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

Robert South



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Sermons Preached Upon Several Occasions. Vol. V.

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SERMONS

PREACHED UPON

SEVERAL OCCASIONS,

BY

ROBERT SOUTH, D.D.

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

A NEW EDITION, IN SEVEN VOLUMES.

VOL. V.

OXFORD,

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS.

MDCCCXXIII.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Discourses contained in the three last volumes of the present edition, with the exception of the Appendix, were first published in the year 1744, with the following title: “Five additional Volumes of Sermons preached upon several Occasions. By Robert South, D.D. late Prebendary of Westminster, and Canon of Christ-Church, Oxon. Now first printed from the Author’s Manuscripts. With the chief Heads of the Sermons prefixed to each Volume: and a general Index of the principal Matters. London: printed for Charles Bathurst, opposite St. Dunstan’s Church in Fleet-Street. M.DCC.XLIV.”

The editor is said to have been Dr. William King, Principal of St. Mary Hall in the University of Oxford. See Nichols’s *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. II. p. 608.

These Sermons do not appear to have been prepared or even intended for the press by the author, from whose rough drafts they were evidently printed in so careless and incorrect a manner, as in many passages to be absolutely unintelligible. In the present edition it has been deemed proper to have recourse occasionally to conjectural emendation of the text, in preparing which considerable use has been made of a copy bequeathed to the Bodleian Library by Charles Godwyn, B.D. in which many of the errors are corrected in Mr. Godwyn’s own hand. But in all cases, in which an obvious and almost certain correction did not present itself, the original edition has been followed without alteration. A list of the words or passages corrected is subjoined to each volume.



THE
CHIEF HEADS OF THE SERMONS.

VOL. V.

SERMON I.

EPHESIANS iv. 10.

He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. P. 1.

Christianity, in those great matters of fact upon which it is founded, happily complies with man's mind, by affording proper objects to affect both the pensive, sad, and composed part of the soul, and also its more joyful, serene, and sprightly apprehensions; which is instanced in many passages of Christ's life, from the humble manger, attended with angels, to his descent into the grave, followed by his miraculous resurrection and ascension, 1. This last great and crowning passage, however true, still affords scope for the noble actings of faith; and since faith must rest itself upon a divine word, such a word we have here in the text, 3. Wherein are four things considerable:

I. Christ's humiliation implied in these words, *he that descended*, 4.

The Socinians answered concerning Christ's descent according to his divine nature, 5. And an inquiry made as to the place whither he descended, *the lower parts of the earth*, 5. which, 1. Some understand simply of the earth, as being the lowermost part of the world, 6. 2. Some of the grave, 6. 3. Some of hell itself, the place of the damned, 6. 4. The Romanists by the help of this text have spied a place called purgatory; or rather the pope's kitchen, 7. These words may bear the same sense with those in Psalm cxxxix. 15. and be very properly taken for Christ's incarnation and conception in the womb of the blessed Virgin, 8. and that upon these grounds:

1. Because the former expositions have been shewn to be unnatural, forced, or impertinent, and there is no other besides this assignable, 8.

2. Since Paul here uses David's very words, it is most probable that he used them in David's sense, 8.

3. The words *descending* and *ascending* are so put together in the text, that they seem to intend a summary account of Christ's whole transaction in man's redemption, which was begun in his conception, and consummate in his ascension, 8.

II. Christ's glorious advancement and exaltation, *he ascended far above all heavens*; that is, to the most eminent place of dignity and glory in the highest heaven, 9.



III. The qualification and state of Christ's person, in reference to both conditions: he was the same. *He that descended, &c.* which evinces the unity of the two natures in the same person, 11.

IV. The end of Christ's ascension, *that he might fill all things*, 15. *All things* may refer here, 1. To the scripture prophecies and predictions, 15. 2. To the church, as he might fill that with his gifts and graces, 15. Or 3, (which interpretation is preferred,) to all things in the world, 16. which he may be said thus to fill in a double respect.

1. Of the omnipresence of his nature, and universal diffusion of his godhead, 16.

2. Of the universal rule and government of all things committed to him as mediator upon his ascension, 19.

It remains now that we transcribe this into our lives, and by being the most obedient of servants, declare Christ to be the greatest of masters, 21 .

SERMON II.

EPHESIANS iv. 10.

That he might fill all things. P. 22.

These words are capable of a threefold interpretation, 22.

1. *All things* may refer to the whole series of prophecies and predictions recorded of Christ in the scriptures, which he may be said to fulfil by his ascension, 22.

St. Paul vindicated against the Jews' charge of perverting the prophet's meaning in that eminent prediction, [Psalm lxxviii. 18.](#) 23.

2. *All things* may refer to the church: which sense is here most insisted on, 25.

The church, from its very nature and constitution, has unavoidably a double need or necessity, which it is Christ's prerogative to fill, 26.

1. In respect of its government. Hereupon he *gave some, apostles; some, evangelists; some, prophets; some, pastors and teachers*, 26.

2. In respect of instruction: for this Christ made a glorious provision by the diffusion of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles, 27. In which passage two things are observable:

I. The time when, 27. Which is remarkable in respect,

1. Of Christian religion itself, it being about its first solemn promulgation, 27.

2. Of the apostles. It was when they entered upon the full execution of their apostolic office, 29-

II. The manner how the Holy Ghost was conferred; namely, in the gift of tongues, 33. And as these tongues were a proper representation of the gospel, so the peculiar nature and efficacy of this gospel was emphatically set forth by those attending circumstances of the fire and the mighty wind, both of which are notable for these effects; 1. To cleanse. 2. To consume and destroy, 34.



SERMON III.

JOHN ix. 4.

The night cometh, when no man can work. P. 36.

The sense of the text naturally lies in three propositions.

I. That there is a work appointed to every man to be performed by him, while he lives in the world, 36.

Man, as he is, 1. a part or member of the body politic, hath a temporal work, whereby he is to approve himself a good citizen, in filling the place of a divine, lawyer, &c. 38.

2. As a member and subject of a spiritual and higher kingdom, he has also a spiritual calling or profession of a Christian; and the work that this engages him to is three fold, 40.

1. Making his peace with God, 41.

2. Getting his sins mortified, 42.

3. Getting his heart purified with the proper graces and virtues of a Christian, 44.

II. That the time of this life being once expired, there is no farther possibility of performing that work, 46.

The word by which the time of this life is expressed, viz. *a day*, 46. may emphatically denote three things.

1. The shortness of our time, 46. 2. The sufficiency of it for our work, 47. 3. The determinate stint and limitation of it, 48.

III. That the consideration of this ought to be the highest argument for using the utmost diligence in the discharge of this work, 49. Which requires all our diligence; 1. From its difficulty, 49. 2. From its necessity, 50.

SERMON IV.

PREACHED AT THE CONSECRATION OF DR. SETH WARD, BISHOP OF OXON.

JEREMIAH xv. 20.

I will make thee unto this people a fenced brasen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and deliver thee, saith the Lord. P. 54.

Presbytery, derived by some from Jethro, came first from Midian, an heathenish place, 54. Their elders are mentioned sometimes in the Old Testament, but their office not described, 54. A superintendency of bishops over presbyters may be argued from the superi-



ority of the priests over the Levites, much better than they can found their discipline upon the word *elder*, 55. But if God instituted such a standing superiority and jurisdiction of the priest over the Levites, these two things follow;

1. That such a superiority is not in itself absolutely irregular and unlawful, 55.
2. That neither does it carry in it an antipathy and contrariety to the power of godliness, 55.

And yet upon these two suppositions, as if there was something in the very vital constitution of such a subordination irreconcilable to godliness, are all the presbyters' calumnies commenced, 55.

In the words are three things considerable.

I. God's qualification of Jeremy to be an overseer in his church; *I will make thee a fenced brasen wall*, 56.

Now a wall imports, 1. Enclosure, 57. 2. Fortification, 58. This metaphor of a wall, as applied to a church-governor being explained; to make good that title he must have, 1. Courage, 59. 2. Innocence and integrity, 60. 3. Authority, 62.

II. The opposition that the church-governor thus qualified will be sure to meet with in his office: *They shall fight against thee*, 64. And this they are like to do,

1. By seditious preaching and praying, 64.
2. By railing and libels, 65.
3. Perhaps by open force, 66.

III. The issue and success of this opposition: *They shall not prevail against thee*, 68.

It is bold to foretell things future, which fall under human cognizance only two ways: 1. By a foresight of them in their causes, 68. 2. By divine revelation, 69. And from both these there is ground of hope to the church, 69.

The arguments against this answered, 1. That the enemies of the church in the late confusion did not prevail against her: for that only is a prevailing which is a final conquest, 70. 2. That he who is pillaged or murdered in the resolute performance of his duty is not properly prevailed against, 70.

Wherefore the governors of the church may with confidence from the text bespeak their opposers; Who shall *fight against us*? it is God *that saves*. Who shall *destroy*? it is the same God that *delivers*, 71.

SERMONS V. VI.

TITUS i. 1.

Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging the truth which is after godliness. P. 73.



The end of all philosophical inquiries is truth; and of all religious institutions, *godliness*; both which are united and blended in the constitution of Christianity, 73.

I. In this expression of the gospel's being *the truth which is after godliness*, three things are couched.

1. That it is simply a truth, 74.
2. That it is an operative truth, 75.
3. That it operates to the best effect, 75.

The words may have a double sense, 76. 1. That the gospel is so called, because it actually produces the effects of godliness in those that embrace it, 76. 2. That it is, in its nature, the most apt and proper instrument of holiness, 76. and the truth which has thus an influence upon godliness consists of two things, 76.

1. A right notion of God, 77.
2. A right notion of what concerns the duty of man, 77.

II. Three things are deduced from this description of the gospel, 79.

1. That the nature and prime design of religion is to be an instrument of good life.

This cleared by these arguments. 1. That religion designs the service of God, by gaining to his obedience man's actions and converse, 80. 2. It designs the salvation of man, who is not saved as he is more knowing, but as he is more pious than others, 80. 3. That the excellency of Christianity does not consist in discovering more sublime truths or more excellent precepts than philosophy, (though it does this,) but in suggesting better arguments to enforce the performance of those precepts, than any other religion, 81. 4. That notwithstanding the diversity of religions, men will generally be condemned hereafter for the same things, viz. their breaches of morality, 82.

2. That so much knowledge of truth as is sufficient to engage men in the practice of godliness, serves the necessary ends of religion, 82. For,

If godliness be the design, it ought also to be the measure of men's knowledge in this particular, 83.

3. That whatsoever does in itself, or its direct consequences, undermine the motives of a good life, is contrary to and destructive of Christian religion, 83.

The doctrines that more immediately concern a good life are,

1. Such as concern the justification of a sinner, 83.

And herein the motives to holy living are subverted,

1. By the doctrine of the covenant of grace without conditions of performance on man's part, but only to believe that he is justified: taught by the antinomians, 84. 2. By the doctrine of acceptance with God by the righteousness and merits of other saints: taught by the Romanists, 85.

2. Such as concern the rule of life and manners, 87.

And here the motives to godliness are destroyed,



1. By that doctrine of the antinomians, that exempts all believers from the obligation of the moral law, 87.

2. By that doctrine of the church of Rome, which asserts any sin to be in its nature venial, 89. The church of Rome herein resembling the Jewish church corrupted by the Pharisees, who distinguished the commandments into the great and the small, 91. 3. By the Romish doctrine of supererogation, 93. 4. By that doctrine, that places it in the power of any mere mortal man to dispense with the laws of Christ, so as to discharge any man from being obliged by them, 95.

3. Such as relate to repentance, 99.

The doctrine of repentance may be perverted in a double respect:

1. In respect of the time of it: as is done by the Romish casuists, who say, that a man is bound to repent of his sins once, but when that once shall be, he may determine as he thinks fit, 100. 2. As to the measure of it, 103. The Romish doctrine considered in this respect, and refuted, 104.

The improvement of all lies in two things:

1. To convince us how highly it concerns all, but especially the most knowing, to try the doctrines that they believe, and to let inquiry usher in faith, 106.

2. It suggests also the sure marks, by which we may try them, 107. As, 1. It is not the pleasingness or suitableness of a doctrine to our tempers or interests, 107. nor, 2. The general or long reception of it, 108. nor, 3. The godliness of the preacher or asserter of any doctrine, that is a sure mark of the truth of it: but if it naturally tends to promote the fear of God in men's hearts, and to engage them in virtuous courses, it carries with it the mark and impress of the great eternal truth, 109.

SERMONS VII. VIII. IX.

PROVERBS xxix. 5.

A man that flattereth his neighbour, spreadeth a net for his feet. P. 111.

The words being plain, the matter contained in them is prosecuted under three general heads, 111.

I. What flattery is, and wherein it does consist, 112.

Though we cannot reach all the varieties of it, the general ways are,

1. Concealing or dissembling the defects or vices of any person, 112. And here are shewn two things:

First, Who they are that are concerned to speak in this case; namely, 1. Such as are intrusted with the government of others, 114. 2. Persons set apart to the work of the ministry, 115. 3. Those that profess friendship, 116.



Secondly, The manner how they are to speak: as, 1. The reproof should be given in secret, 117. 2. With due respect to and distinction of the condition of the person reproved, 119. 3. With words of meekness and commiseration, 123. 4. That the reproof be not continued or repeated after amendment of the occasion, 127.

2. The second way of flattery is the praising and defending the defects or vices of any person, 129.

Under this species, the distinction between a religious and a political conscience observed, and censured, 132. And two sorts of men charged as the most detestable flatterers:

1. Such as upon principles of enthusiasm assure persons of eminence and high place, that those transgressions are allowable in them, that are absolutely prohibited and condemned in others, 134.

2. The Romish casuists, who persuade the world, that many actions, which have hitherto passed for impious and unlawful, admit of such qualifications as clear them of all guilt, 135.

This kind of flattery is of most mischievous consequence, and of very easy effect: 1. From the nature of man, 137. 2. From the very nature of vice itself, 137.

3. The third kind of flattery is the perverse imitation of any one's defects or vices, 138.

4. The fourth consists in overvaluing those virtues and perfections that are really laudable in any person, 141.

II. The grounds and occasions of flattery on his part that is flattered, 144.

Three mentioned. 1. Greatness of place or condition, 144. 2. An angry, passionate disposition, and impatient of reproof, 146. 3. A proud and vainglorious disposition, 148.

III. The ends and designs of the flatterer. *He spreads a net for his neighbour's feet*, 152.

The flatterer is influenced by these two grand purposes;

1. To serve himself, 152.

2. To undermine him whom he flatters, and thereby to effect his ruin, 154. Which he does, 1. As he deceives him, and grossly abuses and perverts his judgment, which should be the guide of all his actions, 155. 2. He brings him to shame and a general contempt, 156. He effects his ruin; forasmuch as by this means he renders his recovery and amendment impossible, 157.

SERMONS X. XL XII.

PSALM *xix.* 13.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.
P. 160.

These words suggest three things to our consideration.

1. The thing prayed against; *presumptuous sins*, 160.



2. The person making this prayer; one adorned with the highest eulogies for his piety, even by God himself, 160.

3. The means he engages for his deliverance; namely, the divine grace and assistance, 160.

The words are discussed under two general heads.

I. Shewing what these presumptuous sins are.

II. Shewing the reason of this so holy person's praying so earnestly against them.

The first head is handled in three things.

1. Shewing in general what it is to presume, 160.

The scripture description of presumption. Three parts go to make up a presumptuous sin. 1. That a man undertake an action, known by him to be unlawful, or at least doubtful, 161. 2. That, notwithstanding, he promise to himself security from any punishment of right consequent upon it, 162. 3. That he do this upon motives utterly groundless and unreasonable, 162.

The presumptuous sinner is divested of the two only pleas for the extenuation of sin. As, 1. Ignorance, 163, 2. Surprise, 165.

Distinction between sins of presumption and sins of infirmity.

Three opinions concerning a sin of infirmity, 167. The

1st, Derives the nature of it from the condition of the agent; affirming that every sin committed by a believer, or a person truly regenerate, is a sin of infirmity, 167. This doctrine is considered and refuted, 168.

2. Some, from the matter of the action; as that it is committed only in thought or desire, or perhaps in word, 170. To this is answered, 1. That there is no act producible by the soul of man under the power of his will, but it is capable of being a sin of presumption, 170. 2. The voice of God in scripture is loud against this opinion, 171.

3. Some, from the principle immediately producing the action, viz. that the will is carried to the one by malice, to the other by inadvertency, 171.

But for our better conduct is shewn, first negatively, what is not a sin of infirmity: as, 1. When a man ventures and designs to commit a sin upon this ground, that he judges it a sin of infirmity, 172. 2. That sin, though in itself never so small, that a man, after the committing of it, is desirous to excuse or extenuate, 173. 2. Positively, what is: namely, a sin committed out of mere sudden inadvertency, that inadvertency not being directly caused by any deliberate sin immediately going before it, 173.

II. Assigning some of the most notable kinds of presumptuous sins, 175. As,

1. Sin against the goodness of God, manifesting itself to a man in great prosperity, 175.

2. Sins committed under God's judging and afflicting hand, 178.

3. Committing a sin clearly discovered, and directly pointed at by the word of God, either written or preached, 181.



4. Committing a sin against passages of Providence, particularly threatening the commission of it, 182.

5. Sins against the inward checks and warnings of conscience, 184.

6. Sins against that inward taste, relish, and complacency, that men have found in their attempts to walk with God, 186.

7. The returning to and repeated commission of the same sin, 188.

III. Proposing some remedies against these sins. As,

1. Let a man endeavour to fix in his heart a deep apprehension and persuasion of the transcendent evil of the nature of sin in general, 191.

2. Let him most seriously consider and reflect upon God's justice, 194.

3. Let him consider, how much such offences would exasperate even men, 195.

Second general head: shewing the reason of the Psalmist's so earnest praying against these sins, 197.

The prosecution of the first head might be argument enough: but yet, for a more full discussion of the point, these further reasons, which might induce him to it, are considered.

1. The danger of falling into these sins. 1. From the nature of man, which is apt to be confident, 198. 2. From the object of presumption, God's mercy, 199- 3. From the tempter, who chiefly concerns himself to engage men in this kind of sin, 199-

2. The sad consequences of them, if fallen into. Amongst which are, 1. Their marvellous aptness to grow upon him that gives way to them, 201. 2. That of all others they prove the most difficult in their cure, 203. 3. They waste the conscience infinitely more than any other sins, 204. 4. They have always been followed by God with greater and fiercer judgments than any others, 205.

SERMON XIII.

PSALM cxxxix. 3.

Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. P. 209.

The metaphorical expressions in the text being explained, 209. this doctrinal observation is gathered from it; viz.

That God knows, and takes strict and accurate notice of the most secret and retired passages of a man's life; which is proved by reasons of two sorts.

I. Such as prove that it is so, that God knows the most secret passages of our lives, 212.

1. He observes them, because he rules and governs them, 212. Which he does three ways: 1. By discovering them 2. By preventing of them, 213. 3. By directing them for other ends than those for which they were intended, 214.

2. Because he gives laws to regulate them, 215.



3. Because he will judge them, 216. First, in this life, wherein he often gives the sinner a foretaste of what he intends to do in the future, 217. 2. At the day of judgment, 218.

II. Such reasons as shew whence it is that God takes such notice of them.

He observes all hidden things:

1. From his omniscience, or power of knowing all things 219.

2. From his intimate presence to the nature and being of all things, 220.

The application of the whole lies in shewing the uses it may afford us: which are,

1. A use of conviction, to convince all presumptuous sinners of the atheism of their hearts, 221.

2d use. It speaks terror to all secret sinners, 223. Now secret sins are of two sorts, both of which God perfectly knows. As,

1. The sins of our thoughts and desires, 224. And he will judge of men by these, 1. Because they are most spiritual, and consequently most opposite to the nature of God, 226. 2. Because man's actions and practice may be overruled, but thoughts and desires are the natural and genuine offspring of the soul, 228.

2. Such sins as are not only transacted in the mind, but also by the body, yet are covered from the view of men, 229.

3. As God's omniscience is a terror to secret sinners, so it speaks no less comfort to all sincere-hearted Christians, 231.

SERMON XIV.

ECCLES. vii. 10.

Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this. P. 233.

In the days of Solomon, when Jerusalem was the glory of the whole earth, these complaints of the times were made; and yet a little backward in the calendar, we have nothing but tumults, changes, and vicissitudes, 233.

The words run in the form of a question, yet include a positive assertion, and a downright censure, 234. The inquiry being determined before it was proposed, now the charge of folly here laid upon it may relate to the supposition, upon which it is founded, in a threefold respect; viz.

I. Of a peremptory negation, as a thing absolutely to be denied, that former times are better than the following.

II. As of a case very disputable, whether they are so or no.

III. As admitting the supposition for true, that they are better, 234.

In every one of which respects this inquiry ought to be exploded. And,



I. That it is ridiculous to ask, why former times are better than the present, if they really are not so, 235. And that they are not, is evinced, 1. From reason, 236. 2. From history and the records of antiquity, 237.

II. Supposing the case disputable; which being argued, 1. On the side of antiquity, 240. 2. Of succeeding times, 241. this inquiry is shewn to be unreasonable,

1. In respect of the nature of the thing itself, 243.

2. In respect of the incompetence of any man living to judge in this controversy, 243.

III. Supposing it true, that former times are really best; this querulous reflection is foolish,

1. Because such complaints have no efficacy to alter or remove the cause of them, 244.

2. Because they only quicken the smart, and add to the pressure, 246.

3. Because the just cause of them is resolvable into ourselves, 247, &c.

SERMON XV.

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

MATT. v. 25, 26.

Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him: lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. P. 250.

In these words, Christ enforces the duty of an amicable concord and agreement betwixt brethren, from the unavoidable misery of those obstinate wretches that persist in and perpetuate an injury, 250.

Some understand the words in a literal, some in a figurative sense, 251.

The several terms therein explained in the spiritual sense of them; according to which, by the word *adversary* is meant the divine law, or a man's own conscience, as commissioned by that law, 251. By *the way*, the time of this life, or rather the present opportunities of repentance, 252. By *judge*, the great God of heaven, 252. By *officer*, the Devil, 253. By *prison*, hell, 253. By *paying the utmost farthing*, the guilty person's being dealt with according to the utmost rigour and extremity of justice, 253.

The text is parabolical, and includes both senses. For the better understanding which, a parable is explained to contain two parts. (1.) The material, literal part, contained in the bare words. (2.) The formal, spiritual part, or application of the parable; which is sometimes expressed, and sometimes understood, as in this place, 254.

The sense of the text is presented under three conclusions:



1. That the time of this life is the only time for a sinner to make his peace with God, 256.

2. That this consideration ought to be a prevailing, unanswerable argument to engage and quicken his repentance, 256.

3. That if a sinner lets this pass, he irrecoverably falls in to an estate of utter perdition, 256.

The second conclusion, the subject of this discourse, the truth whereof made appear three ways:

I. By comparing the shortness of life with the difficulty of this work of repentance, 256.

The difficulty of repentance appears,

1. Because a man is to clear himself of an injury done to an infinite, offended justice, to appease an infinite wrath, and an infinite, provoked majesty, 259.

2. Because a man is utterly unable of himself to give God any thing by way of just compensation or satisfaction, 261.

II. By comparing the uncertainty of life with the necessity of the work, 263.

III. By considering the sad and fatal doom that will in fallibly attend the neglect of it, 266.

The misery and terror of this doom consists in two things: 1. That it cannot be avoided, 267. 2. That it cannot be revoked, 268.

Application in urging over the same duty from another argument, namely, that so long as there is enjoyment of a temporal life, there may be just hope of an eternal. Therefore *kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the way*, 270.

SERMON XVI.

MATT. xxiii. 5.

But all their works they do for to be seen of men. P. 272.

This notable instance of religious ostentation in the pharisees leads to an inquiry, how far the love of glory is able to engage men in a virtuous and religious life, 272.

I. A love of glory is sufficient to produce all those virtuous actions that are visible in the lives of those that profess religion: because,

1. It has done so: this shewn from the examples of the noblest and most virtuous of the heathens, 273. from the abstinence of the ancient athletics, 274. from the character of the ancient pharisees, 275. and from that of many modern Christians, 276.

2. There is nothing visible in the very best actions, but what may proceed from the most depraved principles, if acted by prudence, caution, and design, 277.

II. The reasons, whence this affection comes to have such an influence upon our actions, are these:



1. Because glory is the proper pleasure of the mind; it being the complacency that a man finds within himself arising from his conceit of the opinion that another has of some excellency or perfection in him, 279.

2. Because it is founded in the innate desire of superiority and greatness that is in every man, 282.

3. Because a fair reputation opens a man's way to all the advantages of life: as in the times of the rebellion, when the face of a dissembled piety gave men great credit and authority with the generality, 284.

III. This principle is insufficient to engage mankind in virtuous actions, without the assistance of religion: two considerations premised, viz.

1. That virtue and a good life determines not in outward practices, but respects the most inward actions of the mind, 285.

2. That the principle of honour or glory governs a man's actions entirely by the judgment and opinion of the world concerning them, 287.

These considerations premised, the principle of honour appears to be utterly insufficient to engage and argue men into the practice of virtue in the following cases:

1. When, by ill customs and worse discourses, any vice, (as fornication, theft, self-murder, &c.) comes to have a reputation, or at least no disreputation, in the judgment of a nation; the shame God has annexed to sin being in a great measure taken from it by fashion, 288.

2. When a man can pursue his vice secretly and indiscernibly: as, first, when he entertains it in his thoughts, affections, and desires; secondly, when, though it passes from desire into practice, yet it is acted with such circumstances of external concealment, that it is out of the notice and arbitration of all observers, 291.

If then honour be the strongest motive nature has to enforce virtue by, and this is found insufficient for so great a purpose, it is in vain to attempt such a superstructure upon any weaker foundation, 294.

IV. Even those actions that a principle of honour does produce are of no value in the sight of God; and that upon the account of a double defect:

1. In respect of the cause, from which they flow; inasmuch as they proceed only upon the apprehension of a present interest, which when it ceases, the fountain of such actions is dried up, 295.

2. In respect of the end to which they are directed; which end is self, not the glory of God, 296.

In both these respects, the most sublime moral performances of the heathens were defective, and therefore have been always arraigned and condemned by Christian divinity, 297.

Two things inferred, by way of corollary and conclusion:



1. The worth and absolute necessity of religion in the world, even as to the advantage of civil society; and the mischievous tendency of atheistical principles, 297.

2. The inexcusableness of those persons who, professing religion, yet live below a principle inferior to religion, 298.

SERMON XVII.

2 COR. i. 24.

For by faith ye stand. P. 300.

Faith more usually discoursed of by divines than explained, 300. Three sorts of faith mentioned in scripture. 1. A faith of simple credence, or bare assent, 300. 2. A temporary faith, and a faith of conviction, 301. 3. A saving, effectual faith, (which here only is intended,) wrought in the soul by a sound and real work of conversion, 301. Two things considerable in the words. I. Something supposed, viz. that believers will be encountered and assaulted in their spiritual course, 302. In every spiritual combat are to be considered,

1. The persons engaged in it, 303. which are believers on the one side, and the Devil on the other.

2. The thing contended for by it, 304. This assault of the Devil intended to cast believers down from their purity and sanctity of life, 304. and from their interest in the divine favour, 305.

3. The means by which it is carried on, 307. The Devil's own immediate suggestions, 307. The Devil assaults a man, by the infidelity of his own heart, 308. by the alluring vanities of the world, 309. and by the help of man's own lusts and corruptions, 311.

II. Something expressed; viz. that it is faith alone that in such encounters does or can make believers victorious, 313. For making out which, is shewn,

1. How deplorably weak and insufficient man is, while considered in his natural estate, and void of the grace of faith, 313.

2. The advantages and helps faith gives believers for the conquest of their spiritual enemy, 315. It gives them a real union with Christ, 316. It engages the assistance of the Spirit on their behalf, 317. And lastly, gives them both a title to, and a power effectually to apply, God's promises through Christ, who is the rock of ages, the only sure station for poor sinners, and able to save, to the uttermost, all those that by faith rely upon him, 319.

SERMON XVIII.

PSALM cxlv. 9.

The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. P. 323.

Mercy, as it is ascribed to God, may be considered two ways, 323.

I. For the principle itself, 323.



II. For the effects and actions flowing from that principle, which, in the sense of the text, are such as are general and diffusive to all, 324.

The words are prosecuted by setting forth God's general mercy and goodness to the creature in a survey of the state and condition,

1. Of the inanimate part of the creation, 324.
2. Of plants and vegetables, 325.
3. Of the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air, 328.
4. Of man, 329.
5. Of angels: in respect of their nature, 331. of their place of habitation, and of their employment, 333.

A deduction from the precedent discourse, to settle in the mind right thoughts of God's natural goodness to men, 334. with arguments against the hard thoughts men usually have of God, drawn from two qualities that do always attend them, 336.

1. Their unreasonableness, 337.
2. Their danger, 339.

SERMON XIX.

JAMES i. 14.

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. P. 342.

The explication of these two terms being premised,

1. What the apostle means here by being tempted, 342.
2. What is intended by lust, 343.

The prosecution of the words lies in these particulars:

I. To shew the false causes upon which men are apt to charge their sins. And that,

1. The decree of God concerning things to come to pass is not a proper cause for any man to charge his sins upon, 344. Objection to this stated, and answered, 345.
2. The influences of the heavens and of the stars imprint nothing upon men that can impel or engage them to do evil, 347.
3. Neither can any man charge his sins upon the constitution and temper of his body, as the proper cause of them, 349.
4. No man can justly charge his sins upon the Devil, as the cause of them, 350.

Though these be not the proper causes of sin, they are observed to be very often great promoters of it, where they meet with a corrupt heart, 352.

II. To shew, that the proper cause of sin is the depraved will of man; which being supposed sufficiently clear from scripture, is farther evinced by arguments and reasons.

1. From the office of the will, 354.



2. From every man's experience of himself and his own actions, 354.
 3. From the same man's making a different choice of the same object at one time from what he does at another, 355.
 4. From this, that even the souls in hell continue to sin, 355.
- III. To shew the way by which a corrupt will, here expressed, is the cause of sin. And,
1. It draws a man aside from the ways of duty, 356.
 2. Entices him, by representing the pleasure of sin, stript of all the troubles and inconveniencies of sin, 357. and by representing that pleasure that is in sin greater than indeed it is, 359. But
- The exceeding vanity of every sinful pleasure is made to appear by considering,
1. The latitude or measure of its extent.
 2. The duration or continuance of it, 360.

SERMON XX.

ISAIAH xxvii. 11.

For it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour. P. 362.

The prophet, after eloquently describing a severe judgment to be inflicted on the Jews in the deplorable destruction of Jerusalem, 362. does in the next words assign a reason for it: *For it is a people of no understanding.* This ignorance is here explained to be not that of an empty understanding, but of a depraved heart and corrupt disposition, and therefore the highest aggravation, 363.

From the words of the text are deduced two observations;

- I. The relation of a Creator strongly engages God to put forth acts of love and favour towards his creature, 365. The strength of which obligation appears,
 1. Because it is natural, 366.
 2. Because God put it upon himself, 366.

There are three engaging things, implied in the creature's relation to God, that oblige him to manifest himself in a way of goodness to it:

1. The extract or original of the creature's being, which is from God himself, 366. which includes in it two other endearing considerations. (1.) It puts a likeness between God and the creature, 367. (2.) Whatsoever comes from God, by way of creation, is good, and so there naturally does result an act of love, 368.

2. The dependence of its being upon God, 368.
3. The end of the creature's being is God's glory, 370.

- II. How sin disengages, and takes off God from all those acts of favour that the relation of a Creator engaged him to, 371.



1. It turns that which, in itself, is an obligation of mercy, to be an aggravation of the offence, 371.

2. It takes away that similitude that is between God and the creature, which (as has been observed) was one cause of that love, 373.

3. It takes off the creature from his dependence upon God; that is, his moral dependence, which is a filial reliance and recumbency upon him, 375.

4. It renders the creature useless, as to the end for which it was designed, 376.

In an application of the foregoing, the first use is to obviate and take off that common argument, in the mouths of the ignorant, and in the hearts of the knowing, that God would never make them to destroy them; and therefore, since he has made them, they roundly conclude that he will not destroy them, 378.

Now the reasons upon which men found their objections may be these two:

1. A self-love, and a proneness to conceive some extraordinary perfection in themselves, which may compound for their misdemeanours, 380.

2. Their readiness to think that God is not so exceeding jealous of his honour, but he may easily put up the breach of it, without the ruin of his creature, 381.

These pleas and objections of men answered by considering and comparing the offence of a child against his natural parent, with that of a creature against his Creator, 383.

The second use is to inform us of the cursed, provoking nature of sin, 385. And,

The third use may shew us under what notion we are to make our addresses to God; not as a Creator, but a reconciled God, 386.

SERMON XXI.

MATT. xix. 22.

When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. P. 389.

After reflecting upon the command that gave occasion to this sorrow under these three degrees; 1. *Go sell that thou hast.* 2. *Give to the poor.* 3. *Come and follow me,* 390. and likewise stating and answering some abuses in the doctrine of the papists concerning this scripture, 391. the words of the text are observed to contain in them four things considerable:

1. The person making the address to Christ, who was one whose reason was enlightened to a solicitous consideration of his estate in another world, 393.

2. The thing sought for in this address, viz. eternal life, 393.

3. The condition upon which it was proposed, and upon which it was refused; namely, the sale and relinquishment of his temporal estate, 393.

4. His behaviour upon this refusal: *he departed sorrowful,* 393.

Which are all joined together in this one proposition, viz.



He that deliberately parts with Christ, though for the greatest and most suitable worldly enjoyment, if but his natural reason is awakened, does it with much secret sting and remorse, 393. In the prosecution of this is shewn,

I. Whence it is, that a man, acted by an enlightened reason, finds such reluctancy and regret upon his rejection of Christ: it may proceed from these causes:

1. From the nature of conscience, that is apt to recoil upon any error, either in our actions or in our choice, 394.

2. From the usual course of God's judicial proceeding in this matter, which is to clarify the eye of reason to a clearer sight of the beauties and excellencies of Christ, in the very moment and critical instant of his departure, 396.

3. Because there is that in Christ, and in the gospel, even as they stand in opposition to the best of such enjoyments, that answers the most natural and generous discourses of reason, 397. For proof hereof, two known principles of reason produced, into which the most severe commands of the gospel are resolved:

(1.) That the greatest calamity is to be endured, rather than the least sin to be committed, 397.

(2.) That a less good is to be forsaken for a greater, 400. To reduce this principle to the case in hand, two things are demonstrated. 1st, That the good promised by our Saviour to the young man was really greater than that which was to be forsook for it, 401. 2dly, That it was proposed as such with sufficient clearness of evidence, and upon sure, undeniable grounds, 403.

Here, to omit other arguments, the truth of the gospel seems chiefly to be proved upon these two grounds,

1. The exact fulfilling of prophecies in the person of Christ, 403.

2. His miraculous actions; the convincing strength of which is undeniable upon these two most confessed principles. (1.) That they did exceed any natural created power, and therefore were the immediate effects of a divine, 404. (2.) That God cannot attest, or by his power bear witness to a lie, 404.

II. The causes are shewn why, notwithstanding this regret, the soul is yet brought in the issue to reject Christ.

(1.) The perceptions of sense overbear the discourse of reason, 406.

(2.) The prevailing opposition of some corrupt affection, 408.

(3.) The force and tyranny of the custom of the world, 410.

Now the inferences and deductions from the words thus discussed are these:

1. We gather hence the great criterion and art of trying our sincerity, 412.

2. That misery which attends a final dereliction of Christ; whereby a man loses all his happiness. (1.) That which is eternal, 415. And, (2.) even that which is temporal also, 417. Now we may conclude, that unbelief is entertained upon very hard terms, when it not only



condemns a man to die, but also (as it were) feeds him with bread and water till his execution; and so leaves him wretched and destitute, even in that place where the wicked themselves have an inheritance, 418.

SERMON XXII.

I PETER ii. 23.

Who, being reviled, reviled not again. P. 419.

A Christian's duty is fully comprised in his active and his passive obedience, 419. Christ's example shews, that he was not only able to do, but also to suffer miracles: and all his actions are usually reduced to three sorts. 1. His miraculous, 420. 2. His mediatorial, 420. 3. His moral actions; which last he both did himself, and also commanded others to do: wherefore it is our positive duty to imitate this particular instance of Christ's patience, 421.

The words are discussed in three particulars.

I. In shewing what is implied in the extent of this duty of *not reviling again*. It implies two things:

1. A suppressing of our inward disgusts, 423.
2. A restraint of our outward expressions, 424.

A caution given for our regulation in this duty, that a due asperity of expression against the enemies of God, the king, and the public, is not the reviling in the text, the scene of which is properly private revenge, 425.

II. In shewing how the observation of this duty comes to be so exceeding difficult.

It is so, 1. From the peculiar, provoking quality of ill language, 428, 2. Because nature has deeply planted in every man a strange tenderness for his good name, which, in the rank of worldly enjoyments, the wisest of men has placed before life itself, 430.

III. In shewing by what means a man may work himself to such a composure and temper of spirit, to observe this excellent duty.

Nothing less than God's grace can subdue the heart to such a frame; but we may add our endeavours, by frequently and seriously reflecting, that to return railing for railing is utterly useless to all rational intents and purposes, 432. This is made appear inductively, by recounting the several ends and intents to which, with any colour of reason, it may be designed.

1. The first reason should be to remove the cause of the provocation received, 432. 2. May be by this means to confute the calumny, and to discredit the truth of it, 433. 3. To take a full and proper revenge of him that first reviled, 434. 4. To manifest a generous greatness of spirit, in shewing impatience of an affront, 436.

By severally unravelling of which is shewn, how unfit reviling again is to reach or effect any of them. And St. Paul writes, *If any one that is called a brother be an extortioner or a*



railer, not to keep company with such an one, no, not to eat; but especially at the Lord's table: and he that is thus excommunicated and excluded the company of the saints in this world, is not like to be thought fit for the society of angels in the next, 437.

SERMON XXIII.

PSALM xc. 11.

Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. P. 438.

This description of God's anger is supposed to come from Moses, who might well be sensible of its weight, 438.

Anger (and the like affections) cannot properly be said to be in the infinitely perfect God at all; but is only an extrinsical denomination of a work wrought without him, when he does something that bears a similitude to those effects that anger produces in men, 439.

The prosecution of the words is managed in four particulars.

I. Two preparatory observations are laid down concerning God's anger.

I. That every harsh and severe dispensation is not an effect of it, 440. 2. That there is a great difference between God's anger and his hatred, 442.

II. Those instances are shewn in which this unsupportable anger of God does exercise and exert itself.

1. It inflicts immediate blows and rebukes upon the conscience, 444.

2. It imbitters afflictions, 445.

3. It curses enjoyments, 447.

III. Those properties and qualifications are considered, which set forth and declare the extraordinary greatness of it.

1. It is fully commensurate to the very utmost of our fears, 449.

2. It not only equals, but infinitely transcends our fears, 451.

3. Though we may attempt it in our thoughts, yet we cannot bring it within the comprehension of our knowledge, 453.

4. The greatness of God's anger appears, by comparing it with that of men, 454.

IV. Some use and improvement made of the whole. As,

1. It may serve to discover to us the intolerable misery of such as labour under a lively sense of God's wrath for sin, 455.

2. It may discover to us the ineffable vastness of Christ's love to mankind in his sufferings for them, 456.

3. It speaks terror to such as can be quiet, and at peace within themselves, after the commission of great sins, 457.



4. All that has been said of God's anger is a warning against sin, that cursed thing which provokes it. Therefore men are advised to begin here, and not expect to extinguish the flame, till they withdraw the fuel. Let them but do this, and God will not fail to do the other, 459.

SERMON XXIV.

MATT. x. 28.

Fear not them which Mil the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell. P. 460.

Christ in this chapter is commissioning his twelve apostles for their evangelical expedition: from the fifth verse almost to the end of the chapter we have an explication of their commission. 1. In respect of the place where they were to administer it, 460. 2. In respect of the doctrine they were to preach, 460.

Christ's instructions are reducible to these two. (1.) A caution against the luxury of the world, 461. (2.) An encouragement against the cruelty of the world, 462.

And to make his admonitions more effectual, he descends to those particular things he knew they chiefly feared. 1. Bodily torments, 464. 2. Disgrace, 464. 3. Death, 465.

Which last he cautions them against for these three reasons. (1.) Because it is but the death of the body, 465. (2.) Because hell is more to be feared, 465. (3.) Because they live under the special care of God's overseeing Providence; and therefore cannot be taken away without his special permission, 465.

An objection concerning the fear of men stated, and answered, 465.

These things premised, the words of the text are pregnant with many great concerning truths. As,

1. That it is within the power of man to divest us of all our temporal enjoyments, 467.
2. That the soul of man is immortal, 467.
3. That God has an absolute and plenary power to destroy the whole man, 468.
4. That the thought of damnation ought to have greater weight to engage our fears, than the most exquisite miseries that the power or malice of man is able to inflict, 468. The prosecution of this lies in two things:

I. In shewing what is in these miseries which men are able to inflict, that may lessen our fears of them. Seven considerations ought to lessen our fears of those miseries.

(1.) That they are temporal, and concern only this life: as, 1. Loss of reputation. 2. Loss of an estate. Or, 3. Loss of life, which of itself is quickly past, 469-

(2.) They do not take away any thing from a man's proper perfections, 470.

(3.) They are all limited by God's overruling hand, 473.

(4.) The good that may be extracted out of such miseries as are inflicted by men, is often greater than the evil that is endured by them, 474.



(5.) The fear of these evils seldom prevents them before they come, and never lessens them when they are come, 475.

(6.) The all-knowing God, who knows the utmost of them better than men or angels, has pronounced them not to be feared, 476.

(7.) The greatest of these evils have been endured, and that without fear or astonishment, 478.

II. In shewing what is implied in the destruction of the body and soul in hell, which makes it so formidable, 480.

After running over several common considerations, this gives a sting to all the rest; that it is the utmost the al mighty God can do to a sinner, 482.

Some objections about total annihilation and diminution of being, here answered, 483.

Application in exhorting us, whenever we are discouraged from duty, or tempted to sin by man, on one side conscientiously to ponder man's inability, and on the other God's infinite power to destroy. The power of the latter consideration instanced in the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; of Joseph, and of the apostles perseverance in preaching; and the neglect of the former consideration in the case of Saul and Amalek; David's madness, and Peter's denial of Christ, 485.

2d Use. That it is not absurd to give cautions for the avoiding eternal death, even to those whose salvation is sure, and sealed up in the purpose of God, 489.

3d Use. This speaks reproof to that slavish sort of sinners who are men-pleasers. Flattery of men always carries with it a distrust or a neglect of God: it is ignoble as a man; and irreligious as a Christian, 490.



SERMON XXV.

HEBREWS ii. 16.

For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.
P. 492.

The dark and miserable ignorance considered, that had overspread almost all the world for four thousand years before the coming of Christ, who was born to be the great mediator and instructor of mankind; which he was to do by the strongest methods, and most miraculous condescensions to our likeness, 492.

A critical exposition of the words to vindicate the translation of the text, 494. which is prosecuted in two particulars.

I. In shewing what is naturally inferred from Christ's taking *on him the seed of Abraham*. Four things follow, and are inferred upon it.

1. The divine nature of Christ is unavoidably consequent from hence, 497.
2. The reality of Christ's human nature, 498.

3. The truth of his office, and the divinity of his mission is deducible from the same ground, 500.

4. Christ's voluntary choice and design, to assume a condition here upon earth low and contemptible, 501 .

II. In shewing why Christ took upon him the nature of man, and not of angels. The reasons whereof (besides that it was the divine will, which is a very sufficient one, 504.) may be these two:

1. The transcendent greatness and malignity of the sin of the angels above that of men; (1.) As being committed against much greater light, 505. (2.) As commenced upon a greater liberty of will and freedom of choice, 506.

2. Without such a Redeemer the whole race and species of mankind had perished, as being all involved in the sin of their representative; whereas though many of the angels sinned, yet as many, if not more, persisted in their innocence, 507.

We are exhorted to a return of gratitude, and to a remembrance that Christ made himself the *Son of man*, that, by the change of our nature, we might become *the sons of God*, 508.



SERMON I.

EPHESIANS iv. 10.

He that descended is the same also that ascended Jar above all heavens, that he might fill all things.

IF religion were not to bear only upon the unshakeable bottom of divine authority, but we might propose to ourselves in idea what could be fittest to answer and employ those faculties of man's mind that are capable of religious obligation, reason would contrive such a religion as should afford both sad and solemn objects to amuse and affect the pensive part of the soul, and also such glorious matter and bright representations as might feed its admiration, and entertain its more sprightly apprehensions: for the temper of all men in the world is either sad and composed, or joyful and serene; and even the same man will find that he is wholly acted, in the general tenor of his life, by the vicissitude and interchange of these dispositions.

Accordingly Christianity, in those great matters of fact upon which it is founded, happily complies with man's mind by this variety of its subject. For we have both the sorrows and the glories of Christianity, the depressions and the triumphs, the mournings and the hosannahs: we have the affecting sad nesses of Christ's fasting, his bloody agony, his crucifixion, and the bitter scene of his whole passion in its several parts and appendages: on the other side we gaze at his miracles, admire his transfiguration, joy at his supernatural resurrection, and (that which is the great complement and consummation of all) his glorious ascension.

The first sort of these naturally suit with the composed, fixed, and monastic disposition of some minds, averse from all complacency and freedom; the second invite the joys of serener minds, happier constitutions, and brisker meditations.

Nay, such a divine chequer-work shall we find in the whole contexture of the story of our religion, that we have the light still with the advantage of the shade, and things exhibited with the recommending vicinity of their contraries; so that it is observed, that in the whole narrative of our Saviour's life, no passage is related of him low or weak, but it is immediately seconded, and as it were corrected, by another high and miraculous.

No sooner was Christ humbled to a manger, but the contempt of the place was took off with the glory of the attendance, in the ministration of an gels. His submission to that mean and coarse ceremony of circumcision was ennobled with the public attestation of Simeon concerning him; his fasting and temptation attended with another service of angels; his baptism with a glorious recognition by a voice from heaven. When he seemed to show weakness in seeking fruit upon that fig-tree that had none, he manifested his power by cursing it to deadness with a word. When he seemed to be over powered at his attachments, he then exerted his mightiness, in causing his armed adversaries to fall backwards, and



healing Malchus's ear with a touch. When he underwent the lash and violent infamy of crucifixion and death, then did the universal frame of nature give testimony to his divinity; the temple rending, the sun darkening, and the earth quaking, the whole creation seemed to sympathize with his passion. And when afterwards he seemed to be in the very kingdom and dominions of death, by descending into the grave, he quickly confuted the dishonour of that, by an astonishing resurrection, and by an argument *ex abundantia*, proved the divinity of his person over and over, in an equally miraculous ascension.

Which great and crowning passage of all that went before it, however it is most true, and therefore most worthily to be assented to, yet still it affords scope for the nobler and higher actings of faith: for reason certainly would now very hardly be induced to believe that upon bare testimony and report, which even those who then saw it with their eyes, that is, with the greatest instruments of evidence, scarcely gave credit to.

For it is expressly remarked in [Matt. xxviii. 17](#), that of those who stood and beheld his ascension, though *some worshipped*, yet *others doubted*.

It seems things were not so clear as to answer all the objections of their eyes, or at least of their incredulity. But he ascended *in a cloud*, as it is said; there was some darkness, something of mists and obscurity that did attend him. Yet a lively potent faith will scatter all such clouds, dispel such mists, conquer this and much greater difficulties: which faith, since it must rest itself upon a divine word, such a word we have here; and that a full, a pregnant, and a satisfying word, which, from the pen of a person infallibly inspired, assures us, that *he who descended is the same also that ascended far above all heavens, that he might fill all things*.

In the words we have these four things considerable.

I. Christ's humiliation intimated and implied in those words; *he that descended*.

II. His glorious advancement and exaltation; *he ascended far above all heavens*.

III. The qualification and state of his person in reference to both these conditions; he was the same. *He that descended is the same also that ascended*.

IV. The end of his exaltation and ascension; *that he might fill all things*.

Of all which in their order. And when I shall have traversed each of these distinctly, I hope I shall have reached both the full sense of the text and the business of the day.

I. And first of all for Christ's humiliation and descension. As every motion is bounded with two periods and terms, the one relinquished, the other to be acquired by it; so in Christ's descension we are to consider both the place from which it did commence, and the place to which it did proceed. The place from whence, we are told, was heaven.

But the difficulty is, how Christ could descend from thence: according to his divine nature he could not; for, as God, he filled the universe; and all motion supposes the mover to be sometimes out of the place to which he moves, and successively to acquire a presence to it; so that nothing that adequately fills a place, can move in that place, unless it moves



circularly; but progressively, or in a direct line, it is impossible. Whither then should the divine nature move where it is not prevented by its own ubiquity? whither should it go where it is not already? And as for Christ's human nature, that could not descend from heaven, forasmuch as it was not first in heaven, but received its first being and existence here upon earth.

This argumentation, we see, is clear and undeniable; how then shall we make out Christ's descension?

The Socinians, who allow Christ nothing but an human nature, affirm, that he is said to *descend from heaven* only in respect of the divinity of his original and production; as it is elsewhere said, that *every good and perfect gift descends from above*, namely, because it is derived from a divine principle. But his *descending* being here in the text opposed to his *ascending*, clearly shews, that there is a further and more literal meaning imported in the word.

I answer therefore, that Christ descended according to his divine nature, not indeed by a proper and local motion, as the former arguments sufficiently demonstrate, but because it united itself to a nature here below; in respect of which union to an earthly nature, it might metaphorically be said to descend to the place where that nature did reside: and thus much for the way and manner how Christ did descend.

We are now to direct our next inquiry to the place whither he descended; and for this we are to reflect an eye upon the former verse of this chapter, which tells us, that it was into the *lower parts of the earth*; but what those *lower parts of the earth* are, here lies the doubt, and here must be the explication.

There are several opinions to be passed through before we can come to the truth. I shall propose them all, that every one may be his own judge which of them carries in it the greatest probability.

1. Some understand it simply of the earth, as being the lowermost part of the world. But why then could not the apostle have said, that Christ descended εἰς τὰ κατώτερα τοῦ κόσμου, and not τῆς γῆς, to the lower parts of the *world*, not of the *earth*? but to call the earth the *lower part* of itself is an apparent violence to the naturalness of the expression, and indeed not more forced than ridiculous.

2. Some understand it of the grave, which is called the heart of the earth in [Matt. xii. 40](#). *The Son of men shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*. Now the heart or middle of the earth is the lowest part of it, forasmuch as every progression beyond that is an access nearer to heaven, which encloses and surrounds the whole earth, and the nearer we come to heaven, the higher we are said to go: but this exposition is more artificial than natural, more ingenious than solid, and only to be valued as we do those things that are far fetched.



3. Some understand it of hell itself, the place of the damned; and our creed tells us, that Christ descended into hell: but to this I answer, that it relates not at all to our present purpose, whether Christ descended into hell or no; but the thing to be proved is, that hell, or the place of the damned, is the lower parts of the earth; which we deny, as being contrary both to the judgment of the church and of reason; it being hard to conceive what capacity there can be within the earth for the reception, not only of the souls, but of the bodies of all the persons that for six thousand years shall have peopled the world, the number only of those who shall be saved (which we are told are very few) being excepted.

4. But 4thly, the quicksighted Romanists, (forsooth,) who can see further into the earth than other men, have by the help of this text spied in it a place called purgatory, or rather the pope's kitchen, for certain it is that nothing so much feeds his table. Now here, they say, are those *lower parts of the earth*, whither Christ descended: but before they prove that Christ came down hither, I would have them prove that there is such a place.

They say they prove it from [1 Pet. iii. 19](#), where it is said, that Christ by his spirit went and preached to the spirits in prison; the words in the Greek are, ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασι πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν. But do these words imply that those spirits were in prison at that time that he preached to them? Not at all; but the entire sense of them is this: *He preached to the spirits in prison*; that is, Christ in the days of Noah, by his spirit, preached to and strove with those disobedient spirits, which spirits are now in prison, or in hold, for so ἐν φυλακῇ signifies; that is, they are *held in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day*: as, suppose I should say, that Christ preached to many hundred souls in hell, does it follow hence, that they were in hell while he preached to them? No, but it must be took in a divided sense, that many hundreds, who are now in hell, were once preached to by Christ.

And thus having shewn the nullity of this argument, I think it is clear that Christ descended not into purgatory, for that which is not cannot be descended into. But I wonder why men should be so solicitous in finding out a purgatory; for if they go not to heaven, they need not doubt but that there is room enough in hell, without providing themselves of a third place.

5. In the fifth and last place therefore, I conceive these words in the text to bear the same sense with, and perhaps to have reference to, those in [Psalm cxxxix. 15](#), where David, speaking of his conception in his mother's womb, says, that he *was framed and fashioned in the lowest parts of the earth*. In like manner, Christ's descending into the lowest parts of the earth may very properly be taken for his incarnation and conception in the womb of the blessed virgin.

That this is so, yet with submission to better judgments, I judge upon these grounds.

1. Because the former expositions have been clearly shewn to be, some of them, unnatural and forced, and others impertinent: but those four being removed, there is no other besides this assignable.

2. It is usual for the apostles to transcribe and use the Hebrew phrases of the Old Testament: and since Paul here uses David's very words, it is most probable that he used them in David's sense.

3. I add, that these words of Christ's *descending* and ascending are so put together in the text, that they seem to intend us a summary account of Christ's whole transaction of that great work of man's redemption from first to last; which being begun in his conception, and consummate in his ascension, by what better can his descending be explained, than by his conception, the first part and instance of this great work, as his ascension was the last? So that by this explication the apostle's words are cast into this easy and proper sense, that the same Christ, and eternal Son of God, who first condescended and debased himself so far as to be incarnate and conceived in the flesh, was he who afterwards ascended into heaven, and was advanced to that pitch of sublime honour and dignity, far above the principalities and powers of men and angels.

And thus much for the first thing, Christ's humiliation and descension, both as to the manner how, and the place whither he did descend.

II. I come now in the next place to consider his exaltation and ascension. For shall he so leave his glory, as never to re-assume it? Shall such a sun beam strike the earth, and not rebound?

As for the way and manner how he ascended, I affirm, that it was according to his human nature, properly and by local motion; but according to his divine, only by communication of properties, the action of one nature being ascribed to both, by virtue of their union in the same person.

As for the place to which he advanced, it is, says the apostle, *far above all heavens*. In the exposition of which words it is strange to consider the puerile fondness of some expositors, who will needs have the sense of them to be, that Christ ascended above the empyrean heaven, the highest of all the rest, and there sits enthroned in the convexity and outside of it, like a man sitting upon a globe: for, say they, otherwise how could Christ be said to have ascended *above the heavens*? But if they will stick to this term *above*, let them also stick to the other, *far above*, and then they must not place him just upon the empyrean heaven, but imagine him strangely pendulous in those spatia extramundana, those empty spaces that are supposed to be beyond the world. How improper, and indeed romantic, these conceits are, you easily discern.

But the words of the text have something of figure, of hyperbole, and latitude in them; and signify not, according to their literal niceness, a going *above the heavens* by a local superiority, but an advance to the most eminent place of dignity and glory in the highest heaven.

Besides, the very common use of the word does not of necessity enforce the former interpretation; for we think we say properly enough, that a man is upon the top of an house



or tower, if he be but in one of the uppermost parts of it, without his standing upon the weather-cock: but it is the usual fate of such over-scrupulous adherers to words and letters, to be narrow men and bad interpreters.

I have nothing else to add for explication of Christ's ascension, but only to observe and adore God's great and wise methods of exalting, exemplified to us by an instance in his dearest Son. He, we see, is depressed before advanced, crucified before enthroned, and led through the vale of tears to the region of eucharist and hallelujahs. He was punished with one crown before he was rewarded with an other, and disciplined by the hardships of shame and servitude to the glories of a kingdom.

And do we now think to have our whole course spun in one even thread? to live deliciously in one world, as well as gloriously in another? to tread softly, and to walk upon paths of roses to the mansions of eternal felicities?

No, it is the measure of our happiness, and ought to be so of our wish too, to be but like Christ. The preferments of heaven will be sure to meet us only in the state of an afflicted abject humility. Christ preached upon the mountain, but he lived and acted his sermons in the valley.

The way of salvation must needs be opposite to that of damnation. We must (as I may so speak) descend to heaven; for it was Adam's aspiring that brought him down, and Lucifer's fall was but the consequent of his ascension.

III. I come now to the third thing, which is the qualification and state of Christ's person, in reference to both these conditions: he was the same; *He that descended is the same also that ascended*. Which to me seems a full argument to evince the unity of the two natures in the same person; since two several actions are ascribed to the same person, both of which, it is evident, could not be performed by the same nature.

As for Christ's descending, I shew that it could not be by his human nature, for that received its first existence on earth, and therefore could not come down from heaven; but it was to be understood of his divine nature, though improperly, and only so, as it became united to a nature here below: but as for his ascending, it is clear that Christ did this by his human nature, and that properly and literally; and yet it is here affirmed, *that it was the same Christ who both ascended and descended*; a great proof of that mysterious economy of two natures in one hypostasis.

The school of Socinus, we have heard, affirms Christ to have descended from heaven, only in respect of his divine and heavenly origination: but how, according to their opinion, can they make it out that it was the same Christ who ascended? for they affirm concerning the body which lie had before his death, and after his resurrection here upon earth, that he did not carry that with him into heaven, but that was left here behind, whether by annihilation, or some secret conveyance of it into the earth by the power of God, they tell us not, nor indeed know themselves; but in the room of it, they say, he had a spiritual, ethereal



body, with which he ascended into heaven; a body without flesh and bones, a refined, sublimated, angelical body; which are words enough, I confess, but where the sense is, we may go seek. I wonder they do not further explain their subtle notion, and say, that it is a certain body with out corporeity.

But though they will not allow the union of two complete natures in the same person, yet they and all the world must grant, that two distinct substances, the soul and the body, go to compound and integrate the man: and I know, according to their usual appellation of him, they will allow him to be *the man Christ Jesus*.

Now I demand of them upon what principles of reason or philosophy they will prove that to be the same compound, when one entire half, that goes to the making of it, is wholly another thing. When we take white, and mingling it with red, make a third distinct colour; if we could now separate that white from the red, and join it to a blue, do we think that this conjunction would make the same kind of colour that the former mixture did? In like manner can I affirm, that the same soul, successively united to two several bodies of a kind wholly diverse, if not opposite, makes the very same compound? If the whole be nothing else but its parts united, essential parts totally changed, I am sure, cannot be the same whole.

Neither let them reply, that this argument savours too much of philosophy; for by saying so, they say only that it savours too much of reason.

I confess there are some passages that fell out after Christ's resurrection, that seem to persuade us that the body he then appeared in was not of the same nature with our bodies nowadays, nor with that which he himself had before his death; for we read, that *he vanished out of some of the disciples' sight, and that he came into them, the doors being shut*.

Which considerations, I suppose, drove Origen to assert, that Christ's soul had such a command over his body, and his body such a ductility to comply with those commands, that the soul could contract or expand it into what compass, or transfigure it into what shape it pleased; so as to command it through a chink, or crevice, or represent it sometimes under one form, sometimes under another.

But to this I answer, that however Christ's body, as every body else, is capable of continuing the same, notwithstanding the alteration of its qualities and outward form; yet, that a body of such a dimension should be contracted to such a thinness, as to pass through a chink or crevice, cannot be effected without a penetration of the parts, and a mutual sinking into one another: which those who understand the nature of body know to be a contradiction, and consequently impossible.

As for those scriptures which seem to give colour to the opinion that Christ, after his resurrection, had such an aerial fantastic body, before I answer them, I shall premise that great instance and affirmation that Christ gave of the reality of his body, to his disciples, being frightened at his presence, and supposing they had seen a spirit or apparition, [Luke xxiv. 38, 39](#). *Why, says he, do such thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet,*

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that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. What could be more plain and positive for the clearing of this particular? Certain it is, therefore, that he had the very same body, be the explication of other places that seem to imply the contrary never so difficult.

The first is in [Luke xxiv. 31](#). *He vanished out of their sight.* To which I answer, that it is not at all absurd, to affirm, that Christ, by his divine power, might cast a mist before their eyes; or suspend the actings of their visive faculty in reference to himself, while he conveyed himself in the mean time away; or possibly he might depart with so quick a motion, that it was almost instantaneous, and so in discernible: for either the exceeding quickness or slowness of motion makes the successive progress of it not observable to the eye, as is manifest from an hundred daily experiments.

For the second place in [John xx. 19](#), where it is said, that *he came amongst his disciples, the doors being shut*: this is capable of an explication that is obvious, and removes all difficulty. For it is not to be understood of the doors being shut in the very act of his entrance, but just antecedently to it; that is, Christ coming to the place found the doors shut; yet notwithstanding, by his immediate power, he caused them to fly open, as the angel did the prison doors at the release of Peter, [Acts xii.](#) and then he entered. Thus we read, that the *lame walk, the blind see*; not indeed while they continued lame and blind, but the lame and blind were first cured of those infirmities, and so made to walk and see.

So Christ did not enter, the doors continuing shut, but the doors that he found fast shut, he by a strange power opened, and so came amongst his disciples, which was enough to affright and amaze them.

But to reduce this to a familiar instance: Sup pose a stranger or suspicious person should come into an house, and the master of the house should ask his servant, whether the doors were shut or open when he came in? Surely his meaning is not, did he pass *through* the door while it was shut? But his sense is, did he find the door shut, and so broke it open, or did he find the door standing open, and so entered? This exposition is natural, and so clears the doubt, that the difficulty itself vanishes, and is but an apparition: and so much for the third thing.

IV. I proceed now to the fourth and last thing; which is, the end of Christ's ascension, *that he might fill all things.*

This also is capable of various interpretation, for this term, *all things*, may refer,

1. Either to the scripture, that he might fill, or rather fulfil, (for the Greek πληρώ signifies both,) all those prophecies and predictions recorded of him in the books of the prophets.

2. Or secondly, it may refer to the church, that he might fill all things belonging to that with his gifts and graces; for it is subjoined, that *he gave some, apostles; some, prophets; some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, and for the edifying of the body of Christ.* Both these expositions, I confess, are probable. But,



3. In the third place, it may relate to *all things* in the world, within the whole compass of heaven and earth; and since the words so taken afford us an eminent proof, both of Christ's essential deity, as also of the power with which he was endued as mediator; we shall not let so great a prize slip out of our hands, but prefer and follow this as the most genuine interpretation.

Now Christ may be said thus to *fill all things* in a double respect.

1. In respect of the omnipresence of his nature and universal diffusion of his godhead. The schools, in stating the manner how one thing is in another, whereas they make bodies present by circumscription, finite spirits definitive, that is, by being so here, as at the same time not to be there; not improperly, I think, make God to be in all things by repletion; that is, he is so in them, that they are rather in him; spreading such an immense fulness over all things, as in a manner swallows and folds them up within himself.

Such a fulness has Christ as God, by which he fills, or rather overflows the universe, *et ad omnia praesentialiter se habet.* Could there be a more full and apposite proof of this than that place, [John iii. 13.](#) *No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven.* He came down from heaven, and at that time was talking with Nicodemus upon earth; and yet even then he was still in heaven. How, but by the omnipresence of his divine nature, that scorned the poor limitations of place, diffused an immense presence every where, and could be in heaven without ascending thither?



But what I say of Christ, as to his divine nature, should I assert the same of his human, it would be both an error in divinity, and a prodigious paradox in philosophy.

Yet the Romanist will have Christ's whole body to be in ten thousand places together, and at once; namely, wheresoever their host is celebrated, and in every particle of that host; which certainly is the greatest absurdity and most portentous piece of non sense that ever was owned in the face of the rational world.

And the Lutherans, who, by a dough-baked reformation, striking off from the Romish errors, have rather changed than corrected this grand absurdity, they assert a consubstantiation, and the consequent of it, the ubiquity of Christ's human nature.

But certainly they have some unanswerable arguments that force their assent to such uncouth propositions. What they are, we shall hear. They argue thus:

Christ, in respect of his human nature, sits at God's right hand; but God's right hand is every where, and consequently Christ's human nature must be so too.

If I might answer a foolish argument according to its folly, I might demand of them, if God's right hand be every where, where then will they place his left? But do not they know that Christ's sitting at God's right hand is not taken in a metaphysical sense, for his coexistence with it; but is only a phrase, importing God's advancing him to high dignity and honour, as princes use to place their favourites at their right hand?

But they proceed. If Christ's human nature be united to the whole divine nature, then, wheresoever his divine nature is present, there must be also his human. But supposing that his human nature is not every where, and that his divine is, then in those places where the human nature is not, the divine is there without it; and so consequently in those places it is not united to it: for things intimately united must be present together in the same places.

But what pitiful, thin sophistry is this! whatever at the first sight it may appear: for they distinguish not a spiritual union from that which is corporeal, and between things having quantity. If indeed Christ's human nature were united to his divine by way of adequate commensuration one to the other, it would then follow, that if one was where the other is not, the union so far would cease; but the union between these two natures is only by intimate, indissoluble relation one to the other; so that wheresoever the divine nature of Christ is present, though his human is not there present too, yet it still holds the same relation to it, as to a thing joined with it in one and the same subsistence. And so much in answer to a sophistical argument brought to defend a misshapen, monstrous assertion.

We see here the first way how Christ fills all things in the world; namely, by the essential omnipresence of his divine nature. But yet this is not the *filling all things* directly intended in the text; for that was to be consequent to his ascension; *he ascended that he might fill all things*; it accrued to him upon and after his ascension, not before; but his omnipresential filling all things being an inseparable property of his divine nature, always agreed to him, and was not then at length to be conferred on him.

