those objects that are fully presented to its view. There are many other places in scripture that richly hold forth God's omniscience, but in a point so evident, these two may suffice.

Our second proof is from reason; and here our first argument shall be drawn from his works of creation and providence. It is impossible that he that made all things should not also know all things. Who is it that cannot readily acknowledge and read his own hand? What artificer is there that does not presently know and distinguish his own work? In all rational agents, before every action there is presupposed a knowledge of the thing that is to be produced by that action. So that if we grant (as I suppose none denies) that God is the maker of all things, that every creature dropped into the world through his hands, we cannot be so absurd as to deny him a distinct knowledge of those things, which with his own finger he made and fashioned. Next, his providence sufficiently declares his omniscience: if he manages, rules, and governs all things, yea sin itself, sometimes by permitting, sometimes by limiting or preventing, other times by punishing it, it clearly follows, that he has full cognizance of those things, since all these acts presuppose knowledge.

Now, from the consideration of this attribute, since it is our duty to be like our heavenly Father, let us endeavour also to resemble him in knowledge. As it is the perfection of God to know all things, so it is the excellency of man to know any thing aright. Ignorance, it is the dishonour of our nature; and he that continues in it, what does he but erect a certain kingdom of darkness in his soul? But of all knowledge, that is the most excellent, upon which depends our eternal interest; I mean, our knowledge of God in Christ: in comparison of which, God gives a very slight character of all things be sides. What more desirable in the eyes of the world than riches? What more excellent than strength, more to be admired than wisdom? Yet what says God of all these, *Jer. ix. 23, 24, Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, that exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth.* So that this is a knowledge that does not only surpass strength and riches, before which the very heathens could prefer their poor knowledge of nature; but it is such a knowledge, in comparison of which the very wisdom of men is folly. Consider also, that this is the sure way to everlasting life; so sure, that in scripture it is called everlasting life itself, in *John xvii. 3, And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.* Observe likewise, as this knowledge is called eternal life, so, on the contrary, the Spirit of God calls ignorance eternal death; *John iii. 19, And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light.* Now if there can



be any greater argument to a rational soul, to pursue after this knowledge, than the obtaining eternal life, let that soul neglect it; and, on the other hand, if there can be any stronger motive to woe a man out of his ignorance, than avoiding damnation, let him hug his ignorance as a desirable thing: let him embrace a cloud, and refresh himself under the shadow of death. But consider this, you that are ignorant of God, ignorant in the midst of teaching ordinances. O how dreadful is it, to enjoy precious means of knowledge, and only to be proficient in ignorance! As long as thou art destitute of this spiritual light and knowledge, thou art to the Devil as Samson to the Philistines without his eyes, thou must go whither he will lead thee, grind in his mill, and undergo all the slavish drudgery of sin, that a malicious Devil, that hates thy soul, can put thee to. But, on the other side, knowledge, as it makes thee in a true sense a man, so this saving knowledge of God makes thee more than a man, that is, a Christian. And remember, as the preposterous desire of knowledge was the first cause of man's unhappy fall, so the pursuit of this spiritual knowledge must be the first occasion of his recovery.

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Thus far the arguments by which we prove God's omniscience: pass we now to the second thing, which is to shew the excellency of God's knowledge, above the knowledge either of men or angels.

And this appears, 1st, From the properties of this knowledge. 2dly, From the object.

1st, Concerning its properties. The first property holding forth the excellency of this knowledge, is the exceeding evidence, and consequently the certainty of it; for though a thing may be certain, and yet not evident, yet whatsoever is evident, that also is certain. Evidence brings a property emanent from the essence and being of knowledge; it follows, that that which includes the nature of knowledge in an infinite manner, must be also attended by a most infinitely clear evidence. He that causes that innate evidence in every object, by which it moves and strikes the faculty, shall not he see? He that gives light to the eye, by which that evidence is discerned, shall not he discern? The great *intellectus agens*, that by shining upon our understandings causes us to understand, shall not he himself understand much more clearly? [John i. 9](#), it is said of Christ, in respect of his deity, *that he is the true Light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world*. It is elsewhere said of God, that he is *the Father of lights*. Indeed, the knowledge of man, upon the greatest improvements, retains a great mixture of ignorance; and all his labour, all the travail of his soul in the pursuit of science, is not able thoroughly to work out that darkness of mind which he brought with him into the world: but now God is not only light, but such a light as *with him there is no darkness at all*. And thus it is clear, that the best of human knowledge is not able to contest with the divine. But yet may not the angels, those sons of light and knowledge, those near resemblances of their Creator, may not they at least vie with the divine knowledge? Why, no. For even the angels stoop down and pry into the mysteries of God, and particularly that of the incarnation, as it is in [1 Pet. i. 12](#). Therefore they do not fully and evidentially know

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them, for these are the postures, not of those that know already, but of those that endeavour to know. But now God must needs know this great mystery, for he contrived it. In [Job iv. 18](#), he is said to *charge his angels with folly*. Certainly then he must have a transcendently perfect wisdom, far excelling theirs. From hence, therefore, we see, that the knowledge of God, even as to its clearness and pregnant evidence, is unconceivably beyond the knowledge of men or angels.



2dly, Another property of this knowledge, shewing the excellence of it, is this, that it is a knowledge independent upon the existence of the object or thing known. Man indeed receives nothing into his understanding but through his senses; and sense has nothing but what it fetches from the object. Take away sounds, and there will be no hearing; deprive us of light, and there will be no seeing. But now God beholds all things in himself; and that both eminently, as he sees his own perfection, which eminently includes all the perfection that is scattered among the creatures, as the light of all the stars is contained eminently in the sun; and he beholds them also formally, distinctly, and according to the model of their own proper beings, without looking upon the existence of the things themselves, and that two ways.

1st, By reflecting upon his power, and what he can do; he has a perfect knowledge of all possibilities, and of things that may be produced.

2dly, By reflecting upon his power and his will; he knows whatsoever shall be actually produced. For upon the concurrence of God's will with his power there is nothing else requisite, but the thing does immediately result. This is the constitutive knowledge which gives being to the thing known; in which sense it may be truly said, that God does not therefore know things because they are or may be, but they therefore are or may be because he knows them. So that this our maxim, *Non entis nulla est scientia*, is true only of finite knowledge. For God's knowledge is antecedent to the object, quite different from ours, which is borrowed from it, and so subsequent to it. As the knowledge that a builder has of an house depends not upon the actual being of it; but he knows it, partly by reflecting on his skill, in which he sees a perfect idea of it before ever it is made; and partly on his power, by which he is able to make it: but now others knowledge depends upon the actual being of the house, as flowing from those representations they have of it after it is built. And such is our knowledge in respect of God's.



2dly, The excellency of God's knowledge appears in respect of his objects; which are all things knowable.

But they may be reduced to three things especially, which God alone perfectly knows, and are not to be known by men or angels.

1st, The nature of God himself. Nothing but an infinite knowledge can comprehend an infinite being. We may as well endeavour to take up the ocean in the hollow of our hands,

or to clasp the heavens in our arms, as to understand or fathom the immense perfections of the divine nature.

2dly, The second sort of things only known to God are things future, and these are only within his reach. As for us, setting aside what we know by history, which is not so properly knowledge as belief, we know only what is present; for although we know some things that are passed also, yet we first know them as they were present; and the reason is, because we know things by our coexistence with them. Now God, by reason of the infinite compass of his being, running through all the distinctions of time, by an intimate coexistence with them, and consequently with all things that do exist in those several and successive parcels of time, he takes a full survey of things, both past, present, and to come; which, though it be an undenied principle both in Christian and natural theology, and consequently to be rather granted as a self-evident truth, than disputed as a problem, yet he, who shall look into the writings of the Pelagians, Jesuits, or their Dutch brood, the remonstrants, will find that their grand fallacy, their *πρωτον ψευδος*, is founded upon their erroneous stating of the divine knowledge; by which they affirm, that God's knowledge, in respect of future contingents, is wholly conditional. For as by one simple act of his being he does coexist with all successive durations, so by one act of his understanding he does also know them. To help our apprehensions in this thing, we may take this similitude: a man walking in a path sees not that part of the way that is behind him, neither that which is any great distance before him, but successively comes to see it, as by degrees he arrives to and coexists with it: but now he, that is upon an high mountain or tower, by one single cast of his eye takes a view of the whole path, and at once sees the man, and what is behind him, and what so remote before him. Just so man, who exists in some part of time, neither properly knows those things that were before he was, nor those things that are future, but as he gains a successive coexistence with them. But God, being (as I may say) exalted upon his own essence, does from thence, as from an high and lofty place, by one single act of his understanding, take a survey of us that are in the world, and those things that are past and behind us, together with those that are before us, and yet to come.

Now, things future are of two sorts.

1st, Such as depend upon necessary causes, that is, those that constantly, and in the same manner, produce their effects: such are the sun and moon, in respect of the eclipses; and the heavens, in respect of many things here below. So that their effects, though future, may be yet known in the causes. For we can foretell an eclipse many years before: and while it is yet winter, we know that within such a period of days it will be summer. Now, in respect even of these future things, the knowledge of God, and of the creature, is very different: God, indeed, certainly knows when they will come to pass. Men and angels indeed have also a certain knowledge of them: but it is not absolute, but only suppositional; that is, upon supposal that such and such things continue in their being, and that God withal affords



them his ordinary concurrence, such and such effects will certainly follow. But the causes themselves may perish; and God, that created nature, may, by the same power and sovereignty, interrupt it in its course; as he did the sun in the time of Joshua, [Josh. x. 13](#), and the operation of that fire upon the three children. Now, in this case, neither men nor angels can certainly know or determine of such futures.

2dly, The second sort of things future are things in their nature occasional and contingent; such as come by chance, and such as depend upon the free will of man, which is various in its working, and consequently, that which is produced by it, must needs be uncertain in the event. Now it is the prerogative of God alone to have a steady foreknowledge of such things; no created being can dive into them: that man cannot, as reason would sufficiently prove, so scripture also does no less clearly demonstrate. [Isaiah xlvii. 11](#), God speaks to Babylon; *Evil shall come upon thee, and thou shalt not know from whence it ariseth: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know*: hereupon, in the two next verses, he defies them to find thorn out with all their sorceries and enchantments; in the twelfth verse, *Let now the astrologers and prognosticators stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee*. If any man could foresee future events, then certainly it would be those who made it their business and their profession; those who had not only their own understanding, but all the light of heaven to direct them. A man may as easily draw the perfect picture of a man yet unborn, as have in his mind the idea of a contingent future.

Who knows what a day may bring forth? God has put obscurity between us and the nearest futures: there is night between us and the very next day. To the proofs drawn from scripture, we may add the over plus of our own experience. And that angels are also to seek in the certain knowledge of these things, is no less true. Had those fallen angels, before their sin, foreseen what would have followed it, we cannot but in reason imagine, that the foresight of their fall would have kept them from their sin. Hereupon the Devil, in the heathen oracles, when he was consulted about future events, gave always doubtful, ambiguous answers; so that, howsoever the thing fell out, he had still a salvo, or evasion, in the ambiguity of the expression. It is confessed, that sometimes his predictions have been answered by the event of the thing; but then this was rather from the happiness of his conjecture, than the certainty of his knowledge. And, as one says, "Angels have the advantage of us in respect of their experience, which is far greater in them than in us, both because they have been of longer duration and continuance in the world, and also because of the piercing quickness of their understandings, in comparing one thing with another; and from thence making conjectures at other things." Now experience is a reiterated or repeated knowledge of things past; from whence arises an ability of judging or guessing at things future. And thus far angels can go, and no further. As for that argument, by which some would prove that angels know things future, because distance of time and distance of place are equally accidental differences; and

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we know distance of place does not impede the knowledge of angels; therefore they may know things, notwithstanding the difference of time, that they are future: I say, this argument proves nothing, because the case is not the same, in respect of difference of place and of time. Distance of place always supposes the existence of the things that so differ: futurity, which is a difference of time, puts a nonexistence of the thing; for that which is future, is not yet in being. And since all created knowledge follows the existence of the thing known, there can be no knowledge of that which does not exist, but of that which either exists, or is supposed and looked upon as existing. But now, God knows contingent futures, yea, and that certainly and infallibly; and the reason is, because the most contingent being, when and while it actually exists, is, in its being, necessary: *Omne quod est, quando est necessario est.* But all things are present to God; they are looked upon by him as under an actual existence; from whence we may collect, that he has a certain and necessary knowledge of them.

3dly, The third sort of things, known only to God, are the thoughts of men: it belongs to the sovereignty of God's omniscience alone to judge and know these: [Psalm cxxxix. 12](#), *Thou understandest my thoughts afar off.* This is attributed to God by way of eminence; and every such thing is not only proper, but also peculiar to him; so as to be communicated to nothing else: for that cannot be ascribed to God by way of distinction, which is also common to the creature. Angels indeed do exactly know our constitutions, and so can read the general inclination of our thoughts in them, but not the particular determination of them, *quoad hic et nunc*, in respect of particular objects and circumstances; and also, when the thoughts move and stir the passions, and the passions work some change on the body: for, as natural philosophy teaches, every passion (which is a motion of the sensitive appetite) *fit cum aliqua mutatione corporis non naturali.* I say, in this respect, the angels may know the thoughts, as they betray themselves in some outward, corporeal sign; but by any immediate inspection of the thoughts themselves, so they are not able to discern them. It is a privilege that God has given to our nature, to be able to conceal our thoughts; next to that by which we are able to communicate them: [Jerem. xvii. 9](#), *The heart is deceitful above all things; who can know it?* None can read the thoughts, none can behold the intentions and desires, but that God, who vouchsafes an influence to the production of every thought, and every desire: [1 Cor. ii. 11](#), *Who knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man that is within him?* It is well known, that these interrogations imply strong denials. Who can know the things of man? that is, none can know them: they are not subject to the inspection of any being, but God. For notwithstanding this universal negation, we must of necessity except him, because the scripture elsewhere makes a peculiar exception of God, even there, where it affirms that the heart cannot be known, [Jerem. xvii. 10](#), *I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins.* From hence therefore appears the transcendent excellency of God's knowledge beyond all created, that it is able to pierce into men's thoughts.

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I proceed to make some application; and to see what uses may be deduced from the consideration of God's omniscience: it may serve as an argument to press several duties upon us.

1st, It must be a strong motive to bring us to a free confession of all our sins to God. God's omniscience, or infinite knowledge, should indeed make us ashamed to commit sin; but it should embolden us to confess it. We can commit and tell our secrets to a friend that does not know them; how much more should we do it to him that knows them already! God's knowledge outruns our confessions, and anticipates what we have to say. As our Saviour speaks concerning prayer, *Your heavenly Father knows what you have need of, before you ask*, [Matt. vi. 8](#), so I may say of confession, your heavenly Father knows what secret sins you have committed, before you confess. But still he commands this duty of us; and that not to know our sins, but to see our ingenuity. Adam, when he hid himself, to the impiety of his sin added the absurdity of a concealment. Our declaring of our sins to God, who knows them without being beholden to our relation; it is like opening a window to receive the light, which would shine in through it howsoever. Every man has *fenestratum pectus*, a casement in his bosom, through which God looks in upon him every day. When a master sees his servant commit a fault in secret, and thereupon urges him to a confession, he does it not so much to know the fault, as to try the man. Now there is no duty by which we give God the glory of his omniscience so much as by a free confession of our secret iniquities. [Joshua vii. 19](#) Joshua says to Achan, *My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him*. Here we see, had he not confessed his theft, he had been guilty of a greater, to wit, the robbing God of his glory. Thus the widow of Tekoah, by confessing her design and project to David, gave him the glory of his wisdom and knowledge. Hereupon having confessed it, she says, in [2 Sam. xiv. 20](#), *My lord the king is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are done in the earth*. God seems to compound with us, and, in lieu of satisfaction, only to require our confession; [Jerem. iii. 12, 13](#), *I am merciful, saith the Lord, and will not keep anger for ever: only acknowledge thy iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God*. Nay, God commands us to confess our sins, not so much that he may know them, as that we may know them ourselves. For while sin sits close in the heart, we cannot see it till we cast it forth by confession; as a man cannot see the corruption that is in his stomach, till he spits it out. But howsoever, the impossibility of concealing our sins from God's omniscience, is the great reason why we should confess them; for as we cannot rescue them from his justice, so neither can we hide them from his knowledge. God's omniscience, together with his justice, represents him to a secret sinner like a flaming fire; which by its heat consumes, and by its light discovers. Wherefore, to confess our sins, since we are not able to conceal them, what is it, but in a spiritual sense to make a virtue of necessity?



2dly, The consideration of God's omniscience may enforce us to an humble submission to all God's commands and directions, and that both in respect of belief and of practice.

1st, And first, concerning things to be believed. There is such a depth in these, and such a seeming contradiction to reason, that our natural understandings are apt to quarrel, and find absurdities in them, and to dispute against that which we cannot comprehend. Hence, in [Eph. iii. 1 9](#), the apostle prays, that we may *know the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge*. Here we should captivate the vain reasonings of our blind understandings, and answer the defect of our knowledge, by the infiniteness of God's; who knows a reason of whatsoever he commands, and of whatsoever we ought to believe. When we hear the mystery of the Trinity, that three subsistencies are contracted into one essence, and one essence enlarged into three subsistences; when we hear of two natures conjoined in the same person, the creator and the creature, united in Jesus Christ; our reason is nonplused and amazed, and cannot satisfy itself from any of its own principles. When we hear of the resurrection, that, after our bodies are destroyed, and by continual transmutation brought to be clean another thing, then for the same numerical bodies to be restored, and all the scattered parts to be renewed, and return to their proper places; so that with Job we should be enabled to see our Redeemer *with these very eyes, and no other*, [Job xix. 26, 27](#). when we hear of the mysterious, hidden works of the Spirit in our regeneration, and the begetting of new principles within us, so as to change and alter our nature; that he, which by his constitution is in temperate and furious, should be made temperate and meek; that he, which by his education is profane and worldly, should, by the secret, forcible operation of the Spirit, become holy and spiritually-minded: I say, this startles and confounds us; and we are apt to say with Nicodemus, *How can these things be?* We cannot, from any topic of reason or philosophy, give a rational account of them. But here we should know, that although these things are not intelligible by men, yet they are to the all-knowing God. And although our reason cannot discern or comprehend these things, yet *God is greater than our reason, and knoweth all things*.

2dly, The consideration of God's infinite knowledge ought to make us comply with God's commands in things concerning our practice, and that even in those duties, that to our natural judgments may seem unreasonable. He that renounces the dictates of his own carnal wisdom, and prosecutes the ways prescribed to him by God, has set to his seal, that God is wise, and infinitely more knowing than himself. For all our disobedience, our relinquishing the ways of God, and adhering to our own, may be resolved into this; that men think they know a nearer way to happiness than God has prescribed them; which, how derogatory it is to the all-knowing wisdom of God, let our own reason be judge. Why do we follow the advice of our physicians and lawyers, but from the opinion we have of their knowledge and experience? Absalom, by not doing according to Ahithophel's counsel, did in that clearly undervalue his wisdom; and the discredit of that made Ahithophel hang himself. Now the most wise and omniscient God, that knows the utmost of sin, that knows



what it is for a sinner to be saved, and to escape the stroke of his justice, does, in order thereto, command us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, to renounce our dearest pleasures, our nearest relations, as they stand in competition with Christ; yea, to prefer the most unpleasant duty before the most pleasing sin. Here flesh and blood is at a stand; and as it cannot endure the strictness and rigour, so neither can it see the reason of these commands. But what Elijah said to Israel in the case of Baal, that I may here apply, *Why halt we between two opinions?* If God, who has commanded and enjoined these duties, be the all-knowing God, why do we not then, without any further delay, perform them? If he be not, why do we then give him divine worship? Wherefore I shall conclude with this most certain truth: there is no such way of giving God the glory of his infinite knowledge, as by an obediential practice of those duties and commands which seem most to thwart and contradict our own.

3dly and lastly, Since it is an express command of our Saviour himself, that *we should be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect*; why should we not, according to our weak model, endeavour to copy out this divine perfection upon our soul, as well as any of the rest? And why, as well as we are commanded to be like him in his goodness, bounty, and mercy, we should not endeavour to resemble him in knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, according to our weak capacity? For this is not to say, as Lucifer, *I will ascend, and be like the Most High*; nor to follow what he suggested to our first parents, *Ye shall be like gods*: for had they affected to be like God in knowledge, as they ought to have done, they would have certainly discerned the cheat of the serpent, and the trials which the Devil was then putting upon them. No; it is no arrogance for us to endeavour to be like God, in passing a right and true judgment upon all things that concern us; in judging of holiness, as God judges; in judging of sin, as God judges of every thing relating to our temporal or eternal happiness or misery. *God, says the apostle, is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.* We do not disparage nor rival the great fountain of light, the sun, by endeavouring to have as much of his light in our houses as we can. We have our rule and measure to proceed by, in our imitation of our heavenly Father, in this respect, as well as in any other: for as it is the perfection of God to know all things, so it is the excellency of man to know any thing aright.

To God, therefore, be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

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SERMON XLI.

JONAH iii. 8, 9.

But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: you, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

THE business of the day is not unknown to you: we are called by public authority to the work of humiliation; and the cause and occasion of this work you are acquainted with, to wit, the deplorable eruption of a sad distemper in sundry parts of the nation; and the cause of this we are to know is sin. There is no calamity, but, if we track it to its original, we shall find it issue from sin. They are the distempers of the soul that cause the distempers of the body; therefore, if we would recover our bodily health, we must begin the cure at the soul. Fasting and humiliation is a sovereign remedy to evacuate all spiritual distempers; and what is true in physic of the body, *tertia pars morborum sanatnr jejunio*, that the third part of diseases is cured by fasting, is much more true in divinity in respect of the soul; that not only some, but all its diseases are removed, or at least weakened and diminished, by a spiritual fasting.

In this chapter we have the example of a fast celebrated by heathens, but worthy of the imitation of the best Christians; and if we do not fast and humble ourselves, now a judgment is actually lying upon us from God, certainly the men of Nineveh *will rise up in judgment against this generation, and condemn it*; for they fasted and humbled themselves upon the very approach of a judgment.

Here are several things considerable.

1st, Jonah's denunciation of a judgment of God impendent upon them.

2dly, Their humiliation upon the hearing of this judgment; in which fast or humiliation there is considerable,

I. The manner of it; which consists in two things:

1st, The external humiliation of the body.

2dly, An internal, spiritual separation from sin.

II. The universal extent of it, *Let man and beast*, &c. and withal the particular application of it, [ver. 8](#), *let them turn every one from*, &c.

III. The ground or motive of this humiliation; which was hope of mercy, and a pardon upon the exercise of this duty.

The words will afford several observations.

1st, The consideration of a judgment approaching unto, or actually lying upon a people, is a sufficient argument for fasting and humiliation, [ver. 4, 5](#).



2dly, That an afflicting of the body is a good preparative to the humiliation of the soul. [ver. 6, 7.](#)

3dly, That the nature of a fast more especially consists in a real, sincere separation from sin. [ver. 8.](#)

4thly, That national sins do deserve national humiliation, [ver. 5.](#)

5thly, The best and most effectual way to remove a national judgment, is for every particular man to inquire into and to amend his own personal, particular sins. [ver. 8.](#)

6thly, Upon a serious humiliation for, and forsaking of our sins, there is sufficient argument in Cod's mercy to hope for a removal of the severest judgment, [ver. 8.](#)

I chiefly intend the discussing the five observations; but I shall speak something to them all.

1st *Obs.* Concerning the first: That the consideration of a judgment, &c. Extraordinary cases call for extraordinary services. Every judgment overspreading a nation is an extraordinary judgment; and fasting bears some proportion to it, as being an extraordinary duty. When God shall shake his sword over a nation, and the inhabitants take no notice of it; when he shall begin to take hold of judgment, and the people not take hold of his mercy in prayer and repentance; these are sad symptoms of a decaying, if not perishing state. When the son sees his father about to whip him, and has already laid hold of the rod, will he not fall down upon his knees, and ask him pardon? Now we ought to humble ourselves under a judgment upon several accounts.

1st, Because in every judgment God calls for humiliation; they are the alarums of the Almighty, by which he terrifies and awakens sleepy souls. We read of the *voice of God's rod*, [Micah vi. 9](#), and the rod of God in every judgment speaks this; either that we should begin or renew our repentance. For a people to hear the dreadful voice of a displeased God in a judgment, and yet not to be wrought upon to proceed to a speedy humiliation; it is like Samuel's hearing the Lord speaking to him when he was a child, in the midst of his sleep; the voice comes, and awakes him, he hears it, yet takes little notice of it, but presently returns to sleep again. If we can so pass over the voice of God in a judgment, as presently to return to our former sleep and security, it is an act of high contempt and disobedience.

The proudest of the heathens, and the greatest contemners of a Deity, yet would be amazed, and endeavour to hide themselves when they heard it thunder. Could the voice of the cloud make them shrink and tremble, and shall not the voice of a national judgment make us mourn and repent? God calls for mourning and lamentation, his voice is plain and loud, and woe be to us if we do not hear it.

2dly, We ought to humble ourselves under every judgment, because it deserves our humiliation: though this be an unpleasing duty to the flesh, yet it is abundantly countervailed by the greatness of the trouble it does remove. Not only Christianity, but nature bids us mourn under an affliction. To what do we reserve our sorrows, if we do not spend them



upon this occasion? [Lament. iii. 48](#), *Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water, for the destruction of the daughter of my people*. The prophet found no such time for weeping as the time of public calamity. Then did Hezekiah mourn and humble himself, when there was a devouring army of the Assyrians approaching. If the securing of your health, your lives, your temporal, your spiritual estates, does not merit the deepest of our humiliations, our strongest wrestlings with God in fasting and prayer, then keep these duties for something that may better deserve them.

2d *Obs.* That the affliction of the body is a good preparative to the humiliation of the soul: thus we see in the second of Joel, where there was a solemn fast proclaimed, and directions given for the keeping of it, it is said, in the [sixteenth verse](#), *Let the bride groom go out of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet*. Bodily and sensual enjoyments must be laid aside; and that which is prescribed to us for the right celebration of the sabbath, *that a man should not find his own pleasure*, in [Isaiah lviii. 3](#), is upon the same account requisite to a due performance of this duty. Sensual delights are not consistent with spiritual services.