2. In the second place therefore, Christ may be said to *fill all things*, in respect of the universal rule and government of all things in heaven and earth committed to him as mediator upon his ascension. This is the only *filling all things* that the school of Socinus will allow him; forasmuch as they make him to be God only by office, not by nature; and that his full deity bears date from his ascension; at which time he took possession of the government of the world.

But in this, I must confess, they are so much the less injurious to Christ, since they allow the Father himself to fill all things no otherwise: they acknowledge him indeed to have such an extent of power as to reach all places, persons, and things; but his omnipresence they deny, and confine his being to a circumscribed residence within the highest heaven; as we may see in Crellius's book *de Attributis Dei*, chap. 1. So little ought we to wonder at their denying the deity of the Son, when they have even torn the fairest perfections out of the godhead of the Father.



But to look back upon Christ, now enjoying the end of his ascension, even the sovereignty of all things. This is he, that is now King of kings, and Lord of lords; who wields the sceptre of heaven and earth, and wears the imperial crown of the universe. Heaven is his throne, and the thrones of kings his footstool.

He now shines in the head of that glorious army of martyrs, and, wearing the trophies of conquered sin and death, possesses the kingdom of the world by the two unquestionable titles of conquest and inheritance. The angels, those immediate retainers to the Almighty, and ministers of Providence, are his attendants; they hear his will, and execute his commands with a quick and a winged alacrity.

All the elements, the whole train and retinue of nature, are subservient to his pleasure, and instruments of his purposes. The stars fight in their courses under his banner, and subordinate their powers to the dictates of his will. The heavens rule all below them by their influences, but themselves are governed by his. He can command nature out of its course, and reverse the great ordinances of the creation.

The government, the stress and burden of all things, lies upon his hands. The blind heathen have been told of an Atlas that shoulders up the heavens; but we know that he who supports the heavens is not under them, but above them.

And to give you yet a greater instance of his sovereignty, he extends his dominion even to man's will, that great seat of freedom, that, with a kind of autocracy and supremacy within itself, commands its own actions, laughs at all compulsion, scorns restraint, and defies the bondage of human laws or external obligations.

Yet this, even this absolute principle, bends to the overpowering insinuations of Christ's spirit; nay, with a certain event, and yet with a reserve to its own inviolate liberty, when he calls, it cannot but be willing. My earthly prince may command my estate, my body, and the services of my hand, but it is Christ only that can command my will: this is his peculiar and prerogative.

It remains now that we transcribe this article of our creed into our lives, express his sovereignty in our subjection, and, by being the most obedient of servants, declare him to be the greatest of masters: even *the blessed and only Potentate, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto.*

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON II

EPHESIANS iv. 10.

—*that he might fill all things.*

THESE words exhibit to us the great end and design of Christ's ascension, and, without any strain or force laid upon them, are capable of a threefold interpretation; a distinct survey of each of which shall be the business of the present exercise.

1. In the first place then, this term *all things* may refer to the whole series of prophecies and predictions recorded of Christ in the scriptures; which he might be said to fill, or rather to fulfil by his ascension; which signification, as it is most proper to the force of the Greek word, (forasmuch as all other places which we translate *fulfil*,) are expressed by this word πληρώω, so it is most agreeable to the method of the scriptures, speaking of Christ; of whom we never find any great action recorded, which was before pointed at by some prophecy, but it is immediately added, that it was done ἵνα πληρώσῃ, *that such or such a scripture might be fulfilled.* And for Christ's ascension, and the consequent of it, his diffusion of the gifts of the Spirit, we have an eminent prediction of that in [Psalm lxxviii. 18](#), here referred to by the apostle; *He ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.*

Concerning which place it must be confessed, that both the Hebrew and the Septuagint from the Hebrew render it, not, *he gave gifts unto men*, but *he received gifts amongst men*, ἀνέβη εἰς ὕψος, καὶ ἔλαβεν δόματα ἐν ἀνθρώποις: and for this the Jews, who at all hands lie upon the catch, charge Paul as a perverter of the prophet's meaning, in a false rendition of the sense of the place.

But to repel their calumny, and to salve the credit of our apostle, there may be a double answer applied to this.

1. That the apostle did not precisely tie himself to the very words, but followed only the design and sense of the text: and this was the same in both those different words, ἔλαβε καὶ ἔδωκε, *he received* and *he gave*. For the prophet, speaking of it as of a thing at that time future, says, that Christ *received gifts*, namely, from his Father: which gifts he was afterwards, in the fulness of time, to pour forth upon men. But the apostle, speaking of it as of a thing in his time past and fulfilled, mentions only his giving and actual bestowing those gifts, which in deed was the end for which he first received them of his Father.

2. But, secondly, if the Hebrew be rendered, not he received gifts *for men*, but *from or amongst* them, as the Jews contend that it ought; forasmuch as the prophet, in that psalm, relates the conquest God gave his people over their enemies; where upon he is said to have received gifts from them; as it is the custom for conquerors to set apart and consecrate some of their spoils to their god: I say, if this be admitted, as the plea is very plausible, we affirm then, that it was not Paul's design to use these words, *he gave gifts unto men*, by way of

citation out of David; but having by a kind of transumption and accommodation borrowed those former words of his, *he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive*, to shew how great a triumph God made over those greater enemies, sin and death, in the ascension of Christ, that he might now also express how much this spiritual triumph did exceed those temporal ones that God wrought for his people over their temporal enemies; whereas the psalmist says, that upon those triumphs he *received gifts from men*. Paul here adds these words of his own, that upon this greater triumph in the ascension of Christ, *he gave gifts unto men*; according to which sense the words carry in them an elegant antithesis, designed to set forth the excellency of one above the other, by how much it is more excellent to give than to receive. And thus we have a full vindication of the apostle.



But here, for the further illustration of Christ's *filling all things* in this sense, I cannot pass over that useful observation of Grotius about the word πληρώω, that it does not signify only a bare giving an event to a prophecy, many of which, though applied to Christ by the apostles, yet indeed were fulfilled before him; as particularly that place in Matt. ii, *I have called my son out of Egypt*, was fulfilled in the children of Israel, of whom it was first spoke. But because those prophecies had not only a literal and historical, but also a further and a mystical intention, therefore this word πληρώω signifies a completion even to a redundancy, a fulfilling them over and above; namely, such a one, as not only reaches their first and historical event, but also verifies their mystical and more remote sense.

And such a filling or fulfilling of the old prophecies and predictions was proper and peculiar to Christ, to whom they all pointed, and in whom they all ended, as in their utmost period, their only centre, their great and last design. And thus much for the first interpretation.



2. But 2dly, the term *all things* may refer to the church; which sense I shall most insist upon, as carrying in it the subject-matter of this day's commemoration.

Now Christ, it seems, would not have the fabric of his church inferior to that of the universe: it being itself indeed a lesser world picked or rather sifted out of the greater, where mankind is brought into a narrower compass, but refined to a greater perfection. And as in the constitution of the world, the old philosophy strongly asserts that nature has with much care filled every little space and corner of it with body, there being nothing that it so much abhors as a vacuity: so Christ, as it were, following the methods of nature in the works of grace, has so advantageously framed the whole system of the church; first, by an infinite power making in it capacities, and then by an equal goodness filling them.

Chasms and emptinesses are the infelicities of the work, but the disgrace of the workman. Capacity unfilled is the opportunity of misery, the very nature and definition of want. Every vacuity is, as it were, the hunger of the creation, both an undecency and a torment.

Christ therefore would have his body the church not meager and contemptible, but replenished and borne up with sufficiency, displayed to the world with the beauties of fulness and the most ennobling perfections.

Now the church being a society of men combined together in the profession of Christian religion, it has unavoidably a double need or necessity emergent from its very nature and constitution. That is, one of government, the other of instruction; the first agreeing to it simply as a society, the second as it is such a society. And it is Christ's great prerogative to fill it in both these respects.

1. And first in respect of its government, of which excellent and divine thing in general we may say this, that, as at first it could be nothing else but the invention of the infinite, eternal mind; so now it is the vital support, and very sinew that holds together all the parts of society. And being of such universal necessity, there must be a policy in church as well as state. The church indeed is a spiritual body, but government is the very spirit of that.

Hereupon it follows in the next verse, that *Christ gave some, apostles; some, evangelists; some, prophets; some, pastors and teachers;* part of which are names importing rule and jurisdiction.

But yet in all this catalogue of ecclesiastical officers we find no lay-elders, no church-aldermen, no spiritual furs; nor yet in the whole current of antiquity, till they dropped from the invention of a late impostor, who, being first expelled by the popular rout, became afterwards obnoxious to it, and so had no way to make himself chief in the government, but by allowing them a share.

But Geneva certainly is not the mother-church of the world, nor are Mr. Calvin and Mr. Beza fit correctors of antiquity or prescribers to posterity; nor ought this new fashion in church-government to be therefore authentic, because derived to us from France.

2dly. The church being thus framed into the economy of a governed body, stands equally in need of instruction. For inasmuch as the doctrine it professes grows not upon the stock of natural principles, so as to be deducible from thence by the strength of reason and discourse, but comes derived from immediate and divine revelation; it requires the helps and assistances of frequent inculcation, to water and keep it alive upon the understanding and the will, where nature gives it no footing from any notions within, but what it receives from the force and arts of external impression.

Now for this also, Christ made a full and glorious provision by that miraculous diffusion of the Holy Ghost, after his ascension, upon those great pastors and representatives of his church, the apostles.

In which notable passage of his conferring the Holy Ghost, we have these two things observable.

- I. The time when.
- II. The manner how it was given.

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As for the time in which it was conferred, this is remarkable in a double respect.

1. In respect of Christian religion itself, it being about its first solemn promulgation; which though it was a doctrine most true and excellent, yet certainly it was also very strange and unusual. And this we may observe, that there is no strange institution that can ever be of long continuance in the world, but that which first enters and ingratiates itself by something signal and prodigious.

The beginning of every thing has a strange and potent influence upon its duration: and the first appearances usually determine men either in their acceptance or dislike. Nothing stamps itself so deep in the memory as that which is fresh and new, and not made contemptible by a former acquaintance; and the freshness of every thing is its beginning.

Had not Christ therefore ushered in his religion by miracle and wonder, and arrested men's first apprehensions of it by something grand and super natural, he had hindered its progress by a disadvantageous setting forth, exposed it naked to infidelity, and so rendered it first disputable, and then despised. It had been like the betraying a sublime and noble composition by a low and creeping prologue, which blasts the reputation of the ensuing discourse, and shuts up the auditors approbation with prejudice and contempt.

Moses therefore, by the appointment of God, bringing in a new religion, did it with signs and wonders, the mountain burning, and the trumpet sounding; so that it was not so much the divine matter of the law, as the strange manner of its delivery, that took such hold of the obstinate Jews; and possibly Moses should never have convinced, had he not first frightened their belief.

And this is so necessary upon the very principles of nature, that even those impostors who have introduced false religions into the world, have yet endeavoured to do it by the same methods by which the true was established. Thus Numa Pompilius settled a religion amongst the old Romans, by feigning strange and supernatural converse with their supposed goddess Egeria. Apollonius Tyanaeus, who endeavoured to retrieve gentilism in opposition to Christianity, attempted it by such strange and seemingly miraculous actions. And Mahomet is reported to have planted his impostures by the same way of recommendation. Though in all these, the sober and judicious observer will easily perceive that their miracles were as false as their religions.

But however, this shews how the mind of man is naturally to be prevailed upon; and that in the proposal of so great a thing to it as a new religion, the natural openness and meeting fervours of men's first acceptance are by all means to be secured and possessed; which is more successfully done by a sudden breaking in upon their faculties, with amazement and wonder, than by courting their reason with argument and persuasion.

2. But secondly, the time of Christ's sending the Spirit is very remarkable in respect of the apostles themselves. It was when they entered upon the full execution of their apostolic office, and from followers of Christ became the great leaders of the world.



During the time of their discipleship, and Christ's converse with them upon earth, we read of no such wonderful endowments, such variety of tongues, such profound penetration into the mysteries of the gospel. But, on the contrary, with many instances of very thick ignorance, childishness of speech, and stupidity of conception, as appears from their many weak and insignificant questions proposed to Christ; their gross dulness to apprehend many of his speeches, in themselves very plain and intelligible: so that Christ is almost perpetually upbraiding them upon this account, as in [Luke ix. 41](#), *How long shall I be with you, and suffer you?* and [Matt. xv. 16](#), *Are ye also yet without understanding?* and [Luke xxiv. 25](#), *O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have said;* with many other such increpations; which shews, that while they were yet under Christ's wing, and, as it were, in the nonage and minority of their apostleship, they were not the most seraphic doctors in the world.



But when Christ brings them forth upon the stage of a public office, to act as his commissioners and ambassadors, to gather and to govern a church in his name; immediately, like Saul upon his being anointed king, they step forth men of another spirit, great linguists, powerful disputants, able to cope with the Jewish sanhedrim, to baffle their profoundest rabbies, and to out-reason the very Athenians. With their faculties strangely enlarged, their apprehensions heightened, and their whole mind furnished with that stock of endowments and rare abilities, that in others are the late and dear-bought acquisitions of large parts, long time, and severe study.

I confess there is something in office and authority that of itself raises a man's abilities; and the very air and genius of government does, as it were, inspire him with that largeness and reach of mind, that never appeared in the same person yet in the state of privacy and subjection: so that government oftentimes does not only *indicare virum*, but *facere*; insensibly mould and frame the man that has it, to a fitness for it; and at length equals him to his employment; raising him above all the personal defects and little nesses of his former condition; sublimating his parts, changing his thoughts, and widening his designs. The reason and philosophy of which I shall not inquire into, the thing itself being clear from experience.

Now that the apostles felt these natural influences from their apostolic employment, we have no reason to deny. Yet certainly these could not work in them such a stupendous change. This could be ascribed to nothing, but to those omnipotent assistances of the Spirit descending upon them from heaven, and investing them in their office by so magnificent and miraculous an installation.



And here I cannot but reflect upon the brutish folly and absurd impudence of the late fanatic decriers of the necessity of human learning, in order to the ministerial function, drawing an argument from this, that the first and greatest ministers of the church were persons illiterate, and not acquainted with the academy, but utterly ignorant of the arts and

sciences, the study of which takes up so much of our time, and draws after it so much of our estimation.

Which argument though they vaunt in as their greatest and most plausible, yet there is none that so directly strikes at the very throat of their cause. For whereas God found the apostles upon their first access to the ministry thus naked of those endowments, he by a miracle supplies what their opportunities permitted them not to learn, and by immediate power creates in them those abilities which others by their industry acquire.

Had not the knowledge of tongues and the force of disputation been necessary to a divine, would God have put himself to a miracle to furnish the apostles with such endowments, in themselves so useless, and in these men's judgment also pernicious? But such persons are below a confutation, and made only to credit what they disapprove.

Now concerning the time of the effusion of the Holy Ghost, upon comparing one scripture with an other, there seems to me a very considerable doubt, very near a contradiction, and therefore worthily deserving our explication.

The giving of the Holy Ghost is, by many clear scriptures, affirmed to be after Christ's ascension: nay, his ascension is made not only antecedent, but also causal to it, [John vii. 39](#), *The Holy Ghost was not yet given., because that Jesus was not yet glorified.* And yet in [John xx.](#) it is said, that Christ, a little before his ascension, conferred the Holy Ghost upon his disciples, [ver. 22](#), *And he breathed upon them, and said., Receive ye the Holy Ghost.* Now these places seem directly contradictory.

To which I answer, that if the giving of the Holy Ghost be in both places to be understood for one and the same thing, they certainly contradict one another. Wherefore, to avoid this, we must allow a double giving of the Holy Ghost: one, in which Christ conveys the ministerial power; the other, in which he confers ministerial gifts and abilities. Now it was the first of these that happened before Christ's ascension, as is clear from the following words in [ver. 23](#), *Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted.* Which we know is the great instance of ministerial power and authority. And this, by the way, excellently explains the sense of our church, as it uses the same words in the ordination of priests, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost.* Whereby she does not profess to convey to the person ordained ministerial gifts and abilities, but only ministerial power.

But this solemn giving of the Holy Ghost after Christ's ascension, was a conferring gifts, graces, and abilities upon the apostles, to fit them for the discharge of their ministerial office and power, which had been conveyed to them by the former giving of the Holy Ghost before Christ's ascension. And thus we have given a fair accommodation to these places of scripture.

And so having considered the first thing observable in Christ's giving the Holy Ghost, viz. the time when; I pass now to the

Second; which is, the manner how it was conferred. And here the more brevity is required, the thing being so eminently known to us all upon that full description of it in [Acts](#)

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ii. 2, 3; as, *That the Holy Ghost descended and sat upon the apostles in the form of cloven fiery tongues, ushered in with the sound of a rushing mighty wind.* The various significancy of which circumstances would furnish out matter for a year's discourse. And as for the popish writers and commentators, they are almost endless in this particular, so anatomizing the miracle into all its minute particles, and spinning out every circumstance into infinite allusions and metaphors: which indeed is their custom, in treating of most of the grand passages of the gospel, till they have even made their religion itself but a metaphor, that is, something like a religion, but not a religion.

But the design of this great action being to signify and to transmit spiritual notices by sensible conveyances, it must not wholly be passed over in silence.

Briefly therefore, it exhibits to the world the great means chosen by God for the propagation of the kingdom of Christ. The apostles, beating upon that general misconceit of the Jews about the kingdom of the Messiah, in the preceding chapter, [ver. 6](#), asked Christ, Whether he would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel and questionless, in the strength of that prejudice, they expected here some strange appearance of angels that should conquer the world before them, and bring all nations to the Jewish yoke and subjection.

But suddenly, by a new kind of warlike preparation, they receive no other weapons but tongues, the proper badges of him that is the eternal Word, weapons that draw no blood, break no bones; their only armour and artillery was variety of languages, that fitted them more to travel over than to conquer the world: and thus was that first cause of the world's confusion made the great instrument of its salvation.

And as these tongues were a proper representation of the gospel, so the peculiar nature and efficacy of this gospel was emphatically set forth by those attending circumstances of the fire and the mighty wind, both of which are notable for these two effects.

I. To cleanse. 2. To consume and destroy. The gospel came like a great and mighty wind, to dry and cleanse a dirty and polluted world; like a fire, to purge and carry off that dross that had spread and settled itself in the inmost regions of our nature. The design of Christianity was nothing else but to make virtue as universal and as natural to men as vice, as desirable to their thoughts, and as suitable to their affections. Christ's intent was not so much to amuse men's reason with the belief of strange propositions, but to refine their manners, to correct their tempers, to turn vultures into doves, goats into sheep; to make the drunkard once for all vomit up his sin; to bring the wanton only in love with purity, and to see no beauty but in holiness; to make men, of covetous, cruel, and intemperate, to become liberal, courteous, and sober; in a word, to be new creatures and excellent persons.

And therefore he that, in the profession of so pure and noble a religion, thinks not of the design of it, but only hears, and never feels the word; to whom it comes only in the sound of the wind, but not in the force and efficacy of the fire: who, in the midst of all spiritual helps, of the several methods of amendment and renovation; as, seasonable sermons, con-



tinual prayers, frequent sacraments, and the like; yet carries his old, base inclinations fresh and lively about him; and cannot say that he ever conquered so much as one habitual sin, nor got the better of any one vile appetite; but remains sordidly obnoxious, and a slave to all its motions and returns; so that by a desperate vicissitude of sin and duty, he hears and sins, prays and sins, partakes and sins; and that perhaps with a better stomach than before; till, by such a continual mockery of God, he comes at length to have finished the fatal round of reprobation: such a one will find, that that Word which could not cleanse him will be a wind to blast, and a fire to consume him; and that the same Spirit, that only breathed in gentle, but neglected persuasions, will at length, like a resisted tempest, rage in the sad effects of incurable breaches and a final confusion.



SERMON III.

JOHN ix. 4.

—*The night cometh, when no man can work.*

THESE words, as they lie in the context, are a general maxim or assertion, assigned as a reason of Christ's constancy and assiduity in the particular discharge of those works, which, as mediator, he was to perform while he was yet conversant in the world. And for the figurative scheme of the words, there is nothing more usual in the dialect of scripture, than to set forth and express the time allotted for this life by *day*; and the time and state after life, which is death, by *night*: the reasons of which similitude being very natural and obvious, to be exact and particular in recounting them would be but to tell men what they know already, and consequently a work both precise and superfluous.

The sense of the text seems most naturally to lay itself forth in these three propositions.

I. That there is a work allotted, begun, cut out, and appointed to every man, to be performed by him while he lives in the world.

II. That the time of this life being once expired, there is no further opportunity or possibility of performing that work.

III. That the consideration of this ought to be the highest and the most pressing argument to every man, to use his utmost diligence in discharging the work incumbent upon him in this life.

I. For the first of these, That there is a work cut out, &c. we must observe, that every man may be considered under a double capacity or relation.

1. As he is a part or member of the body politic, and so is not his own, but stands included in and possessed by the community. In which capacity he is obliged to contribute his proportion of help to the public; as sharing from thence with others the benefits of society, and so being accountable to make it some retribution in his particular station and condition.

2. A man may be considered as he is a member and subject of a spiritual and higher kingdom. And in this capacity he is to pursue the personal, yet great interest of his own salvation. He is sent into this world to make sure of a better; to glorify his Maker by studying to save himself; and, in a word, to aim at enjoyments divine and supernatural, and higher than this animal life can aspire unto.

Now these two capacities are very different; by the former, a man is to approve himself a good citizen; by the latter, a good Christian: and though these relations have their precise limits and distinctions, yet we are not to be ignorant of the subordination of one to the other, as its superior. So that if they chance to clash and thwart, the inferior must give way; nor must a man do any thing to preserve a civil interest that is contrary to a spiritual, and the greater obligations lying upon him with reference to the good of his soul, and the invaluable concerns of felicity in the other world. The distinction of a politic and a private con-



science is a thing that true reason explodes, and religion abhors, as placing the matter of duty under a contradiction, and consequently can be nothing but an art to give a man satisfaction in the midst of his sin.

We have seen then how every man sustains a double capacity; according to which he has also a double work or calling.

1. A temporal one, by which he is to fill up some place in the commonwealth by the exercise of some useful profession, whether as a divine, lawyer, or physician; a merchant, soldier, mariner, or any inferior handicraft; by all which, as by so many greater and less wheels, the business of the vast body of the public is carried on, its necessities served, and its state upheld.

And God, who has ordained both society and order, accounts himself so much served by each man's diligent pursuit, though of the meanest trade, that his stepping out of the bounds of it to some other work (as he presumes) more excellent, is but a bold and thankless presumption, by which the man puts himself out of the common way and guard of Providence. For God requires no man to be praying or reading when the exigence of his profession calls him to his hammer or his needle; nor commands any one from his shop to go hear a sermon in the church, much less to preach one in the pulpit.

God, as the lord and great master of the family of the universe, is still calling upon all his servants to work and labour; a thing so much disdained by the gallant and the epicure, is yet that general standing price that God and nature has set upon every enjoyment on this side heaven; and he that invades the possession of any thing, but upon this claim, is an intruder and an usurper. I have given order, says the apostle, *2 Thess. iii. 10, that if any one refuse to labour, neither should he eat.* It is the active arm and the busy hand that must both purvey for the mouth, and withal give it a right to every morsel that is put into it.

Some perhaps think they are not born to labour, because they are born to estates. But the sentence that God passed upon Adam is universal; we find in it no exception or proviso for any noble or illustrious drone: no greatness can privilege a man to lie basking in sloth and idleness; and to eat the labours of the husbandman's hand, and drink the sweat of his brow; to wallow and sleep in ease only, as an useless lump of well clothed, well descended earth: earth for heaviness only, but not for fruitfulness, serves no other end of society, but only to make one in a number.

But it may be replied, Shall those whom God has blessed in the world, and, as it were, by a particular mark of his providential favour exempted from the general curse of toil and labour, be obliged to work in a trade, or to be of such or such a laborious profession? No, I answer, that they need not, nor is this the thing contended for, but simply that they should labour and fill up all the hours of their time by employing themselves usefully for the public; and there are superior and more noble employments in which this labour may be sufficiently exerted. For is any one so rich or high as to be above the labour of doing good to a whole



neighbourhood, of composing differences, studying the customs of his country, reading histories, and learning such arts as may render him both eminent and useful, serviceable to the public both in peace and war.

If it be answered, that he stands in need of none of all these, as being already abundantly supplied with all the plenties and supports of life: to this also I rejoin, that they are not only a man's own personal needs, but the general needs of society, that command a supply and relief from his labour; add to this also, in the second place, that the obligation to labour, lying upon men, is not founded upon their needs and necessities, but upon God's command, as its proper reason; which command he has laid universally and impartially upon all; and he that excuses himself from all labour, the common lot of mankind, by loading it with the odious name of servility, should do well to consider whether the custom of a place, the vogue of his dependants, and his own little arts of evasion, will be able to bear him out in so broad a contempt of an express command; and to rescue him from that thundering sentence leveled so directly at him in [Matt. xxv. 30](#), *Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

2. Correspondent to a Christian's other, that is, his spiritual capacity, he has also a spiritual calling or profession; and the work that this engages him to, is that grand one of working out his salvation; a work that a life is too little for, had a man any thing more than a life to bestow upon it; a work that runs out into eternity, and upon which depends the wo or welfare of an immortal soul.

Now this work is threefold.

1. To make our peace with God.
2. To get our sins mortified.
3. To get our hearts purified with the contrary graces.

1. And first, for the first of these, the making our peace with God. We know how tedious a work it is to reconcile or appease a potent enemy amongst men; frequent addresses must be made, great and irksome submissions must be digested. Days must be spent in attending, and nights in projecting how to assuage, and qualify, and remove the swelling disgust, and recover a place in that breast that has been boiling with rancour and enmity, and designs of mischiefs. Many years perhaps go over a man's head, before he gets any ground upon such an one, if, peradventure, he succeeds at last; so hard, so troublesome, and discouraging a task it is, to win back a lost affection. Now every man must know, that, upon his very first coming into the world, he has this huge task upon him, to appease and pacify a great enemy; an enemy so much the harder to be pacified, because once a friend. This enemy is God, and therefore his enmities must be commensurate to his person, that is, infinite and unlimited. And it has this property also, that it is an enmity not commencing upon a mere grudge, but upon an injurious violation of his justice, and consequently not to be laid down without satisfaction. This satisfaction was to be infinite, and so impossible to be exhibited by a finite



nature. The case being thus, Christ, the eternal Son of that offended God, was pleased to offer himself as a surety and a ransom in our behalf; so as to answer and satisfy all the demands of offended justice.

A satisfaction therefore there is made for us, but so made, that there are conditions required on our parts, before there can be any application of it to our persons; and if these conditions are not reached, we may die with pardons in our Bibles, but not at all be longing to us. Now these conditions are faith and repentance; words quickly uttered, but things not so easily effected. There must pass such a change upon our natures, such a renovation of the very spirit of our minds, as may amount to the verification of this of us, that we are *new creatures*. The new creature is the subject of justification. And being once *justified*, the apostle tells us, [Rom. v. 1](#), *we have peace with God*.

But how is it possible to establish a peace between natures of the widest distance and the fiercest opposition? such as is the most holy, pure, and just nature of God, and the nature of man, polluted and envenomed by original corruption. Can fire and stubble strike a league together, and be friends? Can guilt and justice unite and embrace? No, nothing of any reconciliation was to be expected, till such time as repentance should cleanse this Augean stable, and the Spirit of God infuse into the soul a new principle called *faith*; which principle shall really translate a man into another family, advance him to the privilege of adoption, and so make him a son and an heir to the God of heaven, by the merits of the second Adam, who was an outlaw and a traitor by the first.

2. The second work that we are to do, is to get our sins mortified. For after we are transplanted from the state of nature into a state of grace, we are not presently to think that our work is wholly done. For after the Israelites were possessed of Canaan, they had many of the Amorites and other enemies to conquer and drive out before them. Every man has corrupt, sinful habits that have overspread, and, as it were, engarrisoned themselves in the most inward parts of his soul; habits deeply fixed, and not easily dispossessed. These are the adversaries that he is to encounter and to wage war with; adversaries that have all the advantages against him imaginable; such as he must make his way to through his own heart, and open his bosom, that the weapon may reach them.

The sharpest, the most afflicting, and yet the most concerning part of a Christian's duty, is the mortification of his sin. For it is, as it were, a man's weeding of his heart; he shall find it a growing evil; an evil, that, by a cursed fertility, will sprout out after the cutting. For scarce any weed is fetched up at once; the gardener's hand and hook must be continually watching over it; and he accounts his ground preserved, if it is not overrun.

Let a man make experiment in any one vice; only let it be such an one as is agreeable and incident to the several ages of man; as for instance, be it pride: for the extirpation of which, we will suppose a man, by the influences of a preventing grace, very early in his attempts against it, and laying the axe to the root of this towering vice in his very youth. Yet,

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does it fall before him suddenly and easily? does the first foil or blow make him victorious, and enable him to set his foot upon the neck of his conquered enemy? No, there are many vicissitudes in the combat; sometimes he seems to get that under, sometimes that seems to be above him. And what through the strength of its hold, and the treachery of its working, a man finds enough to exercise and humble his old age; and perhaps, after all his conflicts with it, goes out of the world only with this half-trophy, (enough indeed to save him,) that he was not overcome.



Now what I say of this is equally true of all other vices; and he that has a voluptuous, an intemperate, or a covetous heart to deal with, will find work enough laid out for him for this life. And let him beware that he ply his spiritual warfare so, that after forty, fifty, or threescore years, his vice is not as lively in his aged bones, and under his hoary hairs, as ever it was; and he die a decrepit, aged sinner, but yet in the youth and vigour of his sin.

3. The third work incumbent upon every man from his Christian calling, is to get his heart purified and replenished with the proper graces and virtues of a Christian. Christianity ends not in negatives. No man clears his garden of weeds, but in order to the planting of flowers or useful herbs in their room. God calls upon us to dispossess our corruptions, but it is for the reception of new inhabitants. A room may be clean, and yet empty; but it is not enough that our hearts be *swept*, unless they be also *garnished*; and that we lay aside our pride, our luxury, our covetousness, unless humility, temperance, and liberality, rise up and shine in their places. The design of religion would be very poor and short, should it look no further than only to keep men from being swine, and goats, and tigers, without improving the principles of humanity into positive and higher perfections. The soul may be cleansed from all blots, and yet still be left but a blank.

But Christianity, that is of a thriving, aspiring nature, requires us to proceed from grace to grace; to *virtue* adding *patience*, to *patience* *temperance*, to *temperance* *meekestness*, to *meekestness* *brotherly kindness*, and the like; thus ascending by degrees, till at length the top of the ladder reaches heaven, and conveys the soul so qualified into the mansions of glory.



I shewed before the difficulty of mortification, and we are not to think that it is at all less difficult to make a depraved heart virtuous, to force the soil of an ill temper, and, as it were, to graft virtuous habits upon the stock of a vicious nature. We see those that learn a trade, and the habit of any mechanic art, must yet bestow time and toil in the acquiring of it; though perhaps they have also a natural propensity to the art they are in pursuit of. Which being so, with how much more difficulty may we imagine a man to get humility or heavenly-mindedness, while all the appetites, and the very nerves of his soul, strive against it, and endeavour to pull down as fast as he can build up.

True it is therefore, that there is not one virtue that is produced in the soul of fallen man, but is infused into it by the operation of God's Spirit. And if any one should hereupon except, first, To what purpose then is our endeavour in this matter, if the Spirit of God works

all? And secondly, Whence is it that these virtues are not in an instant conveyed into the heart in their full perfection, but appear and shew themselves only gradually, and by certain steps and increases?

To both these doubts this one answer will give full satisfaction, namely, that habits, though they are infused, do yet come after the manner of such as are acquired. Though our working produces not those habits, yet the Spirit infuses them into us while we are working; and that in those gradual proportions, that in the whole action it still maintains an imitation of the course of nature, that passes from less profit to more, till at length it arrives at the utmost perfection that it first intended.

And thus I have finished the first proposition, and shewn that there is a work appointed to every man, to be performed by him while he lives in the world; as also the several parts of that work. I come now,

II. To the second proposition, namely, that the time of this life being once expired, there remains no further opportunity or possibility of performing this work.

There is no repenting when we are once nailed up in our coffins; no believing in the grave; no doing the works of charity and temperance in the dust, or growing new creatures amongst the worms; life is the adequate space allotted by the wisdom of Heaven for these matters, which being ended, there is no after-game, or retrieving of a bad choice. And so much seems couched under that one word, by which the time of this life is expressed, namely, *a day*, which, as it is applied to life, may emphatically denote three things.

1. The shortness of it. What is a day, but a few minutes sunshine; one of the most inconsiderable proportions of time; such an one, as we never grudge to bestow upon any thing; an indiscernible shred of that life that is itself but a span. Yet in these reckonings, God is pleased to rate it by a narrower and a more contemptible measure. God will not dally with us in the great affairs of eternity. He allows us our day, and but our day, to choose whether or no we will be happy for ever. Which shows what a value God puts upon these opportunities, by dispensing them so sparingly, that though we have enough to use, yet we have none to lavish or to lend. We are hurried through the world; our whole life is but, as it were, a day's journey; and therefore certainly it concerns us to manage it so, that we may have comfort at our journey's end.

2. A day, as it denotes the shortness, so it implies also the sufficiency of our time. A day, as short as it is, yet it equals the business of the day. God, that knows the exact proportions of things, took the measure of both, and found that the compass of our lives would fully grasp and take in all our occasions. *Are there not twelve hours in the day?* says our Saviour: implying that that was time enough for any man to discharge all the work, that God, and nature, and his profession could, for that space, impose upon him.

And if any one here object the shortness of the time allotted for a Christian's work against the sufficiency of it; though it must be confessed, that, should we live never so long,

we could not have too much time to do the works of repentance, and to honour God in; yet, according to the economy and measures of the gospel, in which God accepts our services according to their truth, not their bulk, we have space enough assigned us, even in this short life, to do all that is necessary to bring us to a better.

And he that repents not and turns to God in the space of fifty, or threescore, or perhaps seventy years, would, for any thing that is in him, live and persevere in the same impenitence, should God add five hundred years to his life. And it is not to be doubted, but God prolongs the life of many here on earth, not with any expectation of their repentance and conversion, as knowing them to be incorrigible, but to serve other ends of his providence in carrying on the affairs of the world.

3dly and lastly, By a day is denoted to us the determinate stint and limitation of our time. For none must think that the great and wise Governor of the world has left a matter of so high a concernment, and of so direct an influence upon the business of the world, as the life of man is, loose and unfixed. God has concluded all under a certain and unchangeable decree; and we have our bounds, beyond which we shall not pass. For as, after such a number of hours, it will unavoidably be night, and there is no stopping of the setting sun; so, after we have passed such a measure of time, our season has its period; we are benighted, and we must bid adieu to all our opportunities.

It is not in the power of man to carve out a longer life to himself. The disposal of times and seasons is part of the divine prerogative: and we know not whether God will allow the figtree to grow one, or two, or three years in his vineyard; but sure it is, that, when its appointed time is come, it must cumber the ground no longer. God has allotted to men talents of time, as well as of other things; to some ten, to some five, to some one. But still we see each man's proportion is set. And he that has but five, must not think to traffick at the rate of him that has ten.

And thus we have taken some survey of the second proposition, namely, that the time of this life being once expired, there remains no further opportunity or possibility of performing the great work incumbent upon us.

I descend now to the third and last,

III. Which is, that the consideration of this ought to be the highest and the most pressing argument to every man to use his utmost diligence in the discharge of this work.

The enforcing reason of diligence in the undertaking of any work, is the difficulty of the performance of that work. Which difficulty here in our case will appear by comparing of the work to be done, with the time allowed for the doing of it. The time I shewed was both short and limited, so, on the other side, the work to be done is both difficult and necessary.

1. And first for its difficulty: though this has been sufficiently intimated in what was discoursed of before, yet, for the further declaration of it, it is observable, that there is no



action of mankind that carries any thing of hardship with it, but the scripture expresses the work and duty of a Christian by it. It calls it *a warfare*; and is there any thing so hard and uneasy as what befalls men in the wars? It calls it *a wrestling with principalities and powers*: and is there any thing that employs and distends every joint and fibre of the body so much as wrestling does? It calls it *a resisting of the Devil*, and, what is more, *a resisting unto blood*: and do men shed their blood and expose their lives to the point of the rapier, and the fury of the enemy, with so much pastime?

But no expressions are so emphatical as those of our Saviour, who calls this work *a taking up of one's cross*; a severe task indeed, whether a man bear the cross, or the cross him. It seems to be our Saviour's design all along to possess men with a true and impartial representation of those afflicting parts of duty, that will be indispensably required of such as shall give up their names to Christianity.

But above all, there is a place in [Luke xiii. 24](#), which I wonder any considerate person can read without trembling: *Strive*, says our Saviour, *to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter inland shall not be able*. What! seek to enter, and yet find no entrance? Good God! What then will become of those numberless numbers of men, who never so much as sought, who never were at the expense of an hearty endeavour to get them selves into these narrow paths of felicity? If those that come *crying, Lord, Lord, and striving*, shall yet have the door shut upon them, what shall the lewd, the slothful, and the sottish epicure build the hopes of his salvation upon?

And now, when we have seen the work to be done so highly difficult, and the time to do it in so very short, can there be a more cogent argument, to induce a man to be covetous of every moment, and to make his industry piece out the scantiness of his opportunities? He that has far to go, and much to do, surely is concerned to rise very early; to count not only hours, but minutes, to make his work keep pace with his time; and, in a word, to mate the difficulty of the business with the diligence of the prosecution.

2. Next to the difficulty of the work, let us take an argument from its necessity. So far as it is necessary for a man to be saved, so far this work is necessary. Which argument will be heightened by comparing this necessity with the stinted, fixed limitation of the time allotted for the work. There is no deferring it beyond our day: there is no such thing as a tomorrow in the Christian's calendar. And yet, are there any almost that lay this so important a consideration to heart? Men, especially in the flower and freshness of their youth, are infinitely careless: while they think they spend upon a full stock, and have the supplies of nature, the treasures of strength, and opportunity open before them. They know not the value of those precious, never-returning hours, that they quaff, and revel, and trifle away, when as the revocation of the least minute is not to be purchased with all the Persian treasures, or the mines of both the Indies.

But when a man comes at last to reflect upon his past days, and the little sand that is left him to run; when *his feet are stumbling upon the dark mountains*, and the shadows of his long night have overtaken him, he never asks the question then, how to pass away time, and to spend the day. None of his hours then lie upon his hands.

Now, when amidst all this, his great accounts shall also press hard upon him, and the terror of past sins lie heavy upon his conscience; it is worth considering his behaviour in this condition. None, surely, ever heard such a one calling religion pedantry, deriding a divine, or jesting upon the scriptures. How much soever a wretch and a scoffer lie was before, his note is changed now; and we may hear him with the most earnest, humble, and lamentable outcries plying his offended God.

Lord, spare me for a while: Lord, respite me but for a month, a week, or but a day, to make my peace with thee. Set the long and the dark night back for a few hours, that I may put my accounts in some better order for my appearance before thy dreadful tribunal.

And then for this spiritual guide, whom, perhaps, not long since, he could scoff out of his company with disdain, he can now bespeak in a more abject and entreating dialect. Sir, do you think that there is any mercy, any hope for such a one as I? Have I not outsinned the line of grace? Do you not perceive any mortal symptoms upon my sins? Do you think that my repentance is sincere, that it reaches the conditions of the covenant, and that I may venture my salvation upon the reality of it? Can you give me any solid argument from scripture, or the judgment of divines, that the promises of mercy can extend to a man that has committed such and such sins, and that under such and such circumstances? And that I do not all this while abuse and flatter myself, and only prepare for an eternal disappointment? Never did any client, with so much scruple and solicitousness, inquire of his counsel about the strength or weakness of his title, when he was to go to law for all his estate, and to see his whole fortune canvassed at the bar, as a man in this condition will dispute his title to heaven, and argue his several doubts and misgivings with his spiritual guide or confessor.

No sinner, be he never so hardy and resolved, must think to keep up the same stoutness of heart, when he is just a stepping into the other world. No; these are usually the sad accents and language of the dying sinner, when he perceives his time spent, and, in the prospect of his approaching end, lies further bemoaning himself.

Oh that I were to live over my former days again! that I could command back some of those portions of time that I sacrificed to my vice, to the humour of my companions, and to those vanities that now serve only to remind me of my folly, and to upbraid me to my face! Oh that I had employed myself in those severities, that I then laughed at as the needless, affected practices of brainsick, melancholy persons! my work had not been now to do, when my time of working is expired.

I shall close up all with that excellent counsel of the preacher, [Ecclesiastes ix. 10](#), *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might: for there is no work, nor device,*

nor knowledge, nor wisdom, (and I may add also, nor working out a man's salvation,) in the grave whither thou goest. And going thither we all are apace: wherefore, since after a few days comes death, and after death judgment, and after judgment an eternal, unchangeable condition; surely it concerns us all so to acquit ourselves in the several parts of our Christian profession, that we may be able to leave the world with that saying of the blessed apostle, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.

Which God of his mercy at last bestow upon us all, to whom be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON IV.

PREACHED AT THE

CONSECRATION OF DR. SETH WARD, BP. OF EXON.

JEREMIAH xv. 20.

I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and deliver thee, saith the Lord.

I SHALL not pretend to derive episcopacy from the Old Testament, as some do presbytery from Jethro, in his humble petition and advice to Moses concerning the government of the Jews. Which presbytery, though some call the rod of Aaron, yet it more resembles those rods of Jacob, as being designed to midwife a piebald, mixed, ringstraked progeny of church-governors into the world. How ever, it is well that we see from whence it first came, even from Midian, an heathenish place, and unacquainted with the true worship of God, then confined only to the Jews.

But it is pity that the Old Testament does not describe the office of those elders, as well as mention the name; we reading scarce any thing of them there, but that some of them scuffled with Moses and Aaron in the *classis* of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. As also of their idolatry, [Ezekiel vi](#). And of their private examination of Susanna in the story of Daniel; which book, though it be apocryphal, yet the practice remains authentic and canonical.

I say, I shall not derive episcopacy from the Jewish model; though, if I would take their liberty to use allusions for arguments. I might argue a superintendency of bishops over presbyters from the superiority of the priests over the Levites, much better than they can found their discipline upon the word *elder*, catching at the bare letter, and, according to their custom, stripping the word from the sense: and also with much more probability than their corypheus in queen Elizabeth's time argued their discipline from [Psalm cxxii. 5](#), that in Jerusalem *there are set thrones of judgment*. By which it seems they would be kings as well as priests, and reign as well as rule, dashing the princes of the earth like a potter's vessel, (an expression which they much delight in.) till, at length, they crouched to the holy discipline, kissed the rod of Aaron, and so acknowledged their elders for their betters.

But surely this I may argue solidly: that if God instituted such a standing superiority and jurisdiction of the priests over the Levites. then these two things follow.

1. That such a superiority is not in itself absolutely irregular and unlawful.
2. That neither does it carry in it an antipathy and contrariety to the power of godliness.

And yet upon these two suppositions, as upon two standing truths, all their calumnies are commenced; as if there were something in the very vital constitution of such a subordination, that was irreconcilable to the power of godliness. As in respect of the civil power,

Calvin, in his commentary upon [Daniel, chap. v. 21](#), that it is common to all kings to jostle out God from his government; a good plea for his abetting the ejection of the lawful prince of Geneva from his government and prerogative.

But to come yet closer to the matter; I do not say that Jeremy was a bishop, nor, with an exact parallel, argue from one to the other. But we know, that, in things of a most different nature, we may yet so sever their peculiar, determining differences, as to leave some one general reason in which they may unite and agree; so here, setting aside the peculiar differences of the Jewish and the Christian economy, there is a general nature of government in which both correspond. And therefore, what concerned Jeremy, as a church-governor, may with good logic be applied to a bishop.

Though indeed the correspondence here may extend to more peculiar and personal resemblances; for might not our bishops lately take up and appropriate to themselves that complaint of Jeremy, in [chap. xv. 10](#), *I have wronged no man, I have neither lent on usury, nor have men lent to me on usury, and yet every man curses me?* Were they not also, like Jeremy, persecuted from prison to prison, and, like him, traduced as secret friends and parties with Babylon, and put into the dungeon for their impartial speaking their consciences? And lastly, notwithstanding their piety, hospitality, and moderation, have they not, with Jeremy, seen a sad and uncomfortable issue of all their ministerial labours, and been forced to second their prophecies with lamentations?

But now to enter upon the words; we have in them these three things considerable.

I. God's qualification of Jeremy to be an overseer in his church; *I will make thee a fenced brazen wall.*

II. The entertainment that he should meet with in the administration of his office, *they shall fight against thee.*

III. The issue and success of this opposition, that, through God's eminent and peculiar assistance, *they should not prevail against him.*

I. And first for the first of these, God's qualification of Jeremy to his charge, *I will make thee a brazen fenced wall.* Now a wall imports these two things.

1. Enclosure.
2. Fortification.

1. It implies enclosure. God did not think fit to leave his church without enclosure, open, like a common, for every beast to feed upon and devour it. Commons are always bare, pilled, and shorn as the sheep that feed upon them. And our experience has shewn us, as soon as the enclosures of our church were plucked up, what a herd of cattle of all sorts invaded it. It contained, as commons usually do, both multitude and mixture.

God said to Moses, *Pull off thy shoes, for the place upon which thou standest is holy ground*; which command would have been but of little force amongst us, where the ground has been therefore counted common because holy; church-lands have been every one's

claim, free and common to all but to churchmen; even as common as the churchyard itself; one to be possessed by the living, the other by the dead.

And the offices of the church were as prostitute as her revenues; every one would be a labourer in that field from whence they expected so fair an harvest. Here a brewer, here a cobbler, there a butcher; a fair translation from the killing of one flock to the feeding of another.

We have Christ comparing the kingdom of heaven, that is, the church, to traffick, to merchandise: but we might compare ours to a fair, in which there was a general confluence and appearance of all tradesmen; and he that had broke in any, presently set up in divinity.

Wherefore to stave off the profane intrusions of the rabble for the future, we must have an enclosure, and an hedge will not serve turn. So many rotten stakes of lay-governors will not raise a fence; an hedge that surrounds an orchard may harbour those thieves that intend to rob it.

No, one brazen wall, one diocesan bishop, will better defend this enclosed garden of the church, than a junto of five hundred shrubs, than all the quicksets of Geneva, all the thorns and brambles of presbytery.

2. A wall imports fortification. No city can be secure without it. It is, as it were, a standing inanimate army; a continual defence without the help of defenders.

There is no robbery, but the wall is first broke; no invasion, but it enters through the ruins of this. And therefore David puts up this for Sion in [Psalm cxxii. 7](#), *Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy bulwarks*. Indeed it had therefore *peace and prosperity*, because it had *walls and bulwarks*.

Something must encircle the church that will both discriminate and protect it. And the altar must be railed in, not only for distinction but defence.

And such a thing is a church-governor, a well-qualified bishop. It is he that must secure the church, and not the little inferior pastors about him. There is as much difference between his protection and theirs, as there is between being encompassed by one continued wall, and by a rank of little hills.

It was Moses, and not the elders of Israel, that stood in the gap; and for our own parts, if we would determine upon whom to place our government, certainly, of all others, those persons are most unfit to stand in the gap that first made it.

We have seen now what is imported in this metaphor of a wall, as applied to a church-governor. Which title that he may make good and verify, there are required in him these three qualifications.

1. Courage, which leads the way to all the rest; a wall, nay, a brazen wall, will not sometimes prove a defence, if it is not well manned. Every church man should have the spirit of a soldier. And pray let us make an exchange; the soldiers have sufficiently invaded the ministers offices; let ministers now borrow a little of the soldiers courage.



Peter was a resolute and a bold man, and therefore fit to feed Christ's lambs. But he that is timorous and flexible, apt to decline opposition when he can, and, when he cannot, to yield to it, will be jaded and rid like an ass; and, like a pitcher, he will be took and emptied by his own handle, to the ruin of the church and the reproach of his function. He will be used, instead of being obeyed; and men will make him their instrument, instead of their governor.

He that does not find in himself a courage to withstand the boldness and violence of a proud seducer or a popular schismatic, betrays his charge in the very undertaking it. A servile temper in any one is unworthy; but a spirit of servitude in the place of government is unnatural: and he that fears does something more than serve: he wears his white in his timorous face, and therefore deserves not to wear it in his sleeves.

The greatest attempts in the world that have failed, have miscarried by the treachery of this one quality, irresolution. Fear is a base thing, it enslaves a man's reason to his fancy; and for the most part proceeds from, but always looks like guilt.

And it agrees to no man living so ill, as to a prelate of the church; of whose qualities if we take a survey, we shall find that, though learning be his ornament, piety a necessary property, yet resolution is his very essence; and now, especially, is the want of it inexcusable, when the ground is firm under you, and the heavens, as yet, fair above you; and all the prudent and judicious for you, that are about you.

Shall those be able to nose and outbrave you, who take all their courage from guilt and from despair? They deride and tax you for bowing and cringing; pray therefore, whatsoever you do, do not bow and cringe to them.

2. There is required innocence and integrity. A brazen wall admits of no cracks and flaws; but that which is made of the baser materials of mud and mortar, of a corrupt conscience, and a corrupter conversation, it gapes into chinks and holes, and quickly totters, being weak and obnoxious.

Hic murus ahencus esto,

Nil conscire sibi.

Let our governors expect reproaches and calumnies, but being thrown at brass, they will never stick, upon mud they will; clay cannot mingle with brass or iron. And if men throw dirt, it will not fasten till it meets with dirt.

A bishop's integrity is the best way to silence a factious minister. Let men first *wash their hands in innocency*, and then let them *compass the altar*.

In these stars of God's right hand, it is their power indeed that gives them an influence, but it is their innocence that makes them shine. Unblameableness of life, an untainted pureness of manners, it defends the person and confirms the office; as cleanliness, it both refreshes, and, at the same time, also strengthens the body. Rust, it not only defaces the aspect,

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but also corrodes the substance; and a rusty sword does execution upon nothing but its own scabbard.

Nothing that is vicious can be lasting; vice is rotten, and it makes so. Whatsoever is wicked is also weak; [Ezek. xvi. 30](#), *Since thou doest these things, how weak is thy heart!*

The enemies of the church may fear your power, but they dread your innocence. It is this that stops the open sepulchre, and beats back the accusation upon the teeth of the accuser. The innocent white, it is a triumphant colour.

And believe it, when all these calumniators shall have spit their venom, it will be found, that an unspotted life will be to them both a confutation and revenge.

For sin they love, that is, to enjoy it in themselves, and to accuse it in others; but God forbid that we should so far gratify their malice, as to verify their invectives, or that any crime should sit blushing upon the mitre.

And certainly it were a strange and a shameful thing, to behold vice installed, debauchery enthroned; and to have the whole transaction only the solemnity of an advanced sin and a consecrated impiety.

3. The third and last qualification that I shall mention is authority; it is to be a *fenced*, as well as a *brazen wall*. The inward firmness of one must be corroborated by the exterior munitions of the other.

Courage is like a giant with his hands tied, if it has not authority and jurisdiction to draw forth and actuate its resolution. Courage is nothing, if it is not backed with a commission.

There are those who absolutely deny any jurisdiction to belong to the church; affirming, that all the apostolical sanctions were rather advice than law; thus making the church-officers to be only like a college of physicians, who when they consult about, and determine any matter in physic, and prescribe to their patients, their prescriptions command no thing by way of authority, but only propose by way of counsel. Whence it is the less wonder, that Erastus, a physician, should endeavour to reduce the church to such an imaginary power.

Others, amongst which a person of great learning and discontent, though they proceed not to a plain, barefaced denial of the church's jurisdiction, yet they deny the derivation of it from Christ; and derive it from the consent of the primitive Christians, voluntarily choosing governors and a government, and then submitting themselves to their jurisdiction.

But God forbid that the church should be forced either to follow Erastus's prescriptions, or to try her title and plead her cause at an adversary's bar.

Certain it is, that the New Testament makes mention of several acts of ecclesiastical jurisdiction performed by the apostles and others. And we find also several express speeches of Christ that do evidently endue them with such a jurisdiction. But we read not a word, that it came from any such consent, or voluntary submission of a company of Christians



combining together, and choosing their own model; and it is strange that, in such a matter, the antiquary should so much recede from the judgment of antiquity.

But thanks be to God that our church has not only its jurisdiction from Christ, but also a superadded overplus of confirmation from the secular power, which has piously and prudently provided those laws, that will certainly bind up her breaches, and bring order out of confusion, if they be executed with the same courage with which they were enacted.

But if the governors and trustees of the church's power fly back, and shrink, and bury a noble law as soon as ever it is born, may not those that made it object to us, *that they would have healed us, but we would not be healed?* May they not also use that speech of our Saviour to us, *Behold, now your house is left to you desolate?* You have lost your advantages, and overlooked your opportunities.

Does it become a man, with a sword by his side, to beseech? or a governor, armed with authority, to entreat? He that thinks to win obstinate schismatics by condescension, and to conjure away those evil spirits with the softer lays and music of persuasion, may, as David in the like case, have a javelin flung at his head for his pains, and perhaps escape it as narrowly.

There is a strange, commanding majesty in two things, *truth* and *law*, and they are now both on the church's side; but there is a dastardly poorness in guilt and faction, that will shrink before the face of justice and the aspect of authority.

And let faction look and speak big in a tumult, and in the troubled waters of rebellion; yet I dare vouch this as a truth of certain event, and that without the spirit of prophecy, that courage assisted with law, and law executed with courage, will assuredly prevail.

Come we now to the second thing, namely,

II. The opposition that the church-governor thus qualified will be sure to meet with in the administration of his office, expressed in those words, *they shall fight against thee*; and this they are like to do these three ways.

1. By seditious preaching and praying.
2. By railing and libels.
3. And thirdly, perhaps, by open force.

1. And first of all, they will assault their governors with seditious preaching and praying. To preach Christ out of contention is condemned by the apostle; but to preach contention, instead of Christ, certainly is most abominable. We have seen men preached into schism, lectured into sacrilege, and prayed into rebellion; the very pulpit has been made to undermine the church.

We have been robbed and plundered in scripture phrase, and have heard rapines and bloodshed not only *justified*, but *glorified*.



People in the mean time thronging to the church, not like *doves to their windows*, but like eagles to their prey; to have their appetites enraged, to have their talons whet against government, and their Consciences fired against whatsoever is constituted in church and state.

Read the collections of sermons upon their bloody thanksgivings, and their bloodthirsty humiliations, and upon other occasions before the two houses, which are so many satires against government, so many declamations against the church; every line and period almost spitting poison against monarchy, against discipline and decency; to the reproach of that exercise, to the shame of their calling, and (so far as it lay at the mercy of their practices) to the blot of Christianity:

I say, let any one read that collection, or, to speak more properly, that magazine of sermons, and then let him confess that it was the sword of the tongue that first drew and unsheathed the other.

He that would hear an invective against the ministry, let him not go to a tavern, to a camp, or to an exchange, but let him repair rather to a church. And when his occasions shall carry him to the market-town, to furnish himself with other commodities, if he would be furnished also with a stock of arguments against loyalty and the church, let him leave the market-place a while, and step aside into the lecture.

2. Their second way of fighting against the officers of the church will be by railing and libels. I may seem to commit an absurdity, I confess, in making this a different head from their preaching and praying. But, considering that they speak from the press as well as from the pulpit, and in other places besides the church, we must admit of this distinction.

And for this way of opposition, by virulent, unseemly language, odious terms, and vilifying words, none ever improved their talent to such an height of perfection.

The reverend fathers of the church were the chief mark at which their virulence was levelled: and for these, the more moderate of their opposers were contented to call them by no worse names than *whited walls, hypocrites, painted sepulchres, scribes and Pharisees, implacable enemies of godliness, limbs of Antichrist, retainers to the whore of Babylon*. But others, who had a greater measure of this gift, bestowed upon them higher titles, as, *devils incarnate, murderers of souls, dumb dogs*; and some, that would tip their virulence with more than ordinary wit, have thought fit to call them *dumb dogs that could only bark at God's people*.

I could give you a larger catalogue of these gentle, pious, Christian expressions, used by the brotherhood in queen Elizabeth's days; though since much augmented with several additions and enlargements never before extant, by their worthy successors and true posterity; persons, whose mouths are too foul to be cleansed, and too broad to be stopped.

But they are in nothing so copious and eloquent, as when they amplify and declaim upon that old, beaten, misapplied theme of persecution. Which charge, if true, yet they, of

all men living, were the most unfit to make it. But I shall not busy my self to confute, much less to retaliate their aspersion.

3. In the third and last place, they may oppose the governors and government of the church by open force; and this is fighting indeed; but yet the genuine, natural consequent of the other: he that rails, having opportunity, would rebel; for it is the same malice in a various posture, in a different way of eruption; and as he that rebels shows what he can do, so he that rails does as really demonstrate what he would do.

The reason of the thing itself does evince this, and, what is yet a greater reason, experience; and he that will not believe what he has felt, nor credit the experience of twenty years, deserves to undergo it for twenty years more.

As the trumpet gives an alarm to the battle, so bold invectives do as certainly alarm the trumpet; it is the same breath by which men utter the one and blow the other.

What insurrections, what attempts, what tumults they may make, we know not; but we know their principles, and we have sufficiently seen them illustrated in their practices; and therefore from what has been done, do but rationally collect what may.

We have heard much of the *power of godliness*, by which indeed is meant only the godly party being in power; and the godly party with them are those who have sworn the destruction of monarchy and of the church, and have bewitched the people with a fardle of strange, canting, insignificant words.

And let men know, that, notwithstanding the disguise of a whining expression and a demure face, there is no sort of men breathing who taste blood with so good a relish, and who, having the power of the sword to second their *power of godliness*, would wade deeper in the slaughter of their brethren, and with the most savage, implacable violence, tumble all into confusion, ruin, and desolation.

The quicksilver of Geneva is a thing of a violent operation, and cannot lie still long, but it will force its vent through the bowels of a nation; and God grant, that it may be thoroughly purged out, before it becomes mortal and incurable: and give us the defence of a prudent jealousy, to beware of those whose loyalty and submission lies only in their want of occasion.

We have now despatched the two first things considerable in the text; in which, as in a set battle, we have seen the armour and preparations of defence in the first place, and the assault and opposition in the second. It remains now,

III. That, as in all fights, we see the issue and success, which is exhibited to us in these words; *but they shall not prevail against thee*.

It is a bold venture to foretell things future, be cause it is infamous to lie under the shame of a mistaken prediction, and some, if they had prophesied less, perhaps would have preached better.

Things future fall under human cognizance only these two ways:

1. By a foresight of them in their causes.

2. By divine revelation.

For the first of these, moral causes will afford but a moral certainty; but so far as the light of this shines, it gives us a good prospect into our future success.

For which is most likely to prevail, a force marshalled into order, or disranked and scattered into confusion? A force united and compacted with the strength of agreement, or a force shrivelled into parties, and crumbled into infinite subdivisions? A government confirmed by age, and rooted by antiquity, and withal complying with the conveniences of society, or a government sprung up but yesterday, and yet become intolerable to day; having the rigour, without the order of discipline; like a rod or twig, both for its smart and also for its weakness?

But besides the arguments of reason, we have the surer ground of divine revelation. God has engaged his assistance, made himself a party, and obliged his omnipotence as a second in the cause: *I am with thee to save thee and deliver thee, saith the Lord.* We have something more to plead than God's providence, their old heathenish argument.

We have his word for our rule, and his promise for our support. He that undertakes God's work, may, by a legitimacy of claim, challenge his assistance.

Yet neither are we destitute of arguments from providence, so far as they may be pleaded. For has God, by a miracle, raised a church from the dead, only to make it capable of a second destruction? has he buoyed it up from the gulfs and quicksands of faction and sacrilege, only to split it upon the rocks of a new rebellion? Has he scattered those mists of delusion, discovered the cheat of a long, religious fallacy, and so strangely opened men's eyes, that he may more strangely put them out again? Or will Christ invert the order of his works, and having cured us, do another miracle only to make us blind?

No certainly; for as God does not create but with a design to preserve, so he does not deliver but with a purpose to defend.

But you will say, Does not our own late experience stare us in the face, and confute this assertion? For has not the church been exposed to the lust, fury, and rapine of her adversaries? Have they not prevailed and trampled upon her? Have they not ruined, reformed, and torn her in pieces as they pleased? And what assurance have we, that what has been done already may not be done again? And then what will become of the truth of this, *they shall not prevail against thee?*

To this I answer two things, with which I shall conclude.

1. That even those enemies of the church, in the late dismal swing of confusion, did not prevail against her. For that only is a prevailing, that is a final conquest.

But this was only a cloud that hindered the sun shine for a while, but did not put out the sun. A veil drawn over the church's face, not to extinguish her beauty, but to hide it for a time. In short, it was only an interruption, not an abolition of her happiness.

2. But secondly, I add, that he who is pillaged or murdered in the resolute performance of his duty, is not properly prevailed against.

It has been a constant tradition of the church, that Jeremy himself, to whom this very promise was made, was barbarously knocked o' the head and killed in Egypt for his impartial prophesying; yet still this promise was the word of God, and therefore doubtless could not fall to the ground, however the prophet might.

There is a great deal of difference between a murder and a conquest.

So that should God again let loose the reins to the former tyranny; should he once more give the sword to faction, ignorance, and discontent, and arm the diabolical legion that lately possessed us, and has been since cast out; should he commission all this rabble to harass and run down the nation with plunders, bloodshed, covenants, and sequestrations; yet still God will verify these words to every faithful, courageous officer in his church, *they shall not prevail against thee.*

Such an one may be plundered indeed, and yet not undone; he may be sequestered, imprisoned, yea, and slain, and yet, according to the soberest judgment of reason, not conquered.

Some may now think that the work of this exercise is not discharged, unless directions are given for the management of the episcopal office; but I persuade myself, that our government advances none to this office, but such as are able to direct themselves. However I, for my part, had rather promise obedience, than proffer counsel to my superiors.

The business I undertook was to speak encouragement to those that shall sit at the stern of the church in such a discouraging age, and to tell them, that God will make them *fenced brazen walls*. And he that strikes at a wall of brass may maul his own hands, but neither shake nor demolish that.

Wherefore, let the furies of a new confusion break forth, let the spiritual trumpets sound another march to rebellion, and the pulpit drums beat up for volunteers for the Devil, and threaten the church once more.

Yet the governors of it may here take sanctuary in the text; and, with confidence from hence, be speak their opposers.

Who shall *fight against us*? it is God that *saves*. Who shall *destroy*? it is the same God that *delivers*.

To which God, fearful in praises, and working wonders, 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 V.

TITUS i. 1.

Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.

IN the last words of this verse, about which only our present discourse shall be concerned, we have a full though compendious account of the nature of the gospel, ennobled by two excellent qualities. One, the end of all philosophical inquiries, which is *truth*; the other, the design of all religious institutions, which is *godliness*; both united, and as it were blended together in the constitution of Christianity.

Those who discourse metaphysically of the nature of truth, as to the reality of the thing, affirm a perfect coincidence between truth and goodness; and I believe it might be easily made out, that there is nothing in nature perfectly true, but what is also really good. For although it is not to be denied, that true propositions may be framed of things in themselves evil, yet still it is certain that the truth of those propositions is good. Nothing so bad as the Devil, or worse than a liar; yet this affirmation, that *the Devil is a liar*, is hugely true and very good.

It would be endless to strike forth into the eulogies of truth; for as we know it was the adored prize for which the sublimest wits in the world have always run, and sacrificed their time, their health, their lives, to the acquit of it; so let it suffice us to say here, that as reason is the great rule of man's nature, so truth is the great regulator of reason.

I. Now in this expression of the gospel's being *the truth which is after godliness*, these three things are couched.

1. That it is simply a truth.
2. That it is an operative truth.
3. That it is operative to the best of effects, which is godliness.

And first for the first of these; it is a truth, and upon that account dares look its most inquisitive adversaries in the face. The most intricate and mysterious passages in it are vouched by an infinite veracity; and truth is truth, though clothed in riddles, and surrounded with darkness and obscurity: as the sun has still the same native, inherent brightness, though wrapt up in a cloud.

Even those transcendent enigmas of the Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, and the resurrection of the dead, they all challenge our assent upon the score of their truth. And that three is one and one three, is altogether as true as that three is three, though far from being so plain. It is hard indeed to conceive a reparation of the same numerical body having been transformed by so many changes, yet we have the divine word for it; and death itself is not more sure, than that men shall rise from the dead.



Now the gospel being a truth, it follows yet further, that if we run through the whole catalogue of its principles, nothing can be drawn from thence, by legitimate and certain consequence, but what is also true. It is impossible for truth to afford any thing but truth. Every such principle begets a consequence after its own likeness.

2. The next advance of the gospel's excellency is, that it is such a truth as is operative. It does not terminate in notion, or rest in bare, unactive speculation, but from the head it shoots forth into the hand, and sets all the faculties of our nature at work. It does not dwell in the mind like furniture, only for ornament, but for use, and the great concernments of life. Most sorts of human knowledge are like the treasures of a covetous man, got with labour and much industry; and being got, they lie locked up and wholly unemployed: and indeed the very nature of them abstracts from practice. The knowledge of astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, music, and the like, they may fill the mind, and yet never step forth into one experiment; but the knowledge of the divine truths of Christianity is quick and restless, like an imprisoned flame, which will be sure to force its passage, and to display its brightness.

3. The third and highest degree of its perfection is, that it is not only operative, but also operative to the best of purposes, which is to godliness: it carries on a design for heaven and eternity. Some things are indeed active, but the design of their action is trivial, cheap, and contemptible; so that, in effect, it is no more than a sedulous and a laborious doing of nothing; which kind of actions, should they be arrested with that question, *Cui bono?* the vanity of such performances would quickly appear, that they were but a shooting without any aim, a raising of a bubble, and a pursuing of the wind. Every thing is ennobled by its design; and an action is advanced in its worth, when it drives at an object grand and necessary; [John xvii. 3](#), *This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and whom thou hast sent, Christ Jesus*. It serves the two greatest interests in the world, which are the glory of the Creator and the salvation of the creature; and this the gospel does by being *the truth which is after godliness*.

Which words may admit of a double sense.

1. That the gospel is so called, because it actually produces the effects of godliness in those that embrace and profess it. 2. That it is directly improvable into such consequences and deductions, as have in them a natural fitness, if complied with, to engage the practice of mankind in such a course.

In the former of these senses, the gospel cannot universally sustain this appellation; forasmuch as in many hearts it is no sooner conceived but it proves abortive; and like the seed falling upon stony ground, it is choked by the thorns of cares and lusts, and other corruptions growing up and hindering it, so that it never brings forth fruit to perfection. Many entertain principles which they defy by their practices, and unlive all that they have believed; so that that which was intended for the cure of sin, by accident becomes its aggravation. Wherefore the latter sense only can take place here; that is, that the gospel, in its nature, is



the most apt and proper instrument of holiness in the world, the most naturally productive of holy living and a pious conversation; unless a man prevaricates with the articles of his faith, runs counter to his profession, and acts contradictions.

Now the truth that we have declared to have thus an influence upon godliness, consists in these two things.

1. A right notion of God.
2. A right notion of what concerns the duty of man.

These two are the foundations of all sound and rational piety; and as it is a matter of great moment, so it is also of great difficulty, so to assert and state each of these, both in their just latitude, and yet within their due limits, that one may not in trench upon or evacuate the other.

It highly concerns us so to discourse of God in the matter of religion, that his prerogative of being the first cause of all things, and both the author and finisher of man's salvation, be not infringed by such assertions as of necessity infer the contrary. And yet, on the other side, this prerogative of God is to be defended with such sobriety, as not in the mean time to leave the creature no scope of duty, or to render all exhortations and threatenings, and other helps of action, absurd and superfluous. The difficulty of doing right to both which, appears from this; that those who endeavour to assert one, usually encroach upon the other.

As for instance; some of those who manage the defence of God's prerogative in being the first cause of all things, and sovereign author of our salvation, assert that the creature never advances into action, but by an irresistible predetermination of the faculty to that action; upon the presence of which predetermination the faculty cannot but act, and upon the absence or defect of which, it cannot possibly move or determine itself. And then, over and above this predetermination, they assert a concurrence of God to that action of the power or faculty, perfectly the same with that action. Which assertions, in spite of all qualifications of them, leave it unapprehensible what place can reasonably be left for addressing exhortations to the will, when it is not at all in its power to proceed to the performance of the thing to which it is exhorted, but solely in the power of him that exhorts.

On the contrary; those who would redeem the will from this inactivity, usually extend the freedom of it to that compass, as to make God a mere stander by in the great business of the soul's salvation; it being at the courtesy of the will's choice and acceptance, whether all that God does towards the saving of a man shall, in the issue, become effectual or not effectual to that purpose. Such will not allow any thing to be liberty of will, but a perfect equilibrium and indifferency of choice as to good or evil; which for papists to assert, who in this assertion lay the foundation of their pretended merits, is no wonder; but why protestants should be so fond of it, I see no reason: for that this indifferency to good and evil is not of the intrinsic nature and essence of the will's liberty, is clear from this; that then the saints, who are confirmed in the love of God and goodness, so that they cannot sin, or choose



that which is evil, could not be said to love God freely; nor the devils to sin freely, for they cannot choose but sin; nor Christ to have done actions of holiness freely, for he could not do otherwise. Besides that the supposition of original sin, and the total depravation of man's nature, renders such a liberty in those that are not renewed by baptism strangely absurd; for it is an apparent making of a corrupt tree to bring forth good fruit.

But you will say, that this nullifies all exhortations to piety; since a man in this case cannot totally come up to the thing he is exhorted to. But to this I answer, that the consequence does not hold: for an exhortation is not frustrate, if a man be but able to come up to it partially, though not entirely and perfectly. As, take a man under the original depravation of nature; though in this condition he cannot avoid all sin, both as to the matter and manner of the action, yet there is no particular sin but he may forbear; though the imperfection and obliquity of the end or motive inducing him so to forbear it, makes the manner of that forbearance not wholly void of fault. A man unregenerate, and unrenewed by grace, may choose whether he will be drunk, fornicate, or swear; but it is not in his power to be acted to these forbearances, out of a love to God, to piety, or virtue; and yet if they proceed not from such a principle, such forbearances are, in the sight of God, but faulty and imperfect.

I am not ignorant, that in giving an account of these matters there is a knot on both sides; and that, upon a nice screwing of consequences, not easily to be resolved; yet surely it concerns us so to discourse of these points in general, as neither to clip the divine prerogative, nor yet, on the other hand, to tie up the creature so, as to undermine duty by taking away the energy of precepts, threatenings, and exhortations.

II. To proceed therefore. There are three things that I shall deduce from this description of the gospel's being the truth according to godliness.

1. That the nature and prime essential design of religion is to be an instrument of good life, by administering arguments and motives inducing to it.

2. That so much knowledge of truth as is sufficient to engage men's lives in the practice of godliness, serves the necessary ends of religion.

For I shew, if godliness were the design, it ought also, by consequence, to be the measure of men's knowledge in this particular.

3. That whatsoever doth in itself or its direct consequences undermine the motives of a good life, is contrary to and destructive of Christian religion.

1. That the nature and prime essential design of religion is to be an instrument of good life, by administering arguments and motives inducing to it.

It were to be wished, that to produce reasons and proofs for such a proposition were wholly needless and vain; yet since the capricious and fantastic notions of some men have made it much otherwise, I shall endeavour to clear up the assertion I have laid down by these arguments.

1. The first is, because religion designs the service of God, by gaining over to his obedience that which is most excellent in man, and that is, the actions of his life, and continual converse. That these are the most considerable is clear from hence; because all other actions naturally proceed in a subserviency to these. As the actions of a man's understanding, directing, and of his will commanding, they are all designed for the regulation of his constant behaviour; and that which is the end to which other things are designed, is, as such, more excellent than those things designed to that end.

2. The design of religion is man's salvation: but men are not saved as they are more knowing or assent to more propositions, but as they are more pious than others. Practice is the thing that sanctifies knowledge; and faith without works expires, and becomes a dead thing, a carcass, and consequently noisome to God; who, even to those who know the best things, pronounces no blessing till they do them. Upon this ground it is, that when a man would gather some comfortable assurance of his future estate, he does not seek for evidences from his knowledge, and the boldness of his belief, but from his godliness, and the several instances of an holy life, the only infallible demonstration of a sincere heart; otherwise, it is probable that hell is paved with the heads of the knowing and the wicked, and the catalogue of the damned made up of such as knew their master's will, and did it not.

3. A third argument is from hence, that the discriminating excellency of Christianity consists not so much in this, that it discovers more sublime truths, or indeed more excellent precepts than philosophy, (though it does this also,) as that it suggests more efficacious arguments to enforce the performance of those precepts, than any other religion or institution whatsoever. Compare the precepts of Pythagoras, of the stoics, and of Christian religion: Does Christian religion commend piety towards God, and justice to our neighbour? Does it arraign vicious affections and corrupt desires? So do they. Wherein then has it the preeminence? Why in this; that after they had taught the world their duty, what they were to do, and what not to do, they had no arguments prevalent with the nature of men, above their contrary propensions, to bind them over to such practices.

But Christianity has backed all its precepts with eternal life and eternal death to the performers or neglecters of them; whereas philosophy could do nothing, but by taking in the assistance of fabulous stories, or by telling men, that virtue was a sufficient reward to itself; which, upon all experience, has been found an argument infinitely short, and unable to bear up the practices of men, contrary to the soli citations of their opposite, impetuous corruptions.

4. The fourth and last argument is from this; that notwithstanding the diversity of religions in the world, yet men hereafter will generally be condemned for the same things; that is, for their breaches of morality. Men shall be condemned for being false, lustful, injurious, profane, *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*, and the like. But these are the sins of all nations, and are universally found in the profession of all religions.



It is confessed there shall be an accession to men's guilt, and more or less fuel added to their torments, according as the religion they lived under administered to them clearer or obscurer notions of duty, and more or less pregnant instructions to the exercise of piety; otherwise, men shall not so much be condemned for not believing of riddles and hard sentences, as for not practising of plain duties: for this is that which religion drives at; not to subtilize men's conceptions, but to rectify their manners.

And these are briefly my reasons for the first deduction from the words, namely, that the nature and prime essential design of religion is to be an instrument of good life, by administering arguments and motives inducing to it.

2. A second inference from the gospel's being the truth according to godliness is this.

That so much knowledge of truth as is sufficient to engage men's lives in the practice of godliness, serves the necessary ends of religion; for if godliness be the design, it ought also, by consequence, to be the measure of men's knowledge in this particular: which consideration, well and duly improved, would discover how needless it is, to say no more, that ignorant people should be let loose to read and judge of writings that they do not understand. The principles of Christianity, briefly and catechistically taught them, is enough to save their souls; but, on the other hand, they may read themselves into such opinions and persuasions, as may at length destroy a government, and fire a whole kingdom: and for this I shall not seek for arguments, after experience.

3. The third and great consequence, from the gospel's being the truth according to godliness, shall be this.

That whatsoever does in itself, or its direct consequences, undermine the motives of a good life, is contrary to and destructive of Christian religion.

Now the doctrines that more immediately concern a good life are reducible to these three heads.

1. Such as concern the justification of a sinner.
2. Such as concern the rule of manners.
3. And such as concern repentance.

All which things are such vital ingredients of religion, that an error in any of them is like poison in a fountain, which must certainly convey death and contagion to every one that shall taste the streams. It will be of some moment therefore to bring the doctrines that lie under these several heads to a particular examination, that so, having a distinct view of life and death before us, we may both secure our choice and direct our practice.

First of all then, concerning the justification of a sinner. The great business that we have in this world, is to endeavour to be saved, and the means to that is to be justified. This, therefore, is the great mark at which all our actions are to be levelled, the great prize for which we run: and, consequently, if it is not stated and proposed to us upon such terms as shall employ and call forth the utmost attempts of the soul, the nerves of piety are cut, and

obedience is overlaid by taking away its necessity. How this may be done, let us take a brief survey.

1. First then, that doctrine that holds that the covenant of grace is not established upon conditions, and that nothing of performance is required on man's part to give him an interest in it, but only to believe that he is justified; this certainly subverts all the motives of a good life. But this is the doctrine of the antinomians: and the foundation of this they have laid in another wild, erroneous assertion, that every believer was actually justified from eternity, and that his faith is only a declaration of this to his conscience, but no ways effective of any alteration of his state or condition. Justified in the sight of God he was before his belief, but his belief at length gives him the knowledge of it; and so makes him not more safe, but more confident than he was before.

But certainly this inevitably takes away the necessity of godliness: for it asserts that a sinner, and an ungodly person, while such, may stand justified before God. For the better understanding of which we must observe, that a man may be said to be a sinner in a double respect: 1. In respect of the law, as having not continued in all things written in the law, to do them. 2. In respect of the gospel, as having not believed and repented; which are the terms upon which, through Christ, we are accepted as righteous.

As for the former of these respects, all men are sinners upon a legal score, as not having performed an entire, indefective, legal obedience. But in the latter sense, upon evangelical allowances, a man that believes is not counted to be in a state of sin, though legally he is.

Now the forementioned doctrine allows justification to these sinners also; for if a man is actually and perfectly justified from all eternity, whereas he comes but in some period of his life to believe and repent, does it not invincibly follow, that he was justified before that belief and repentance; and, consequently, while he was under an estate of unbelief and impenitence? which assertion is the very bane of all piety and gospel obedience. It dashes all industry in the ways of holiness, lodges a man's hands in his bosom, and renders a pious life superfluous and precarious.

2. That doctrine that teaches that a man may be accepted with God for the righteousness and merits of other saints, poisons and perverts the nature of justification, so as to render it utterly ineffectual to engage men in a course of godliness. For if there is a treasury of good works and merits deposited in the custody of the church, and to be dispensed by her to whom she pleases, for all the purposes of salvation, a man need not be rich in good works of his own, provided he be rich enough in money to purchase himself a propriety in those of other men. So that it is not a good life, but a good purse that is necessary to the justification of a sinner: yet upon such wretched doctrines as these is built one of the most externally glorious fabrics that the world has yet seen.

But it will be objected, perhaps, that the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ does equally evacuate all motives to a good life; for if his righteousness, which is infinitely

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perfect and exact, be imputed to us, what need we produce any of our own? To this I answer, that the reason is not the same. For though the righteousness of Christ be imputed to us, yet it renders not a good life on our part needless, since this is made the very condition of that imputation. That is, if we fill the measures of sincerity, in doing the utmost that we are able, Christ's righteousness shall be imputed to us for justification, notwithstanding our failing in many things, which, by reason of the infirmities of our nature, we have not done. Thus, therefore, the imputation of Christ's righteousness is suspended upon a man's own personal righteousness, as its necessary antecedent condition.

But now it is otherwise in the imputation of the merits of the saints to any man, since this cannot proceed upon any such condition of personal obedience on his part. For thus the argument against it will run: either that man does the utmost that he is able, and lives as well as he can, according to the terms of angelical sincerity, or he does not; if he does, then what need can he have of the righteousness and merits of the saints, who themselves were able to do no more while they lived in the flesh? But if he does not acquit himself in an holy life, and it be admitted that the righteousness of the saints may supply such a defect, so as to render the man accepted before God; is it not as clear as the sun, that by this means the sinner is discharged from pressing after godliness, as necessary to his justification? For it seems he may want it, and yet, for all that, have his business done to his hand.

How much the great God has been dishonoured, and how many poor souls have been murdered, by such assertions as these, is sad to consider: for they have been abused into a confidence in, and reliance upon, such supports; which, in the invaluable concernments of eternity, have deceived and given them the slip, and let them fall without remedy into the bottomless gulf of endless perdition. God amend or rebuke such pernicious impostors.

In the next place, let us consider the doctrines that relate to the rule of life and manners, which is the law of God.

1. First then, that doctrine that exempts all believers from the obligation of the moral law is directly destructive of all godliness; which doctrine is taught and asserted by the anti-nomians, who from thence derive that name, as being opposers of the law. But now, if there be no obligation upon men to the duties of the moral law, how can it be necessary for them to perform any such duties? and consequently the command of loving God with all their strength and all their soul, of not worshipping images, of not dishonouring God's name, of obeying parents, of not committing murder and adultery, and the like, concerns not these persons. But if this be their opinion, it is well that they are not able to escape the force of human laws, as they do the obligation of the divine.

I confess the apostle Paul oftentimes opposes *the law to grace*, and affirms of believers, that they are *not under the law*, but *under grace*. But what does he mean by these expressions? why his meaning is founded upon a twofold acceptance of the law.



1. That it may be taken as a covenant conveying life upon absolute, entire, indefective obedience, and awarding death to those who fail in the least iota or punctilio.

2. It may be taken as a rule of life and a transcript of the duty of man.

Now it is in the former sense only that believers are not under the law; for if they were, they could not possibly be saved, since all men have sinned; and the law, as a covenant, promises life only upon the terms of such an exact obedience, as excludes all sin. But the covenant of grace, under which believers are, promises life upon condition of such obedience as is sincere, though legally imperfect: that is, such an one as is not absolutely exclusive of all sin, but only of the reign, and power, and dominion of sin.

Yet all this does not loose them from the obligation of the law as it is a rule of life, to which they are to conform their actions. The law tells believers what they are to do, and withal obliges them to do it; but what measure of obedience will be accepted of a man, in order to his salvation, that is determined not by this rule, but by the covenant of grace declared in the gospel; which, upon the account of Christ's merits, pardons and dispenses with many deviations from that strict rule, and condemns for none, but such as are inconsistent with a state of sincerity.

The forementioned persons, who cashier this obligation of the law also, and admit it for not so much as a rule, resigning themselves up to the sole conduct of their own heart, which they call *the spirit*; these, I say, as needs they must, assert also, that believers cannot sin: for since sin is a transgression of a law, it roundly follows, that those who are obliged to no law can be guilty of no transgression.

But this doctrine is so broadly impious, that it does not undermine a good life, but directly blow it down. And therefore I shall only say this of the abettors of it, that those who can own themselves to be without *sin*, demonstrate themselves to be without *shame*.

2. That doctrine which asserts any sin to be in its nature venial, that is, such as God cannot in justice punish with damnation, tends to subvert a good life: but the doctrine of the church of Rome asserts this; and lays the foundation of this assertion in a distinction between works done *against the law*, and works done *beside the law*. Now they say a thing is done *beside the law*, when though it is a deviation from the law, yet it is not contrary to the end of the law, which is love to God, but very fairly consistent with it: that is, though a man does such and such things, yet the doing of them ejects not the love of God out of his heart, and so long the design and purpose of the law is served and complied with, notwithstanding all such diminutive transgressions.

But this discourse is very weak and impertinent. For when they say, that some actions destroy not the creature's love to God, and so are only *beside the law*, as not overthrowing the *end* of it; they either understand that those actions destroy not that love as to the habit, or the act. If they intend the former, they speak nothing to the purpose; for an action may be sinful, and yet not drive the principle of habitual love to God out of the soul; forasmuch

as an habit is not destroyed by every contrary action: as a man may be habitually holy, and yet sometimes be surprised with the commission of unholy actions; and as to the main, a wise man, though possibly he may have spoke or done some things in his life unwisely. But however, neither the holiness of one, or the wisdom of the other, makes an unholy or unwise action to be upon that account holy or wise.

But if, on the other side, they assert, that these kind of sins interrupt not the actual exercise of the creature's love to God, they will prove that which I believe was never yet proved; namely, that it is possible for a man, in one and the same action, to deviate from the law of God, and yet to exert an act of love towards him; which indeed amounts to a plain contradiction: for since to love God is to perform his commands, if we assert that that love is not for the present hindered or intermitted by some transgressions of those commands, does it not clearly follow, that a man may perform the command, and yet transgress it at the same time and in the very same action?

But it is not directly my business to insist here upon the absurdity of this doctrine, but to demonstrate the impiety of it, so far as it tends to abate men's endeavours in the pursuit of a stricter course of holiness; which surely it does with a very great and pernicious efficacy. For if men can pervert their judgments so, as to look upon some deviations from the law of God, the great rule of life, as no sins, taking sin strictly and properly, they will proceed to a general undervaluation of the nature of sin; and, keeping a due proportion, if small sins must pass for no sins, the greatest sins must lose many degrees of their greatness. The heart of man will insensibly be wrought upon to make a sport of sin, and to trifle with two the most dreadful things in the world, a strict law and an infinite justice.

But there are no two things that seem to bear so great a resemblance one to another, as the state of the Christian church perverted by the doctors of the church of Rome, and the state of the Jewish church corrupted by the glosses and doctrines of the Pharisees. For as the Romists hold fast the distinction of mortal and venial sins; so the Pharisees, with the same result, distinguished of the divine precepts and commandments, that some were *great*, that is, necessary to be observed, and some *small*, that is, such as did not bind the conscience with so strict an obligation, but that the violation of them might, with a very fair comportment with the divine justice, be dispensed with. And it is with direct allusion to this distinction of theirs, that our Saviour speaks in [Matt. v. 19](#), *Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men to do so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven*; that is, in the Hebrew dialect, he shall have nothing to do there at all; least being here not only a term of diminution, but of absolute negation.

The meaning and design of those words was Christ's clearing himself from the common imputation that the scribes and pharisees loaded him with, of being an underminer of the law of Moses. As if he had said, I am so far from having an intent to destroy or untie the binding force of the law, that I enforce a stricter observation of it than those that make this

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charge against me. For whereas they teach that some of the divine commandments are to be reputed *little*, and such as men are not bound to the strict observance of; I on the contrary affirm, that there are no such *little* commands, (as they call them,) but that the very least of them obliges so indispensably, that the violation and neglect of it will, without repentance, exclude from heaven, and bind over to damnation.

And no question, but, were he now amongst us, he would rebuke the modern Pharisees, and patrons of venial sins, in the same manner; who, by that unhallowed distinction, have lopped off a large proportion of that obliging force that belongs to every divine precept, and so in effect have made the law itself faulty and defective; not obliging where men are pleased not to be obliged; and making that to be no duty, which licentious persons are unwilling should be so. Indeed he that sins against the law is bad enough, but he that makes even the law to sin, that he may discharge himself, is incurable and in sufferable.



SERMON VI.

TITUS i. 1.

—*The acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.*

3. THAT doctrine that asserts, that it is in men's power to supererogate, and to do works of perfection over and above what is required of them by way of precept, tends to the undermining and hinderance of a godly life. Works of evangelical perfection or supererogation are defined, such as a man may without sin not do, but, if he does them, they entitle him to a greater reward. Which assertion carries along with it this visible impiety, that a man is not obliged to do the utmost, in the way of holiness, that he can; for the law is the measure of men's obligation, and no man is obliged to any thing as his duty, but what the law obliges him to: but if it is in his power to do some sublime works of holiness, over and above what the law exacts of him, it clearly follows, that without sin he may omit the doing of them; for where there is no law there is no sin: and here we suppose the obligation of the law not to extend thus far.

Now surely there can be no greater a stop to an active endeavour, than to state the proportions of men's duty less than the proportions of their strength and ability; and to assure them, that they do all that is necessary for them to do, though they do much less than they are able. It seems by this, that God does not call for all their strength and all their souls, but they have great reserves of both left entirely in their own disposal; nay, and those of much greater worth and excellence than what the law demands from them; since the doing of these advances them to an higher perfection, and prepares for them a greater and a brighter crown than all the rest of their obedience.

But if this were so, how shall we make out the sense of those precepts that command us *to strive to enter in at the strait gate; and to press forward to the mark of the prize of the high calling; and to use our utmost diligence to make our calling and election sure; that having done all, we may be able to stand;* and the like. Certainly these are expressions that stretch endeavours to the highest, and determine in no less compass than the whole that a man by all the powers and faculties of his soul can perform.

Nor can it avail the persons that we contend with to reply, that God vouchsafes us those assistances of grace, that are able to bear men beyond the lines of mere duty; for the dispensations of grace would, upon these terms, put us into the same condition of perfection, that we are to expect only in a state of glory. Grace indeed extinguishes the reign of sin, but it does not wholly extirpate the inherence of it as to all the remainders. It makes a man that he will not devote and give himself over to the practice of sin, but it does not wholly rescue him from the surprise of many infirmities.



And were not these men fuller of pride than perfection, and more Pharisees than Christians, they would acknowledge so much, and let down those gaudy plumes of their high pretences of a double refined sanctity, upon the sight of their black feet and polluted goings. For surely they have not yet convinced the world of the feasibility and truth of their propositions, by any manifest transcriptions of them upon their lives. But can these doctors style themselves angelical from any thing that they do, what soever they are pleased to teach? I cannot see but that a friar or a Jesuit is subject to the same passions and irregular motions that other men are. Nor can I perceive that their lives proceed in such a super natural strictness, and transcendence of piety, above the rest of the world. They should do well to prove their doctrines of perfection by instance and example; and to demonstrate that a thing may be done, by shewing that actually it has been done: but if they cannot, they should first acquit themselves in point of duty, before they flourish it with their supererogations; and think of paying their debts, before they go about to purchase.

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Besides, to assert that the perfection, commanded by the law, is less than the perfection that the power of man can raise itself to, seems an high imputation upon God's wisdom and holiness, as he is a legislator; the design of which must needs be to work up the creature to the highest conformity to himself, that a created nature is capable of. But he that, in stead of stretching himself to the latitude of the law, contracts the law to his own measures, will find that God, when he comes to deal with him, will have recourse to his own rule, and not correct a true original by a false copy.

4. That doctrine that places it in the power of any mere mortal man to dispense with the laws of Christ, so as to discharge any man, in any case, from being obliged by them, is highly destructive of holy living: but so does the doctrine of the church of Rome, that vests such a dispensing power in the pope; by which they raise the pretended chair of St. Peter above the throne of Christ himself: for the sovereign power resides not so much in him that makes the law, as in him that is able to do with the law what he pleases when it is made, by either continuing or suspending the obligation of it. Christ indeed has given laws to his church; but when it is at the pope's pleasure, whether those laws shall oblige or not oblige, I leave it to the judgment of the meanest reason, who, in this case, must be accounted superior.

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The laws of men are dispensable, because the nature of them subjects them to the reason of dispensation; that is, because no human lawgiver is of that wisdom, as to provide against all future inconveniences in the constitution of laws, but that the observation of them may sometimes run men upon greater mischiefs, than the making of them was designed to prevent: but Christ was of that infinite wisdom and knowledge, as to enact laws of that universal compliance with all the conditions of man, that there can be no new, emergent inconvenience unforeseen by him, that should at any time make the obligation of them to cease.

It is possible indeed, that the law may cease to oblige, upon the removal or want of the matter of the obligation. As it is every man's duty to give alms; but if a man has nothing, he can give nothing: and to communicate is a duty, but if the materials of the sacrament, bread and wine, cannot be had, to communicate is impossible, and so no man can be obliged to it: but still, in all this, there is no dispensation with either of these laws; for the impossibility of their performance makes them, to such persons, under such circumstances, cease to be laws. But a law is then properly dispensed with, when it is capable of being obeyed; and the person capable of yielding such obedience to it is yet, by an intervenient power, discharged from his obligation to obey: the former case is like fire's not burning, when it has no fuel, or matter, to fasten or prey upon; the latter is like the fire's not burning the three children in the furnace, when both the fire was in full force, and also a proper combustible subject offered to it; but, by the interposal of a divine power, it was hindered from exerting that burning quality upon that subject. So here, the law is in full force, and the person under it in a capacity to do the thing commanded by it; but the pope tells him, that he shall not be obliged to it, he will dispense with him; and so the labour of obeying is saved.

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But since bold encroachments seldom venture themselves without pretences, it concerns us to see what reason the pope assigns for his exercising such a power over the laws of Christ. Why his spiritual janizaries, the schoolmen and casuists, tell us, that where the observation of any command is *impeditiva majoris boni*, a stop and hinderance of a greater good than the non-observance of it would occasion, there the pope has power to dispense with the observation of that command, and to discharge men from it.

As for instance: a man has bound himself with a lawful vow or oath, and accordingly proceeds to the execution of it; but the priest finds, that the greatness of their church would be considerably advantaged by this person's not observing his vow or oath, and accordingly persuades him to break it; but the man's conscience is solicitous and tender, and asks who shall warrant him in the breach of a lawful oath: hereupon the pope says that he will; and though the law of God and nature ties a man to the keeping of his oath, yet because the not keeping of it will minister to a greater good, namely, the advantage of the church, this is a sufficient reason for him to dispense with his oath: for answer to which, I would inquire, whether the command of keeping oaths and vows is not clear and express; and whether there can be any greater good, than to obey an express command of God. I demand also, supposing that the advancement of their church be indeed a greater good, yet, whether the intending of such a good can legitimate an action in its nature sinful? and whether the breach of a clear command be not such an one? When these questions receive a full and a satisfactory resolution, then may the conscience acquiesce in the pope's dispensation; but till then, it is safer to obey God in the precept, than man in the interpretation of it.

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And now, who is there that deserves the name of a Christian, whose heart does not rise against such horrid and impious usurpations upon the prerogative of Christ? such gross

and open methods of promoting the course of sin? If a command of Christ thwart that which the pope, in the behalf of his own interest, will judge a greater good, the command must stand back, and his dispensation take place. All such bands upon the conscience are like the withes, or the cords, upon Samson; they fly asunder like flax burnt with fire; they are of no force or efficacy at all. For as it is in the pope's power to dispense with a command, so it is also solely in his power to judge of the reason upon which he is to dispense with it; and we know that he is seldom the poorer for such dispensations.

The truth is, he exposes the precepts of Christ to sale, and he that will bid most for the breach of a command shall carry it: which is such an intrenching upon all the offices of Christ, such an impudent defiance of that supremacy of which he pretends to be the vicar and substitute, that it is apparent that St. Peter's pretended successor sells Christ's power, as much as ever Judas did his person. Here is the making merchandise of religion, and with that of souls: here is the groundwork of indulgences, the quick market for pardons, by which the gospel, from the law of liberty, is turned into the instrument of licence; and the sure asylum for such as would live sinners, and yet die saints.

And thus much for the doctrines that tend to the undermining of a pious life, by perverting the great rule of living, the law of Christ. I come now to the third sort, which,

III. Are those that relate to repentance.

This follows in order of nature; for after a law is broke, there is no recovery but by repentance; so that the depravation of the nature of this, is a sin against our last remedy; and he that, having transgressed the divine law, abuses his conscience with false rules of repentance, does like a man, that first by his intemperance brings himself into a disease, and then puts poison into his physic.

Now the doctrine about repentance may be perverted in a double respect.

1. In respect of the time of it.
2. In respect of the measure.

1. And first for the doctrine that states the time of repentance destructively to a pious life. And for this, it cannot but be very grievous and offensive to persons possessed with a real piety and sense of religion, to consider the assertions and positions of the Romish casuists touching this particular. Their answer to this question, When shall a sinner repent? is, in general, At any time whatsoever. Which indefinite assertion has by some been drawn out into particular determinate periods of time. As some affirm, that it is a man's duty to act repentance on the grand holydays, as Christmas, Whitsuntide, but especially at Easter. But others except against this as too severe, and say, that since God has not determined the time of repentance, we are to presume that the church also is so favourable as to leave it undetermined too: and therefore some blush not to state the matter thus; That the time in which a sinner is bound to repent, or to have contrition for his sins, is the article of imminent death,



whether natural or violent. In a word, they say a man is bound to repent of his sins *once*; but when that *once* shall be, he may determine as he shall think fit.

Before I come to examine these profane assertions, I shall carefully premise this observation; that in this whole matter we are by no means to confound the duty of repentance with the success or issue of repentance. For although it is not to be denied, that a man, having sinned, and afterwards defers his repentance for a long time, may yet, by the grace of God, repent savingly and effectually at last; yet this makes nothing for the proving that it was not that man's duty to have repented immediately upon the commission of his sin; and that every minute of such delay was not sinful. No man is to make the event of what he has done, the measure of what he ought to do. It is possible that a sinner may be converted, and turned to God, in the last year, or month, or perhaps day of his life; but, notwithstanding this, he sinned, in not being converted to God before.

This premised by way of answer to the Romish casuists, I reply, that that sentence of the church, "At what time soever a sinner repenteth him of his sins, God will blot out his iniquities from before him," speaks only of the consequent event and success of a true repentance, but determines nothing antecedently of the time in which that repentance is to be gin; which, in opposition to the foregoing blasphemies, we are undoubtedly to hold to be the very next instant after the commission of the sin: then is the time in which it is the duty of a sinner to repent; from that very moment there is an obligation upon him to recover himself by an hearty contrition and humiliation; and that I prove by this argument: Either a man is bound immediately to repent after he has sinned, or the impenitence remaining upon him in that subsequent portion of time is no sin; and if so, then, in case he should die in that time, he could not be chargeable before God for that impenitence. Chargeable indeed he would be for the sin he had committed; but for not repenting of that sin no charge could lie upon him. But this is an assertion of such barefaced, intolerable impiety, so directly contrary to the whole tenor of the gospel, that it can need no confutation.

However, it is worth considering, to see upon what ground our adversaries have built their assertion. And it is briefly this, that God obliges a sinner to repentance, not properly as to a duty, but as to a punishment; and being so, from the strength of this maxim, that nobody is bound in conscience to undergo a punishment till he is condemned; and adding withal, that the day of danger, or approaching death, seems to be this arraignment and condemnation of a sinner; then they conclude, that, for his own security, it is incumbent upon him to submit to the penalty of repentance.

But to this I answer, first, that this supposition, that repentance is properly a punishment, is, in a great measure, false. For repentance is properly the amendment of a man's life, and a passing from a state of sin to a state of holiness; but this is not a punishment, but a perfection and a privilege. It is indeed accompanied with afflictive actions, such as sorrow and remorse for past sins; but this is only by accident; because a man cannot recover himself to

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newness of life, without such sorrowful reflections upon what is past; otherwise, if amendment of life could be compassed without them, we should find that sorrow for sin was not the thing directly and chiefly intended in the precept of repentance.

It is clear therefore, that repentance is not properly a punishment; but whether it were so or no, that which was argued before from the nature of it, and the sinfulness of impenitence, sufficiently evinces that the practice of it is to be immediate: no man can without sin defer it till the morrow, any more than to the year after, or to that, than to his death. For the words being indefinite, respect not one time more than another, and therefore the determination of the time must be fetched from the nature of the duty commanded in these words; which, since it determines for the present, it ought presently to be put in practice.

Add to this, that every moment passing without repentance adds to the guilt and strength of sin unrepented of; which lies not idle or unactive, but fixes its possession deeper and deeper; the mind, by reflecting upon it with relish and complacency, grows into more intimate unions with it; so that, in effect, by the internal actions and approbations of the will, it is repeated and reacted without any external commission. There is nothing more absolutely destructive of the very designs of religion, than to stop a sinner in his return to God, by persuading his corrupt heart that he may prorogue that return with safety, and without any prejudice to his eternal concerns. Upon the best issue of things, it amounts to an exhortation to him to reap the pleasures of sin as long as he can; and then, at last, that he may not also reap the fruits of sin, to submit to repentance as a less evil, but not to choose it as a good. But whether he that has these notions of repentance is ever like to arrive to the truth of repentance, he alone knows, who knows whether he will give such an one another heart or no. The doctrine therefore of a deferred repentance is a mischievous and a devilish doctrine, and like to bring those that trust in it to the Devil.

2. The next pernicious error about repentance relates to the measure of it. And here we will suppose the Romish casuists to recede from the former error, and to be fully orthodox as to the time of repentance, and to enjoin it immediately. But then, what is the repentance that they enjoin? Is it such an one as changes the life and renews the heart? such an one as breaks the power and dominion of sin, and works an alteration in all the faculties and inclinations of the soul? No, this is too troublesome a task; they have a much shorter way: for unless they can put off their sins as easily as a man does his cloak, they had rather have them stay on. And therefore, placing the nature of repentance only in sorrow for sin, they distinguish this sorrow into two sorts: the first is contrition, which is a sorrow for sin conceived from the apprehension of its natural filth and contrariety to the pure nature of God; the other is attrition, which is any sorrow or remorse of the mind for sin conceived from the apprehension of the danger and misery like to be consequent upon it.

Now, though they enjoin the former, and recommend it, yet not as absolutely necessary to the forgiveness of sins: for they hold, that a man dying with attrition, that is, a less sorrow,

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and commenced upon lower motives than the love of God, if attended with confession to the priest, and absolution from him, shall undoubtedly be saved. An assertion of such high venom and malignity, that it even opens the floodgates to all wickedness, and confirms men in a resolved pursuit of their sin, by securing them a passport to heaven and happiness upon those easy terms, that it is scarce possible for the vilest of sinners but they must come up to.

For imagine a man, after threescore years' debauchery, laid at length upon his deathbed, without any hope of recovery, and then for the priest to ask him, whether he is not troubled for his sins, and whether he wishes not, that he had not committed those things that are like to pay him home with the wages of eternal death; the man, no doubt, under his present weariness of appetite and decay of body, can not be so much a stock, and unconcerned for himself, but that he can wish these things undone, of which he tastes no present pleasure, and for which he fears a future vengeance. Now if this, joined with their customary confession, shall be accounted by the priest a sufficient ground upon which to absolve him, and, upon his absolution, to warrant his salvation, I cannot see but that, upon this way of procedure, it is more difficult for a man to be damned than to be saved. For this whole act of attrition is not properly the sinner's being troubled that he has sinned, but that he is like to be damned for his sin; which for a man not to be troubled at, that carries human nature and sense about him, is impossible.

This therefore is short of that which is itself short of repentance; that is, it is short of real sorrow for sin: and sorrow for sin (whatsoever some may imagine) is not repentance. It is indeed a part, or rather an adjunct of it, there being no true repentance without sorrow. But repentance is properly a man's engaging in a new course of life; not a weeping for sins past, but a vigorous resistance and mortification of sin for the future. The contrary opinion has undoubtedly deceived many, and betrayed them into that place, where they are repenting too late of the errors of their former repentance. Let no man account himself to have repented, who has not changed his life. And as the apostle says of circumcision and uncircumcision, so say I here, that neither mourning for sin, or confession of it, avail any thing, but *a new creature*. And truly, he that will hope for life upon other terms, must do it by a new gospel.

And thus I have traversed those pestilential doctrines, that, like worms, He gnawing at the root of all godliness; doctrines, that only purvey for licentiousness. And I dare avouch, that, if these carry in them the true sense of Christian religion, a man may, with full and perfect compliance with the rules of Christianity, make as plentiful a provision for the gratification of his corrupt desires, as if he were a mere atheist or epicure. And therefore I wonder not that many pass from our church to the church of Rome; for being sick in conscience, and yet impatient to undergo the rigours of a thorough cure, they are willing to make up all with a skinning plaster, and to relieve their minds upon as easy terms as they can. And of this they cannot fail in the church of Rome, which has contrived her doctrine to a perfect agreement with all interests and dispositions: so that to frame and bend all dis-

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courses of divinity to the humours and corruptions of men, is with them religion, as with us it is, for the most part, accounted prudence.

I have now finished the third and last conclusion drawn from the words; namely, That whatsoever does in itself or its direct consequences undermine the motives of a good life, is contrary to and destructive of Christian religion.

The improvement of all that has been delivered shall lie in these two things.

1. To convince us how highly it concerns all, but especially the most knowing, to try the doctrines that they believe, and to let inquiry usher in faith.

It is noted of the Bereans, [Acts xvii. 11](#), as a sign of a generous and noble spirit, that they would search and sift the nature of the things that were delivered to them; for it is sifting that separates the flour from the bran, the precious from the vile. Error is a thing that does not always discover itself to the first view; it is often fair as well as deceitful; and therefore that understanding that will sell its assent to first appearances is in danger of the snare, and to mistake an imposture for an oracle. An error may look speciously in a principle, which will betray ugliness enough in the consequences. It may be honey in the mouth, and wormwood in the belly; delicious to the first apprehensions, but found destructive upon after inquiry and experiment.

He that embraces and believes a truth, if he does it without trial, owes the Tightness of his judgment not to understanding, but chance. But truth is too great a prize to be the reward of laziness. God never made it but for the trophy of a laborious and a searching intellect. No man can rationally build upon an implicit faith, that is, upon another's knowledge, but he that has given his name to that church, which allows a man to be saved by other men's righteousness. We are commanded *to try all things*; and therefore certainly that thing that is worth all the rest. In a word, since truth is the way to happiness, and since there is no promise of *finding* but to him that seeks; he that will not be at the trouble to *seek out the way*, does not deserve to *attain the end*.

2. As what has been delivered convinces us of the necessity of trying all doctrines; so it suggests also the sure marks by which we may try them.

1. As first negatively; it is not the pleasingness or suitableness of a doctrine to our tempers or interests, that can vouch it to be true. Men often times believe things to be so, because they would have them so; and the judgment is strangely induced to yield its assent to any assertion that shall gratify the affections. But my profit or my pleasure are very incompetent guides of my conscience; very unfit casuists to resolve questions. Truth is a thing that usually carries with it too great a severity to correspond with our pleasures. It lies in the rough paths of duty and difficulty, things wonderfully opposite to the delights of pleasure and sensuality, and made to please, not in themselves, but in their effects and consequences. No man thinks a thing too pleasant or too profitable; but many will hereafter find that some things are *too true*.



2. The commonness, and the general or long reception of a doctrine, is not a sufficient argument of the truth of it. This relies upon the former consideration, that the suitability of any doctrine does not evince it to be true; but it is certain, that doctrines are oftentimes generally received, because they are suitable, and serve an interest: witness most of those that are held in the church of Rome; they were introduced by fraud, and continued by force: for there is something of pleasure or profit in the bottom of almost every one of them.

But falsity does not cease to be falsity, by having the good fortune to be generally believed a truth; any more than a plague ceases to be a plague, by spreading itself over all places. It is indeed the more dangerous and formidable, and so may be more hardly conquered, but for the very same cause it is to be the more earnestly opposed.

Neither does long continuance sufficiently commend a doctrine; for it is possible that it may be no more than agedness of error, and no gray hairs can make that venerable. The impostures of Mahomet have lasted now a thousand years; and should they last a thousand more, they would be as false as they were at their first beginning. Age alters the circumstance, but not the nature of things.

3. It is not the godliness or virtue of the preacher or asserter of any doctrine, that is a sure mark of the truth of it; for godliness makes no man infallible. It is possible that a man may think a principle true or pious, which, in its consequences, may be false or impious; because he has not force of reason enough to discern all the conclusions into which a proposition may be improved.

It is the infelicity of truth, and the great hinderance both of science and religion, that the greatness or goodness of some persons should imprint the same authority upon their words. And error has never such an advantage to prevail and insinuate, as when it is propagated by a person of reputation for wisdom or piety. It has been observed, that most heretics have been such; by virtue whereof they have conveyed their poison to the world success fully. And our own schismatics took the same course; for had they not gained such an opinion for sanctity with the rout, they could not have countenanced and christened all those black villainies that were acted in the late rebellion.

But a doctrine is to be tried by its consequences; as a way is to be chosen or shunned, according as the end is to which it leads. It concerns every man to preserve his reason from fallacy and deception; and it makes no alteration of his case, that he was deceived by an authentic hand, any more than it is a comfort to a man dying by an infection, that he caught it of a great and honourable person.

But if a doctrine naturally tends to promote the fear of God in men's hearts, to engage them in the prosecution of virtuous courses, to persuade them to be sober, pious, temperate, charitable, and the like; it carries with it the mark and impress of the great eternal truth; and so is no more capable of being a lie, than a He is capable of being good; or than God, the fountain of truth and goodness, is capable of being contrary to himself.



SERMON VII.

PROVERBS xxix. 5.

A man that flattereth his neighbour, spreadeth a net for his feet.

HE that shall set himself to fight against a custom, will find that the match is not equal; and that by speaking against a generally received practice, he only treads the dry paths of duty, without any reward or recompence, but only to be slighted for his pains. But since neither custom nor credit must authorize a vice so far, as to set it out of the preacher's reach; surely an ill practice may be very safely and discreetly reprehended, while, in the mean time, persons are spared.

That which the text here offers for the subject of this discourse, is flattery; a thing condemned by the mouth of one who could very well judge, as being a king, and therefore experimentally acquainted with the ways and arts of flatterers; a sort of cattle that usually herd in the courts of princes and the houses of great persons.

The words of the text are so plain, that they can need no explication, and therefore I shall immediately fall upon the prosecution of the matter contained in them, which I shall manage under these three general heads.

I. I shall shew what flattery is, and wherein it does consist.

II. I shall shew the grounds and occasions of it on his part that is flattered.

III. I shall shew the ends and designs of it on his part that flatters.

I. And first for the first of these, what flattery is. It surely must be a very difficult thing to bring it under any certain description, the very nature and property of it being to put on all forms and shapes, according to the exigence of the occasion: as it is reported of a creature called a polypus, that it still assumes the exact colour of that thing to which it cleaves. And therefore he that would paint flattery must draw a picture of all colours, and frame an universal face, indifferent to any particular aspect whatsoever. But though we cannot reach all the varieties of it, we may yet endeavour to give some account of those general ways in which it does exercise and shew itself.

1. The first is the concealing or dissembling of the defects or vices of any person. Indeed to publish a man's defects to others is malice, but to declare them to himself is friendship and sincerity; for it is to awake him out of his sleep when his house is afire, and to tell him that he is under a distemper that may prove mortal, if not prevented by timely applications: but flattery is like that devil mentioned in the gospel, that is both *blind* and *dumb*; it will pretend not to see faults, and if it does, it will be sure not to reprove them; a temper of all others the most base, cruel, and unchristian: for it declares a man unconcerned in the misery and calamity of his brother, such an one as will not put himself to the expense of a word, to

recover a perishing soul from the mouth of ruin and damnation. It shews him to be void of compassion, the bond of converse and all society.

It is indeed, in the estimation of the world, accounted a piece of prudence, to let things go as they will, without interposing to interrupt or alter their course: and no question but if a man, according to our modern politics, makes himself the sole centre of all his actions, and thinks upon nothing but the improving and securing his private interest, it is the safest and most prudential course to stand still and say nothing, though he sees never so many destroying themselves round about him. But had the world heretofore acted by those principles that pass for prudence nowadays, perhaps it would not have stood so long as it has; for had no man espoused the cause of the public, nor thought himself at all obliged, upon the common accounts of humanity, to contribute to the good and advantage of others, men could never have united or embodied; or being once embodied, and gathered into corporations, they must presently again have been scattered and dissolved; there being (upon supposition of that temper that we have been discoursing of) no common cement to bind and hold them together.

Now this is the only ground upon which the flatterer's silence can be accounted prudence; but unless to be base is to be prudent, I suppose it will have another esteem with those who are the most competent judges of such things. It is indeed a pest and a disease, and so to be looked upon and detested by those minds that have the least tincture of virtue and generosity. It breeds only in narrow, paltry, self-serving spirits, that lie upon the catch, and make this their whole design, to enjoy the world, and to live to themselves.

But now, as to be silent of men's defects and vices is a piece of flattery, and flattery a degenerate and unworthy thing; yet, that all people may not promiscuously think themselves called upon to reprove and declare against whatsoever they see amiss in others, and so mistake that for charity and duty, which is indeed nothing else but sauciness and impertinence, it will be convenient to shew,

1. First, who they are that are concerned to speak in this case.
2. The manner how they are to speak.

And first for the persons: I conceive they may be brought under these three sorts:

1. First such as are intrusted with the government of others. All government makes the actions and behaviour of him that is governed, in some sense, the actions and behaviour of him that governs: and consequently a governor is as really obliged to observe and regulate what is done by those that are under him, as what he does himself. And therefore as no man is to flatter himself, so neither is such an one to flatter others. No man is to be abused into a destructive persuasion, that his vices are virtues, and his faults perfections; which without an impartial discovery will certainly follow, from that opinion that self-love begets in every man of his own actions, though never so ugly and irregular. He that says nothing of the miscarriages of a person under his government betrays a trust, and forgets, that as every

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father is a governor, so every governor ought, in some respect, to be a father: and surely no father will suffer a son to perish, only for want of telling him that he is like to perish; if he does, God will require his blood at his hands, which will be but a sad reckoning, where the relation shall redouble the murder.

2. The second sort of persons, to whom it belongs to tax and take notice of miscarriages, are those who are intrusted with the guidance and direction of others; such as are persons set apart to the work of the ministry. It may possibly be looked upon as a piece of presumption to say, that *they* are to guide or to direct, who of all men are accounted the most ignorant and impertinent; yet such is their unhappiness, that the sins of those that think themselves much wiser, if not reprov'd and testified against by them, will be charged by God upon their score. That preacher that shuts his eyes and his mouth where he sees a bold and a reigning vice, prevaricates with his profession, and deserves to be removed from it by some remarkable judgment from Heaven, for being too wise to discharge his duty.

He is silent, it seems, for fear of interrupting a great sinner's repose. The galled conscience must not be touched, for fear the beast should kick, and do him a shrewd turn.

And therefore there must not be a word cast out, that may so much as border upon a reprehension, or but hint his sin to his suspicion; for if that takes fire, so as to make him worry, and at length ruin the preacher, all the pity he shall find, for being faithful so much to his own disadvantage, shall be to be upbraided for want of experience, and for not knowing men. However this and a much sharper calamity cannot take off the obligation that Christ and Christianity has laid upon every preacher of the word. And it is to be feared, that God may, some time or other, silence those, who have in this manner first silenced themselves.

3. The third sort of persons to whom this duty belongs are those that profess friendship. Every man is to challenge this as a debt from his friend, to be told impartially of his faults: and whosoever for bears to do it, fails in the highest office of kindness. For to what purpose does a man take another into that intimacy as to make him in a manner his second conscience, if he will not be bold and impartial, and do the office of conscience, by excusing or accusing, according as he has done well or ill? Two things are required in him that shall undertake to reprove another; a confidence in, and a kindness to the person whom he reprov'd: both which qualifications are eminently to be found in every real friend. For who should a man confide in, if not in himself? and who should he be kind to, if not to himself? and is it not a saying as true as it is common, that every friend is another self?

But is it possible that that man should truly love me, that leaves me unguarded and unassisted, when the weakness and inadvertency of my own mind would expose me with all my indecencies and imperfections to the observation and derision of the world? No; it is the nature of *love to cover a multitude of sins*; which are by no way so effectually concealed

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and covered from the eyes of others, as by being faithfully discovered and laid open to him who commits them.

It puts him upon his defence, and upon all the arts of securing himself, by watching and criticising upon his own behaviour: it arms him with caution and recollection, and so frees him from the great est evil in the world; which is confidence in the midst of folly: a quality that destroys wheresoever it abides; that unfits a man for conversation, deprives him of all respect; and, in a word, is the only thing that can make his enemies formidable, and, in all their attempts against him, successful.

And thus I have shewn who the persons are to whom it belongs to discover and to reprove faults: but since, though the work is fitted to the person, there may still be a fault in the manner, we shall, in the next place, see how these reprehensions are to be managed: concerning which I shall set down these rules.

1. First, let the reproof, if possible, be given in secret; for the design of it is not to blazon the crime, but to amend the person. Let it not be before malicious witnesses, such as shall more enjoy the man's shame, than hate his vice. The publication of a miscarriage, instead of reforming the offender, may possibly make him desperate or impudent; either to despond under the burden of his infamy, or to harden his forehead like a flint, and resolve to out face and outbrave it; neither of which are like to conduce any thing to the purposes of virtue, or to promote the person's recovery.

Shame indeed is a notable instrument to deter a man from vicious and lewd practices, but then it is not shame as it is actually endured, but as it is yet feared; for the endurance of it puts an end to the fear; and if the man is of a bold and a daring temper, is like to make him ten times more a wretch and a villain than he was before: for now he thinks he has felt the worst of his crime, and so lies under no check, as to its further progress.

But such is partly the malice, partly the unskilfulness of most persons, in their taxing the faults of others, that the man that is most concerned in the report perhaps comes to hear of it last; it being first communicated to another, and so, through many hands, is at length conveyed to him: or peradventure it is at the very first proclaimed upon the house top; so that the man, instead of being gradually reduced, is at once blown up and undone; and this is all the charity and discretion of some reprovers.

But the method prescribed by Christ is very different. Has thy brother offended thee? *first tell him his fault between him and thee*; and if that prevail not, then take unto thee a *witness*; but if neither this will do any thing, *then tell it him before two or three witnesses*: and at last, upon contempt of all these, then *bring it to the church*. All which excellent proceeding consists of so many steps of prudence and humanity; of tenderness to our brother's reputation, as well as to his soul; and of his comforts in this world, as well as of his salvation in the next: a course worthy the imitation of all, but especially those who are to study the great wisdom of winning souls.

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The vices of most natures have in them this property of the dirt, that the sight of the sun hardens, but never dissolves them. When the crime is made public, the criminal thinks it not worth while to retreat. His ignominy is now in the mouths and memory of all men, and so not to be cancelled or brought into oblivion by any after-practices of virtue or regularity of living.

The end of every reproof is remedy; but to shame a man is revenge; and such an one as the bitterest adversary in the world cannot act a sharper or a more remorseless: and therefore the church of Rome, which practises and requires confession of sins to the priest, thinks no penalty too severe to be inflicted upon that confessor that should disclose any thing revealed to him in confession. A practice most wise and charitable; and though used by them perhaps upon grounds of policy, yet to be enforced in the like instances upon the highest accounts of religion.

For it is a piece of inhuman barbarity to afflict a man, but in order to his consequent good; and I have shewn, that the publication of a man's shame, that might otherwise be concealed, can contribute nothing to the making of him better. It may sink his spirit or exasperate his vice; but any other effect upon him it can have none. A sore is never to be ripped up, but in order to its cure.

2. Let a reproof be managed with due respect to, and distinction of the condition of the person that is to be reproofed. He that at any time comes under the unhappy necessity of reprehending his superior, ought so to behave himself, that he may appear to acknowledge him his superior no less in the reproof, than in the most solemn acts of reverence and submission; for religion teaches no man to be rude or uncivil, nor takes away the difference of persons and the inequality of states and conditions, but commands a proportion of respect suitable to all: and he that reproofs a prince or a great person in the same manner that he would a peasant, or his equal and companion, shews that he is acted rather by the spirit of a Scotch presbytery, than of Christ. But such perhaps will defend themselves with the example of the prophet Elijah reviling Ahab and Jezebel, and so, baptizing the intemperance of their tongues with the name of zeal, bear themselves for persons of an heroic spirit comparable to the old prophets. But persons that pretend this, ought to satisfy the world that they act by the same extraordinary commission from heaven that Elijah did, and withal to do the miracles that Elijah did, for the proving of that commission; otherwise it will not be sufficient for them, that they shew wonders of incivility and ill behaviour.

All persons called to the ministry are undoubtedly commissioned by Christ to bear witness to the truth, by testifying against the enormities of the greatest as well as of the meanest sinners; but no man's particular personal indiscretion is any part of his commission. It is possible indeed that it may, nay, very certain that it will make the execution of it very useless and ineffectual to most of the great purposes to which Christ designed it; for truth unseasonably and unmannerly proposed comes with a disadvantage, and is in danger to



miscarry through the unskilfulness of the proposer: and as we say of some commentators and interpreters of scripture, that the text had been clearer, had they not expounded, or, indeed, rather exposed it; so it is like that some persons had not been so vicious and lewd, to the degree of incorrigible, had not their vice and lewdness been indiscreetly reprov'd; for that has made them bid defiance to virtue, and turn their backs upon the reproof; imputing (by an unjust in deed, but yet by an usual inference) the faults of the person upon the office and the religion; in which case the reprover shall, before God, share the of fender's guilt; for that finding him sinful, he made him obstinate and impenitent; and so confirmed the beginnings of sin into a resolved, settled impiety.

I question not, but it had been very lawful for Abraham to have reprov'd his father's idolatry, and to have declared and represented the unreasonableness of such a worship to him. But yet while he was doing so, I cannot believe that he was in the least discharged from the eternal obligation of the law of nature, exacting a due honour to be paid to parents: for a true doctrine could never have excused an undutiful behaviour.

With what humility, reverence, and distance did Daniel reprove Belshazzar! Though a most impious, insulting heathen, and one that had but newly, in a drunken revel, even spit in the face of the God of heaven, by a profanation of the sacred vessels of the temple amongst his unhallowed parasites and concubines; yet he did not fly in his face, or call him profane or sacrilegious prince, and tell him that divine vengeance would pay him home for his insolence and unthankfulness to God. No; Daniel did not speak as some, that nowadays pretend to interpret, utter themselves to princes. But after he had recounted the signal mercies and judgments of God upon his father Nebuchadnezzar, all the reproof he gives him runs in these gentle and sober words, [chap. v. 22](#). *And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this*. For undoubtedly, had he been sharp and peremptory, Belshazzar, a prince of that haughty and arrogant spirit, would never have sent him out of his presence clothed with scarlet, and with a gold chain about his neck. No; it is like he had been loaded with another kind of chain, and, perhaps, worn a scarlet died with his own blood. But prudence and submission made his reproof acceptable and his person honourable.

Great ones, whose state and power makes their will absolute and formidable, must, for the most part, be pleased before they can be convinced; and therefore must be brought to *love* before they will obey the truth. Upon which account it is infinitely vain to cast the issue and success of persuasion upon the sole force of truth or virtue addressing itself to the mind, with all its severities bare and unqualified by a winning behaviour in him that is to persuade. He that presumes upon the mere efficacy of truth, forgets that men have affections to be caressed, as well as understandings to be informed; which is the reason, that a reprehension can never be grateful to persons of high place, but as it comes disguised with ceremony, and attended with all the expressions and demonstrations of honour and due respect; all which will be found little enough to keep them from thinking themselves affronted, while they are



only faithfully admonished; and from throwing back an unpleasing truth in the teeth of him that brings it.

What men's pride and ill-nature may carry them to, is not in the preacher's power to remedy or prevent; only it concerns him, that the reproof which men's sins have made necessary should not, by any failure of duty on his part, be made ineffectual. God has not made it a virtue in any man to have no respect of persons: and therefore let him that shall call upon princes and Caesars to give God his due, beware that he do it with that homage as not to bereave Caesar of his due; remembering, that if he that reproves is God's ambassador, yet he that is reprov'd is God's vicegerent; and that there is nothing in the world that more highly deserves reproof, than a pragmatial and absurd reprover.



3. Let him that reproves a vice, as much as is possible, do it with words of meekness and commiseration. Let the reprehension come not as a dart shot at the offender's person, but at his crime. Let a man reprehend so, that it may appear that he wishes that he had no cause to reprehend. Let him behave himself in the sentence that he passes, as we may imagine a judge would behave himself, if he were to condemn his own son, brought as a criminal before him; that is, with the greatest reluctancy and trouble of mind imaginable, that he should be brought under the necessity of such a cruel accident, as to be forced to speak words of death to him, whose life he tenders more passionately than his own.

Now this being the temper and disposition that is required in a reprover, it easily appears, that nothing can be more deformed and uncharitable than scoffs and bitter sarcasms thrown at a poor guilty person; than to insult over his calamity, and to seem, as it were, to taste and relish his distress. A jeering reprover is like a jeering judge, than which there cannot be imagined, either in nature or manners, a thing more odious and intolerable. And therefore the Roman orator, discoursing of sceptical urbanity, or jesting, how far it was allowable in speeches and pleadings, lays down an excellent rule, fit to be owned by the most Christian charity, that two things were by no means to be made the subject of jest; namely, great crimes and great miseries; for if these be made the matter of our mirth, what can be the argument of our sorrow? There is something in them at which nature shrinks and is aggrieved; so that it beholds them with horror and uneasiness: and nothing but a very ill mind, improved by a very ill custom, can frame itself to pleasant apprehensions upon such occasions; for that any man should be merry, because another has offended God, or undone himself, is certainly a thing very unnatural.



But then further; as reproofs are not to be managed with bitter and scurrilous reflections upon the offender, so neither is the offence itself to be aggravated by higher and blacker expressions, than the nature of the thing or the necessity of the occasion requires. He that is to reprove is to remember, that his business is not to declaim and shew his parts, but to work a cure. And some actions are so confessedly lewd, that but to hint them to the offender is sufficient to cover him with shame and sad remembrances, without a morose and partic-

ular insisting upon the description of their vileness; which being to tell the guilty person no more than what he knew before, cannot properly serve to in form, but only to upbraid and afflict him; which is none of the works of charity, as every reprehension ought to be.

David was not to be informed of the enormity of the sins of murder and adultery, and to have long harangues made before him, to aggravate and set forth their filthiness; and therefore, when the prophet Nathan was to bring him a reproof from heaven, and to call him to repentance, we see with what insinuations and arts of gentleness he does it; he represents the injustice and unreasonableness of what he had done in a parallel case, leaving him to make the application; by which, having brought him to the confession of his sin, he does not presently fill his ears with tragical exclamations about the impiety and grossness of it, both in respect of the person that committed it, and the persons upon whom it was committed; a work fitter for a schoolmaster than a prophet; but he answers his confession with a declaration of pardon, seconded only with a gentle item, or admonition; *The Lord has done away thy sin; thou shalt not die: howbeit, by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.* Nothing could have been spoke more gently, and yet more forcibly, to melt him down into a penitential sorrow for, and an abhorrence of those two foul deviations from the law of God. But there is a sort of men in the world, pretending to a degree of purity and acquaintance with the mind of God above other mortals, that upon such an opportunity would have called up all their spleen and poison, and have reviled him at least two hours by the clock; and could no more have refrained doing so, than they could have held their breath so long.

Before I pass from this rule of managing reproofs with words of meekness, candour, and compassion; I cannot but think this also necessary to be added, that they are to be managed without superciliousness, and a certain spiritual arrogance, by which the reprover looks upon the guilty person with disdain, in comparison of that higher measure of holiness and perfection, that upon this account he presumes to be in himself. But this is for pride to reprehend other vices, which perhaps, in the sight of God, carry a much less guilt.

He that has a criminal and a vicious person under his reproof, should speak as one that thankfully ascribes it to God's mere grace, that he is not as bad himself, having the same nature, and the same natural corruptions, to betray him to all the evil and villainy that can be, if God should but desert and leave him to his own strength. By this means he treats the offender as his equal, his brother, and naturally standing upon the same ground, the vantage being entirely from divine favour; of which a man may have cause to be glad indeed, but no cause to boast.

For let that proud pharisee that shall reprove a publican with words of insultation and boasting, *that he is not such an one as he*, tell me how he knows, that, had he been placed under the same circumstances and opportunities of sin, he should not have been prevailed upon to do the same for which, with so much arrogance, he reproves or rather baits another.

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Was it not the mercy of Providence, that cast the scene of his life out of the way of temptation? that placed the flax and the stubble out of the reach of the fire? And what cause has he then to be bitter and insolent upon him, that God thought fit to deny these advantages to, though otherwise of no worse mould or make, or less merit than himself?

But this is not to be passed by, that, as God most peculiarly and directly hates such an arrogant disposition, as is apt to crow and insult over the failings and lapses of others; so it is ten to one but that, some time or other, he lets loose some fierce temptation upon such an one, and leaves him so far to himself, that he falls foully and scandalously, to the perpetual abasement of his pride, and the infamy of his person; in which case, all the daggers that he threw at others are, with greater force and sharpness, returned upon his own breast, where formerly there dwelt so little compassion to his offending brother.

And therefore, surely, I should think it concerned every one, about to reprove any vicious persons what soever, first to allay his spirit, and to compose himself to mildness and moderation, with that excellent admonition of the apostle, *Gal. vi. 1, If a man be overtaken in a fault, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.* And believe it, it will be but an uncomfortable revolution, when he that once bore himself high upon his innocence, and then shewed no mercy upon others, shall come to have the same need of mercy himself.

4. The fourth and last rule that I shall mention, for the completing of our direction about this duty, is, that a reproof be not continued or repeated, after amendment of that which occasioned the reproof. For this is both malicious and useless; malicious, because it renews a man's torment, and revives his calamity; and then useless, because the man is already reformed.

Pardon is still to be accompanied with oblivion; not that it is in our power to forget a thing when we will; but it is in our power to behave ourselves as if we had forgot it; with that friendliness of address, that unconcernment of speech, that openness and respect of carriage that we use to persons that never did those actions which others have only left off to do.

But to be still sarcastically reminding of a penitent amended person of his former miscarriages, which perhaps stand cancelled in heaven, and even blotted out of the book of God's remembrance; it is like the breaking open of graves, to rake out bones and putrefaction, and argues not only an unchristian, but an inhuman, wolfish disposition.

Let this suffice to render every such person inexcusable to himself, that he would not endure to wish that either God or man should deal so by him; and if so, there can be no such true and infallible demonstration of his baseness, as the impartial measure of this rule.

And thus much for the first thing, wherein flattery does consist; namely, the concealing and not reproving the defects and faults of obnoxious persons; which, understood with those due limitations hither to laid down, will be able to keep him, whose place or condition



may at any time call him to this work, both from a sordid, undutiful silence on one hand, and from a saucy, meddling, bitter impertinence on the other.



SERMON VIII.

PROVERBS xxix. 5.

A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.

2. THE second thing wherein flattery consists is, the praising and defending the defects or vices of any person. This is a step much higher than the first, which was (as we may so call it) the negative part of flattery, as consisting only in silence, and a not reproving those things that both deserved and needed reproof. And as it goes higher, so it is much more inexcusable, and incapable of those apologies that may be alleged, though not in justification, yet at least in mitigation of the former. For partly the timorousness, partly the bashfulness of some tempers, (affections not always at our command,) may silence the tongue, and seal up the lips from uttering those things which the mind and judgment frequently suggests upon these occasions. A man may be sometimes even dazzled and astonished into silence by the presence of some glistening sinners; so as to be at a loss both for words and confidence to vent those reproofs that fill the conscience, and are even struggling to break forth. Certain it is, that this or any other consideration can by no means warrant a silence there, where religion bids a man cry aloud; nor can any one plead his modesty in prejudice of his duty: yet surely there is something at least pleadable upon this account, for the bare not-reproof of a sin, that can with no face be urged for its defence.

For pusillanimity must first pass into a prostitute impudence, before a man can arrive to that pitch as to vouch himself the encomiast of sin, and to speak panegyrics upon vice: many a man may favour a malefactor, and wish his crime concealed or passed over, who yet would never endure to be his advocate. It is one thing for a man to shut his eyes, and so resolve not to see that which is black; another for him, with an open eye and a shameless front, to affirm black to be white; and to undertake to persuade the world so much.

But so does he that attempts the commendation of any thing lewd or vicious: he transforms the Devil into an angel of light: he confounds the distinction of those things that God has set at an infinite distance: he outfaces the common judgment of sense and reason, and the natural, unforced apprehensions of mankind.

And though one would think that there is that commanding majesty in truth, as even to awe men into an acknowledgment of things to be as really they are, and generally do appear; and withal that ingenuity bred in every breast, as not to own any broad defiance of the clearest evidence: yet experience shews, that there is a sort of men in the world, that have wrought themselves to that hardiness, as to venture to tell one that has done passionately and rashly, that he did courageously and discreetly; that shall applaud him in all his follies; assuring him, that if men speak amiss of his behaviour, it is rather upon the account of envy



and malice to his person, than any real disapprobation of his actions; and that he is not to measure himself by the words of his adversaries, that speak their prejudice, not their judgment; oftentimes valuing that inwardly which they inveigh against outwardly, and cherishing that in themselves, that they tax and discommend in him.



They shall tell him further, that though possibly such and such actions were faulty, and unbecoming in others, yet the difference of his condition alters the case, and changes the very quality of the action. For what should a great person have to do with humility? or the rich and the wealthy with temperance, industry, and sobriety? Why should a states man or politician restrain himself to the punctilios of truth and sincerity? These are the virtues of mean employments and lower minds; they may perhaps be commendable in country gentlemen and farmers, but persons that move in an higher sphere, must have a greater latitude and compass for their motion; and it were infinite weakness and inexperience to stick at a lie or an oath, or the taking away an innocent life, when reason of state requires it, and so unshackles its ministers from the bonds of those nice rules that are to hold and direct other mortals.