Now the reasons that the affliction of the body is so good a preparative to the humiliation of the soul, are,

1st, Because the operations of the soul do much follow the disposition and temper of the body. There is a near connection and a sympathy between these two. There can scarce be grief and pleasure in one, but the other partakes. Pleasure! it melts the soul through the body, as lightning does the sword through the scabbard. Can the body be pampered, and the soul not grow wanton? Can the carnal objects of sense be received, without leaving a tincture upon the mind? When the body is filled and feasted, the soul is not in so fit a posture to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Herod, after his feast, is fit to behead, but not to hear John Baptist.

2dly, The afflicting of the body, it curbs the flesh, and makes it serviceable to the spirit. The flesh is unruly, and repugnant to the yoke of a spiritual service; it has a natural averseness to them, and as long as it is indulged, the opposition is so much the stronger: wherefore, if we would keep our hearts close to so heavenly a duty, we must sequester them from the incentives of carnal objects. *I keep under my body*, says St. Paul. In all these engagements the spirit must keep under the body, or the body will be above the spirit. The body is and ought to be the soul's instrument in the execution of all duties; but if it be not rightly fixed and disposed, it may recoil upon the soul, and hurt it: as a hatchet, if not rightly ordered, may fly off, and mischief him that uses it. O let us therefore lay aside all flesh-pleasing vanities; let us abandon those delights that encumber the soul, that clip its wings, and hinder its aspiring to heaven. It will be part of our happiness and perfection hereafter to have spiritual bodies; let us endeavour to make them so now: *Canst thou not watch with me an hour?* says Christ: *canst not thou fast with me a day?* It is our duty to deny ourselves in these outward refreshments, so far as it may quicken and enable us to a more nimble performance of so



severe a duty. Let us follow the example of the Ninevites in the text; *Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth*. Let our brutish part, our body, as well as our manly part, our soul, be brought under the spiritual yoke of humiliation. But it may be here said,

(*Objection.*) Is not this contrary to what our Saviour prescribes in the gospel, who in express terms forbids us this afflicting of the body, in our fastings; [Matt. vi. 16, 17, 18](#), *When ye fast, be not as hypocrites, of a sad countenance, &c.* Now, how can this scripture consist with the truth of this doctrine, that the affliction of the body tends to advance the devotion and humiliation of the soul?

In answer to this, we may observe;

1st, That Christ does not absolutely forbid them to be of a sad countenance, but with this qualification; *Be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance*. There is a difference between a religious and an affected sadness; between a due composure, and a dissembling of the countenance: one is spiritual duty, the other is spiritual pride; one adorns, the other destroys humiliation. And those that do in this manner, and for this end, disfigure their faces, that they may appear to fast, they make themselves more deformed in the eyes of God than in the eyes of men.

2dly, Christ does not forbid such a sadness of countenance as was the natural effect of an inward sorrow. For as it is said, *Mine eye affecteth mine heart*, Lament, iii. 51, so the heart will affect the eye; spiritual sorrow will break out into the countenance. But the Pharisees had a peculiar way among themselves, of making and deforming their faces, in their days of fasting; in which they placed the chief part of the duty, (as the papists do in whipping themselves;) and it was against this abuse that Christ cautioned his disciples. For when he bids them, on the contrary, anoint their head, and wash their feet, it was not meant of ornament, but of a decent dressing of themselves, according to the custom of those places. So that he does not here oppose jollity and looseness to a due and serious sadness, so as to command that in the room of this; but he does oppose a prudent decency to an absurd superstition. And thus much in answer to this objection, and concerning the second observation.

3d *Obs.* I proceed now to the third; viz. That the nature of a fast especially consists in a real, sincere separation from sin. The truth of this will appear from these considerations.

1st, That fasting, it is a spiritual duty: the humbling of the body indeed is required, not so much as a part, as an instrument of this duty: it is separation from sin that God requires, and the soul must intend; it is thy heart, and not thy stomach, that God would have empty. It is not thy outward mourning or complaining, not the presence of thy body in the church, not thy abstaining from bodily food, that makes a fast; for what does it avail thee to forbear thy meat, if thou dost feed upon thy sin? What does the sackcloth and the ashes, if thou art not clothed with righteousness? God overlooks and rejects all these services, as a piece of a provoking mockery, if they are not attended with a sincere renouncing of thy sin. Thou

mayest have a thin, pining body, and yet a luxurious soul: thou mayest hang the head, like a bulrush, and yet aspire in thy mind, like a Lucifer. Let us not deceive ourselves, for God is not deceived. If our sin abides, after all our fasting, we shall return to it with a greater appetite. To leave our sin, and exercise the opposite duties of holiness, this is that which gives a relish and a savour to all our humiliations before God. In [Isaiah lviii. 4, 5, 6](#), God roundly tells his people what was truly a fast, and what was no fast, in his esteem.—Not to abstain from bread, but to deal it to the hungry; this is properly to fast: not to wrap thyself in sackcloth, but to cover and clothe thy naked brother; this is to be humbled. Hence, in [Jerem. xxxvi. 6, 7](#), we have the prophet presenting the children of Israel, upon their fasting days, with a catalogue of God's commands: this was their bill of fare upon such days.—Take therefore a survey of the state of thy soul. Is there such a corruption in thy heart? remove it; such a sin in thy hands, such a blot upon thy conscience? wash it out with the tears of a true repentance. He that only forbears his meat, and not his sin, the beasts of Nineveh kept as good a fast as he. It is as unseemly to come to a fast with a foul heart, as to dinner with foul hands.

2dly, The nature of a fast chiefly consists in our separation from sin, because this is the proper end of it. As the end of eating is to strengthen the body, so the end of fasting is to strengthen the soul. For as our Saviour speaks of some unclean spirits, [Matt. xvii. 21](#), so it is true of some kind of sins, that they are not to be cast out but by fasting and prayer. This is the greatest means of mortification of sin, and that which of all others carries it on most effectually; it is that which lays the axe to the very root of our corruption. It is a duty that is marked out by God's institution, for this very purpose. David, that was most in this work of mortifying his sin, that omitted the use of no means that might weaken his corruption, he gives us an account of what course he took; [Psalm cii. 4](#), he tells us, *that he forgot to eat his bread*; and [Psalm cix. 24](#), *that his knees were weak through fasting*. Now all that he aimed at in this, was the getting the upper hand of his corruption, that he might starve his sin. So that it follows, that if our fasting attain not the proper end for which God designed it, it falls short of its nature, and cannot properly be called a duty. True it is, that one end of a religious fast is to prevent or remove God's judgments; but how does it effect this? Is it not by removing sin, that is the cause of those judgments? No humiliation ever took off an affliction, before it first took off the sin. Misery is the natural consequent of iniquity; and he that endeavours to rid himself of one, before he has freed himself of the other, would hinder the streams before he has stopped the fountain. Humiliation! it quenches the wrath of God, by removing the combustible matter of sin, upon which it preys. When this affords no fuel, God's anger ceases to burn. A plague, or a disease, sent from God, will scarce be able to hurt or infect that soul, which has cleansed and purged off all its ill humours by a thorough humiliation. It is clear therefore, that the removal of sin is the very essence of this duty, without which all other humbling ourselves is so far from being profitable, that it is abominable; [Joel ii. 13](#),

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Rend your hearts, and not your garments. If the heart be not torn off from sin, to rend only the garment, it further provokes God, and (as I may so speak) makes the breach wider. To what purpose does the riotous drunkard strain himself to a fast, if he does not from this gain strength against his intemperance? To what end does the profane, the covetous, the neglecter of sabbaths, engage in this duty, unless he gathers spiritual strength, to walk more closely with God for the future? This we must know, that there is no religious duty that attains its end, but when it weakens our sin.

And thus much of the third observation.

4th *Obs.* National sins deserve national humiliation: there must be some proportion between sin and sorrow. Humble repentance is to cure us of our sins and miseries; and there can be no cure wrought, unless the plaster be as broad as the sore. If a whole nation sins, a whole nation must also repent, or perish. If a whole world corrupts itself before God, it must either be humbled or be drowned. The highest to the lowest have provoked God; there has been a joint concurrence in sin, therefore all must jointly concur in humiliation. When a distemper has seized the whole body, there must be a general change of the whole habit and frame of it, otherwise no sound recovery can be expected. The body of a nation should speak to God, as Peter did to Christ, when he washed his feet; *Lord, wash not my feet only, but also my head and my hands.* Let thy Spirit enable, not only the vulgar sort, but the great ones, to abase themselves in tears and repentance. The spirit of humiliation should be like Aaron's precious ointment, running down from the head to the skirts and hem of his garment. This was the custom of the religious princes of Judah, when they were to deal with God about public mercies; they knew their sins were general, and therefore that their humiliation was to be of the same extent; [2 Chron. xx. 3, 4](#), *And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah:* and [Jerem. xxxvi. 9](#), it is said of the princes of the people, *that they proclaimed a fast before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem.* Now the reasons that there is such an universality required in our humiliations, may be,

1st, Because a general humiliation tends most to solve the breach of God's honour. A prince that has been offended by a general rebellion, cannot be appeased but by a general submission. This is a lively acknowledgment of God's majesty; when a nation shall lie in the dust before him; when he shall be praised and adored in the great congregation: by this we confess him the Lord of nations; and that he is able to destroy us, though we unite ourselves into multitudes; and that we need be humbled, and tremble at his power, as much as if we were but one single person.

2dly, Generality gives force and strength to humiliation. When an army of humble penitents be sieges heaven, it is hard, if their prayers do not force their way through: *Credidimus junctas fortius ire preces*; many hands give despatch to a difficult business. And humiliation is a very hard task, and justly requires many helping hands to be lift up together



in prayer. General sins are strongest to bring down a judgment; therefore, general humiliation must needs be strongest to prevent it. I proceed to the

5th *Obs.* viz. That the best and most effectual way to avert a national judgment, is for every particular man to inquire into, and to amend his own personal, particular sins.

I shall prove the truth of this assertion by several reasons.

1st, Because particular sins oftentimes fetch down general, universal judgments. Sin, like a leprosy, though it begin in a small compass, yet it quickly, in the effects of it, overspreads the whole. It may first appear like that cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, [1 Kings xviii. 44](#), but it presently overclouds and darkens the heavens over us, and showers down the heaviest of God's judgments. Adam's sin was but the sin of one man, and yet how large and extensive were the dimensions of the curse! it diffused itself to all his posterity, and that in all places, in all ages. When David numbered the people, none but David sinned; yet all Israel felt the smart of the punishment, thousands fell under the pestilence: the penalty of this sin was as large as his dominions; the curse, it reached from Dan to Beersheba. But here it may be replied, these indeed were public persons, and their offences public, and therefore the punishment might be so too. But then what shall we think of Achan? he was no public person, no governor, no representative of a people; yet we see his one particular trespass, in meddling with the cursed thing, caused the whole armies of Israel to fly before their enemies: that one sin chased a thousand, and put ten thousand to flight, [Joshuah vii](#). And again, did not the sin of a few profane Benjamites scatter and almost devour a whole tribe? [Judges xx](#). From these examples we may make this natural conclusion to ourselves, that what God did then, if he please, he may do the same now.

The reasons that God sometimes, for particular sins, inflicts general judgments, may be these.

1st, To shew us the provoking nature of sin; and that we live upon the score of mercy, and not by any title that we claim to life from our own righteousness: it is a mercy that God does not destroy for the sins of other men. Was it not a singular mercy to Lot, that he was delivered from the common destruction, though he never shared in the common sin? The righteousness of the whole world, since the fall, is not able to save one man; but the sin of one man, if God should deal according to the rigour of his justice, was enough to destroy a whole world.

2dly, God deservedly sometimes sends a general judgment for a particular sin; because, though the sin is particular, in respect of the subject and cause of it, yet it may be general, in respect of its contagion. The plague, though but in one man, yet it is able to derive a general infection over a whole city. Thy sin, though the commission of it abides upon thy particular person, yet thou dost not know how far the example of it may spread. David's murder and adultery, as to the personal guilt of it, went no further than himself; but we



know the scandal of it was very infectious; it caused the enemies of God to blaspheme: God therefore may deservedly avenge particular sins with general judgments.

2dly, As some particular sins are the total cause of a general judgment, so all and every particular sin shares and contributes its part in the bringing down of a judgment upon a nation, though it be not always the only cause of that judgment: a universal sin is made up of many particulars: if there were no personal, there could be no national sin. We may look upon our own particular miscarriages as small things, and not discernible in so great a crowd; we may think, that the sins of one man are no more considerable, in respect of the sins of a nation, than one man is in comparison of all the inhabitants of the nation: yet one man's sin, though in itself it should be weaker, yet, as it is joined with the sins of a multitude, it will do execution. One soldier, taken by himself, is of no considerable force; but as joined to the body of an army, he will conquer and trample down towns and cities. One single drop of water, how contemptible is it! but as it is joined to the ocean, so it is terrible; it drowns, it destroys. Wherefore let none flatter himself, and think that his sin has no share in the misery of the nation; for every particular man may think so, as well as one: and if it should be true of every one to whose sin should we ascribe the calamities we endure? *For the sin of the inhabitants a land is said to mourn; a fruitful land to be made barren, for the wickedness of those that dwell therein.* And who knows but mine and thy sins may have provoked God to visit the nation with this distemper? How dost thou know, but thy profaneness, thy drunkenness, may cause the land to mourn? thy slighting God's ordinances, and thy causeless absenting thyself from his worship, may cause God to appear against the nation in anger? When a barrel of gunpowder is fired, does not one corn, as much as another, contribute to the blowing up of the house? Certainly, if the nation should receive some great blessing from God, upon the score of desert, would not every particular man be apt to thrust in, and ascribe some part of it to the merit of his own particular righteousness? How much more should we take shame and confusion to ourselves, and mark out our own personal sins, as those that have stuck deep in the nation's misery! As it is the duty of every particular soldier in the army to fight in the day of battle, so it is equally the duty of every particular Christian to mourn in a day of humiliation.

3d Reason. Because God takes special notice of particular sins: punishing of a multitude does not make God overlook particulars; but he takes a distinct view of each several man's transgression; as in our reading over a volume, the eye takes a distinct view of every letter. It is our prudence to take notice of those sins that God takes notice of; and as it is our prudence to take notice of them, so it is our greater prudence to lament them. Hence we have God in scripture so often singling out some sinners; in particular, [Deut. xxix. 18](#), God, speaking to the whole body of the Israelites, says, *Take heed, lest there be amongst you a root that beareth gall and bitterness.* One would think that in so large a garden one weed might escape his eye: but the eye of God, like the sun, as it enlightens the whole world, so it discovers



every little atom. It is said, that God *would search Jerusalem with candles*; so exact is he in his survey of each several man's condition. In [Psalm xiv. 2](#), *God looketh down from heaven, to see if there were any one whose heart sought the Lord*: and in the third verse he brings a particular report of their wickedness; *There is none that doeth good, no, not one*. He speaks as if he had searched and considered them one by one. Now the consideration of this, that God takes a particular notice of our personal misdemeanours, should engage us to set about a particular amendment. When workmen know their master will come, and take a particular account of each man's several task, this is a sufficient argument to make them fearful to be negligent, and incite them to be accurate in their performance of it. God oftentimes, in a general judgment, has a more especial design upon some few particular sinners; as when Joab drew up a party of men to be slain by the Ammonites, his design was only directed to the death of Uriah. God, when he commissions his plagues to go over a nation, he gives them more especial charge to visit such and such a sinner. God sends a war and the sword abroad to such nation; but be sure, says he, take such a secure sinner, such a covetous person in your way; let his goods and his substance be rifled and made a spoil: I have observed, that his heart has been estranged from me, and wholly set upon the world. he bids a sickness go to such a people; but be sure, says he, forget not to take off such a backsliding, incorrigible sinner: he cumpers the ground, and I can hear with him no longer. To speak according to the manner of men, God does as really mark out and separate some sinners, more especially, to a general destruction, as David gave his captain a more especial command to preserve Absalom. This is a third reason, why men should in their humiliations descend to a particular removal of their personal sins, because God accurately considers them.

4th Reason. No humiliation can be well and sincere, unless it be personal and particular. It is a saying, that there is *dolus in universalibus*, deceit and cozenage in universals. In general acknowledgments, a man is apt to put a fallacy upon his soul, and to take that for repentance which is no repentance. He that is truly humbled and repents, his voice must be, not, *We have sinned*, but, *I have sinned against the Lord*. Nathan, when he would force home a sound, real humiliation upon David, he makes his case particular, *Thou art the man*, [2 Sam. xii. 7](#). The only word that dropped from Pharaoh, that seemed to have something in it of true humiliation, was that in [Exod. ix. 27](#) *In this I have sinned: the Lord is righteous, but I and my people are wicked*. Now it is clear, that this is the only true way of humiliation; for this is the way and the method that the Spirit of God takes in humbling the soul; it makes a personal, particular application of all God's curses against sinners to the soul. The word in general says, *Cursed be he that continues not in all these things that are written in the law, to observe and do them*. Here the Spirit comes in, and with much power tells a soul, *Thou art the man*; thou art he that has broke God's commands, violated his laws, trampled upon all his precepts, and therefore thou art he that liest under the dint of this heavy curse: God means thee; God speaks to thee in particular; therefore take it to thyself, and be humbled.

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Now the reason that a man's consideration of his particular sins is the means to produce a true and thorough humiliation is, because man is only humbled for those things in which he is concerned; and no man looks upon himself as concerned in a general evil, till he makes it particular by a personal application. When we hear of sickness abroad, we are not much moved; but when we find the symptoms of it upon our own bodies, then we speak more feelingly of it, and use the utmost care to remove it. The notions we have of sin, and misery that follows sin, are but common and superficial, till we make them particular by our own experience. If we would kill our sins, we must not shoot our sorrows at random, at sin in general, but single them out, and take a distinct aim at every sin in particular. Although, to make the work of humiliation more easy, I should advise the soul to this way, because we may master and conquer these sins by our sorrows, that we take severally and apart, which we could not so well deal with in the heap. Those evils most affect our sorrows that most affect our apprehensions; but sins, as they are represented to us in particular, chiefly affect our apprehensions: generals and universals leave a confused, imperfect notion in the mind; but particulars leave a more clear and evident impression. Thus much of the fourth reason to prove this doctrine, that it is the best and most effectual way to avert a general judgment, for every particular man seriously to inquire into and amend his personal, particular sins.

6th *Observation* is, That upon our serious humiliation for, and forsaking of our sins, there is sufficient argument in God's mercy to hope for a removal of the severest judgment.

Now the truth of this will appear from these three things.

1st, Because God has promised, upon true humiliation, to remove his judgments.

2dly, Because he has often actually removed them upon such humiliation.

3dly, Because when we are brought to be thus humbled, God has attained the end of his judgments.

1st, There is argument for this hope, because God has promised it. Mercy, it is the only refuge of a lost creature, the only prop of a decaying confidence, it is God's endearing attribute. But since we have sinned, God's justice keeps us from relying upon his mercy, till his promise gives us leave; this is that alone that opens a door of mercy to a forlorn soul, and makes that confidence become duty which would otherwise be presumption. In the 26th of Leviticus, the Spirit of God reckons up many sad and dismal curses which should befall the children of Israel, if they did apostatize from God, and break his commands. Yet in the [41st and 42d verses](#), he promises them an after-return of mercy upon their humiliation. So merciful is God, that he closeth his threatenings with prescriptions how to avoid them; and in the midst of judgment shews the way how to regain mercy. What God promised to Israel he does as truly promise to us; for his mercy, that caused him to make this promise, is the same yesterday and to-day. And as the apostle observes, no promise is of private interpretation. In the forementioned [Jer. xxxvi. 3](#), *It may be, says God, that the house of Judah will hear all the evil that I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil*



way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. Where God forgives the sin, he always removes the judgment. Why do we not then engage our utmost in these duties? Is not God's promise true, that we should not believe it? And if it be true, and we do believe it, is it not worthy our closing with it, by fulfilling its conditions? We have cause enough to believe, that God is much more willing to remove than to bring judgments upon men. It is reason enough that we should humble ourselves under God's judgment, though he had made no such promise of mercy; even for this cause, that by our humiliations we might prevail with him to make us such a promise. But how much readier should we be in this duty, now the promise is prepared and presented to our hands! Surely if our miseries abide upon us, it is not because God is wanting to us, but we are wanting to ourselves.

2dly, There is argument for hope, because God has often removed judgments upon a sincere humiliation. And if we cannot command our faith to believe what God has promised to do, yet let us believe what God has done already. Every instance in this nature, it is an overplus of evidence to overrule us into this persuasion. A promise with an instance, it is like an excellent medicine with a *probatum est*, ratified by experience. The first instance of those that have tasted mercy after humiliation is that in the text, the [10th verse](#), *And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not*. God will let men see that he can more easily repent of his anger than they of their sins. The second instance is that of Manasses; a prodigy of sin, one as it were raised up on purpose, in whom it might appear how far wickedness might proceed; yet we know, upon his humiliation, God turned his captivity, and set him loose from his chains, and from a prison, (a thing seldom known in any age;) he returned him to a kingdom, [2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13](#). Now is there any man that can rationally doubt of the strength of humiliation, after it has restored a Manasses?

3dly, The third instance is that of Ahab, one almost as deep in sin as Manasses; one that sold himself to do wickedly; a king of Israel, yet a slave to sin; polluted with the blood of his innocent neighbour; yet when the curse of God met him, and shook him into an humiliation, [1 Kings xxi. 29](#)? God's anger thereupon leaves him for a while, and though his justice could not let him take away the punishment, yet his mercy caused him to defer it. God's fury in this case (if I may so express it) some thing resembling an ague; it shook him for a while, and then it left him. All divines do agree, that Ahab's humiliation was not sincere, but only hypocritical. Now if God were so merciful as to reward the bare outside of an humble repentance with such an abatement of a judgment, will he not answer and reward thy hearty, sincere humiliation with an entire removal of it? In [Psalm cvii. 17, 18, 19](#), *Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted; their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their troubles, he saveth them out of their distresses*. Here we have another kind of unsincere repentance, seconded with an undeserved reward. And can God so love the very picture of

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humiliation, and not love and embrace that much more? Can the bare show of repentance delay God's stroke, and shall not the reality and truth of it avert it? Certainly this is the only reason that God shews himself so favourable to hypocrites' bare pretences, that he may encourage our real endeavours.

3dly, There is argument to hope for the removal of a judgment upon true humiliation, because in this God attains the end of his judgments. No need of further purging when the humour is carried off. God's actions extend no further than his designs. God does not punish that he may punish, but that he may humble; wherefore, when humility is produced, his punishments proceed no further. God is of too great mercy to triumph over a prostrate soul. There is a resurrection from misery as well as from the grave. It is true, God is said *to kill*, [1 Sam. ii. 6](#), but in the next words it is added, that *he makes alive*. God does not punish as that he may thence receive satisfaction for our sins; for then, as our sin is infinite, so our punishments would be endless. All satisfaction is laid up in Christ, and when we are thoroughly humble for sin, that satisfaction is then actually made ours. No wonder therefore, if God's judgments vanish before that satisfaction; if it removes a temporal judgment, that rescues from an eternal. This is certain, and worth our observation, that God never sends a judgment upon any of his children, but it is for one of these two ends, either to prevent or remove sin. O, says God, here is a poor soul that is hugging and embracing its sin, pleasing itself in its own ruin; unless sin be embittered to it by some severe affliction, it will never leave it, but perish in it. Here is another ready to sin, in a posture to close with any temptation, going on in the ready road to death. O, says God, here is another poor creature, that if some sharp judgment does not meet and stop it, it is posting on with a full career to its own perdition. Now God does effect both these works, to wit, the removal and the prevention of sin, by the instrumental help of a thorough humiliation. Consider therefore with thyself, thou that hast lain a long time under any cross or affliction from God, has thy affliction humbled thee? has it weakened thy sin, strengthened thy hands to duty? If it has not, thou hast cause to fear that God will either continue that judgment that now presses thee, or bring a greater and a sorer evil upon thee. But, on the other hand, if thy affliction has wrought kindly, if it had cleansed off the filth and corruption of thy heart, if it had brought thee to disesteem the world, and value Christ, to look upon sin as a greater evil than death, believe it, God has done his work upon thee, and he will quickly remove either the judgment itself, or the venom and sting of it. Now the showers of repentance are fallen, the clouds of God's wrath are vanishing: and he is coming forth to meet thee as a poor returning prodigal. He looks upon thee as he did once upon Ephraim, [Jer. xxxi. 18, 19, 20](#), *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, &c. therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord*. If thou hast an heart to mourn over thy sin, God has bowels of compassion to yearn and relent over thee. If thou canst in sincerity say, I will sin no more,

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God is as ready to say, that he will afflict no more. Believe it, if thou hast a purpose to return to God, God has mercy to return to thee.

To which God, therefore, be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for ever more. Amen.



SERMON XLII.

MATTHEW v. 3.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

IT is doubtless a great paradox in the general judgment and opinion of the world, that any poverty, of what sort soever, should be desirable: forasmuch as every one desires to enjoy the good things of the world, and thereby to enjoy himself; to the attainment of which, riches are the most acknowledged means. And if these are the prime instrument of enjoyment, poverty surely must be the main opposite to it. But the gospel, we confess, is a system of paradoxes and absurdities to the maxims of the world; the grand rule which the generality of mankind both live and judge by, being to follow the full bent of their sensuality. And therefore our Saviour begins this his notable and great sermon in the mount, with seven or eight such propositions, as directly oppose and bid defiance to the opinions and practices of the carnal world: and these he ushers in with the commendation of that so much abhorred thing called *poverty*. And that also such a poverty, as rests not only in the surface of the body, clothing that with rags, or (which is worse) with nothing; but such an one as enters into the very soul, and strips the spirit, leaving that naked, destitute, and forlorn.

In the words we have these two things considerable.

1st, A quality or disposition recommended by our Saviour, which is *poverty of spirit*.

2dly, The ground and argument upon which it is recommended, namely, that it entitles him who has it to *the kingdom of heaven*.

And first for the first of these, the thing recommended by our Saviour, viz. *poverty in spirit*. In the treating of which, I shall,

I. Declare the nature of this *poverty of spirit*; and,

II. Shew the means by which it is to be obtained. As for the nature of it, I shall give an account of this,

(1.) Negatively, by shewing what it is not.

(2.) Positively, by shewing what it is, and where in it does consist.