And if these actions have a cleanly and a successful issue, they shall certainly find sycophants enough to extol them for the greatest prudence and wisdom that in such grand and difficult affairs could be shewn: they shall at least be vouched necessary, and consequently lawful, or as good; and the authors of such actions seldom seek for or desire any further warrant for them than necessity, though it be of their own making.

But that people may not be wicked without some plea or pretence to cover and protect them from being thought so, there has a very serviceable distinction been found out and asserted by some, between a religious and a political conscience, in every one that is a governor; the former is to guide him as such a particular person, having a soul to save; the other to rule and direct him, as a person intrusted with the good, safety, and protection of those that are under his government, and consequently empowered to use all those courses that serve as means absolutely necessary to compass such an end: which two capacities, as they are very different, so it seems that they cannot both proceed by the same rule. Forasmuch as a governor, in many junctures and circumstances of affairs, cannot reach the ends of government, in protecting and se curing his people, but by sometimes having recourse to those ways and actions that perhaps are not allowable upon the strict rules and measures of religion, which, if rigidly and unseasonably adhered to in such instances, may possibly throw all into ruin and confusion.



For answer to which: it is not for me to inter pose in what concerns government and governors; it has its mystery, and those that manage it are to be presumed best to understand it: but as for this distinction between a religious and a political conscience, I shall make bold to give it its due, in saying, that in all those cases in which it comes to be practised, it subverts

religion. For to affirm that there is any capacity or condition of man, of which religion is not a competent rule, is to make it a rule infinitely short and insufficient, as to the guidance and direction of the manners and actions of man kind; the great end for which God designs it.



Besides the gross absurdity of placing the same man under two contrary rules; which is to bring him under two contrary duties; and to make him at the same time obliged to do a thing, and yet upon another score discharged from that obligation; which is a ridiculous contradiction.

Many things indeed are distinguished in speculation, that perfectly coincide, and are inseparably the same in practice. And though it is not to be denied, that the capacity of a man and of a governor differ in apprehension; forasmuch as to be a man and to be a governor are not the same thing: yet when we come to behold those two capacities, as they really exist in nature, we shall find, that what is done by one is also done by the other, and what befalls one consequentially befalls the other. If the governor sins, the man will not be innocent; and if the man is sick, the governor will find himself but ill at ease. He that breaks the law under one capacity shall suffer under both, and then, setting aside all the niceties of speculation, if God condemns king Ahab, I believe it will be hard to distinguish the man Ahab out of the same condemnation.

But now, if to persuade men out of the acknowledgment of the evil and unlawfulness of their actions, be flattery; and further, to use arguments and acts to settle them in such a persuasion, be one of the grossest and most detestable sorts of it, especially if religion be abused to so base a purpose; then surely none are so deeply chargeable with flattery as these two sorts of men.



1. Such as, upon principles of enthusiasm, assure persons of eminence and high place, that those transgressions of the divine law are allowable in them, that are absolutely prohibited and condemned in others. For thus they reason: That the divine laws and precepts were intended only for the ordinary rules of life; but such as are extraordinary persons, raised up by God for some extraordinary work, are exempted from those common obligations; as being directed by an higher rule, namely, the immediate dictates of the Spirit speaking and acting within them, which Spirit, being God, is able to dispense with his own laws, and accordingly does so, as the exigence of those works, that he calls such persons to, shall require. So that for them to rob and plunder is as justifiable as for the Israelites to rob the Egyptians; and to slay and murder, though it be princes, is but like Phinehas's standing up and executing justice; the inward motions of the Spirit countermanding the injunctions of the outward letter.

But to raise in any such an opinion of themselves, is surely one of the vilest and most destructive pieces of flattery that can be used by one man to another: for it is to make religion minister the same scope and licence to the most impious actions that atheism itself can allow;

and that with this advantage, that it does not trouble the mind with the same stings and remorse that the professed despiser of religion usually feels in the midst of all his extravagancies: for if a man is brought to believe that he breaks the divine law with as good a conscience as others keep and observe it, there is no doubt but such a belief will keep him at perfect peace with himself, notwithstanding the most enormous violations of it.

I cannot believe that the authors of our late confusions could have ever acted in such a barefaced opposition to all laws, both human and divine, with so much satisfaction, serenity, and composure of mind, had not their seducing prophets thoroughly leavened them with this principle; that being the select people of God, and so stirred up and peculiarly called to *serve him in their generation*, (as the phrase then ran,) they were privileged from those ordinary rules and measures by which the lawfulness and morality of other men's actions were determined. The saints indeed might do the very same actions which in other men were sinful, but yet they in so doing could not sin; and this was that persuasion that still patched up their conscience, after all the blows and wounds it had received by dashing against the divine precepts.

Such was the soul-destroying flattery by which those impostors encouraged many thousands in the way of damnation; like that lying prophet, that bid Ahab *go and prosper*, when he sent him to the battle in which he was to fall and perish.

2. The other sort of persons chargeable with this kind of flattery are the Romish casuists, who have made it their greatest study and business to put a new face upon sin, and to persuade the world that many of those actions that have hitherto passed for impious and unlawful, are indeed nothing such, but admit of such qualifications as clear them of all guilt and irregularity.

They are not indeed so absurdly impudent as to declare that murder is no sin; but they will order the matter so, that a man may be killed upon many punctilios of credit and reputation, and yet no murder be committed. They will not tell a man that it is allowable to steal; but they will teach that, in case a servant finds that his master will not afford him wages proportionable to what he judges his own service to be worth, he may take from him so much as will amount to a valuable compensation, and not be chargeable with the breach of that law that prohibits a man to steal. They will not deny many actions to be evil; but if a man have but the dexterity and art of directing his intention to some right end, or at least of not actually directing it to an ill, why then presently the whole action loses all its malignity, and becomes pure and innocent, by a wonderful, but a very easy transformation.

It were infinite to draw forth all particulars; but these are some of the ways by which these religious sycophants have poisoned the fountains of morality, and flattered mankind with such doctrines and assertions as shall soothe them up, and embolden them in the most vicious and lewd courses imaginable. They have opened a well, not only for sinners, but even for sin itself to *wash in*, and *to be clean*. So that if there be any persons in the world

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who may be justly accused for calling *good evil*, and *evil good*, these are the men; and they do it too, diligently, co piously, and voluminously; and consequently have the fullest and the fairest claim to the curse that is joined to that accusation.

But now this kind of flattery is so much the more to be abominated, because as it is of most mischievous consequence, so it is also of very easy effect, and meets with a strange success, seldom returning with out accomplishing the work of persuasion, or rather indeed of fallacy and delusion.

Of which a double reason may be assigned.

1. The first taken from the nature of man.
2. The other from the very nature of vice itself.

1. For the first of which; it is too apparent how fond and credulous most men are, and even desirous to be persuaded into a good estimation of whatsoever they do; and therefore as some people will buy and use flattering glasses, though they know them to be so, because they had rather please themselves with a false representation, than view their deformity by a true; so some will catch at any colour or dress, (though never so thin,) to give some varnish and better appearance to their vice.

A perverted, disordered mind, if it cannot have arguments and solid reasons to allege for the legality of what it does, it will content and satisfy itself with flourishes and shows of probability; and that deceiver that shall labour to furnish it with such, shall be welcome and honourable; his dictates shall be received as oracles, and never sifted by questions and examinations; for people are naturally averse from inquiring after that which they are unwilling to know; and therefore such an one shall be even prevented by a willing, forward assent. But it is easy for a man to finish his visit, that is met three parts of his way.

2. The other reason is from the very nature of vice itself, which oftentimes bears a great affinity to virtue, and so admits of the harder distinction. Upon which account, it is no difficult matter to persuade the prodigal person, that he is only very liberal; it being very hard to assign the precise point where liberality ceases, and prodigality begins. Upon the same ground, covetousness may easily pass for providence, and a proud mind be mistaken for an high and generous spirit; there being a great likeness in the actions respectively belonging to each of these, enough to impose upon unwary, undistinguishing minds, that are prone to receive every *like* for the *same*.

Now from these two considerations we may easily gather, how open the hearts of most men lie to drink in the fawning suggestions of any sycophant that shall endeavour to relieve their disturbed consciences by gilding their villainies with the name of virtues, and so smoothing the broad way before them, that they may find no rub or let in their passage to dam nation. This therefore is the second thing wherein flattery consists.

3. The third is, the perverse imitation of any one's defects or vices, which seems to carry it higher than the former, forasmuch as actions are much more considerable than words or



discourses. A man, for many causes, may be brought to commend that which he will never be prevailed upon to follow: but for any one to transcribe and copy out in himself whatsoever he sees ridiculous or impious in another, this argues a temper made up of nothing but baseness and servility.

And to any generous and free spirit it is really a very nauseous and a fulsome thing, to see some prostitute their tongues and their judgments by saying as others say, commending what they commend, dispraising whatsoever things or persons they dispraise, and framing themselves to any absurd gesture or motion that they observe in them; making them selves as it were an echo to their voice, and a shadow to their bodies. In a word, no man can be exact and perfect in this way of flattery, without being a monkey and a mimic, and a lump of wax for any fool to stamp his image upon.

But surely few would be so sottish and servile, as to break a leg or an arm, or put out an eye, because they see the great person whom they depend upon and adore, deprived of any of these parts. And if so, do they not consider, that a man is to be more tender of his manners and the dignity of his soul, than of any thing that belongs to his body, which would give him but a small preeminence above the brutes, were it not animated and exalted by a principle of reason?

Every kind of imitation speaks the person that imitates inferior to him whom he imitates, as the copy is to the original: but then to imitate that which is mean, base, and unworthy, is to do one of the lowest actions in a yet lower instance; it is to climb downwards, to employ art and industry to learn a defect and an imperfection; which is a direct reproach to reason, and a contradiction to the methods of nature.

And so much the more intolerable is it, because such persons are seldom seen to imitate the excellencies and the virtues of him whom they flatter; these are looked upon with distance and lazy admiration: but if there be any vice that sullies and takes off from the lustre of his other good qualities, that shall be sure to be culled out, and writ upon their lives and behaviour. Alexander had enough to imitate him in his drunkenness and his passion, who never intended to be like him, either in his chastity, or his justice to his enemies, and his liberality to his friends. And it is reported of Plato, that being crookshouldered, his scholars, who so much admired him, would endeavour to be like him by bolstering out their garments on that side, that so they might appear crooked too. It is probable that many of these found it easier to imitate Plato's shoulders than his philosophy, and to stuff out their gowns than to furnish their understandings, or improve their minds.

I am confident there is none that does not deride and condemn this silly piece of officiousness, as scarce to be reconciled to common sense; yet we may find as bad daily in the behaviour of most parasites, who think they can never honour their great masters, but by exposing themselves. Which practice, though it is most irrational, yet it has this to encourage and continue it, that such grandees are wonderfully pleased to see their vices and defects

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aped by their followers and retainers; indeed much more than to see their perfections drawn into imitation.

And that, I conceive, for this reason; because vice, being weak and shameful, is glad to have any countenance and credit shewn it; which is done by no way so much as by having many followers. To be vicious alone is a great shame, and few natures are able to bear it; and therefore company gives a kind of authority to sin, and brings vice into fashion, which is able to commend and set off any thing. Nero's killing his mother could not but be looked upon as an hideous and unnatural thing, for all the senate's public thanking of him for it, and his courtiers applauding of the action; because in this, humanity was too strong for flattery, and suffered none of them to practise what their slavish disposition induced them to commend; which shews how much the greater number of flatterers speak against their conscience; for that which a man in the same condition would not do himself, he certainly dislikes in another.

4. The fourth and last thing that I shall mention, wherein flattery consists, is an over-valuing those virtues and perfections that are really laudable in any person. This is a different sort from all the former, which had no foundation of good at all to work upon, but were wholly employed in giving appearances where there was no substance, in painting of rotten sepulchres, and belying vice into the reputation of virtue.

But this is more modest and tolerable, there being some groundwork of desert, though much too narrow for those huge superstructures of commendation that some raise upon it; which therefore turn into flattery, which consists in a partial representation of any thing to be greater and better than indeed it is: for truth suffers as much by this as by the former; it being violated by any disproportion between the thing as it is expressed and as it does exist.

The flatterer views every little virtue or good quality in him whom he resolves to extol, as it were, with a microscope; such an one as shall swell a gnat into an elephant, and an elephant into a mountain. Ordinary, plain, homespun sense shall be magnified for extraordinary wit and fancy; and good, honest, flat words shall pass for propriety and exactness of expression.

But to go higher. Let a star be accounted, as in deed it is, a bright and a glorious thing; yet we are not therefore to persuade the world that it is a sun. Herod, no doubt, in [Acts xii. 22](#), spoke like an eloquent man; yet that was short of speaking with *the voice of a god*, as his flatterers told him in that their impious and profuse acclamation. He that should celebrate a captain that had the good fortune to worst the enemy in a skirmish, to the degree of a Caesar or an Alexander, would wonderfully stretch and overdo, and render the poor man ridiculous, instead of glorious: and every one that measures his actions by any eulogies given him by the flatterer, sets his reputation upon stilts, which is not the surest way of standing;



and when he comes to be weighed in the balance of the impartial and the judicious, will be found wanting.

For look, as the detractor represents the perfections of him whom he hates, lessened and diminished from what they really are, partly by a malicious concealment, partly by calumny and direct slander; so the flatterer, whose design is managed by a contrary way, (though perhaps in itself the same,) greatens and advances every thing beyond the bounds of its real worth; describing all in hyperboles, high strains, and words of wonder, till he has puffed up that little thing that he commends, as we see men do a bladder, which owes all its bulk only to air and wind, upon the letting out of which, it returns and shrinks into a pitiful nothing.

And just so must the opinion, that a man conceives of himself from the delusions of flattery, vanish and have its end: for, like a feather, it was raised by a breath, and therefore, when that breath ceases, it must fall to the ground again.

And thus I have finished the first general head under which I cast the prosecution of the words; namely, to shew what flattery was, and wherein it did consist. I do not profess myself so skilful and experienced in it, or desirous to be so, as to affirm that I have recounted all the ways and methods, all the turnings and meanders, through which this various thing uses to wind and carry itself.

But these are enough to serve as a rule by which both to direct our own actions, and to judge of the actions and behaviour of other men. They may convince us how vast a difference there is between flattery and friendship, and between the crafty, low mind of a flatterer, and the generous disposition of a friend. But when I have said all of the baseness of this art, yet so long as men find it beneficial, and withal see the world full of those that are willing to be made fools of by it, I believe all that I shall persuade men of will be this, that they are like to get more by practising of it, than any one else shall get by speaking against it.



SERMON IX.

PROVERBS xxix. 5.

A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.

II. THE second general head proposed for the prosecution of these words, was to shew what were the grounds and occasions of flattery on his part that is flattered. I shall mention three.

1. Greatness of place or condition. There is no thing that secures a man from flattery more than the confident and free access of ingenuous persons. But confidence and freedom are seldom found but where there is a parity of conditions: reproof being of the nature of those things that seldom ascend and move upwards; but it either passes to an equal, or descends upon an inferior. He that is great and potent casts an awe and a terror round about him, and, as it were, shuts and barricadoes himself in from all approaches, like mount Sinai, where the fire burning, and the voice thundering, would suffer none to come near it; so that such an one is still treated with silence and distance; his faults are whispered behind his back; he is scoffed at in little rooms and merry meetings, and never hears the severe, healing truths that are spoke of him; but lives muffled and blind fold, unacquainted with himself and the judgments of men concerning him.

Upon which account, great persons, unless their understandings are very great too, and withal unprejudiced with self-love, so as to be their own monitors, and impartial exactors of themselves, are of all others the most miserable. For though a reproof might open their eyes and correct their behaviour, and though there are not wanting those that are concerned for their good, yet they fright away all these remedies, and live and die strangers to their cure.

For in this case men consider, first, the great danger of speaking freely to great persons what they are not willing to hear: it may enrage, and make them their mortal enemies. It may render them as great in malice as they are in power and condition. It is at best a very bold venture, and greatness is not so tractable a thing, as to lay itself quietly open to the reprehender and the faithful admonisher, who speak for the man's advantage more than for his pleasure, and bring him physic instead of sweetmeats. The experience men have in the world usually makes them fearful to engage in unpleasing offices. Especially when they consider further, how easy it is to be safe and silent; and how little it concerns them to court a trouble, a danger, and a potent displeasure, by endeavouring to do a man good against his will. They think it a great folly to put themselves upon an harsh, and the same also a thankless employment; to lose an interest, and a great friend, only for doing that which they could with much more ease have let alone.



Men see also how ill it has fared with such as have presumed to be free with the grandees of the world, in point of reproof and animadversion: they have been rewarded with frowns, sharpness, and disdain, and sent away with dejected countenances; as if the reprovers themselves had been the persons in fault. Majesty and power usually think virtue and happiness itself bought at too dear a rate, if it be at the price of an admonition.



For all which causes, persons of evil or low minds, which make up much the greater part of the world, are willing to follow their game, and to cajole and flatter a vicious greatness, since it turns so much to their profit and reputation; while the great one, that is abused according to his own heart's desire, bids the flatterer sit at his right hand; in the mean time making his impartial friend and reprover his foot stool, slighting him for his upright dealing, and sending him to his own virtue for a reward.

2. The second ground of flattery, on his part that is flattered, is an angry, passionate disposition, and impatient of reproof. This also frights and deters men from doing the office of friends in a faithful reprehension. For some minds are more raging and tumultuous than the sea itself; so that if Christ himself should rebuke them, instead of being calm, they would rage and roar so much the louder. That admonition that would reclaim others, does but chafe and provoke them; as the same breath of wind that cools some things, kindles and inflames others. No sooner do some hear their behaviour taxed, though with the greatest tenderness and moderation, but their choler begins to boil, and their breast is scarce able to contain and keep it from running over into the heights and furies of bitterness and impatience. The man, instead of correcting his fault, will redouble it with a greater; add fierceness to his folly, affronting and reviling him that would unbesot and reform him.

Now it requires a person not only of friendship and fidelity, but also of courage and valour, to under take to be a reprover here; forasmuch as to reprove such an one, is, in effect, to give him battle: he must be able to bear, and, what is more, to slight and tame his rage; he must not sneak and fly back at every great word, nor suffer himself to be talked and vapoured out of countenance.



But few people are able, and fewer willing, to put themselves to so great an inconvenience for another's good, and to raise a storm about their own ears, to do an odious, ungrateful piece of service for an ungrateful person; and therefore men usually deal with such currish, sharp natures as they do with mastiffs, they are fain to stroke them, though they deserve to be cudgelled. They flatter and commend them, to keep them quiet, and to compose the unruly humour which is ready to grow and improve upon the least check or opposition.

From the consideration of which we easily see the great misery and disadvantage of passionate, angry persons; their passion does not only bereave them of their own eyes, but also of the benefit of other men's; which he that is of a gentle and a tractable nature enjoys in the midst of all his errors: for his friend sees, and judges, and chooses for him, when the present precipitation of his mind hurries him besides the steady use of his reason. He is re-

duced by counsel, rectified and recalled by one that sees his fault, and dares tell him of it; so that the cure is almost as early as the distemper.

We may observe of brambles, that they always grow crooked; for by reason of their briars and thorns no hand can touch them, so as to bend them straight. And so it is with some dispositions; they grow into a confirmed, settled obliquity, because their sharpness makes them unfit to be handled by discipline and admonition. They are a terror and a grievance to those that they converse with: and to attempt to advise them out of their irregularities, is as if a chirurgeon should offer to dress a wounded lion; he must look to perish in the address, and to be torn in pieces for his pains.

It was surely of very great importance to Nabal, mentioned in [1 Sam. xxv.](#) to have been admonished of the rough, unadvised answer that he returned to David's soldiers; for it was like to have brought a ruin upon him and his family and his whole estate; yet none would do him that seasonable kindness, because of the rudeness and churlishness of his manners: for in the [17th verse](#) that character is given of him, that he *was such a son of Belial, that a man could not speak to him.*

Many would be willing to recover a person from his follies, but they are not willing to be snapt and railed at for so doing; they would be ready enough to pluck a brand out of the fire, might they do it without burning their fingers. But to be foolish and to be angry too, is for a man first to cast himself into a pit, and then to hinder others from pulling him out.

3. The third and last ground of flattery, on his part that is flattered, is a proud and vainglorious disposition. To tell a proud person of his faults, is to tell infallibility that it is in an error, and to spy out something amiss in perfection. Such an one looks upon himself as above all defects, and privileged from doing any thing mean, low, or obnoxious. There is no quality that more estranges a man from the free addresses of his friends, and their hearty communications of their thoughts concerning him, than an high conceit and opinion of himself: for this makes him rate all other men's judgments by his own measures, and set that price upon himself and his actions, that he thinks all the world must come up to: and therefore he that taxes or reprehends him, must expect the same credit and success that he is like to find, that should accuse an only son to his fond mother: he would quickly experiment that love is wonderfully blind, but especially about those things that it has no mind to see.

A proud person, who, with the worst kind of idolatry, adores himself, and what is more, the worst part of himself, his defects and vices, thinks that his doing of any action is sufficient to stamp it decent and virtuous. As it is reported of Cato being drunk, that one should say of him, by reason of his reputation, so much too great for any slander, that it would be easier to prove that drunkenness was no vice, than that Cato could be vicious; so some people, though they spoil every thing by an undue management of it, lose opportunities, and overlook occasions, yet they must be thought to be still carrying on designs of policy, to err and mistake prudentially; the world must persuade itself out of its own experience,

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and believe surmises, though contradicted by effects. It must be willing to be sunk by the hands of such skilful pilots, and judge the foolishness of some to be wiser than the wisdom of others.

Now those that would have the world maintain such an opinion of them, are the fairest and the broadest mark for the flatterer to shoot at that can be, the fittest persons to be made buffoons of: for do but commend and praise them to their face, and you may pick their pockets, cut their throats, and cheat them of their estates. Nor need the flatterer fear that they will look through his design, and so discover and loathe all his feigned encomiums; for let them be never so gross and palpable, let him lay it on never so thick, yet pride and conceitedness will swallow all, and look upon itself obliged too, for being so kindly abused.

And it has been sometimes seen, that a man, while he has been flattering and extolling an opinionative fool, (who has with much pleasure heard and embraced him, for the glorious things he so liberally spoke of him,) he has now and then turned his head aside, and flouted and laughed at him to his companions, for suffering himself to be held by the nose by such pitiful arts, so easily discerned and detested by any person of discretion.

Upon an easy observation we shall find, that there is nothing that renders a man more ridiculous, in most of the passages of his life, than much credulity; there is nothing that more certainly makes him a prey to the deceiver and the cheat: but now this is the inseparable property of pride and self-estimation. Every such person carries a belief about him so strong and so great, that it is impossible to overwork it: he will turn every romance into a real history, and even believe contradictions in his own behalf.

Which being so, if a man be great and potent as well as proud, it is no wonder if he is always plied with flatterers, and if they resort to him as the crows do to a carcass, always fluttering and chattering about him; for alas! he thinks they are only doing him right, and admiring him for that which he himself admires much more. Pride makes him lift his eyes upward, which is the reason that he never turns them inward; and so being unknown to himself, he must believe the deceiver upon his own word.

Now the deduction that I shall make from all this is, that of the many arguments and signs of real friendship, none is so sure and infallible, as a readiness to reprehend impartially and seasonably whatsoever needs reprehension. For it is clear, that he that does so, prefers the good of him whom he reprehends before his own interest. He knows not but his proud and impatient humour may make him disgust and persecute him for giving him so free and true a view of himself; but yet he ventures all to redeem him from shame and disorder: in a word, he resolves to do the part of a friend, though his very doing so makes him forfeit his being thought so. He that carries on no design for his own advantage in what he does, gives an unfailing demonstration of his sincerity; and he that tells a man what he knows, will find but a small acceptance with him, (as the story of his faults is like to do,) hazards

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his friend's favour, and with that his own emolument; and really makes himself and his hopes a sacrifice to the other's reputation.

Having thus finished the second general head, and shewn the grounds and occasions of flattery on his part that is flattered, I proceed now to the

Third and last, which is, to shew the ends and designs of it on his part that flatters: and those are briefly comprised in these words of the text, *He spreads a net for his neighbour's feet.*

It is a metaphor borrowed from the practice of hunters or fowlers: and now, as there is no man that spreads a net, but does it with this double intention, first to catch and destroy the thing for which he spreads it, and then, by so doing, to advantage himself, as either in his pleasure or his profit; so accordingly every flatterer, in all his fawnings and dissimulations, is acted and influenced by these two grand purposes.

1. To serve himself.
2. To undermine him whom he flatters, and there by to effect his ruin.

1. And first, he designs to benefit and serve himself. In all that artificial scene that he lays, by adoring and commending this or that great person, he intends not so much *to praise* as *to be* what the other is. He would be great, rich, and honourable; and that puts him upon the dissembler's drudgery to enslave himself to all his humours, to extol his impertinences, and adore his very villainies. It is not for want of wit or apprehension, that the flatterer speaks such paradoxes; for he sees through that great and glorious bauble that he so cringes to; he despises him heartily, while he harangues him magnificently; his thoughts and his words are at a perpetual jar and distance; he thinks satires, while he speaks panegyrics.

Nay, and perhaps he hates and abhors his own ill fate too, that should force him to take such a sordid course to advance himself; that should make him fall down before such an image, and worship such an illustrious piece of emptiness. But profit reconciles evil minds to the coarsest and lowest services; and men are willing to bow their bodies, and stoop down to take up a jewel or a piece of gold, though it be from a dunghill.

But it is evident, that every flatterer designs only his own advantage, whether there be or be not any real foundation of worth in him whom he pretends to admire; and that, from this one consideration, that the same person, in case he falls from his greatness and power, is presently deserted, and finds all his parasites' encomiums turned into scoffs and invectives. The man's virtue, if he had any, remains untouched, and perhaps by his calamity improved. He can be as valiant, as just, and temperate, as he was before: but what is that to the purpose? He cannot reward or prefer; he cannot frown an enemy into ruin, or smile a friend or a dependent into a fair fortune. And if so, the flatterer thinks he should but lose his time and his breath to declaim and be eloquent upon so dry a subject. No; his game lies another way; he bids good night to the setting, and reserves his devotion for the rising sun. Men may be both wise and virtuous; but it is their power that makes them commended for being so.



And from this it is also that we may observe in flatterers such great difference in the behaviour of the same person at one time, from what it is at another. While he is yet upon the chase, and a get ting, none so humble, so abject, so full of all servile compliances; but when his nest is feathered, and his bags full, he can be insolent and haughty, he can bend his knee as stiffly, and keep his distance as magisterially as another. For, like Saul, after he comes to a crown and a kingdom, he then presently finds in himself another spirit, and disdains to look after those asses that he used formerly so much to follow. Let his old, rich patrons now commend themselves; he has served his turn of them, caught the fish, and he cares for no more. After the young one is grown up and well thriven, it follows the dam no longer; but instead of following it, if occasion serves, it can kick it. No man uses flattery as his employment, but as his instrument; and consequently, when it has done his work, he lays it aside. And thus much for the flatterer's first design, which is to serve and advantage himself.

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2. His second is to undermine and ruin him whom he flatters. He finds his interest and affairs cast so, that he is not like to be considerable without the downfall of such or such a person, who yet is so great and powerful, that he despairs to shake him by violence and direct force, and therefore he endeavours to circumvent him by art; to which purpose, he pretends himself an admirer of his extraordinary parts and virtues, tickles his ears with perpetual applauses of all his words and actions; and by this means he gets the esteem of a friend, and with that an opportunity of working under ground. But all this while he is big with a design of mischief; he is only taking aim where he may shoot him surely and mortally; so that all the fair speeches and fine flowers that he strews in the other's way, are only to cover and conceal the fatal gin and trap that he has placed, to catch and bring him into the hands of the destroyer. And it is very frequent, that the flatterer, by taking this course, makes his design effectual, and compasses the ruin of him whom he flatters; and that upon these several accounts.

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1. First, By this means he deceives him, and grossly abuses and perverts his judgment, which should be the guide and director of all his actions. A right judgment is to the soul what a strong and an healthful constitution is to the body; it will, by its own force, work off all lesser inconveniences and distempers. Though a man be sometimes driven aside by his passions and his irregular appetites, yet so long as his mind and understanding has an habitually true notion and apprehension of things, it will recover the man, and prevent the error from being in finite. And therefore, according to that advice given to the soldier, τὴν κεφαλὴν πεφύλαξο, *secure your head*; so is every one to be careful to preserve his judging faculties entire, that he may not be abused into false choices, and imposed upon by undue and fallacious conclusions: for a flaw in these leaves the soul like an army without conduct, exposed to all the miseries of dispersion and confusion.

He that is thoroughly deceived, is in the very next disposition to be ruined; for cast but a mist before a man's eyes, and whither may you not lead him? He marches on with as much confidence into a slough or a pitfall, as he would tread the direct paths that lead to his own house. None plays the fool confidently, but he that verily believes he does wisely. He is flattered into mistakes and false measures of his actions, and views all the passages of his behaviour by a false light, the consequences of which must needs be destructive and miserable.

And therefore every flatterer who endeavours to delude and blind the judgment of a man, properly gives him a fatal wound in the head; and if that be crazed and giddy, it is not the absolute, entire perfection of all the other parts of the body, that can suffice to regulate and direct so much as any one action of life. The whole tenor of a man's behaviour in this case is like the motion of a watch that has a fault in the spring; he is rendered utterly use less, as to all great and considerable purposes.

2. The flatterer undermines, and perhaps, in the issue, ruins him whom he flatters, by bringing him to shame and a general contempt; for he deals with him like one that pins some ridiculous thing upon another's back, and then sends him with it into the market-place, where he finds himself hooted and laughed at by all, but walks on wholly ignorant of the cause. The flatterer tells an impertinent, talking grandee, that his discourse wonderfully becomes him; that he utters himself with extraordinary grace and exactness of speech: he accordingly believes him, and gives his tongue no rest, but is still proclaiming his emptiness and indiscretion in all companies. He tells another passionate furioso, that it argues height and gallantry of spirit, not to endure the least under valuing word, the least shadow of an affront; and he accordingly, upon every trivial occasion, takes fire, and flames out into all the expressions of rage and revenge; and, for his pains, is despised by some, hated by others, and opposed by all; and these are the effects and favours of flattery.

In a word, the flatterer deals with the flattered person as the Philistines did with Samson, first put ting out his eyes, and then making him a mock and a sport to all that had a mind to divert themselves with his calamity. Shame, of itself, is indeed a great misery; but then we are to consider further, that as to the real advantages of the world, it is to be reckoned amongst the surest and speediest causes of a man's ruin. For who will employ, who will prefer or recommend a despised person? Kindness and contempt seldom lodge upon the same object. But suppose that a man had a kindness for such an one, yet he would not be able to own the effects of such a kindness, against the general envy and derision and censures of the world; bad certificates to vouch a man's fitness for any place or preferment.

Shame and contempt casts a man under the feet of those whom he converses with; in which case, we cannot presume upon any such redundancy of compassion and good nature amongst men, as to imagine that any one can be under foot without being trampled upon. He that slights me himself cannot possibly be my friend; but he that endeavours to make others slight me too, must needs be my mortal enemy.



3. The flatterer undermines and effects the ruin of him whom he flatters; forasmuch as by this means he renders his recovery and amendment impossible. Every fault in a man shuts the door upon virtue, but flattery is the thing that seals it. Solomon gives his judgment in the case fully and unanswerably, [Prov. xxvi. 12](#), *Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of that man.* A man's way out of error lies through the paths of conviction; and he that recovers a fool must first unfool him to that degree, as to persuade him of his folly: for it is a thing against nature and reason for a man to think of amendment, who at the same time thinks himself perfect. No man surely prepares himself for travel, while he supposes himself at his journey's end.

He that makes another sick, and brings him under a distemper, does not presently destroy him, because there is still a remedy in physic; but he that persuades a sick, distempered person that he is well, and so keeps him from the use of physic, he certainly is preparing a coffin for him, and designs no thing but to bring him to his grave.

Every flatterer, by infusing into a man a good opinion of his defects and vices, endeavours to fasten and rivet them into his behaviour for ever; for no man leaves what he cannot dislike. Persuade a prisoner, or a captive, that his prison is a paradise, and you shall never hear him petition for a release. Vice indeed captivates and enslaves wheresoever it prevails; but flattery strives to make the mind in love with its slavery, and so to render that slavery perpetual and unalterable; it would fain intoxicate and charm a man into a kind of stupidity and impotence to help himself. In short, it uses him as Jael did Sisera; it pretends to refresh and entertain him kindly, but it designs only to nail his head to the ground.

And thus I have endeavoured to lay open the flatterer's ends and purposes. Where, upon the result of all, it is perhaps a disputable case, whether of the two is a worse thing, *to flatter* or *to be flattered*; to be so sordid, and withal mischievous, as to practise the one, or so blind and sottishly easy as to suffer the other. But the truth is, this latter is the object of pity, as the former is of the justest hatred and detestation. In fine, it must be the *harmlessness of the dove* that must keep a man from doing one, and *the wisdom of the serpent* that must preserve him from being abused by the other; neither of which virtues can be had in any perfection, but from the grace and bounty of him who is the author and giver of every good and perfect gift.



SERMON X.

PSALM xix. 13. FIRST PART.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.

THESE words, running in the form of a prayer or petition, may suggest these three things to our consideration.

1. The thing prayed against; *presumptuous sins*.
2. The person making this prayer; king David; one adorned with the highest eulogies for his piety, even by God himself.
3. The means that he engages for his deliverance from the thing he prays against; namely, the divine grace and assistance: *Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins*.

All these things lie naturally and evidently in the text; and there is no doubt, but that it may be most pertinently handled in a distinct prosecution of them. But I shall choose rather to frame my thoughts into another method, and designing to take in and comprehend all these in the progress of the following discourse, I shall cast the discussion of the words under these two general heads.

- I. To shew what these presumptuous sins are.
- II. To shew the reason of this so holy and excellent person's so earnestly praying against them.

As for the first of these, what presumptuous sins are. In the handling of this, I shall do these three things.

1. I shall shew in general what it is *to presume*.
2. I shall assign some of the most notable kinds of presumptuous sins.
3. I shall prescribe some remedies against them.

And first for the first; what it is in general *to presume*: where, before we proceed to any strict and positive definition of it, we may briefly take notice of the description it lies under in the word of God, which sets forth this sin by various, and those very significant expressions. It calls it a man's *hardening of his heart: hardening his neck, hardening his face*, and, in a word, *hardening himself against God*. It calls it *a walking frowardly, and a walking contrary to God*; as also *a resisting of the Holy Ghost*; and *a grieving and doing despite to the Spirit of grace*. It is likewise expressed by a *man's going on in his own ways, and refusing to be reformed*, with the like: that is, all the several evils and provoking malignities that are in obstinacy, stubbornness, impudence, and direct contempt of God, like so many lines in their centre, meet and concur for the making up of the character of presumption.

But that we may yet view the nature of it more closely, and define what it is: to presume, or to commit a presumptuous sin, is for a man, in the doing of any unlawful or suspicious action, to expect and promise himself impunity upon those grounds that indeed afford no reason for any such expectation.



So that, to the making up of such a sin, these three integral parts are required.

1. That a man undertake an action, known by him to be unlawful, or at least doubtful.
2. That notwithstanding this, he promise to himself security from any punishment of right consequent upon it.
3. And lastly, that he do this upon motives utterly groundless and unreasonable.

In this order therefore does presumption accomplish its course of acting in the heart of the presuming sinner. For, as for the thing that he is about to do; he either doubts whether it be lawful or no; or he certainly knows that it is unlawful: whereupon, if on either hand he proceeds to the doing of it, he infallibly bolts upon a sin, because he certainly acts against conscience, either doubtful or knowing; both of which will involve him in sin: for to act against a knowing conscience is apparently sinful; and to act also against the doubting, from the mouth of the apostle receives the express sentence of condemnation; *He that doubteth is damned if he eat*, [Rom. xiv. last verse](#).

Now the presuming sinner, knowing the action he is attempting to be unlawful, or at the best suspecting it as doubtful, proceeds, notwithstanding this dissatisfaction, to deliberate and advise with himself, whether he should undertake it or no; he argues the case with himself on both sides. On one side he pleads the unlawfulness, or at least the suspiciousness of it, and the great danger that may follow upon either: on the other, he thinks of the pleasure, the profit, and the advantage of the thing under debate, together with a supposed probability of escape and impunity, though he does commit it. And hereupon, as the result and upshot of his deliberation, he comes to fix, and to resolve that he will do it, be the consequence what it will; though yet he believes he shall carry the matter so, as to bring himself off clear and harmless after all: and thus from suspense he proceeds to resolution, and from resolution passes into action; and so stands a perfect, complete, presumptuous sinner before God, as having brought his sin to maturity and actual commission, through all the by-traces, all the rubs and impediments that either conscience or Providence laid in its way.

From what has been said, we may here observe, that the presumptuous sinner is utterly divested of those two only pleas that can be alleged for the extenuation of sin, as, 1. Ignorance. 2. Surprise.

And first, as for ignorance. Though the case is such in the rules of morality, that no ignorance of things, lying under necessary practice, can be totally inculpable, and so cannot wholly excuse the guilt of the action occasioned by it; yet as to an extenuation of the degree, we find the plea of it frequently admitted in scripture; as *the servant that knew not his lord's will, and did things worthy of stripes, was therefore beaten but with few stripes*, [Luke xii. 48](#). And our Saviour himself grounds his prayer for his murderers upon their ignorance of what they did; [Luke xxiii. 34](#), *Father, for give them; for they know not what they do*. And St. Paul gives the same account of his obtaining mercy after his blasphemies and persecutions; [1 Tim. i. 13](#). *I obtained mercy, says he, because I did it ignorantly and in unbelief*. So that ignor-

ance, we see, though not by any virtue in itself, but by the mere mercy, and goodness, and condescension of God, has prevailed and been effectual for the covering of a multitude of sins, not yet grown too big for pardon.

But now the presumptuous sinner cuts himself off from all such plea; for he sins with an high hand, with an open and a seeing eye. His conscience is all the time awake, like a thief that breaks open an house in the face of the sun, and amidst the resorts of a market. The motto of a presuming sinner may be, *Veni, vidi, et peccavi*. The Devil told Eve, that her and her husband's eyes should be opened, upon their eating of the forbidden fruit; and accordingly most of their posterity have since inherited the power of sinning knowingly and seeingly, of offending their Maker with counsel and deliberation. Their eyes are opened indeed with a mischief: but for that very cause their sin is heightened; and it were better for them that they *were blind*; for then, as said our Saviour to the pharisees, *they would have had no sin*; that is, no sin in comparison: their sin would not have borne so deep a tincture, and been set off with such crimson aggravations.

As sin leaves the soul, so presumption leaves sin itself naked, by drawing from it its covering; and also helpless, by taking away its last asylum and retreat. In both of which it had a fair accommodation from ignorance, which, like darkness, invites sleep; and so is the parent of a little rest and transient quiet to sick, guilty, and disturbed consciences.

Ignorance is looked upon as so plausible a defence, that I have heard and read of those that have studiously been ignorant of the evil of an action, where they have passionately desired the pleasure of it: they have endeavoured to shift off the light, and to convey themselves from the inspection of their own consciences, that so their sinful delights might proceed with the greater relish and the less interruption. A pretty art for men to befool and damn themselves withal.

But such must know, that ignorance affected, and voluntarily procured, is so far from giving any mitigation or excuse to other actions, that it is not able to excuse itself. For who can defend an action, by pleading that he did it ignorantly, when it was in his power not to have been ignorant, when the means of knowledge were before him, and the neglect of them was his choice? Presumption and such an ignorance may walk hand in hand, forasmuch as it may be resolved into presumption. It is a blindness brought upon a man, because he would not see; otherwise all ignorance, that is merely negative and inculpable presumption, is utterly inconsistent with, and makes absolutely unpleadable.

2. Presumption excludes all plea from surprise: a plea admitted in human courts for the diminution of the malignity of many crimes. An action not being perfectly evil, but as committed by perfect choice, which is much weakened and disturbed by the hurry of a surprise. And there is no doubt but the mercies of the court of Heaven also have some grains of allowance for those actions that men are thus, in a manner, thrown headlong into. But now where there is deliberation, there can be no surprise; forasmuch as a surprise prevents



and takes a man off from all previous deliberation: and presumption is still accompanied with deliberation; it is a sin that proceeds gradually, it destroys the soul soberly, and with design.

But before I go any further, when I say that surprise takes off from the nature of presumption, so that every presumptuous sin must be supposed to be committed with deliberation; I conceive that, for the preventing of mistakes, this may need some further explication. We must know therefore, that a sin may be said to be committed deliberately, either formally and immediately, or only virtually and remotely. Of the former there can be no doubt; for in that sense a man sins deliberately, when he sins with foregoing thought, as well as with present purpose of mind. But for the latter, we may take those terms more at large thus: when a man is brought into a sudden heat of passion and confusion of spirit, in which he proceeds to blaspheme God, or to revile his prince, or the like; this blasphemy and treason of his must not think presently to take sanctuary in this pretence, that it was done only in a surprise of passion, and so ought not to be accounted presumptuous, upon this ground, that it cannot pass for deliberate: this, I say, is not to be allowed, because if the man knowingly and deliberately put himself under those circumstances that raised him to that fury of passion, every action done under that passion is virtually deliberate, and follows the nature and quality of the first action, as the leading, principal cause of all that directly ensued upon it.

A man drinks himself into a present rage, or distraction of mind; in which condition he is perhaps carried to commit a rape or a murder, which action is indeed in itself sudden and indeliberate: but, since the man at first engaged in drinking with full choice and deliberation of mind, his passion being caused by that drink, and the murder being caused by that passion, are both of them virtually deliberate, as being resolvable into a foregoing choice: upon which score they contract the guilt and foulness of presumptuous sins, and so stand rated in the accounts of Heaven.

But here, because there is much and frequent discourse in divinity, of a distinction between sins of presumption and sins of infirmity; and since very much depends upon the right or the wrong apprehending of it in a casuistical theology, as also in the daily practices of men; it will not be amiss to inquire into the ground or reason of this distinction.

What a sin of presumption is, we have declared already; so that the whole business will lie in this, to see what that is that makes a sin to be a sin of infirmity.

Three opinions there are in this matter.

1. The first derives the nature of it from the condition of the agent, or him that commits it.

2. The second derives it from the matter of the action.

3. The third and last, from the principle producing it.

We shall consider each of them in their order.



1. First of all then, there are some who derive the nature of a sin of infirmity from the quality or condition of him that commits it; affirming every sin committed by a believer, or a person truly regenerate, to be a sin of infirmity; partly, because they say, that there is not that absolute and full concurrence of the inward principle in such a one to the commission of the sin; but chiefly because such persons, being supposed to be fixed in an unchangeable possession of the divine favour, so that they cannot possibly fall from it, no sins can be able to alter their estate; whereupon their sins lose their full effect, and become only lapses and infirmities.

For answer to this; it is not necessary here, either to assert or to deny the perpetuity and unalterable tenor of a regenerate man's estate: but this I affirm, that to take the nature of his actions merely from the condition of his person, is hugely absurd; for that can only infer the pardon of his sins upon another account: but surely a sin changes nothing of its nature by this, that in one man it is pardoned, in another not.

This indeed has been eagerly asserted by some; and in this assertion they laid a foundation for all licentiousness; for, according to the tenor of their doctrine, it was but for them, first to put on a bold front, and to persuade themselves and others that they were of the number of the converted and the regenerate; and then, whatsoever sins were after wards committed by them, sunk to a wonderful low degree of guilt, as being chargeable with no higher than what arises from infirmity. In the strength of this doctrine, some would hold David's murder and adultery to have been only sins of infirmity; though each of them complicated, and made up of so many several base sins, and ripened with such deliberate contrivances, that it is hard to commit, or indeed to imagine, sins of a blacker hue.

But, for a fuller vindication of the truth, I shall, even upon the supposition and grant of this principle, that a regenerate person never so loses his ground by any sin, as to be cut off from his interest in the favour of God, and his title to heaven; I shall, I say, yet shew the falseness and unreasonableness of the doctrine perversely built upon it; and that by these following arguments.

1. First: whereas it is said, that persons regenerate sin not with such a plenary and entire consent of will as others; for which cause their sin loses many degrees of its malignity; I demand, whether by this they understand not, (as in all reason they must,) that such persons find in their conscience a greater reluctancy to be brought to the commission of sin than others? And if so, what is their excuse but an higher aggravation of their sin? that it is committed more against the light and dictates of conscience struggling and contending against it, than the sins of persons wholly unsanctified.

2. But in the second place, I demand further, whether this estate of regeneration does not, according to their own supposition, raise the persons so qualified to the privilege of being the sons of God? And if so, I would fain know, whether the unworthy behaviour of a son is not of a more provoking nature than the same deportment from a stranger? A son is



capable more of presuming upon his father than a slave or servant upon his master; for one of fends only against authority, the other against authority mixed with love, and endeared with the nearest relation. I conclude therefore, that this is so far from degrading a sin to the smallness of an infirmity, that it stamps it ten times a greater presumption than it would be, if committed by another person.

3. And lastly, If the sins of persons regenerate must all pass for infirmities, then how comes David here (who surely was not the last or meanest of this number) to pray so earnestly to be kept from sins of presumption? If the nature of his condition secured him from all possibility of falling into them, where was the danger? And if no danger, where was the necessity of praying to be rescued from an impossibility? But it seems David steered his actions by a different divinity, and looked upon this as the most dangerous presumption of all, to call sins of presumption sins of infirmity. And thus much in answer to the first opinion.

2. Some derive the nature of sins of infirmity from the matter of them; as that they are committed only in thought or desire, or sometimes in word, but pass not into outward and gross action.

But this also is most false and pernicious, and directly opens a gate to the encouragement of the vilest impieties. For though it must be granted, that our thoughts and desires, and sometimes our words, are less under command than our outward actions; yet to affirm, therefore, that whatsoever is sinfully transacted in these, must presently be baptized but an infirmity, is an assertion no ways to be endured.

And for answer to it, I affirm,

1. First, that there is no act producible by the soul of man, that either is or ever was under the power and command of man's will, but is capable of receiving all the poison and guilt, that the will (which is itself the fountain of all sin) is able to infuse into it; and consequently of being a sin of presumption. But now both thoughts, words, and desires are controllable by the will, which is able to make the soul cease thinking and desiring of any particular thing, by diverting and applying it to other objects. And if the will has now lost some of the absoluteness of its primitive dominion, yet when we come to state the morality of actions, we are to consider the power it had naturally, and in man's innocency, and has since lost by its own fault; but stands therefore no less accountable for it to God, than if it were not lost.

2. But secondly, let us hear the voice of God in the scriptures concerning this matter. There, I am sure, are loud complaints of the sins of men's thoughts. [Esa. lv. 7](#). *Let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts*, says God; and [Jeremy iv. 14](#), *How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?* And in [Matt. xv. 19](#), *From the heart*, says our Saviour, *proceed evil thoughts, murders, and adulteries*. We see here evil thoughts put into the same catalogue with murders and adulteries; and these surely are not sins of infirmity. But above all, take that place in



[Acts viii. 22](#), where St. Peter bids Simon Magus *pray to God, if peradventure the thought of his heart might be forgiven him*.

And then for desires; we know that in God's account they stand for actions. In [Matt. v. 28](#), Christ calls the unlawful desire of a woman adultery. And God still complained of his people, that *their heart went after idols*: and in [Psalm lxxviii. 18](#) it is said of them, *that they tempted God in their heart*.

But that evil desires carry so high a guilt with them, is no less evident from mere reason: for if the evil of the thoughts lies under so great a condemnation before God, that of the desires must needs lie under a greater; forasmuch as desire is a further step and advance of the soul into sin; and is indeed the very pulse of the soul, naturally showing the temper and inclination of it.

And so much for the second opinion.

3dly and lastly. The difference of a sin of presumption and of infirmity may be drawn from the principle immediately producing the action; as namely, that the will is carried to the one by malice, to the other by inadvertency. And this is that, that reason will force us to pitch upon. For there is no doubt, but an evil choice (the thing here meant by malice) is that which greatens the impiety and guilt of an action into the nature of presumption; which action, done out of a sudden incogitancy, might pass for but a weakness, and so stand rated at a much lower pitch of guilt.

Certain it is therefore, that malice is that that constitutes the nature of presumption, and inadvertency that makes a sin to be but an infirmity. But then to draw this down *a thesi ad hypothesin*, and to determine the bounds of each, by showing exactly where malice ceases, and where a faultless inadvertency begins; this, I confess, is most difficult, and perhaps, by any one common rule, constantly and universally applicable to every particular action, not to be effected.

But for our better conduct in a case of such importance, I shall shew first negatively, what is not a sin of infirmity; 2dly, what positively is.

As for the negative part, we are to observe,

1. That whensoever a man ventures and designs to commit a sin upon this ground, that he judges it a sin of infirmity; that sin, by such antecedent thought and design beforehand, is changed from a sin of infirmity into a sin of presumption. For though an infirmity be comparatively but a little sin, yet it is far from an infirmity to account any sin little, and much more upon that ground to commit it. Men are apt to say, (in their hearts at least,) that such or such a thing is no great matter; and therefore, surely, they need not so much scruple the doing of it. But such must know, that this argues a cursed undervaluing of the evil of sin, and a desire to take any advantage to commit it; than which there can not be a greater proof of a corrupt, rotten, and un sanctified heart.



2. That sin, though in itself never so small, that a man after the committing of it is desirous to excuse or extenuate, by charging it upon surprise, passion, weakness, company, or the like, does by such excuse cease to be an infirmity: for when a man comes to defend his sin, it shews that he has an hearty kindness for it, and dislikes nothing in it but the consequent danger; than which temper of mind few actual sins are more loathsome and provoking in the sight of God.

But in the next place, to pass from negatives, and to shew positively what a sin of infirmity is; I conceive it may not unfitly be defined, a sin committed out of mere, sudden inadvertency, that inadvertency not being directly caused by any deliberate sin immediately going before it. The reason of this has been given already, viz. that the consequent actions follow the guilt and nature of the antecedent action that caused them. But for the better clearing of the thing discoursed of to our apprehensions, that I may also give an instance of this kind of sin; I suppose, when a man, being suddenly urged and provoked vehemently, conceives an angry thought, or utters an hasty word, that that thought and that word may be reckoned for infirmities. And when an unlawful desire suddenly strikes the mind, but a man's heart immediately smites him for it, so that he presently checks that desire, this also, I conceive, may be reputed a sin of infirmity. But, God knows, few sins pass from us thus. Sin is scarce ever acted by us, but with the full force and power of all our faculties. And it is seldom that we do any thing faintly, when it is to dishonour God, or to ruin ourselves.

And thus I have finished the first branch of the first general head; which was to shew, what it was in general *to presume*, and wherein the nature of a presumptuous sin did consist.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, might, majesty, and dominion, now and for ever. Amen.



SERMON XI.

PSALM xix. 13. SECOND PART.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins.

II. I COME now to the second, which is to as sign some of the most notable kinds of presumptuous sins.

Concerning which, I shall premise this in general; That there is no sin committible by man, as to the kind of it, but by circumstances is capable of being made a sin of presumption. Upon which account it would be infinite to set down all the several kinds; and therefore I shall only insist upon some of the greatest remark for their malignity, and such as it most concerns the souls of men to be clear and se cure from.

For a man to sin upon hopes or confidence of pardon or mercy, I cannot reckon as a particular kind of presumptuous sin; this being the general nature of presumption running through all the respective kinds and species of it. For he that presumes to offend, promises himself pardon from God's mercy, without any warrant from God's word.

The particular kinds therefore of presumptuous sin, that I shall cull out and insist upon, are these that follow.

1. The first is, to sin against the goodness of God, manifesting itself to a man in great prosperity. Every beam of God's favour to a sinner in these outward enjoyments, is a call to repentance upon the stock of ingenuity. And the apostle's exhortation in [Rom. ii. 4](#) lies full against the neglecter of it; *Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* Every breath of air that the sinner takes in, is a respite given him by mercy from sin-revenging justice. Every morsel he eats, and every drop that he drinks, is an alms, and a largess, and a repast, that he has no claim to.

But when mercy shall rise higher, and from the benefit of a bare subsistence serve his convenience, and, what is more, his abundance; when Providence shall make his increase bigger than his barns, and his incomes to upbraid the narrowness of his coffers; when it shall add a lustre to his person, and at the same time multiply and advance his family; when it shall appoint angels for his guardians, and, in a word, set an hedge about all that he has: for such a one to rise up and spurn against his Maker, to make all his plenty and greatness the drudge of his luxury and ambition; so that his sins shall outvie his substance, and the very effects of mercy be made the weapons of unrighteousness; for him therefore to sin, because he is great, and rich, and powerful, that is, because Providence has by all this obliged him not to sin; is not this the height of ingratitude, as ingratitude is the height of baseness?

Samuel upbraided David for his two great sins, by recounting what God had done for him, and how openhanded Providence had been to him, in heaping upon him all external



blessings, even to the anticipation and exceeding of his desires. *Behold*, says the prophet, in the name of God, [2 Sam. xii. 8](#), *I had given thee suck and such things*: and certainly these things are mercies; those, I am sure, that enjoy them, would confess them so in the want of them. For let such a one reflect upon the thousands and the ten thousands of calamitous persons round about him, and tell me a reason why he should stand exempted from the same lot; why Providence should be so fond of him, as to make him swim in pleasure, while others are sinking under their necessities? When he sees this man roaring under pain, that man languishing under sickness, another hauled to prison for poverty and debt, another starving with cold and hunger; let him tell us what obligation he has laid upon God, that he should be healthful in his person, flourishing in his condition, full in his revenues, and sit down to a table, the very scraps of which were a feast for many persons much more holy and virtuous than himself.



But to go a little further: while he is thus provided for, (as we have observed,) not only as to convenience, but also supplied as to affluence; can he tell me, why he is all this time permitted to live, and to tread the earth? why he is not in hell, roaring in the flames, and bemoaning himself in the regions of the damned? whether his sins have not long since deserved it, and whether both the mercy and justice of God might not be glorified in his destruction? and whether many, whose sins were fewer and smaller than his, have not been cut off from the earth in wrath, and disposed of into that remediless estate of torment? Can he ascribe this reprieve to any thing but to mercy, to mere undeserved mercy, that places the marks of its favour absolutely and irrespectively upon whom it pleases?



But now is there any gross sin, that such a one can commit, that is not a direct defiance to the designs of this mercy? There is not any temporal blessing that a man enjoys, that shall not be reckoned upon his eternal account. That sentence shall appear fresh and fierce against him, *Son, thou receivedst thy good things*. And it is not so much his having sinned that shall condemn him, as his having sinned in pomp, in plenty, and magnificence. His having sinned against the bounties and endearments of Providence; this is that, that shall rank him with those leading sinners, whose portion lies deeper in the bottomless pit than that of ordinary offenders.

2. A second sort of presumptuous sins, are sins committed under God's judging and afflicting hand; than which there cannot be a more open and professed declaring of an opposition to God; it being little short of sending a challenge to Heaven. It is a striking of God, while God is striking us; and so, as it were, a contention who should have the last blow. For a child to commit that fault under the rod, for which the rod is upon him, shews an incorrigible disposition, and a malice too great to be chastised into amendment.

What does God send forth his arrows for, and shoot this man with sickness, another with poverty, and a third with shame, but to reclaim and to recover them? to embitter the sweet morsels of sensuality to them, and to knock off their affections from sinful pleasures?

For God makes not the miseries of men his recreation; it is no delight to him to hear the groans and the sighs of a distressed person. It can be no diversion to the chirurgeon to hear the shrieks and the cries of him whom he is cutting for the stone; but yet he goes on with his work, for he designs nothing but ease and cure to the person whom he afflicts.



God would make men better by soft and persuasive means, he would *draw them with the cords of a man*; but when these prevail not, he is drove to the use of his whips and his scorpions: but if these prove ineffectual too, the man is too great a sinner to be corrected, and consequently to be saved. When a man comes three or four times out of God's furnace with his dross about him, it is a sign of a reprobate and a castaway. God complains of the house of Israel, [Ezek. xxii. 18](#), *that they were dross in the midst of the furnace*. When the flesh is so proud, that it scorns all the powers of a corrosive, it is an argument that it is incurable, and fit for no thing but to be cut off. God speaks it with a certain pathos and expostulation, and as if he were even brought to a nonplus, [Esa. i. 5](#), *Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt still more and more*. Some are so obstinately bad, and confirmed in their vice, that judgments and afflictions are but thrown away upon them; and God's shooting at them is but like shooting at a mark, which indeed receives the arrow, but does not at all feel it.

But such persons must know that their sins are rendered infinitely more daring and provoking by the distress of their condition. God throws them upon the ground, and they, instead of being humbled, rage and rave, and throw the dirt in his face. This is properly a man's hardening himself against God. The Holy Ghost speaking of a wicked prince of Judah, sets forth the height of his wickedness by this character, [2 Chron. xxviii. 22](#), *In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz*. What a brand does he give him! as if he had said, This is that monster of men, that spot of nature, that prodigy of impiety. It is the property of dogs to snarl under the whip, and to fly in the face of him that strikes them.



There is never an affliction that befalls any man, but it comes with this motto written upon it by the finger of God himself; *Go, sin no more, lest a worse evil come unto thee*. Has any man felt the hand of God upon his body, his estate, or his family, or any concernment that is dear unto him? Why let him hear his voice also; his admonishing, his counselling voice, *Sin no more, lest a worse evil happen unto thee*. Has God snatched away a man's child? God can snatch away his estate too. Has God took away his estate? he can take away his friends also. Has he bereaved him of his friends? he can likewise bereave him of his reputation. Has he blasted his reputation? he can proceed to touch him in his health, and with the most miserable of distempers to smite him with madness, phrensy, and distraction. And after all this, God has more ways to plague his rebel creature, than our poor, short apprehensions can reach unto.

But now for a man to sin against all this; to laugh at all these warning periods of Heaven; what is it but a kind of waging war with God? Well may every serious person be still putting

up this prayer, Lord, keep me from this kind of presumption: for certainly, wheresoever it is, it places a man but a finger's breadth from destruction.

3. A third sort of presumption is, to commit a sin clearly discovered and directly pointed at by the word of God, either written or preached. The word sometimes meets the sinner with that power and clearness, that his conscience even forces him to cry out and arraign himself; This is my sin, and I am that sinner that is preached against. He finds it not in the power of his invention, by any art or evasion, to elude or shift off the charge, it comes so home and close to his condition. It is to his sin, as a looking-glass to his face; it represents it in every shadow, lineament, and proportion: so that the preacher might be even thought to have had a correspondent in the man's breast, and to have held intelligence with his heart: he gives him so exact and particular an account of the several ways, methods, and actings of his sin.

Now for a man to turn his back upon all these bright discoveries of his sin, to commit it, as it were, with the word yet sounding in his ears, and full and quick in his memory; it is like a man's offending, not only against a law, but a law rubbed up, renewed, and set afresh before men's eyes, by the king's proclamation.

It is but too usual to see some persons, who at church feel their consciences searched and lanced, and the word even lashing their sin over the face; yet presently, like Samson after the Philistines had been upon him, to go out and shake themselves a little, and forthwith become the very same men that they were before. They are as ready for their cups, for their rotten, obscene, and profane discourse; and, in a word, for all kind of lewdness; as if the preacher had not reproved their vice, but produced new arguments to encourage it; and exhorted them to persevere diligently in those blessed paths, in which they are sure to have the Devil for their leader, and their lust for their companion.

But the word of God will not be baffled and put off so: where it finds no reception, it will be sure to leave a guilt, and no man can despise it securely: the more clearly it informs, being rejected, the more fiercely it condemns. For surely we cannot imagine that the great God of heaven is so cheap in his addresses to men's souls, as, according to his own expressions, *to wait, to rise up early, and all the day long to stretch forth his hands* to the sons of men, in setting out the nature and danger of sin before them; only that they may have opportunity to shew how little these things change and move them; how hardy and obstinate they can be in holding fast their vice, as it were, in spite of Heaven, and maugre all the divine warnings, threats, and admonitions.

This is none of the least degrees of presumption: for supposing that the sinner has not shook off the first principle of self-preservation; while he ventures and proceeds confidently in a sin marked out for vengeance by the voice of God himself, he must needs question either his truth, that he will not, or his power, that he cannot, make good what he says, by punishing as severely as he threatens.

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4. A fourth sort of presumption is, to commit a sin against certain passages of Providence, particularly thwarting, and, as it were, lying cross to the commission of it. God is so merciful to and careful of some men's souls, that when his words make no impression, he is pleased in a manner to put forth his hand, and, by some kind of force, to withhold a man from the perpetration of his intended villainy, as by dashing the opportunities of sinning with some unlooked-for accident, so that the thread and chain of all his fine contrivances is, for the present, broke.



It were infinite to recount particulars; each man may collect enough from his own observation. The drunkard's merry meetings are put off and defeated by the interposal of emergent, unexpected business; the designs of the revengeful person, by the intervention of company, perhaps by sickness, or some other misfortune disabling him for the execution of his malicious purposes: nay, and sometimes the frustration and disappointment shall be so repeated, and withal so strange, that the sinner's conscience can not but tell him that the finger of God is in the whole affair, and that the Almighty himself with stands him: in which case, for him still to hold on his wicked design, and to look for new opportunities to bring it to birth; to make fresh attempts, and to try other courses; it argues a man furiously and invincibly set upon offending God, and pursuing the satisfaction of his sin over all those mountains of opposition that Heaven has raised in his way.

Thus we see nothing could withhold Pharaoh and his host from following the Israelites; for in [Exod. xiv. 24, 25](#), it is said first, *that God troubled them*; then, *that he took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove heavily*; and lastly, such a terror seized them, that they cried out, *Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians*: yet nothing could recall Pharaoh, till Moses stretched out his rod upon the sea, and it returned and swallowed up him and his whole army, so that *they sunk like lead in the mighty waters*.



And then for Balaam, whose story we have in the [22d of Numbers](#): his heart was all that time upon the rich, enticing offers of the king of Moab; yet how many rubs and repulses did God cast in his way, and with what difficulty did he go after *the ways of unrighteousness*: yet go after them he did, and upon that score stands recorded in scripture for as presumptuous and resolved a sinner as any is mentioned in the sacred story.

Those who break through all those mounds and hinderances that God has laid between them and the gratification of their vice, imitate Balaam's sin, and may expect to inherit his damnation.

5. A fifth kind of presumptuous sins are, sins against the inward checks and warnings of conscience about the evil of any course or action. We may call them the checks of conscience, though I doubt not but that sometimes they are the immediate whispers of God's Spirit in the soul; but it matters not much which they are, it coming all to one result; whether God speaks immediately by himself, or by his interpreter, for so is the conscience

littering every thing in the name and authority of God: that there are such inward checks and startings of the soul at the attempt of any great sin is most certain; and I appeal to the mind of every particular person that hears me, whether he has not often found a struggle within himself, and a kind of pull-back from the sin that he has been about to engage in, raising such questions in his heart as Joseph put to himself, *How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God*, and how shall I answer it at the last day? and, What if I should die before I repented of it? and, May it not, for all its present promises of pleasure, be bitterness in the latter end? I know every one (none excepted) feels something like this within himself: it is a thing of universal experience, and no man can deny it.

Now from whence and for what can all these suggestions be sent into the heart? What is the reason that there is such a kind of thing within us, ready, as it were, to catch us by the arm, and to bid us hold our hand when we are putting it forth to the commission of any sin? Surely they are the spiritual engines of God, planted by him in the soul to wield it this way and that way, to the prosecution of virtuous, and from the pursuit of vicious courses: they are the characters of every man's duty drawn and engraven upon his heart; they are the expositors and faithful reporters of the mind of God to a man concerning the quality of every action that he is about to do.

And to thwart and trample upon them, is to presume upon God to that degree that is called *a resisting of his Spirit*. It is to extinguish the eternal light; and to shut our eyes, that we may the more boldly leap down this dismal precipice into the arms and embraces of our sin. However, such presumers must learn, that he who now warns us from sin in *a still voice*, when he comes to reprove and judge for sin will do it in thunder. And there is not one of these inward, gentle, and (as they think,) inconsiderable movings and endeavours of the conscience against sin, but shall one day come into account, and be reckoned in the catalogue of its aggravations.

So that if we should imagine a sinner pleading the excuse of his sin before God, that he was pushed on to the acting of it by a clamorous, furious principle within him, his violent affections, his mouth would quickly be stopped, and all his plea cut off by this one demand; Whether he did not find another principle within him, as much protesting against that sin, as passionately dissuading and drawing him off from it, painting the evil of it before his eyes, and laying the sad consequents of it home to his heart. All this will and must be granted; and therefore he that sins against these inward checks, presumes, and, what is more, he presumes inexcusably.

6. A sixth sort of presumptuous sins are, sins against that inward taste, relish, and complacency that men have found in their attempts to walk with God, and comply with the precepts of the gospel. The former are sins against the sight, these against the taste of God's favour. For the explication of which we must observe, that some persons, wrought up and warmed by the word into good resolutions, set forth for heaven, and intend with themselves



a dereliction of the world, and a living up to those divine rules of piety taught and proposed by the Saviour of the world, the great instructor of souls. Hereupon, by reason of the native suitableness of those excellent things taught by him to the generous principles of virtue, naturally planted in every mind, a man, upon the least compliance with them, finds a strange, exalting pleasure and satisfaction arising from thence, much superior to all the poor delights of sensuality. This is called, in [Matt. xiii. 20](#), *a receiving the word with joy*: and it is said of Herod, in [Mark vi. 20](#), *that upon the Baptist's preaching he did many things, and heard him gladly*: and there is mention of some, in [Heb. vi. 4](#), that *had tasted of the heavenly gift*.