First of all then, that excellent thing here recommended by our Saviour, is not,

1. A mere outward indigence, and want of all the accommodations of common life. For certain it is, all want, considered merely in itself, and not as sanctified by the Spirit of God to some further use, is a curse, and consequently can of itself make no man blessed; as the poor, here spoken of, are pronounced to be. It is possible that a man may be poor, in point of wealth, but yet abound in sin and vice; and experience shews, that there is not a more unsanctified, wretched, and profane sort of men under heaven, than beggars commonly are; whose manners entitle them to a less portion of happiness in the other world, than they



can have in this. Many beg of us for Christ's sake, whom Christ will never own; as I icing the very shame and spots of Christianity; persons void of all sense of virtue, all conscience of duty, either to God or man; swearers, railers, idle, useless drones, and intolerable burdens to society. Nay, and we shall sometimes find poverty in conjunction with such vices as seem to be directly crossed and took away by poverty. For how poor are some, and yet how insolent! what pride lurks under their rags, like a snake under the leaves! Yea, and how luxurious are many! for there is scarce any man in the world, be he never so poor, but some time or other chances upon opportunities of luxury: so that those common expressions, *as proud as a beggar*, and *as drunk as a beggar*, are so far from being either false or improper, that they are the most full and significant descriptions of a person possessed with these vices, to the utmost height of them, that can be found out. Many there are who embrace dunghills, the filth and offensiveness of whose lives does exceed them; and who are sordidly and nastily habited, whose clothes are but an emblem of their hearts, and a lively picture of their manners.

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Poverty is not always the lot of the righteous, and the true servants of God, who make a conscience of their ways; but sometimes, by the just disposal of Providence, comes to be the inheritance also of the wicked, the unconscionable, and such as would be rich, if they could, upon any terms whatsoever: but the curse of God has been too hard for them, and put them behindhand in spite of all their gains; so that whatsoever they have got, has in sensibly melted, and mouldered to nothing. Their riches have never stayed with them, but *made themselves wings, and flown away*; and thereby taught the world, that to get and to thrive are not always the same thing.

Besides, that poverty very frequently is the direct effect and consequent of sin and vice. The drunkard drinks off his estate, like his cups, to the very bottom, and leaves nothing behind. The vain glorious man wears his fortunes upon his back, till at length he has worn them out. The contentious man follows the law against his neighbour, for the gratification of his revengeful humour, so long, that in the end the very obtaining of the cause does not defray the charges, or remove the poverty contracted by its prosecution.

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But now, certainly, such a poverty can be no more recommended by our Saviour than the sinful causes of it. For Christ commands no man to be luxurious, ambitious, or revengeful, in order to his making of himself poor. He who is the one will undoubtedly be the other. But the interest of religion and virtue is not concerned, that a man should be either.

In a word, poverty is usually the effect of sin, but always a temptation to it. For it provokes the corrupt heart of man to discontents, murmurings, and repinings, to sinister and base courses for his relief, unless there be a predominant principle of grace, to compose and quiet the dissatisfactions of nature. This therefore cannot be the thing to which Christ pronounces a blessing. For whatsoever renders a man blest may be the proper object of his prayers: but none surely ought to pray for a temptation, or to petition Heaven for a great calamity. But,

2. The *poverty of spirit* here spoken of is not a sneaking fearfulness and want of courage; for there is nothing base in nature that can be noble in religion. Cowardice is neither acceptable to God nor man; it neither promotes the honour of one, nor the good of the other: it being indeed the portal and broad gate through which most of the unworthy and vile practices that are seen in the world enter upon, and rifle the consciences of men. So that in the Revelation, [ch. xxi. 8](#), St. John, reckoning what kind of persons shall be cast into the *lake that burns with fire and brimstone, amongst murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, and idolaters, ranks the fearful*. And why? Because fearfulness betrays a man almost to all other sins. So that the fearful person is incapable of making good any relation of common life, whether in the capacity of a subject, a friend, or a servant; for a man's fear will make him speak, swear, or do any thing, to rescue himself from an impendent danger.

And if this had been the proper virtue and qualification of a Christian, there would never have been any such thing in the world as martyrdom; as owning of Christ in the face of tyranny and torment, and holding fast the Christian faith upon the rack and in the flames. And therefore it is the *righteous man only*, who, Solomon tells us, *is as bold as a lion*; and who carries in his breast an heart too big *to fear those who can only kill the body*. In many passages and circumstances of life, it requires no ordinary pitch of courage for a man to dare to be good: and he must be a valiant as well as a conscientious man, who can and will choose duty, when it is beset with the greatest danger, and can defy *the powers of darkness*, as well as abhor *the works of it*.

Wherefore, since the *poorness in spirit* here spoken of by our Saviour is neither to be understood of meanness or timorousness of spirit; it is much that some should make the badges and characters of such a pitiful temper the proper indications of piety, and the marks of a more improved Christianity. For do not many, by a sneaking look and a whining voice, affect the reputation of pious and devout persons? Do not many behave themselves so, as if there were no going to heaven but by creeping, no passing through the *strait gate* but upon all four? But such persons understand not the nature of the Christian religion, if they think that such ignoble qualities can be any parts of it. Christianity is a superstructure upon, and an addition to the excellencies of nature: and therefore, if a pusillanimous spirit debases and degrades a man, considered but as a man, it can neither adorn or improve him in the capacity of a Christian.

Having thus, by a negative consideration, shewn what this *poverty of spirit* is not, I come now, in the next place, to shew positively what it is, and wherein it does consist. In order to which, we are to observe, that poverty, or want, is properly a privation of fulness, or abundance, and consequently opposed to it. Now a man may be said to be spiritually full, when he abounds in a confident opinion, both of his own righteousness, and his happiness thereupon: and therefore *poverty of spirit*, which is its direct opposite, may be said properly to consist in these two things:

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1. An inward sense and feeling of our spiritual wants and defects; and,
2. A sense of our wretched and forlorn condition by reason of those wants.

1. And first, it consists in an inward sense of that deplorable want of holiness, which we are in by nature. We are horn into the world destitute, and surrounded with innumerable infirmities; and, in the phrase of the apostle, in the [Revelation, chap. iii. 17](#), *poor, miserable, blind, and naked*. All the powers of our souls are crippled and disordered, and rendered strangely impotent to the prosecution of good. Our judgments are perverted, our wills depraved, and our affections misinclined, and set upon vile and unworthy objects. This is the portion and inheritance which we derive from our first parents: these are the weaknesses and evils we labour under; and the first step to a deliverance from them, is to be sensible of them: for we shall never attempt to be what we are not, till we come to dislike what we are.

Self-opinion and self-love are the great strong holds which the gospel sets itself to beat down; for by nature we are as prone to overvalue as to overlove ourselves; but in both of them there is a kind of spiritual fulness and repletion, which must be removed and carried off, before the gospel can have its effect upon us. For Christ comes with a design to infuse his gifts and graces into the soul; but there is no pouring of any thing into a vessel which is full already. And therefore a man must be emptied of all his vain and fond conceptions and principles, and, in a word, of himself too, before he can be prepared and qualified for the infusions of the Spirit.

He who thinks himself holy and righteous enough, is a most unfit subject for the gospel to work upon: indeed he is scarce fit for repentance; for Christ *came not to call the righteous*, that is, those who thought themselves so, but sinners to repentance: sinners, who in their consciences stood convict of their sinful estate, who beheld the *plague of their own hearts*, the sores and leprosy of their souls; these were the men who stood in the next disposition for the reception of mercy, for the alms of heaven, and the compassions of a Saviour: for these are such as Christ properly calls the *heavy laden*, and upon that account invites to himself. As for the Pharisees, and the opinionators of their own holiness, the spiritually proud, confident, and disdainful, they were men of another dispensation: the gospel knows them not, nor justifies any such; it finds them standing upon their own bottom, and so also leaves them to fall.

That soul, upon which the spirit of regeneration has truly passed, is utterly of another temper; it is still apt to bemoan, and to condemn itself; it sees its own scars and deformities, and upon the sight of them falls down, and wallows in the dust before the pure eyes of God. The true Christian temper shews not itself upon the mountains of pride and self-opinion, but dwells low in the valleys of humility, self-denial, and spiritual dejection.

And as it behaves itself thus towards God, so it demeans itself with a proportionable condescension to men too. He who has this evangelical poorness of spirit, is still apt to think



others better and holier than himself; for his conscience teaches him to think the worst of his own heart, and his charity prompts him to judge the best of his neighbours.

Upon a due consideration of which, I have often wondered, and indeed think it a just matter of wonder, how some persons are able to reconcile their high and loud pretences of piety, and a more than ordinary purity, with that insolence and spiritual pride, which breaks forth in every part of their conversation. For how do some, as it were, monopolize the covenant of grace wholly to themselves, calling themselves the only people of God, the saints, the godly; looking upon all round about them as heathens and reprobates; and upon that account separating themselves into little companies and congregations, as not being willing to join (forsooth) in a less refined way of God's worship. Which persons, though they have the good fortune to find friends to countenance them upon a supposed political account, such as call compliance prudence, and cowardice moderation; yet upon what grounds of true piety and religion can these pharisaical separatists acquit themselves? I am sure not upon this, which recommends poorness in spirit: for did ever anyone yet, endued with this excellent grace, say to his brother, *Stand off, for I am holier than thou?* or bid defiance to a whole church, and spit in the face of all church-governors, as every conventicler certainly does, upon a supposal of his own transcendent purity and perfection; which neither upon clear evidence of scripture, the practice of former ages, nor the judgment of many thousands more knowing than himself, (as they may very easily be,) he is at all able to make out or demonstrate? Such persons may (latter themselves as they please; but the gospel must alter its voice, and say, Blessed are the proud in spirit, the censorious, the insolent, and self-opinioned, before they can either have any solid ground of comfort, or real title to a blessing.

Where true poverty of spirit dwells, a man thinks of nothing less than his own perfection, which he utterly disowns. There is no beggar and forlorn, distressed person that more keenly feels the afflicting hardships of hunger, cold, and nakedness, than such an one feels and groans under his spiritual wants: he laments the hardness of his heart, his want of life and activity in the performance of duty; he complains of the weakness of his faith, the instability of his hope, the dispersion and wanderings of his affections; he cannot pray with that fervour, hear with that attention, and practise with that steadiness and perseverance, which, he is sensible, becomes the excellent and exact measures of Christianity.

These blots and flaws in his Christian course his eye is constantly upon: and as they are the objects of his thoughts, so they are the continual matter of his sorrow. Let this therefore be the first thing, in which consists this poorness in spirit here recommended by our Saviour in the text; namely, a sense of that deplorable want of holiness, which we are in by nature.

2. The second thing in which it consists, is a sense of our wretched and miserable condition by reason of such want; the wretchedness of which appears from these two considerations.

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(1.) That we are utterly unable, by any natural strength of our own, to recover and bring ourselves out of this condition.

(2.) That during our continuance under it, we are exposed and stand obnoxious to all the curses of the law.

1. And first of all, this evangelical poverty of spirit makes a man sensible in how wretched a condition he is, by reason of his own utter inability to redeem himself from it. he finds his understanding much darkened, so that he cannot perceive and judge of the things of God; and his will full of weakness and impotence, as to its choosing of them: it sees *no beauty* in holiness, *why it should desire it*; but the stream of all its appetites and inclinations wholly runs out after other things, things evil and pernicious, and tending to the direct ruin of him that does embrace them. All this does a person so qualified find and feel in himself; but, for all this, is still unable to enlighten his own understanding, to sanctify his will, or correct his inclinations: but, like a man bound hand and foot, and thrown into a quagmire, there is he like to lie and sink, for any succour that he can give himself, unless such as pass by have compassion on him, and relieve him.

And therefore, as the assertion of Pelagius of the freedom of the will, and its full power to choose things spiritually good, even since the fall, is indeed a great piece of nonsense in itself; so those that maintain and insist upon it sufficiently declare themselves to have little or no experience of their own hearts: nor can all the rhetoric of men and angels persuade a person truly poor in spirit, and fully studied in his own spiritual wants and defects, that he is able to repent when he pleases, to believe when he pleases, and to perform all the divine commands. For he looks upon it as a contradiction, and a defiance to his experience, which he will believe and subscribe to, in spite of all the world, as he has good reason.

And therefore, in his use of all the outward means of grace, he depends upon them no more than if he used them not; but upon the Spirit of God only working in them: for he knows it is he alone that can change his heart; and that must be changed, or a man cannot be saved. It is in his power indeed to hear and read the word, and to say his prayers, but this will not do his work; and for this cause it is, that God often suffers a man to wait upon him for many years in the use of these duties, and yet gives him not his desired success, in the change of his heart, and the conquest of his corruptions, merely to convince him of the emptiness and inefficacy of all means considered in themselves; and to shew him, that when these great things come to be wrought for him, it is the sole grace of God to which he is a debtor for all.

It would be long enough before we should hear a person, endued with this evangelical quality, to talk of his merits and his supererogations, of his fulfilling and even outdoing the law: for these are whimsies, framed and minted in the heads of those, whose hearts never served them to be experimentally pious. That poverty of spirit that has a claim to the kingdom of heaven, neither discourses nor thinks after this manner; but vents itself in that doleful,

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passionate exclamation of St. Paul, *Who shall deliver me from this body of death?* It convinces a man that he is *carnal and, sold under sin*, and sold to a more than Egyptian bondage, to the yoke of Satan, and the tyranny of his own base, domineering affections.

But surely none is ever heard to cry out with so much vehemence, *Who shall deliver me?* who thinks that he is able to deliver himself. None calls in for auxiliaries from abroad, who finds a sufficiency of strength to secure him at home. Let this therefore be one part of the misery of that wretched condition that this poorness in spirit makes a man sensible of, namely, that he is utterly unable by any strength of his own to get out of this condition.

2. The other part of its misery, which this evangelical poorness makes a man also sensible of, is, that during his continuance under this woful condition, he stands liable and obnoxious to all the curses of the law. A sad consideration certainly, that a man should be in a condition, from which he is not able to rid himself, and in which, if he remains, he is infallibly ruined. Yet this is the state of every man by nature. He is born in sin, and *the wages of sin is death*; death in its utmost compass and latitude, considered with all its retinue of miseries and calamities, which, as its harbingers, make way for it, and by degrees usher on the last and fatal blow, which from temporal sufferings translates a man to eternal.

Whosoever has a right spiritual sense of sin, knows the terror of the law, and the dreadfulness of the curse; what it is to live under the sentence of damnation; every day, every hour, every minute expecting its fearful execution. And he knows also, that till the Spirit of regeneration puts him within the verge of the second covenant, he is responsible for the breach of the first, which makes all that his portion, that the law awards, and the wrath of God inflicts upon transgressors.

Now surely he that lives with these apprehensions quick upon his mind, with the terrors of the Al mighty fresh upon his conscience, must needs carry about him all the dejection, poorness, and lowness of spirit before God, that we can imagine in a male factor convict, and ready to suffer before men. His heart fails and sinks, and is utterly at a loss where and upon what bottom to fix. Only he knows that the hands of mercy are not tied, nor the bowels of divine goodness wholly shut up against sinners; and that, as it is enough to rescue him from despair, so on the other side it is far from ministering to confidence and ostentation.

This is properly the person who works out his salvation with trembling and continual fears; as knowing that corrupt nature has treasured up fuel enough in his breast for the wrath of God to feed upon for ever: between which and himself nothing can interpose, but the free, unmerited relentings of the divine compassion; which like the wind blows where it lists, and lays itself out upon whom it will, as being above the claim and challenge of any sinner under heaven, whose title lies clear and questionless to nothing but the curse. Now the sense of a great misery impendent upon a man, naturally casts his mind into a depressed and an abject posture. For what person living can be bold, free, and cheerful, who knows that he lives every minute upon courtesy, that he breathes by the connivance of his great

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Judge, and a suspension of that sentence that the law has already pronounced, and justice may execute when it pleases. Such must needs look upon themselves as lost and undone by nature: and those, whose eyes God has never yet opened to see themselves in such a woful, forlorn estate, but have passed their days with a blind assurance, void of the least grudging, doubtful, or suspicious thought about the safety of their spiritual condition, are not yet arrived to that poorness in spirit that all must come to, before they arrive to heaven.

For indeed it would be but salvation and redemption thrown away, for Christ to save any, who are not convinced that they are ruined without Christ. None shall enter the gates of heaven, whose fears and apprehensions have not sometimes placed them upon the brink of hell. For the vastness of such a change is that which sets a price and a crown upon mercy; and the apprehended nearness of utter perdition, that which enhances and endears salvation.

Having thus shewn the nature of this poverty of spirit, and that both negatively, by distinguishing it from what it is not, as also positively, by declaring wherein it does consist; I proceed now to the next thing, which is to shew, by what means this frame of spirit is to be obtained.

As for the cause from whence it must flow, that is evident without inquiry. For being a supernatural grace, it springs not from the stock of nature, but descends from above, from that eternal Spirit, that is the *author and giver of every good and perfect gift*. Reason is too weak a principle to discourse a man into so excellent a disposition. A disposition that holds no intercourse with the flesh and the world, but raises the mind to such desires, such ways and courses of acting, as not only transcend, but also thwart and oppose all his earthly affections. But still, though the Spirit be the only productive cause of this evangelical virtue, yet there are certain means to be used by us, with the use of which he concurs in the production of it; for God will treat us like rational agents, and not like senseless logs, requiring us to bear an active share in the promoting and carrying on of that great affair of our eternal happiness. Now there are three ways, by which, through the concurrence of the Holy Ghost with our endeavours, we may at length bring ourselves to this blessed poorness of spirit, a quality of so much value in the eyes of our Saviour, of so much worth and weight in the balance of the sanctuary.

1. The first is a frequent, deep, and serious considering of the relation we stand in towards God. The contemplation of which will shew us that unmeasurable distance that is between him and us. It will convince us what nothings we are in comparison of him, that first raised us out of nothing. When we consider the unlimited perfections of his nature, we shall find our thoughts even swallowed up, and our understandings dazzled, as not being able to fathom so great an abyss, or to behold so radiant a brightness. And this must needs dash all esteem of ourselves, and bring us out of love with our own little supposed excellencies. He that accustoms himself to meditate upon the greatness of God, finds those questions continually rising and stirring in his heart, How shall dust and ashes ever be able to stand before

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him? how shall weakness and imperfection enjoy that nature that it is at a loss even to think of, and never contemplates upon, without amazement? The creature never appears so pitiful and inconsiderable, as when it views itself with one eye, and its Creator with the other.

Every thing is more apparent as it stands compared with its opposite. Man is but a weak and a contemptible thing at the best; but much more contemptible, if compared to an angel, and yet infinitely and inconceivably more despicable must he be, if compared to God. A glowworm signifies little if compared but to a candle; but set it before the stars, consider it in emulation with the sun, and the ruling lights of heaven, and what a silly, ridiculous thing must it appear!

While men consider nothing but themselves, they may grow proud and conceited: for little things may be valued by those who never saw greater. He that never saw the day, may admire and dote upon his lamp. But consideration and experience of great things reduces and degrades little petit matters to their own proper dimensions. *Those that measure themselves by themselves* (says the apostle) *are not wise*. For when we make a thing its own measure, it is impossible to discover any defect in it. But bring it to another thing that excels and outshines it, and then we shall quickly see how much a tree is taller than a shrub, and a royal palace greater and nobler than a country cottage.

Men are enamoured with their own reason; but let them compare it with omniscience, and it is no thing. They perhaps value themselves upon their dominion over these inferior things; but what is all their grandeur to the royalty and universal empire of Providence? what is their policy to the wisdom of him that governs the world, and *charges the very angels with folly*? It is impossible for a man that frequently and seriously thinks of God, to value himself.

Now to these considerations we may add that also of our unprofitableness to God. For by all that we either are or do, we can contribute nothing to that immense fulness that is in him. And if it were possible that some emolument might rise to him from our services, yet it were infinitely needless; for what want could there be in all-sufficiency? what need could his ocean have of the drops of our bucket? *Thou desirest not sacrifice*, says David. And God himself gives the reason why he does not, in [Psal. 1. 9, 10, 12](#), *I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. We need not ply his altar with sacrifices, or spread a table before the Almighty, as if he ate the flesh of bulls, or drank the blood of goats. It is like that in the Jewish economy many were so stupid and gross in their opinions of God, as to think that they gave him a repast, and a large meal in all their burnt-offerings: for certain it is that many of the heathens thought so. And therefore God upbraids them with those absurd discourses, by vouching his dominion over all the stores of nature, by which, if he had thought fit, he could easily have supplied himself, without the ministry of any of the sons of men. Now what those absurd*

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persons thought of their sacrifices in relation to God, the same nowadays think many of the Christians of their prayers, their services and religious works, that from these is imported so large a revenue to the divine honour, that God is much the better and the richer for them, and could not maintain his glory to the same height in the want of them. This is the philosophy of the popish operators in all their religious performances. But may not God answer these men, about their so much valued services, as he did the Jews about their sacrifices? I need none of your prayers, none of your humiliations; my glory is above them, and entire without them. But if the service of any of my creatures might be of advantage to me, is not the whole host of heaven mine? Have I not thousands and ten thousands of angels, ready at a word to fulfil my will, to execute my commands, and to speak my praises?

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Surely if these men dwelt much upon the contemplation of God's glorious nature, they could never esteem themselves for paying God those services, of which he stands in no need, and by which the substantial greatness of his honour is not at all increased. For most true it is, that there is no accession to the divine perfections, by the very best and utmost that the holiest person in the world can do. And if there was no other rational end and use of our obedience than this, God would never exact it. For the ends why he exacts and requires it of us are, that it may be both a testification of our homage to him, and an instrument of good to ourselves. That is all, for there is no end of profit or advantage on our Creator's part served by it, who is neither a greater God or a mightier Lord, because we serve him, or pray unto him. Since, if we did not, he could equally make good his honour upon us, and fetch his pennyworths out of us by damning us for our disobedience.

Let a man think much of this, and make God the measure of his perfections and his services; and he cannot but see cause to bring down his spirit, and to make it poor, and humble, and base, in all his reflections upon himself: it will shew him how mean and useless a thing he is, as to the compassing of the great ends and designs of Heaven; how easily Providence can be without him, without any straitening of itself; and how far he is from being necessary to the setting forth of the glory of his Maker. We know how high Job bore himself, in the apprehension of his own integrity, which he thought gave him the vantage-ground so far, as to be able to expostulate and to reason it out with the Almighty; nor could all the discourses of his friends reduce him to a right understanding of himself, so as to bring him upon his knees in a submissive acknowledgment of the righteous proceedings of his great Judge. Nothing could control either the risings of his spirit, or the insolence of his speech, till God himself undertook, and encountered him out of the cloud, displaying his greatness, his power, his wisdom, and his other surpassing perfections, laying all these before his astonished eyes, as we have them fully described in those four excellent chapters, the [38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st of Job](#): and then the man's stubborn heart began to bend, and to come down from its heights; then he presently knows himself, and his distance from God; his deplorable weakness and his vileness, and so breaks forth in those expressions, [Job xlii](#).

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5, 6, *Behold*, says he, *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee*. What follows? *Wherefore*, says he, *I abhor myself*. It was the clear sight of the glory and greatness of the divine nature that humbled him to this self-abhorrence, and altered the tune of his former self-justification. Now let every confident, self-valuing person, compare himself with those descriptions of God in the forementioned chapters; and if he has but his understanding and his judging faculties about him, I doubt not but they will have the same effect and impression upon him, that they had upon Job, and make him descend some steps lower, till they have brought him to the level of *the poor in spirit*. Let this therefore be one way for the obtaining of this evangelical virtue, for a man to think much of the transcendent greatness and majesty of God, and his own unspeakable distance from him.

2. The second course that he is to take for the same purpose, is for him to be much in comparing himself with the exceeding exactness, perfection, and spirituality of the divine law. Self-esteem, which is the thing properly and directly opposite to this poorness of spirit here spoke of by our Saviour, is the effect of men's rating themselves by false measures; and, as I shew, that men's not measuring themselves by the infinite perfection of God's nature brought them to overvalue their persons, so now their not measuring themselves by the sublimity and exactness of God's law will bring them to the same false valuation of their actions and services. *The law of the Lord is perfect*, says the Psalmist, [Psalm xix. 7](#). But certain it is, that no mortal man is so; and yet it is as certain, that thousands think that they are, and accordingly entertain thoughts of pride, naturally consequent upon thoughts of perfection.

But now what is the cause of this error, and where and how do men gather up these unreasonable thoughts? Why it is from their ignorance of, or nonattendance to the law, which requires a perfect original uprightness and rectitude in the whole man, and throughout all his natural faculties; it requires also a constant holiness and purity in his very thoughts and first inclinations; it requires an universal, uninterrupted practice of the same in all his actions, and through the tenor of his whole life: and this it does with that unrelenting strictness and rigour, as not to allow of the least deviation or turning from the rule; but inexorably curses every the least and most minute transgression of it in thought, word, or deed. This is the economy and constitution of the law: *but who is sufficient for these things?* What man can answer all these demands, or live up to these heights? What merit-monger among all the sons of supererogation will promise and engage, upon the utmost peril of his soul, that from the first to the last minute of his breathing in the world he will never do or desire, or so much as think any thing amiss? But if this be an undertaking too vast for weak flesh and blood, that will have its failings, and lives merely upon the stock of grace and pardon; then let every man let fall his crest, forget his pride, and learn to be poor in spirit, till he is richer in good works.

Let him come off from those false weights and wrong measures, that pervert him in his judgment about all his actions. Some have contrived the body of practical divinity into easy

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and flesh-pleasing propositions; such as make salvation attainable by something less than a good life. Now, so long as men trust to and steer by such directions, they may quickly and easily grow into a very good opinion of their own piety and perfection, when to be pious, and to be perfect, is only to live up to an imperfect and a faulty rule: but it is a ready and easy way of proficiency, for a man to learn as much as he is taught, when he is taught but very little.



Others again there are, who measure the piety of their own lives by the scandalous and enormous impiety of other men's; and will therefore conclude themselves holy, because they neither revel it with the drunkard or the epicure, swear with the profane, or *grind the face of the poor* with the tyrant or extortioner: all which are heights and great improvements of villainy, and such as have many degrees under them, many impieties of a lesser guilt and malignity, yet enough, unrepented of, to damn and destroy the person in whom they are found. No wonder therefore if men take up a fair opinion of themselves and their own righteousness upon these grounds; and if they count themselves very good indeed, so long as the being good is only not to be as bad as the worst.

But now what course is to be taken to dispossess men of this false and flattering opinion? Why, surely, that course prescribed by the prophet, [Isaiah viii. 20](#), *to the law and to the testimony*. The doctrines of men may deceive us, and examples may blind us; but there is no trick, or fallacy, or imperfection in the law, which issues from the fountain of infinite truth and goodness, and so is reached forth to the world as that absolute, indefective copy of divine holiness, that all mankind is to write after. This is a glass in which the fairest soul may see its spots and deformities; a glass that will not, that cannot flatter: and therefore he that shall view himself in it frequently and attentively, shall see enough to shame and humble him into poorness of spirit: he shall see how many flaws and defects there are in his choicest and most accurately performed duties; how many infirmities cleave to his warmest devotions, that the letter of the law would curse and condemn. And surely, upon a due survey of this, if he has but a spiritual sense of spiritual things, he cannot but loathe and despise his own righteousness, as a torn and ragged garment, utterly unable to cover the nakedness of his soul; and consequently think himself the most miserable person in the world, if there were no other righteousness for him to trust to. This therefore is a second way of obtaining this evangelical poorness of spirit; namely, for a man to compare himself and his actions with the high and absolute perfection of the divine law.



3. The third and last that I shall mention is, for a man to make a due and a spiritual use of all those afflictions and cross events, that the providence of God is pleased to bring him under; for every man shall assuredly have his share of these sooner or later, before he quits the world. And as the scripture says, *affliction springs not out of the dust*; though it may seem to us an accident, yet God does it by design: and what should he design by it, but to discipline and cure the soul by the adversity of the body? Though the subject-matter of most calamities

is something temporal and external, yet the end of them is certainly spiritual; and this end can be no other, than by this means to bring us to a sight of our own wretchedness and great obnoxiousness to the anger of God, whensoever he shall be pleased to let it loose upon us. For such is the blindness and stupidity of man's heart, that while these outward enjoyments flow in fast upon him, he never thinks of those things: spiritual pride and security drive all these thoughts out of his mind; and he cannot frame himself to a thorough practical and severe consideration of that woful and forlorn estate that he was born in, and that he lives and continues in, so long as ease and prosperity keeps him from feeling any of the penal effects of it: but he is cheerful, frolic, and gay, and, while he thrives in this world, questions not his happiness in the other.

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But when a mighty blow from heaven strikes away all his comforts, and leaves him stript and naked, despised and trampled upon; then other thoughts naturally begin to take place; then the ministers of his outward man minister to him sad and misgiving reflections upon the condition of his inward, and make him doubt where the great calamity may end. For his heart must needs tell him, that affliction is but the consequent of sin, and that also such an one, as will determine where the worse and greater consequents of sin shall but begin: and then how unspeakably miserable would his lot be, should all these temporal hardships be but preludiums and beginnings of an intolerable weight of wrath reserved and treasured up for him hereafter. Every affliction carries in it many excellent instructions to a considering mind, when it humbles him under the feet of the insulting world, and covers him with contempt and scorn. It can tell him also, that sin makes him in finitely more contemptible and vile in the sight of God, who despises a wicked person more than the world can undervalue a man for his poverty, while it scoffs at his threadbare clothes and his empty purse. For God knows that the penury and bareness of a soul unjustified, and uncovered with the robe of Christ's righteousness, represents it more shameful than Job in his utmost misery appeared to be, when he sat naked and afflicted, full of noisome sores and ulcers, upon the dunghill, a mock to others, and a burden to himself.

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When men feel the afflicting hand of God pressing them, there is also a voice from the same God, calling upon them to search for the cause of that grievance in their own sinful breasts; and, since they so much abhor the bitterness of the stream, to bethink themselves of the overflowing malignity of the fountain, and to hate and abhor that much more. For this is the only thing that God drives at: it is not so much the poverty of our purses, as of our spirits, that he regards; and if the former does not produce and occasion the latter, there is an affliction; that is, an opportunity of grace lost and misspent upon us. But he that will husband every temporal calamity to a spiritual advantage, will strike in with the divine methods, and being humbled by God, will humble himself yet further. Every judgment shall read him a lesson of himself, discover to him the vanity of his confidence, make him low

and destitute in his own eyes, and so impoverish him into the best, the fullest, and the most abiding riches.

And thus I have finished the first general head proposed from the words; namely, the quality or disposition here recommended by our Saviour, which was poorness in spirit.

I shall now speak something briefly of the second; to wit, the ground or argument upon which this poorness of spirit is recommended; which is, that it entitles him that has it to the kingdom of heaven.

Christ never enjoins us any duty, though ever so irksome, so harsh, and so displeasing to flesh and blood, but still he makes it worth our pains to comply with him, even in those his severest and most unpleasant commands. For a man to loathe and despise himself, to whom nature has made self-love so delightful, and almost inseparable, must certainly be an hard lecture, and not easily learned, because so little liked; yet Christ invites us to it with no less a recompence than the gaining of a kingdom; he calls upon us to exchange an airy conceit for a substantial enjoyment, pride for glory, and opinion for possession. If to be poor is a frightful word, and such as carries but little allurements in it to persuade, yet surely a kingdom sounds big and high, and the kingdom of heaven yet higher; and this is that which is held out and offered to us, to reconcile us to the former. To be poor for a time is but an easy task, when the reward that follows it is to be rich for ever: it is a duty that carries a blessing in its front, and is contrived into such words, that it exhibits the reward before it enjoins the work. Heaven is the first thing that it sets before us, and thereby seems not so much to exact, as to purchase our obedience. Upon which account, though there is required poorness of spirit in point of duty, I am sure there is requisite largeness of spirit to make us capable of the reward. Now in these words, *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*, two things are worthy of our remark.

1. The thing promised, *the kingdom of heaven*, which I conceive does not here precisely signify the future state of glory allotted for the saints in the other world; but that whole complex of blessings that is exhibited to mankind in the gospel, the economy of which is frequently styled by the evangelists, *the kingdom of heaven*. So that the meaning of the words is, that those great and glorious things that the gospel is big with, belong only to the humble, lowly, and full of the sense of their own unworthiness, as being the only proper and capable subjects of them. But now the gospel offers grace as well as glory; it gives the Spirit, with all its helps and assistances, to recover the soul of man to some measures of the divine image, worn out and defaced by original sin. There is a great deal of heaven that the gospel imparts to believers in this world, giving them the first-fruits of glory in the sanctification and justification of their persons, and those high privileges of sonship and adoption, by which they are repossessed of and reinstated in all those rights that had been forfeited by sin, and so come to have a new claim to what they enjoy here upon earth, as well as what they hope for in heaven; for they are the saints only to whom even these temporal blessings descend by

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covenant and filial relation to God; which the rest of mankind receive only as his vassals, by the liberality of a general and promiscuous providence.

2. The second thing to be remarked is, the manner in which heaven is here promised; which is in words importing the present. I shew indeed, that the future state of blessedness was not the only thing here intended, yet it is undoubtedly the principal; and Christ here conveys it to the saints in terms not expressing future, but actual possession: not *theirs shall be*, but *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. They do not so much expect, as grasp it: it is not so much set before their hopes, as put into their hands, and from expectation passes into fruition. By this way of speaking, Christ designs to seal to us the certainty of the promise, and to assure us that we have firm hold of heaven, before we find an entrance into it.

The world surely would think that the poor man is of all persons living the most unfit to make a purchase, especially to buy kingdoms, and to bid a price for a crown and a sceptre. But it seems that the evangelically poor man can do all this, and yet not exhaust himself; which shews that the spiritual person is never so indigent, but that he can still outbid the world, and possess himself of that which all the riches upon the earth cannot compass; for immortality and heaven, and not only heaven, but also the God of heaven himself, is his possession.

To whom be rendered and ascribed, as its most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON XLIII.

JOB viii. 13.

The hypocrite's hope shall perish.

HERE is nothing in the world, though never so excellent, but it has its counterfeit; religion and grace itself are not exempted: so that in these matters, as well as in others, we often suffer a fallacy in our choice, by embracing resemblances instead of things. Sincerity and hypocrisy are the two great things about which the whole stress and business of the gospel is laid out; namely, to persuade and enforce the one, and to discover and detect the other. And here we have hypocrisy presented in its greatest and most flourishing enjoyment, which is hope; and in its greatest misery, which is utter frustration.

There are only two things that can require any explication, and the words will be very clear: first, what is meant by *the hypocrite*; and secondly, what by *the hypocrite's hope*.

As for the first, all hypocrites in the world may be comprehended under these two sorts.

(1.) The first is the gross dissembler, who knowingly, and against his conscience, pursues some sinful course, endeavouring only to conceal it from the eyes of men: such an one was Gehazi, who concealed his sharking, covetous acts from his master Elisha, [2 Kings v. 25](#). Such an one also was Judas, while he plotted the betraying of his Lord; he could eat and converse with him, and yet carry on a design against him at the same time; he could bring the guest and the traitor to the same table. Such an one was the lewd woman, in [Prov. xxx. 20](#), who took secrecy for innocence; and, putting a fair face upon a foul fact, *wiped her mouth, and said, she had done no wickedness*. Such were also the scribes and pharisees, whom our Saviour upbraids so severely, [Matth. xxiii. 27](#); for as they had the outward varnish, so they had also the inward rottenness of a noisome sepulchre. In short, this sort of hypocrites, the utmost of whose religion is to conceal, not to renounce their sins, comes within the number of those that are even stigmatized by the heathen, *qui famam, non conscientiam verentur*; such as prefer credit before conscience, an outward, lying, pompous appearance, before an inward, sincere reality.

(2.) The other sort is the formal, refined hypocrite, who deceives his own heart. he is many degrees above the other; for his conscience and his convictions will not let him take up in a course of professed dissimulation. And therefore he makes some advances into the practice of holiness; but not being sound at the heart, not being thoroughly divided from his sin, he takes that for grace which is not sincerity, and therefore much less grace; and being thus deceived, he misses of *the power of godliness*, and embraces only *the form*. Such an hypocrite we have described in [Matth. vii. 26, 27](#); he raised a very fair building, but *he laid the foundation of it in the sand*. Now both these hypocrites agree in this, that they are deceivers; for deceit is the formal, constituent reason of hypocrisy: only the difference lies



here, that one deceives the world, the other deceives himself; one resolvedly goes towards hell, the other sets forth for heaven, but misses of his way; one is a mere shadow, the other is a rotten substance.

I conceive the hypocrite here spoken of in the text is to be taken in the latter sense; for the gross, palpable dissembler neither does nor can rise so high, as to entertain any seeming, rational hope of a future felicity. For he who knows his present estate to be totally bad, and knowingly persists in it, can not with any colour of reason hope that his future condition should be good. And thus much for the first thing to be explained. As for the

Second, By *the hypocrite's hope* is here meant those persuasions that a man has of the goodness and safety of his spiritual condition, whereby he strongly persuades himself that he is now in a state of grace, and consequently shall hereafter attain to a state of glory.

Yet, since it is not to be imagined that this hope is in the same proportion in all hypocrites, we may justly distinguish in it these two degrees.

1. A probable opinion. Now opinion, we know, is but the lowest degree of assent; nay, it is rather thought, than assent; it is the understanding, as it were, halting between doubt and belief; rather catching at, than embracing its object. So that if opinion at best be so weak, what is that that is commenced upon a false ground? that hangs upon the thin, rotten thread of a bare *peradventure*: for the voice of the hypocrite is generally but the same with that of the king of Nineveh, *peradventure the Lord will be gracious*.

2. The second degree is a peremptory persuasion. This is its highest pitch and perfection; and it seems seldom to be entertained, but where hypocrisy is in conjunction with gross ignorance or judicial searedness. It is hope raised into confidence, and confidence, as it were, screwed up to a kind of plerophory; when a man is so confident of his future happiness, that nothing seems wanting but an actual possession.

These things premised briefly by way of explication, the words naturally cast themselves into these two propositions.

First, that an hypocrite may proceed so far, as to obtain an hope and expectation of a future blessedness.

Secondly, that all the hypocrite's fairest expectations and hopes of such an happiness, will in the end vanish into miserable disappointment.

For the prosecution of the first of these, I shall do these three things.

I. I shall prove that the hypocrites have such hopes.

II. I shall shew how and by what ways these hopes are first produced in the hypocrite's mind. And,

III. I shall shew how they are cherished and preserved there.

I. And first for the first of these; to wit, that the hypocrites have and do obtain such hopes, may be evinced by these two arguments.

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(1.) The first of which shall be taken from the nature and constitution of man's mind, which is vehement and restless in its pursuit after some suitable good. Now the happiness of man is not from within, from himself, but from without. And all the good he takes in from thence is conveyed, and, as it were, drained through the apprehensions of his mind: and the mind, or reason, not only apprehending its present state, but also caring for the future, it is accordingly put to seek out for a good that may bear proportion to both these conditions, that is, both a present and a future; and a present good it takes in and enjoys by actual possession, and a future only by its hope. Now it is natural for every man, both in his desires and designs, to build chiefly upon the future; and that, I suppose, for this reason, because he looks upon the future only as his life. For so much of our life as is past is gone, and to be reckoned with that which is not; and the present we know is a narrow, indivisible point, enjoyed and spent in an instant; so that all our treasure and reserve is wrapt up in the future.



And that men's desires chiefly run out after things future is clear, because the most ardent and natural of all desires, which is that of knowledge, chiefly catches at and pries into futurities. Man naturally looks forward: the eye of the soul is like that of the body, though it passes through things immediately before it, yet it always terminates in something distant. When a man is dejected upon the sight and consideration of what he is at present, he is naturally apt to relieve himself with the hope and expectation of what he shall or may be hereafter; and it is not to be questioned, but that all the world live more by hope than by fruition. Whence it is, that a person condemned, or mortally wounded, will say that he is a dead man; because he dates his death, not from the expiration of his life, but of his hopes. And this is so evident, that though in things of a most different nature, yet the truth is still the same. For as in temporals no man looks upon himself as rich or happy in the present possession of lands, unless they are secured, and made over to him for ever; so in spirituals, a man that is acted but by his bare reason, finds no relish or satisfaction in any thing at present, but as it is seasoned and set oil with an expectation of a future blessedness.



Every man naturally carries on some particular design, upon the event of which he builds his satisfaction; and the spring that moves these designs is hope. Hopes of the future are the causes of present action: for that the hypocrite performs some duties, wades through some afflictions, and that he makes some imperfect essays of obedience, it is all from the strength and activity of his hope: this first excites and quickens him to the work, and then animates and upholds him in it. Otherwise, the natural weakness of his mind would quickly cause him to quit the field, and put an end to such uncomfortable labours; for when the sight and expectation of good fails, it is natural for endeavour to cease. Hope is that which antedates and prepossesses a future good; that sets it in the view of the will, which alone puts all the faculties in motion. From hence therefore it follows, that the hypocrite has his

hope, for he has his course, and his way, according to which he acts; and without hope there can be no action.

(2.) The other argument, proving that hypocrites have their hopes, shall be taken from that peace and comfort that even hypocrites enjoy; which are the certain effects, and therefore the infallible signs of some hope abiding in the mind. We may take a view of the profound peace and security enjoyed by hypocrites in several instances: and first, we have the old world, though polluted with a general corruption, yet enjoying a general peace before the flood, so that, in [Matt. xxiv. 38, 39](#), *they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and knew not till the flood came, and took them all away*. Strange was the security of conscience that had seized upon these sinners; it was so great, that though death and destruction were even at the door, yet they ruffled it in the highest actions of jollity that human life was capable of. And in the [25th of Matthew](#) we have the foolish virgins at so firm a peace with their own conscience, that they could even sleep securely; shutting both heart and eyes against all thought of danger. And in [Amos vi. 3, 4](#), we have some *putting far away from them the evil day, lying upon beds of ivory, and stretching themselves upon their couches*: free from all thought or care; unless possibly how to make their visits, or to contrive some revel, or to prepare and dress themselves for some ball or lewd meeting. Also in [Zech. i. 11](#), we have the angel of God giving an account of the state and posture of an unsanctified world. *Behold*, says he, *the whole earth sitteth still, and at rest*. To all which scriptures we may add, by way of overplus, the verdict of our daily experience and observation. For who so much at ease and quiet, who so jocund and free from anxious distracting cares, as those that are visibly strangers to the sincerity of religion, apparently unacquainted with the ways of God? From which temper and state of mind, we may undeniably collect and argue, that they have their hopes. For where there is comfort, there must be hope: since it is built upon this foundation, it grows out of this stock, as it is in [Job viii. 11](#), *Can the rush grow up without mire? or can the flag grow with out water?* The hypocrite's hope is indeed both a water that will fail, and a mire that will defile him; yet it is this alone, that for a while gives growth and greenness to his comforts. If the heart of man were not pitched upon some bottom, it would of necessity be continually sinking. Now hope is the great and only bottom of an hypocrite's tranquillity. It is this alone that feeds all his contents, that gives continual supplies to all his satisfactions. And if hope did not (as it were by main force) stand and guard the heart, a deluge of despairing thoughts would immediately and irresistibly break in upon it. For if sinners were assured of wrath, and had certain presumptions of future vengeance, despair and rage would waste the world, and men would sin with an high hand, that they might not only merit, but, as it were, even revenge their future sufferings.

Whence it is, that though God's decree concerning the final estate of every impenitent sinner be certain, yet it is also secret, to prevent despair. And because God may intend even those that stand sentenced by it the transitory reprieve of a little worldly comfort, he keeps

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them in ignorance of it; and so long, they keep themselves in hope. How ever, every reprobate is in this respect before God, like a condemned person with a veil drawn before his eyes. For if a man did really apprehend his case utterly hopeless, he could not master the apprehensions of common humanity so far, as to admit of the least comfort. For did we ever see a condemned person (if in his wits) dancing and ranting the day before his execution? Certainly that man must needs be far overgrown with stupid ignorance or epicurism, who could eat and drink heartily to-day, when he knew that to-morrow he should die. Assuredly if it were not for hope, the heart of the merriest and most secure hypocrite in the world would break.

Other reasons of the point might be assigned; but I think these two sufficiently prove, that hypocrisy and hope may dwell together, that danger and confidence of safety are consistent, and that a man's persuasions both may be and often are much better than his condition. I come now to the

Second general thing proposed, which is to shew by what ways and means the hypocrite comes first to attain this hope.

I shall instance in four.

(1.) The first is by misapprehending God. The first foundation of this hope is laid in ignorance: for as hereafter it must end, so here it begins, in darkness. Caution, experience, and accurate meditation are apt to check hope; because they lay open the difficulties of the thing we hope for. But the persons here spoken of fetch their hope not from their judgment, but their fancy. The sum of the hypocrites creed and hope may be delivered in that of Tacitus, *fingunt creduntque*; they first feign things, then believe them. And their grand, leading mistake, which draws after it all the rest, is about God.

It is indeed our unhappiness in this state of weakness and mortality, that the most advanced in knowledge and improved in piety have yet but very lame and imperfect conceptions of the great God. And the reason of it is manifest; because we are forced to understand that which is infinite, after a finite manner. For philosophy teaches, that *intelligere est pati, et pati est recipere*. And one thing receives another, not according to the full latitude of the object, but according to the scanty model of its own capacity. If we let down a vessel into the sea, we shall bring up, not what the sea can afford, but what the vessel can hold: and just so it is in our understanding of God. Besides, it is the proper quality of the intellect in apprehending, naturally to assimilate the thing apprehended to itself. And these are the true grounds of the natural, unavoidable imperfection of our apprehensions of God.

However, God is pleased to bear with our apprehensions of him, though imperfect, so long as they are not impious and absurd; and to accept of them, though below him, so long as they are not contrary to him. But the hypocrite frames to himself such notions of a god, as have no foundation either in his nature or his word. He does (as it were) create to himself a deity, and sets up a god according to the model of his own senseless imaginations. I know

nothing that does so lively characterize and express those gross, carnal, groveling conceptions that hypocrites entertain of God, as that signal place in [Psalm l. 21](#), *Thou thoughtest*, says God, *that I was altogether such an one as thyself*. That is, he took the measure of God's thoughts of sin by his own; he rated God's esteem of duty by his own indifference. Every man, through the native pride of his heart and the deceitfulness of sin, is naturally very prone rather to bring down God to his thoughts, than to raise up his thoughts to God.

Now the soul in its course and practice of religion, having immediate intercourse with God, according to those thoughts it takes in concerning him, it is suitably affected either with fear or hope, comfort or distraction: and when it has once got this cursed, fallacious way of misrepresenting God to the conscience, there is nothing in him from whence it will not draw an argument of hope. It will suck poison out of every attribute, strain every perfection to make it subservient to the interest of its hypocrisy.

And first for that sin-devouring attribute of God's justice, which one would think should rout the hypocrite out of all his satisfactions; yet even this at tribute, (which carries in it nothing but fire and brimstone, speaks nothing but lightning and claps of thunder to the secure sinners,) as it is qualified, and allayed by the shifts and evasions of a treacherous heart, shall not at all disturb his quiet, or entrench upon his hope. The hypocrite indeed does and must acknowledge that God hates sin, and that his jealousy burns against the sinner; that his law is violated, and his justice provoked: but then he has this evasion, that *justice is God's strange work, that he does not afflict willingly*, nor take any delight in the exercise of that severe attribute; and that if at any time he does think fit to exercise it, it is only upon gross, scandalous sinners, such as wallow in the enormities and pollutions of the world; such whose damnation is visibly writ upon their present lives, as swearers, atheists, whore-mongers, and such like modish fashionable sinners. But as for those who are civilized in their manners, and stand guilty of no such clamorous sins, who carry a fair profession, and keep the church constantly, though perhaps it is chiefly to see and to be seen; to such the hypocrite concludes that there is no condemnation.

But now, if after all these debates and reasonings conscience is still unsatisfied, and God's justice appears terrible, and his power grim and dreadful, yet then the thoughts of mercy shall come in, and clear off all. So that if conscience and sins unrepented of begin to cry out, mercy shall cry louder: if vengeance seems ready to strike, mercy shall divert the stroke. Whatsoever objections the hypocrite can make against himself from God's justice, he will answer from the topic of his mercy.

But then here the fallacy lies: the hypocrite considers God's justice appeased and his mercy enlarged; but he does not consider the qualifications of those persons to whom these attributes bear such a gracious aspect. It is confessed, God's justice is satisfied and his anger is disarmed; but it is so, to those only whose sins are remitted, and whose persons justified; and whose burden is entirely transferred, and cast upon the person of Christ their great



surety, whose satisfaction wards off the sin-revenging justice of God, only from the penitent and truly pious. But what is this to the hypocrite, who was never translated and implanted into Christ by a true and lively faith?

And then for that other attribute of mercy: it is indeed infinite and boundless in its outgoings; it covers all sins, keeps off the law, and evacuates the curse. But it does these great things only for such as are true believers and regenerate; and to be so is an harder matter than the world generally takes it for. But this the hypocrite does not consider, and therefore he retains his confidence; he catches at the mercy, but overlooks the condition; and so no wonder, if he has hope, where he has no interest. And thus much for the first way, by which the hypocrite raises his false hope, namely, by his misapprehensions of God, and particularly in respect of those two great attributes, his justice and his mercy.

(2.) The second way by which he raises the same false hope is by his misunderstanding of sin. Sin, one way or other, is the true cause of all the trouble, anguish, and despair, that is incident to the mind of man. Every tear springs from this fountain. Every thought of terror and distrust issues from sin, as from its first occasion and original. But now these troubles and despairs about the main issues of a man's future happiness being very irksome, and contrary to the heart's content, a man is willing to gratify his heart so far, as to endeavour their removal, by winking at sin that is their cause. Hence it is, that men hold fast their confidence of life, though they walk in the ways of death: for they studiously cast a mist before their own eyes, that they may go on securely, and not be forced to see that, which, being seen, would certainly constrain them to lay down their hopes. Sin rightly apprehended would quickly confound all their comforts, dash their peace and security, and lay their fairest confidence in the dust.

Wherefore the hypocrite, to establish his heart in hope, labours with all his might, and casts about, to relieve his conscience with such easy conceptions of sin, as may not at all grate or fall foul upon his comforts. He cannot persuade himself, that that can be so heinous and dreadful, that is committed with so much facility. Many are apt to look upon actual, as some do upon original sin, not as the error, but as the condition of their nature. Love to sin naturally covers all its deformities.

And first for the nature of sin in general, as stript of all its circumstances and particularities. The hypocrite does not look upon it in its native filth, as contrary to the infinite purity of God's nature and his law, as leaving an everlasting, indelible stain upon the conscience; no, nor yet in its dangerous effects, as dooming the sinner to all the curses that an infinite wrath can inflict: but because punishment is only threatened while pleasure is presented, the colour of the serpent covers his poison, the danger is overlooked, and the proffer accepted, and so the pardon of sin is counted as easy as the commission.

And from this undervaluing of the nature of sin in general, he quickly passes into a cursed extenuation of particulars. Some indeed hold and maintain a distinction of sins into

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mortal and venial; calling those mortal, that for their greatness and enormity deserve death; and those venial, that for their smallness naturally deserve pardon: which distinction as some assert in doctrine, so all hypocrites own in practice, and it is the inward language of all their hearts. For though perhaps they may *strain at camels*, yet they can easily *swallow gnats*; though blasphemies, thefts, and murders may be shunned, yet sinful, impure thoughts, words, and desires are passed over by the hypocrite, not only without remorse, but without notice, as things below his sorrow, and not deserving repentance, much less condemnation. Gross external acts of sin, he knows, are visible, and therefore no ways for his advantage; so that no wonder if the hypocrite avoids these: but this is not his penitence, but his prudence; not because he hates the nature of sin, but because he fears the circumstance.

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And thus I have shewn the two first ways by which the hypocrite gains his hope, namely, by misapprehending God, and misunderstanding sin. And when he has wrong apprehensions of that which deserves punishment, and of him who is alone able to inflict it, I suppose it will be no hard matter to conclude, that he may easily shuffle himself into hopes of an escape.

(3.) The third way by which the hypocrite first attains this false and spurious hope, is by mistakes about the spiritual rigour and strictness of the gospel. God at first gave man a righteous law, and entered with him into a covenant of works. According to the tenor of which covenant, the law required exact obedience, universal holiness, and perfection; and this in the greatest rigour, not admitting any grains of allowance for the least defect or deviation. But man having sinned, and thereby broke this covenant, *the law became weak through sin*; that is, weak and unable to justify, and powerful only to condemn: so that now all legal dispensations are dispensations of terror; and to tell sinners of the law, is only in another word to tell them of the curse. Hereupon God was pleased to introduce a new covenant, and instead of works to establish our salvation upon a law of faith, as it is in [Rom. iii. 27](#). So that no breach of the law whatsoever should be able to condemn him that believes.