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Now this is that relish and inward complacency that I spoke of, and which I said might be sinned against. For I doubt not but God gratifies new beginners in the ways of piety with certain strictures and tastes of spiritual pleasure, in vain to be sought for any where else: they are transient discoveries of himself; the very glimpses of heaven, and drops of an overflowing bounty.

And I doubt not also, but many, who have been admitted to a participation and experience of these privileges, have yet, through the force of temptation, the entanglements of the flesh, and the deceitfulness of their own hearts, been so far turned aside, as to have all these impressions worn off their minds, and in the issue prove wretched apostates. For these are not the peculiar mercies of the elect, who are loved with an everlasting love, but kindness of a lower degree. God may drop such manna upon those that shall never enter into Canaan: many, like Moses, may have a short view of that which they shall never enjoy.

But this is that that we drive at, that every apostasy and sinful backsliding after the soul has been thus treated by God, is thereby inflamed to the nature of a great unkindness and a vast presumption. For can a man do any thing more heinous than this? After God has met him in his prayers, embraced him in sacraments, and given him hope of the pardon of his sins; after all this, to turn rebel? to hear the Baptist gladly, and within a while to behead him? Can there be a viler and blacker presumption? He that only has a cordial by him, and balks the use of it, dies without remedy; but he that also tastes it, and then spits it out again, dies without pity.

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And let this be observed, that if such persons, who, like Agrippa, were almost Christians, and have been, as it were, in the skirts and out-courts of heaven, chance to apostatize finally, and to perish, the consideration of this will make the worm of conscience bite much more terribly, and the everlasting flame burn ten times more violently, than if they had gone to hell at the common rate of sinning, with such as never thought of any other god but their belly, nor any religion beside their sensuality.

7. The seventh and last sort of presumptuous sins that I shall mention is, the returning to and repeated commission of the same sin; which surely is the greatest demonstration of a bold, stiff, resolved sinner that can be. Flies are accounted bold creatures, and that for a very good reason; for drive them off from a place as often as you will, yet presently they will

be there again. It is not a thing so clear, but it has been disputed by divines, whether a relapse into the same sin, if a gross one, be pardonable. There is great cause to conclude, that it may and is: the contrary assertion being a limitation of mercy, where the word sets no limits to it: yet surely the case is dangerous, and those two things may be very well consistent, that a disease is curable, and yet not one of five hundred ever cured of it.

And if one, of so many sinning presumptuously in this nature, has been, by the singular grace of God, recovered, and in the end saved, I should think it would be but a small encouragement to any, to presume that he shall be the one picked out of so great a number. David presumed upon the goodness and justice of God broadly and foully enough in those his two great sins; and so did Peter in denying his master. But we read of no more murders or adulteries in David, or denials of Christ in Peter: and God knows, if there had, what would have been the issue of such a presumption in either of them.

This is a sinning against the common methods of nature, as well as the obligations of grace. For it is natural to all men, nay, even to most brute animals, to avoid that thing or place where they have met with some notable mischief or disaster. There is a lasting horror of it imprinted upon the spirits, that presently works and shews itself upon the sight of the hurtful thing. Some stomachs never can abide a liquor or meat wonderfully grateful to them before, after they have had some loathsome physic conveyed to them in it: now there can no reason be assigned why men should not be thus affected also as to spirituals.

A man commits a gross sin, and by it makes a great breach upon the peace of his conscience, loses all present sense and feeling of the favour of God, and perhaps, over and above, finds some outward, fierce expressions of his wrath in the discomposure of his worldly affairs, so that both within and with out the man is distempered and disordered, and in finitely at a loss how to resettle himself in his former calm condition. But at length, by divine favour, he does regain his former ground; and perhaps, within a while, his former sin also presents itself to him with fresh enticements and little renewed arts of persuasion; What will the man do now? Will he let the old, stale cheat, new dressed, be acted over upon him the second time? Will he venture the loss of God's favour once more? and try whether his pardoning mercy will hold out as long as he is pleased to abuse it? Will he have his conscience about his ears again, and break his leg, because once, by much pain and misery, he got it set in the like case?

If he does, let him know that he is incorrigibly presumptuous, *he crucifies the Son of God afresh*, is a professed despiser of mercy, and by this daring return to his former sin, that had so fearfully mauled and shattered him, has, to say no more, put his repentance, his recovery, and salvation, under a very great improbability. And thus much for the second branch of the first general head, which was, to assign some of the most notable kinds of presumption.

SERMON XII.

PSALM xix. 13.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me.

THE prosecution of these words was first disposed under these two general heads.

I. To shew what these presumptuous sins was.

II. To shew the reason of this so excellent and holy person, the Psalmist's, so earnest praying against them.

The first of these I proposed to be handled under these three particulars.

1. To shew what it was in general *to presume*.
2. To shew and assign some of the most remarkable kinds of presumption.
3. To propose some remedies against these sins.

The two first of which being despatched, I proceed now to the third and last.

The grand and general remedy against presumptuous sins surely must be, to arm the understanding, and to check the exorbitance of the will, by consideration: for the employment of which, with matter in reference to the sins we are treating of, these three things offer themselves to be considered.

1. Let a man endeavour to fix in his heart a deep apprehension and persuasion of the transcendent evil of the nature of sin in general: which is no less than a direct affront to our Creator and Governor in a breach of that law that he values as a transcript of his own holiness, and enforces by the penalty of eternal death threatened to the violators and transgressors of the least iota of it. The foundation of men's apostasy from God seems to be laid in the undervaluing thoughts they have of sin. It is but as a mote in their eye, not for any trouble that it gives them, but for their opinion of its smallness. The easiness of the commission of it hides the monstrous greatness of the provocation: and men can sport away a soul so quickly and so easily, that they can scarce be brought to think themselves any poorer for the loss.

But since it is difficult to view the nature of a thing immediately in itself, let men read the nature of sin in the dismal history of the effects and consequents of it. And for this, let them first see the ruin of a whole species, and the fall, not of man only, but of mankind, effected by it. Let them view Adam tumbled out of paradise, embased in his nature, and cursed in his actions, with a perpetual toil and misery entailed upon his descending posterity. Let them also see a deluge breaking in upon the earth, and the whole world lying under the destroying element; and they shall find that it was sin that opened the sluices of heaven, and brake up the fountains of the great deep. Sin was the thing that made God almost unravel the works of an whole creation, and deface the draughts of his own hand.

He that shall read the several captivities, bondages, dispersions, and massacres of the Israelites, reads so many comments upon sins, so many lively descriptions of the destructive

force of a mighty guilt. But he that would bring the matter to a compendium, and see all in one, let him see the only Son of God fetched out of the bosom of his Father, to bleed and suffer, and die upon the cross; that is, to die a vile, cursed, ignominious death. Let him see his very Father his executioner, and preparing him a cup full of the dregs of an infinite, flaming fury, to be drunk off by him. And all this, not for any personal sin of his own, but for the sins of others, took upon himself merely by imputation: so that being found under this, neither the dignity nor innocence of his person could secure it against the nails and the spear, the scoffs and the flouts, the gall and the vinegar, that our sins had prepared and infused for him.

And lastly, to add a later, since there can be no greater instance of the malignity of sin: when we shall have the fabric of this beautiful frame of all things unfixed and torn down about us, the elements melting with fervent heat, and the heavens passing away with a noise; when the universe shall be reduced to its first principles, and time shall be no more; when the judgment shall be set, and the books opened; then we shall understand that it was sin that made all these desolations, that kindled these fires, and will be yet kindling much greater.

Now let a sinner consider all these passages, and when he has considered them, let him know, that there is unspeakably more evil in sin than in all these. For God can destroy and confound a world, but he cannot sin: and Christ could submit to all the violences of cruelty, all the loads of contumely; but he who could do all this, could not be brought to commit the least sin.

Nor is this to be wondered at; for as every quality flows much more plentifully in the cause than in the effect; so sin, that causes and produces all these evils, must needs contain a much more redundant evil in itself. But now, after all this, the presuming sinner must yet further consider, that all the evil he has hitherto heard of is but the evil of sin considered barely as sin: and then let him collect, that presumption is the very poison and gall of sin itself, the highest degree of it. Sin then reigns and sits in its throne, when it is once advanced to the nature of being presumptuous: so that presumption is a sin (if it were possible) something more than sinful.

2. Let a man most seriously consider and reflect upon God's justice. The hands of justice are not so tied up by mercy, but that they are loose enough upon those who have no title to mercy: and such the greatest part of the world are, who may possibly, by a redundant bounty, enjoy, but they cannot claim it; for as God deals with men upon a double account, either of the gospel or of the law, the tenor of the former of which is, that *there is no condemnation to such as are in Christ Jesus*; that is, to such as believe and repent, and become new creatures: and the tenor and voice of the latter is, *Cursed be every one that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them*; so these two dispensations divide and comprehend all mankind; whereupon those who are not under one are certainly ranged under the other. Those who



have not, by sincere repentance and the fruits of it, reached the conditions of the gospel, are under the lash and dint of the law. In the execution of whose sentence the divine justice reigns and shews itself, as the other is the proper scene of mercy.

But now, while a sinner presumes and sins confidently, upon what grounds of certainty, or indeed of rational probability, can he conclude himself to be within the verge and compass of the second covenant? There is not a greater and a more dangerous symptom of a person wholly estranged from all right to the evangelical privileges. For none can be entitled to these but the penitent; and can any man evidence his penitence by his presumption? his sorrow for sin by a resolved progress and continuance in it? And if he can make out no title here, let him consider, and tremble under the consideration, that he lives every minute obnoxious to the arrests of that fierce attribute of God, his justice: he is absolutely under the power of the law, that law that cries for wrath and revenge upon the violators of it.

So that, as presumptuous, he is the proper object for wrath and justice to discharge itself upon. Mercy indeed wards off all these dreadful blows; but it does not this universally and promiscuously for all, but for those only who by certain conditions are qualified for the proper subjects of mercy, as others are of justice. Where we may observe, that each of these attributes confine their working within their proper object, and encroach not upon the respective bounds of each other. He that is a vessel of mercy is out of the reach of justice; and he whom the law consigns over to justice, so long can have no protection from mercy.

The impartial thought of which, surely, should be sufficient to disabuse the confidence of the presumptuous, and to rectify his wild, unlimited apprehensions of that pardoning grace, which speaks pardon to none while they presume upon it.

3. Let a man correct his presumptuous humour, by considering how much such offences would exasperate even men. It is well, if some men can pardon once. But when they see that an offender grows upon them, takes heart, and reiterates the provocation over and over, their patience is out of breath, tires, and can hold out no longer. Peter thought, according to the rate of the world's pardoning, that he extended charity to a vast compass, when he discoursed of pardoning his brother seven times. He thought that then surely the acts of pardon were in their number of perfection.

No man of spirit will endure that his clemency should prostitute his honour to the saucy invasions of a bold and a growing impudence. No father will endure that his son should abuse his goodness, as if it served for nothing else but only to suffer and for give. And this is a thing so known to men, so implanted in them by nature, that such as have not wholly shook off all modesty, dread the very sight of a man whom they have much presumed upon: and though they fear no punishment from him, yet they find those rejets from humanity, that deject their countenance, and make them sneak, and fly the presence of an affronted person.

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Which being so, has not every presumptuous sinner reason thus to school and upbraid himself: Shall I fear to deal thus and thus with a man, a sinful man like myself; a worm, a piece of living dirt; one whose breath and life are in his nostrils? and shall I venture to pass the same and greater affronts upon the omnipotent Creator of the world, that can crush me to nothing, that can frown me into hell, and even look me into endless destruction? Shall I fear an anger that lasts but a moment, and can do but little while it lasts; an anger that is but as the spleen of a wasp, a short fester, and huff of passion: and shall I provoke such a displeasure as the very angels tremble at; a displeasure that for its duration is eternal, and for its weight intolerable?

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Men see and converse with that every day, in the ordinary passages of common life, that might invincibly argue them into a better behaviour towards their Maker. Could we but treat God as a king, as a magistrate, or a master, of all sins those of presumption would be the fewest. For in the courts of men people seldom expect to be pardoned the second time. But as for God, his mercy, they say, is infinite; and therefore they resolve that their rebellions shall be so too, since there is no exhausting, no coming to the bottom of an infinite: and thus they presume to be pardoned so often, that in the issue they fall short of being pardoned once.

And thus much for the third and last branch of the first general head; which was, to prescribe remedies against sins of presumption.

II. I proceed now to the other general head proposed at first for the handling of the words; which is, to shew the reason of this holy and excellent person's, the Psalmist's, so earnest praying against these sins.

I suppose the prosecution of the first head, which was to declare to us what presumptuous sins were, might be argument enough to declare to us the second also, in shewing the cause why the Psalmist so fervently prays against them. He prays against them, as against so many pests, so many direful causes of God's wrath, so many devourers of souls; and every prayer made against such things carries its reason too visibly writ upon it to be long inquired after.

But yet, for a more full and explicit discussion of the point in hand, I shall endeavour to give some more particular account of the reasons inducing this holy person with so much zeal to engage his prayers against presumptuous sins. And I conceive the principal of them may be brought under these two heads.

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1. The danger of falling into these sins.
2. The sad consequences of them, if fallen into.

And first for the danger of falling into them; this appears in several respects.

1. In respect of the nature of man, which is generally apt to be confident, and to measure its belief by its desires; still presaging the best, flattering itself, and building broad superstructures upon narrow foundations. Few men feel their conditions so bad, but they find room

for hope: and that which is hope in some cases, will rise into arrogance and presumption in others.

Most men are of a debonair, sanguine, jolly disposition, which never fails to supply those builders with materials, who are apt to rear castles in the air: so that we may well avouch, that where despair has slain its thousands, presumption has slain its ten thousands.

For despair seldom breeds but in the melancholy temper, that inclines men to be thoughtful and suspicious, or in such breasts as have been forced into a preternatural melancholy by conversing with unskilful spiritual guides, of an indiscreet severity, and pinning their faith upon ill-managed discourses about predestination. But these are but a very small portion of mankind, in comparison of the other: these go in handfuls, the other in herds, thronging into the broad way, where mirth and confidence carry them, hopping and laughing into perdition. Let this therefore be the first reason of the danger of men's falling into presumptuous sins.

2. The second reason is from the object of presumption, God's mercy: which though I shew was limited, and not as boundless and absurd as some men's imaginations; yet there is no doubt but, according to the present economy of God's actings, the exercise of it is of much more latitude and extent than the exercise of his justice. The time of this life is a time of mercy, and God delights to make the experiments of it splendid and illustrious.

Hereupon presumption strikes in, and advances it into endless and irrational; and uses it not only as an argument for repenting of past sins, (the sole proper use of it,) but as an antecedent inducement to warrant sin for the future. The largeness of mercy has made it apt to be abused by the corruption of man's heart, which is ready to suck poison out of the fairest flowers of God's garden; and to make the most amiable of his attributes serve the interest of its vilest affections.

Let both law and gospel denounce death against the commission of such or such a sin; and presumption shall interpose, and tell the sinner in the Devil's own words, *Thou shalt not surely die*; and then mercy shall be alleged for a proof of this assertion: that shall be brought for an encouragement, that God intended only for a cure of sin.

3. Thirdly and lastly. A third reason of the danger of falling into presumptuous sins is from the tempter, who chiefly busies and concerns himself to engage men in this kind of sin. It is said of David, concerning his sin in numbering the people, which put the sword in the hand of the destroying angel, to give his whole kingdom such a blow, *that Satan stood up and provoked David to number Israel*, [1 Chron. xxi. 1](#). And of Judas it is most particularly remarked, in [Luke xxii. 3](#), *that Satan entered into Judas*; and so by a kind of immediate possession acted him to the betraying of his master. And for Ananias who prevaricated about the price of his lands, and so endeavoured, as it were, to put a trick upon the Spirit of God, the apostle Peter tells him, in [Acts v. 3](#), *that it was Satan that filled his heart to lie to the Holy Ghost*. Nay, and in that notable temptation in which he accosted our Saviour

himself, the sin he drove at was a high presumption, namely, that Christ should cast himself headlong from a pinnacle of the temple; *because God had charged his angels to keep him in all his ways*; that is, that he should presume to promise himself the divine protection in an action wholly uncommanded, and consequently unwarranted, because God had engaged to secure and guard him in the commanded instances of duty and obedience.

It is clear therefore, that the Devil lays a more than ordinary stress upon this; and if so, he will be sure to employ all his engines to push his design forward; for he knows that one great sin does his work compendiously, and destroys at a blow. He knows also, that his design, like a twoedged sword, may chance to cut both ways. For first he will make a man presume to commit a sin, and then, if possible, he will make him despair for having committed it. Wherefore, if all the arts and stratagems of our mortal enemy can endanger us, we are in danger of being entangled in this sin; this fatal, destructive sin, which is the very masterpiece of the Devil, and the gate of hell; and consequently have cause, with bended knees and bowed hearts, night and day to invoke the almighty assistances of Heaven for our rescue from that sin; in the commission of which every man so really proves the murderer of his own soul.

And thus much for the first reason of David's so earnest praying against presumptuous sins, namely, the danger of falling into them; as also the several causes from whence that danger does arise.

I proceed now to the other reason, which is, the sad consequences of these sins, if once fallen into: amongst which we may reckon these that follow.

1. This kind of sin is marvellously apt to grow and prevail upon him that gives way to it; which ill consequence of it is deservedly mentioned by me, in the first place, it being that great and only one that David mentions instead of all the rest; *Keep, says he, thy servant from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me*. Every presumption is properly an encroachment, and all encroachment carries in it still a further and a further invasion upon the person encroached upon. It enters into the soul as a gangrene does into the body, which spreads as well as infects, and, with a running progress, carries a venom and a contagion over all the members. Presumption never stops in its first attempt. If Caesar comes once to pass Rubicon, he will be sure to march further on, even till he enters the very bowels of Rome, and break open the capitol itself. He that wades so far as to wet and foul himself, cares not how much he trashes further.

When the tenderness of the soul is lost, and its first awe of God and religion broke by a bold sin, it grows venturous, and ready to throw itself upon all sorts of outrages and enormities. It does not demur and tremble as it used to do, when any thing gross and foul was proposed to it; but it closes with it readily, and steps undauntedly into that stream that is like to carry it away, and swallow it up for ever.

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This growing, encroaching mischief perhaps first fastens but upon the thoughts, and they take the liberty to settle upon some unlawful, base thing, like flies upon a carcass; from these it advances a step further, and seizes the desires, which presently are carried out with a restless eagerness after the same vile object; and these at length meet with some friendly opportunity, by the help of which they break forth into actual commission; which actual commission grows from one into many, and comes to be frequent and repeated, till it settles into a custom, and fixes itself immoveably and for ever in a man's behaviour.

This is the nature and quality of presumption; much like what our Saviour says of the mustard seed, which at first is the least of all seeds, but being grown up is greater than all herbs, so that the birds of the air lodge in the branches of it. In like manner presumption first sows itself in a thought, the least of all sins for the matter of it; but from thence shooting up into a custom and an habitual practice, it grows mighty and wide, opens its arms, and spreads out its branches for every unclean bird, every sinful action and abomination to come and lodge and rest upon.

No man can assign the limits, the *ne plus ultra* of presumption, where it will stay, and with what pitch of villainy it will be contented: it is as unruly as power, as boundless as rebellion; and therefore, he that would preserve his conscience, and the peace of it, has cause to keep a perpetual guard upon his heart, to stave it off from a first admission.

2. The second ill consequence of presumptuous sins is, that of all others they prove the most difficult in their cure, forasmuch as they take away that which is the proper disposition to it, tenderness of conscience; leaving the heart fixed and hardened, and not easily capable of any healing impression. It is impossible for any man to be brought off from sin, but by the sense and feeling of sin: which sense, every presumption does by degrees weaken and dull, and in the issue utterly extinguish.

For I shew before, that the proper effect of such sins was custom in sinning; and with what difficulty that is removed we are told in [Jeremiah xiii. 23](#). *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.* The Ethiopian's blackness and the leopard's spots are natural to them; and there is no washing away nature, no purging off the essential properties of things; and therefore this is mentioned as a difficulty but one remove from an impossibility.

Custom and frequency in sin breeds a familiarity with it that produces an affection to it, and ends in a resolved continuance in it. And as it is said by the apostle upon another occasion, *that perfect love casts out fear*; so, where custom has fastened a man's love upon sin, the awe and the dread of it vanishes; and the sinner can break a precept under the very eye of sin-revenging justice, without trembling; without feeling any inward wound or blow upon his heart: which is a frame of spirit, leaving a man not far from a reprobate mind and a seared conscience; a disease that laughs at all the applications of the spiritual physician; [Jerem. li. 9](#), *We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed.* And the truth is, he who



comes recovered out of a course of presumptuous sinning, has plucked his foot out of a mortal snare, a deliverance never vouchsafed but to the favourites of mercy, supplying the defect and weakness of the means by an invincible grace. And we may say of such an one very properly, as of a man rising from a swoon, and the very neighbourhoods of death, that he is come to himself.

3. As sins of presumption are more difficultly cured, so they waste the conscience infinitely more than any other sins. As really as blows and wounds and bruises weaken the body, and by degrees dispose it to its final dissolution; so certainly do some sins shake, and batter, and tear down the constitution of the soul. Guilt upon the conscience, like rust upon iron, both defiles and consumes it, by degrees gnawing and creeping into it; as that does, till at length it has eat out the very heart and substance of the metal. The inward as well as the outward man has his proper health, strength, and soundness naturally belonging to him; and in proportion, has also his diseases and distemper, arising from an irregular course of living. And every act of presumption is to him as a spiritual debauch or surfeit: things that bring a present disorder, and entail a future decay upon nature.

David was a sufficient example of this, who complained in [Psalm xxxviii](#). *that there was neither soundness in his flesh, nor rest in his bones, by reason of his sin:* and that *his wounds even festered and grew noisome because of his foolishness*, so that *he became as a man in whom there was no strength*. He lost that vigorous, athletic habit of soul, which before made him eminent and mighty in the ways of God; and now he began to droop and languish like a man that had drank a poisonous draught, that ever after wasted and consumed his spirits; so that in [Psalm xxxix](#). and the last verse, he prays to God *to spare him a little, that he might recover strength, before he went hence, and was seen no more*. He that would see what desperate stabs and gashes the guilt of presumptuous sinning gives the conscience, should do well to acquaint himself with the case of David, as he himself (dolefully enough) expresses it all along in his Psalms; and if that does not warn him of his danger, he is like to learn it too late by the woful instructions of smart and experience.

4. Fourthly and lastly. These sins have been always followed by God with greater and fiercer judgments than any others; and for this also we need go no further than David for an eminent in stance and demonstration: for after those two horrid sins committed by him, did not God raise up a rebel against him, not only out of his own house, but also out of his own loins? one that defied him both in the relation of a father and of a king, that trampled upon his authority, and abused his wives in the face of all Israel? Did not God also punish his adultery with an infamous lewd action in his family? his son committing incest with his own sister: and moreover the *sword was never to depart from his house*. To all which may be added the ignominy, the scoffs and reproaches that were in whole volleys discharged at him from all sides: hard usage for majesty and sovereignty to be treated with: yet by all this, God was pleased to give him some taste of the poison of his presumptions.



And to proceed to other instances: Did not the villainy and lewdness of a few Benjamites, set and resolved upon their sin against all admonition, almost consume and reap down an whole tribe? Did not the violence and uncleanness of Hophni and Phinehas, bring a disaster and a defeat upon the armies of Israel? and withal perpetuate an hideous destructive curse upon their father's house? Did not the apostasy and ingratitude of Solomon against that God that made him shine like a star of the first magnitude amongst all the neighbouring princes, rend away ten tribes from his son at once?

But above all, take that notable instance of Manasses, whose sins indeed were of that high strain, that they seemed to surpass all those of the kings of Israel and Judah, that were either before or after him; yet, notwithstanding this, both he himself proved a penitent and a convert at the last; and as for his son and successor Josiah, he was as eminently transcendent for his piety, as his father had been for his sin; and extended a reformation every way as large and wide as the former's corruption. So that one would have imagined that he had cleansed the land, and even atoned his father's abominations: whereupon the Spirit of God gives him this bright and glorious character; [2 Kings xxiii. 25, 26](#), *That like unto Josiah there was no king before him that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, neither afterwards arose any like unto him.* And now what follows after all this? Why in the next verse, *Notwithstanding this, the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath, wherewith his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasses had provoked him withal.* Josiah's goodness could not expiate Manasses sin. The son's penitential tears could not wash away the father's guilt.

And now for the sinner that we have been hitherto discoursing of; if all the former considerations will not move him, yet let him at least arrest his presumption with this last. Perhaps the growing, contagious nature of his sin moves him not; the difficult cure of it, peradventure, prevails upon him as little; and it is like, that its aptness to waste, and harden, and debauch the conscience may make but small impression upon him; yet shall not the effects of it, the confusion, the disaster, and the curse that it is big with, the curse that will descend like *rottenness into his bones, and strike like a dart through his liver*; shall not all this terrify him into caution and prayer, into reformation and amendment?

It is the concernment of God's justice and his honour, to meet and confound an audacious sinner in his course with some remarkable instance of his vengeance. It is a clearing of his Providence to the rational world. Men surely have cause to pray against the commission of that sin, which, if once committed, may leave a guilt that no repentance can so wipe off as to discharge the sinner wholly from all punishment in this world. God, upon the intercession of Moses, was reconciled to the Israelites after their making of the golden calf; yet the pardon was mingled with a bitter allay; [Exod. xxxii. 34](#), *Nevertheless, saith God, in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them.* And it was an usual saying of the Jewish rabbies,

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that there was no affliction or judgment that ever befell the children of Israel but had an ounce of the golden calf in it.

And no sinner can assure himself but that, after all his prayers, and tears, and humiliations, nay, and what is more, his reconcilment with God, as to his eternal estate, yet, as to his temporal, the anger of the same God may, for the guilt of some gross, presumptuous sin, stick in his skirts, and never cease to pursue and dog him to his grave, sealing his offence with that dreadful sentence in [Isaiah xxii. 14](#), *Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till you die*. Which sentence as every presumption will deserve, so it is only in his power that pronounces it to prevent.

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



SERMON XIII.

PSALM cxxxix. 3.

Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.

IN this Psalm David endeavours to possess himself with an holy admiration of the excellency of God's knowledge, which is one of those divine perfections which we call attributes; all of which, though they are so many expressions of God condescending to our capacities, yet they are so exceeding glorious in themselves, that when we study to search them out, we must needs conclude, that they are objects much fitter for our admiration than our understanding. And one of the greatest of these is that which we are now about, to wit, God's knowledge.

It is such a knowledge as sees and comprehends all things, but is comprehended by none; and the best of human knowledge is so far from equalling of it, that it is its greatest perfection to be able to express it. But when we have said all concerning it that we can, when we have spent our inventions and our words, we must set down and confess with David, that *such knowledge is too wonderful for us*; since our highest and most devout expressions of God rather testify our reverential desires of honouring him, than at all express his nature. Now the knowledge of God is chiefly wonderful, in respect of the extent and latitude of its object, as it takes in all things knowable. But here the prophet considers it in a more restrained sense, as it is conversant about the secret and hidden things of man, and in this respect it is admirable. It was no small testimony of the divinity of our Saviour's knowledge, *that he knew what was in man, and needed not that any one should tell him*, [John ii. 25](#). Certainly none can find out those many windings and turnings, those strange intricacies of the mind, but the great artificer that framed them. From the [1st verse to the 17th](#) we have many rare, full, and elegant expressions setting forth God's accurate discernment of the most hidden contrivances of men; who, by one cast of his eye, looks through the whole scene of our lives. Whether rising up or lying down; waking or discoursing; thinking, yea, before we think; yet unborn and enclosed in the womb, he clearly sees and beholds us. The words that I have read unto you seem to be a metaphor, taken from soldiers surrounding the ways with an ambush, or placing scouts and spies in every corner, to discover the enemy in his march: thou *compassest my path*; thou hast, as it were, thy spies over me, wheresoever I go. By *path* is meant the outward actions and carriage of his ordinary conversation. By *lying down* is signified to us the private and close actions of his life; such as were attended only by darkness and solitude. In the [36th Psalm, verse 4](#), it is said of the *wicked*, *that he deviseth mischief upon his bed*, to denote, not only his perverse diligence, but also his secrecy in it: and God is said *to hide his children in the secret of his pavilion*. So that these places of *rest* and *lying down* are designed for secrecy and withdrawing. When a man retires into his



chamber, he does, in a manner, for a while, shut himself out of the world. And that this is the fine sense of that expression of *lying down*, appears from the next words, *Thou art acquainted with all my ways*; where he collects in one word, what he had before said in two; or it may come in by way of inference and deduction from the former. As if he should say, Thou knowest what I do in my ordinary converse with men, and also how I behave myself when I am retired from them; therefore thou knowest all my actions, since a man's actions may be reduced either to his public or private deportment. By the other expression of *my ways* is here meant the total of a man's behaviour before God, whether in thoughts, words, or deeds, as is manifest by comparing this with other verses. In the [2d verse](#) it is said, *Thou understandest my thought afar off*; and in the [4th verse](#) it is said, *There is not a word in my mouth, but thou knowest it altogether*. And thus we see, that it was David's scope to shew, that the most dark counsels of men are exposed to God's view, and this he does by a distinct enumeration of all the particulars: *Thou knowest my down-sitting and my uprising; thou understandest my thoughts; thou compasses my path and my lying down; there is not a word in my mouth, but thou knowest it; thou hast beset me before and behind; thou coverest me in my mother's womb, and seest my substance being yet imperfect*. He might have comprised all this in short, as in some such like expression; Lord, there is nothing in the life of man so concealed, but it is open and manifest to thy discernment. But he chose rather to dilate himself; because a distinct and particular mention of each several passage shews not only God's bare knowledge, but also his observance of these things. From hence therefore I shall gather this doctrinal observation, viz.

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That God knows and takes strict and accurate notice of the most secret and retired passages of a man's life.

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In the prosecution of this doctrine I shall only prove it by some reasons, and afterwards make application, which I chiefly intend.

The reasons shall be of two sorts.

- I. Such as prove that it is so, that God knows the most secret passages of our lives.
- II. Such as shew whence it is, that he takes such notice of them.

The first reason proving that God does observe the secret passages of man's life is, because he rules and governs them. Government is such a thing, as requires the highest and most perfect endowments of knowledge: the very wheel and hinge even of human government is intelligence. Can a man deprived of his sight manage a chariot through by and dark ways with a steady hand? Can God that carries the rule of all things in so constant and fixed a course, and yet not observe those things? Certainly he could not govern the world by his power, unless he governed his power by his knowledge. In [Ezek. i. 18](#), God's providence in the administration of all things here below is expressed by a wheel full of eyes, to signify God's quicksighted knowledge in his government, and to express also, that those eyes were always in motion.

The Spirit of God attributes the like knowledge to Christ in his providential ruling the church; [Zech. iii. 9](#), *Upon one stone shall be seven eyes*. By *the stone* is here meant Christ, to whom is ascribed perfect knowledge; by *eyes* is signified knowledge, and the number denotes perfection. Now there are three ways by which God governs the most secret projects of man, to all of which there is required a distinct knowledge.

1. He governs them by discovering of them. Now how is it possible for any one to make that known to another which he does not know himself. God prudently overrules most plots by a seasonable revealment of them, as the sun may be said to *rule the day*, as it is in [Gen. i. 16](#), because of his universal sight, by which he discovers all things. In [Matt. ii. 13](#), God disappointed Herod's design of killing Christ, by making it known to Joseph: and God made ineffectual the treacherous intentions of the men of Keilah, in delivering David to Saul, [1 Sam. xxiii. 12](#), by discovering to David what they intended against him: wherefore it must needs follow, that since God makes hidden things open to men, they must of necessity be much more open and manifest to himself.

2. He governs the most secret intentions by preventing of them. For assuredly, if God should permit all the sin that men conceive in their thoughts to break forth into action, the world would not be able to continue, by reason of the overflowing sinfulness of men. God does therefore prevent and hinder it, and as it were stifles it in the very birth. Now to be able to prevent an evil, argues a clear knowledge of its approach. How many secret villainies, thought of and intended, and even ready for execution, have been turned aside, by God's interposing providence! In [Gen. xx. 6](#), God says of Abimelech, that *he withheld him from sinning against him, and suffered him not to touch Sarah*. Adultery, in all likelihood, would have followed, had not God stepped in between the intentions and commission of it; and does not this argue God to be a strict discerner of our most private actions? Wisely to prevent, is an act of the highest prudence and experience: that watchman must have his eyes open, that discerns an enemy coining while he is yet afar off.

3. God governs the secret designs of men, by directing them to other ends than for which they were intended. Man may resolve, but God often secretly blows upon his counsels, and scatters all his resolutions. In vain do the Syrians take counsel to invade Judah, when God says, in [Isaiah vii. 7](#), *It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass*. If God can turn the designs of men which way soever he pleases, he cannot but also see and observe them. To be able to divert a river in the midst of its most violent course from its native channel, shews more than ordinary skill. When a sinner in the full career of his intentions is rushing into sin, like a horse into the battle, then for God to wind him to his own purposes, it shews him to be of an infinite wisdom, and withal to have his eye continually fixed upon that man's ways. How privately did Joseph's brethren carry on their plot against him, with an evil and malicious intent; yet God observes their treachery; and what they intended for his misery, God turns to be a miraculous means of their own preservation, [Gen. xlv. 5](#). And thus did Judas



plot in secret with the rulers of the Jews to betray his Master; God sees his design, and withal orders the most cursed intention that ever was, to the best and most glorious end: most excellent therefore must the knowledge of God be, that describes the most hidden, sinful actions of men, so as to manage them contrary to their natural tendency: the sinner shoots the arrow, but God takes the aim, and directs it to his own marks. Let a man sin as secretly as he can, yet he shall not be able to avoid God's knowledge, nor to contradict his will, I mean his efficacious and hidden will; which, by a secret influence, controls all actions, even the most wicked, to the glory of God. From hence we may be assured, that God is both privy to and observant of our most concealed iniquities, since he is able to see further into them, than the sinner himself that commits them. And thus much concerning the first reason, proving that God observes the most secret passages of our lives, because he governs them, and that both by discovering, by preventing, and by directing them to his own ends.

The second reason proving the same is, because he gives laws to regulate the most secret passages of our lives, and therefore he must needs know and observe them. It is absurd for any governor to impose laws upon men in respect of those actions which cannot come under his knowledge. Hereupon all human laws tend only to the regulation of the outward man, and proceeds no further. But God extends his law to the most secret behaviour of men, even to the thoughts. Hence our Saviour interprets the lust of the heart, and the first motions thereof to uncleanness, to be adultery, [Matt. v. 28](#). Hence also the *word, or law, of God*, is said, in [Heb. iv. 12](#), to be *quick and powerful, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*. And in [Heb. iii. 12](#), the Spirit of God commands them not to entertain *an evil heart of unbelief*, nor so much as in their desires *to depart from the living God*. If God took no notice of secret unbelief, if he did not know or regard all the private excursions of the mind to sin, it were vain and fruitless to limit them by a law. But since he has set a law even to these also, since he does not only restrain our secret actions, but even our thoughts and desires, we may very well collect that all these are in his view, that he evidently beholds and searches them out, and that his knowledge is not shorter than his commands.

The third reason is, because he will judge the most secret passages of our lives, therefore they are manifest to him. Knowledge is so requisite to judgment, that our earthly judges cannot judge rightly in matters that they do not know: hence Job, to shew how uprightly he judged, said, that *he searched out the cause that he knew not*, [Job xxix. 16](#), implying that it was impossible for him other wise to award a righteous sentence. Justice indeed is pictured blind, not because it is to be without the eye of knowledge, but the eye of partiality. Now shall not God, that is the judge of all the earth, do right? Shall he condemn and punish men for such sins as he knows not whether they have committed or not? Certain it is, that he judges men for secret sin; therefore it is also certain that he knows them. In [Eccles. xi. 9](#), Solomon says of the voluptuous man, that for the ways of his heart, which are his secret and his hidden ways, *God will bring him to judgment*; and in [Eccles. xii. 14](#) it is said, *that God*



shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil; and no wonder, since there is not so much as the least rising of the heart to sin but he views it; no circumstance so inconsiderable to our apprehensions, but he ponders it: he does, as it were, severely winnow every action, and discerns that which is good in it, from that which is vile and sinful. Now there are two seasons wherein God will judge men for their secret sins. First, in this life, wherein he often gives sinners a foretaste of what he intends to do in the future: and though he does reserve the whole weight of his judgment till after death, yet he frequently dispenses some strokes of it by way of earnest before. Because not only men's desires, but also their belief, is chiefly satisfied by things present; wherefore God sometimes follows secret sins with present judgment. When Moses declared the law of God to Israel, and withal denounced punishments to the disobedient, he applies himself especially to those that were guilty of secret disobedience; and lest they should rid themselves of the fear of those punishments, by looking upon them as future and remote, he shews how dreadfully God intends to deal with such sinners even in this life: [Deut. xxix. 18-21](#). Here we see sin was very secret, shut up in the private reasonings and debates of the mind; but God fetches the sinner out, and purges him, with present temporal judgment; for, as it appears from the foregoing chapter, the curses here mentioned were chiefly such as touched men in their life, their estate, and outward relations. Such is the irrational atheism of most men, that although they have no thought, and consequently no fears, of hell, yet they accordingly dread temporal affliction. Like a child, that does not so much fear the loss of his life, as the loss of his apple. Let such men know, that it is very probable that by their secret sins they may bring down the curse of God upon themselves in this world; and although their hell be completed hereafter, they may begin it here. Whence is it that some men are so strangely blasted in their parts and preferment, but from some hidden sin, that rots and destroys all: whence is it that many large estates do undiscernedly shrivel away and come to nothing, but perhaps from the guilt of some secret extortion, perjury, or the like, that lies fretting and eating out the very bowels of them. I do not speak this universally, nor affirm that this is always the cause of these miseries, but it is to be feared that it is very often so.

2. The second season wherein God judges the secret passages of our sins is at the day of judgment. In respect of which our Saviour says, that *there is nothing hid but shall be made manifest*, [Luke xii. 2](#). A thief or a murderer may carry on his villainy undisclosed for many years, but the day of his trial will discover all: in [Daniel vii. 10](#), it is said, *the judgment was set, and the books were opened*. By *the books* is meant the knowledge of God, in which all things are kept as durably and distinctly as if they were registered in a book. Then God will open this book of his knowledge, and read all those hidden passages that are writ in it in the audience of all the world. And this is one reason why he permits so many heinous impieties to be concealed here on earth, because he intends to dignify that day with the revelation of them.

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And thus much concerning the first sort of reasons, which prove that it is so, that God knows and observes the secret passages of our lives. I proceed now to the second sort of reasons, that prove whence it is that God thus knows them. Now these proofs are very different: for the first proves, that God knows these things by way of connection, that is, by those acts of God which are always enjoined with knowledge, as his governing, giving laws, and judging: but now these latter reasons prove, that he observes all hidden things from that which is the cause of such observations.



1. And the first reason shall be drawn from God's omniscience, or his power of knowing all things: from whence it follows, that nothing can be hid from him; and this is that light which no man can keep off, any more than he can in the opening hinder the day from shining upon him; it is a light shining in every dark place: as it has no obscurity itself, so it permits nothing else to lie obscure: and that it is universal and infinite, appears from this, because otherwise it would not bear a full proportion to the rest of God's perfections. Now in respect of this, it is said in [Prov. xv. 3](#), *The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*: and in [2 Chron. xvi. 9](#), *The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth*: and in [Job xxviii. 24](#), it is said of God, *that he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heavens*. How vain therefore is the thought of these men that attempt sin upon confidence of privacy, that do, as it were, dig deep to hide their counsel from the Lord. O that such would but read and consider that text in [Heb. iv. 13](#), *All things are naked and open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do*. Now to behold a thing as naked, implies the greatest evidence and discovery. It is also said, that *secret things belong unto the Lord*, [Deut. xxix. 29](#); which, as also the forementioned places, are only so many expressions of God's infinitely comprehensive knowledge: from hence therefore we may clearly deduce what we do intend. If the perfection of God's nature engages him to know all things, he must also actually know all things; and if he actually discerns all things, he must also discern all secret things; and if he is acquainted with all secrets, he must also behold and observe the secret passages of our lives, which of all other secret things are the most considerable.



2. The second reason may be drawn from God's intimate presence to the nature and being of all things, from whence is also inferred his knowledge of them: for since there is no real distinction between the being and knowledge of God, but only in the manner of our conceptions, it follows, that where he is present in respect of his being, he must be also present in respect of his knowledge. But now the being of God is diffused through the whole and every part of the universe, as the soul insinuates itself into all the members of the body: not that God is thus present to all the world by way of identity with it, (as some profane philosophers have affirmed, who, in a literal sense, may be said to have known no God but the world;) but he is present with it by way of nearness and inward proximity to it. Without which, the creature could not derive continual influence from him for the upholding of its

being, but must of necessity fall back into its first nothing. From this universal presence of God the scripture often proves the universality of his knowledge: in the [twenty-third of Jeremiah, ver. 24](#), God thus argues himself, *Can any hide himself in secret places that I should not see him? saith the Lord.* Why? whence is it so impossible to avoid God's sight? That which follows proves it; *Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.* God's filling heaven and earth, that is, his being present everywhere, proves also, that there can be no place hidden from him, but that he like wise sees everywhere. David also, in this hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm, where the text is, proves God's infinite discernment of all things by the same argument. He had said, that God *compassed his paths, and knows all his ways*: but what was the reason that convinced him of this? He sets it down in the seventh and eighth verses, *Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.* He that always stands by us must needs see and observe what we do: wherefore, if the sinner would act his sin out of God's knowledge, let him first endeavour to go out of his presence; which he is no more able to do, than to go out of his own being. And thus much concerning the reasons proving the point; I now proceed to application.

If it is thus certain that God takes strict notice of the most secret passages of our lives, both because he overrules them, and prescribes laws to them, and judges them; and also because that his omniscience and omnipotence, then, in the first place, it may afford, [*Sic in ed.* 1744.]

1. A use of conviction, to convince all presumptuous sinners of the atheism of their hearts. I know the proof of this point, that God sees in secret, may seem to have been superfluous; since the general vogue of the world is ready, not only to meet, but even to prevent us in their acknowledgment of God's all-seeing eye: but if we look through men's professions, and trace their lives, we shall find that they do not really believe any such thing. For were we fully convinced that the just God, that declares himself a most certain punisher of sin, did also most certainly know sin, we should not dare to commit it presumptuously before him. Experience, the strong est argument, shews us the contrary in the ordinary passages of our lives. A very child will forbear to offend not only before his father, but before such an one from whom his father may come to know it. The reason is, because all persuasions, if real, do naturally engage a man to actions suitable to those persuasions. As for example, had you a thorough persuasion upon your heart that God saw you when you were attempting any vile sin, the very thought of this would beget such a reverence and a dread upon your spirits, as you could not venture to commit, if to gain a world: for we see such thoughts cast an awe upon us, even in our deportment before men. Hence the fool, that is, the wicked man, is said to say in his heart, that *there is no God*, because he does act in his life as if he thought there was none. In like manner the presuming sinner may be said to deny that God sees and observes all his actions, because he behaves himself so, as if he were really persuaded that God did not observe them: therefore, whosoever thou art that art a presumptuous of-

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fender, setting aside all thy spurious words, when thou dost resolve upon any sin, thou dost either believe that God sees thee, or that he does not. To believe he does not, is to deny him to be God: to believe he sees thee, and yet to commit the sin, is to affront him to his face, to bid open defiance to him, and to cast that unwisely contempt upon him, that the most audacious and impudent offender dares not offer to his earthly magistrate: wherefore, if from thy heart thou dost acknowledge God's all-seeing eye, cease from sin; otherwise, to any reasonable judgment thou dost really deny it, and in spite of all thy fair speeches art truly an atheist. For deeds always over balance words, and downright practice speaks the mind more plainly than the fairest profession.

Second use. It speaks terror to all secret sinners: God sees and observes them in all their secrecies; he spies out all their private haunts and their sly recourses to their beloved sin. Let such men consider how unwilling they would be that men should know of their concealed villainies, of what they act by themselves: surely they would rather forfeit their lives, and all that was near unto them, than their secret sins should be divulged; and then let them know that God sees them, and that it was better that they were known to all the world that they so fear, than to him. For he sees more filth in them, than one of the most discerning and carping judgment can find in the faults of his adversary; and he does more detest them, than the most holy and up right man can do the most grossest and notorious sin. Let them also consider, that the greatest ground of all their sins, which is secrecy, is by God's all-seeing eye taken away. For assuredly the confidence of concealment is the greatest inducement for an hypocrite to commit the vilest sins. [Psalm lxiv. 5](#), *They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they say, Who shall see them?* And thus confidence of secrecy gave them confidence in sin. But certainly it is an ill argument, because sinners do not see God, to conclude therefore, that God does not see them; like the foolish bird hiding his head in a hole, thinks himself secure from the view of the fowler, because the fowler is not in his view. O how miserably are such sinners deceived in the vain prop of a false confidence! in [Psalm xc. 8](#), *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.* As God lifts up the light of his countenance upon the godly, to refresh and comfort them, so he does also upon secret sinners, to discover and to amaze them. It is said of the secret adulterers, in [Job xxiv. 16, 17](#), *They know not the light: for the morning is to them as the shadow of death.* How then will they bear the light of God's countenance, which will cast the shadow of death in their faces in a much more dreadful manner? In the same verse it is said, *If one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death:* but the all-seeing God knows them: O the fear, the shame, and confusion that is in the mind of a discovered sinner! And let such an unclean person know, that he had better act his impurity in the sight of his reverend parents, and of a severe magistrate, than under the observing eye of a just and holy God, before whom secret sins are not secret, but open and revealed. Yet such as are secret to men we may rank into two sorts, both of which God perfectly knows.

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1. Such as are wholly transacted in the mind, without the service and ministration of the body; and these are the sins of our thoughts and desires, which are locked up from the knowledge of men or angels. No court of human judicature pretends to judge or punish the thoughts and intentions: they are in a peculiar manner reserved for the jurisdiction of the court of Heaven, which alone is able to examine and find them out. Now there is no act of man so quick as his thoughts; which in this resembles the angelical nature, that they are swift and invisible. Let the gross acting sinner act as fast as he can, yet the thinking sinner will have the start and advantage of him, and sin an hundred thoughts before he shall perform one sinful action. O the infinite multitudes of impure thoughts in a polluted mind, like swarms of flies upon a carcass, continually sucking and drawing in corruption. Now God has a more than ordinary respect to men's thoughts; hence God cries out of his people, [Jer. iv. 4](#), *How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?* The greatest wickedness, and that which is the most odious to God, is the wickedness of the heart; and this consists in pollution of the thoughts and desires. Nay, God does so much hate the sinfulness of these, that sometimes he expresses the whole work of conversion by the renovation and change of the thoughts: in [Isaiah Iv. 7](#), *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him.* But was it God's intention only to restrain these, and in the mean time to give him liberty in his sinful actions? No: but the forsaking of one implies the leaving of the other, as the greater duty includes the less. He that will not so much as indulge himself in an evil thought, will much less venture upon the gross commission of sin. Now God often times judges of the state and condition of a man from the purity or impurity of his thoughts; and that upon these reasons.

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1. Because the sin of the thoughts and desires is most spiritual, and consequently most opposite to the nature of God: spiritual wickedness is properly contrary to spiritual holiness, and it is that by virtue whereof Satan has strongest possession of the soul, as being that wherein most men resemble him, who being destitute of a body is not capable of corporal, fleshly sins: hence, in [Ephes. vi. 12](#), we have the vileness of his nature expressed by *spiritual wickedness in heavenly places*. Now, as there is nothing almost so evident in itself, as by the advantage of contraries, so we may see how odious spiritual sin is to God, in that spiritual duty is so acceptable. God does not so much command us to serve him, as to *serve him in spirit and in truth*. In all religious duties the voice of God is, *Son, give me thy heart*. To find a sacrifice without an heart, was always accounted a thing prodigious. To bring our bodies to church, and leave our thoughts at home; this is most detestable before God. To lift up our eyes to heaven in prayer, and yet to fix our desires upon the earth, O this his soul hates. As God drew a resemblance of himself upon the whole man, so, in a more lively manner, he imprinted it on the mind. Now one sinful thought is able to slur this image of God upon the soul: one corrupt desire is able to divest the soul of all its native innocence and purity. This certainly must be true, that that which tends to corrupt the best and most worthy part

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of man, must needs be the worst and greatest corruption. But all, even the heathens, will acknowledge, that a man's mind is his better part: and scripture and experience tell us, that evil thoughts and desires defile the mind: therefore we should endeavour, in the first place, the sanctification and regulation of these. Moral philosophy tells us, that external actions are not morally good or evil of themselves, but by participation of the good and evil that is in the acts of the will, by which they are commanded. We are not angry with the hand that strikes us, but with the evil intention that guided the hand: nor with the tongue that curses us, but with the vile disposition of the mind that bid it curse. God commanded David to cut off the sin of Saul, in [2 Sam. xxi. 1](#), and he commanded Jehu to slay the posterity of Ahab. The outward action is here the same: whence then was David's action pleasing to God, and Jehu's reputed murder, [Hosea i. 4](#), but from the difference of their thoughts and intentions? David did it with an intent to obey God, and Jehu with a design of private revenge. It is most just therefore that God should judge of the whole man by his thoughts and desires, since from these are the issues of life and death.



2. He judges a man by these, because his actions and practice may be overruled, but thoughts and desires are the natural and genuine offspring of the soul. Experience tells us, that we have not that command and dominion over our thoughts that we have over our actions; they admit neither of order nor limitation, but are the continual, incessant bubbling up of sin out of the mind: for we may observe, that those acts that may immediately result from the faculty, without the interceding command of the will, are scarcely controlled by it. How will the unruly imaginations of a vain fancy range and wander, in spite of all the dictates and commands of reason. There is nothing more easy or usual than for one to counterfeit his behaviour. A man may cause, that nothing but love and kindness shall appear in his actions, when in his thoughts he breathes cruelty and murder. The hypocrite, in the outward part of the most holy duty, may make as fine and specious a shew as the best, when there is nothing but sin and rottenness in his heart; [Ezekiel xxxiii. 31](#), *They sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.* Here we see they had nothing so frequent in their words and outward services as the worship of God, and nothing so remote from their desires. But now in the thoughts there is no dissimulation: what a man is in these, that he is in truth and reality: the soul is in its thoughts, as in its retiring room, laying aside the garb and dress in which it appeared upon the stage of the world. Nay, although a man had a full rule over his thoughts, yet they must needs be free from dissimulations, as not being capable of the causes of it. That which makes men dissemble, is a fear of and a desire to please the eyes of men; which we know cannot reach to the thoughts. It is therefore clear, that sincerity does only reside, and consequently is only to be found in these: hence we may observe, that Christ, in all his replies to the Jews and the pharisees, did rather answer the inward reasonings and thoughts of their mind, than the questions they did propose. In [Ezek.](#)



xiv. 3, 4, we have men addressing themselves to God in the greatest shew of salvation that might be; yet he professes that he will not answer them according to those pretences, but according to the idols they had set up in their hearts. A man, by reason of his concernments and interest in the world, what for fear of this punishment, and hope of that preferment, will cast himself into such a mould, as he shall be really nothing less than what he does appear to be; his words, actions, and outward carriage shall bear no correspondence with his intentions. The covetous man, in his mind, can lay heap upon heap; and what he cannot gain by his endeavours, he will make up by his thoughts. The ambitious man will think over all the applauses and greatness of the world, and in the closet of his mind erect to himself the idol of his own excellencies, and fall down and worship it. The revengeful person, though fear will not let him act his revenge, yet in his thoughts he will stab and trample upon his brother. The lascivious wretch, though shame will not let him execute his sin, yet he will feed his corrupt fancy with unclean imaginations. In all these passages men, being secure from the view of others, behave themselves according to the free genius and inclination of their nature. But God knows all these silent workings: he knows them, and abhors them: and that he does know them, he will make it appear at that day, when he shall also make others know them, and when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed. O what black stories will be told at the day of judgment of men's thoughts!



2. The second sort of secret sins are such as are not only transacted in the mind, but also by the body, yet are covered and kept close from the view of men. Such was David's sin in the matter of Uriah, [2 Sam. xii. 12](#). God says to him, *Thou didst this thing secretly*. Such was Cain's murder of his brother. Such was the theft of Achan: there were no standers by, conscious to it; it was not done before spectators. Now certainly a sinner should thus argue; If I cannot hide my secret sinful thoughts and desires from God, how much less shall I be able to conceal my actions, be they ever so private. When Satan, secrecy, and opportunity, all of them great tempters, shall tempt you to sin, consider that you have still this company with you, a conscience that will accuse you, and a God that will judge you. And is there any man so irrational as to commit a robbery in the sight of his accuser? to do a felony before his judge? What reason will not suffer us to do before men, shall not reason and religion keep us from committing before God? Thou mayest wrong and defraud thy neighbour in secret, [Habakkuk ii. 11](#), *but the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall accuse thee*. Thou mayest kill and murder, and none behold thee, *but the voice of thy brother's blood shall cry to God from the ground that receives it*, [Gen. iv. 10](#). I may here speak to the secret sinner in the words of an holy author; Let him but find some corner where God may not see him, and then let him sin as he pleases. The adulterer, in the forementioned place of Job, is said *to wait for the twilight*: but here we find in this Psalm, *that the darkness and light are both alike to God. The drunkard will presume to be drunk in the night*; [1 Thess. v. 7](#). but here we read, *that the darkness hideth not from God, but the night shineth as the*



day. No sins can be covered, but such as God himself shall be pleased to cover within the righteousness of his own son: he that can see in secret, and when thou shuttest thy door behold thee praying in thy closet, can as easily see thee when thou art sinning there; and as for private duty he will reward, so for secret sin he will punish thee openly, either in this world or in another. And therefore it were good for such kind of sinners to consider, that while their door is thus shut, the gates of hell stand open.

3. As it speaks terror to all secret sinners, so it speaks no less comfort to all sincere-hearted Christians. The same sunrising and break of day that terrifies the robber, is a comfort to the honest traveller. Thou that art sincere, God sees that sincerity in thee that others cannot discern; yea, he often sees more sincerity in thy heart, than thou canst discern thyself. This may uphold the drooping spirits of a disconsolate soul, when the black mouths of men, steeled with ignorance and prejudice, shall be opened in hard speeches against him. For indeed nowadays, when a man cannot find fault with his brother's outward conversation, which only he can behold, he will censure him in respect of spirituals, which no man can discern, any more than I can know what is in a man's mind by the colour of his clothes. Such men speak as if God did not only make them partake of his mercies, but also of his prerogative. And when it should be their work to resemble God in holiness, they arrogantly pretend to be like him in omniscience. How severely, though blindly, do they judge of men's hearts! Such a man is profane; another is carnal, and a mere moralist; another proud, and as to the bent and frame of his spirit, a contemner of religion. But here the sincere soul may comfort itself, when with one eye it can reflect upon its own integrity, and with the other upon God's infinite, infallible knowledge, and say, indeed, Men charge me thus and thus, as false-hearted and an hypocrite, but my God knows otherwise. This, I say, may set thee above the calumnies of unreasonable men, and make thee ride upon the necks of thy accusers. And as Daniel, by trusting in his God, was secure from the mouths of the lions; so thou, by acting faith upon, and drawing comfort from God's omniscience, mayest defy the more cruel mouths of thy reproachers. When a man is accused of treason to his prince, and knows that his prince is fully assured of his innocence, he will laugh all such accusations to scorn. It is thus with God and a sincere heart: in the midst of all slanders, he will own thee for innocent; as he did Job, when his friends, with much specious piety, charged him with hypocrisy. Wherefore commit thy way to the all-seeing God, to that God that is acquainted with all thy ways; that sees thy goings out and thy comings in, and continually goes in and out before thee, and will one day testify and set his seal to thy integrity. Comfort thyself in the consideration of his omni science, from whence it is, that *God judgeth not as man judgeth, but judges righteous judgment.* And hold fast thy integrity, that lies secret in the heart, *whose praise is of God, and not of man.*

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SERMON XIV.

ECCLESIASTES vii. 10.

Say not thou. What Is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.

IN the days of Solomon, when Jerusalem was the glory of the whole earth; when it flourished as the metropolis, not only of religion, but of the riches of the world; when gold was made as common as silver, and silver as the stones of the street, (so that its inhabitants might even tread and trample upon that which so much commanded the hearts of others;) when their exchequer was full, and their fleets at Ophir; when religion was established, and the changing, ambulatory tabernacle fixed into a standing temple, and all crowned with a peace under Solomon after the afflictions and wars of David; when they flowed with plenty, and were governed with wisdom; yet, after all, the text here gives us a clear intimation, that plenty passed into surfeit, fulness into loathing, loathing into discontent, and that (as it always happens) into complaints of the times, viz. *that former days were better than these*.

When yet, upon a small reflection backward, we have the calendar of the former times red with the bloody house of Saul, with the slaughter of the priests, and with the rebellions of Sheba and Absalom; nothing but tumults, changes, and vicissitudes; and yet, in the verdict of folly and faction, present enjoyments did so far endear former calamities, as to give them the preeminence in the comparison.

But we see there may be *folly even in Israel*; and, if they were all of this mind, Solomon may justly seem to have monopolized all the wisdom to himself. We have him here chastising the sottishness of this inquiry: indeed the fittest person to encounter this exception, as being a king, and so able to control; being a preacher, and so able to confute it; furnished with power for the one, and with wisdom for the other.

This is therefore the design of the words, either to satisfy or silence this malecontented inquiry: and supposing it to carry in it its own confutation, he confutes it, not by argument, but reproof; not as a doubtful problem, but as a foolish question: and certainly the case must needs be carried, where the fool makes the question, and the wisest of men gives the answer.

The matter in controversy is the preeminence of the former times above the present; when we must observe, that though the words run in the form of a question, yet they include a positive assertion, and a downright censure.

The inquiry being determined before it was proposed, now the charge of folly here laid upon it may relate to the supposition upon which it is founded in a threefold respect, viz.

I. Of a peremptory negation, as a thing absolutely to be denied, that former times are better than the following.

II. As of a case very disputable, whether they are so or no.



III. As admitting the supposition for true, that really they are better, and so bear away the preeminence.

Yet in every one of these three most different respects, this inquiry ought to be exploded as absurd, impertinent, and irrational.

1. And first of all, that it is ridiculous to ask why former times are better than the present, if really they are not better, and so the very supposition it self proves false; this is too apparently manifest to be matter of dispute, and that it is false we shall endeavour to prove and evince in the ensuing discourse: but before I enter upon the proof of it, this one observation must be premised.

That time is said to be good or bad, not from any such quality inherent in itself, but by external denomination from the nature of those things that are and do subsist in such a space of time. Time is the great vehicle of nature, not only for its swift passage and career, but because it carries in it the system of the world, from one stage and period of duration to another.

Now the world may be considered either in its natural or moral perfections. Some hold, that for the former, there is a continual diminution and an insensible decay in nature, things growing less and less, the very powers and faculties of them being weakened and shrunk; and the vital spirit, or *humidum radicale*, that God and nature first infused into the great body of the universe, being much exhausted, so that now, in every following age, the lamps of heaven burn dimmer and dimmer, till at length they dwindle into nothing, and so go out of themselves.

But that this cannot be so, is clear from these reasons. 1st, Because the ancientest histories generally describe things in the same posture heretofore that we find them now. 2d, That admitting the least and most undiscernible degree of diminution, even to but one remove from none at all, the world, in the space of six thousand years, which date it almost now bears, by the continuance but of that small proportion of change, would have sunk even to no thing, or the smallness of an atom. 3d, This will make the final annihilation of the world a mere effect of nature, and not of God's supernatural power; and so the consequent of it is irreligious.

Wherefore it being sure that the whole fabric of the world stands in the same vigour and perfection of nature which it had at first, we come next to that in which we are now most concerned, to see whether or no it be impaired and sunk in its moral perfections, and what is the consequent of that in political.

We have here an aphorism of Horace much inculcated. *Terra mulos homines nunc educat atque pusillos*. But poetry never yet went for argument: and perhaps he might speak this, being conscious of his own manners, and reflecting upon his own stature. But that in the descent of succeeding generations, the following are not still the worse, I thus evince.

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1. By reason: because there were the same objects to work upon men, and the same dispositions and inclinations in men to be wrought upon, before, that there are now. All the affairs of the world are the births and issue of men's actions; and all actions come from the meeting and collision of faculties with suitable objects. There were then the same incentives of desire on the one side, the same attractiveness in riches, the same relish in sovereignty, the same temptation in beauty, the same delicacy in meats, and taste in wines; and, on the other side, there were the same appetites of covetousness and ambition, the same fuel of lust and intemperance.

And these are the wheels upon which the whole visible scene of affairs, ethic and politic, turns and depends. The business of the world is imitation, and that which we call novelty is nothing but repetition. The figure and motion of the world is circular, and experience no less than mathematics will evince, that, as it turns round, the same part must be often in the same place: one age indeed goes before another, but precedency is not always preeminence; and it is not unusual for a worse to go before a better, and for the servant to ride before and lead the way to his master.

2. But 2dly, the same may be proved by history and the records of antiquity; and he who would give it the utmost proof that it is capable of from this topic, must speak volumes and preach libraries, bring a century within a line, and an age into every period. But what need we go any further than the noblest and yet the nearest piece of antiquity, the book of Moses.

Is the wickedness of the old world forgot, that we do so aggravate the tempest of this? Was it destroyed with waters of oblivion? and has the deluge clean overwhelmed and sunk itself? In those days there were giants in sin, as well as sinners of the first magnitude, and of the largest size and proportion.

And to take the world in a lower epocha, what after-age could exceed the lust of the Sodomites, the idolatry and tyranny of the Egyptians, the fickle levity of the Grecians? and that monstrous mixture of all baseness in the Roman Neros, Caligulas, and Domitians, emperors of the world, and slaves to their vice?

And for the very state of Israel, in which this envious inquiry was first commenced, was that worse in Canaan, under the shadow and protection of a native royalty, than under the old servitude and tyranny of Egypt? Was their present condition so bad, that while Solomon was courting Pharaoh's daughter, they should again court his yoke? woo their old slavery, and solicit a match with their former bondage? Was it so delightful a condition to feed Pharaoh's cattle, and to want straw themselves? instead of one prince, to have many task-masters? and to pay excise with their backs to maintain the tyrant's janizaries, and to feed their tormentors? But it seems, being in a land flowing with honey, they were cloyed with that, and so, loathing the honey, they grew in love with the sting.



But to bring the subject to our own doors; if we would be convinced that former ages are not always better than the following, I suppose we need not much rack our memories for a proof from experience.

I conceive the state of the Christian church also may come within the compass of our present discourse. Take it in its infancy, and with the properties of infancy; it was weak and naked, vexed with poverty, torn with persecution, and infested with heresy. It began the breach with Simon Magus, continued it with Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, Aerius, some rending her doctrine, some her discipline; and what are the heresies that now trouble it, but new editions of the old with further gloss and enlargement? What is Socinus, but Photinus and Pelagius blended and joined together in a third composition? What are our separatists and purity-pretending schismatics, but the tame brood and successors of the Donatists? only with this difference, that they had their headquarters *in meridie*, in the southern parts of the world, whereas ours seem to be derived to us from the north. These, I thought, had put it out of dispute, that no succeeding age of the church could have been worse: and, I think, the assertion might have stood firm, had not some late instances of our own age made it disputable.

But as for those who clamour of the corruptions of our present church, and are so earnest to reduce us to the primitive model; if they mean the primitive truth, and not rather the primitive nakedness of it only, we know this, for doctrine and discipline, it is the very transcript of antiquity. But if their design be to make us like the primitive Christians, by driving us into caves, and holes, and rocks; to tear down temples, and to make the sanctuary itself fly for refuge; to bring beasts into churches, and to send churchmen into dens; at the same time to make men beggars, and to take away hospitals; it is but reason to desire, that they would first begin and exemplify this reformation in themselves; and, like the old Christians, with want and poverty, wander about in sheepskins and goatskins: though, if they should, that is not presently a sheep that wears the skin, nor would the sheep's clothing change the nature of the wolf.

I conclude therefore, that all these pompous declamations against the evil of the present times, set off by odious comparisons with the former, are the voice of error and envy, of the worst of judges, malice and mistake: though I cannot wonder if those assert affairs to be *out of order*, whose interest and desire it is to be once more a reforming.

And thus much for the first consideration of the suppositions: as a thing false, and to be denied. I shall now,

II. In the second place, remit a little of this, and take it in a lower respect; as a case disputable, whether the preceding or succeeding generations are to be preferred: and here I shall dispute the matter on both sides.

1. And first for antiquity, and the former ages, we may plead thus. Certainly every thing is purest in the fountain, and most untainted in the original. The dregs are still the most



likely to settle in the bottom, and to sink into the last ages. The world cannot but be the worse for wearing; and it must needs have contracted much dross, when at the last it cannot be purged but by an universal fire.

Things are most fresh and fragrant in their beginning. The first-born is the most honourable, and it is primogeniture that entitles to the inheritance: it is not present possessions, but an early pedigree, that gives nobility.

The older the world grows, the more decrepit it must be: for age bows the body, and so causes an obliquity: every course of time leaves its mark behind it; and every century adds a wrinkle to the face of nature.

As for knowledge, the former age still teaches the latter; and which is likely to be most knowing, he that teaches, or he that is taught? The best and most compendious way of attaining wisdom is the reading of histories; but history speaks not of the present time, but of the former.

Besides, it was only the beginning of time that saw men innocent. Sin, like other things, receives growth by time, and improves by continuance: and every succeeding age has the bad example of one age more than the former. The same candle that refreshes when it is first light, smells and offends when it is going out.

In the alphabet of nature, it is only the first letter that is flourished. In short, there is as much difference between the present and former times, as there is between a copy and an original; that indeed may be fair, but this only is authentic. And be a copy never so exact, yet still it shines with a borrowed perfection, and has but the low praise of an imitation: and this may be said in behalf of the former times.

2. But secondly, for the preeminence of the succeeding ages above the former, it may be disputed thus.

If the honour be due to antiquity, then certainly the present age must claim it; for the world is now oldest, and therefore upon the very right of seniority may challenge the precedence: for certainly the longer the world lasts, the older it grows. And if wisdom ought to be respected, we know that it is the offspring of experience, and experience the child of age and continuance.

In every thing and action, it is not the beginning, but the end that is regarded: it is still the issue that crowns the work, and the *amen* that seals the petition: the *plaudite* is given to the last act: and Christ reserved *the best wine* to conclude *the feast*: nay, a fair beginning would be but the aggravation of a bad end.

And if we plead original, we know that sin is strongest in its original; and we are taught whence to date that. The lightest things float at the top of time; but if there be such a thing as a golden age, its mass and weight must needs sink it to the bottom and concluding ages of the world.



By having the histories of former ages, we have all their advantages by way of overplus, besides the proper advantages of our own; and so standing upon their shoulders, or rather upon their heads, cannot but have the further prospect.

Though the flourish begins the line, yet it is the period that makes the sense. As for the infirmities of age, we confess that men grow decrepit by time, but mankind does not. Policy, arts, and manufactures improve; and nature itself, as well as others, cannot be an artist, till it has served its time.

And, in religious matters, for the church, we know that it is Christ's body, and therefore its most natural, commending property is growth: but growth is the effect of duration, and if it had had its greatest perfection at the first, growth would have been impossible.

Besides, we confess that prophecy was a thing appropriate to the first days of the church: but then it is not prophecy spoken, but fulfilled; not the promise made, but performed, which conveys the blessing; and though the giving of prophecies were the glory of the first times, yet their completion is the privilege of the latter.

But do we not see all this while, that by thus ascribing the preeminence to former ages, we tacitly reflect a reproach upon the great Maker and Governor of the universe? For can Omnipotence be at a stand? Is God exhausted? And is nature the only thing which makes no progress? God has made all things in motion, and the design of motion is a further perfection.

In sum, it was the fulness of time which brought Christ into the world; Christianity was a reserve for the last: and it was the beginning of time which was infamous for man's fall and ruin: so in scripture they are called *the last days*, and *the ends of the world*, which are ennobled with his redemption.

But lastly, if the following ages were not the best, whence is it, that the older men grow, the more still they desire to live?—Now such things as these may be disputed in favour of the latter times beyond the former.

Having here brought the matter to this poise, to this equilibrium, that reflexive inquiry in the text concerning the worth of former times above the present, is eminently unreasonable in these two respects.

1. In respect of the nature of the thing itself; which we have seen is equally propendent to both parts, and not discernible which way the balance inclines: and nothing can be more irrational, than to be dogmatical in things doubtful; and to deter mine, where wise men only dispute.

2. In respect of the incompetence of any man living to be judge in this controversy; and he that is unfit to judge, I am sure is unable to decide. Now that incompetence arises from this: that no man can judge rightly of two things, but by comparing them together; and



compare them he cannot, unless he exactly knew them both. But how can he know former ages, unless, according to the opinion of Plato or Pythagoras, he might exist and be alive so many centuries before he was born?

But you will reply, that he may know them by the histories of those that writ of their own times.

To this I answer, that history may be justly suspected partial; and that historians report the virtues of their own age, selected and abstracted from the vices and defects; and if sometimes they mention the vices also, (as they do,) yet they only report the smaller, that they may with less suspicion conceal the greater. Now it is an unequal comparison to compare the select virtues of one age, with both the virtues and the vices of another.

History, stripped of partiality, would be a poor, thin, meager thing, and the volume would shrink into the index. I conclude therefore, that he who would decide this controversy, whether the former or latter times ought to have the preeminence, by the historians of those times, he properly does this; he first calls a man into question, and then makes him judge in his own cause, and at the best sees only by another's eyes.

Come we now to the third and last ground.

3. That admitting this supposition as true, that the former ages are really the best, and to be preferred; yet still this querulous reflection upon the evil of the present times stands obnoxious to the same charge of folly; and if it be condemned also upon this supposition, I see not where it can take sanctuary: now that it ought to be so, I demonstrate by these reasons.

1. Because such complaints have no efficacy to alter or remove the cause of them. Thoughts and words alter not the state of things. The rage and expostulations of discontent are like thunder with out a thunderbolt, they vanish and expire into noise and nothing; and, like a woman, are only loud and weak.

States are not altered, nor governments changed, because such an one is discontented, and tells us so in a sermon, or writes it in a book, and so prints himself a fool. Sad, undoubtedly, were our case, should God be angry with a nation as often as a preacher is pleased to be passionate, and to call his distemper the word of God.

A quill is but a weak thing to contest with a sceptre, and a satirical remonstrance to stand before a sword of justice. The laws will not be worded out of their course. The wheel will go on, though the fly sits and flutters and buzzes upon it.

It would be well if such persons would take Luther's advice to Melancthon, and be persuaded to leave off to govern the world, and not to frame new politic ideas; not to raise models of state, and holy commonwealths, in their little discontented closets; nor to arraign a council before a conventicle; and being stripped of their arms, to fly to revelation; and when they cannot effect, at least prophesy a change.

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Though there be a lion, a bull, a venomous serpent, and a fiery scorpion in the zodiac; yet still the sun holds on his way, goes through them all, brings the year about, finishes his course, shines, and is glorious in spite of such opposition. The maunderings of discontent are like the voice and behaviour of a swine, who, when he feels it rain, runs grumbling about, and by that indeed discovers his nature, but does not avoid the storm.

2. Such complaints of the evil of the times are irrational, because they only quicken the smart, and add to the pressure. Such querulous invectives against a standing government, are like a stone flung at a marble pillar, which not only makes no impression upon that, but rebounds, and hits the flinger in the face. Discontent burns only that breast in which it boils; and when it is not contented to be hot within, but must boil over in unruly, unwarrantable expressions, to avoid the heat, it wisely takes refuge in the fire: hence, when the sea swells and rages, we say not improperly, that the sea itself is troubled.

Submission is that which either removes or lightens the burden. Giving way either avoids or eludes the blow; and where an enemy or an affliction is too strong, patience is the best defiance.

And herein does the admirable wisdom of God appear, in modelling the great economy of the world, so uniting public and private advantages, that those affections and dispositions of mind, that are most conducive to the safety of government and society, are also most advantageous to every man in his own personal capacity: for does not an humble, compliant subjection at the same time strengthen the hands of the magistrate, and bless the person that has it with the privileges of quiet and content? He who has content, has that for which others would be great; he both secures and enjoys himself: but, on the contrary, he that frets, and fumes, and is angry, he raises tumults abroad, and feels the same within: as he that cries, and roars, and makes a noise, first hinders his own sleep, before he breaks the rest of others: and it is not unusual to see a fire sometimes stifled and extinguished in its own smoke.

In short, discontent is as laborious as useless: and he who will rebel must reckon upon the cost and conduct of an army; and endure the trouble of *watching*, as well as use the dissimulation of *praying*.

3. Thirdly and lastly, these censorious complaints of the evil of the times are irrational, because the just cause of them is resolvable into ourselves. It is not the times that debauch men, but men that derive and rattle a contagion upon the time: and it is still the liquor that first taints and infects the vessel.

Time is harmless; it passes on, and meddles with none: the sun rises, the year proceeds, and the seasons return, according to the decrees of nature, and the inviolate constancy of a perpetual course. And is it not irrational for a man to cast the errors of his choice upon the necessity of fate? or to complain that men speak low, because his hearing is decayed? and to utter satires and declamations against those times which his own vice has made bad? and, like Amnon, defile his sister, and then loathe her for the wrong he did her?

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Thus we use to say, it is the room that smokes, when indeed it is the fire which is in the room: and it is still the fault of the common banter or way of speaking, to disjoin the accusation and the crime, and to charge a land with the vices of its inhabitants.

But I should think, that it might not be so difficult a thing to find out a way both to remedy the complaint, and to remove the cause of it. For let but the prodigal confine himself, and measure his expenses by his own abilities, and not by another's books; let him trust himself more, and others less; let ministers cease to call faction religion, to lift up their voice too much like a trumpet, and in petitions for peace declare for war; and let not others think themselves wronged, if they be not revenged: let no man be forced to buy what he has already earned; to pay for his wages, and to lay down new sums for the price of his blood, and the just merit of his service: and then, certainly, there will be no cause to prefer former ages before the present. But if men will extravagantly plunge themselves in debt, and then rail and cry out of bad times, because they are arrested; if the gallant will put all upon his back, and then exclaim against the government because he has nothing for his belly; if men will think themselves bound to preach the nation all on fire, and being stopped in their attempt, cry out of persecution; if the public peace must be sacrificed to private revenge, certainly the complaint is impudent and brutish, and deserves to be sent to the law for an answer, and to the gaol for satisfaction.

But it is a sure, though no new observation, that the most obnoxious are still the most querulous: that discontent, and the cause of it, are generally from the same person: and that, when once the remorse of guilt and villainy improve into discontent, it is not less difficult to make such persons contented, than to make them innocent.

Rigour and contempt are the best correctors of this distemper. And he who thinks that such persons may be pacified, may as well attempt to satisfy the bottomless pit, the cravings of hell, or the appetites of the grave, which may sooner be *filled* (as impossible as that is) than be *satisfied*.

For where interests are contradictory, (as in all societies or companies of men some must needs be,) there an universal satisfaction is just in the same measure possible, in which contradictions are reconcileable. And doubtless there have been those, who have heartily cursed that rain or sunshine, for which others have as heartily prayed.

Even our blessed Saviour himself, we read, in [Heb. xii. 3](#), *endured the contradiction of sinners*: and (be it spoke with reverence) it would put Providence itself to a kind of nonplus, to attempt any dispensation of it to an universal acceptance; any more than that glorious fountain of light, the sun, can shine upon all the corners of the earth at once. Wherefore, since the distemper we speak of is incorrigible, and the remedy deplorable; let not bare power attempt to outdo Omnipotence, nor the *gods of the earth*, as they are called, think to do that which the *God of heaven* has never yet thought fit to effect.

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



SERMON XV.

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

MATTHEW v. 25, 26.

Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him: lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

IN these words Christ endeavours to enforce that high and noble duty of an amicable concord and agreement betwixt brethren; the greatest bond of society, and the most becoming ornament of religion: and since it is to be supposed that men's frailty and passion will sometimes carry them out to a violation and breach of it, and, if not prevented, settle in a fixed and lasting rancour; he prescribes the antidote of a speedy reconciliation, as the only sovereign and certain remedy against the poisonous ferment of so working a distemper. If an injury be once done, Christ will have the repentance almost as early as the provocation; the rupture drawn up as soon as made; the angry word eaten as soon as uttered, and in a manner disowned before it is quite spoke; that so men's quickness in the one may in some measure answer and compound for their hastiness in the other.

And since those are always the strongest and most effectual addresses to the mind of man, that press a duty not only by the proposal of rewards to such as perform, but also of punishments to such as neglect it, Christ therefore shews us the necessity of immediately making peace with our injured brother, from the unavoidable misery of those obstinate wretches that persist in and (as much as in them lies) perpetuate an injury; and being mortal themselves, yet affect a kind of immortality in their mutual hatreds and animosities.

As for the words, some understand them in a literal, and some in a figurative sense.

Those who take them literally affirm, that Christ intended no parable in them at all, but by *adversary* meant any man whom we had injured, any one that has an action against us; and by *way*, a way, properly so taken; and by a judge, officer, and prison, an earthly *judge*, *officer*, and *prison*. And thus Chrysostom understands them, according to the strict acceptance of the letter, affirming that Christ's whole scope and intent was to terrify men from being injurious to their brethren, by shewing what severe, inexorable usage would attend such as should offend in this kind.

Others will have the whole scheme of the text figurative, and to be understood only in a spiritual sense: according to which opinion, it will be requisite to give some short account of the several terms contained therein, and to shew briefly and distinctly what may spiritually be meant by each of them.



1. And first for the word *adversary*. Not to traverse the various and differing opinions of commentators; if the form of the words should be only tropical and figurative, I conceive it most rational to understand here by *adversary*, either the divine law, or a man's own conscience as commissioned by that law to accuse, charge, and arraign him before the great and dreadful tribunal of God. For to make either God himself the adversary, who in this case must of necessity be supposed to be the judge; or Satan the adversary, who upon the same account must needs be the officer or executioner; or lastly, to make a man's own sin the adversary, which, how soever it may cry out for justice against him, yet can with no tolerable sense be said to be that which he is here commanded to agree with; these, I say, all and every one of them, are such unnatural assertions, and the grounds of them so weak, and the consequences of them so absurd, that any ordinary reason may soon discern the falseness and unfitness of such an exposition of the word, which, how tropical so ever the scheme of the text may be, still ought to maintain that due analogy and relation, that the things signified by those words naturally bear to one another.

2. By *the way* is meant the time of this life; or rather the present opportunities of repentance, which last not always as long as life lasts. These are the happy seasons of making up all differences with a threatening law and an accusing conscience; the great pathway of peace, in which we may meet and join hands with our angry adversary, and so close up all those fatal breaches through which the wrath of an ireful judge may hereafter break in upon us.

3. By *judge* is meant, as we have intimated already, the great God of heaven, who at the last and great day shall judge the world. We may behold him, in [Psalm 50](#), as it were advanced upon his throne of justice, and from thence summoning all flesh before him to receive sentence according to the merit of their ways; and it is emphatically added, in the sixth verse of that Psalm, *for God is judge himself*.

4. By *officer*, as we also hinted before, is to be meant the Devil, the great gaoler of souls, the cruel and remorseless executioner of that last and terrible sentence, which the righteous Judge of heaven and earth shall award to all impenitent sinners.

5. By *prison*, no doubt, is meant hell, that vast, wide, comprehensive receptacle of damned spirits, from whence there is no redemption or return. As for that larger signification that some would fasten upon the word here, there is no solid ground for it, either in the context or the reason of the thing itself. Hell is a prison large enough already, and we need not enlarge it by our expositions.

6. And lastly, by *paying the uttermost farthing* must be signified the guilty person's being dealt with according to the utmost rigour and extremity of justice. For when the sinner is once lodged in that sad place, his punishment can have neither remission nor extenuation: but there must be an exact commensuration between the guilt and the penalty; which must be adjusted according to the strictest measures of the law. For mercy has no more to do, when justice is once commanded to do its office.

All these things are very easy and obvious, and I cannot but think it needless to insist any longer upon them.

And thus I have given you both the literal and the figurative sense of the words; and if it be now asked, which of them is to take place, I answer, that the words are parabolical, and include them both. For the better understanding of which, we are to observe these two things concerning parables.

First, that every parable is made up of two parts.

1. The material, literal part, which is contained in those bare words and expressions in which it is set down.

2. The formal, spiritual part, or application of the parable; which consists of those things that are further signified to us under those literal expressions.

The other thing to be observed is, that this spiritual part, or application of the parable, is some times expressed and positively set down *in terminis*: as in St. [Matth. xiii.](#) where Christ speaks of the seed and of the ground. He afterwards explains himself, and says, that by *the seed* is meant *the word*, and by *the ground*, *the hearers*. And sometimes again this spiritual part is not expressed, but only implied or understood, as in [Matth. xxv.](#) where Christ sets down the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, yet does not in express words set down the spiritual meaning and design of it, but leaves us to comment upon that in our own meditations. And so he does here; we have the literal part or outside of the parable expressed, but the spiritual sense of it under stood.

Now these two rules thus premised, we are to observe further, that in the application of the parable, and bringing the two parts of it together, the literal and the spiritual, we are not to search after a nice and exact agreement between them in every particular; but to attend only to their correspondence in the design, drift, and purpose of the parable. Which design doubtless in these words is no other than to set forth the severity of God's proceedings against all impenitent, unreconciled sinners, by shewing that strict and unrelenting severity that a man not reconciled to his adversary meets with even before the tribunals of men; so that we are not now anxiously to strain the parable, and to fit every member of the literal expression to the spiritual meaning; as that, because in judicial processes amongst men there is an adversary, a judge, and an officer, and all these three distinct persons, there must therefore be such an economy in the tribunal of Heaven. No; all these things belong only to the material part, the dress and ornament of the parable; but the sense and purpose that Christ drives at, is that only which we are here to insist upon. As if Christ should say,

You know that in matters between man and man, when one has trespassed against another, if the party offending, while he has opportunity to make his peace with the party offended, shall neglect it, so that the matter comes at length to be brought before the judge, he is then to look for nothing but the most rigorous penalty of the law without mitigation. Just so it is between God and man: if any one sins against God, whether by offending his

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brother, or by any other kind of sin whatsoever, if he does not speedily and prudently lay hold on the opportunity of reconciling himself to God in this life, when God shall enter into judgment with him in the next, there will then be no mercy for him, but, according to the exact tenor of a righteous, indispensable law, he must abide the woful, irreversible sentence of eternal death. This is a compendious paraphrase upon the text, setting forth the full meaning of our Saviour in it. So that from what has been laid down, I shall now present you with the sense of the words, under these three conclusions.

1. That the time of this life is the only time for a sinner to make his peace with, and to reconcile himself to God.

2. That the consideration, that the time of this life is the only time for a sinner to reconcile himself to God in, ought to be a prevailing, unanswerable argument to engage and quicken his repentance.

3. That if a sinner lets pass this season of making his peace with God, he irrecoverably falls into an estate of utter perdition.

I shall single out the second for the subject of the present discourse, and take in the rest under the arguments by which I shall prove it.

The proposition therefore to be handled is this, That the consideration, &c. Now this shall be made appear these three ways.

I. By comparing the shortness of life with the difficulty of this work.

II. By comparing the uncertainty of life with the necessity of it. And,

III. and lastly, by considering the sad and fatal doom that will infallibly attend the neglect of it.

I. And for the first of these. Let us compare the shortness of life with the greatness and difficulty of the work here set before us. What is a man's whole life, but the inconsiderable measure of a span? and yet the vast business of eternity is crowded into this poor compass. It is a transitory puff of wind; while it breathes, it expires. The years of our life are but too fitly styled in holy writ *the days of our life*. Man takes his breath but short, and that is an argument that it is always departing. *Our days* (says the royal prophet) *are but as a shadow*. Every day added to our life sets us so much nearer to death; as the longer the shadow grows, the day is so much the nearer spent. *Few and evil have the days of my life been*, says Jacob in [Genesis xlvii. 9](#). The number of our calamities far exceeds the number of our days. *It is a pilgrimage*, (as it is expressed in the same verse;) it is a going through the world, not a dwelling in it. We do not use to make any long stay in the journey, nor to take up our habitation at an inn. As Lot said of Zoar, the city of life, so we may say of the time and space of life, *Is it not a little one?* How is it passing away continually! how is it stealing from us, while we are eating, sleeping, talking! how is it shortened even while we are complaining of its shortness! There is nothing that we can either think, speak, or do, but it takes up some time. We cannot purchase so much as a thought or a word, without the expense of some of our

precious moments. God has shut us up within the boundaries of a contracted age, so that we cannot attempt, much less achieve, any thing great or considerable. Our time is too scant and narrow for our designs. Our thoughts perish before they can ripen into action; the space of life being like the bed mentioned in [Isaiah xxviii. 20](#), *it is shorter than a man can well stretch himself upon it*. For how do we hear the saints complaining of this in scripture! Sometimes it is termed *a vapour*, [James iv. 14](#), a thing that appears and disappears almost in the same instant. Sometimes it is likened to *a tale that is told*, [Psalm xc. 9](#). a frivolous thing, and after a few words speaking, quickly at an end. And sometimes, again, it is resembled to *a watch in the night*. We are presently called off our station, and another generation comes in our room. This is the best that can be said of life; and what shall we do to make it other wise? Stretch or draw it out we cannot beyond the fatal line; it is not in our power to add one cubit to the measure of our days. We cannot slacken the pace of one of our posting minutes. But time will have its uncontrolled course and career, bringing age and death along with it, and, like the Parthian, shooting its killing arrows, while it flies from us. This is our condition here, this the lot of nature and mortality.

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And now, if upon this transient survey of the shortness of life we could find that our business were as small as our age is short, it would be some relief to us however. But on the contrary, the work of our lives is long, difficult, tedious, and comprehensive, such as could easily exhaust and take up the utmost period of the most extended age, and still cry out for more. And if so, then certainly, to have a large task enjoined, and but a poor pittance of time to discharge it in, to have a large tale of brick required, and a small allowance of straw to prepare it with, cannot but be a great and heart-discouraging disadvantage. Yet this is our case; our sin has cut short our time, and enlarged our work: as it is with a man going up an hill, and falling backwards; his journey is thereby made longer, and his strength weaker. Seneca, speaking of the shortness of life, says, that we did not first receive it short, but have made it so. But by his favour, nature gave it but short; and we, by ill husbanding it, have made it much shorter; spending vainly and lavishly upon a small stock, so many of our precious hours being cast away upon idle discourse, intemperate sleep, unnecessary recreations, if not also heinous sins; all which have set us backward in the accounts of eternity, and are now to be reckoned amongst *the things that are not*: while in the mean time the business incumbent on us, is to recover our lost souls, to return and reconcile ourselves to a provoked God, to get our natures renewed, and reformed with an holy and divine principle; and in a word, to regain our title to heaven. All these are great, high, and amazing works, beyond our strength, nay our very apprehensions, if an overpowering grace from heaven does not assist and carry us above ourselves. It is a miracle to consider, that such a pitiful thing as this life is, even upon the longest extent and the best improvement of it, should afford time enough to compass so vast a business, as the working out of a man's salvation.

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Now the difficulty of this business will appear from these considerations.

1st, Because in this business thou art to clear thy self of an injury done to an infinite, offended justice, to appease an infinite wrath, and an infinite, provoked majesty. And this must needs be no small or ordinary work; for who can stand before them! Wherefore it is the highest prudence to engage in it betimes, and to take up injuries between God and thy soul as speedily as may be. For if God should go to law with thee, or thou with him, thou wert undone for ever. He who goes to law with this king, is like to have but bad success. *No flesh living* (says the Psalmist) *shall in thy sight be justified*. Certainly the consideration of thy debts should take up thy thoughts, even by night as well as day, hold thy eyes waking, and make thee take every step with terror, lest divine justice should arrest thee of a sudden. For, O man! whosoever thou art, according as the party is whom thou hast offended, the difficulty of the reconciliation will be proportionable. If thou hast offended a *friend*, the Spirit of God says, *that it is easier to win a castle, than to regain such an one*. If thou hast offended thy sovereign, *the anger of a king is as the roaring of a lion*. Now thy business is to make thy peace, both with an offended friend, and with an affronted sovereign. Thy debts are many thousand talents; and as for thee to pay them is impossible, so to get a surety for so much will be very difficult. When a creditor is urgent for his money, or for thy body, there is no demur, no delay then to be made. God has a writ out against thee, and is ready to arrest thee either for the debt, or for thy soul. And it will cost thee many prayers, many an hard fight and combat with thy sin, many mortifying duties and bitter pangs of repentance, before Christ will come in and pay the debt, and set thee free: and when this is done, how difficult will it be to get the Spirit to set his seal to thy pardon, and to keep the evidences of it for thee clear and entire. For without thy justification thou canst have no security, and without thy evidences thou canst have no comfort. It requires the most strict and accurate walking before God that can be, with a frequent and thorough examination of all thy experiences; and yet perhaps when all this is done, thou mayest fall short of it at last. For sometimes one great sin, one dangerous false step in the ways of God, may so blot thy evidences, that thou shalt even think the love of God is gone from thee; that he has *shut up his tender bowels in anger*, and that *he has forgotten to be gracious*: so that thou mayest go mourning all thy days, and die doubtful whether thou hast made a thorough peace with God or no. And is not the overcoming of this difficulty worth the spending of thy best time and thy choicest endeavours? Can it be done in a moment? Is it, think you, the easy performance of a few hours? No; God has rated these acquirements at the price of our greatest, severest, and longest labours. And to shew yet further, how difficult it is to make thy peace with the great God, consider how hard it is to make thy peace with thy own conscience. And shall a bare witness (for conscience is no more) prosecute the suit so hard against thee, and shall not the adversary himself be much more violent and hard to be taken off? When thy own heart shall so bitterly charge thee with thy guilt, and the black roll of thy most provoking sins shall

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be read against thee by an angry conscience, will a small matter, think you, give it satisfaction? Will a few broken sighs, and tears, and mournful words, make it compound the matter with thee, and let the suit fall? No certainly, the time of thy whole life, upon the best and strictest improvement of it, is but little enough to clear up and settle all differences between thee and thy conscience; and how much less then can it be to pacify, and make all even with thy offended God!

2dly, The other cause of the difficulty of making thy peace with God appears from this, that thou art utterly unable of thyself to give him any thing by way of just compensation or satisfaction. We have a large instance of something offered that way in [Micah vi. 7](#), *Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* Alas! all this is but an impossible supposition; but yet shews, that all and the very utmost that the creature does, or can do, or give, is but debt and duty, and that surely is not meritorious.

Can a man pay his old debts by discharging his present? Can the creature oblige God by any good duty, when it is God himself that enables him to perform that duty? It may be said, that Christ has engaged to make the soul's peace, to clear off his debts to God. True: but then the soul engages in a new debt of faith and obedience to Christ. And here all the stress of the business lies, how the soul will be able to pay off this, and to secure itself a well-grounded interest and confidence in Christ; to take him in respect of all his offices; not only to be saved, but also to be ruled by him; not only as a priest, but also as a king. This will drink up and engross all that the soul can do and endeavour: all the strength and time allotted in this world is little enough to do such works as may prove the sincerity of its faith. For whatsoever relation faith may have to works, whether as to a part, or to a consequent to it; it is certainly such a thing as indispensably obliges the whole of a man's following life to a strict, constant, and universal obedience to the laws of Christ. But that which ought chiefly to quicken the soul to a sudden improvement of the perishing time of this life, in making its peace with God, is this, that as Christ will not undertake for it without faith and repentance, so the offer of these does not last always. The consideration of this made the apostle quicken the Hebrews to present duty: *To-day if you will hear his voice*, [Heb. iii. 15](#). There may be those offers of mercy made to thee to-day, that thou mayest not enjoy again for ever. The things of thy peace may be freely held forth to thee now, which for the future may be set out of thy reach. Consider therefore upon what terms thou standest with God, and lose no time: the work is difficult, and the delay dangerous, and the time short. The Spirit, that to-day stands at thy door and knocks, may be gone before to-morrow; and when it is once sent away, no man can assure himself that it will ever return.

And thus much concerning the first argument to prove the doctrine, drawn from our comparing the shortness of life with the greatness and difficulty of the work.

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II. The second argument is taken from our comparing the uncertainty of life with the necessity of the work. Life, as it is short, so it is dubious; like a problematical question, concise, but doubtful. None can promise beyond the present. Who can secure to himself the enjoyment of a year, nay of one day, one hour? *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be taken from thee, Luke xii. 20.* A man is in this contracted life as in a narrow sea, ever and anon ready to be cast away. Strength and health of body can make thee no absolute promise of life, although the surest grounds we can build upon. For may we not take up the complaint of David, and mourn over the immature death of the strong; *How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!* How are the strong and healthful become a prey to an untimely death! Count not, therefore, how many hours thou hast to live in the world; look not upon thy hour-glass; do not build upon the sand. Death may snatch thee away of a sudden. As it is always terrible, so it is often unexpected. Thou flourishest at present like a flower, but the wind bloweth where and when it listeth. *It passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more, Psalm ciii. 16.*

Now this being considered and duly pondered in one scale of the balance, and the necessity of making our peace in the other, how should it incite us to a serious, present endeavour for the accomplishment of this work! *Can two walk together, unless they be agreed?* says the prophet Amos, iii. 3. Canst thou walk quietly with God, while he is thy adversary? Will not the consideration of this, that thou art going to the judge, and the way is short, and thy adversary ready to give in an accusation against thee, whet thy importunity to make an agreement with him? Thy endeavours are not serious and rational, unless they are present and immediate. That endeavour is only rational, which is according to the exigency of the thing. Now the business of thy soul is the matter thou art to engage in, and thou art only sure of the present time to manage it in. Unless this be laid hold of, thou dost really trifle in the business of eternity, and dost only embrace a pretence, instead of a serious intention. Things that are earnestly desired, and withal not to be delayed, are effected with an immediate expedition. If I am uncertain when my enemy will invade me, I will imagine that he will do it suddenly, and therefore my preparations shall be sudden. In things that concern our temporal interest, we are so wise as to make present provision, and not to suspend all upon contingent futurities. He that is sick to-day, will not defer sending for a physician till to-morrow. He that waits for the fall of some preferment puts himself in a present preparedness. But, alas! upon all these things the most we can write, it is convenience, not necessity. There is one thing, and but one that is necessary. It is not necessary that thou shouldest be healthful, nor that thou shouldest be honourable: but it is necessary for thee to be saved; to be at peace with God; to have the hand-writing that is against thee, by reason of the law, blotted out; to be friends with an almighty adversary. It was the note of a merry epicure, but may be refined into a voice becoming a Christian, *Τὸ σήμερον μέλει μοι, τὸ δ' αὐρίον τίς οἶδε;* I will take care for to-day, who knows to-morrow? Let the Christian lay hold of the

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present occasion; and if he would live for ever, let him look upon himself as living but to-day: let this be secured, and whatsoever comes afterwards, let him reckon it as an overplus, and an unexpected gain. If to-day it be thy business to gain a peace, all the rest of thy days it is thy only business to enjoy it. Reason is impatient of delay in things necessary, and Christianity elevates reason, and makes it more impatient. Are we not bid *to watch, to be ready, to have our loins girt and our lamps prepared?* Now the persuasive force of this is grounded upon the uncertainty of Christ's coming: although his coming be but once, yet if it is uncertain, the expectation of it must be continual. As indefinite commands do universally engage, so indefinite, uncertain dangers are the just arguments of perpetual caution. O that men would be but wise, and consider, and lay aside their sins, and stand upon their guard! Wouldest thou be willing that a sudden judgment should stop thy breath while thou art a swearing or a lying? Wouldest thou have God break in upon thee, while thou art in the loathsome embraces of a filthy whore? Wouldest thou have death come and arrest thee in the name of God, while thou art in thy cups and in thy drunkenness? Now since these sudden soul-disasters may fall out, *what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?* Who knows but within a few days a noisome disease may stop thy breath? It did so to Herod. Or perhaps an unfortunate stab send thee packing? It did so to Abner. Or perhaps a stone from the house dash out thy brains, and prove both thy death and thy sepulchre? It did so to Abimelech. These small, inconsiderable things, commissioned by a Deity, are able to snap asunder the rotten thread of a weak life, and waft thee into eternity. And if thou hast not prepared a way beforehand, by concluding a solid peace with God, thou wilt find but sad welcome in the other world. Thou art indeed taken from the prison of thy body; but it is because thou art led to thy eternal execution.

And thus much concerning the second argument drawn from the uncertainty of life, compared with the necessity of the work.

III. The third argument to prove that the consideration, that the time of life is the only time of making peace with God, ought to quicken us to a speedy repentance, may be taken from considering the dismal doom that does attend those who go out of the world before their peace is made.

Now the misery and terror of this doom consists in two things.

1. That it is inevitable, it cannot be avoided.
2. That it is irreversible, it cannot be revoked. And this takes in the substance of the third doctrine, viz. That if a soul let pass this season of making its peace with God, it immediately falls into a state of irrecoverable perdition.

1. This doom is inevitable, it cannot be avoided. When we have to do with a strong enemy, if we cannot fly from him, we must of necessity fall by him. If we cannot outrun vengeance, we must endure it. The poor soul is now fallen into an ocean of endless misery, and if it cannot swim, or bear up itself, must sink. The place of torment is before thee, and an



infinite power behind thee, to drive thee into it; therefore in thou must, there is no remedy; no ways to escape, unless thou canst either outwit God or overpower him. All possibility of escaping an evil must be either by hiding one's self from it, and so keeping ourselves from that; or by repulsing it, and so keeping that from us. But either of these are impossible for thee to do, when thou art environed on this side by an omniscience, on the other by an omnipotence. We read of those that shall *cry unto the mountains to fall upon them, and to the rocks to cover them from the face of the Lamb, and of him that sitteth upon the throne, Revel. vi. 16.* But, alas! what poor asylums are these, when God, by his all-seeing eye, can look through the mountains, and by his hand can remove them! A condemned malefactor may break the prison, and fly, and escape the punishment. But canst thou break the gates of hell? Canst thou, like a stronger Samson, carry away the door of the infernal pit? Oh! who can be strong in the day that the Lord shall thus deal with him! Admit thou couldst unfetter thyself, and break thy prison, yet thou wert not able to run from God: God has his arrows of vengeance, and canst thou outfly an arrow? To speak after the manner of men, thou hast a severe judge, and a watchful gaoler. *As he that keeps Israel,* so he that imprisons thee, *does neither slumber nor sleep.* He has an eagle's eye to observe, and an eagle's wing to overtake thee: there is no way to avoid him. If thou canst find the way out of the midst of utter darkness, break asunder the everlasting chains, break through the Devil and his angels, and those armies of eternal woes, then mayest thou wring thyself out of God's hands.



2. This doom is irreversible, it cannot be revoked. It is proper to any word, when once spoken, to fly away beyond all possibility of a recall; but much more to every decretory word of God, which the deliberate resolutions of an infinitely wise judge have made unchangeable. The word is gone out of God's mouth in righteousness; it shall not return: God's condemning sentence admits of no repeal. *The Strength of Israel is not a man, or the son of man, that he should repent, 1 Sam. xv. 29.* The outcries of a miserable, perishing man may often prevail with a man like himself, who is of the same mould, the same affections, so far as to cause an act of passion and commiseration to revoke an act of justice. But, alas! all the cravings and the wailings of a justly condemned sinner shall be answered of God with, *I know you not.* All such lamentations cannot at all move a resolved Deity; they are like a vanishing voice echoing back from a marble pillar, without making the least impression. *As the tree falls, so it lies.*



If the sinner falls into destruction, there he must lie for ever without recovery. *I sink,* says David, *in the mire, where there is no standing, Psal. lxxix. 2.* What he says of his affliction, a lost soul may say of its perdition; that it sinks deeper and deeper, it cannot so much as arrive to a stand, much less to a return. A man, while he is yet falling from some high place, is not able to stop or to recover himself, much less can he be able, when he is actually fallen. Even the heathen poet, from those imperfect notions that the heathens had of the future misery of lost sinners, could acknowledge the descent to hell easy, but the return impossible:

Facilis descensus Averni: sed revocare gradum, &c. It is a rule in philosophy, that from a total privation to the habit, there can be no regress. So after a total loss of God's love and presence, there is no possibility of reobtaining it. For put the case that it were possible, yet who should solicit and seek out thy pardon, and get thy sentence reversed? It must be either God, or angels, or men. First, it cannot be God the Father; for he is thy angry judge, and therefore cannot be thy advocate. Nor God the Son, for him thou hast crucified afresh, and his offers of redemption are only upon the scene of this life. *He prays not for the world, John xvii. 9,* that is, for the wicked world; then much less for the condemned world. The Spirit will not intercede for thee; for him thou hast often grieved, and frustrated all the methods of his workings. Now good angels cannot present a petition for thee; for it is as much their work and business to glorify God in the destruction of the wicked, as in the salvation of the righteous. The devils are the instruments of thy misery, and thy tormentors will never prove thy intercessors. As for men, those that are saved are the approvers, and those that are condemned are the companions of thy misery; but neither can be thy helpers. Perpetual therefore must thy perdition needs be, when both the Creator and all his creatures are concerned either to advance, or at least to rejoice over thy destruction. O let every sinner, that is yet on this side the pit, carry this in his more serious thoughts, *Psalm xlix. 8, The redemption of the soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever.* The loss of time, and the loss of a soul, is irrecoverable.



All the application I shall make shall be to urge over the same duty enjoined in the text upon the score of another argument, and that also couched in the words, *Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way;* yea, for this very reason, because thou art in the way. *As long as there is life, there is hope,* we say; and so, as long as there is the enjoyment of a temporal life, there may be just hope of an eternal. These days of thy respite, they are golden days: every hour presents thee with salvation; every day lays heaven and happiness at thy door. Wherefore go forth, and meet thy adversary; do not fly off and say, *There is a lion in the way;* that he is austere, and hard to be appeased. No, he does not come clothed with thunder and terror, but with all the sweetness and inviting tenderness that mercy itself can put on. Thou hast a friendly enemy, one whose bowels yearn over thee; for although, of all others, he is, if unreconciled, the most terrible; so to be reconciled, he is the most willing. While with one hand he shakes his rod at thee for departing from him, with the other he graciously beckons to thee to return. And if thou canst so far relent as to endeavour it, believe it, he is ready to meet thee half way: he did so to the prodigal.



O consider then this thy inestimable advantage, that thou art yet in the way, yet in a possibility, nay in a probability of reconciliation. Thou art not put to sue for terms of peace, but only to accept of those that are freely offered and prepared to thy hand. Close in with such a potent adversary; it is thy wisdom, thy eternal interest, thy life; thou mayest so carry the business, as to turn thy enemy into thy Saviour. Wherefore take that excellent advice of

the Spirit, with which I shall conclude, [Psalm ii. ult.](#) *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the way.*



SERMON XVI.

MATTHEW xxiii. 5.

But all their works they do for to be seen of men.

IT is strange to consider the great difference both of the principle and quality of most of those actions that in the world carry the same reputation. Of this we have here a notable instance in a sect of men amongst the Jews called the pharisees; who made as glorious an appearance, and had as high a vogue for piety, as the best. Their righteousness and good works so glistened, that they even dashed the judging faculties of those who judged more by seeing than by weighing; and doubtless they were in shew so exactly good, that no argument from appearance could decide the difference.

And yet, like those trees which are fair and flourishing at the top from the dung that lies at the root, the principle of all these good works was a sinful appetite, an appetite of glory, an ambitious desire; sinful perhaps in itself, but certainly so in its application to such a design. Yet, however sinful it was in the nature of an appetite, we see it was very strong and operative in the nature of a principle; and such an one as wrought men to great heights in the outward and splendid side of religion.

My design at this time is from these words to inquire into the force of this principle in reference to a virtuous and religious life; and to shew how far it is able to engage men in it.

And this I shall do under these four heads.

I. I shall shew that a love of glory is sufficient to produce all those virtuous actions that are visible in the lives of those that profess religion.

II. I shall shew whence this affection comes to have such an influence upon our actions.

III. I shall shew the inability of it to be a sufficient motive to engage mankind in virtuous actions, without the assistance of religion.

IV. I shall shew that even those actions that it does produce are yet of no value at all in the sight of God.

For the first of these, that the love of glory is able to produce all those virtuous actions that are visible in the lives of those that profess religion.

This I prove first from this, that it actually has produced them, and therefore it is able to produce them: for this, let the noblest and most virtuous of the heathens be an instance; whose outward virtues few Christians equal, but none transcend: yet they were acted in all by a thirst of that glory that followed those performances. For into what will you resolve the industry of the philosophers, the chastity of Scipio and Alexander, the liberality of Augustus, the severity of Cato, the integrity of Fabricius, but into a desire of being famous for each of these perfections? See what a round and open profession of this Tully makes in his defence of Archias the poet! We know he had behaved himself with great virtue and resolution in the behalf of his country against Clodius and Catiline; but what induced him? Was it either



love of the virtuous action itself, or hopes to gain by it a better place in their Elysium? Nor he nor any of the wiser sort believed any such thing. Juvenal tells you, *vix pueri credunt*. But what was it then? Why he tells you, that if he had not grown up in persuasion from his youth, that nothing was earnestly to be desired in this life but praise and honour, he would never have exposed himself to those enmities, dangers, and oppositions, that he underwent in the prosecution of his country's defence.

And after that he had proved that other great men acted upon the same principle; for how came they else to be so fond of poets and historians, the great instruments and propagators of their fame? he then gathers up all into this general conclusion; *Nullam virtus aliam mercedem laborum periculorumque desiderat praeter hanc laudis et gloriae: qua quidem detracta, quid est quod in hoc tam exiguo vitae curriculo, et tam brevi, tantis nos in laboribus exerceamus?* You see now the springhead from whence streamed all the splendid and renowned moral actions of these persons.

Nay, in persons of a much inferior rank and apprehension, we have the same principle working them to a degree of abstinence equal to the greatest austerities and instances of mortification seen nowadays in persons religious. Those that used to run and wrestle in the public games, what strange abridgments did they suffer both as to the kind and measure of their food! what abstinence from wine and women, and all other luxury, did they constantly tie themselves up to! The apostle Paul gives them this testimony in [1 Cor. ix. 25](#), *Every man that striveth for mastery is temperate in all things*: and that with such a strict and rigorous exactness, that many who nowadays profess Christianity, would not deny their appetites half so much to gain a kingdom in this world, or the world to come, as the apostle says those persons did to gain a corruptible crown; that is, some pitiful garland, ready to wither and to be blasted by the breath of those applauses that attended the putting of it on.

But further, that even in those that profess religion, religion is not always the commanding, producing principle of their best actions, the very example of the pharisees will demonstrate. For what almost could be outwardly done, which these men did not do with great advantage, pomp, and solemnity of performance? They were frequent in prayer, they gave alms, they were exact in their tithings even to mint and cummin; they sat in the seat of Moses, and taught sometimes so well, that Christ, in [Matt. xxiii. 3](#), charges his disciples, that *whatsoever they bid them, they should observe and do*: and for their zeal, they would undertake the expense and toil of *compassing sea and land, to gain one proselyte to their religion*. In a word, they had gained such a reputation for their piety, that it was a common saying amongst the Jews, "That if but two men in the world should be saved, one of them would be a pharisee." Now, let any one shew me, where amongst us there is such a face of religion and concernment for it. You will say, perhaps, that the truth and body of it may be among us; but certainly it is a strange thing to see a body without a face, and reality without

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any shew. There is a difference in deed between the substance and the shadow, yet there is seldom a substance without the shadow. But this by digression.

We have seen what the pharisees did; but what was the first moving cause that bore them up to such a pitch of acting? Why, that they might be talked of and admired; in a word, that *they might be seen of men*. They gave alms indeed, but it was with trumpets and proclamations. They prayed; but it was standing in the streets, with a design more to be seen here below, than to be heard above. They fasted; but then they disfigured themselves, wore a sad countenance and a drooping head, that they might gain notice and observation, and so feed their ambition. They pretended great zeal to the law; but carried it more in their phylacteries than their hearts, and in the borders of their garments more than their lives. All their teaching was in order to be called *rabbi*; to be treated with public and pompous salutations; to be cringed to in solemn meetings; to be at the top of every public feast and assembly. The whole design of all that pageantry and show of piety that they amused the world withal, was nothing but noise, and vogue, and popularity: this was the breath that blew up their devotion to such an high and a blazing flame.

And are not many Christians, though differing from them in religion, yet the very same men; and owe all those shows and forms of godliness, which they have clothed themselves withal, to the influence of the same spurious principle? How many appear devout, and zealous, and frequent in the service of God, only to court the esteem of the world, or perhaps to acquit themselves to the eye of a superior!

How vast a distance is there between their inside and their outside; between the same men as they open themselves in private, and as they sustain an artificial dress or person in public! The reason is, because, though they have not goodness enough to be religious, yet they have pride enough to appear so.

2. That the love of glory is sufficient to produce all those virtuous actions, that are visible in the lives of those that profess religion, appears further from hence; that there is nothing visible in the very best actions, but what may proceed from the most depraved principles, if acted by prudence, caution, and design. And if piety be not requisite to their production, I am sure the next principle, for influence and activity, is a man's concernment for his reputation.

Now that a principle, short of piety, is able to exert the fairest performances that bear the name of pious, is clear from this, that there is no external discrimination of the hypocrite from the sincere person: what one does, the same is done by the other. He that should see a stone that is shot from a sling, and a bird fly in the air at the same time, were he ignorant of their nature, could not, by any mark of discovery inherent in the motions themselves, know one to be natural, and the other to be violent. And Christ pronounces, that in the great day of disco very, *many that are first shall be last*; that is, those who had the highest

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esteem for piety, grounded upon the gloss of an outwardly virtuous behaviour, shall be found to have had but little reality, and so be rewarded accordingly.

This therefore being proved, who can deny but a sense of honour, and a touch of ambition, may supply the room of a better principle in those outward instances of virtue, that shine only upon the surface of men's lives; yet sufficient to attract the estimation of those who can look no further?

We know designs much inferior to this are able to bear a man up to such a pitch. The designs of gain, which are the lowest and basest that can be, and put a man upon the most sordid and inferior practices: yet these are able to inspire him with such an impetus, as is able to raise him to a shew of piety; so that the vilest person shall appear godly, when, in a literal sense, he shall find *that godliness is great gain*.

Nay, the design of pleasure and sensuality may make a man undergo many religious austerities, and sacrifice a less pleasure to the hope of a greater. For in the great instance of mortification, which is fasting, what were all the fasts and humiliations of the late reformers, but the forbearing of dinners? that is, the enlarging the stowage, and the redoubling the appetite, for a larger supper; in which the dinner was rather deferred, than took away.

But now the design of glory is as much above these, as the mind of a Caesar above the mind of a farmer or an usurer; or the applauses of the learned and the knowing above the entertainments of a kitchen. And therefore, if those ignoble appetites were able to advance a man to so high a strain, certainly the other, which has the same activity, and a greater nobility, must needs do it much more. And thus much for the first thing.

II. I come now to the second, which is to shew, whence this affection comes to have such an influence upon our actions.

The reasons, I conceive, may be these.

1. Because glory is the proper pleasure of the mind. That which pleases is by the Latins called *jucundum*: and I find this *jucundum*, by a certain author, of some repute in the world, divided into that of the body, and that of the mind. That of the body is properly the perception of those pleasing objects that respectively belong to the five senses; but that of the mind he affirms to be glory: which, I think, may be properly defined or described, the complacency that a man finds within himself, arising from his conceit of the opinion that another has of some excellency or perfection in him. For as pride is the opinion that a man has of his own perfection, so glory is the pleasure that he takes, from the opinion that another has of it. And experience shews, that the perception of harmonious sounds do not more please the ear, nor sweet things the taste, than the opinion of this does affect and please the mind. It was the speech of Dionysius, concerning his parasites and flatterers, that though he knew that what they said was false, yet he could not but find himself pleased with it. And Themistocles, being pointed at in the public theatres and meetings, confessed, that the

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pleasure he took in it did amply reward all those great exploits that he had done for his country.

Now that this so intimately affects the mind with pleasure, appears from the great regret and trouble that the mind feels from its contrary, which is scorn and disgrace. There is nothing that pierces the apprehensive mind so keenly and intolerably as this. It depresses the spirits, restrains the freedom, and contracts the largeness of the thoughts. A man that is under disgrace neither relishes the returns of business, nor the enjoyments of society; but desponds, and suffers himself to be trampled upon and contemned by persons much worse than himself.

From whence it follows, since glory so much enamours, and disgrace so much afflicts the soul of man, that it is no wonder, if the acquiring of one, and the avoiding of the other, so potently commands all our actions. For what are actions, but the servants of our appetites? And what are all the labours of men laid out upon, but to acquire to themselves such objects as either please their senses, or gratify their more noble desires?

And certainly there are some tempers in the world, that can set up as late, and rise as early, and endure as much trouble, to purchase the pleasure of their mind, as others do for that of the senses. Sallust, in the character that he gives of Lucius Sylla the dictator, amongst other things, sets down this, and it is for his commendation, that he was *voluptatum cupidus, sed gloriae cupidior*: though he loved his cups and his women too well, yet still he commanded them as well as his army; and had rather court honour with the hardships and dangers of the field, and with hunger and thirst, and toilsome watchings, arrive at length to the glories of a triumph.

And no wonder; for the pleasures that lie in the gratifications of the senses are transient, and short, and perishing, as those gratifications are themselves: but the pleasure of a glorious object is lasting; it is treasured up in the memory, and the mind may have recourse to it as often as it will. He that eats a luscious morsel, or sees a fine picture, is pleased as long as he tastes the one, or beholds the other, which perhaps is a minute: but he that has done a glorious action, reflects upon it with pleasure to his dying day; it is as sure to him as his life or his being; it lasts and lives, and supplies the mind with continual, fresh perceptions, with all the delights of an active remembrance and a busy reflection.

The same also holds in the contrary of glory, which is disgrace, compared to all those pains that afflict the body, which are afflictive just so long as they actually possess the part which they aggrieve; but their influence lasts no longer than their presence. Nobody is therefore in pain to-day, because his head ached a month ago; nobody feels the torments of a cured gout, nor languishes with the remembrance of a removed sickness. Nay, he is rather so much the more refreshed, by how much a former pain gives a man a quicker sense of his present ease.



But it is otherwise in the afflictions of dishonour: this, wheresoever it fastens, leaves its marks behind it. It torments the mind with an abiding anguish. A man cannot lay it down; it incorporates into his condition. It is a pain not to be slept away, and a scar not to be worn off. He eats, he travels, he lies down and rises up with it. It is an emblem of hell, irksome and perpetual.

And being so, we need seek for no further cause why these affections so entirely command a man, as to every faculty both of body and soul. A man would do any thing to secure his honour and his reputation; that is, to live while he is alive, and not to be the scorn and laughingstock of a company of worthless, pitiful, and contemptible persons, who have nothing else to make them seem honourable, so much as in their own esteem, but the disgraces of others.

2. The second reason, that this affection of glory comes to have so strong an influence upon our actions, is from this; that it is founded in the innate desire of superiority that is in every man. One man desires to be greater and better than another, and consequently to be thought so. Nature has placed us in the lower region of the world, but for all that we aspire; it has cast us upon the earth, but still we rebound.

If it be here demanded, whence this desire arises, and upon what it is founded; I answer, that it is founded upon the very natural love that we bear to our being, and the preservation of it. For every degree of superiority, or greater perfection, is a further defence set upon a man's being: as he that is powerful, rich, wise, or the like, has those means of securing his being, that he, who is destitute of power, riches, and wisdom, has not. So much as any man is above another, so much he thinks himself safer than another.

But now it is the great effect of glory and fame thus to raise a man: hence the very word, by which we express the praising of one, is to *extol* him; that is, to *lift* him up: for honour properly sets a man above the crowd; it makes him, like Saul, higher by the head than the rest of his brethren.

Hereupon, since the desire of superiority is such a restless affection, engaging a man in the highest and hardest attempts; and since the desire of glory is grafted upon it, and indeed is subservient to it; it is a matter of no hard resolution to find out, whence the desire of glory comes to exercise such a control over us, as to compel us to do this, abstain from that, endure another thing, and that with such success, as to carry its commands victorious through any reluctances whatsoever.

For what is it that makes the practice of religion irksome and difficult, but that it thwarts the inferior appetites of sense? which being thwarted, will be sure to make a considerable opposition. But now, if an appetite stronger and more active than those of sense strikes in with religion, it will render its conquest over them easy and effectual: and such an one I affirm to be the appetite of glory; which certainly rules more or less in every one, who has not de-

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generated into a brute so far, as to have fastened his designs to the earth, and his desires to his trencher.

But besides a desire of superiority, there is also a desire of greatness, (for I know no other name to give it,) which is equally predominant in men, and equally served and promoted by fame and honour: for does not this, as it were, diffuse a man, and extend him to the wideness and capacity of the world? That little bulk that is contained in this or that room, in its fame carries a circumference greater and larger than a nation. Glory makes a man present in ten thousand places at once, and gives him a kind of ubiquity, and that without labour or motion: while he sits still, he travels over the universe; he crosses the seas, and yet never passes the continent; he visits all nations, and perhaps never stirs abroad. But his fame, like lightning, makes him shine from one end of the heavens to the other. No wonder therefore, since glory itself is able thus to stretch a man to a kind of omnipresence, if the desire of glory has over his life and actions a kind of omnipotence.

3. The third and last reason that I shall assign, why this affection of glory comes to have such an influence upon our actions, is, because it is indeed the great instrument of life to have a fair reputation, and really opens a man a way into all the advantages of it. For who would employ a profane person, or trust a known atheist? And he that is counted neither fit to be employed or trusted, may go out of the world, for he is like to find but little happiness in it. The repute of a man's principles, his conscience and honesty, is that which represents a man worthy to be used and preferred; and the repute of a man's principles grows out of the external fairness of his practices.

All the accommodations of life, as power, wealth, offices, and friends, are often derivable from the good opinion that men have procured themselves by the outward and seeming piety of their behaviour. For the proof of which, take but the instance of the late times: more than a show of piety I think none will allow them, that well understood them; but a show they had, and so wisely did they manage it, that the opinion which the vulgar had of their saintship was such an engine in their hands, that by it they could turn and wield them to all their designs and purposes as they pleased. They plundered, and oppressed, and robbed men of their estates: yes, but they did it preaching and praying, and abstaining from swearing, drinking, and the like, and composing themselves to the rigours of an appearing virtue and sobriety. Not but that they had an appetite to have lashed out into all that looseness, gawdery, and debauchery, that sometimes bewitches other men. But they were too wise: they knew that would have vilified their persons, and consequently have dashed their designs: their villainy was sober, and therefore successful. And I am afraid that experience is like to convince us, that the face of a dissembled piety gave them a greater credit and authority with the generality, than others are like to gain by a better cause managed with seemingly worse manners. So much does the appearance, the opinion, and the noise of things govern the world!



Let this therefore pass for another great cause, why the affection of glory so engages and rules the practices of men, viz. that it does indeed serve a real interest, and is resolved into the *utile*, the idol of profit so much adored by mankind. It is to very great purpose for a man to be esteemed; for he that is so, will at length be something more. Fame is indeed but a breath and a wind; yet even the wind is that which carries the ship, and brings the treasure into the merchant's bosom.

And thus much for the second general head proposed for the handling of the words, viz. to shew whence this affection comes to have such an influence upon men's actions.

III. Pass we now to the third; which is to shew the inability of it to be a sufficient motive to engage mankind in virtuous actions without the assistance of religion.

In order to the proof of which, I shall premise two considerations.

1. That virtue and a good life determines not in outward practices, but respects the most inward actions of the mind. Virtue dwells not upon the tongue, nor consists in the due motion of the hands and the feet: but it is the action of the soul, and there it resides. Whatsoever we behold of it in the external behaviour of men is but the manifestation, not the being of virtue; as the action of the body is not the principle, but only the discovery of life. They are inward, secret wheels, that set the outward and the visible a-work.

Piety lodges in the regions of the heart; and when the body is immured in prison, or withered by sickness, an active soul feels none of those impediments, but is free to the exercise of virtue or vice; and by inward volitions or aversations can supply the want of outward performances.

A man may act like a saint before men, and like a devil before God; and on the contrary, appear but mean outwardly, and yet be all-glorious within. Otherwise virtue would be but an outside, and sit but as a varnish upon the forehead; and he that looked upon the body would be as competent a judge of it, as he that searched the heart. But colour is not health; he that looks pale, may be sound and vigorous; and he that wears the rose upon his cheeks may have rottenness in his bones.

Virtue and vice are the perfection and pollution of the soul; that is, of a being in its nature spiritual, and consequently invisible; whereupon they must be such also themselves. The scene of their acting is the conscience; and conscience has an eye over a man's most inward and retired behaviour; it spies out the first infant essays and inclinations of virtues, and encourages them, and discerns the first movings and ebullitions of concupiscence, and severely checks and condemns them. And thus it judges of a man's estate before ever the soul comes to communicate with the body, in the external production of any of those actions; and so to alarm the notice and observation of the world.

So that a man is indeed condemned before the world knows him to be an offender, and has made a very great progress in sin before he comes to execute and declare it by visible practices. But yet the man is a vile person, a stranger to virtue and goodness, as well when

he is concealed, as when the light shews him to a public detestation. The swine is as filthy when he lies close in his sty, as when he comes forth and shakes his nastiness in the street. Let this therefore be the first previous consideration, that virtue and vice chiefly respect the inward, invisible behaviours of the soul.

2. The second consideration is this; that the principle of honour or glory governs a man's actions entirely by the judgment and opinion of the world concerning them. The grand proposals, that a man acted by this principle makes to himself upon every undertaking, and which either licenses or rescinds his designed action, is, What will the world say of me, if I do thus or thus? He never says, Is it pious, or generous, or suitable to a rational soul? or is it contrary to all these, and unbecoming the strictness of the religion I profess, and the ingenuity of being really what I am thought to be? Is it such an action as would blush in the dark, and needs not the sun and the day to discover its deformity?

No, these are none of the questions or the demurs, that such an one troubles himself withal; if the action be safe and secret, let it be dirty, and ill-favoured. All actions, he thinks, are the same, and are discriminated with these different appellations, by custom, by received prejudices, and common opinion. And if he can but secure himself as to these, he may enjoy the reputation of virtue, while he reaps the sweetness of his vice.

Now these two considerations premised, I affirm that the principle of honour is utterly insufficient to engage and argue men into the practice of virtue, in these following cases.

1. When by ill customs and perverse discourses a vice comes to have a reputation, or at least no disreputation in the judgment of a nation: and that this so falls out sometimes is evident. Some nations have allowed of simple fornication; some have so far perverted that which we call nature, as to count it lawful, nay laudable, for a son to have his own mother in marriage, as Quintus Curtius reports of some of the Persians. The Lacedemonians would commend and reward their children when they could thieve and rob dexterously. Many have counted self-murder in many cases an heroic action, and becoming a man of courage and philosophy. For a son to defraud his parents, and to give that which he purloined from them, or at least withheld from them in their indigence and necessity, to holy uses, was, in the judgment of our Saviour, a great sin, and a perversion of the divine law: yet the pharisees from Moses's chair authorized it, as hugely suitable to that law, and an action of sublime devotion.

Now that the forementioned practices were highly unlawful, and inconsistent with piety and virtue, is most certain; yet passing current in the world by public warrant, and the countenance of general use, I demand upon what rational ground any man, acted by a bare principle of honour, could be kept from them, if either his inclination or convenience prompted him to them? That which he was only a slave to, the opinion and vogue of the world, that could not withhold him, for that would own and credit him in the practice; and any other restraint upon him be sides this, we suppose to be none.

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But now, God would have made but very short provisions to engage men in duty, if he had not bound it upon them by such a principle, as should universally be able to oblige them in all cases, and in all circumstances of condition, in which it concerned them to be virtuous, and to abhor and shun the contrary vices. But it is clear, that a man's tenderness of his honour cannot be that principle; for that looks only upon what is allowed and countenanced: but sin is sin, and consequently damnable, whether custom revenges it with a gibbet, or adorns it with a garland. And the divine tribunal will punish an incestuous person, a pilfering Lacedemonian, a self-murdering Roman or Athenian, and an undutiful Jew, as much as it would a person guilty of these crimes in any of those nations, where they are cried down, detested, and revenged by the hand of public justice; did not the infamy of such actions in those places by accident state the guilt of the persons that committed them under an higher aggravation.

And this, in my judgment, may be one reason amongst others, why God is so severely angry at national sins; or such sins as have at least an influence upon the manners of a nation, though committed by a few persons, viz. that by this means there is a reputation given to sin, and the shame that God has annexed to it in a great measure took from it: for nothing is shameful that is fashionable. And when a thing comes to be practised by all, or by such as are eminent, public, and leading persons, it gains credit, and easily passes into a fashion.

But now by this, one of the great instruments by which Providence governs the societies of men, and controls the course of sin, is made utterly frustrate to this purpose. This instrument is the shame that attends upon base and wicked actions; a great curb to the fury of some men's inclinations, and consequently a great mound and bank against that torrent of villainy, that would otherwise break in upon society: for the better understanding of which, we must observe, that as God, in the great work of governing the world, has several purposes upon several men, so he effects those purposes by several means.

Some men he intends to save, and to prepare for another world, and their hearts he renews and changes by a supernatural, ineffable, and prevailing operation of his grace. But others he intends only to civilize, and to fit them to converse in this world; and these he governs, not by any supernatural change wrought upon them, but by the principles of natural affections, as fear, shame, and the like; which shall suit them to society, by restraining their extravagant and furious appetites within bounds and measures. And of all these principles, there is none such a bridle in the jaws of an unregenerate person, as the dread of shame upon the commission of things unlawful and indecent. But now, if custom and countenance takes off the shame, and paints the Jezebel, and gives a gloss and a reputation to a vile action, why this cord is snapt asunder; and the principle of honour can be no argument to keep a man from a creditable villainy and a splendid sin.

If to have been a rebel is no shame, provided a man be rich, potent, or factious; and to have been loyal is no honour; but to be poor, though loyalty were the cause of it, is a great



dishonour; I would fain know, what principles of honour could engage a man to draw his sword in his prince's defence, or tie his hands when it lies fair for his advantage to rebel. Nothing but conscience and a sense of duty can have any obliging influence upon him in this case; for all arguments from credit or reputation dissolve, and break, and vanish into air.

Now certainly the thought of this should add caution to the behaviour of persons of eminence, and such as sit at the top of affairs, and attract the eyes of a nation: for their practice of any sin leaves a colour, and imprints a kind of an authority upon it; so that the shame of it comes at length to be took away, and with that the strongest dissuasive that averts the natural ingenuity of man from vile and enormous practices.

And this is the first case in which a principle of honour, without the aid of religion, is insufficient to engage men in the practice of virtue, viz. when the contrary vice comes, in the general judgment of a people, to lose its infamy and disrepute.

2. Another case, in which the same principle is in sufficient for the same purpose, is, when a man can pursue his vice secretly and indiscernibly; and that he may do two ways.

(1.) When he entertains it in his thoughts, affections, and desires. These are the cabinet councils of the soul; and it is certain that God does not take his estimate of a man from any thing so much as from the regular or irregular behaviour of these: for as a man thinks or desires in his heart, such indeed he is; for then most truly, because most incontrollably, he acts himself.

But now, if a man shall take a pleasure to gratify and cherish a corrupt humour by the services of fancy, and desire, and imagination representing to it suitable sinful objects; why he knows himself out of the reach, and consequently out of the awe, of any moral inspection; there is no prying into the transactions of thought, no overhearing the whispers of fancy, no getting into the little close cabals of desires and affections, when they contrive and reflect upon their own pleasures, and laugh at all external spectators. And if so, what influence can the care of credit and honour have upon them, which only regards and fears those eyes that can look no further than the body? The credit of any action is safe, where it is not discerned; for as no vicious person, though ever so slavishly tender of his credit, would be afraid to do an indecent thing before a blind man, or to speak indecent words before the deaf; so the greatest enormities may be securely thought over and desired even in the concourse of theatres and the face of the world.

(2.) The other instance of a man's pursuing his vice secretly is, when though it passes from desire into practice, yet it is acted with such circumstances of external concealment, that it is out of the notice and arbitration of all observers. This, I confess, from the very nature of the thing, is not altogether so secure as the former; yet it is sufficient to render all checks or restraints from credit utterly inefficacious.

There is none indeed who loves his sin so well, as to dare to own the satisfaction of it in the market place, in a church, or upon an exchange; common sense of honour is able to overrule the luxuriances of vice upon these occasions and places: for there is no generally condemned practice so impudent, as to desire to be public, to be gazed and pointed at, and run down by an universal outcry and detestation.



But when a man has contrived and cast the commission of his sin into such opportunities of darkness and retirement, that, in the sinful satisfaction of his flesh, he acts as invisibly as if he was a spirit; what stop can the fear of shame give to him in such practices? For shame never reaches beyond sight; and we suppose the sinner now to have placed himself out of the eye of every thing but of omniscience and of conscience; which also, in the present case, we suppose him not to fear.

For he that has no principle to withhold him from villainy, but the dread of infamy, has no God but public opinion, and no conscience but his own convenience. And therefore having, by much dress, and secrecy, and dissimulation, as it were periwigged his sin, and covered his shame, he looks after no other innocence but concealment, nor counts any thing a sin, provided it be a work of darkness; nor cares to be thought a sheep for any other purpose, but that he may act the wolf, and worry with more reputation.

And thus I have shewn the cases in which a bare principle of honour, unassisted by religion, has no efficacy at all to engage men in virtuous practices: in a word, he that does all such works, only that he may be seen of men, will do none, when he is sure that he cannot be seen. But now, before I proceed any further, I cannot but add this withal, that honour is the strongest motive that mere nature has to enforce virtue by; so that if this is found feeble, and impotent, and inferior to so great a purpose, it is in vain to attempt such a superstructure upon any weaker foundation.



It is possible indeed, that some tempers have so degenerated, as to be acted by principles much inferior, when arguments from honour make no impression upon them at all: as there are some who follow no lure like that of gain; and others who are tempted by no bait like that of pleasure. But for the first of these, the desire of gain is but the quality of some men, or at least but of some ages; for youth is little prevailed upon by it: so that this is an unfit instrument of virtue, the motive to which ought to be universal. And for designs of pleasure, they cannot constantly carry the mind to virtuous practices, because, when those designs arrive to enjoyment, such enjoyments are for the most part contrary to a virtuous course, which is never more exercised than in the severities of abstinence and great abridgments. These principles therefore, are unable to effect that, in which the principle of honour is deficient.

Concerning which it is to be observed, that I take it not only in the positive sense, according to which, honour is a desire of a further degree and access to a man's reputation; but also, nay chiefly, in the negative sense, as it imports an abhorrency of shame. Now,

though the former of these is principally no table in minds of a more noble and refined mould, vulgar tempers being seldom concerned to heighten and propagate their fame; yet the latter sense of honour, as it is a flying from shame, seems universally to have fixed itself in the breasts of all man kind: there being no man in his wits, of so sottishly depressed a soul, as to endure to be trampled, spit upon, and avoided like a walking infection, without a strange grief, anguish, and inward resentment. But however, that this also is short of being an universal engagement to virtue, the precedent arguments have sufficiently evinced.



IV. I proceed now to the fourth and last particular; viz. to shew, that even those actions that a principle of honour does produce are of no value in the sight of God; and that upon the account of a double defect.