Now the hypocrite seeing this, and reflecting upon the former unsupportable severity of the law, he naturally dashes upon the other extreme, and thinks that if the law were all justice, then certainly the gospel must be all mercy, without justice. Thus making it so the law of liberty, as not of duty; and getting a full liberty, or rather licentiousness of conscience, together with a plentiful stock of faith, without good works, he looks upon himself as perfect and evangelical: and henceforward in the business of justification, but to think any more of an holy life, he calls it (as the phrase of some is) a returning to Egypt. And therefore as for duty, obedience, and such other legal things, they must belong only to moral men, who are not acquainted with this sublime mystery of the gospel.

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Hereupon, having made so fair a progress, he proceeds further, and proposes to himself the gospel, as it is held forth in the most lax and favourable expressions, in some scriptures, which he first misunderstands, and then draws to his own purpose.

As for instance, that in [2 Corinth. viii. 12](#), where God is said to accept the will for the deed. From whence, though he lives in a continual omission of known duties, and a frequent commission of known sins; yet he will comfort himself in this, that his heart is good, that he means well, that his will is upright; and God accepts of this as well as the strictest obedience. But to rectify so perverse a mistake, such an one must know that God never accepts the will for the deed, where he puts it into a man's power to do as well as to will: but this holds only where a man is disabled from the performance of his duty, in which case the inward sincerity of the will supplies the want of the outward action. As for instance, it is a man's duty both to frequent the public worship of God, and to worship him in private with the humblest postures of body, as kneeling and the like; but if God casts him upon his bed of sickness, and the man is not able to stir an hand or a foot, there is no doubt but God accepts of his desire to do these outward acts of reverence as much as if he actually did them. And if a man would receive the blessed sacrament, but is in a place where he cannot have it administered to him, it is as little to be questioned but that God accepts the devout pantings and breathings of his soul after that heavenly ordinance, as much as if he were really a partaker of it in the outward elements. But what is this to the hypocrite's case, who pretends will in contradiction to practice, when both are in his power? thus deluding himself and abusing the grace of God, and withal not considering, that such kind of expressions as this, that God accepts the will for the deed, and the like, are not proposed to us as the standing rules of our obedience in our ordinary Christian course, but as special arguments of comfort in cases of extraordinary distress; not as our spiritual diet to feed and to sustain, but as cordials to recover us.

Again, when the hypocrite reads in [Rom. x. 9](#) that *whosoever shall confess with his mouth, and believe with his heart, that God hath raised Christ from the dead, shall be saved*; he finds that it is no hard matter to own such a belief and profession, to carry the name and wear the colours of Christ, and so long he concludes that this scripture warrants his salvation. And again, [1 John ii. 1](#), *If any one sin, we have an advocate with the Father*. Hence with much confidence he can cast all his sins upon Christ's intercession; and though he continues to sin, yet as long as Christ continues to intercede, he doubts not but the interest of his soul stands sure. Now these scriptures, with many others, being improved by a subtle, crafty, self-deceiving head, and a wicked, unsanctified heart, lay the foundation of all the hypocrite's hope. But if he would undeceive himself, and consider that obedience is still necessary, and that *Christ came not to destroy, but to establish the law*, as the rule of that obedience; that he came not to give any new law, (as Socinus and his school would have it,) but to vindicate and clear the old in its just purity and extent; I say, the thought of this would make him begin to question the soundness of his hope, and try the foundation before he finished the superstructure.

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Christ's yoke is indeed easy, but it is still a yoke; and his burden is light, but it is still a burden, and will be so as long as we carry flesh and blood, and a body of sin about us. That one gospel-precept of self-denial seriously considered, how difficult it is to our corrupt nature, how contrary to our most native inclinations, would make the hypocrite confess, that notwithstanding all these gracious concessions and abatements of legal rigour, that shine forth upon mankind in the gospel, he must yet be forced to purchase heaven and happiness at a far higher rate than he did imagine.

(4.) The fourth and last way that I shall mention, by which the hypocrite attains his false hope, is by his mistakes about repentance, faith, and conversion. And it is not to be questioned, but that mistakes about these have been the deplorable cause of the ruin of many thousands: for, as Quintilian says of eloquence, *Multi ad eloquentiam pervenire potuissent, nisi se jam pervenisse putassent*; so many, in all probability, might have attained to repentance, but that they thought they had repented already: many might have believed and been converted, had they not preferred speed before certainty, and too erroneously and hastily presumed upon these works, before they were ever thoroughly wrought upon them.

The carnal hypocrite is apt to think every fit of sorrow for sin, every grumbling of natural conscience, to be repentance; and therefore here he rests, thinking his sorrow to have atoned his sin, and his tears to have washed away his impurities: not considering the great and vast difference that is between μεταμέλῃσθαι and μετανοεῖν; between a bare regret and anguish for sin, causing the soul to wish only that it had not been committed, and between such a sorrow as is attended with a total change and renovation of the heart. The first may proceed from the principles of nature awakened, and so is common to those that finally perish, and prove castaways; the latter is a product of the special working of God's Spirit infusing grace into the soul, and therefore peculiar only to believers. Now, if the hypocrite would warily observe, whether the sorrow he so much trusts in did ever yet cleanse his heart, so as to turn the full bent and propensity of it to the commands of God, he would find little cause for hope, and see that his very repentance was to be repented of; and that all his penitential showers were like the rain upon the streets, that does not cleanse, but foul the ways.

Also for conversion: if the hypocrite can strain his heart so high as to relinquish some sins, to make some confession, and to engage in some brittle, uncertain promises of future amendment, he imagines now that the great work has passed upon him, and that he is taken from the portion of sinners to the privilege of saints. But if he would impartially read his own case in the examples of others, and see Judas confessing his sin, and that with much bitterness, and yet for all that *a son of perdition*; if he would view Herod doing many things upon John's preaching, and yet continuing an unconverted, bloody Herod still; if he would consider Agrippa in the very borders of conversion, and almost become a Christian, and yet for all that never converted, nor made a Christian; he would find just cause to change

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his hopes into fears; and instead of being confident of this work, with much humility and trembling to seek after it.

And then, lastly, for that grand, deciding work of faith: because the hypocrite, by a blind, irrational boldness, is confident that Christ will save him, and redeem him from God's wrath; therefore he thinks that he believes, and that he relies and depends upon Christ. But if he would examine his faith by these interrogatories; as, 1st, Whether or no he has overcome the world? for every believer does so; [1 John v. 4](#). He triumphs over Satan, he conquers his corruptions, and repels temptations. And 2dly, Whether he can say, not only that *he does not sin*, but that *he cannot sin*? Not that he cannot commit, but that he cannot approve or delight in sin; and that he never sins with such a full consent of will, but that it is still with some secret reluctancy and remorse of the renewed principle: every true believer is able to say so, as is evident from [1 John iii. 9](#), *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God*. It is as impossible for the spiritual man to relish sin, as it is for the natural man to feed upon stones or dirt. Now, I say, if the hypocrite would bring his faith to the test of these questions, and let his conscience truly and fairly return an answer, he would find that there is as great a difference between a well-grounded gospel-hope and his hope, as there is between believing and presuming.

This therefore is the fourth way, by which the hypocrite procures his hope. He reads, that those who repent, believe, and are converted, shall be saved; and hereupon he remembers, that he has been sometimes troubled about sin, and this he calls repentance. Also he finds himself full of confidence, that Christ will undertake for his salvation, and this he persuades himself is faith. And lastly, he finds that there is some outward change made in his life; some duties performed that were before neglected, and some sins avoided that were before committed; and this he styles conversion. And herein is the whole stock upon which the hypocrite trades, to secure himself some hope of eternal happiness.

And now, to make some use and improvement of what has hitherto been delivered: if in this grand business of salvation the hypocrite may and does entertain an hope, then let none, from the confidence of their hopes, conclude that they are not hypocrites; but consider at least, if not suspect the safety of their condition. It is indeed the custom of some to put the superstructure in the room of the foundation, and first of all to urge assurance: but such persons measure their safety by their confidence, and so may very fitly have that speech of Solomon applied to them in a spiritual sense, in [Prov. xiv. 16](#), *The fool rageth, and is confident*: for certainly where the venture is of eternity, the greatest caution is the best security. The apostle indeed says, in [Rom. xiv. 23](#), that *he that doubteth is damned*: but this is quite upon another occasion; and I am afraid that it will one day be found, that many have been and shall be damned, because they never doubted. For since there are so many ways for a man to delude himself about his spiritual estate, since hypocrisy is so connatural to us, and the



heart not only easy, but willing, and not only willing, but also industrious to cheat itself into such a vain hope; can there be any thing more seasonable and rational, than to caution such as *think they stand, to beware lest they fall*, and still to fear that that hope is scarce sure enough, that can never be too sure?

And thus to persuade doubting is not to persuade scepticism in religious matters; for scepticism is properly a doubting of the truth of universals, and of the articles of religion; but the doubting here spoken of is concerning the safety of a man's own particular condition: nay, this doubting presupposes a certain assent to the former; for if a man were not persuaded of the general truth of religion, he would never doubt, or be solicitous about his own personal concern in it. This doubting therefore is so far from weakening, that it does indeed establish our hope: for as it is said of knowledge, *Firmissimam esse scientiam quae oritur ex dubitatione*; so the same may be said of our hopes of future happiness, that those are the most sure and rational, that were first ushered in with doubting and distrust. I say distrust, not of God, but of ourselves; for this kind of doubting causes trial, and trial produces knowledge, and knowledge brings assurance, and assurance so obtained maketh not ashamed.

He that shall observe what the scripture says of the deep, unconceivable treachery of man's heart, will have sufficient warrant from thence to bid the most holy in appearance suspect his condition. Let none say that he was converted so many years since, and that therefore, though he knows himself under the present power of some sin, yet his hopes of heaven stand sure and good, in the strength of that his former conversion: but let him consider rather, how easy it is for a man to think that he is converted, when he is yet in the very *gall of bitterness, and the bonds of iniquity*; and to take that for assurance, that is only self-flattery; and to think that he has a lively faith and a lasting hope, which yet, being spurious and unsound, will one day miserably deceive him; and, having raised him up to heaven, leave him in the lowest regions of hell: much like the flattering disappointment of the hungry man's dream in [Isaiah xxix. 8](#), *The hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty*. This know for certain, that the only way for a man to make his hopes sure and lasting is to be sincere; and the next way to attain sincerity, is first thoroughly to know and understand his hypocrisy.

And thus much concerning the second thing proposed, which was to shew by what means the hypocrite takes his first rise, and how he gets and obtains this hope. The third and last will be to shew, how he maintains and preserves it.

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SERMON XLIV.

JOB viii. 13.

The hypocrite's hope shall perish.

I FORMERLY made an entrance upon these words, in which, after some brief explication of the terms, I shewed that they naturally cast themselves into these two propositions.

I. That even an hypocrite may proceed so far, as to entertain hopes and expectations of a future happiness.

II. That the hypocrite's fairest and most promising expectation of a future blessedness would in the end vanish into miserable disappointment.

For the first of these, I cast the prosecution of it under these three heads.

1. To prove that an hypocrite may and does entertain such hopes.
2. To shew by what ways and means he comes first to obtain them.
3. And lastly, to shew how he continues and preserves them.

For the first, That an hypocrite may and does entertain such hopes: I proved it by two reasons, the first of which was taken from the nature of man's mind, which was vehement and restless in its pursuit after a suitable good, and accordingly was put to seek out for a good that might bear proportion to both its conditions; that is, both a present and a future: and a present good it takes in by actual possession, and a future only by its hopes.

2. The second reason was taken from that peace and tranquillity of mind that even hypocrites enjoy; which are the certain effects, and therefore the infallible signs of some hope abiding in the mind.

As for the next thing, which was to shew by what ways and means the hypocrite comes first to obtain this hope:

I mentioned four.

1st, By his misunderstanding of God, especially in his two great attributes, his justice and his mercy. 2dly, His misapprehending of sin. 3dly, By his ignorance of the spiritual rigour and strictness of the gospel. And 4thly, By his mistakes about the nature of repentance, faith, and conversion.

These things I then insisted upon at large, and so far I have gone; and I shall not prevent myself in what remains by any further repetitions; but shall now proceed to the third and last thing proposed for the prosecution of the first proposition, which was to shew by what ways and means the hypocrite preserves and continues this false hope. And here we must observe, that those methods by which he first gets it have in them also a natural fitness to continue, cherish, and foment it: the same thing being usually the producing and the preserving cause; as the parent that begot the child will also foster and maintain it.

But I shall instance in three ways more especially, by which the hypocrite keeps up and continues those hopes, which upon the former false grounds he took up.



1. The first is, by keeping up a course of external obedience, and abstaining from gross, scandalous sins. Now the hypocrite's confidence having no reality or ground in being, but only an imaginary foundation in his own apprehensions, it concerns him by all means to keep fair with conscience; forasmuch as that has the keeping of, and the power over all his contents. And it is withal of a lively, active nature, apt to discern sin, and apt to pursue and vex the soul for it; it will be flying in a man's face, if not pacified, or at least deluded, by some seeming pursuit of religion. It is to the soul as the disease called the wolf to the body; if it be not continually fed, it will gnaw and prey upon the body itself, devour and consume the flesh. So if conscience be not gratified by some outward services, it will recoil upon the soul, and with much rage and bitterness torment and feed upon that.

Wherefore the hypocrite, that his conscience may not pass the condemning sentence upon him, will be often bribing it with some specious outward performances: and that he may pacify it, his chief work and business must be to possess it with this persuasion, that he is in a state of grace: which being that, which the scripture in other words calls *spiritual life*, it does by consequence imply in it two things; first, the principle and fountain of this life, which is faith: and this the hypocrite thinks himself endued with, from his fore mentioned mistakes about conversion. The second is the acting and exercise of this principle, which is called *gospel obedience*; and of this the hypocrite must endeavour to assure himself by his behaviour, in the continued tract and course of his life. Hereupon he is careful to conform himself to the exact letter of the law, and not to pursue those practices that carry in them an open, barefaced opposition to it. And so long as he does this, his conscience is silent, and his hope continues.

The young man in the gospel was a pregnant instance of this, who, reflecting upon his strict and unblameable conversation according to the several precepts of the law, vaunted himself in that confident reply to Christ in [Matth. xix. 20](#), *All these things have I kept from my youth*. See St. Paul also before his conversion: questionless his hopes of heaven were as full and fair, as large and promising, as his heart could desire, and the foundation of them all (as we may collect from his own writings) was only his external conformity to the words of the law. [Philipp. iii. 6](#), *Touching the righteousness (says he) that is in the law, I was blameless*. That is, according to the doctrine of the pharisees, of which sect he was, he placed a legal righteousness in abstaining from those external commissions of sin, that were prohibited in the letter of the law, and in the performance of those outward acts of duty that were there enjoined: whereupon, leading his conversation in an accurate observance of the outward letter, he pronounces himself blameless; and therefore, doubtless, while he thought himself thus blameless, he had all those hopes of happiness that it is natural for a person, that thinks himself blameless, to entertain. And that he gathered this opinion of himself and of his condition only from his fulfilling the outward letter, without insisting upon the inward, spiritual, stricter part of it, is clear and manifest from [Rom. vii. 7](#), *I had not known sin* (says

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he) *but by the law: for I had not known Inst, unless the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.* In which words he considers the law not barely according to the letter, but according to the spiritual scope and intention of it: and though the law taken in the former sense did acquit and absolve, yet in this latter sense it did condemn him. And the reason is, because the law considered in the letter did only regulate external actions: but, thus considered, it was a searcher into, and a *discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*; and consequently did arraign the very desires of sin, the first risings and movings of concupiscence.

Now that this external obedience to the law, and refraining from gross, notorious sins, is a singular preservative of the hypocrite's hope, and a strong maintainer of his confidence, as it has been sufficiently proved by these scripture-instances; so the same is yet further manifest from that strange method that God has sometimes used for the conversion of formal hypocrites. He has let them fall into some gross, open, scandalous sin, the cry of which has exceedingly troubled and disquieted them, and beat them out of all those refuges of hope, which the former civility of their conversation had afforded them. Whereupon, being utterly bereaved of their confidence, God has took this occasion to let into their hearts a full sense of all their sins, even so far as to discover and rip open to them their sinful nature, their original corruption, and thereby to convert and cause them to repair to Christ, and by a lively faith cast all their hopes upon his satisfaction. And no doubt but it was upon this account that our Saviour said, that the publicans and harlots, persons of scandalous lives and prostitute reputations, yet went to heaven sooner than those glorious but rotten counterfeiters, the scribes and pharisees. This therefore is the first way by which the hypocrite continues and preserves his false hope, viz. by the civility and outwardly blameless carriage of his conversation.

2. The second way by which the hypocrite keeps up his hopes, and maintains the good opinion he has conceived of his spiritual estate, is by comparing himself with others, who are openly vitious, and apparently worse than himself. There is no way more effectual for a man to argue himself into a delusion. It is an easy matter to enhance our apprehensions of the value of any thing, while there is a worse in our view, Clipt money may be accounted good, if compared to counterfeit. The hypocrite thinks himself religious, not from any goodness of his own, but from the badness of others. he raises a structure of reputed holiness upon the deplorable ruins of other men's, and so entertains both hope and comfort not upon judgment, but comparison.

But as in other things comparisons are justly accounted odious, so here they are dangerous and pernicious. For it is this that makes him overrate his condition, and set that price upon it that God will never come up to. This makes him overvalue his own estate, and despise others; while he should pity and lament theirs, and amend his own.

This was the chief ground of the pharisee's hope and confidence, that *he was not as other men*; an adulterer, covetous, swearer, or the like. When he sees the enormous intem-



perance of the drunkard, and compares it with his own strictness, he blesses himself with all the promises and assurances of heaven, because he sees the other directly posting to hell. When he sees the open profaneness of some, then he reflects upon his own religious duties and fastings, and so by a fallacious comparison concludes himself happy, because he sees another very miserable. He does not measure the holiness of his actions by their conformity to the law of God, but by their unconformity to the actions of others. In short, the hypocrite could never with any colour of confidence think himself holy, if others were not exceeding wicked.

But he that is apt to overvalue himself upon such deceiving grounds, and to owe his perfection not to any worth of his own, but to a foil, should consider, that sin admits of a large latitude of degrees, the least of which will ruin and condemn as surely, though not as deeply, as the greatest; and withal, that there are as many degrees of sinners as of sins. There are many paths in the broad way, some of which are more cleanly, some more foul; yet they all tend to the same end: and those shall in the issue as certainly arrive at hell, that tread the cleanlier paths of a refined hypocrisy, as those that trash through the mire and dirt of the grossest abominations. And therefore let not the hypocrite think himself in a good condition, because others are in a worse; let him not compare his life to theirs, but let him rather bring and compare it *to the law and to the testimony*, and there he shall read the vanity of his hopes, the deplorable defects of his most exact righteousness, and find that it is infinitely more below the perfect purity required in God's commands, than it is above the foulest practices of the most scandalous, shameless transgressors.

3. The third way by which the hypocrite keeps up and maintains his hopes, is by forbearing to make a strict and impartial trial of his estate. That which first raised his hope, I shew, was ignorance; and that which continues and fomented ignorance is want of self-trial. He that would thoroughly understand himself must first thoroughly try himself. For it is this that dives into the retired depths of a deceitful heart, that does (as it were) sift and winnow the soul, and singles out the precious from the vile, that before lay in a confused heap, and placing them under a distinct view of the judgment, gives it a full and a clear prospect into them.

No wonder if the hypocrite discerns not his condition, when he never turns his eyes inwards by a thorough faithful examination. For as in a trade a man may go on and traffic, thinking himself to be rich, when indeed he is poor and near breaking, only because he does not examine his stock, nor take a survey of his accounts, so is it in the hypocrite's profession of religion; he proceeds in it, and thinks himself in a thriving condition, while in the mean time he withers and decays, and is *near to cursing*: and all this befalls him because he considers not whether he has a sufficient stock of grace to carry him through his Christian profession. A man must descend into himself, and retreat into his own bosom by a severe inquiry, or live and die a stranger to his spiritual estate, and at as great a distance from his own heart

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as that is from a sure peace. We know how apt every man is to think his case good, and such as will abide the law, till the weakness of it be made manifest in the trial. *The rich man* (says Solomon) *is wise in his own conceit; but he that has understanding searches him out.* And so may it be said of the hypocrite, that he conceits himself holy and happy, and in a state of grace and favour with God, till such time as an awakened conscience searches him out, and discovers to him the vanity of his groundless imaginations.



The foulest soul may think itself fair and beautiful, till it comes to view its deformity in the glass of God's word. No man can discover the depth and danger of his spiritual wounds but by searching them. But it is not to be wondered, that an hypocrite is so fearful to engage in this work; for he has a shrewd suspicion that it will overthrow and put an end to all his comforts: and every man is naturally averse from seeking after that, which he is unwilling to find. He that would fain seem holy, will hardly be brought to set about that duty, that will certainly convince him of his unholiness. But how irksome and displeasing soever this work is, the hypocrite must know that it comes authorized both with God's counsel and command; and I shall here add only this argument to enforce this duty upon him, that if his hopes and confidence will not abide the examination of his own conscience, he must not expect that they should ever endure the trial of God's tribunal.

And thus much for the third way or means by which the hypocrite continues and preserves his false hope; which was the last thing proposed for the prosecution of the first proposition: I proceed now to the

Second, viz. That the hypocrite's fairest and most promising expectation of a future happiness will in the end vanish into miserable disappointment.

For the prosecution of which, I shall,

I. Prove the proposition, and shew that the hypocrite's hope and expectation of a future happiness will perish and he disappointed.



II. I shall shew those critical seasons and turns, in which more especially the hypocrite's hope will be sure to fail him.

III. And lastly, make some application of the whole.

I. For the first of these, I shall prove the proposition two ways.

1. From clear testimony of scripture. And here, though the text itself be sufficient to prove the doctrine drawn from it, this being only a variation of that into other words; yet, for the more clear and evident illustration of the truth in hand, we will take in also the suffrage of other scriptures. And first, in this very chapter we have seen the hypocrite's hope compared to flags and rushes, which in their most flourishing condition are not far from lading; but while they have one part in the spring, have another usually in the fall. To-day they are fresh and verdant; to-morrow they wither and die, and are cast into the oven: you may spare the sickle, they will droop and fall of themselves. And in the [14th verse of this 8th chapter of Job](#), we have the hypocrite's hope compared to a *spider's web*; a similitude of great elegance

and significance; and we may observe a great analogy between the spider's web and that in a double respect. 1st, In respect of the curious subtilty and the fine artificial composure of it. The spider in every web shews itself an artist: so the hypocrite spins his hope with a great deal of art, in a thin, fine thread. This and that good duty, this good thought, this opposing of some gross sin, are all interwoven together to the making up a covering for his hypocrisy. And as the spider draws all out of its own bowels, so the hypocrite weaves all his confidence out of his own inventions and imaginations. 2dly, It resembles it in respect of its weakness; it is too fine spun to be strong. After the spider has used all its art and labour in framing a web, yet how easily is it broke, how quickly is it swept down! So after the hypocrite has wrought out an hope with much cost, art, and industry, it is yet but a weak, slender, pitiful thing. He does indeed by this get some name and room amongst professors; he does, as it were, hang his hopes upon the beams of God's house. But when God shall come to cleanse, and, as it were, to sweep his sanctuary, such cobwebs are sure to be fetched down. Thus the hypocrite, like the spider, by all his artifice and labour only disfigures God's house. An hypocrite in a church is like a cobweb in a palace; all that he is or does serving only to annoy and misbecome the place and station that he would adorn.

Sundry other scripture-expressions there are, that cast much light and evidence upon this truth; as in [Job xx. 5](#), *The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment*. The hypocrite takes a great deal of pains, and by much ado pieces up his broken evidences for heaven, bolsters up his decaying hopes, and by many shifts keeps up a contented heart for the time of a transitory life. But, alas! what is hope lengthened out for a few moments, to an eternity of despair! when he shall be swallowed up in that black abyss of darkness and despondency, from whence he shall never enjoy the least glimmering hope of an after-delivery. Could he prolong his hopes beyond the years of Methuselah, yet all these together put into the balance with perpetuity are but as a moment, as an instant, that vanishes as soon as present. Hence in [Job xiii. 16](#), Job making mention of God says, that *the hypocrite shall not come before him*. Such an one indeed, while he jogs on in a formal, seemingly pious course, may think that every step sets him nearer and nearer to God; but it is with him here, as with a man out of his way, the further and faster he goes, the wider he is from his intended journey's end. Again, in [Job xxvii. 8](#), there is a pathetic interrogation made; *What is the hope of the hypocrite, when God taketh away his soul?* A sad exchange certainly! But that which begins in vanity must needs determine in vexation of spirit, horror of conscience, and eternal confusion. And, to shew yet further how contemptible and vain a thing it is, we have the wise man emphatically comparing it to a candle, in [Prov. xxiv. 20](#), where he tells us, *that the candle of the wicked shall be put out*. And what is a lamp or candle, but a diminutive, dwindling, contracted light at best? made only to measure out a few moments, and to burn for a little time, both shining and spending itself at once: so that although it should not be blown out, or extinguished by any violent accident, yet it would at length



go out of its own accord, and that with an offensive farewell too left behind. In like manner, though God should not, by any severe and boisterous dispensation of judgments, forcibly rend and tear the hypocrite's hope out of his heart; yet through its own native weakness, having lasted its term, and, like a lamp or candle, having consumed its little stock, it must die, and sink, and drop away of itself. In short, we have Christ's own word, assuring us that it cannot last, in [Matth. xv. 13](#), *Every plant (says he) that my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up*. But the hypocrite's hope is a slip of his own planting, of his own watering and dressing; and therefore, when God shall come to purge his garden, such weeds and nuisances are sure to be cast out. Thus we see the whole current of the scriptures directly set against the hypocrite's confidence; we may read its doom almost in every page and period of God's word: so that if this be certain, that the word of God shall stand and abide, then this must be also as certain, that the *hypocrite's hope shall perish*.