1. In respect of the cause from which they flow.
2. In respect of the end to which they are directed.

1. And first of all, they are deficient in respect of their producing cause, which should be a real love to virtue itself, upon the score of its worth and excellency; otherwise they are forced and violent, and proceed only upon the apprehension of a present interest, which when it ceases, the fountain of such actions is dried up, and then the actions themselves must needs fail.

But when the heart is carried forth to duty by an inward, vital principle of love to the thing it practises, it renders every such performance free and connatural to the soul, and consequently of value in the sight of God, who in every action requires not only what it is, but whence it comes; and never accepts the bare deed, but as it is animated and spiritualized by the desire. But interest and design are a kind of force upon the soul, bearing a man often times besides the ducture of his native propensities and the first outgoings of his will. But the fruits of righteousness grow not in such forced soils; and a man never acts piously, according to the measures of the gospel, but when his action becomes also his inclination.



If care of my credit brings my body to church, when in the mean time my choice and my will places me either at the table of the epicure or in the embraces of an harlot, will God, think we, value this shadow and surface of devotion, and be satisfied with the attendance of the body, when the free, natural, uncontrolled flight of my desires has carried away my soul to an infinite distance from it? Yet honour can command only the former; but the spirit, with which only he that is a spirit will be served, is wholly out of its reach and dominion.

2. All actions of virtue, performed from a principle of honour, are deficient in respect of the end to which they are directed. This end is self; whereas it should be the glory of God, a thing diametrically, irreconcilably opposed to it. God's displeasure is never so high, as when it arrives to jealousy: and then God is properly jealous, when he finds that man thrusts his own glory into the place of his; which he never does more than when he makes the divine worship the instrument and engine of his own reputation, and uses piety only as a handmaid

to fame, and a convenient means to slide him into the esteem and acceptance of the world. This is properly for a man, instead of serving God, to make God serve him.

But it is great reason, that a servant, whose condition declares him not his own, but another's, should be concerned only to serve the interest and occasions of his lord; and then, certainly, the creature much more, who stands accountable to God, not only upon the score of his inferiority, but his very existence and production. But he, that employs all his actions for the advance of his own glory, has renounced the condition of a creature and a servant, sets up for himself, becomes his own master, and, what is more, his own god.

It was for the two forementioned defects, that the most sublime moral performances of the heathen have been always arraigned and condemned by Christian divinity; namely, that they proceeded from an heart unrenewed and unsanctified, and so under the pollutions of original pravity; and withal were designed only to derive a reputation and fair esteem upon their names and persons, to make so many glorious pages in their story, or so many glittering epitaphs upon their monuments. Thus were managed their best actions. But whether an arrow be shot from an ill bow, or levelled and directed by a false aim, it must both ways equally miss of the mark.

Now, from the subject hitherto discoursed of, by way of corollary and conclusion, I shall infer these two things.

1. First, the worth and the absolute necessity of religion in the world, even as to the advantages of civil society. I have shewn how weak, and short, and insignificant, as to these effects, the best and noblest principle, that grows upon the stock of bare nature, will be found. It is not able to abash a secret sinner; and yet the greatest and the most mischievous villainies in the world are contrived in darkness and concealment. But religion never leaves a man with out a thousand witnesses, and that in his own breast: it places him under a perpetual awe of that justice that sees in secret, and rewards openly. The religious man carries those principles and persuasions about him, that tie him up from those practices, to which his interest, and the eye of the world, would let him loose. It is he alone that uses the night only for the necessities of nature, and scorns it as a covering; that dares venture his heart upon his forehead; and in a word, is not afraid to be seen.

But now let any one tell me, what hold can be took of an atheist in these opportunities of secrecy? His principles are as large and wide as hell itself. What can make him restore a trust, if he can safely and dexterously conceal it? What can make him true to his prince, his friend, or any relation of human life, if his reputation conspire with his advantage so, as to serve one without endangering the other?

Surely there is no such pest to society as such a person, who owns no concernment beyond himself; but having shook off the bonds of those principles and persuasions by which mankind are governed, and by which they are, as it were, put upon equal grounds, in reference to a common intercourse, he ought to be exterminated like a wolf, or a tiger, and as a

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common enemy to human converse: for such is the scope that the atheist gives himself, that nothing can keep him from doing his neighbour mischief, but shame or impossibility.

2. The other thing that we infer from the precedent discourse is, the inexcusableness of those persons, who, professing religion, yet live below a principle much inferior to religion. We need not repair to Christianity for arguments to run down a drunkard, a swearer, a noted adulterer, or a rebel. A generous heathenism, ruled by maxims of credit and shame, is virtue and piety compared to the lives of such Christians. Self-love, acted by prudence and caution, is enough to mortify and shame such enormities out of the world. Nothing but grace can extinguish sin; but honour and discretion is enough to prevent scandal. He is a fool that says but in his heart, *There is no God*; but he is sottishly and in corrigibly so, who proclaims such a belief by the open and visible actions of his life.

He that pursues his vice notoriously, has not so much religion as the fear of men would suggest to the discourses of an ordinary reason. To perjure one's self publicly, to talk obscenely or profanely in company, it may be condemned out of the lives of the pharisees, and the writings of Cicero or Seneca: it is to be short of that perfection which will carry many to hell, viz. *a form of godliness*. It is to have all the venom and malignity without the wisdom of the serpent: for surely no wise atheist ever, in his discourse, thought it becoming to speak irreverently of God, or to scoff at religion.

Those, who do so, have cause to make this prayer, if ever they make any; That God would give them so much discretion as to fit them for this life, since he denies them grace to prepare them for a better.



SERMON XVII.

2 COR. i. 24.

—*For by faith ye stand.*

HERE can be none here ignorant, that the great evangelical virtue so frequently spoken of, so highly commended, and upon which the whole weight of man's salvation leans and depends, is faith; a thing more usually discoursed of by divines than explained, and consequently more easily took up by their hearers than understood: there being scarce any who will not with much zeal and vehemence pretend to it, and by all means wear the reputation of the name, though they are wholly strangers to the nature of the thing. For it being the great and glorious badge of the citizens of heaven, the sons of God, and heirs of immortality; it is no wonder if every man has his mouth open to profess and boast of his faith: and those possibly the most loudly of all others, who entertain it only in opposition to good works.

But that I may give some account of the nature of it, I shall observe, that the scripture makes mention of three several sorts of faith.

1. The first is a faith of simple credence, or bare assent; acknowledging and assenting to the historical truth of every thing delivered in God's word. And such a faith is not here meant; for the devils may have it, who, the apostle St. James tells us, in the [2d chapter, 19th verse](#), *believe and tremble*. They own all the word of God for a most certain, undoubted truth; but the devils' faith is very consistent with the devils' damnation. He that believes well, may live ill; and a good belief will not save, when a bad life condemns.

2. The second sort is a temporary faith, and (as I may so call it) a faith of conviction. Such an one as by the present convincing force of the word is wrought in the heart, and for a time raises and carries out the soul to some short sallies and attempts in the course of godliness; nevertheless, having no firm fixation in the heart, but being only like the short and sudden issue of a forced ground, it quickly faints and sinks, and comes to nothing, leaving the soul many leagues short of a true and thorough change of its estate.

3. The third and last sort, and which here only is intended, is a saving, effectual faith, wrought in the soul by a sound and real work of conversion. It takes in both the former kinds, and superadds its own peculiar perfection besides. And if it be now asked, what this faith is, I must answer, that it is better declared by its effects and properties, than it can be set forth by any immediate description of the thing itself. However, this seems to be no improper representation of its nature; that it is a durable, fixed disposition of holiness, immediately infused by God into the soul, whereby the soul in all its faculties is changed, renewed, and sanctified, and withal powerfully inclined to exert itself in all the actions of a pious life.



It is not a bare persuasion or conviction resting upon the heart; for persuasion (which is nothing else but the proposal of suitable objects to the mind) is of itself no more able to effect this strange and mighty work, than it is possible to persuade a man that is stark dead to be alive again. No; it is a living, active principle, wonderfully produced and created in the heart by the almighty working of God's Spirit; and which does as really move and act a man in the course of his spiritual life, as his very soul does in the course of his natural. And this is that faith by which we stand; and if ever we are supported against the terrible assaults of our spiritual adversary, this must be our supporter.

In the words we have these two things considerable.

I. Something supposed; which is, that believers will be encountered and assaulted in their spiritual course.

II. Something expressed; which is, that it is faith alone that in such encounters does or can make them victorious.

I. And first for the first of these, the thing supposed. The words of the text are a manifest allusion to a person assaulted or combated by an enemy. From which the Spirit of God in scripture frequently borrows metaphors, by which to express to us the condition of a Christian in this world. Sometimes setting it out by wrestling, as in [Ephes. vi. 12](#); *We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. Sometimes by warring, as in 2 Cor. x. 4*; *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.* And sometimes by striving, as in [Heb. xii. 4](#); *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.* But still it describes a believer's life in some word or other, importing contest or opposition.

Now in every such contest or combat, there are three things to be considered.

1. The persons engaged in it.
2. The thing contended for by it.
3. And lastly, the means and ways, by which it is managed, and carried on.

Of each of which in their order; and,

1. For the persons engaged in this conflict; they are such, whose hatred of one another is almost as old as the world itself, as being founded in that primitive enmity sown by God himself between the *seed of the woman*, and the *seed of the serpent*, in [Gen. iii. 15](#). The Devil's hatred of us bears date with our very being, and his opposition is as early as his hatred; for it is of too active a virulence to lie still and dormant, without putting forth itself in all the actings of a mischievous hostility. The Devil hates us enough as men, but much more as believers; he maligns us for the privileges of our creation, but much more for the mercies of our redemption: and as soon as ever we list ourselves in the service of the great captain of our salvation, he bids present defiance to us, and proclaims perpetual war against us; which he will never be wanting to carry on with all the force, art, and industry, that malice, bounded within the limits of created power, can reach unto.

None, that gives up his name to Christianity, must think that he enters upon a state of ease, softness, and fruition. For though it is called indeed *the way of peace*, yet it is of peace only in another world, or of peace with God and our own consciences, but of incessant war with the Devil, who will always have power enough to trouble and discompose even those whom he cannot destroy; and to bruise our heel, though he gets a broken head for his pains.

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We see, then, who the persons are, concerned in this spiritual combat; namely, believers on the one side; that is, persons truly sanctified and justified, and consequently in a state of grace and favour with God; and, on the other side, the great enemy of mankind, the tempter, with all his hellish retinue, all the powers of darkness (as it were) drawn out into battalia, and headed by him, to defy the armies of the living God. It follows now, that we see what is the thing designed and contended for by him, in the assault he makes upon believers, which is the second thing here to be considered. And it is, in short, to cast them down from that state of happiness in which he finds them; which happiness consisting partly in God's image, which is holiness, and partly in an interest in God's favour, which indeed is but a consequence of the former, the loss of one naturally drawing after it the loss of the other; therefore the Devil does the utmost he is able, wholly to divest the soul of both.

1. And first, he designs to cast believers down from that purity and sanctity of life, that the Spirit of regeneration has wrought them up to: for the Devil, having lost all holiness himself, perfectly abhors it in all others. A pious person is an eyesore to him; and to be holy is to begin his hell here upon earth, and to torment him before his time.

As he was the first and grand apostate from God, so he is restless and indefatigable to propagate that apostasy and rebellion amongst mankind, and to draw them into a confederacy against their Maker. He is said to have been *a liar and a murderer from the beginning*; and chiefly does he attempt the murder of souls, by making them like himself. And so intent is he upon his cursed game, that he will compass sea and land, tempt and entice night and day, use both force and art to debauch and deface God's image in the soul, to rob it of its innocence; and, in a word, to plunge it into all kind of filth, folly, and impurity. It is his business, for the labour he employs about it; and his recreation, for the pleasure he takes in it: for every upright and virtuous person is a reproach to him, and upbraids him with the loss of that, which he was so much concerned to have preserved entire. Holiness carries its beauty with it; and there are none that malign and envy the beautiful so much as those that are deformed: but sin has left upon the Devil a spiritual deformity, greater and more offensive than any bodily deformity whatsoever.

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2. The Devil designs to cast believers down from their interest in the divine favour. After the angels were fallen from heaven, the door was presently, without either delay or pity, shut upon them: nor was there any reserve of mercy, to recover them to their lost estate. Whereupon their envy and malice were inflamed against the sons of men, whom God treated upon gentler terms, not taking them upon the first advantage; but allowing them means of

pardon and restitution, and so cancelling the *handwriting* that *stood against them*, by reason of *the law*. He spread open the arms of an evangelical and better covenant to receive them.

No wonder, therefore, if the Devil strives to cast the soul from that pitch of happiness which he finds denied to himself. And if he grudges to see men so much superior to him in the felicity of their estate, whom he knows to be so much inferior to himself in the perfection of their nature; no wonder, I say, if the pride of Lucifer disdains to see poor men ascend to that from which he fell, and so would lay them in the dust again, from whence they were first took. The Devil would make us God's enemies by sinning, that so God may be our enemy in punishing. For the thing that he so earnestly drives at, is to sow an immortal enmity between God and an immortal soul, and to embroil the whole creation in a war against heaven.

The divine grace, he knows, is a thing never to be aspired to by him; the everlasting gates are made fast against him; and therefore he would give himself that fantastic pleasure, at least of having company in the same condemnation, and consequently of getting the whole race of mankind excluded and cut off from the enjoyment of that, of which he himself has no hope. He would gratify his envy and his implacable virulence, by feeding upon the sight of others' misery, and solacing himself with the despair and wretchedness of unpardoned sinners. He would have others hate God as much as he does, to the intent that they may be as much hated by him.

For, believe it, how little soever men may value the grace, mercies, and forbearances of the gospel; yet the Devil, who knows the worth of them, by wanting them, would never be so much concerned to bereave us of the benefit of them, did he not judge it infinite and invaluable. For can we think that he would be so intent and busy, use so many arts and stratagems, only to rob us of a toy? No, surely; we may learn the greatness of the prize, from the labour used to compass and obtain it. The favour of God is the very life of the creature; and if the Devil can but prevail with a man to sin himself out of it, he prevails with him to cut his own throat, and to imbrue his hands in the blood of his own soul.

3. I come now to the third thing considerable in this spiritual combat, which are the ways and means by which it is managed and carried on.

I shall mention four.

(1.) The Devil's own immediate suggestions. The Devil, being a spirit, can operate upon the mind and the imagination, raising in it evil thoughts, and frequently filthy desires, by the representation of objects suitable to our beloved and most predominant affections. And this course of working is so subtle, and withal so efficacious, that he can slide into the hearts of men, without any resistance, or indeed any observation. Thus he is said to have *filled the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira*, [Acts v. 3](#), and to have *entered into Judas*, [John xiii. 27](#). All which was done by the wicked thoughts he injected into the minds of those wretched persons. The Devil is often at work within us, when we know it not; and secretly undermining the

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very foundation of our peace with God, planting his engines, and laying his trains, to fetch down all that spiritual building that the Holy Ghost has reared up within us. He creeps into our bosoms, and lodges himself in our very hearts, before we can so much as spy out his motions; and then he is tampering with our thoughts, desires, and particular inclinations, before we are aware that our adversary is near us, or any thing designed against us: upon which account, he is such an enemy as will certainly gain an entrance; and therefore it must be our care, that he completes it not with a conquest.

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(2.) The second means, by which the Devil assaults a man, is by the infidelity of his own heart. A quality that, of all others, does his work the most compendiously and the most effectually. It was the engine by which he battered down that goodly fabric of the divine image in our first parents: and wheresoever he can fix this instrument, like another Archimedes, he will turn about the world, and make every one of his assaults against the souls of men successful and victorious.

This is such a thing, as was even able to counter work the miracles of Christ, and, as it were, to bind those hands of omnipotence by which he wrought his mighty wonders. For in [Matt. xiii. 58](#), it is said of our Saviour's countrymen, *that he could do no mighty work amongst them, because of their unbelief*. It is a thing that seems to keep possession for Satan in the hearts of men, and to frustrate all addresses of the Holy Ghost to them: for if men can but once arrive to that pitch of desperate impiety, as to question the truth of the divine oracles, and to disbelieve the words of veracity itself, what can possibly work upon them, while they are under the power of such a persuasion? there being no coming at the will and the affections, but through the understanding; nor any prevailing upon those, without first convincing of this. And surely, if the understanding can hold out against the commanding authority of divine and infallible truths, it may well defy the impression of all other arguments whatsoever.

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The Devil was to induce Eve to eat the apple, against God's express prohibition, guarded and confirmed by a severe threatening: an hard task, one would think, to undertake to bring a person, both innocent and very knowing, to such an horrid prevarication, and to eat the forbidden fruit, though served up to her with certain death; [Gen. ii. 17](#), *In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die*. And questionless the tempter could never have succeeded in such an unlikely attempt, had not unbelief cut the way before him: for as soon as he brought her to disbelieve that severe word of God, and to be persuaded that she *should not surely die*, and thereby, in effect, to give the lie to an infinite truth, the Devil's work was then done; for thereupon she presently takes the fatal morsel, and eats death and confusion, both to herself and her whole posterity.

3. The third means by which the Devil assaults and combats the soul, is by the alluring vanities of the world. Look over the whole universe, and you will find it to be the Devil's grand and plentiful magazine; there being scarce any thing in it, but what he sometimes

uses either as a weapon or a snare: the whole way and course of it being a professed enmity and opposition to God; so that he that loves one cannot possibly love the other, [James iv. 4](#).

While we live in the world, we walk upon traps and pitfalls, and such things as have a strange and peculiar energy to work our destruction. Even the most beautiful and desirable things of it are deadly and pernicious; nay, so much the more deadly, by how much the more desirable. Like a sepulchre, it is still a devouring and a consuming thing, for all its paint and varnish, its stately and fair appearance. For see how the world first entangles, and then kills such as come within the compass of its mortal embraces!

One man is taken with the riches of it, which he pursues, follows, and at last worships, till he has even made his gain his god; but at length he finds, that his god deserts him, and leaves him in the hand of the Devil. Another has his eyes dazzled with the glories and glistening honours of the world; and being mad upon them, lists himself a servant of the Devil in the practice of all baseness imaginable, that so he may at length rise by him and like him; not considering that the Devil carries the aspiring wretch up to such a pinnacle, only that he may persuade him to throw himself thence down headlong. Another man is caught and inveigled with the pleasures of the world, and so suffers himself to be carried away with that general torrent of voluptuousness that runs violently, and drowns certainly. He first makes himself a swine, and then the Devil enters into him, and hurries him into the gulph of eternal perdition.

And if the world cannot get that hold of a man, as to captivate him into a slavish pursuit either of the riches, honours, or pleasures of it; yet the very custom, the compliance, and fashion of it, insensibly cools, and at length freezes up that ardent principle of love to God and holiness, that should animate and bear up the soul in the ways of duty. Nay, the very wisdom of the world (which is the best part of that bad thing) pollutes and deflours the heart, and brings it under the power of principles directly contrary to the very spirit and design of religion: and a man shall pass for a wise man and a politician, when, with much artifice and subtilty, he is only spinning the thread of his own destruction. Which being so, it is not for nothing that Christ bids his disciples *be of good cheer*, for this very one thing, that he *had overcome the world*, [John xvi. 33](#), that great and mighty adversary, and, as it were, under the Devil himself, the general of all his forces. For it is the custom, the garb, and fashion of the world, that credits, and strengthens, and in a manner leads on all those sins by which the Devil fights against the souls of men.

4. Fourthly and lastly, the Devil assaults and encounters men by the help of their own lusts and corruptions. The world, the flesh, and the Devil, are those three formidable enemies, that we stand jointly engaged against by our very baptism. Our own bodies are armed against our souls; for the scriptures tell us, that *the lusts of the flesh war against the soul, or spirit*. So that it may be said, that a man's enemies are not only those of his own house, but also of

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his own flesh; not only of the house he lives in, but also of the house he carries about him: and surely a bosom-enemy must needs be as great a mischief, as a bosom-friend is a blessing. The body of sin and lust that dwells within us is an adversary that will be always annoying us, a domestic tempter, always at our elbow to seduce, and thereby to ruin us.

So that which way soever we cast our thoughts, we shall find enemies ready to attack us in all our spiritual concerns. For if we consider the invisible world, there is the Devil and his legions embattled against us; if we look abroad upon things visible, there the whole world stands engaged in the same quarrel; and if we look yet further into the lesser world, ourselves, there we shall find our bodies furnishing out weapons of unrighteousness for the same war; and lastly, if we take a survey of our own hearts, we shall find them full of treachery and infidelity; so that we have cause to cry out, Who shall deliver us from such potent enemies, and especially from our own selves? How shall we be able to bear up against such an unequal, such an over powering force? Surely it can be no ordinary assistance that can bring us off from such opposition clear and victorious. And if the strong man be overcome, it must needs be by some other that is stronger than himself.

And thus I have finished the first general head proposed from the words; namely, the thing implied or supposed in them; which was, that believers should be encountered and assaulted in their spiritual course.

But now, as all kind of opposition or assault includes in the very nature of it an endeavour in the assailant to conquer and cast down the person as sailed by him from his present station, which we have been hitherto discoursing of; so, in the second place, it implies also an endeavour in the person assaulted to maintain and make good that his station against all the force and opposition of his adversary.

And he that is so victorious as to keep his ground, maugre all such encounters, is said to *stand in the day of battle*; which is a word expressing the posture of a combatant defending himself with success: *Ephes. vi. 13, Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.* So that by *standing* is here signified to us a man's preserving himself in that estate, from which his adversary contends by all means possible to throw him down.

It remains therefore now, that we shew how and by what means this is to be effected; and the text tells us, that it must be by faith; *by faith ye stand*: which introduces the

Second general head proposed, which is the thing positively expressed in the words; namely, that in all these spiritual assaults made against believers by their implacable enemy, it is faith alone that does or can render them victorious.

For the making out of which, I shall shew,

1. In what condition man is, considered according to his mere natural estate, and void of the grace of faith.

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2. What advantages and helps faith gives believers, for the conquering of all that opposition that shall be made against them by their spiritual enemy.

And first for the first of these, the condition that man is in, considered according to his natural estate, and void of the grace of faith; which, we may be sure, is bad and deplorable enough: and to prove it so, there needs no other argument than this, that if bare nature, since the fall of Adam, were not infinitely insufficient to work out its own recovery, the divine grace would never have put itself to the expense of little less than a miracle, to work in it such qualifications as may in some measure enable it to acquit itself in the keeping of God's commands. For so very strong is the sway and bias of nature to contrary courses, that if those inclinations were not controlled and overpowered by some superior principle, it would, notwithstanding all instructions and exhortations to the ways of duty, of itself roll back and relapse into a state of sin, even without any solicitation from Satan or the world: as a stone, if we quit our hold of it, will of itself, without any further impulse, fall down to its centre fast enough. Nothing can hinder the workings of nature, but something that shall be of more force than nature. But while a man is destitute of faith, what forces can he rally up against the workings of so quick and vigorous a principle as his own corruption? Will he oppose his imperfect good desires, his fading resolutions, his good duties and self-righteousness? Alas! nature will quickly break through all such puny resistances. These are all like the cords upon Samson; they seem to bind him indeed while he lies still; but when the strong man bestirs himself, then presently they break: all the forces that reason or natural conscience can raise, fly before a temptation. All good purposes, made in the strength of human wisdom and bare morality, vanish, when a pleasing sin offers and presents itself to a lively appetite.

It is with the body of sin as with our natural body, which, if there be strength of nature, will by degrees work out all those obstructions that grieve or offend it. So strength of natural corruption will of itself gradually work off all those convictions that restrain it.

Nay, after it has been in some measure hampered and oppressed by those convincing works, it will then, upon the least recovery of itself, act so much the more strongly against them; it being the property of any active principle, whensoever it is opposed, then to exert its strongest actions in order to its own preservation and defence. Every conviction or serious thought, cast into the soul by the word, will oppose the corrupt workings of nature; which, finding itself so opposed, will endeavour to rescue and relieve itself by a greater vehemence of acting.

So that, till a thorough change pass upon our sinful nature, in the renovation of all its powers, faculties, and inclinations, the soul remains as weak and naked as it first came into the world, without either strength or weapons to defend itself; and when an alluring temptation comes in its way, it will run with fury through all its convictions to embrace it, and is no more able to abstain from it, than an hungry wolf to forbear his prey. Nature has

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corruption enough to be its own tempter; and if want of grace leaves the door of the heart unguarded or open, sin needs no other invitation to enter: nor has the soul only, while unrenewed by faith, a readiness and propensity to sin, but also a cursed suitableness to and compliance with every thing that may any ways induce it to sin: so that, in this forlorn, faithless condition, it is like a city, about which there is an army besieging it, and within which there is treachery betraying it, and no arms to defend it. And thus much for the first way of proving that it is faith alone that can render a man victorious in his conflicts with his spiritual adversaries; namely, by shewing his deplorable weakness and insufficiency to deal with such opponents, while considered in his natural estate, and void of faith.

The other way of proving the same assertion is, by shewing what advantages and helps faith gives believers for the conquest of these their spiritual enemies.

I shall mention three.

1. It gives them a real union with Christ; concerning which we must know, that as the union of the soul to the body is the cause of life natural, so the union of Christ to the soul is the fountain of life spiritual. Christ being to the soul like armour, he then only defends it, when he is close united to it. And that such a nearness to him will afford us such protection from him, is evident from the nature of those things, by which this union between him and believers is expressed. In [John xv. 1, 2](#), Christ compares himself to *the vine*, and believers to *the branches*. And in [Coloss. i. 18](#), he is compared to *the head*, and believers to *the members*. Where we see, that as long as the branch continues united to the vine, it receives both life and sap from it, where by it is enabled to fructify and flourish; and so long as the members preserve their conjunction with the head, they derive from thence spirit and motion, whereby they are enabled to preserve themselves. But let there be a separation or disjunction between either of these, and then presently the branch withers and dies, and the members putrefy and rot, and at length pass into a total corruption. And just so it is with Christ and believers; *through him strengthening them, they can do all things*; [Philip. iv. 13](#). And on the other side, *without him they can do no thing*; [John xv. 4](#). It is from his fulness, that life and strength flows in upon every part and portion of his mystical body. And as our union to him is the great conduct by which all this is conveyed to us, so faith is the cause of this union. Faith ties the conjugal knot, and is that uniting principle, that, like a great nerve or string, fastens us to our spiritual head, and so makes us partake of all its enlivening and supporting influences.

Aristotle observes, that union is never perfect between complete natures of a different kind. But now it is faith alone that denominates and makes us new creatures; and consequently gives us a spiritual cog nation with Christ, without which it is no more possible for us to be united to him, than for the dead to incorporate with the living, for darkness to hold communion with light, or hell with heaven.

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In short, the result of all is this: want of a true and lively faith in Christ speaks want of union to him; and want of union to him speaks want of influence from him; without which no sin can be really opposed, much less overcome. It is from Christ, and from Christ alone, that there must issue forth strength for the subduing of our corruptions; from him alone that there must come an healing virtue for the stanching of this bloody issue of sin, or, in spite of all our plasterings and dressings of it, it will prove incurable: it is from him that there must come a continual supply of assisting grace, to support and bear us up in a course of evangelical obedience; and without this, miserable experience will convince us that we are not able to stand.

2. Faith helps believers in the conquest of their spiritual enemies, by engaging the assistance of the Spirit on their behalf; without whose special influence it is impossible for the soul to do any thing in the ways of duty effectually, or to oppose any sin with success; for still we find all ascribed to this. It is *through the Spirit that the deeds of the flesh are to be mortified*, Rom. viii. 13; and *it is the Spirit that worketh in us*, Phil. ii. 13. Nothing but the Spirit of God, living, reigning, and conquering in the heart, can repulse, and beat back our great adversary. That opposition that is from without, must be resisted and kept out by some living, mighty principle residing within us: but if the heart of man had of itself any thing to secure it against the assaults of sin and the tempter, Christ would have saved himself the labour both of purchasing and of sending the Spirit. But he well knew our weakness, our exceeding great and deplorable weakness; how unable naturally we are but to see the false and alluring fruit of sin, and not to desire it; to desire it, and not to taste it. How ready we always are to admit of a temptation, though offered by the Devil; to eat the apple, though presented by a serpent. And there are some temptations so strong, contrived with so much hellish art, tendered with such particular advantage to the acceptance of a corrupt heart, and withal pressed with such importunity, that nothing but the hand of Omnipotence can keep them off; nothing but the Spirit of God himself can hinder them from fastening upon, and prevailing over, the soul.

From whence it is evident, that the heart must be borne up and acted by the Spirit of God, or of necessity fall away. Every man naturally moves that way that the temptation moves; and if he goes a contrary way, he must needs do it, not as he is led by himself, but by another. As in the motion of the celestial orbs, when we see the inferior ones snatched about with a motion contrary to their own proper motion, we collect thence, that they are moved by a superior.

This is most certain, that it is not in the power of man that goes, to order his goings, but he must have a conduct. It is not in the power of man to foil the tempter; but it is God himself that must bruise Satan under our feet: it is not in the tender herb to keep itself from withering, and being blasted; but in the careful hand that covers and protects it. When God bid the children of Israel go and possess Canaan, he told them, that he would send his angel

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before them, and drive out their enemies. In like manner we go forth against a temptation; but Christ must send his Spirit before us to subdue it, or we shall certainly fall and perish by it. And as it is the Spirit that must do all this for us, so it is faith alone that entitles us to his assistance, as an effect and consequent of that interest that it first gives us in Christ. The Spirit never assists but where he dwells; and still it is faith that makes the soul, as well as the body, the temple of the Holy Ghost.

3. And lastly, faith helps believers in the conquest of their spiritual enemies, by giving them both a title to, and a power effectually to apply God's promises. We all (as has been shewn) stand engaged in a spiritual warfare, and strength we have none, but what we fetch from God. God conveys none but through Christ: whatsoever Christ gives is by the Spirit; and the Spirit works by the promises, putting those weapons into our hands; and faith is properly that spiritual hand into which they are put. Every promise is indeed a spring of living water; but it is water in a well, and faith is the bucket that must fetch it up both for our use and comfort. There is enough in every promise, if apprehended by a lively faith, to enable any intelligent nature to defy and look all the powers of hell in the face. That one

promise, [Revel. ii. 10](#), *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*, is enough to render the strongest assault of the Devil vain and ineffectual, and the most alluring temptation flat and insipid; if so be faith takes in the truth of it by a firm persuasion.

For God having so framed the nature of man, that every one of his actions is the prosecution of some thing first desired; and since nothing moves desire, but so far as it is apprehended good and beneficial; it follows, that since the Devil has engaged our actions and desires in his service by the pleasures and profits of the world, and such other things as affect the sense; if ever those desires be took off from thence, and pitched upon the service of God, it must be by proposing to them some greater good, obtainable in such a course, than can be had in the other: and greater good there seems to be none, but heaven and immortality. Which things falling not under the apprehension of sense, but only being represented in the divine promise, they are only apprehensible by believing, and by that faith that apprehends the promise: for till I either know or believe that there is an heaven, and a state of immortal glory, these can have no more influence upon my practice, than if there were no such things at all. So that it is faith that does, as it were, realize and make these things as present to a rational understanding, as the eye makes a desirable object present to the sense. Where upon, in [Hebrews xi. 1](#), faith is, both with great elegance and significance, styled *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*. That is, when we really believe the certain event of any good, though it be indeed future, yet it has as strong an influence to move the soul, as if it were actually present; and though it be indeed invisible, yet it does as really affect a man's desires, as if it were placed before his eyes. So that those heroical conquests obtained by the saints over the Devil and the world, and there so fully described by



the apostle, are all attributed to the strength of their faith in the promises; as, *that they had seen the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them*, in the [thirteenth verse](#). And particularly that glorious triumph that Moses made over the proffer of all the grandeur of a court and kingdom, is solely ascribed to the mighty efficacy of the same faith, as the only thing *that could enable him to have respect to the recompence of reward*, in the [twenty-sixth verse](#), and even *to see him who was invisible*, in the [twenty-seventh verse](#).

Thus, therefore, does faith empower believers to stand it out against all the fiery onsets of their spiritual enemies; namely, by enabling them to see better and more desirable things in God's promises to engage them to obey his precepts, than any that the Devil can propose to them in his temptations to allure them to the commission of sin.

Wherefore, it being evident, from what has been delivered, both that believers will be fiercely encountered in their spiritual course, and that faith is the only thing that can preserve and defend them in those encounters, we collect hence both the necessity and excellency of this grace; for it is this alone that will bear us victorious through all that opposition, that would otherwise wholly crush and extinguish us. It is this that will set us above all our enemies, by setting us above our own weaknesses. It is this that will make us *more than conquerors*; and that by carrying us out of ourselves, and pitching us upon Christ. For in all these spiritual conflicts it will be found, that he that stands upon no other legs but his own, will certainly fall; there being no sure station for poor sinners but in him, who is the rock of ages, and the great Saviour of mankind; and so able to save to the uttermost all those that by faith rely upon him.

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



SERMON XVIII.

PSALM cxlv. 9.

The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.

HE that undertakes to discourse of any of God's attributes, must profess that he undertakes to discourse of that which he does not thoroughly understand, if so be that he understands himself. For how can a finite comprehend an infinite? or how can any one express what he cannot comprehend? But of all God's perfections, his mercy especially is a theme so great, that none but an infinite person can worthily enlarge upon it. However, since God is pleased to call us to the study and contemplation of himself, we may, I conceive, without any presumption or injury to his greatness, frame to ourselves the best apprehensions and discourses, that the condition of our nature can afford us of a thing, of which we have no explicit knowledge.

Now mercy, as it is ascribed to God, may be considered and taken two ways.

I. For the principle itself; which is nothing else but the simple, undivided nature of God, as it does manifest and cast abroad itself, in such and such acts of grace and favour to the creature. Which very same essence or nature, according to different respects, is called wisdom, justice, power, mercy, and the like.

II. It is taken for the effects and actions flowing from that principle, by which it does so manifest and exert itself.

Which also admit of a distinction into two sorts.

1. Such as are general, and of equal diffusion to all.

2. Such as are special, and peculiarly relate to the redemption and reparation of fallen man; whom God was pleased to choose and single out from the rest of his works, as the proper object for this great attribute to do its utmost upon.

Now it was the former sense that was intended by the Psalmist in the text, as is evident from the universality of the words. It was such a mercy as spread itself over all his works; such an one as reached as wide as creation and providence. It was like the sun and the light, to shine upon all without exception. And therefore we are not at all concerned here to treat of the miracles of God's pardoning mercy, as they display themselves in the satisfaction and ransom paid down by Christ for sinners: for it would be a great deviation from the design of the words, to confine the overflowing goodness of a Creator to the more limited dispensations of a Redeemer; and so to drown an universal in a particular.

For the prosecution of the words, there is no way that seems more easy and natural, and withal more full, for the setting forth of God's general mercy to the creature, than to take a distinct, though short, survey of the several parts of the creation, and there in to shew how it exerts and lays itself out upon each of them.



1. And first, to begin at the lowest step of creature-perfection. The divine goodness pours itself forth even upon the inanimate part of the creation: for look over the whole universe, and you shall find no one part of it but has its peculiar beauty and ornament. So that the Greek word κόσμος, which signifies the *world*, signifies also *dress* and *ornament*; as if the world were nothing else but a great union and collection of all beauties and perfections. *The sun*, the Psalmist tells us, *comes every day dressed and adorned, like a bridegroom, out of his chambers in the east*. He casts abroad a lustre too glorious to behold: it is enough that we can see it at a second hand, and by reflection. Nor can the night itself conceal the glories of heaven; but the moon and the stars, those deputed lights, then shew forth their lesser beauties: yet even those so great, that when weariness, and the lateness of the night, has invited some eyes to sleep, in the mean time the lights of it have kept others awake, to view their exact motion and admirable order. While the labourer lies down for his rest, the astronomer sets up, and watches for his pleasure. And then, if we consider the earth and the sea, we shall find them like two inexhaustible storehouses, exhibiting the riches of nature in a boundless, unmeasurable plenty; a plenty ennobled by two excellencies, fulness and regularity. So that the whole system of the world is but a standing copy and representation of the divine goodness, writing little images of itself upon every the least part and portion of this great body.

2. But secondly, to proceed further to plants and vegetables, which have a little higher advance of perfection, and enjoy something like life; that is, something that is enough to make them grow and flourish: *Consider the lilies*, says our Saviour, [Matt. vi. 28](#), *how they grow; they toil not, they spin not; and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them*. And we read in the [30th verse](#), of *God's clothing the grass*. It is some part of a father's or a master's bounty, when his sons or servants go splendidly clothed, and so carry the marks of his liberality upon their back. And then also, to preserve these things in a constant possession of that beauty that their first creation imparted to them, all the influences of the upper, and the virtues of the lower world are set on work; all the elements are employed, the planets engaged, and the sun himself rises betimes, and labours all day long, to give verdure and freshness to the least spire of grass, to convey sap and nutriment to every little plant or twig: so bountiful is the hand of Providence, to maintain the being that it once gave. So that it is here expressed not only by mercy, but by *tender mercy*; such an one as is proper to parents, who preserve their children with care and solicitude, supplying their necessities, and providing also for their conveniences. There is not the least flower but seems to hold up its head, and to look pleasantly, in the secret sense of the goodness of its heavenly Maker; which silent rhetoric, though we cannot hear, but only see, yet it is so full and expressive, that David thought he neither spoke impropriety, or nonsense, or a strong line, where he says, *that even the valleys break forth into singing*. And surely then it must be a song of praise



and thanksgiving, a song of joy and triumph, for those liberal effusions of goodness, even upon these lower parts of the creation.

But this goodness stops not here: but when those things seem to have finished their course, and then to wither and die, and at last bury themselves in the bowels of the same earth that bore them; why then, the same Providence vouchsafes them a resurrection and a return to life. Every season has, as it were, its commission and command from Heaven, to furnish the world anew with the very same things: and when the spring comes, the decrepit tree grows young and blossoms, the grass rises from the dead, and the flowers step forth, as if the whole winter's interval had been but a sleep, and the places upon which they grew were indeed beds, without a metaphor. Thus the goodness of Heaven, while it provides for the creature, proceeds in a constant circle; and as a circle has no end, so neither has that. For it first produces these things into being, then preserves them, and at last, being dead, recovers them; and by that gives them some resemblance of an immortality, so far as the proportions of their nature will admit.

And if it be now said, What good can all this be to such creatures as have no sense of it? I answer, that every thing that is perfect and regular is a credit and a glory to itself, as well as to its author, whether it knows so much or no. Different natures have different capacities of good: things endued with sense and apprehension receive what is good by apprehending and being sensible of it. But to say, that therefore inanimate things, whose nature is wholly different, must do so too, or be utterly incapable of good, this is a great fallacy and error in discourse; it being to rate the most different things by the same measure.

For as the brutes are, in their way, capable of receiving the benefit and good that is properly fitted to their nature and condition, though they cannot take it in by the sublimer and higher apprehensions of reason; so these inanimate beings, that are void of sense, have also their proper good things belonging to them, though they cannot enjoy them by hearing, seeing, tasting, and the like, which are the peculiar fruitions of sensible creatures. The herb feeds upon the juice of a good soil, and drinks in the dew of heaven as eagerly, and thrives by it as effectually, as the stalled ox, that tastes every thing that he eats or drinks. Providence has suited each nature with its enjoyment; and therefore the *tender mercies of God* may be said to be over these things also.

3. From hence let us now, in the third place, advance a little higher, to the sensible parts of the creation, the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air; amongst which we shall find even the chiefest and the strongest of them constant retainers and pensioners to the bounty of their Creator; the lion, who, one would think, was pretty well able to provide for himself: yet David tells us, [Psalm civ. 21](#), that he still *seeks his meat from God*. And the *young ravens too can call upon him* in their way, and be heard and fed by him when they do call, through a strange providence.



How has God given every creature a power most particularly to pursue and compass that which makes for the welfare of its being! Where he denies strength, he usually gives sagacity and quickness of sense; and withal implants in every one a certain instinct, that teaches and prompts it to make use of that faculty in which its chief ability is seated. The ox, a creature of none of the most ready senses, has them yet ready enough to know how to defend himself, and will not encounter his adversary or assailant, as the mastiff does, with his teeth. The little bird has not strength to grapple with the hawk or the eagle; but it has agility of body to carry it out of reach, and smallness too to convey it out of sight. Nay, and if we consider the poor, helpless lamb, which has neither strength, nor wings, nor craft to secure itself by, but seems wholly offered by nature as a prey to any thing that will prey upon it; yet its great usefulness for the occasions of man's life has entitled it to the care and protection of him whom it serves. So that the goodness of God has left nothing defenceless, but has sent every thing into the world well accoutred and provided, according to the exigence of those necessities that its nature is like to expose it to. And he that would do Providence right, in recounting fully what it has done for the creature in this particular, must, with Pliny, write a natural history.

4. In the fourth place, proceed we now one step further, and take a survey of rational creatures, men and angels. And first for man; who is, as it were, an epitome, or rather an union of the two worlds; as by his body relating to the earth, and by his soul to heaven: nothing can more declare the goodness of his Creator to him, than that he made him *after his own image*.

But passing over the bounty of God to man in his state of innocence, as not sufficiently to be expressed by any since the loss of it; I shall remark only those blessings and favours, which men, even since the fall and apostasy of Adam, seem to enjoy upon the mere stock of the common mercies of Providence; which, we find, as to all the outward materials of happiness, makes no discrimination between the good and the bad; but causes the sun and the rain to visit the vineyard, as well when it is Ahab's, as while it was Naboth's. And David says of the wicked, in several of his Psalms, *that God fills their bellies with his hid treasures; that their eyes stand out with fatness, and that they have even more than heart can wish*.

And surely to be rich, healthy, and honourable, are favours and blessings, and such as are the prizes that the most excellent and renowned part of the world strive for: yet experience will shew, that these are not the badges of saintship, or the certain marks of God's peculiar mercies. A man may affront and offend all that is above him, and yet command and enjoy all that is beneath him: for were not the four monarchies of the world successively in the hands of heathens, who worshipped false gods, while they subsisted and flourished by the beneficence of the true? Nay, and to go even to Israel itself, were not almost all of its kings enemies to and contemners of that God, whose peculiar people they reigned over? Which shews, that they enjoyed these privileges and prerogatives, not upon the score of any federal

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endearment, or any interest in a promise that they could lay claim to. These and many other examples declare, that the benignity of Providence seems to be promiscuous and universal, and as undistinguishing as the air and the elements, which equally dispense themselves to the necessities of all.

And now, we cannot but judge it an instance of a strange, and almost an invincible goodness, for a prince to clothe his rebels in scarlet, and to make his traitors fare deliciously every day. Yet the wicked and the profane ones of the world, who stand in the same defiance of the majesty and supremacy of Heaven, are treated with as great obligingness and favour by him, whom they so defy.

And besides, how many are the casual, unforeseen dangers, that the hand of Providence rescues them from! How many little things carry in them the causes of death! and how often are men, that have escaped, amazed that they were not destroyed! Which shews that there is an eye that still watches over them, that always sees, though it is not seen; that knows their strengths and their weaknesses, where they are safe, and where they may be struck; and in how many respects they lie open to the invasion of a sad accident. And though it be ten to one, but that in the space of a year or two a man is attacked by one or other of those many thousand casualties that he is obnoxious to; yet we see that most men make a shift to rub out, and to be safe, to grow old, and to be well. In a word, every man lives by a perpetual deliverance; a deliverance, which for the unlikelihood of it he could not expect, and for his own unworthiness, I am sure, he could not deserve.

5. And now, in the last place, we are arrived at the very top of the creation, the angels; those more lively and bright resemblances of the Deity, whose raised endowments and excellencies speak the goodness of their Creator to them in that degree, that it would nonplus the tongue of angels themselves to express the greatness of the obligation. For compare a Solomon, an Aristotle, or an Archimedes, to a child that newly begins to speak, and they do not more transcend such an one, than the angelical understanding exceeds theirs even in its most sublime improvements and acquisitions.

Nothing but omniscience can outdo the knowledge of angels; a knowledge that dives into all the recesses of nature, and spies out all the secret workings of second causes by a certain and immediate view; which the quickest human intellect pursues by tedious meditation, dubious conjectures, short experiments, and perhaps after all is forced to sit down in ignorance and dissatisfaction.

Nor do they excel in knowledge only, but also in power and activity. Men indeed raise armies, and, by much ado and much time, rout an enemy or sack a city; but we shall find a destroying angel in one night slaying an hundred, fourscore, and five thousand men, [2 Kings xix. 35](#). So great is the force of those spiritual beings! For corporeal matter is not the proper cause of action, but remains sluggish and unmoved, till it receives motion by the impulse of an immaterial principle: nor does any philosophy prove, nor indeed can prove, that any

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thing that is merely body can move itself. So that the angelical essence, being free from any material mixture, is also free from all clogs and incumbrances. It is all pure action: and so must needs exert itself at an higher rate of force, than any of those bodily agents that we see and converse with.

Neither do the angels move by certain periods and steps of progression, as we are fain to do, who carry our own weights and hinderances about us; but they measure the vastest spaces and the greatest distances in the twinkling of an eye, in a moment, in a portion of time so short, that it falls under no mortal perception or observation. And for this cause were the cherubims in the tabernacle painted with wings, the best way that we have to express the greatest agility by: though the swiftness of an arrow out of a bow is no more to be compared to the speed of an angel, than the motion of a snail can be compared to that.

And now, as God has been so bountiful to the angels, by ennobling them with such excellent qualities, so he has yet further manifested the same bounty to them in a double respect.

1. In respect of the place of their habitation or abode.
2. In respect of their employment.

1. And first, for the place of their abode: it is the highest heaven, the place of God's immediate residence; even the presence-chamber of the Almighty. *Matt. xviii. 10, In heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father*, says our Saviour: and *Psalm lxviii. 17, The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; and the Lord is among them*. They are (as I may so say) God's menial and domestic servants; they are part of his family; they attend about his throne; and have the most exalted and direct fruitions of the beatific vision.

2. In the next place, as for their employment, that is twofold.

1. To be continually worshipping and speaking praises to God; to behold and admire him in the full brightness of his glory; to contemplate upon all his ineffable perfections, and to be in a continual rapture and ecstasy upon such contemplation; expressing it in constant hallelujahs and adorations. In a word, their great business is to admire and to praise.

2. Their other employment is immediately to execute God's commands about the government of the world: they are the great ministers of Providence, and it is their glory so to be; their service is their privilege: as in the courts of princes every attendant is honourable, or at least thinks himself so. The angels are still despatched by God upon all his great messages to the world; and therefore their very name in Greek, which is ἄγγελος, signifies *a messenger*: in short, they have the most illustrious employment that can be, which is to be ambassadors extraordinary from the King of kings.

And thus I have traced the divine goodness to the creature, beginning at the lowest, and from thence ascending to the highest parts of the creation: which subject, though it has been

general, yet, as to the use and improvement of it, may very well have a particular reference and application to us men. And therefore the deduction that I shall make from all the precedent discourse, shall be to instate and settle in our minds right thoughts of the natural goodness and benignity of God towards men.

How many and vast endearments might we draw from God barely as a Creator! Suppose there had never been any news of a redeemer to fallen Adam; no hope, no aftergame for him as a sinner: yet let us peruse the obligations that lay upon him as a man.

Was it not enough for him, who but yesterday was nothing, to be advanced into an existence, that is, into one perfection of the Deity? Was it not honour enough for clay to be breathed upon, and for God to print his image upon a piece of dirt? Certainly it would be looked upon as an high kindness for any prince to give a subject his picture: was it no act of love therefore in God to give us souls endued with such bright faculties, such lively images of himself, which he might have thrust into the world with the short and brutish perceptions of a few silly senses; and, like the beasts, have placed our intellectuals in our eyes or in our noses?

Was it no favour to make that a sun, which he might have made but a glowworm? no privilege to man, that he was made lord of all things below? that the world was not only his house, but his kingdom? that God should raise up one piece of earth to rule over all the rest?

Surely all these were favours, and they were the early, preventing favours of a Creator; for God then knew no other title, he bore no other relation to us: there was no price given to God, that might induce him to bid Adam rise out of the earth a man, rather than a spire of grass, a twig, a stone, or some such other contemptible superiority to nothing.

No; he furnished him out into the world with all this retinue of perfections, upon no other motive but because he had a mind to make him a glorious piece of work, a specimen of the arts of Omnipotence, to stand and glisten in the top and head of the creation.

Which consideration alone, should think, might be able to compose the murmurs and the grudgings that lie festering in many men's hearts against God, caused by a surmise of God's hard dealings with them. In short, they paint God with dismal colours, and then they fly from him: they treat him with the basest of affections, which is suspicion, and look upon him as glad to take advantage against his creature.

But may we not say of such, Is this their kindness to their friend? Are these the best returns of gratitude that they can make to their Creator? For God, as their Creator, was their friend, had he never took upon him any other respect; their very production was an obligation, and their bare essence a favour above a recompence: for why should God put a greater lustre upon one piece of the chaos than upon another?

The fallen angels, who will never have any other relation to God, but as to a Creator, will upon this very score, had they no other sin to condemn them, stand inexcusably condemned for ingratitude, in that they sinned against that God that obliged them with so ex-

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cellent a nature, with the nearest similitude to his own substance; that they sinned against him, who made them so able not to have sinned.

But now God's relation of a Creator reflects the same obligation upon men that it did upon the angels; and that so great, that though they chance to perish for their sins, yet they will go to hell obliged, and carry the marks of God's favour with them to their very destruction.

Wherefore all the hard thoughts men usually have of God, ought by all means and arts of consideration to be suppressed: for the better effecting of which, we may fix our meditation upon these two qualities that do always attend them.

1. Their unreasonableness.
2. Their danger.

1. And first for their unreasonableness; all such thoughts are not any true resemblances of our Creator, but merely our own creatures. All the sad appearances of rigour that we paint him under are not from himself, but from our misrepresentations: as the fogs and mists we sometimes see about the sun issue not from him, but ascend from below, and owe their nearness to the sun only to the deception of the spectator.

Is it possible for him, who is love itself, to be cruel, harsh, and inexorable; to sit in heaven contriving gins and snares to trapan and ruin his poor creatures; and then to delight himself in the cries of the damned, and the woful estate of tormented souls?

There is, I confess, a sort of men, *sons of thunder*, (but, by a new way, they thunder from hell, not from heaven,) who delight to represent God with all the terror and hostility to men, that their own base spirit and sordid melancholy can suggest. They so account him a maker, that they scarce allow him to be a preserver: they describe him as a father without bowels; they make him to triumph, and please, and as it were recreate himself in the confusion of all his works: as if our destruction had been the sole end of our creation, and God only made us, that he might afterwards have the pleasure of destroying us. As men use to nourish and breed up deer, and such kind of beasts, only that they may hunt and worry them.

With what pleasure may we hear some persons tell men that they are damned! Indeed with so much, that they seem to taste the expression more than if they had heard that they themselves should be saved; persons fitter to blow the trumpet upon mount Sinai, or, according to their old note, to *curse Meroz*, than to proclaim the glad tidings of the gospel. But still, after such have said all, to bespatter God's natural kindness to the sons of men, all their furious, blustering expressions will be found not to have been copied out from any such real harshness in God, but to have issued only from the fumes of an ignorant head and an ill-natured constitution.

The divine nature is the light and the refreshment of a rational creature; God is of all beings the most amiable, suitable, and desirable: all the loveliness, the beauty, and perfection that is diffused and scattered here and there through the whole creation, and which is so

apt to excite and win our affections, is in an infinite, inexhaustible manner treasured up in God. And shall we now court the stream, and in the mean time throw dirt into the fountain?

Nay, to proceed further; the very design of a creation unanswerably speaks the goodness of the Creator. For why should he communicate himself? why should he diffuse any of those perfections which he was so fully master of by an ineffable acquiescence in himself? But his goodness was so vastly, so infinitely full, that he seemed unquiet and unsatisfied, till he had as it were disburdened himself by some communications of it. One would have thought that these perfections had been too rare to be communicated, so much as in resemblance, and that God would have folded them up within his own essence for ever; so that he who now contents himself with the prerogative of being the best and the greatest Being, might have been the only Being: but he chose rather to draw out, than only to possess his own fulness, to scatter something of his image upon the creature, and to see himself in effigy. From all which it follows, that hard, suspicious apprehensions of God are both injurious to him and unreasonable in themselves.

2. The other argument against men's entertaining such thoughts of God is the consideration of their exceeding danger. Their malignity is equal to their absurdity: for whosoever strives to beget or foment in his heart such persuasions concerning God, makes himself the Devil's orator, and declaims his cause, whose proper characteristic badge it is to be the great accuser or calumniator; for that is the force of the Greek word διάβολος.

And as he is the constant accuser of us to God, so, by a restless circle of malice, he is no less industrious and artificial in accusing God to us. The first engine by which he battered down our innocence, and brought sin into the world, was by insinuating into Eve's mind thoughts that God rather envied than designed their happiness, in forbidding them to eat of that one tree: and we know what success it had, to bereave man of an almighty friend, only by a false supposal that he was his enemy.

Despair, which is the greatest instrument next to that of presumption, by which the Devil draws men headlong into the fatal net of perdition, how and by what means does he cause it? Why, by representing God to the soul like himself, a tyrant and a tormentor; by tragical declamations upon his vindictive justice: that he is one full of eternal designs of revenge, rigid and implacable, exacting the utmost farthing from a poor bankrupt creature, that is not worth it. By such diabolical rhetoric does he libel and disgrace God to the hearts of his creatures.

And he well knows, that by these arts he does his business effectually; forasmuch as it is impossible for the soul to love God, as long as it takes him for an enemy and a destroyer. We should contradict the principles of our nature, should we love God so considered; it being unnatural to love any thing clothed with the proper motives and arguments of hatred. And as it is impossible for the understanding to assent to a known, apparent falsity; so it is equally impossible for the will to love, choose, and embrace God, considered as an adversary.



And from hence it is, that those who give directions to distressed, afflicted consciences, for the re-obtaining of comfort, wisely lay the foundation here; first of all, to fasten in the heart a deep and thorough persuasion of God's natural goodness and benevolence to all his creatures, to mankind especially, one of the choicest and most beloved parts of the creation.

And by such thoughts we are to antidote the poison of the contrary; which of themselves would quickly ripen into blasphemy, and from thence pass into a confirmed malice against God; the proper sin and character of the Devil.

We are to assure ourselves of the infinite agreeableness of the divine nature to ours; that God's goodness is not only full, but exuberant; the first is his glory, the second our advantage. Indeed so full is it, that when it is said, that God cannot shew or exercise mercy, it is not from any defect either in him or in that, but merely for want of a suitable object; he has always a liberality inclining him to give, but we have not always a capacity fitting us to receive.

But, as I shew at first, the divine goodness and mercy is a subject too large to be wielded by our short and imperfect discourses; for that which is *over all his works* may well be above all our words: and therefore we have cause to turn our descriptions of it into a petition for it, and to beseech God that we may come at length to enjoy what we are not able now to express.

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



SERMON XIX.

JAMES i. 14.

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust., and enticed.

IT is natural for men, in the commission of sin, to design to themselves as much of the pleasure, and as little of the guilt of sin, as possibly they can: and therefore, since the guilt of sin unavoidably remains upon the cause and author of sin, it is their great business to find out some other cause, upon which to charge it, beside themselves. Accordingly the apostle here directs these words and the foregoing, as an anticipation of, and an answer to a secret objection that might possibly arise in some minds against God himself, as if he were the great impeller and inducer of men to sin; in which answer he clears God, by stating sin upon its true cause and original.

In the prosecution of the words, I shall only premise the explication of these two terms, and so descend to their further discussion.

1. What the apostle here means by being *tempted*.
2. What is intended by *lust*.

1. For the first of these: it is as certain, that the scripture affirms some men to have been tempted by God, and particularly Abraham, as that it is positively affirmed in the verse before the text, *that God tempts no man*; and therefore this word must needs be of various signification. In the sense that it is ascribed to God, it signifies no more than a bare trial; as when, by some notable providence, he designs to draw forth and discover what is latent in the heart of man. In the sense that it is denied of God, it signifies an endeavour, by solicitations and other means, to draw a man to the commission of sin: and this the most holy God can by no means own; for it would be to take the Devil's work out of his hands. But neither does this sense reach the measure of the word in this place; which imports not only an endeavour to engage a man in a sinful action, but an actual and effectual engaging him with full success and prevalence, as to the last issue of the commission. And thus a man can be only tempted by his own lust; which is the

Second thing to be explained. By *lust* the apostle here means, not that particular inordinateness or vice that relates to the uncleanness of the flesh; but that general stock of corruption that possesses the whole soul through all its respective faculties. But principally is it here to be understood of the prime and commanding faculty of all, the will, as it is possessed and principled with sinful habits and depraved inclinations. And this is the grand tempter, that tempts and seduces, so as actually to engage and determine a man to the choice of sin.

Now, though the apostle seems, by stating the cause of sin upon this, directly and principally to have it in his design only to clear and discharge God from this imputation; yet the nature of the proposition is of a wider compass, and carries it to the exclusion of all other external causes whatsoever. And therefore, in compliance with this, the business of the en-

suing discourse shall be to demonstrate, that the corrupted will of man is the sole, adequate, and entire cause of all his sinful prevarications, and deviations from the law of God.

The prosecution of which shall lie in these three particulars.

I. To shew those false causes upon which men are apt to charge their sins.

II. To shew positively, that lust is the true and proper cause of them.

III. To shew the way by which it causes them; and that, the text tells us, is by *seducing and enticing*. *Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

I. And for the first of these, the mistaken causes of sin; in the number of which we may reckon these that follow.

1. The decree of God concerning things to come to pass, is not a proper cause for any man to charge his sins upon; though perhaps there is nothing in the world that is more abused by weak and vulgar minds in this particular. I shall not concern myself to dispute how God decrees the event of sins: but this I shall affirm in general, that be the divine decree never so absolute, yet it has no causal influence upon sinful actions; no, nor indeed upon any actions else: forasmuch as the bare decree or purpose of a thing produces or puts nothing in being at all. It is, as the schools call it, an immanent act; that is, such an one as rests wholly within God, and effects nothing without him. A decree, as such, is not operative or effective of the thing decreed.

Besides, whensoever God decrees that a thing shall come to pass, he decrees the manner of its production also, and that suitably to the way of working proper to that cause by which it is effected: as if he decrees that a man shall do such or such a thing, he decrees that he shall do it freely, and agreeably to that liberty of will that his nature invests him with.

But it will be replied, Does not every thing decreed by God certainly and necessarily come to pass? And then, how can we prevent it? And if so, is there not a force upon us from Heaven to do the thing that is thus decreed?

I answer, No; for there is a great deal of difference between a mere illative necessity, which consists only in the logical consequence of one thing upon another, and between a causal necessity, which efficiently and antecedently determines and puts the faculty upon working. But so does not the divine decree: it exerts no force or impulse upon man's will, but leaves it to its own natural liberty. However, it is certain, that, by the former kind of merely illative necessity, the thing decreed will assuredly have its event. But this is no greater a necessity, than God's foreknowledge puts upon the event of the thing foreknown: for it is impossible that God should not foreknow all things that shall come to pass; and it is equally impossible, if God foreknows a thing shall come to pass, that that thing should not come to pass. And yet, I suppose, that none will say, that God's foreknowledge of a man's actions does, by any active influence, necessitate that man to do those actions: albeit, that this consequence stands unshakeable, that whatsoever God foreknows a man will do, that shall certainly and infallibly be done. Otherwise, where is God's omniscience and his

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infallibility? He knows the last point to which the will will incline its choice; he is beforehand with all futurities, and so takes them into his view with the same certainty, as if they were present or actually past.

Now let any one compare these two, God's decree and his foreknowledge, and he will find, that, as to the event, the same necessity passes both upon the thing decreed and the thing foreknown. And therefore, if men will confess that God's foreknowledge does not force or push a man upon the doing of any thing, it will follow also, that neither does his decree. But if, in the scanning of either, there occurs any difficulty, to our apprehensions not resolvable, it is because God is infinite; and because an infinite mind, both in its knowledge and purposes, proceeds not according to the methods and measures of a finite understanding. And upon this account, all the arguments, that, with so much noise and confidence, are urged against God's decrees, will be found but popular and fallacious, and grounded upon the application of men's ways of acting and apprehending to God; and consequently tend to disprove God's infinity, as much or more than any thing else.

Let no bold or ignorant sinner, therefore, think to take sanctuary here; or to allege God's decree as an excuse for those villainies, which, with full purpose and choice of will, he committed. If God, by the unsearchable counsel of his will, designs, fore sees, and orders, what yet the sinner does most freely, what is that to him? That alters not the nature of his action, any more than if I had a design to kill my enemy, and another, without any knowledge of such a design of mine, should of his own accord kill him. Would this free him from bearing the guilt of his own action, and undergoing the deserved punishment of a murderer? None so apt to babble about predestination and God's decrees, as the illiterate vulgar; and from hence to take reasons for what they are to do. But what can warrant them to insist upon mysteries, when they are called to duty? And to pore and break their brains upon the hidden senses of a decree, when they have the plain and intelligible voice of a precept? God hath shewed thee, O man, what is good and what is evil. He has placed life and death before thee. This is the rule by which thou must stand or fall: and no man will find, that his fulfilling God's secret will, will bear him out in the breach of his revealed.

2. The influences of the heavens and of the stars imprint nothing upon men that can impel or engage them to do evil; and yet some are so sottish, as to father their vices and villainies upon these: they were born (forsooth) under such a planet, and therefore they cannot choose but be thieves, or whoremasters, or rebels, all their life after. But it is strange, that heaven should prepare men for hell, and imprint those qualities upon them, that should hinder them from ever coming to heaven. This would be highly injurious to the great artificer and maker of those bodies, that he should provide such storehouses of mischief, such irresistible conveyers of the seeds of sin into men's minds. To be born under any planet would in this case be worse than not to be born at all. And to what purpose should God allow men

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the means to save them, if he places them under such an influence as must certainly damn them?

But these are mere fopperies; the fables and follies of old women and astrologers, who are seldom able to give an account of that which is under the immediate impressions of the heavens, that is, of the air and the elements; and upon the stock of all their acquaintance with these celestial bodies, to secure us but one fair day a month or two hence. It is all but confident conjecture, and cheating reduced to an art grounded upon the ignorance and credulity of the vulgar, who are always willing to be deceived, if any one will but take the pains to deceive them.

But admitting that the heavens have an influence and operation upon inferior bodies, and that those glorious lights were not made only to be gazed upon, but to control as well as to direct the lesser world; yet still all communication between agent and patient must be in things that hold some proportion and likeness in their natures; so that one thing can pass no impression upon another, of a nature absolutely and in every respect diverse from it, provided it be also superior to it; and such a thing is a spirit in respect of body.

Upon which grounds, what intercourse can there be between the stars and a soul? How can the sun or moon, or any planet, move or incline the will this way or that way? and carry the freedom of its choice to one thing rather than another? This is absurd and unimaginable, and contrary to all the principles of philosophy as well as religion. And therefore let no man think himself under a necessity of sinning from any such superior influence; it is not that which he sees over his head, but that which he feels within his heart, that he is to look to. The will scorns the control of any creature, either in heaven or earth; next under God it is its own master. Every man is indeed to look upon God as his Saviour; but it is himself only that can be his destroyer.

3. Neither can any man charge his sins upon the constitution and temper of his body, as the proper cause of them. The body was made to serve, and not to command. All that it can do, is only to be troublesome; but it cannot be imperious. If the soul will but maintain its right, and resolve to keep the throne, it may easily make the fleshly part, not only its subject, but its instrument; not only quiet, but useful. They are not the humours of the body, but the humours of the mind, to which men owe the irregularities of their behaviour.

The sensitive appetites having their situation in the body, do indeed follow the peculiar complexion and temper of it: but reason is a thing that is placed solely and entirely in the soul, and so depends not upon those inferior faculties; but though it is some times solicited by them, yet it is in its power, whether or no it will be prevailed upon. And for all the noise, and hurry, and tumult, that is often raised amongst them; yet reason, like the upper most region of the air, is not at all subject to the disturbances that are below. And so long as the soul listens to reason, the inferior appetites may bawl indeed, but they cannot persuade. Let

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a beggar be never so impudently craving and importunate, yet the door may be shut against him, and then he must be either quiet, or only troublesome to himself.

In vain therefore does any man for his excuse allege the solicitations of his appetites, against the dictates of his reason: it is, as if in a rebellion a man should act by the summons of a constable, against the command and proclamation of his prince. No man is made an adulterer, a drunkard, or an idle person by his body; his body indeed may incline him to be so, but it is his will only that makes him so. And be the clamours and requests of appetite never so earnest, reason has still a negative voice upon them; and if it shall be pleased but to advise upon the matter, they cease and are extinct, and can never pass into action.

If indeed reason shall give way to these sensual motions, and take the bit into its mouth, and suffer itself to be rid; there is no doubt, but it may be made a servant of servants, a slave and a drudge to all the tyrannies of a domineering sensuality. But this will be no apology before God, who endued it with a perfect sovereignty, and put the government of the whole soul into its hands.

And besides, there have been some in the world, who by the conduct of their reason have made their way to virtue, through all the disadvantages of their natural constitution. Philosophy has done it in many, and religion may do it in all. Let no man therefore charge his sins upon that part of himself, that cannot possibly sin without the consent of his will.

4. And lastly, to proceed yet higher: no man can justly charge his sins upon the Devil, as the cause of them; for God has not put it into the power of our mortal enemy to ruin us without ourselves; which yet he had done, had it been in the Devil's power to force us to sin. The Devil can only tempt and allure, but compel he cannot; he may inveigle, but he cannot command our choice; and no man yet ever suffered death, who did not choose death: the fisher may propose, and play the bait before the fish, but he cannot force it to swallow it. And so whatsoever the Devil does, he does by insinuation, and not by compulsion.