2. That the hypocrite's hope of future happiness shall assuredly perish, may be proved from the weakness of the foundation upon which it is built. And we know, that in all buildings, if this be rotten, the superstructure cannot be lasting; if the supporters reel, that which is supported must needs shake. I have already shewn, that ignorance and misapprehension were the grounds upon which the hypocrite's fairest confidences were raised, and the only pillars upon which they were borne up: and can we imagine, that errors and mistakes are such foundations, as to rear upon them an hope that must stand and last to eternity? I have made it appear, that all the hypocrite's hopes are taken up from erroneous, mistaken conceptions of God, of sin, of the gospel, and of repentance, faith, and conversion. And are these, think we, likely to bear him out? Because the hypocrite builds an unreasonable, presumptuous confidence upon God's mercy, do we think that this will secure him from the dreadful blow of his justice? Because the hypocrite never truly apprehended sin, will it therefore follow that he shall never smart for sin? Will shutting our eyes against a danger secure us from it? Because the gospel, through the deceit of his ignorant mind, seems to favour and release him from duty, will this warrant him in the neglect of it? Will ignorance of the spirituality and strictness of the gospel discharge him from the curse of the law? Or because he falsely thinks he has repented, will this entitle him to the privileges of the penitent? Because he mistakes the nature of faith, shall he therefore inherit the portion of believers? Thus we see how the whole fabric of his hope bears upon the false and treacherous bottom of ignorance and mistake, which support and hold together all the parts and parcels of it.

And as ignorance is one of its main foundations, so it equally rests upon another altogether as weak and as uncertain; which is self-love. For as wicked and as confident as such persons are, they are yet afraid to be damned; and therefore they are willing to believe that they shall not. And howsoever they live here, they are very desirous to be happy here after; and therefore they find their hearts very prone to be persuaded that they shall be so. For I challenge the most confident and improved hypocrite in the world to shew any other ground

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for his hope of ever coming to heaven, but only because he thinks so, and because he would have it so. But can bare thought or desire alter the reality and state of things? Well, therefore, may we conclude, that that which is founded only upon ignorance and self-love must needs end in disappointment and shame. And thus much for the first thing, which was the proof of the proposition: I proceed now to the

Second, which is to shew what are those critical seasons and turns, in which more especially the hypocrite's hope will be sure to fail him. I shall mention two.

1. The first is in the time of some heart-breaking, discouraging judgment from God. And here we must know, that the hypocrite has two supports upon which jointly he casts the whole burden of his spiritual estate; namely, his hope in God, and his enjoyment of the creature. With the former he quiets his conscience, with the latter he comforts his heart. For whatsoever he pretends, and howsoever he seems to place all his expectations above; yet he draws all his content, his delight and satisfaction from the world. Like a tree, though he seems to flourish upwards and rise towards heaven, yet his root is in the ground, and he lives from beneath. He cannot place his joys entirely in God, but he must have something else besides. Ananias and Sapphira will cast in their estate into the common stock of the church; but the public faith will not satisfy them, unless they reserve a secret portion to themselves. The hypocrite cannot hope for another world any longer than he enjoys this. Wherefore when God strips him of all his temporals, then he is utterly cast down, his heart breaks, his hope fails, and his confidence of future happiness vanishes before his present afflictions. He can look up to heaven no longer than he stands firm upon the earth. Had Job been an hypocrite when he was brought so low, and utterly spoiled of all earthly comforts, no former hope he had in God could have kept him from following his wife's advice; but he would have been ready to curse God, and spit the venom of his discontented heart in his face, though he died for it. No hypocrite is so far of Job's temper as to be able at the same time to hold fast his hopes, and to *embrace a dunghill*, and (according to his phrase) *to trust in God though he kills him*. He cannot heartily call God father, while he whips and chastises him.

Hence Job clears himself of hypocrisy by this notable question, [Job xxvii. 10](#), *Will the hypocrite delight himself in the Almighty?* God indeed is usually made the prop of his presumption, but never the object of his delight. he never attains to those well-tempered, durable, victorious hopes of the righteous, so excellently set forth in [Habak. iii. 17, 18](#); *Although the figtree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, and the labour of the olive shall fail; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation*. No, the hypocrite's hope and joy is quite of another make and mould. he finds no taste or relish in celestial joys, abstracted from the plenties and jollities of the world. He finds no feast in a good conscience any longer than he sits down to a full table. Come to such an one while he is flushed in honour, strong in interest, and all things flow in full and fair to his ambition, and what devout



discourses shall you hear from him, especially after a large meal; and what contempt of the world, and affiance in God, as if his heart were already lodged in Abraham's bosom! But let God once put forth his hand and touch him in his beloved name or interest, toss him upon the tongues of his enemies, and lay him low in contempt and disgrace; and then come to him, and see whether he can now live upon his former talk, and support his spirits with those glorious pretences he used to flourish his discourse with, in the midst of his former affluence. No; the case is quite altered, and you shall find him a pitiful, abject, dispirited lump of clay: pale and whining, and creeping into every company to tell doleful stories of himself and his sufferings. Or, as the prophet, [Isaiah li. 20](#), much better expresses it, you will find him *like a wild bull in a net*; tumbling and tossing, hampered and impatient, and fit for nothing but to let the world see the strange and ugly difference between the way and postures of an hypocrite in a prosperous and in a calamitous condition. It is clear therefore, that in the time of such severe judgments the hypocrite's confidence leaves him, deserts, and utterly fails him: for he cannot hold his hope in one hand, unless he grasps the world in the other.

2. The other season, in which the hypocrite's hope will be sure to fail and to forsake him, is at the time of death. Although he has by many arts and shifts prolonged his confidence hitherto, yet this hour will put a period both to his life and his expectations at once: for the hypocrite's hope is but an annuity at the best, he has it but for term of life at the longest. When a few days in the flesh shall be passed, he must be forced to lie down, and breathe out his soul and his hopes together. And though it might be said of him, that as long as there was life there was hope; as long as his body breathed, his soul hoped; yet at this time that saying of the Psalmist must pass upon him, [Psalm cxlvi. 4](#), *His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, and in that very day all his thoughts perish*. All his fond expectations shall then upbraid him to his face: Satan, his greatest flatterer, shall then laugh him to scorn; death shall confute all his confidences, and hell convince him that his hopes of heaven were groundless and irrational. He now steps out of an old world, and finds that *old things are passed away*, and all things presented to him in a new state and dress: his old thoughts, his old reasonings, hopes, and confidences vanish; and he has new apprehensions of God, new conceptions of the nature of sin, and of his own state and condition.

For as soon as the soul is once dislodged from the body, it is also freed from many causes of ignorance and deception, that did encumber it in that estate; so that now its reason is quicker, and its discernment clearer, both to perceive other things, and throughly to reflect upon itself. It now spies out all the flaws and fallacies of its former fair, but deceiving hopes; it sees the non-concludency of those arguments that it rested upon before. Death, as it shuts our bodily eyes, so it opens and enlarges our spiritual. One moment after death shall discover the errors of many ages: for the time of this life is a time in which all things are, as it were, huddled up in a kind of mixture and confusion. The righteous own and profess Christ, and

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so do the hypocrites; the righteous have their hopes, and so have they: and both of them live and act, and are supported by their hopes; and as to any outward appearance, we cannot discriminate the unsound from the sincere. But when death comes, that divides them by an open and a manifest distinction, the hope of the righteous is crowned, and the hope of the wicked is confounded: a line of eternal separation is then drawn between them; the hypocrite must then let go his hold, bid an everlasting farewell to all his comforts, renounce his usurped confidence, and take up his portion in those mansions of endless despair, where he shall have abundant cause to wish, but no grounds to hope for the least redemption.

And thus much for the second thing proposed; which was, to shew those critical seasons and turns, in which more especially the hypocrite's hope will be sure to fail him. I come now to the

Third and last thing, which is to make some use and improvement of the whole foregoing discourse. And it shall be to display and set before us the transcendent, surpassing misery of the final estate of all hypocrites; whose peculiar lot it is, not only to be damned, but, what is infinitely more, to hope themselves into damnation, and to perish with those circumstances that shall double and treble the weight of their destruction. Hope is the last refuge and retreat of an afflicted soul, the last support of a sinking mind. And in this life the heart of man is not capable of such absolute, entire misery, but that some glimmerings of hope will still dart in upon him, and buoy up his spirits from an utter despondency. But when it shall come to this, that a man must go one way, and his hopes another, so parting as never to meet again, human nature admits not of any further addition to its sorrow; for it is pure, perfect, unmixed misery, without any alloy or mitigation. The strongest affections and the greatest hopes, if not answered, do of necessity leave behind them the quickest pain: for if, as the wise man says, in [Prov. xiii. 12](#), *hope only deferred be so grievous*, what then must he hope utterly disappointed? If delay be so irksome, what then must he total frustration? Nothing is more contrary and tormenting to the nature of man than to be degraded; to be low is sad, but to be brought low is much worse. Poverty is troublesome, but poverty after riches is insupportable. Former happiness is the greatest ingredient of present misery: for look what comfort springs from past sorrows heretofore endured, the same degree of misery arises from past happiness heretofore enjoyed. In Lament, i. 7, it is represented as the height and sting of the calamity of Judah, *that in the day of her affliction and of her misery she remembered all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old*. It would be some relief to a condemned sinner, if with the loss of his hope he could lose his memory too: but, alas! when he shall lie down in sorrow and torment, this will recall to his mind all that peace, comfort, and tranquillity that his false hopes formerly fed him with, and then force him to write this emphatical character of misery upon all; Thus and thus I was; these things I did enjoy. No voice will be heard in hell so loud and frequent as this sad and doleful one; My hopes deceived

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me, my confidences deluded me. And (believe it) this will make it ten times more hell, than the *wailing and gnashing of teeth*, and all the other torments of it put together.

For take the case in a similitude: When a poor traveller, disheartened with bad ways and weather turmoiling him, and fear of thieves besetting him, shall yet comfort himself with this thought, that when he comes to his journey's end he will refresh himself at his inn; and, as soon as ever he comes thither, he is set upon, stabbed, and cruelly murdered: does not such an one, think we, die with a strange horror and surprise? So the hypocrite can not pass the stage of this world, but he will meet with many crosses and discouragements, under which he is apt to think, through the flattery of his hopes, that he shall find an end of all these sorrows in another world. But then, alas! they chiefly begin; then he enters upon them in their height, fulness, and perfection. Hopes of heaven therefore, by those that either tender their own happiness, or dread the extremity of misery, are to be entertained warily; for if they are not genuine, and of the right stamp, they will only end in a greater load of sorrow and confusion. They may indeed for a little time support and keep us up in this world: just as a man's clothes, when he falls into the water, will for a while hold him up from sinking; but when they are once thoroughly wet and heavy, then they drown and sink him so much the faster and deeper.

This we may observe, that those appetites and desires, the satisfaction of which brings the greatest delight; the defrauding or disappointment of them, according to the rule of contraries, brings the greatest and the sharpest misery. Now a strong hope, suitably and luckily answered, comes, as it were, rushing into the heart with a fulness of content; it bears in upon it like a favourable wished-for wind upon a spread sail. It is, according to Solomon's expression, *health to the navel, and marrow to the bones*. Satisfaction added to a longing expectation, is like a refreshing shower upon a dry, gaping, thirsty ground. Nothing so comfortable as hope crowned with fruition; nothing so tormenting, as hope snapt off with disappointment and frustration. And were it lawful to wish an enemy completely miserable, I would wish that he might vehemently desire, and never enjoy; that he might strongly hope, and never obtain.

Now, from what has been delivered, I think we may truly conclude, that of the two, the despairing reprobate is happier than the hoping reprobate. They both indeed fall equally low: but then he that hopes has the greater fall, because he falls from the higher place. he that despairs goes to hell, but then he goes thither with expectation; though he is damned, yet he is not surprised: he has inured his heart to the flames, and has made those terrors familiar to him, by the continual horror of his meditation; so that when he dies, he passes but from one hell into another; and his actual damnation is not the beginning, but the carrying on of his former torment. In short, to express the wretchedness of the hypocrite's hope, I shall only add this, that certainly that must needs be exceeding dismal, in comparison of which despair is desirable.

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And now, O God, thou that requirest truth in the inward parts, cleanse us inwardly and thoroughly from the leaven of hypocrisy; sanctify us by thy truth; thy word is truth; and let our obedience to thee justify our hopes in thee, that so trusting in thee, we may never be confounded.

To whom be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON XLV.

PSALM xxxix. 9.

I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.

IF we would give one general account of all the duties that are incumbent upon a Christian, we shall find them reducible to these three, *faith, obedience, and patience*; and the vital principle that animates and runs through them all is *submission*. Faith being a submission of our understanding to what God commands us to believe: obedience being a submission of our will to what God commands us to do: and lastly, patience being a submission of the whole man to what God commands us to suffer. Concerning which excellent virtue, glorious things are every where spoken, not only by the penmen of holy writ, but also by the sons of reason and philosophy: and great eulogies of it might be drawn, both from their writings and examples. But, as we need not, so we shall not seek for any beyond the compass of the church. And here we have this virtue represented to the full, in that great hero in the ways of God, king David; a person signalized with that eminent character, of being *the man after God's own heart*, and therefore certainly a most fit example to make an impression upon ours.

It is impossible that a discourse of patience should ever be unseasonable: for to such as are in adversity, it will be a cordial to support them; and to such as are in prosperity, it will be an amulet to preserve them. For since no mortal man can be so happy, as to hold his happiness by a lease for life, every Christian, even in the height of his enjoyments, ought in habit, and disposition of mind, at least, to be a sufferer; that is, to have cast his resolutions into such a well ordered, confirmed posture, as no calamity, how sudden or great soever, shall be able to surprise or shock him, either in point of courage or submission. It is one of the arts of patience still to be beforehand with an affliction, and to expect that at all times which a man may endure at any and since the healthiest of men may be sick, it is but prudence, while they are well, to have a remedy about them.

In the text we have these two general parts.

1. David's submissive deportment under a sharp affliction; *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth.*

2. The ground and reason of such his deportment, which was the procedure of that affliction from God; *I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.*

And thus, the words being a full lecture of patience, recommending it to us by a great pattern, and consequently being designed to argue us into an absolute submission to the divine will, in our most pressing and severe distresses, we shall endeavour the prosecution of them in these two following things.

I. In declaring the nature and measures of this submission. And,

II. In shewing the reasons and arguments for it, as the suffering person stands related to God. And,



- I. For the nature of this submission; which I shall declare,
 1st, Negatively, by shewing wherein it does not consist; and,
 2dly, Positively, by shewing wherein it does.

As for the negative part, that we may distinguish this great virtue from all false and mistaken resemblances of it, we shall observe first of all, that this submission, or rather submissive frame of spirit, consists not in an utter insensibility of, or an unconcernment under an affliction. For God, who gave us a being, did therewithal give us a connate desire to a well-being; which every affliction in some measure robs us of, and, as it were, rends away a piece of our happiness; the entireness of which consists, not only in a freedom from sin, but also from sorrow. It can be no man's duty to be above the laws of his creation, and to contradict his nature, by a senselessness in the midst of those sufferings which oppress it. We read in Ecclesiastes of *a time to mourn*; a time in which mourning is so peculiarly in season, so proper, and so decent, that the contrary is absurd and unnatural. God, who calls and commands us to sympathize with our friends in their distress, surely will not forbid us to sorrow for our own. It was noted for one of the most inhuman pieces of tyranny in a Roman emperor, that when he had cruelly put some to death, with a greater cruelty he forbade their relations to lament for them: thus, by the former act destroying the men; by the latter, humanity itself.

A pensive consideration therefore of the sharpness of an affliction does not at all lessen our submission to it: for God never heaps such loads of grief upon us, but that he still leaves us the relief and pleasure of weeping, the privilege and free vent of our sorrows. He never turns *children of Abraham into stones*; but whensoever he strikes, not only permits, but also commands us to feel the smart. And indeed, how could we evidence to the world a due sense of the favours and smiles of God, if we should not droop under his frowns? For to be asleep with Jonas, while a tempest is rattling about our ears, is not submission, but stupidity. Nay, let me add this further, that there cannot be a more dreadful sign of a man left to himself, and hardened by God, than to be unconcerned in the midst of his afflictions. For he who is so, certainly incurs these two great and fatal evils.

1. That he robs God of that honour which he particularly designs to himself by that afflicting dispensation; for God requires that men should fear him for his judgments, as well as love him for his mercies; and regard the strokes, as well as the other operations of his hands. Besides, that this in sensible frame of spirit clearly frustrates another great end of these severities; which is antecedently to fright and deter men from sin. For he who does not feel God when he strikes, will hardly fear him when he threatens.

2. Such a person, by such an insensibility, renders every affliction befalling him utterly useless to all spiritual purposes whatsoever. For his heart, like an anvil, by bearing many strokes, and feeling none, grows so much the harder by every blow. Afflictions are some of God's extraordinary ways of reclaiming sinners; but can have no effect where they can imprint



no sense. He that can overcome and digest his physic like his daily food, is not like to be purged or cured by it. In like manner, when God takes in hand the cure of an overgrown sinner, and to that purpose applies the corrosive of some afflicting providence, whether of poverty, banishment, or disgrace, to eat away his proud, dead flesh, and so to restore him sound; if this man now can lightly pass over, outface, and wear off the sense of these severe applications, let him never expect any medicinal healing virtue from them; but conclude with himself, that, being too sturdy to feel God's rod, he is certainly too bad to be mended by it.

Let this therefore be fixed upon in the first place, that the submission here spoken of in the text is not a stupid indolence or insensibility under such calamities as God shall be pleased to bring upon us. Nor,

Secondly, does this submission lay any restraint upon us, from praying against any calamity, either actually inflicted upon us, or as yet but approaching towards us. For to pray against such things is not only lawful, but indeed our duty; forasmuch as God has commanded us to pray: and prayer ought to contain, not only a petition of things good and suitable, but also a deprecation of whatsoever is evil or noxious to us, as an integral part of it. For though possibly God may have designed to bring the evil we pray against upon us; yet, till providence has decided this to be the will of God by the event, we are (as much as in us lies) to prevent it by our prayers.

And the reason is, because though God's secret will and purpose be the rule of his own actions, yet his revealed will ought to be the sole director of ours. And God has wrote this in large characters upon every heart, that we ought to preserve our being from whatsoever may annoy it, by all lawful means; and surely there is none more lawful or approved by God than prayer. We have an eminent instance of this in David, in [2 Sam. xii.](#) who though he had received a special revelation from God himself, that his child should die, yet ceased not for a while to fast and pray, and importune God, that it might live: but when God took away the child, then presently he rose up, and turned his mourning for that into a submission to the hand that took it from him.

In this case therefore, we are not to inquire into the counsels of God, what he intends to do; it being impossible that they should be a rule for us to steer our course by, forasmuch as they are hidden and concealed from us; and it is implied in the very essence and nature of a rule, that it should be known. From whence it follows, that till we know that it is God's will to bring an affliction upon us, we are not bound to suppose it to be his will; and consequently both may and ought to pray against it: it being no ways inconsistent for the same heart to have a spirit of supplication to pray against an affliction before it comes, and yet a spirit of submission to endure it when it comes.

Thirdly and lastly. To advance yet higher, this submission is not such a thing as excludes all endeavour to prevent or remove an affliction. That we may lawfully pray against it, has



been already proved; and it is certain that we may (within our compass) lawfully engage our endeavours against whatsoever we may engage our prayers: prayer being a duty of that nature, that neither in the accounts of God or man will it pass for serious, but as it is seconded with proportionable action. He who is visited with sickness may solicitously use all direct means for his recovery; and he who has lost his estate may vigorously endeavour to regain it from the spoiler's hand; and he who has been defamed may use all imaginable industry to clear his reputation: and yet, for all this, never in the least transgress the bounds of submission prescribed him by God, in any of these visitations. For God seldom delivers men but by the mediation of their own endeavours, where these endeavours may be used. But patience has its sufficient scope and proper sphere of shewing itself, even where the powers of action cease. And that man who does the utmost to rid himself from any pressure which the laws of God and nature allow him to do, and when he finds the evil too big for him to master, humbly and quietly sits down under it, has fulfilled all the measures of a pious submission. For God casts no man under such circumstances as shall make idleness and pusillanimity his duty; but bids every man, upon the arrest of any sad calamity, *up and be doing*, for the removal of it; though perhaps after he has done all, his lot may be to lie down and suffer under it.

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And thus I have done with the negative part; and shewn, what the submission, spoken of in the text, is not; as namely, that it is not any such thing as ought to restrain us, either from entertaining a tender sense of, or from using our prayers and (what is more) our endeavours against any disaster or calamity inflicted by the hand of Providence upon us.

Come we now, in the next place, to shew positively what this submission is, and wherein it does consist.

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And in order to this, we are to observe, first in general, that it is a quiet composure of the whole man under any cross or mischievous accident befalling him, either in his person, interest, or any of his concerns whatsoever. And since every man is a compound of several parts and faculties, both of body and soul, which are all respectively to bear their share in this present affair, we will therefore trace the nature of this submission severally and distinctly through them all. And,

(I.) For the understanding: there is required a submission of that to God, by a perfect approbation of the justice and equality of all his proceedings with us. And as the understanding is the governing and first moving principle of a man's whole behaviour; so is it a matter both of the greatest difficulty, and importance too, rightly to state and settle the apprehensions and resentments of it: it being to the other faculties of the soul like the foreman of a jury to his fellows, all are apt to follow its verdict.

And therefore our submission must begin here; it must move upon this great wheel; for in vain do we expect that the other parts of the soul should keep the peace, while the understanding mutinies and rebels. To prevent which, we must endeavour by all means to possess

it with a full persuasion of the infinite reasonableness of all God's transactings with his creature, though the particular reason of them does not always appear. It being but suitable to the majesty of Heaven, to exact our submission without assigning any other reason for it but his own will: for *sic volo, sic jubeo*, howsoever harsh and tyrannical it may sound from a sinful man, like ourselves, though never so great; yet from God, who is as essentially good as he is great, it is the highest reason and the most rational divinity: upon which account, let every man silence the disputes of his froward reason, not only with an *ipse dixit*, as the very disciples of Pythagoras could do, but also with an *ipse voluit*: an answer and a solution be coming the most improved and eminent proficients in the school of Christianity.

For what was it that raised Job to such a degree of insolence and indiscretion, as to venture to hold an argument with his Maker, and to dispute the case with the Almighty, but the sturdiness of his blind and saucy reason, falsely so called, that could not subscribe to the equity of those severe w sages which he smarted under? He could not comprehend how the divine justice could degrade so much uprightness and integrity to a dunghill; and to all the miseries that a diseased body, a distressed mind, and a desperate fortune could reduce him to: no, he thought he had holiness enough to have prescribed gentler methods to Providence. But at length, when religion had cooled the boilings of his passion and discontent, and taught his reason more sober discourses, then he sinks many notes lower, and utters himself in a quite differing strain; in *Job xl. 4, 5*, Behold, says he, *I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer.* And thus, what conviction and satisfaction he could not gain by disputing, he arrived to by obeying: submission was his casuist, and patience the best resolver of his doubts. And indeed, what can we account disputation in such a case, but the hostility of the mind, and a kind of rebellion of the soul against God; opposing reason and argument, or rather argument without reason, to Providence? So that a man can never be said truly to submit, till he lays down these arms, and acknowledges a sufficient reason of any dispensation in the sole good pleasure of the dispenser; and, in the midst of all his misery, can confess that things ought to be so, because actually they are so. And thus much for the submission of the understanding.

(2.) This submission requires in the will also a perfect acquiescence, and resignation of itself to God's will. For the will being properly the seat both of sovereignty and activity, the resistance which this makes must needs be the greatest and most considerable. The reluctancy of the understanding, in opposing God, and complying with sinful objects, is like Adam's seeing the forbidden fruit and liking it: but the will's embracing them, is like Adam's putting forth his hand and taking it. So that by our submission of the former to God, in any of the perplexing passages of our lives, the soul may be said, as it were, to keep silence; but by this latter, it also gives consent. By that it confesses the reasonableness, by this also the suitability of the dispensation. By the former it could say, it is just; by this latter it can say also with David, *it is good that I have been afflicted.*

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And how necessary an ingredient of our submission this is, will appear to any one who shall consider the absoluteness and autocracy of this faculty; whereby the will is free either to follow or not to follow the advice of the understanding; so that when that has done its utmost in the way of counsel and instruction, the issue of the execution follows wholly the resolves of this. For it is this which commands and lords it in the soul; every thing that a man does or desires being entirely at its beck.



Upon which account it is, that the overpowering efficacy of the Spirit of God, in the conversion of a sinner, appears in nothing so much, as that it conquers and subdues this free, self-governing faculty to a perfect compliance with all its motions; and that without the least intrenchment upon its freedom. For it makes us willing, and draws us in that manner, that we yet follow of our own accord. Now such a readiness is here required in the business of our submission: it must be perfectly free and voluntary; and that not only as to an exclusion of all force, but also of the servilities of fear and terror; which take off some of the perfection of our freedom in respect of the motive or inducement to an action, though they cannot in respect of its productive principle. As when a man throws his rich wares into the sea, to prevent a wreck, and to save his life, he does indeed will what he does, but yet it is with an unwilling kind of willingness: for though the will absolutely commands the thing to be done, yet still the motive of doing it is full sore against its inclination.

But such a submission to the hand of God will not suffice us here, nor turn to any account in the reckonings of Heaven: where every performance is rated chiefly by the manner of it; and the spring or principle as much considered as the object. God regards not that submission that is not out of love to him. And *perfect love*, we know, *casts out fear*; that is, God will have us submit not as slaves, but as sons: so as to kiss the rod that corrects us; and, knowing from whom the blow comes, to receive it not only with quietness, but complacency. And thus to demean ourselves in our sufferings is the very soul and spirit of a filial submission.



(3.) There is required also a submissive composure and serenity in our passions and affections. For naturally these are the most unruly and outrageous faculties of the soul; and such indeed as set the whole world in a combustion. For how insolent is pride, how intolerable is anger, and how noisome and imperious is lust! No confusion in human affairs ever falling out, but the cause of it always lies here; and still the commotion begins in the fury and violence of the affections, those great masters of misrule, which, like the waves of a troubled sea, swell and rage, and rise up against heaven, when any thing from thence blows rough and hard upon them. It is impossible that either a proud, a lustful, or an angry man, so continuing, should be patient; forasmuch as the same frame of spirit, which disposes him to one, directly indisposes him to the other. Patience is the effect and consequent of self-denial and mortification; and the passions and affections are the proper objects of that, they are the things that are to be denied and mortified; so that a man must have passed many stages in this excellent course, before he can arrive at the perfection of making the duty of

submission his practice, and much less his pleasure. For how hard is it to maintain a smooth and equal temper in one's mind, when there is nothing but cross and rugged accidents in the whole affairs of a man's life! How hard is it to see and feel great disturbances without, and yet to keep all quiet within! to behold the prosperity of the wicked, the false, and the treacherous, and not to say in our haste, that *we have cleansed our hands in vain*, and retained our innocence to no purpose! It is infinitely difficult so to conquer and keep down the insurrections of a furious passion, as to command and hold it within compass, when it meets with fuel and provocation.



The faculties of the soul do much resemble the economy and constitution of a commonwealth, in which the passions are like the vulgar rout, or meaner sort of people, who are always the most impatiently sensible of any the least burden; and when the government imposes any thing upon them, are presently apt to tumultuate, to rise, and to rebel: so when the least chastisement from God pinches us, forthwith the unruly passions are apt to clamour, and cry out *grievance and oppression*. But now God will have all these clamours hushed, all these resistances quelled, and an humble subjection paid to the most grating edicts of his will, proclaimed and made known to us by the events of his providence.

And indeed thus to compose and master our rebellious passions is a duty that may commend itself to us, not only from the necessity of a strict command, but also from the excellency of the work itself. For it was this alone, which the greatest philosophers, and particularly the Stoics, placed their highest happiness and perfection in; namely, to regulate and subdue their passions to such a degree, as to bring themselves to a perfect apathy, to stand fixed and unmoved, when any thing thwarted either their interest or desires; which glorious (and perhaps more than human) frame of mind, though it was not their felicity to reach, yet it was their commendation to aim at. But surely Christians, who act by higher principles and greater helps, should think it but reasonable, with such advantages, to go a pitch beyond bare, unassisted nature; and by their actions to make good the heathens pretences, and to count it a shame for themselves not to attain (in part at least) what the philosophers were so generous as to attempt.



(4.) There is required yet further to this submission, a suppressing of all hard and discontented speeches; and this is so absolutely necessary, that the whole work of submission is set forth and expressed to us by *silence*, and *not opening our mouths*, as here in the text, and elsewhere, by *putting our mouths in the dust*; that is, by shutting, and, as it were, even stopping them up, from letting fly at any of the cross, irksome, and severe passages of Providence. *He that ruleth his tongue* (says St. James) *is a perfect man*; forasmuch as by this he declares himself lord and master of his passions, which, when they domineer, chiefly make use of this member as the prime instrument of their rage. In like manner, he who can submit without noise and murmur proves his submission perfect, as springing from a complete conquest of all unruly motions within. While Job let loose the reins to his impa-

tience, he let the same loose also to his language; filling heaven and earth with querulous outcries, vehement imprecations upon himself, and expostulations with Heaven: sometimes questioning the equity of the divine proceedings with him; sometimes cursing and bitterly exclaiming against the day of his birth, and the unhappy hour of his conception. Thus, so long as his towering passion was upon the wing, it beat the air with loud and vain complaints; and, like a froward child, was always crying, and nothing could still its peevish and impertinent rage. But the same temper of mind which reduced him to submission, reduced him also to silence, and checked the sallyings out of such wild, ungoverned expressions, as could tend to no other effect but to increase the guilt of him that spoke, and the indignation of him that heard them. A lamb, we know, suffers with silence, and parts not only with its fleece, but even with its life also, with out noise; but it is the unclean swine which roars and cries when any one lays hold of him: and we read of no such creature in the flocks of Christ; they are only the innocent, silent, suffering sheep, that have a title to his care and protection.

Any kind of impatience under God's hand does indeed offend him; but the impatience of the tongue has this peculiar malignity in it above all others, that it also dishonours him in the face of the world: for while our impatience bounds itself within the understanding, will, or affections, so long it lies retired from the observation and eye of men, which pierces not into the secrets of the heart; but when it once comes to proclaim itself in words and noise, the multitude round about is called in as witness of our insolent deportment towards God; the sin becomes loud and clamorous, public and provoking; and so puts God upon new severities to revenge upon us the affront openly passed upon his honour; a thing which he is too jealous of, to prostitute and expose it to the scorn and arrogance of every bold sinner.

Silence is a thing of great decorum in a suffering person, whose condition properly calls him to sorrow; the most natural and becoming dialect of which is, to say nothing. For even the common and received measures of human converse allow it only to the prosperous, the gay, and the rising persons of the world to talk high, and argue, and expostulate much to no purpose; but where affliction has brought a man so low, as to make it difficult for him to be heard, it has made it also fit for him not to speak.

Besides, no man ought to be endured to complain, who is not presumed to have right on his side. But can any man have a right against God? can he implead his Maker? or prefer a bill of grievances against his Preserver? I am sure, if his plea be traversed in the court of conscience, that must and will pronounce on God's side, and vote the accuser the only criminal. *Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?* says the prophet Jeremy, in Lament, iii. 39. In which piece of scripture there are more arguments than words or syllables, to demonstrate the unreasonableness of any man's complaining against God. For first, shall any one complain of his benefactor? And does not God abundantly prove himself so, even by this, that the person complaining is yet alive, and thereby



able to complain? Or shall a guilty person complain of his judge? and complain also while he is punished, which implies demerit? and, what is more, punished less than he deserves, which imports mercy? For every sin revenged upon the sinner, according to the full measure of its guilt, would quickly put him out of all possibility of complaining in this world, or be moaning his case on this side hell; where that he is not disposed of already is enough to teach him, that it were much fitter for him to turn his complaints into gratulations; and, instead of crying out of the hardship of his condition, to magnify the divine goodness, that it is not remediless and intolerable. Let every afflicted person therefore *set a watch before the door of his lips*, and beware that the intemperance of his tongue robs him not of that crown, that is prepared only for such as suffer with silence and discretion.

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(5.) And lastly, to complete our submission to God in a suffering estate, there is required also a restraint of all rage and revenge against such as are the instruments, by which God is pleased to humble and afflict us. A perfect submission to the will of the first cause is naturally apt to reconcile us to the second; though not for its own sake, yet for his, at least, who was pleased to make use of it. For what is an enemy, when he acts the utmost of his fury and barbarity, but a scourge in the hand of the Almighty, either punishing a sinner, or chastising a son? And therefore we find David, when he was cursed and railed at by Shimei, in that villanous, lewd, insufferable manner, yet utterly refusing to revenge upon him that high indignity, though passed by a subject upon his prince, and his prince in distress; that is, against all laws, not only of loyalty, but of nature and common humanity. But now what could it be that induced David to demean himself in such a manner to so bitter an enemy and so mean a wretch? Surely nothing either desirable or formidable in the person himself; no, nothing but this one consideration, that at that time Shimei came (as it were) upon an errand from heaven, and cursed David by commission from God himself. *God has bid Shimei curse*, says David, *2 Sam. xvi. 10*. Not that God did directly and indeed give him any such command; but that, by his providence, he had then cast David under such circumstances of misery and distress, as would infallibly provoke an adversary of a malicious and a base spirit to insult over him. Now this quiet and meek deportment of David towards so vile and so provoking an object, was a direct act of piety and submission to God himself; who never accounts himself more honoured by us, than when our reverence to him can command us to compliances so much against the grain of our nature; and tie up our hands from those violences, which the fierce appetite of revenge would otherwise so passionately and easily, and many times so creditably, carry us out to.

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If upon any injury done us, we can but prevail with ourselves to see the hand of God principally acting in the whole affair, it will certainly much allay our spleen against the immediate workers of the mischief: and if we can but cease to be angry with the judge, and the condemning sentence itself, surely we shall not much concern ourselves to rage at the executioner; who is but a servant, and only ministers to the will and command of a superior.

But, on the other side, all bitter and vindictive treating of an injurious person is in its proportion a contest with Providence; even that Providence, that not only overrules, but also employs the worst of events, and the wickedest of persons. And he, whose spirit frets, and boils, and raves against his enemy, because of the calamities that he feels himself brought under by his means, strikes as high and as far as he is able. The dog that bites the stone that is flung at him, would do as much to the hand that flung it, if he had it within his reach. But the temper of a Christian prompts him to quite other things, and teaches him to measure his behaviour, not by what his enemy has deserved, but by what the grand exemplar of patience has both commanded, and himself in the same case practised.

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And yet I do not say, that it is any man's duty to account his enemy his friend; to court or embrace a tyrant; or to take him into his bosom, who would have took the bread out of his mouth. Some indeed may think it a policy so to do; and perhaps, by so thinking, may prove just such politicians, as the man, that took a frozen snake into his house, and cherished and warmed it, till at length it hissed, and bit, and stung him to death for his absurd compassion. But be it a policy, I am sure it is no duty for a man to caress, and hug, and be fond of his mortal adversary; nor to fawn and cringe, and lick the foot that basely and barbarously tramples upon him. No man is forbid by any law of God or man to look upon an enemy as an enemy, howsoever he may be bound to treat him. Forasmuch as no law, human or divine, can oblige a man to entertain a false judgment, either of things or persons. But he who supplants a man in his estate, or any of his lawful interests, is and ought to be looked upon by that man as a malicious underminer. And he who by unworthy calumnies blasts his neighbour's reputation and good name, may and ought to be accounted (as in truth he is) a black-mouthed, virulent back biter: and the name of friend is by no means to be fouled or abused by being applied to such an one. Yet still for all this, I own it to be every man's duty, to leave such a person to the vengeance of Heaven, and not to act himself as judge in his own cause, by carving out his own measures of revenge upon him. It is his duty to *stand still*, (as Moses bade the Israelites,) *and to see the salvation of the Lord*. All the pains that he is to take in this case, is to prevail with himself to do nothing, and to be only a spectator, not an actor in his enemy's confusion.

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And indeed this is sometimes pains enough; and no small piece of self-denial and submission, thus to keep within the strict line of God's commands, when either passion or interest would tempt him to leap over it; as it will do very importunately, when a man finds himself grieved, and ill-used in his person, name, or estate; and disturbed in any of those interests, which God and nature have made it his birthright to enjoy. Yet since it often so falls out, that God is pleased to let loose the oppressor upon all these, he also calls upon us to behave ourselves as persons having no authority to right ourselves, but depending wholly upon the supreme justice of Heaven both for deliverance and reparation.

And thus I have finished the first general head proposed for the handling of the words, which was to declare the nature of the submission spoken of in the text: and that both negatively, by shewing what it is not; and also positively, by shewing what it is. As namely, that it is a suppressing of the restiness and contradiction of our understandings, the rebel lion of our wills, the tumult of our passions, the querulous outcries of our tongues, and lastly the vindictive fierceness of our actions or behaviours, under any calamity or distress, injury or provocation whatsoever.

Now by way of consequence and deduction from what has been delivered, we shall from the foregoing particulars naturally infer these three things.

- (1.) The worth and excellency of such a submissive, composed frame of spirit.
- (2.) The difficulty of attaining to it. And,
- (3.) And lastly, the necessity of an early and long endeavour after it. And,

(1.) For the excellency of it. It is that, which all the great and wise men in the world have both strove after in themselves, and admired in others: and it is as impossible for a man to be great, as to be good without it. It is the practice of the truest and the highest philosophy. And there is nothing that draws so much contempt upon a man, as the want of it. For how uncomely a sight is a man in a rage! a man fretting and fuming, and suffering his passion to ride his reason; indeed so uncomely is it, that there is no man living who allows it in himself, but will condemn and despise it in another. Nor is there any thing that so peculiarly unfits a man for business, and doing such things as may render him considerable. Business is to be carried on with counsel, and a calm, sedate conduct of things; which can never take place, where passion hinders all fore sight, and fury and fluster make thinking and contriving utterly impossible. It is not the storm, but the gentle wind that must carry the vessel to its designed haven. And to lead and govern an army, requires another kind of spirit from that which heats, and acts a man in the battle.

On the other side, patience is (as it were) the girding up of the soul, which, like the girding up of the body, gives it both strength and decency too. In the judgment of all the intelligent part of the world, patience is conquest; and in St. Paul's esteem, [Rom. viii. 37](#), it is something more; it being hardly possible to conceive any condition that a man can fall into so miserable; nor any injury, or contumely, that can pass upon him, so sharp and provoking, in which patience does not at length get the better. And he that quietly suffers the ill turn, will in the end both shame and weary him that does it. For all violence is its own executioner: and indignation, not enlivened by resistance, like a flame not blown up, goes out of itself.

But the excellency of this great virtue appears yet further from this, that the greatest persons that ever lived, and whom Providence sent into the world upon the most important messages that ever were delivered to mankind, have been signal and remarkable for it. And those were Moses and our Saviour Christ himself; both of them, in their several times, the

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meekest persons upon the earth: and such as (according to the true measures of greatness) were of too great and high a mind to do any violence, but not of too great to suffer it. Both of them shew their magnanimity in this, *that being reviled*, and that by persons extremely their inferiors, *they reviled not again*. And for the latter of the two, did the royal diadem ever sit so gloriously upon the head of any earthly prince, as the crown of thorns did upon the head of our Saviour? or could any thing so fully prove him more than a man, as to be buffeted, scourged, scoffed at, spit upon, and at length crucified, without so much as one impatient word?

The achievements of passive valour are upon many accounts more glorious than those of active: forasmuch as there is a great force and inclination in nature, pushing it on to exert itself in the way of action, but not at all to dispose it to suffer. This is a thing which mere nature flies from, and abhors. And if we compare these two together, whether doing or suffering duly circumstantiated ought to have the preeminence, still let us remember this in behalf of the latter, that it was suffering which redeemed the world.

(2.) From the foregoing particulars we learn also the difficulty of attaining to such a submissive frame of spirit. Which difficulty will appear from these two things.

1. From that opposition which a man is to conquer, before he can attain to it. And,
2. From that mean, though mistaken opinion, which the generality of men have of such a temper. And,

1. For the opposition that a man is to conquer, before he can arrive to it. He is to force and fight his way through all the resistance that the strongest powers of nature can make against him. For no man is born a patient man; whatsoever personal advantages and dispositions some particular constitutions may afford towards it, more than others. But every man comes into the world with something of pride and passion about him, which is to be subdued and mortified, before he can be fit to live in the world, and much more before he can be fit to leave it. But now it is patience, which must take down these heights, and level these mountains into valleys. It is patience, which must smooth off the ruggedness of passion and the unruliness of appetite; and so make plain a way for reason and religion to run their course in. I shewed he fore, that there was a natural stubbornness and averseness in every faculty of the soul to a compliance with the divine will, especially in those severer instances of it, which call upon a man *to take the yoke upon his neck*, and the *burden upon his shoulders*, and to be quiet, humble, and content in the most calamitous condition. It is an hard lesson to do God's will, but a much harder to suffer it. Nature has not only an insufficiency for, but also a contrariety to this. For reason will be disputing, the will disobeying, and the passions will murmur and rebel: and what is there in bare nature that can overrule all these? and from such a posture of defiance, compose and quell them into the contrary posture of the meekest submission? This is that, which both scripture and philosophy style a man's conquering of himself. A victory, in the judgment of all wise and sober men, more glorious



and more difficult too, than any that crown the memory of Caesar and Alexander. So much harder, and consequently so much greater a thing is it, for one to endure another man's rage, than to vent his own.

2. The other cause of the difficulty of attaining to such a patient, submissive frame of spirit, is from the contempt and disregard attending it, through the false estimate which the generality, or rather vulgarity of men have of it. For when patience must pass for pusillanimity, who would take pains to procure himself so disadvantageous a character? and endeavour to conquer his passions, if for the greatest conquest in the world he must be accounted a coward?

Desire of glory is generally the great principle that animates men to high and difficult attempts. But when huffing and hectoring must be looked upon as the only badges of gallantry and courage, what can recommend the exercise of patience against the disgrace of it? or induce a man to put up an affront, when the result of virtue shall be reputed the want of spirit? This indeed is a discouraging consideration; but it is so only from a most unjust and false judgment of things. For patience is not the want of spirit, but the government of it. It is a virtue; and therefore the ingredients of it are choice in the agent, and difficulty in the object. And he only is or can be a patient man, who is first a man of courage; who has sense enough to resent a provocation, spirit enough to prompt, and opportunity to enable him to revenge it: and yet, in the midst of all these tempting circumstances, chooses rather to offer up his passion a sacrifice to his virtue; and by a fixed, settled judgment of mind, thinks it as much nobler to pass by an injury, than to repay it, as it is to slight an unworthy person, than to strive to be like him. But still, I say, when the generality of men judge otherwise, though by error and mistake, yet the tyranny of a general mistake is so imperious and intolerable, that for the most part it is too hard for an ordinary virtue to contend with. And that which puts patience out of credit will (with some) quickly put it out of countenance too: unless grace comes in as a second to nature, and the conscience of a practice overcomes the disrepute of it.

(3.) And lastly, we learn from what has been delivered, the necessity of an early and long endeavour after such an excellent frame of mind. The conquest, which the patient man is to make, is not by battle, but by siege; one is quickly over, but the other is often a long and a tedious task. The apostle calls upon us to *let patience have its perfect work*: and few things, we know, arrive to perfection but by degrees. It is an high and a glorious ascent, and there is no getting up to it but by steps. It must make its entrance into the soul by a total extirpation of the contrary habits: and no habit can be presently rooted up, where nature is the soil in which it grows. For do we think it possible for a proud man to grow humble in a day? or for a passionate man to get the absolute command of his passions in a few weeks? It is, I confess, *possible with God*, and omnipotence can effect it; but what God *can* do, is not the measure of what he *will*. According to the stated method of the divine actings upon the soul

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of man, the Spirit of God proceeds gradually, and grace imitates even where it exceeds the course of nature. So that where it rids the soul of any vicious habit, it destroys it insensibly and by degrees; and where it infuses good habits, it instils them into the soul by small proportions: they are an oil that is dropt, not poured into it. And it is the judgment of all divines, that infused habits come into the soul after the same manner with those that are acquired. Grace acts like nature, even where the effect is above it.

He therefore who would cooperate with the grace of God, for the working of so noble a change upon himself, as to keep his passions calm and regular in spite of all provocations that would inflame them; he who, in all the cross accidents of life, would have his own will, as it were, wrapt up in the divine will, and be able to say with his great master and example, Christ himself, *Not my will, but thine be done*: he, I say, who would arrive to such an height of Christianity, let him begin early; let him consider with himself the length, the difficulty, and the fatigue of *the race that is before him*, and set out by times; let him inure himself in his minority to lesser self-denials and mortifications; let him learn to put up and pass by a slighting, undervaluing word, and in time he shall find himself strong enough to conquer and digest an injurious action; let him learn to overlook his neighbour's incivility, and in time he shall be able with patience and firmness of mind to endure his insolence and his cruelty, and that with out being discomposed by any instigations to revenge: and let him accustom himself to do this often, and at length he shall be able to do it always.

But if a man suffers his impatience to grow up with him, and gives it its free, outrageous, unbounded scope to the greatest part of his age, he must not hope to master and dispossess such a giant of his strong hold by a few assaults; he must not think wholly to alter and transform himself, and pick up such a virtue as patience on a sudden. He who has allowed his passion to live, and rage, and domineer to the age of forty or fifty, must not expect, without a very extraordinary grace indeed, to be patient at threescore. So infinitely sottish and ignorant of human nature are those men, who think it in their own power to change and reform their manners when they please. No, it is a long and a severe discipline; and the wisest and best of men have found it task enough for their whole lives. And therefore, certainly none deceive themselves so foolishly, and so fatally too, as those, who design to learn, just as they are leaving off to live. The times of youth and prosperity are the proper times to strengthen and to ballast the mind with pious principles and wise customs against the trying, searching times of age and adversity. For if these seasons do not find a man patient, they seldom make him so. They are the seasons to spend upon a stock, and not to gather one; to crop the fruits of a virtuous habit, and not to plant it. For surely no man goes about to careen and fit up his ship in the midst of a storm, nor to buckle on his armour in the heat and fury of the battle. No, this is a work that should have been done before. It is a work of preparation; and it can be no time for a man to prepare a thing, when he is just about to use it.

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This is certain, that afflictions will come, trials and perplexing providences will some time or other overtake us, and God knows how suddenly and how severely. And then happy, and only happy, is that man, who, by a long and daily exercise of this great virtue, has fore-armed and fortified himself against the fierce and critical day of trial; who, to temperance has added patience; that is, to the proper virtue for prosperity, has joined the proper one for adversity: I say, *blessed is that faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so prepared.* Verily, as patience has made him ruler over himself; so, according to our Saviour's own expression, his Lord shall make him ruler over all his goods.

To which our great Lord and Saviour, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be rendered and ascribed all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore.
Amen.



SERMON XLVI.

PSALM xxxix. 9.

I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.

FORMERLY made an entrance into these words, and observed in them these two parts.

1. David's submissive deportment under a sharp affliction: *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth.*

2. The ground and reason of such his deportment, which was the procedure of that affliction from God: *I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it.*

And so I shewed the words were a full lecture of patience, recommending to us a great virtue by a great example, and consequently designed to argue us into an absolute, entire submission to the divine will, in our most pressing and severe distress. The prosecution of them I cast under these two general heads.

- I. To give some account of the nature and measures of this submission.

- II. To shew the reasons and arguments for it, as the suffering person stands related to God.

The first of these I have already despatched, and proceed now to the second; which is to shew, what reasons and arguments may be produced for the submission here spoken of, as the suffering person stands related to God. And for this, I think, we may lead our way with this general assertion; that there is no thought, which a man can possibly conceive either of God or of himself aright, but will afford a strong argument to enforce this submission upon us. He that duly considers both what God is, and what he himself is, can need no other demonstration of the infinite folly and absurdity of opposing or contending with him. But yet to give light and life to this general proposition by particular instances, there are six things in God that offer themselves to our consideration; which are so many invincible arguments to quiet and compose all those unruly motions, that are apt to disturb the spirit of a man, when God by any severe passage of his providence calls him to a state of suffering; and this is certain, that every call from God to suffer, is a command also to submit.

- (1.) The first is God's irresistible power. And there are some who place God's very right of sovereignty in the boundlessness of his power; affirming, that the great reason why God *may* do any thing, is because he *can* do any thing. But far be it from any sober person to discourse of the divine nature and actings upon the stock of such a principle. But yet to illustrate and make out the absurdity of any thing that looks like a non-submission or repugnancy to the afflicting hand of God, were it possible for us to imagine or suppose that God had no right to treat his creature in so severe a manner, yet the surpassing greatness of his power has rendered it impossible for the creature to receive any benefit by demurring to his right. Such a plea being like a poor conquered captive's impleading a victorious sword,



absolutely senseless and ridiculous; it being certainly absurd to resist, where it is impossible to conquer or escape. A good cause itself against an overpowering force, is an impotent, insignificant thing; impotent as to self-support, in significant as to success. For power is the great disposer of the issues and events of things; and wheresoever there is any effect, it is certain that some power or other is the cause. And therefore all acts of hostility or opposition upon a mischief done or offered suppose, in the person who makes the opposition, an opinion at least of power in himself able to repel or revenge that mischief; and all complaint supposes a likelihood of engaging the strength and power of such as hear it, in the help and vindication of him who makes it; and is indeed used only as a means or instrument to supply the defect of a man's own personal power, by the conjunction of other men's. But now, where neither of these considerations can take place, both resistance and complaint are utterly irrational: as in the case of the divine power's dealing with man, it must needs be. For what is all the world to him that made the world? [1 Cor. x. 22](#), *Do we provoke God to jealousy? are we stronger than he?* All the nations, all the armies of the whole earth are to him but as *the drop of the bucket, or the small dust of the balance*: and can we possibly think or speak of things under a greater disparity? And if so, will reason allow that there should be any contention where there can be no proportion? *He has done whatsoever pleased him both in heaven and earth*, [Psal. cxxxv. 6](#). As soon as his will gives the word, his power executes. *No god can deliver as he can*, says Nebuchadnezzar, [Dan. iii. 29](#); nor can any one destroy as he

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can, says our Saviour, [Matth. x. 28](#). He gives away kingdoms and empires, disposes of crowns and sceptres, with the breath of his mouth. And after all this, can a pitiful piece of animated dirt be fit to quarrel and expostulate with a power infinitely greater than his very thoughts, and therefore certainly in no degree to be matched by his strengths? But to what purpose is it thus to argue or dispute the matter? to light a candle to the sun? or with much ado to prove a finite no ways equal to an infinite? For that in effect is the thing now before us; while we are disputing, whether a man may contest with, or ought to submit to his Maker; and whether he should be permitted to talk high and loud, who can do nothing; and to be still upon the offending part, who is wholly unable to defend himself. A man so behaving himself is nothing else but weakness and nakedness, setting itself in battle-array against omnipotence; an handful of dust and ashes, sending a challenge to all the host of heaven. For what else are words and talk against thunderbolts? and the weak, empty noise of a querulous rage, against him who can speak worlds, who could word heaven and earth out of nothing, and can when he pleases word them into nothing again?

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What can we utter or express greater of the vast distance between God and man, than by a kind of tautology to say, that God is God, and man is man! For it is certain that the first can have no predicate but himself; since he that is pure act, and perfect simplicity, can be said to be nothing, but by an identical repetition; in which both predicate and subject are

no more than one and the same thing set forth in two several words: an evident demonstration, that words cannot keep pace with things, when we discourse of God. In short, since matters stand thus between God and us, let us consider what hands we are in, and what an irresistible gripe has hold of us; and let that teach us, even for our own sakes, to be quiet under it. There is indeed one, and but one way of encountering an infinite power; and that is, by an extraordinary and (if it were possible) an infinite patience.

(2.) The next thing to be considered in God, as another argument for our submission to him, is his absolute, unquestionable dominion and sovereignty over all things. And this, according to the true and exact notion of things, differs formally from his power, though sometimes they are unskilfully confounded. For the difference between them is as great, as between δύναμις and ἐξουσία, between *strength* and *authority*; between a bare ability to act, and a right to act; which may be often one without the other: for there may be force and power without authority, and a rightful authority without any force or power; both of which we have known by woful experience.

But to the subject before us. This dominion of God is founded upon the best, the greatest, and most undeniable title; which is that of creation and providence. It being infinitely reasonable, that the first cause should upon that account be the supreme governor; and that whatsoever has been made and preserved by God, should be also commanded by him.

And besides, as God is the first cause, so he is also the last end of all things; they terminate in him, as well as they issued from him; they were produced by his power, and designed for his pleasure: [Rev. iv. 11](#), *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.* God might have chose whether he would have made the world or no; for he had no need of it, to complete or add to his happiness, which was infinitely perfect within the compass of his own glorious being. Yet he was pleased by a most free and unconstrained motion of his own will, to communicate and diffuse some little shadows of those perfections upon the creatures, and more especially upon those nearer resemblances of himself, men and angels.

Upon which account it is certain, that God has the entire disposal both of our persons and concerns; which, giving him a full propriety in all that we are or have, it is also as certain that he can do us no wrong. God's pleasure is his sufficient warrant, and therefore ought to be our undoubted law: for being vouched by the supremacy of heaven, there can be no appeal from it, no address to any higher tribunal; for as it is in [Job ix. 12](#), *Who may say unto God, What doest thou?* It is not for the clay to expostulate with the potter, though, instead of making it a *vessel of honour*, he treads it under foot, from whence he took it.

Men indeed may contest their rights one against another; even an inferior against his superior: because there is none so absolutely superior to, or lord over another, but holds that superiority or preeminence by a limited right, and by concession from him, who is

equally a lord and master to them both; and consequently will treat them as fellow-creatures and fellow-servants, and with an impartial hand exact an account of the behaviour of him who rules, as well as of him who obeys. But it is not so with God, who being absolutely first and supreme, must needs upon the same score also be absolutely unaccountable: for none can stand obliged to render an account of his actions to his inferiors; such as we all are to God, and that by vast and immeasurable disproportions.

(3.) Together with God's irresistible power and his absolute dominion, let the afflicted person consider also his infinite and unfailing wisdom: that wisdom by which he first made the world, and by which he does and always will govern it: that wisdom by which all the strange events and odd contingencies which sometimes occur, are cast into a regular method and an exact order; though the short reach of sense and natural reason is not always able to fathom the contrivance, or to discern the rare and curious disposal of them.

But how much soever we are in the dark as to this, still we are sure, that a being essentially wise cannot do any thing but wisely. Our ignorance of the particular reason of God's actings cannot infer or make them in the least unreasonable. It is not accounted discretion to quarrel or find fault with the actions of a wise man; and much less can it be so to question the proceedings of an infinitely wise God; who is wise without any mixture of folly or imperfection, a privilege granted to no created nature: for *he has charged his very angels with folly*, [Job iv. 18](#). And be they ever so wise, it is certain that they are not wisdom itself.

It is arrogance in us to pretend so much as to understand the counsel of God, in his managing the great affairs of the world, and much more to blame or carp at them. Providence is more honoured by our admiration, than our inquiries: for these latter are for the most part the effects of pride, but always of curiosity; whereas the former always produces, or at least accompanies humility. We cannot pierce into the designs which God may have in every passage, every accident that befalls us; we cannot look through the long and intricate train of causes and effects, and see by what strange, mysterious ways the smallest things are oftentimes directed by a sure hand to an accomplishment of the greatest ends. Providence is nothing else but infinite power managed by infinite wisdom, and the divine knowledge displaying itself in practice.

The consideration of which alone, one would think, should be abundantly enough to compose all our murmurings and repinings under any calamity that can possibly happen to us; and to reduce us to an acquiescence in our present condition, be it what it will. For while we fret and repine at God's will, do we not say in effect, that it is better for us to have our own? that is, in other words, that we are wiser than God, and could contrive and project things much more to our own advantage, if we had the disposal of them? Do we not as good as complain, that we are not took in as sharers with God in the government of the world? that our advice is not taken, and our consent had, in all the great changes which he is pleased to bring over us? These indeed are things that no man utters in words; but whosoever refuses

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to submit himself to the hand of God, speaks them aloud by his behaviour; which by all the intelligent part of the world is looked upon as a surer indication of man's mind, than any verbal declaration of it whatsoever. God, perhaps, is pleased to visit us with some heavy affliction; and shall we now, out of a due reverence of his all-governing wisdom, patiently endure it? or out of a blind presumption of our own endeavour by some sinister way or other to rid ourselves from it? Passengers in a ship always submit to their pilot's discretion, but especially in a storm; and shall we, whose passage lies through a greater and more dangerous deep, pay a less deference to that great pilot, who not only understands, but also commands the seas?

It is sometimes so far from being a privilege for a man to be governed by his own will without the conduct of a wiser, that it is indeed his misery, and his great unhappiness, and a direct throwing himself into the very mouth of danger: forasmuch as no human wit or wisdom can always distinguish between what will help, and what will hurt us. If children might have their own wills, and be their own choosers, they would certainly choose poison before a cordial, if that were but sweet, and this bitter. And so it is with men themselves in reference to the dealings of God's providence; every dispensation of it may prove our physic or our bane, according as it is ordered and applied. God can make our most pleasing and promising enjoyments become a plague and a destruction to us, and *turn our very table into a snare*: and, on the other hand, he can make us *gather grapes of thorns, and figs of thistles*, and reap comfort from the sharpest affliction. God's wisdom still warrants all his actions to be for the best.

And as his glory is the grand end of all that he does, and consequently ought to be so likewise of all that we either do or suffer; so this is most worthy our observation: that whatsoever befalls any man, that makes most for God's glory in respect of that man; and if he be a child of God, most for his own good too. For in this case, things must not be estimated according to their bare natures, but according to their use and tendency; and, as they lie under the direction of that providence which guides things to effects much beside and beyond what their mere nature, left to its own course of acting, would carry them out to. Poison itself, by art, may be made an ingredient in the composition of an anti dote; and things in themselves really good, yet, by ill circumstances and misapplication, may become hurtful and pernicious. Prosperity, considered absolutely and irrespectively, is better and more desirable than adversity; and yet, perhaps, as our spiritual estate and condition stands, adversity may be better for us: for that may harden, and this may humble us; that may prepare us for judgment, this for mercy. As the having blood in our veins is in itself naturally better than losing it, and yet in some cases, and under some distempers, the very principle of life becomes the occasion of death; and that blood kept in, destroys, which being let out would recover and preserve us. Now the divine wisdom best knows all the maladies, all the weaknesses and

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distempers of our souls, and consequently ought to claim and challenge our sole and absolute dependence upon it, even in its harshest and most amazing prescriptions.

(4.) Let the afflicted person consider the great goodness, the benignity and mercy of God to all his creatures; which is so great, that the Psalmist tells us, in [Psalm cxlv. 9](#), it spreads itself with an universal extent *over all his works*: but especially the noblest and most beloved piece of his workmanship, mankind; which seems to have been created by God purposely to shew how much he delighted in mercy. God is the greatest of kings and potentates, but yet has nothing of a tyrant in his nature, how ill and tragically soever some may represent him: he takes no delight in our groans, no pleasure in our tears, but those that are penitential. It is no pastime to him to view the miseries of the distressed, to hear the cries of the orphan or the sighs of the widow. The prophet tells us, in [Lament. iii. 33](#), that *God docs not willingly afflict the children of men*: he seems to share in the suffering, while he inflicts it; and to feel the very pain of his own blows, while they fall heavy upon the poor sinner. And again, in [Isaiah xxviii. 21](#), judgment is called God's *strange work*; a work that he has no proneness to, nor finds any complacency in: and therefore, whensoever he betakes himself to it, we may be confident that it is not for the sake of the work itself, but that he has some secret, overruling design of love, which he is to compass after an unusual, extraordinary way. He never lops and prunes us with his judgments, because he delights to see us bare, and poor, and naked, but because he would make us fruitful; nor would he cause us to pass through the fiery furnace, but to purge and to refine us. For can it be any pleasure to the physician to administer loathsome potions or bitter pills? or can it be any satisfaction to a father to employ a chirurgeon to cut off his child's arm, were not the taking away a part found necessary to secure the whole? Common humanity never uses the lance to pain and torture, but to restore the patient. But now, the care and tenderness of an earthly parent or physician is but a faint shadow and resemblance of that infinite compassion and affection, which God bears to his children, even in the midst of his severest usage of them. For what is or can be that affliction, through which God's love does not shine and shew itself, to an eye spiritual enough to discern it? God sometimes dashes a man's beloved reputation, and exposes him to the scorn of those, who are a juster object of scorn themselves. Sometimes he lessens a man's estate, and, after he has grown old in wealth and plenty, brings him at length, in his declining years, to the irksome change of a poor, low, necessitous condition: and sometimes again, God breaks in upon a man's family, his dearest friends and relations, and so bereaves him of a right hand or a second self. But still, as grievous as all these things may seem at first view, may not yet the traces and footsteps of divine love be discernible in all these strokes? For some perhaps may value more the esteem of men, than that of God; and then is it not better for such an one to have his name blasted amongst men, than blotted out of the book of life? Another may idolize his money, and make his gold his god; and, in such a case, is it not really more profitable for him to lose an earthly estate, than to have no treasure in heaven? And a third



may dote upon friends, and place his whole heart and confidence in his relations; and if so, is it not indeed his advantage to be stripped of a perishing, mortal friend, and took into the bosom of an everlasting father? Certainly every such person may write upon all his losses, *Periissem nisi periissem*. For be it reputation, estate, friends, or whatsoever else is or can be desirable to a man, that he has lost; yet if by all this God has given laws to his outrageous appetites, and bounds to his ambitious designs; if by this he has extinguished in him the spirit of pride, and stirred up in him the spirit of prayer; and lastly, if by this he has mortified his worldliness and sensuality, and convinced him of the infinite vanity, the emptiness, and dissatisfaction that is in all created enjoyments; how much soever such a man has been a sufferer, it is certain that he has been no loser. He has indeed been upon a great traffic, he has driven the gain fullest bargain in the world, having exchanged his pence for pounds, things carnal for things spiritual; things which perish in their very use, for things that never fade.



(5.) Let the afflicted person consider God's exact and inviolable justice; so that if he had no kindness for us to do us any good, it is certain that this alone would keep him from doing us any wrong; for this is a thing which omnipotence itself cannot do.

God never strikes without a cause, nor wounds us, till our own sins draw the sword. All punishment essentially supposes and implies, one way or other, a guilt in the party punished; and every man's sufferings are a true comment upon his deserts. God punishes no man beyond the rate and proportion of his own demerit, though short of it he does very often; accepting small payments for great debts, and setting down fifty in the punishment, where sin has run us in arrears to him many thousands in the guilt. And can we then think it reasonable to maunder and repine at him, who treats us with such abatements? chastising us *with whips*, when he might lash us *with scorpions*; and only correcting, when he might, with full warrant from his justice, confound us? The divine justice never acts up to its highest pitch, in its dealing with sinners in this world; but still proceeds with some temper and allay of mercy, which makes it quite another thing from what it would be, if it should flame out in its own native, proper, unrelenting severities. And sinners who taste of it, both in this world and the other too, find the vast difference of it here and there, by woful experience: for here it smites us only with the rod of admonition, and puts just so much sharpness into the blow, as may embitter sin to us, not thoroughly revenge it upon us. And therefore, in scripture-dialect, God's *righteousness* is oftentimes but another word for his *mercy*; mercy being still predominant in the exercise and manifestation of it. So that at the same time God punishes men both for, and yet beneath their sins; and with great lenity still proportions his judgments, rather to the measure of their strengths, than to that of their deserts.



(6.) And lastly, let the afflicted person consider the method of Providence, in its dealing with such as have been eminent for their submissive deportment under God's afflicting hand, and he shall see how mightily God has turned all to their advantage at last; and that

not only in the next life, but often times very signally even in this too. The consideration of which alone may and ought to administer no small support to any one, who has understanding enough to compare past events with present, and so to read his own case in other men's. For in things of this nature examples are the best arguments, and precedents the strongest persuasives: and therefore St. James, in his last chapter, having several times pressed this grand duty of patience, seals his exhortation with this argument, in [verse 11](#), *Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord*. And such an end and issue did God put to Job's calamity, that we find his prosperity returning, or rather with a full tide flowing in upon him, in a more than treble increase: nay, and we read of his losses made up to him, even in kind; besides the peculiar advantage accruing to his condition from the circumstance of his restitution, that by thus immediately passing from one extreme to another, the very neighbourhood of his sufferings gave him so much a quicker and livelier taste of his returning felicity. And then for David, who so quietly endured the rage and contumelies of Shimei, did he not presently see a merciful turn of Providence restoring him to a more established royalty than ever he was master of before; and bringing that base tongue to lick the dust under his feet, that a few days before had so foully thrown dirt in his face?

Could we but trust God to do our business for us, to assert our cause, and to vindicate our innocence, we should find that he would not only answer, but also outdo our hopes; we should find that our sorrows would prove our harvest, and our *sowing in tears* make us *reap sevenfold in joy*.

Men are apt to think both themselves and others miserable, because they pronounce and pass judgment hastily, from the present sense of a grievance, without expecting its issue; which usually converts the sighs and lamentations of a pious mourner into the triumphal songs of a joyful conqueror; and having led God's chosen ones through a Red sea and an *howling wilderness*, plants them at length, safe and free, in all the wealth and affluence of a promised Canaan. No person, that ever heartily submitted to the rough dealings of Providence, could upbraid it with unkindness at the last; but has still found the same hands more bountiful in rewarding, than ever they had been severe in striking.

The ways of patience may at first indeed appear rugged and frightful, full of terror and discouragement; but it is *the end (we know) that still crowns the work*, and the issue and conclusion, from whence all things take their estimate. A welcome reception at our journey's end is a sufficient recompence for all the fatigue and tediousness of the way: and the scripture tells us, that as soon as a woman in child-bed is delivered, all the pangs and travails of her labour presently vanish, and are swallowed up in the joy, that a man is born into the world. True wisdom, in taking the worth and value of things, never terminates in the present state of them, but casts its eye chiefly upon the future. And therefore, as no man can be accounted truly happy, even as to the things of this world, till his death; so neither can any one pass for truly miserable, (and that even upon a temporal account,) till he has finished his course



here; for every thing is well or ill, as it ends: and this let every afflicted person cause his meditations chiefly to dwell upon, still directing his observations to the final issue of God's dealing with such as have signalized their patience, by suffering his sharpest rebukes with all the stillness and composure, constancy and firmness, of a pious, humble, and well-resolved submission.



Now these six things in God being seriously thought upon; namely, his irresistible power; his absolute, unaccountable sovereignty; his infinite, unerring wisdom; his boundless goodness and benignity; his exact and inviolable justice; and lastly, his gracious way of treating all patient and humble sufferers, are so many mighty and irrefragable arguments to enforce this great duty of submission upon us, as the most rational thing imaginable: and that upon the account of three great and noble qualities constantly attending on and naturally resulting from it, as it stands related to and grounded upon those six foregoing considerations. And these are, 1. The necessity; 2. The prudence; and 3. The decency of such a submission; all which jointly and severally prove and demonstrate the high and transcendent reasonableness of it. I shall speak something of each of them, and so close up all. And,

1. For its necessity. It is most certain, from what has been discoursed, that in this, as in all other cases, God will have his will; and how should it be otherwise, when nothing can withstand it? Submit we must to the calamity inflicted on us, unless we could be too wise or too strong for him that inflicts it; for other ways of escape there can be none, but either by wisdom to contrive, or by force to wrest ourselves out of God's hand: but he that does the former must outwit omniscience; and he that does the latter must overpower omnipotence. But all such counsels are vain, and ridiculously impossible; for there is no contending with Heaven, no wrestling with God, but by prayer. We know what a weak, pitiful thing a subject is, if contending with his earthly prince; but much more so, opposing himself to the almighty *King of kings*, before whom the powers of the whole earth are as nothing, and all the empires and kingdoms of the world but as so many bubbles before the fury of the wind. He who carries *his breath in his nostrils* surely should be careful to carry a pious and a discreet tongue in his mouth. *Who* (says the prophet Isaiah, speaking of the dreadful power of God) *would set briers and thorns against him in battle? he would go through them, he would burn them together; Isaiah xxvii. 4.* Briers indeed may be sharp and troublesome, but not to the fire that feels them not, but in a moment devours and consumes them. In like manner men may snarl, and word it high against Providence; but we have already observed what silly, senseless things such verbal assaults are against the Creator and Governor of the universe, and to what little purpose we spend our breath against him who gave it, and can take it away when he pleases. Expostulations and invectives may perhaps affect and move a weak man like ourselves, but they are lost before they can get to heaven; they cannot reach, and much less pierce those glorious mansions. Words of rage and impatience can hurt none but him that speaks them, especially when they are shot at God: and therefore, as the same prophet



says again, in chap. xlv. 9, *Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth*, and then possibly they may strike one another in pieces. But a potsherd is a very unfit thing to run against a brasen wall, or to dash itself upon the *rock of ages*.

All affronts put upon God by such a refractory, contumelious behaviour as we have been speaking of, are to be reckoned amongst the absurdities, as well as the impieties of our actions; such as reason itself would decry, should religion be silent. Things so full of paradox and brutish irrationality, that, could great sins be lit to be laughed at, they were fitter to be run down with scoff and sarcasm, than to be thought worthy of a serious confutation: but though it is not for us to laugh at them, we may be sure that God does.

In fine, this we may rest satisfied of, that whensoever God's hand is upon us, we must either yield a voluntary, or be forced to a violent submission. If our stubbornness is such, that we will not bend, it is certain that our weakness is also such, that we must needs break. If God's message will not win upon Pharaoh, his plagues shall compel him; and therefore when he sent Moses to him, he put a rod into his hand, as well as ft word into his mouth. When God fully purposes to afflict u man, he is like a bird in a net, the more he strives and flutters, the more he is entangled; for the supreme Judge of all things is resolved to go through with his *great work of judgment*, and to make all obstinate, sturdy sinners know, that he has power to constrain, where his goodness will not persuade.

2. The second qualification of the submission here spoken of, which also is a farther argument to enforce it, is the great prudence, as well as the necessity of it. There are few things in the world so totally and entirely bad, but some advantage may be made of them by a dexterous management; and it is certainly a man's wisdom to make the best of a bad condition: there being a certain kind of pious and prudential husbandry, by which a man may so improve a calamity, as to make the endurance of that the performance of a duty, and, by his behaviour under it, to procure a release from it. We should with Isaac take the *wood upon our shoulders*, though we ourselves are designed for the sacrifice; and who knows but as in his case, so in ours also, a patient resignation of ourselves to the knife may be the sure and direct way to rescue us from it? For, according to the commerce that God has established between this and the other world, momentary sorrows are improvable into everlasting joys; and we may build as high as heaven, if we lay the foundation deep and low in patience and humility. In 2 Corinth. iv. 17, *Our light affliction*, says the apostle, *which is but for a moment, worketh for us afar more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. In which words, it is worth our while to observe the peculiar force and emphasis of the comparison, and the vast difference of the things that the apostle here confronts one against another: it is a *light affliction*, set against a *weight of glory*; a *light affliction for a moment*, against an *exceeding and eternal weight of glory*: so that it is impossible to word things to an higher disproportion. And now, when the case stands thus, if a man would not endure so much as the smart of a

cut finger to gain a crown; or (as I may so speak) would not lose an hair to save his head; should we not question his wisdom as much as his courage? and look upon him as one so far from *living by faith*, that he does not so much as live up to common sense? For, as Naaman's servant said to him, when he refused in scorn to follow the prophet's advice, *Had the prophet bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?* So, where heaven is the prize, who would not endure hell itself for a while, to obtain that at last? But upon how much easier terms are we treated by God, when he says only. Suffer a few inconsiderable grievances here patiently, and that for a very short time, and then he infinitely, unchangeably happy for ever? It is wisdom, wisdom upon the truest and strictest estimate of things, not only to endure, but even to choose a temporal evil, which leads to an eternal good.

But admit that such a submission to the hand of God should not rid us from the calamity he is pleased to bring upon us, yet this we may be sure of, that it will give us ease and relief under it; and if it takes off nothing of our load, yet it will certainly add to our strength. For it is really armour to the inner man, and (if you will admit the expression) it is a kind of breastplate within us; it being the nature of patience to make heavy things seem light, and of impatience to make the lightest things become really heavy. It is this that renders every affliction, according to the prophetic phrase, truly and properly, *the burden of the Lord*. And still the more we strive to cast off God's yoke, the more it galls us. The sum of all is this, that since there is an inevitable necessity of our suffering when God calls us to suffer, it must needs be the highest piece of Christian policy, by our submissive demeanour to make a virtue of necessity, to extract good out of evil, and to endure that with patience which we cannot remedy by power.

3. And lastly, To the necessity and prudence of such a submissive deportment under the hand of God, let us add also the decency of it, as none of the least enforcing considerations to oblige us to it: for we may trust it to the decision of any ordinary, if unprejudiced reason, whether it can be comely for a sinful, obnoxious creature to contend with him in whose hand his very life and soul is, and *whose are all his ways*, as Daniel expresses it to Belshazzar, [Dan. v. 23](#); and whether it can be fit for a slave, a vassal, to quarrel and contest the will and pleasure of his absolute lord and sovereign.

Add to this, the follies and absurdities of impatience, considered simply in itself, and abstracted from those aggravations that it receives from the peculiar quality and condition of some persons: for in the very nature of it, as such, it degrades a man not only from the degree of a Christian, but also of a man, stripping him of his very understanding and consideration; and so turning not only religion, but also reason itself out of doors. *In patience possess ye your souls*, says our Saviour, [Luke xxi. 19](#). It is this that gives a man the possession of himself; for impatience does, as it were, thrust him out of the present possession of his senses: it invades the capitol, reason is enslaved, and passion domineers; during the furies of which, he ceases for that time to be rational, and passes into the rank and order of brutes,

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which are wholly governed by appetite, and the present impulse of sense, in opposition to the sober conduct of reason, discourse, and deliberation.

Impatience has always these two ill ingredients in the very constitution of it, pride and anger: and can any thing possibly be more indecent, more absurd, and more to be exploded, than a proud beggar, an aspiring lump of dirt? or can there be a greater paradox in manners, than at the same time to be saucy, and to depend; to be arrogant, and yet indigent? And then for anger, it is a monstrous, irregular, unbecoming passion, even when it shews itself against an equal; but how much more against a superior; and yet incredibly, unconceivably more when it fumes and rages against the immense power, and the unquestionable prerogative of the supreme Sovereign of all things, whom our anger cannot reach, but the least spark of whose anger can for ever consume us! What a discomposure docs this ungoverned affection work in the whole intellectual frame, turning the mind topsyturvy, clouding its apprehensions, entangling its counsels, and confounding its reasonings, till it has turned that little light which is in it into darkness, and so quite blown out *the candle of the Lord*. And can this be a disposition of mind becoming a rational nature? a nature that God has made but one pitch *lower than that of the angels*?

But so much the more intolerable is such a stubborn, unsubmitive frame of spirit in men, when the whole host of the creation besides are, with the highest readiness and alacrity, continually intent upon the execution of their great Master's commands. The whole [104th Psalm](#), that noble and sublime piece of sacred poetry, is a full description of, and a panegyric upon the creature's readiness to serve their great Lord; in [ver. 6, 7](#). *The waters*, says the Psalmist, *stood upon the mountains; but at thy rebuke they fled, and at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away*. Nothing to be seen but absolute obedience, even in these inanimate creatures, which, it seems, can obey a command, though they cannot so much as hear it. And then for other creatures, endued with a bare principle of life and sense, they also act in a constant compliance with the divine will, and that sometimes against the most natural inclination of their own. What more ravenous than an hungry lion? and yet he shall restrain his furious appetite when God commands him not to touch a Daniel. What more devouring than the ravens? and yet even they shall part with their own food to an Elijah, when God bids them purvey for a servant of his in distress. And shall men, after all this; man, that has been so signally obliged by Heaven above all the rest of the creation; shall he, I say, be the only thing that shall resist and oppose the proceedings of the Almighty, by fretting and striving against every passage of Providence that comes athwart either his desires or designs? If this be not the highest transgression of the rules of decency, then surely there is no such thing as decency or regularity, order or proportion, in the whole frame and economy of this visible world.

And thus having farther enforced this grand duty of submission upon these three several accounts; to wit, of its absolute necessity; its high prudence and policy; and lastly, its great



decency: I suppose there can need no other arguments to bind it fast upon the consciences of those who, besides their indispensable duty to God, hold it their no small concernment to acquit themselves to the world also, in all these considerations.

In the mean time, the foregoing discourse may teach us an art that all the wisdom of the world cannot teach; which is, to know how to make ourselves happy in the most afflicted, abject, and forlorn condition of life: and that is, in short, to acquiesce cheerfully and entirely in the good pleasure of Almighty God, whatsoever our estate or condition in this world falls out to be: for, to put all into one word, could men be but willing to do what God commands, and to suffer what God inflicts, there could be no more room for any such thing as discontent or misery in the whole course of things here below. The killing force of the greatest and the fiercest judgments is even broke by yeldance and submission; for still it is opposition that strengthens a calamity. And when the creature will needs wage war with God, God acts with the greatest reason and equity that can be expected, even from men warring against men: those that will fight it out, he kills; and those that will yield, he spares.

The felicities and miseries of this world are dispensed by God variously, and the changes of our lives are, for the most part, much more numerous than the years of them: so that he who now flourishes with all the plenty and glory that Providence can heap upon him, may, in a short time, see himself stripped and disrobed of all; and then the use, the worth, and value of a patient, submissive spirit will come to be understood; since, without it, it will be impossible so to behave ourselves under God's afflicting hand, as not to add provocation to provocation, or to fall under one calamity without making it the occasion of another.

Which consideration surely should be sufficient to beget in us a readiness, not only to bear, but even to *take up our cross*; and to make every suffering free and voluntary, by a subsequent act of choice, *looking unto Jesus*, our great pattern and example, who, in obedience to his Father's will, *endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God*.

To which he, of his mercy, vouchsafe to bring us all; to whom be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.

END OF VOL. VI.



The following alterations have been made by conjecture. See the Advertisement in the 5th volume.

- P. 23. l. 13. tends] The *original edition* reads tend
- 109. l. 10. wounded] drowned
- 111. l. 2. amazements] amusements
- 114. l. 7. effect] affect
- 116. l. 7, 8. waking] watering
- 127. l. ult. for a season] fix a season
- 147. l. 3. in spite] on, spite
- — l. 4. on] in
- 169. l. 12. or] and
- 173. l. 25. stop] strap
- 179. l. 29. grates] graces
- 187. l. 23. bare] bear
- 199. l. ult. gasp] grasp
- 214. l. 31. 32. proportion] portion
- 224. l. 2. soul's progress in] soul's in
- 233. l. 20. effect] affect
- — l. 21. causal] casual
- 246. l. 6. signifies his] signifies only his
- 330. l. 25. melts] meets
- 334. l. 25. ivy] joy
- 336. l. 2. of the learned] of and learned
- 350. l. ult. he] it
- 352. l. 32. he] or he
- 355. l. 4. merit] demerit
- 385. l. 24. as God] and as God
- 403. l. 30. cozenage] courage
- 452. l. 4. this the hypocrite] this hypocrite
- 457. l. 20. finished] flourished
- 502. l. 16. its own] his own
- 539. l. 11. all into] all in into

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- Gratior est qui deorum delubris, puram castamque mentem, quam qui meditatam carmen intulerit.: [217](#)
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- Sane sciendum est, quod licet in praesenti articulo a nobis Graeci verbo discordent, tamen sensu non differunt.: [72](#)
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