The Spirit of God assures us, that he may be resisted, and that upon a vigorous resistance he will fly. He never conquers any, but those that yield; a spiritual fort is never taken by force, but by surrender. And when a man is as willing to be ruined, as he is to ruin him, it is that, that makes the Devil triumphant and victorious. How slyly and creepingly did he address himself to our first parents! which surely his pride would never have let him do, could he have effected their downfall by force, without temptation.

It is confessed indeed, that the guilt of those sins that the Devil tempts us to will rest upon him; but not so as to discharge us. He that persuades a man to rob a house, is guilty of the sin he persuades him to, but not in the same manner that he is who committed the robbery; for it was in his power, after all the other's persuasions, to have borne the fact, and to have maintained his innocence: for no man is a thief or a villain against his will.

In vain therefore do men shift off their sins upon the Devil, whose greatest arts they may frustrate, whose strongest solicitations they may make ineffectual: for it is in their power

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(as I may so say) in some respect to make the Devil himself innocent. But still the load of all must lie upon him; and it is not he that commits, but he that tempts to sin, that must be the sinner. It seems to be with the Devil, in respect of the disorders of the soul, as it is with the spleen in respect of the distempers of the body; whatsoever is amiss, or indisposed, the charge is sure to lie there.

But howsoever men may mock themselves with such evasions, yet God will not be mocked, who knows that he left the soul in its own keeping, and made the will free, and not to be forced: and therefore these figleaves will fall off, when he shall come to scrutiny and examination. Every man shall bear his own burden, and the Devil himself shall have but what is his due.

And thus I have done with the first particular proposed, namely, to shew and remove the mistaken causes upon which men are apt to charge their sins; concerning which, before I proceed any further, I shall remark this by way of caution: that though I deny any of these to be the proper causes of sin, yet it is not to be denied, but that they are often very great promoters of sin, where they meet with a corrupt heart and a depraved will. And it is not to be questioned, but that many thousands now in hell might have gone thither in a calmer and a more cleanly way at least, had they not been hurried and pushed on by impetuous temptations, by an ill constitution, and by such opportunities and circumstances of life, as mightily suited their corruption, and so drew it forth to a pitch of acting higher and more outrageous than ordinary.

For there is no doubt, but an ill mind in an ill-disposed body will carry a man forth to those sins, that otherwise it would not, if lodged in a body of a better and more benign temperament. As a sword covered with rust will wound much more dangerously, where it does wound, than it could do if it were bright and clean. And it is also as certain, that were it not for the Devil's suggestions, the bare corruption of man's nature would not engage him in many of those enormities, that frequently rage in the lives of some persons. Nor is it to be denied, but that the circumstances and ways of life, that Providence sometimes casts men under, unavoidably expose them to those occasions of sin, that entangle them in those actions, that they would never have been guilty of, had they lived free from those occasions.

All this is very true; and therefore, besides those internal impressions of grace, by which God sanctifies the heart, and effectually changes the will, many are accountable to his mercy for those external and inferior assistances of grace. As, that he restrains the fury of the tempter; that he sends them into the world with a well-tempered and rightly-disposed body; and lastly, that he casts the course of their life out of most of the snares and occasions of sin: so that they can with much more ease be virtuous than other men; and if they sin, they sin merely upon the stock of an internal, overflowing malice; which is instead of a tempter, a devil, and all sinful occasions to itself.



But on the other side, where God denies a man these advantages, and casts him under all the forementioned disadvantages of virtue, and decoys to sin; it is yet most certain that they lay upon him no necessity of sinning. The will is still entire, and may break through all these impediments: it may be virtuous, though indeed at the price of a greater trouble, and a more afflicting endeavour.

II. I come now to the second particular; namely, to shew, that the proper and effectual cause of sin is the depraved will of man, expressed by the apostle here under the name of *lust*. The proof of which is not very difficult; for all other causes being removed, it remains that it can be only this. We have the word of Christ himself, that it is from within, from *the heart*, that *envyings, wrath, bitterness, adulteries, fornications*, and other such impurities do proceed. To heap up all the several places of scripture that bear witness to this, would be infinite and end less: and therefore supposing it sufficiently clear from scripture, that a corrupt will is the sole cause of all sinful actions, I shall endeavour yet further to evince the same by arguments and reasons.

1. The first shall be taken from the office of the will, which is to command and govern all the rest of the faculties; and therefore all disorder must unavoidably begin here. Nothing can be done without a commission from the will; whereupon, if any thing be done sinfully, the fault lies in him that issued out the commission. The economy of the powers and actions of the soul is a real government; and a government cannot be defective without some failure and defect in the governor.

2. The second argument shall be taken from every man's experience of himself and his own actions; upon an impartial survey of which he shall find, that before the doing of any thing sinful or suspicious, there passes a certain debate in the soul about it, whether it shall or it shall not be done; and after all argumentations for and against, the last issue and result follows the casting voice of the will. This is that which turns the balance, that gives the final determination, and therefore the guilt of every action must inevitably rest here.

3. A third reason is from this, that the same man, upon the proposal of the same object, and that under the same circumstances, yet makes a different choice at one time from what he does at another; and therefore the moral difference of actions, in respect of the good or evil of them, must of necessity be resolved into some principle within him; and that is his will. Which remaining one and the same, according to its own absoluteness and freedom, some times turns itself to one thing, sometimes to another.

4. The fourth and last reason shall be from this, that even the souls in hell continue to sin; and therefore the productive principle of sin must needs be the will.

The consequence appears from hence, because those sins cannot possibly proceed from the body, or the irregular motions of the sensitive appetite, since the soul in this estate is divided from these: nor yet from the temptations of the Devil, for he tempts only that he may bring the soul to hell; but when he has it once there, of a tempter he becomes a torment-

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or. Wherefore they must needs flow from some principle inherent in the soul; and that is the will, which is as inseparable from the soul, as its own substance.

I shall not insist upon any further proofs of so plain a truth: let these suffice to persuade every man to turn his eyes inward, to seek for the traitor in his own bosom; for here is the source and fountain of all those enormities that stream forth in a man's conversation. And therefore it is a great vanity to declaim against any thing without us, as if we were led captive by some external force: for neither the flesh, the world, nor the Devil, no, nor all of them together, could be able to annoy us, if our wills were but faithful to us. Were the *spirit* but *willing*, the *flesh* would be *weak* in a good sense; and were we but *crucified to the world*, the *world* would be as *much crucified to us*. Nay, and lastly, the Devil himself would be but a contemptible adversary, were he not sure of a correspondent, and a party that held intelligence with him, in our own breasts. All the blowing of the fire put under a caldron could never make it boil over, were there not a fulness of water within it.

Some are so stupid as to patronize their sins with a plea, that they cannot, they have not power to do otherwise; but where the will is for virtue, it will either find or make power. The truth is, men are in love with their vices, their will is enthralled, and here is all the restraint that is put upon them; they suffer no violence, but from delight; no captivity, but from pleasure. But if a man binds his own hands, it will be but a poor excuse to plead that he had no use of them, when his work shall be required of him.

III. I come now to the third and last thing; and that is, to shew the way by which a corrupt will, here expressed by the name of *lust*, is the cause of sin; and that is, by drawing a man aside, and enticing him.

1. And first for the first of these: it seduces, or draws a man aside; it actually takes himself from the ways of duty: for as in all motion there is the relinquishment of one term before there can be the acquisition of another; so the soul must pass from its adherence to virtue, before it can engage in a course of sin. It must first be unfastened, and removed from its former bottom, and then it may with ease be pitched upon any other.

Now the first and leading attempt of lust, is to possess the mind with a kind of loathing and disgust of virtue, as a thing harsh and insipid, and administering no kind of pleasure and satisfaction; all the paths of it are represented as planted with thorns, as full of horror, as made up of nothing but the severities of discipline, and the rigours of unnatural abridgments: and by these means lust disgraces and libels virtue out of practice; it brings it out of favour with the will and the affections; and then we know that the natural consequence of being out of favour with them, is to be laid aside by them.

This being done, and the mind clear, it is now ready for any new impression, and to receive the offers and proposals of vice: and vice and virtue are like other enemies; one never supplants the other, but with a design to step into its place; and amongst contraries, when one is drove out, the other usually takes possession.

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Prevail but with a man to remit the prosecution of his duty, and he lies open to all vicious practices imaginable; he offers his mind, as it were, a blank for sin to write what he pleases upon it: and seldom was it known, that omissions of virtue went alone, but were presently followed with enormous commissions of sin.

2. The other course that lust takes to entangle a man in sin, is by enticing; that is, by using arguments and rhetoric, to set off sin to him with the best advantage and the fairest gloss.

And this it does these two following ways.

1. By representing the pleasure of sin, stript of all the troubles and inconveniences of sin. There is no sin but is attended and surrounded with so many miseries and adherent bitternesses, that it is at the best but like a single drop of honey in a sea of gall. Who can extract and fetch it out? It is to be done only by fancy and imaginary speculation. But when a man comes to the real instances of practice and experience, he will find the bitter to intermingle with the sweet, and that with a very great predominance: he will find the sweetness to vanish and disappear, and to be swallowed up in those unequal mixtures of sharpness that are conveyed with it.

But now it is the act of lust, to shew the quintessence and the refined part of a sinful action, separate from all its dregs and indecencies, so to recommend it to the apprehension of a deluded sinner. It will present you only with the fair side, and tell you what pleasure and satisfaction you shall reap from such or such an action: but it never reminds you of the regret and remorse of conscience that will accompany it; of the shame and vengeance that will follow it. No; lust is too skilful a sophister, and has at least this part of perfection, to conceal its imperfections.

Lust never deals impartially with the choice, so as to confront the whole good with the whole evil of an object; but declaims amply and magnificently of one, while it is wholly silent of the other. And it is observable, that there are few things that present so entirely bad an appearance, but admit of very plausible pleas and flourishes of commendation. Sin prevails upon the affections, not so much by the suitableness of the thing proposed, as by the art of the proposal.

As for instance, should I tell a thirsty man that I had for him a drink of a noble colour, a quick taste, and a fragrant smell, surely there could be nothing in this description but must raise and inflame his appetite: but should I tell him that it was poison that was of this so rare a taste, colour, and smell, this would be a full allay to his desire, and a sufficient countercharm to all its other alluring qualities.

It is no question but Judas's covetousness addressed his sin to him in this manner, and struck his apprehension with the convenience of having so much money, and gaining it with so much ease; but it told him nothing of the black despair and the disastrous death that



was to follow it. For had this been offered to his thoughts at the same time, it is no doubt but it must have dashed the temptation, and made it cheap and contemptible.

2. Lust entices, by representing that pleasure that is in sin greater than indeed it is: it swells the proportions of every thing, and shews them, as it were, through a magnifying-glass, greatened and multiplied by desire and expectation; which always exhibit objects to the soul, not as they are, but as they would have them be.

Nothing cheats a man so much as expectation; it conceives with the air, and grows big with the wind; and, like a dream, it promises high, but performs nothing. For the truth is, even in lawful enjoyments God has put an emptiness, and made it the very specific and inseparable property of the creature. So that Solomon, who had both the largest measure of those enjoyments, and of wisdom to pass a right judgment upon them, has given the world a full account and declaration of their vanity and dissatisfaction, upon the credit of a long and unparalleled experience. And if the very condition of the creature gives it such a shortness, and hollowness, and disproportion to the desires of a rational soul, even in the most innocent and allowed pleasures; what shall we think of the pleasures of sin, which receive a further embasement and diminution from the superaddition of a curse?

They are cursed like the earth, not only with barrenness, but with briars and thorns; there is not only a fallacy, but a sting in them: and consequently they are rendered worse than nothing; a reed that not only deceives, but also pierces the hand that leans upon it.

But the exceeding vanity of every sinful pleasure will appear, by considering both the latitude of its extent, and the length of its duration.

1. And first, for the latitude or measure of its extent: it seldom gratifies but one sense at a time; and if it should diffuse an universal enjoyment to them all, yet it reaches not the better, the more capacious and more apprehensive part of man, his soul: that is so far from communicating with the senses, that in all their revels it is pensive and melancholy, and afflicted with inward remorses from an unsatisfied, if not also an accusing conscience.

2. And then secondly, for its duration or continuance: it is but for a moment; it affects and leaves the sense in an instant, and scarce affords so much scope as for reflection: the whole course of such pleasures passes like a tale that is told; a tale, that after it is told, proves a lie. How transient and vanishing are the pleasures of the epicure, that expire with a taste, and determine with the poor and momentary gratifications of his palate! And yet, who thinks he shares so largely of the pleasures of sin as he?

But when sin entices, it takes no notice of these littlenesses and flaws in the enjoyment: it speaks loftily, and undertakes largely; it offers mountains and kingdoms, and never suffers a man to purchase a right judgment of it, but at the dear rate of a disappointment: and then he finds how those offers sink and dwindle into nothing; and what a pitiful skeleton of an enjoyment that is, that at first dazzled his apprehensions with such glistening pretences and glorious overtures of pleasure.



He therefore that would stand upon his guard against all the enticements of his corruption, must fortify himself with this consideration, that sin never makes any proposal, whatsoever shew of advantage it may have, but it is with an intent to abuse and deceive him. And consequently, that it is an infinite folly to seek for pleasure or satisfaction but in the ways of duty; the only thing that leads and unites to the great, inexhaustible fountain of satisfaction: *in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*



SERMON XX.

ISAIAH xxvii. 11.

For it is a people of no understanding: therefore lie that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour.

THIS chapter is one of the eloquent strains of the most oratorical of the prophets, describing a severe judgment to be inflicted on the Jews, in the deplorable destruction of Jerusalem, the demolishing their stately buildings, and the wasting their pleasant and delightful habitations. All this is set down in the [10th and 11th verses](#); *the defenced city shall be desolate*: no defence or munition can keep out a judgment, when commissioned by God to enter. *And the habitation forsaken*: when God forsakes a place, the inhabitants do not stay long behind. *And there shall the calf feed, there shall he lie down*: when men forget their Maker, and degenerate into brutish affections, it is but just with him, that they, who have changed affections with beasts, should change dwellings with them too. *When the boughs thereof are withered*, &c. For the exposition of these words, we must note, that they admit of a double construction.

1. They may be either understood literally, and so they set forth the destruction of Jerusalem, in the devastation of the pleasant gardens and vineyards; which shall be left so desolate, that the vines and trees shall wither, and poor women shall come and gather them into bundles, for the making of fires and heating ovens. Thus we see the vintage of sin, and the clusters of Sodom; they destroy the vines, and fire the vineyard.

2. Another sense of these words is figurative and metaphorical: and so this expression, *When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off*, signifies thus much: when the inhabitants have filled up the measure of their sins, when they are spiritually withered and dead, and fruitful to no good work, then they shall be broken off, and ruined with the heaviest destruction. And to aggravate this judgment, to put an edge upon this misery, it is added in the next words, that *women shall come and set them on fire*: that is, a womanish and effeminate generation of men (for such were the Babylonians) shall triumph over them. A hint of their luxury we have in the seventh chapter of Joshua; it was a Babylonish garment that enamoured Achan. We know how Lucian brings in Menippus, speaking of Sardanapalus, one of the womanish kings of Babylon. Ἐπίτρεψον μὴ ὧ Ἑρμῆ τὴν Σαρδανάπαλον πατάξαι κατὰ κόρρης. Now a generous spirit, that has the least spark of honour and virility, does not feel so much smart in the punishment, as in the unworthiness of the hand that does inflict it. And this was the emphasis of Samson's disgrace, to be held in captivity by a woman. And it is the height and aggravation of this judgment, for men to be fired and destroyed by women; the valiant to be made a prey to the luxurious.



And thus having described the judgment, he does in the next words assign a reason of it; *for it is a people of no understanding*. One would have thought that ignorance should have excused the sin: he that sins out of ignorance is rather to be pitied than punished. Is any father so cruel, so hardhearted, as to disown and cast off his son, because he is a fool? No; an innocent ignorance excuses from sin, both before God and man: and God himself will own that maxim of equity, *Ignorantia excusat peccatum*. But then there is another sort of ignorance, which is not an ignorance of an empty understanding, but of a depraved heart; such an ignorance as does not only consist in a bare privation, but in a corrupt disposition; where the understanding is like that sort of blind serpents, whose blindness is attended with much venom and malignity. This was such a blindness as struck the Sodomites; there was darkness in their eyes, and withal, villainy in their hearts. There is an ignorance that could not be remedied, the schools call it an invincible ignorance, and this excuses from sin, and that deservedly; for this is a man's unhappiness, not his fault. But there is also an affected ignorance, such an one as is contracted by a wilful neglect of the means; and this is not excusing, but condemning. Such a want of understanding it was, that is here charged upon the Jews, as the sad occasion of this woful punishment: for they had large and enriching means of grace; the mysteries of God, the *arcana coeli*, were intrusted with them, and explained to them; the fountains of this great deep of knowledge were broken up before them. And in this case to be ignorant; in the midst of light to be in darkness; for an Israel to have an Egypt in a Goshen; this is highly provoking, and may justly cause God to lay hold on vengeance. Where by the way we observe, that some want of understanding, some ignorance, is so far from excusing sin, that it is its highest aggravation: *It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them, &c.*

Here we ought also to note, in what strange terms God expresses his anger. It is not said, the Lord, the just God will punish them; this was not so wonderful: little to be expected from God's justice but a sinner's misery. No; God assumes the most endearing titles, and under them gives the severest judgments: he joins the creator and the destroyer, such expressions as almost confute one another: he clothes himself in the robes of mercy, and in these pronounces the sentence of death upon the sinner.

From the words thus explained, we may naturally deduce these two observations.

I. The relation of a Creator strongly engages God to put forth acts of love and favour towards his creature.

This is clear from the strength of the antithesis in the words, *he that made them will not save them*: where, for the advantage of the expression, it is redoubled; *he that formed them will shew them no favour*. As if he should say, It may seem strange to you that your Creator, which very name speaks nothing but bowels of love and tenderness, should break and ruin, utterly confound and destroy you. Yet thus it must be; though the relation make it strange, yet your sins will make it true.

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II. Sin does totally disengage God from all those acts of love and goodness to the creature, that the relation of a Creator can engage him to.

Or more clearly thus:

There is more provocation in sin for God to destroy, than there is obligation upon him as a Creator to preserve the creature.

Conclusion the first, viz. That the relation of a Creator strongly obliges God, &c.

The strength of this obligation appears in these two considerations.

1. That it is natural; and natural obligations, as well as natural operations, are always the strongest.

2. That God put this obligation upon himself; therefore it must needs be a great and a strong one: and this is clear, because the relation of a Creator is, in order of nature, antecedent to the being of the creature; which not existing, could not oblige God to create it, or assume this relation.

There are three engaging things, that are implied in the creature's relation to God, that oblige him to manifest himself in a way of goodness to it.

1. The first is, the extract or original of the creature's being, which is from God himself. It is the nature of every artificer to tender and esteem his own work: and if God should not love his creature, it would reflect some disparagement upon his workmanship, that he should make any thing which he could not own. God's power never produces what his goodness cannot embrace. God oftentimes, in the same man, distinguishes between the sinner and the creature; as a creature he can love him, while as a sinner he does afflict him. Hence arises that dearness between the parent and the child: what wonder is it to see him in his father's arms, who before lay in his loins? or to see that child admitted to the bosom, that before lay in the womb? It is mentioned as a sign of strange, unnatural disaffection in the ostrich, that it hardens itself against its young ones, [Job xxxix. 16](#). It has a stony heart without love; a flint without fire. God is not an heathen god, a Saturn, to devour his children. It casts an obligation upon the very place where we are born to regard us; and if there be no father known, it ought not only to be our country, but our parent.

Now the creature's deriving its being from God, includes in it two other endearing considerations.

(1.) It puts a certain likeness between God and the creature. The foundation of love is laid in the likeness that is between things: now the likeness that is between the creature and the Creator consists in this, that he has taken it into the participation and society of that great privilege of being: and it is in respect of this that the creature is a copy of God, a rough draught of some perfection that is in his Maker. What is written in a large, fair character in him, is imprinted upon the creature in a small. Now although God loathes and abominates any likeness that we make of him, yet he loves and embraces the likeness that he has drawn of himself. And as, in respect of holiness, it is not the perfection of it only that God accepts,



but he is ready to cherish our very breathings and longings after righteousness; he will embrace purity, not only in practice, but in inclination. So for the perfections of being; though he does absolutely acquiesce in the contemplation of his own, yet he does not despise those weaker draughts of it, visible in created things; but is ready to own whatsoever he sees of himself in the creature: and, like the sun, can, with much serenity, behold his image in the lowest waters. Every thing has a strong interest in that, by which it had its being and beginning.

(2.) Whatsoever comes from God, by way of creation, is good; and so, by reason of the native agreement that is between that and the will of God, there naturally does result an act of love: for where there is nothing but goodness on the creature's part, there can be nothing but love on God's. Although the acts of God's love do not always presuppose a moral goodness; for he loves the persons of the elect, while they are unconverted: yet it is probable, that the acts of dislike presuppose a want of that goodness. Though a man is not always good before God loves him, yet many are so favourable as to think, that he is always evil before he hates him; those especially that are of this judgment, that in the very act of man's reprobation, God did not reprobate him as a man, but as a sinner. Now the creature as such, and immediately issuing from the hands of God, has no evil cleaving to it, to provoke his detestation; but, like a sword, comes shining out of the hands of the artificer, though afterward it chance to gather rust. *God made man upright*; however since, *he has sought out to himself many inventions*. And this is the first consideration that endears the creature to God, viz. the original of its being.

2. The second thing that bespeaks God's love to the creature is, the dependence of its being upon God. As the fruit is produced by the tree, so it hangs upon the tree. If by creation the creature is endeared to God, then much more by its dependence upon him; for this is founded upon a continual creation. Every creature is upheld from relapsing into nothing, by a continual influence of that creative power by which it was made. A moral dependence upon any one, that is, the voluntary placing of all a man's hopes and confidence upon the goodness of such an one, puts a strong obligation upon the party confided in, to employ the utmost of his power and interest to preserve and defend that man. For to desert him who relies upon me; to elude those hopes, that have no refuge but myself; for that reed, upon which I lean, to pierce my hand; this is a thing that ordinary humanity would detest. But now the natural dependence of the creature upon God is much greater, and consequently much more obliging, than the moral dependence of one man upon another; forasmuch as that is necessary, this voluntary, and from choice. If I desert a man that depends upon me, I disappoint his hopes; but if God forsakes the creature, he disappoints his being. Not to give a being to a thing, could be no misery to it; because to be miserable, presupposes first to be: but when it has a being, then to desert or forsake it, this is a calamity, and an evil to that very existence of which God himself was author; and he will not thus deal with the

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creature till he is provoked. The same goodness which did incite him to make a thing before it was, certainly, now it is made, will much more oblige him to preserve it. Not to beget a child, could be no injury to it; but when it is begot, and born, to deny it food and education, this is an inhuman, an unfatherly temper. *He that does not provide for his family*, the Spirit of God counts him *worse than an infidel*, [1 Tim. v. 8](#); and the reason is, because his family has a dependence upon him. The creature's depending upon God, engages him to uphold it with love and mercy. A poor, empty bladder, if we rely upon it, will keep us from sinking: if we hold fast upon any thing, it will rescue us from falling. *He that took Israel, as an eagle does her young, and bore him upon his wings*, as it is elegantly expressed, [Deut. xxxii. 11](#), would he, think you, without cause, have let him fall? This we may be assured of, that those impressions of love and compassion that are in us, are also in God; only with this difference, that in him they are infinite.

3. The third consideration that engages the love of God to the creature is this; that the end of the creature's being is God's glory. Now God, that loves his own glory, must needs also respect the instrument that advances it. There is no artificer, that intends a work, that would break his tools. Why does a man tender and regard his servant, but because he is for his use? The ability and aptness of the creature for the serving of God's use, does induce God so far to preserve him. For he that has a rational respect to the end, must of necessity bear a suitable affection to the means. The being of the creatures stands related by the tie of a natural connection to God's glory; they are the materials of his praise. Hence we have the business excellently stated by the prophet [Isaiah, chap. xxxviii. 18, 19](#), *The grave cannot praise thee; death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down to the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee.* God's glory is the motto inscribed upon every created being; and wheresoever God reads, he owns this superscription. It is all the creature has, under God's hand and seal, to shew for its life. As God stamp a mark upon Cain to secure him from men, so it is this that secures us, in respect of God. Whatsoever we are, we are not our own, but his. We are by nature servants to the interest of his glory; and if my life, my actions are devoted to such an one's service, I may very well claim a maintenance from him whose interest I serve. And thus much of the third thing that endears God's love to the creature, viz. the designation of its being for the use of his glory.

II. I proceed to the second proposition, to shew how sin disengages and takes off God from all those acts of favour, that the relation of a creation engaged him to.

1. It turns that which, in itself, is an obligation of mercy, to be an aggravation of the offence. True it is, to make a creature, to give it being upon a rational ground, is an argument of love. But for a creature to sin against him from whom it had its whole being; and that a puny creature, the first born of nothing, a piece of creeping clay, one whom, as God created, so he might uncreate with a breath; for such an one to fly in his Creator's face! this gives a deeper die to sin; this makes it ten times more sinful. *What, my son! the son of my womb!*

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the son of my vows! dost thou give thy strength to women? What, my creature! the work of my hands! the product of my power! and the object of my care! dost thou sin against me? dost thou dishonour me? The treason of an Absalom, the stab of a Brutus, is doubled by the circumstance of so near a relation. The nearer the party that offends, the distance is so much the wider. *Nemo tam prope, tam proculque*; none so near in respect of alliance, none so far off in respect of the offence. Between friends, the same friendship that passes by some affronts, heightens others. It is the cause why some are pardoned, and why some cannot, ought not to be pardoned. Such an one speaks slightly of me, but my friendship pleads his pardon; yes, but he endeavoured to take away my life, my reputation; the same friendship speaks this injury unpardonable; in [Psalm lv. 12, 13](#), *If it had been an enemy, I could have borne it; but it was thou, mine equal, mine acquaintance*. The relation of a Creator is always very strong, and before sin, this strength appears in love; but after sin, the same strength vents itself in revenge. Where it meets with holiness, it protects; where it meets with sin, it destroys; as the same wind that carries a ship well ballasted, if ill rigged or accoutred, it drowns it. The same strength of constitution that keeps off diseases from the body, when it comes to be infected, and to comply with a disease, quickens its dissolution. The same argument that proves this assertion, by a subtle inversion of the terms, will prove the contrary. The same relation of a Creator, that endears God to the innocent, fires him against a sinner. God looks upon the soul, as Amnon did upon Tamar: while it was a virgin, he loved it; but now it is deflowered, he hates it. We read in the law, that he that cursed his father was to be stoned to death: we do not read, that if he had cursed another, he had been dealt withal so severely. One would have thought, that the nearness of a father would have saved him; but it was this alone that condemned him. Build not therefore upon the sandy foundation of a false surmise of God's mercy as a Creator; for this relation is (as I may so speak) indifferent, and may be determined, as to its influence, either to be helpful or destructive, according to the goodness or badness of the creature. While thou doest well, it will embrace thee; but upon the least transgression, it will confound thee. The same sword that now hangs by thy side, and defends thee, may be one day brought to run thee through.

2. Sin disengages God from shewing love to the creature, by taking away that similitude that is between God and him; which, as has been observed, was one cause of that love. The creature, indeed, still retains that resemblance of God, that consists in being; but the greatest resemblance, that consists in moral perfections, this is totally lost and defaced. A mere existence or being is an indifferent thing, (it is a *rasa tabula*,) that may be coloured over with sin or holiness: and accordingly it receives its value from these; as a picture is esteemed not from the materials upon which it is drawn, but from the draught itself. Holiness elevates the worth of the being in which it is, and is of more value than the being itself. As in scarlet, the bare dye is of greater value than the cloth. Sin debases the being in which it is; and makes the soul more unlike God, in respect of its qualities, than it is like him in respect of its sub-



stance. It is not the alliance of flesh and blood, but the resemblance of virtue, that makes the greatest likeness between the father and the son. Consanguinity and likeness of features will not so much incite him to love, as a dissimilitude, by reason of vice, will cause him to disinherit him. Better have no son, than a prodigal, profane, unclean son; better not to be a man, than an irreligious man; better an innocent nothing, than a sinful being. God has shed some of his perfections upon the natural fabric of the soul, in that he made it a spiritual, immaterial substance, refined from all the dross of body and matter: but the chief perfection of it consisted in this, that he did adorn it with holiness. As the temple of Solomon was glorious, because built with cedar; but its chief magnificence was the over laying it with gold. But now, when this part of God's image is blotted out, he cannot read his likeness in the soul's other perfections. Be the soul ever so spiritual in its substance, yet if it be carnal in its affections; be it ever so purified from the grossness of body, yet if it be polluted with the corruption of sin; it has nothing to shew why God should not disown it, even to its eternal perdition. If we meet with a letter drawn over with filthy, scurrilous, unbecoming lines, the fineness of the paper will not rescue it from the fire. It is not thy strength, thy wit, thy eloquence, that God so much regards; these indeed may adorn thee, but it is thy holiness that must save thee. A sinner appearing before God, adorned with the greatest confluence of natural endowments, is like Agag presenting himself to Samuel in his costly robes: the richness of his attire could not compound for the vileness of his person. When those glorious pleas shall be produced in the court of heaven; *We have prophesied, we have cast out devils, we have wrought wonders*; God shall answer them with one word, weightier than them all, but *ye have sinned*. Howsoever we flatter ourselves, and misjudge of things, yet God will overlook all the natural perfections of the soul, and punish us for want of moral.

3. Sin discharges God from shewing love to the creature, by taking off the creature from his dependence upon God. I know it cannot dissolve its natural dependence: *for in God we live, and move, and have our being*, Acts xvii. 28, whether we will or no. But our moral dependence, which is a filial reliance and recumbency upon God, this it destroys. For in sin the creature quits his hold of God, and seeks to shift for himself, to find his happiness within the centre of his own endeavours, totally departing and apostatizing from God; for sin is properly defined, *aversio a Creatore ad creaturam*. It was an absolute, independent happiness that was aimed at in the first sin, which made it so detestable. Our first parents, they would be as gods, they would have an *αὐτάρκεια*, a self-sufficiency; they would stand upon their own bottom, without the support of divine influence; they would fetch all their happiness from within, without repairing to the bounty of Providence. Now when the creature depends upon God, and yet scorns to own this dependence; but in a high strain of arrogance would derive his satisfaction entirely from himself; this is the highest provocation. For one to live upon an alms, and yet to scorn an alms; to be a proud beggar; through weakness to lean upon another; and yet through pride to pretend to go alone: this is odious

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and in sufferable; a temper made up of those two abominable ingredients, pride and ingratitude. He that pretends to live upon his own means, does not deserve the continuance of his pension: he that will not acknowledge his felicity from his Creator, deserves to lose it. If we depart and quit our reliance upon God, it is but equitable for him to let go his hold of us; if we desire to be miserable, can we blame him, if he punisheth us with the answer of our own desires? God is not so married to us by creation, but if we leave him voluntarily, it may be the just cause of a perpetual divorce. Yea, sin proceeds so far, as that although the creature cannot dissolve its natural dependence upon God, yet there is nothing that it desires more, and it proceeds to attempt it as far as it is able, that is, in a wish. What would the damned, forlorn spirits give to wring themselves out of God's hand by annihilation? What would the devils give for a full discharge from their being? Job speaks the natural desire of a tormented sinner; [Job vi. 8, 9](#), *Oh that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! even that it would please God to destroy me!* And thus we see how sin takes off the creature from its dependence upon God: first, in the commission of sin, he let go his dependence, as to his confidence; and then in the punishment of sin, he would willingly let it go, as to his very being.

4. Sin disengages the love of God to the creature, because it renders the creature useless, as to the end for which it was designed. Things, whose essence and being stand in relation to such an end, have their virtue and value from their fitness to attain it. Every thing is ennobled from its use, and debased as far as it is useless. As long as a man continues an instrument of God's glory, so long his title to life and happiness stands sure, and no longer. But now, sin in scripture, and in God's account, is the death of the soul; [Ephes. ii. 1](#), *We were dead in trespasses and sins.* Now death makes a thing utterly useless, because it renders it totally unactive; and in things that are naturally active, that which deprives them of their action, bereaves them of their use. The soul, by reason of sin, is unable to act spiritually; for sin has disordered the soul, and turned the force and edge of all its operations against God: so that now it can bring no glory to God by doing, but only by suffering, and being made miserable. It is now unfit to obey his commands, and fit only to endure his strokes. It is uncapable by any active communion, or converse with him, to enjoy his love, and a proper object only to bear his anger and revenge. We may take the case in this similitude: A physician or surgeon has a servant; while this servant lives honestly with him, he is fit to be used, and to be employed in his occasions; but if this servant should commit a felony, and for that be condemned, he can then be actively serviceable to him no longer; he is fit only for him to dissect, and make an object upon which to shew the experiments of his skill. So while man was yet innocent, he was fit to be used and employed by God in a way of active obedience; but now having sinned, and being sentenced by the law to death as a malefactor, he is a fit matter only for God to torment, and shew the wonders of his vindictive justice upon. In short, sin has unframed the fabric of the whole man; it has made all the members and

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faculties of his body and soul weapons of unrighteousness, and placed them in open defiance against God. But now God made the world, and the fulness thereof, to display the riches of his glory, and he continues it to this day to advance his great name, and for no other cause. And it is very probable (which is worth our observation) that if other creatures should bring no more glory to God, within the sphere of their actings, than man does, that the world could not stand, but would certainly provoke God to throw it back into confusion. So long therefore as man continues in sin, he is a useless lump, a burden to God that made him, and to the earth that bears him, an usurper of his being, and a devourer of the creatures that do God more honour and service than himself, not able to think, speak, or do any thing for his glory. And can God preserve such a creature with any credit to his goodness? Will he strain the riches of his mercy to the damage of his honour? Man would provide for his credit better than so; certainly therefore the wise God will much more.

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Application.

First use, is to obviate and take off that usual and common argument, that is frequently in the mouths of the ignorant, and in the hearts of the most knowing; that certainly God would never make them to destroy them: and therefore since he has made them, they roundly conclude that he will not destroy them. Erasmus said, that he could not presume so far as to hope for heaven; but he thought God was too merciful to send him to hell. Now the very design of the Spirit, in these words, is to anticipate and forestall this objection, which he knew was apt to rise in the hearts of men, who, upon the hearing of God's fiery judgments, are ready to shelter them selves under such poor, groundless considerations. How does a poor soul strive to dispute and baffle itself into this persuasion! but how feeble and in consequent are all his arguments! God made thee, and formed thee: true; but since thou hast sinned against so dear a relation, this very thing is an argument that he should destroy thee: God has imprinted his image upon thee, but sin has defaced it. God is the potter, and thou the vessel; but when the potter has made a vessel, if it chance to leak, or get a crack, the very same hand that made it, will break it in pieces. Thou art God's possession, a creature designed for his use: true; but sin has made thee totally useless. Thy soul was made an habitation for God himself; but sin and Satan have got it in possession: and when an house or castle is possessed by the enemy, the very owner himself will set it on fire. As long as thou dost remain entire, thou mayest have recourse to God, and he will receive and own thee, upon this score, that thou art his workmanship; but if broken and defiled through sin, he will not own thee upon this account. As when a man makes and sells a watch, while it is entire we may return it, and he will own it, because he made it: but when it is broke, there is no returning it; though it were of his own making, yet he will not receive it. All the wheels, the faculties of the soul, they are disordered and broke; all the motions of it are depraved: and can God, who made nothing but what was good, who gave every thing its due and exact proportion, acknowledge and embrace such a piece of disorder? A child may be so disfigured and de-

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formed, and changed from its native visage by some diseases, that the very father may not know it, but pass it by as none of his. We can now shew nothing but the ruins of our creation, the just argument of our shame before God; but not at all the matter of our plea. We can say, indeed, Here stood God's image, these understandings were the candle of the Lord, these hearts were the entertaining rooms of Christ, these bodies were the temple of the Holy Ghost; but, alas! what does all this amount to, but a *miserum est felicem fuisse*? Does former holiness excuse present impiety? Because God embraced us in our purity, must he love us in our sins? Is any person in love with a face because it was beautiful heretofore? Now the reasons, I conceive, from whence men frame these kind of objections, may be these two.

1. A self-love, and a proneness to conceive some extraordinary perfection in themselves, which may, as I may so speak, compound for their misdemeanours. Certainly, says the proud heart, God could not be without the service and attendance that he receives from me; he could not well want that revenue of honour that he receives from my prayers and praises. Though I may have slipt and sinned, yet the excellency of my being will outweigh the merit of my sin; not at all considering, why it should not be as easy for God to create -a new innocent world, as to preserve an old sinful one. It is natural for every carnal heart, upon the commission of sin, instead of repenting for sin, to look out for some good in itself that may countervail the sin. When it lays its sins in one balance, it will lay its perfections in the other. If it must acknowledge its *magna vitia*, it will take shelter here by opposing *non minores virtutes*. What is spoke of true, evangelical love, may in another sense be said of this self-love, *that it covers a multitude of sins*. The soul will never view any of its sinful actions, but through those that are religious; and we may be very confident, that many, by reflecting upon some of their good performances, have even by them been emboldened to sin, thinking that those have set them so far before hand with God, that the delinquency of a few sins may well be tolerated. Questionless the pharisee could not have devoured widows' houses with so good an appetite, had it not been for his long prayers. And it is as little to be doubted, but that we may ascribe it to the persuasion that many have of their piety and regeneration, that they dare give their consciences scope to practise as they do; and by their actions so notoriously to confute their professions. Thus the soul is apt to deck and paint itself, as Jezebel did, upon the approach of Jehu; and then presently to imagine, that God would fall in love with it. But now the Spirit of God is no where more full, than in the beating down this proud self-esteem; to this intent it expresses the most exact of our services by the vilest of things, in *Isaiah lxiv. 6*, *All our righteousness is compared to filthy rags*; and in *Ezekiel xvi. 5, 6*. the sinner in his natural condition is presented *wallowing and polluted in his blood, to the loathing of his person*. And can we think that these are such amiable objects in God's eye? Can filth and pollution afford any thing that may enamour God's affections? If a sinner did but dwell upon the serious meditation of his exceeding vileness by reason of sin, he would never be able to entertain the least thought of meriting acceptance before God.

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2. The second reason is, our readiness to think that God is not so exceeding jealous of his honour, but he may easily put up the breach of it, without the ruin of his creature. Nay, we are even apt to doubt, whether or no our sins make any breach upon it at all. For alas! his honour is above the reach of our sins; his glory is so solid and entire, that as it is not capable of receiving any addition from our choicest services, so neither of suffering any diminution from our vilest impieties; neither our goodness nor our evil does extend to him. If we do well, what is he the better? and if we sin, he is not at all the worse. We know the very heavens have this royal property, to be impassible from any thing that is below.

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And moreover, what is this sin? Is it not a mere privation? a nothing? so weak, so low, that we can not ascribe any active influence or operation to it? And shall such a nothing, such a mere deficiency, be expiated by nought under the eternal ruin of an immortal soul? Is this such a thing, for which God should keep anger for ever? especially since it is that which gives him so fair an opportunity for the glorifying his dearest attribute, his mercy. For the proper, formal act of mercy is to pardon and to spare: and if the creature had not sinned, how could God have pardoned? Such reasonings as these the soul is apt to mutter out against God. Hence it is that God so often in scripture sets his face against this imagination; he tells us over and over, that he is a jealous God, [Exod. xx. 5.](#) [xxxiv. 14](#); and *that he will in no wise acquit the guilty*, [Nahum i. 3](#). Shall a poor, mortal man, the best of whose glory is but a fading flower. I say, shall he stand so upon the punctilios of his credit, as to vindicate the least breach of his reputation with duel and bloodshed? and shall not the great God vindicate his honour with fire and sword against all transgressors? We shall one day see, that it is not so easy a matter to escape God's revenging justice for sin.

But now to clear off all these pleas and objections of men, I shall state and answer this question, viz.

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Whence is it, that the offence of a child against a parent does not disengage him from acting according to the relation of a father? I speak of ordinary offences; for there are some that do, as it were, even dissolve this relation, as has been already specified in him that cursed his father, that was incorrigible, [Deut. xxi. 20](#). In this case, the hand of the parent was to be first upon him, both in his accusation and execution. But now, for ordinary offences, whence is it, that a father ought not upon these to cast off a child? And yet, the least offence against God so far dissolves the relation, as to discharge him from manifesting himself in any further acts of goodness towards the creature; notwithstanding the mercies of God are infinitely, inconceivably greater than the most tender compassions of an earthly father.

In answer to this, to omit this consideration, that a man owes infinitely more to God than to an earthly father, even in respect of those things that he received from his father; God gave him his life, the parent only conveyed it. And shall we owe as much to the casket that brought the jewel, as to the friend that sent it?

But I say, to pass by this,

1. The reason that every ordinary offence does not disentitle a son to the love of his father, as it does the creature to the protection and favour of his Creator, is not from the obliging nature of that relation beyond the other, but from the law and command of God; which, on this side, commands men to exercise a mutual forgiveness of injuries, and so much more obliges the father freely to forgive his son: and, on the other side, the law says, *that the soul that has sinned, it shall die*. So that God can not, upon the same terms, forgive a sinner: there is a word gone out against him.

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2. Every offence of a child against a parent, though it immediately strikes him, yet it is ultimately resolved not into him, but into God, of whose righteous command and law it is a breach and violation. But every offence against God is ultimately resolved into God, and no other. And therefore a father is not so much concerned in an injury offered him by his son, as God in the offence of the creature; and, consequently, he is not so much provoked by that, to let fall the tenderness of a father, as God to lay aside the affection of a Creator.

3. That which hinders an offence from pardon, is the vindicative justice of him against whom the offence is committed. But there is no such thing as vindicative justice in men one towards another, naturally and from themselves; for they are all equal, and this is founded in God's essential sovereignty. All coercion, (as Grotius observes,) of which punishment is the greatest, being peculiar τῇ ὑπερεχούσῃ ἐξουσίᾳ: and God himself says, *Vengeance is mine*. Wherefore there is not the same reason for God to forgive a sinful creature, that there is for one man to forgive another.

I think these considerations sufficiently clear the question. But before I leave this use, I shall add this one thing, which may more fully state the case between God and the sinner; viz.

When I say the sin of the creature disengages God from shewing him any favour, it is not hence to be gathered, that it must therefore engage him to shew him none; for this was no less to put a bond of restraint upon God, than if we should admit of a contrary obligation. As for those that say, that God, after the sin of man, is so engaged by the necessity of his nature, that he can with no accord to his justice shew him any mercy, till a full satisfaction be paid down; I think they cannot say, that God's giving of Jesus Christ did presuppose any satisfaction given before; which if so, it may be left to the impartial consideration of any one, Whether for God, being so offended by man, yet upon the free, spontaneous motion of his own will, to find out, give, and constitute a mediator for him, be not as great or greater mercy, than, when a mediator is given, to accept of a satisfaction from him in man's behalf?

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Second use. This may serve to inform us of the cursed, provoking nature of sin. Certainly there is something in it more than ordinary, that should make the great and merciful God take a poor creature, and shake it almost into nothing, to rid his hands of it, to disown and let it fall out of his protection into endless, unspeakable woe and misery; that should make

a Creator the executioner of his own creature; a loving father the butcher of his own child; that should sour the sweet relation of a maker into the terrible name of a revengeful destroyer. O let him that commits sin with pleasure and delight, consider this, and tremble; him that can please himself in his drunkenness, his uncleanness, poor creature! Does such an one know what he is now doing? He is now fixing the insupportable wrath of his great Creator against his poor guilty soul. He is now dissolving that bond of love, by which alone his Maker had bound him to himself. Wouldest thou have all the poison and malignity of thy sin strained into one expression, take it thus in short; it is able to make thy Creator be come thine enemy.



Third use. This may inform us under what notion we are to make our addresses to God; not as a Creator, for so he is no ways suitable to our necessities. He is offended and provoked, and we stand as outlaws and rebels to our Maker. Under this notion, no sinner *can see God, and live*. He is, to such an one, a consuming fire, an everlasting burning, no thing but wrath and vengeance. And can we find any comfort in a consuming fire? Is there any refreshment in an everlasting burning? If we cast ourselves upon his mercy, his justice will break forth upon us, and devour us. But you will then say, What shall poor sinners do? whither shall they repair? Why there is yet hope: God's wisdom has reconciled his justice to his mercy, and consequently us to himself. And now he represents himself under a more desirable relation, as *a reconciled God*. And although, under the former relation, he drives us from him; yet, under this, he tenderly invites us to him. He therefore that trembles at the name of an offended Creator, yet let him comfort himself in the title of a reconciled Father. Though we have cause to dread the tribunal of his justice, yet let us come confidently to the throne of his mercy: let us come freely, and spread all our wants before him; lay open our complaints, tell him all the distresses and secret anguishes of our burdened consciences. Believe it, we cannot be more ready to tell them, than he is to hear them; nor he to hear them, than to relieve them. Let us anchor our hopes, our trust, our confidence, upon his goodness: for although, as our Creator, he will not save us; yet, as our Redeemer, he will.



And could we now have a greater or an happier instance of his reconciliation to us, than the present solemnity that we are engaging in? in which we have the very arts and inventions of omniscience to endear us to himself. Could we have a more pregnant demonstration of a reconciled God, than a sacrificed Son; nay, than the blood of that Son? and that so mysteriously, and yet so really, conveyed to us? that he does not only invite us to come to him, but to come within him; not only to an embrace, but to an union; and by ineffable and seraphic incorporations for *us to be in him*, and for *him to be in us*: not only endearing, but amazing us with his affection; and at the same time feeding our necessities, and entertaining our admiration.

Only let us see that we so come to him, that we do not put him to receive sins as well as sinners. For though Christ is willing to make us part of his body, yet he is not willing to

unite himself to ulcers and putrefaction. And therefore he that comes hither with a Judas's heart and hypocrisy, will find a Judas's entertainment: and though he may receive the morsel from Christ's hand, yet he will find that the Devil will enter and go along with it. It will be only the nutriment of his sin, and the repast of his corruption. He that comes to this dreadful duty profane, unclean, or intemperate, will go away with quicker dispositions and livelier appetites to those sins. Every corruption shall rise and recover itself, like a giant refreshed with wine. For Christ has given the Devil full commission to enter into such swine, and to drive them headlong to their own destruction.



SERMON XXI.

MATTHEW xix. 22.

When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

IT is a truth of general acknowledgment, because of universal experience, that there is no misery comparable to that which follows after a near access to happiness; nor any sorrow so quick and pungent, as that which succeeds a preconceived, but disappointed joy. Such a sorrow we have here; for certainly it must be no small matter, that can make a man sorrowful in the midst of great possessions.

We have this young heir driving a bargain with Christ, and that for no less a thing than eternal life; and driving it so near a close, that only one thing was lacking; a thing, though perhaps in itself great, yet, compared to the purchase, small and inconsiderable: in the [fourteenth verse](#), *Go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven*; here was as vast a disproportion between the price and the purchase, as there is distance between earth and heaven.

Neither was the proposal unreasonable, because usually practised, even by the most worldly; it being frequent with men to sell an estate in one place, to buy another in a more convenient. So that he was not so much commanded to leave, as to change his possessions. And therefore, the rejection of this offer was, upon the best terms of reason, inexcusable; both because the purchase was so advantageous, and the person, to whom it was offered, so rich.

Now the words here importing the young man's sorrow, upon something enjoined him by Christ; the natural method of proceeding will require that we reflect upon the command, that was the occasion of this sorrow: and we shall find that it branched itself into these three parts or degrees.

1. The first was this; *Go, sell that thou hast*. This was not the duty itself, but the preparative and introduction to it. For barely to sell his estate, was only to alter, not to diminish it, and, as we usually say, to turn a long estate into a broad.

2. The second branch was, *Give to the poor*. It was not to throw it away, like the morose philosopher: for the duty here urged, was not to impoverish himself, but to benefit others; not so much to cast it from him, as to secure it to him in other hands.

3. The third and last article of the command was, *Come and follow me*; without which, the other two were utterly insignificant: like two propositions that conclude nothing; or like preparing for a journey, without setting forth. It is the taking up of the cross, that makes our following of Christ feasible; but it is our following of Christ, that makes our taking up of the cross acceptable.



We have here seen the command; and we may be sure that Christ, whose precepts never outweigh their motives, would second it with an argument no less ponderous. And therefore, here he enforces it with a reason as commanding as the precept; even the delight and aim of all created beings, perfection. *If thou wilt be perfect, go sell that thou hast, &c.* Which words, being much abused by the papists, may worthily challenge a further explication.

They, to establish their works of supererogation, have invented a distinction between precepts and counsels. A precept they define a command, so obliging to duty, that the omission of it obliges to punishment. But a counsel not so much commands, as recommends some perfection, beyond what is enjoined in the law; for the omission of which, a man shall not incur punishment; and for the performance of which, he shall have a more eminent reward: and therefore it is called a counsel of evangelical perfection.

That popery undermines the law, and perverts the gospel, we are not now to learn: but in this it is hard to judge which is greater, the arrogance or the absurdity. The first, in that they pretend to surpass the limits of all legal perfection: the second, in that they assert, that there may be some perfection that is not contained in the law, which is the unalterable rule and standard of all created holiness.

Let them strive, and strain, and stretch the very sinews of their souls to the highest pin of austerity and alms; yet, unless they can prove that this is to love God more than *with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength*, (which the very letter of the law exacts,) all their evangelical perfection is already drank up and forestalled in the vast comprehensive verge and latitude of the precept. And therefore, this distinction of precepts and counsels is illogical and ridiculous, one member of the distinction grasping within itself the other.

Now to these counsels they refer this injunction given to the young man, to *sell all, and give to the poor*; which they further prove, because to the performance of it Christ promises not only heaven, but *treasure in heaven*, which imports a more accumulate degree of felicity. But to this

I answer, that the word *treasure in heaven* does not of necessity signify any such superlative degree or pitch of happiness, but simply the thing itself; which appears from this, that the nonperformance of this precept not only degrades from an higher degree of glory, but utterly excludes from any entrance into it at all, as in the twenty-fourth verse.

But you will say, if this be not a counsel, but a command, to which of the ten is it to be reduced? I answer, to the first, of serving God with all the heart and with all the strength.

You will reply then, that all stand obliged to sell their estates, inasmuch as the obligation of that command is universal.

I answer, that this precept commands some things absolutely, which oblige all; some things only hypothetically, that is, in case God shall discover it to be his will to be obeyed



in such particular instances: and consequently oblige there only, where God shall make such discoveries.

And here we must observe, that there is a vast difference between a new precept and a new instance of obedience; one *esse formale* (which is that that gives unity to the precept) may extend itself to the whole objective latitude of many undiscovered particulars.

The precept commands us, in general, *to love God with all our hearts*. Christ here requires this young man to shew that love to God in this particular in stance of selling his estate: so that, though the command of loving God extend to all, yet the determination and application of it to this matter is particular, and consequently but of a particular obligation.

Having thus cleared our way to the words them selves, we may observe in them these four things considerable.

1. The person making the address to Christ, who was one whose reason was enlightened to a solicitous consideration of his estate in another world.
2. The thing sought for in this address, viz. eternal life.
3. The condition upon which it was proposed, and upon which refused; namely, the sale and relinquishment of his temporal estate.
4. His behaviour upon this refusal; *he departed sorrowful*.

Having thus, as it were, analyzed the text into its several distinct parts, I shall here resume and join them together in this one proposition, viz.

He that deliberately parts with Christ, though for the greatest and most suitable worldly enjoyment, if but his natural reason is awakened, does it with much secret sting and remorse.

In the prosecution of this, I shall do these two things.

I. I shall shew whence it is, that a man, acted by an enlightened reason, finds such reluctance and regret upon his rejection of Christ.

II. I shall shew the causes why, notwithstanding this regret that the conscience feels upon its rejection of Christ, it is yet brought in the issue to reject him.

I. For the first of these; that an enlightened reason is affected with such remorse, upon its rejection of Christ: it may proceed from these causes.

1. The first may be taken from the nature of conscience, that is apt to recoil upon any error, either in our actions or our choice.

There are some innate principles of *turpe* and *honestum*; the standing causes of all religion, that supervise all our actions: and according to their agreement to, or deviation from these principles, there follows in the soul a complacency or regret.

And the verdict of these is so infallible, that a man may know the good or evil of his actions, by the temper of his mind after their performance. After a good action, though never so difficult, so grim, and unpleasant in the onset, yet what a light some, refreshing complacency does it leave upon the mind? what a fragrancy, what a cheerfulness upon the spirits? So, on the contrary, an action morally evil and irregular, though recommended with



the greatest blandishment and sweetness of allurements to the appetite, yet how empty, and false, and hollow is it found upon the commission! What a sad damp is there upon the heart! what a confusion and displeas'dness covers the whole soul!

A man no sooner displeases God, but he presently displeases himself; according to that excellent and divine saying of the satirist; *Prima est haec ultio, quod se iudice nemo nocens absolvitur*. Hence the expression of *forum conscientiae* is not a metaphor, but a truth; for there is a severe inquest, an undeniable evidence, an unanswerable charge, and a sudden and a dreadful sentence given by conscience.

No sooner is the action past, but conscience makes the report. As soon as David cut off a piece of Saul's robe, how quickly did his heart smite him! An impure heart, like a foul gun, never vents itself in any sinful commissions, but it recoils.

It is impossible to sequester and divide sin from sorrow. That which defiles, will as certainly disturb the soul. As when mud and filth is cast into a pure fountain, it is not so much said to pollute, as to trouble the waters.

Things good and reasonable have a right to our choice, and a claim to our obedience. There is that overawing majesty, that commanding regency in piety to the conscience, that there is in truth to the intellect. Conscience will not be defied: no stifling the first notions of good and evil, the necessary and eternal dictates of reason.

And this is one cause of the remorse that a sinner feels upon his rejection of Christ. And do you think that this young man had not the experience of this? did not his conscience vex and quarrel with him for his sinful and absurd choice? As soon as ever he turned his back, these thoughts dogged him at the heels. He departed indeed, but it was sorrowful, his conscience ringing him many sad peals within, hitting him in the teeth with the murder of his soul; that he had foolishly and irrationally bartered away eternity for a trifle, and lost a never-returning opportunity: an opportunity, in its improvement unvaluable, and in its refusal irrecoverable.

2. The second cause of this trouble and reluctancy, that men find in the very instant of their rejecting Christ, is taken from the usual course of God's judicial proceeding in this matter; which is to clarify the eye of reason to a clearer sight of the beauties and excellencies of Christ, in the very moment and critical instant of his departure. This is, as it were, a lightening before death, a short opening of the understanding before he shuts it for ever.

For when the affections have resolved upon a refusal of Christ, it is but just with God to tantalize and vex the understanding with a livelier discovery of a forsaken advantage.

And here undoubtedly God has many ways of working upon the understanding, even beyond the understanding; and can affect it with a sudden, instantaneous view of a good, which he no sooner discovers, than withdraws: which, though it enlightens, and, as it were, gilds the apprehension, yet it changes not the will.



It is like a sudden lightening, that flashes in the face, but alters not the complexion: it is rather vision than persuasion. God here represents the beauties of the kingdom of heaven to the sinner, as Satan did the beauty and glory of this world to Christ, by a sudden, transient representation; which, we know, did rather amuse than persuade him: it struck his apprehension, but never changed his resolution.

And that this dealing of God should effect no more upon the mind, is suitable to its proper design and purpose; it being intended by God not to inform, but to afflict the reason: that since it refused a full draught of the waters of life, it might, before the final loss of them, have its memory quickened with a taste.

Now this clearer, transient discovery of Christ made to the sinner, in the instant of his rejecting him, is another cause that whets the sting, that enhances the vexation, and sends him away sorrowful; for the clearer the apprehension of a good, the quicker is the sense of its loss.

3. The third and last cause of the anxiety that a sinner feels upon his relinquishment of Christ, if his reason be enlightened, is because there is that in Christ and in the gospel, even as they stand in opposition to the best of such enjoyments, that answers the most natural and generous discourses of reason.

For the proof of which, I shall produce two known principles of reason, into which the most severe, harsh, and mortifying commands of the gospel are by clear and genuine consequence resolved.

(1.) The first is, that the greatest calamity is to be endured, rather than the least sin to be committed. That this principle grows upon the stock of bare natural reason, may be demonstrated by the united testimony of those, who had no other light but that of reason; all sealing to the truth of this, that the evil of sin is greater than the evil of pain or affliction.

So that it grew into a standing maxim in their philosophy, that no wicked man was happy. But he that is wicked may be rich, learned, beautiful, victorious: he may engross all the perfections, and the very quintessence of nature. It is clear therefore, that their reason told them that these were not happiness; since, notwithstanding these, a man might be wicked, and consequently, upon their own principle, not happy.

Hence Cicero reports, that Socrates would often curse him, that first made that triple division of good, into *an honest, a pleasing, and profitable*; as accounting the pleasing and the profitable, so far as it cut off from honesty, to lose the very nature of good. But now to state a species so, that it should carry in it a negation of, or a contrariety to its genus, is certainly, upon all principles of logic, absurd and preposterous.

The happiness of every thing is to act suitably to its nature; and reason tells us, that those actions most perfect nature, that perfect the best part of it, the soul. All external miseries and enjoyments can not reach this, but the morality of our actions does. Every sin,

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every moral irregularity, does as really imprint an indelible stain upon the soul, as a blot falling upon the cleanest paper.

The satirist calls virtue the end and design of living, the *vivendi causam*; and to save one's life with the loss of one's innocence, is to purchase the means with the loss of the end.

Cicero, in the first of his Offices, peremptorily asserts, that nothing can be stated rightly in that subject, but by those *qui honestatem propter se dicunt expetendam*. Seneca is full of the like assertions. And however they might live below what they spoke, and their practice contradict their principles, yet their principles discovered their reason.

Having thus proved, that natural reason suggests the choice of the greatest misery before the least sin; as being a thing in itself irregular, and therefore irrational, and consequently contrary to nature: it follows, that we are equally to choose it, rather than to engage in that, which by certain and native consequence will occasion sin. For the same reason will prove, that whatsoever is done or suffered against sin itself, holds as well against the immediate causes of sin.

If reason tells me, that it is more misery to be covetous than to be poor, as our language, by a peculiar significance of dialect, calls the covetous man *the miserable man*; and if I find that retaining my wealth, I cannot avoid covetousness; the same reason that tells me, I must avoid the sin, will convince me also, that I am to wash my hands of the temptation. And had the philosopher thrown his wealth into the sea upon this motive, it was more custom than reason that vouched his action ridiculous; it being only a throwing overboard his riches, to keep his conscience from shipwreck.

That reason which tells one, in honour it is better to be despised than to be proud, if with his honours he cannot but be proud, if the popular air will get in, and taint all; why, the same reason will command him to lay them down, and rationally to trample upon them: for if we dread being caught, it is absurd walking upon the snare.

Now what did Christ enjoin in this seemingly severe command to the young man, that a natural reason, acting naturally, might not upon this principle have enforced? For doubtless he saw him so riveted into a confidence and love of his possessions, and perhaps foresaw what he neither did nor could, that they would certainly occasion luxury, epicurism, with all its impure consequences; and that therefore there was no remedy by plastering, but by cutting off the sore; nor by allowing him the use of his possessions, when he saw something in his temper, or the circumstances of his life, that would unavoidably necessitate their abuse.

And without question, the young man who, from Christ's miracles and life, could not but collect his intimate acquaintance with the mind of God, could not but collect also, that he would propose no command, but of which he knew an excellent reason. No wonder therefore, if he rejected it with reluctance; and if this rejection, being contrary to reason, was troublesome: for trouble is, when the object grates upon the faculty, either by its disproportion or contrariety.



And thus much for the first principle of reason, upon which the severest commands of the gospel do proceed.

(2.) A second principle is this; that a less good is to be forsaken for a greater: an aphorism attested to by the natural, untaught, universal judgment of reason. And this is so clear, that those who observe how the will is drawn by its object, find that in choice, a less good compared to a greater, is rejected, not formally as a less good, but as absolutely bad.

Hence all deliberation in choice is caused by our apprehension of an equality of goodness, in two things proposed; and as the disproportion grows clearer and clearer, a man begins less to deliberate, and more to determine. But where this disparity of less and greater is evident, there deliberation has no place, but determination is immediate. And this is the reason of the thing from philosophy.

Add weight to one scale, and the balance will no longer be indifferent which way to incline. Did ever any man in his wits prefer brass before gold, a pebble before a pearl? The same inclination that desires good, does as naturally desire the best. He that deliberates and doubts, whether ten pounds be better than five, may as well question whether it be more than five. Do you think, when Samuel told Saul of the kingdom, that he was any longer troubled for the asses? Or that when David had received the sceptre, he was solicitous about his shepherd's crook?

Suspense in the choice, is from indifference in the object, when both parts are equally attractive: like a needle between two loadstones, it inclines to both, but it adheres to neither; but lay it between a load stone and a flint, and you shall quickly see to which it clings.

Now to reduce this principle to the case in hand, we are to demonstrate two things.

1st, That the good promised by our Saviour to the young man was really greater than that which was to be forsook for it. The greatest, the severest, and most unpracticable duty of Christianity, is enforced upon this very principle of reason: as in [Matt. v. the cutting off the right hand, and the plucking out the right eye](#), is not urged upon the bare obligation of duty, but upon this dictate of reason, that it is really better. In the [29th and 30th verses](#), *It is better* (συνφέρει γάρ, it is profitable for thee) *to go blind and maimed to heaven, than having both eyes and both hands to be thrown into hell*. It is an evangelical conclusion, drawn from a natural medium of self-preservation.

For what person of sobriety and recollection would not crucify his sin rather than damn his soul? and endure the severity, and live under the discipline of a mortifying precept, than fry eternally under the flame and fire of a condemning sentence?

There is no proportion between the miseries or the felicities of this life, with those that are exhibited to us by Christ in the gospel; and where the disparity of things is so great, as to meet our first apprehensions, there to make parallels is superfluous, and to produce proofs rather supposes the case doubtful, than makes it at all clearer.

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Christ opposed eternal life to the young man's possessions; and what compare is there between these upon terms of bare reason? between the narrow compass of a few moments, and the vast spaces of eternity? between the froth and levity of these comforts, and between an exceeding weight of glory, between durable, solid, massy happiness?

What equality between the life of a traveller and the reign of a prince? between the transient titillations of a bewitched, sickly appetite, and those in effable pleasures that stream eternally from the beatific vision?

Reason can say nothing for one before the other, unless perhaps it may reply, that a present good is rationally to be preferred before a future. But to this I answer, that a good is not barely to be measured by its immediate presentiality; but by its adequate coexistence to the soul, whose duration being immortal, reaches more to the future, than it possesses of the present. And this we have to say of the greatest temporal happiness, that though it is present, yet it will quickly be past; and of that which is eternal, that though it be now future, yet it will once be always present; and so even upon this score also it is to be preferred.

We see therefore that natural light joins in with divine revelation, acknowledging the goods of a future estate, incomparably more desirable than any in this. So that when Christ gave this command, reason echoed back the same; and together with the voice redoubled the obligation.

2dly, The second thing to be demonstrated is, that the good promised by our Saviour was not only greater in itself, but also proposed as such with sufficient clearness of evidence, and upon sure, undeniable grounds. For though a thing be really better in itself, yet if it does not appear to be so, no man can be blamed for not embracing it. Now it being proved above, that the eternal life promised by Christ did by infinite degrees of difference exceed the young man's revenues; the only thing remaining was, whether he promised it upon such grounds, that in reason he ought to have believed him.

Here, to omit other grounds and arguments, the truth of the gospel seems chiefly to be proved upon these two grounds.

1. The exact fulfilling of prophecies in the person of Christ.
2. His miraculous actions.

1. For the first of these, it cannot be denied, but that it affords a solid proof to those that will be convinced; but not so convincing to a sceptical disputer, or to an obstinate Jew. Forasmuch as those prophecies make the kingdom of the Messiah, as it is represented in the letter of the scripture, far different from what it fell out to be in the person of Christ; so that we cannot apply them to him, but by a mystical, anagogical explication: the liberty of which they may choose whether or no they will grant us; and if they should deny it, perhaps we could not so easily disprove them.

2. But, secondly, for his miracles: the convincing strength of these was upon all grounds of reason undeniable; and that upon these two most confessed principles.

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(1.) That they did exceed any natural, created power, and therefore were the immediate effects of a divine.

(2.) That God cannot attest, or by his power bear witness to a lie.

Now, when Christ avouched to the world such precepts, promises, and threatenings for truths; and to prove his words cured the lame and the blind, raised the dead, stilled the winds and the seas with a word, fed four thousand with three or four loaves; and all this before his enemies, who spitefully, and therefore thoroughly sifted all his actions, and yet confessed the miracle: if, I say, Christ did these miracles to confirm his doctrine; either God must have employed his divine power to ratify and confirm a falsity, or the doctrine so confirmed must needs be a truth. This to me seems so pregnant, so full of convincing evidence, that it leaves the unbeliever inexcusable.

Undoubtedly, Christ knew his own strongest argument, when he still remits his subtlest and most inquisitive enemies to his miracles; as in [John v. 36](#), *My works bear witness of me*; and in [John xiv. 11](#), *Believe me for the works' sake*. And I think I may truly avouch, that if the grounds upon which the gospel is proposed to our belief, were not sufficient to convince our reason, no man would stand bound to believe it.

Questionless in this very instance, the young man's reason, upon this severe and startling command of Christ, could not but discourse the case in this manner:

“He positively tells me, that if I would obtain eternal life, I must sell my estate, and give it all to the poor: is this true, or is it not? If not, and if he only deludes me, how could he back his words with such works as apparently carry in them the finger of God? For God does not hear sinners, he cannot lend the use of his power to a sycophant, to a deceiver; therefore certainly as what he does cannot but be the works of God, so what he says cannot but be the mind of God; and consequently eternal life, which he promises, will be a thing of certain event: and since I cannot have it otherwise, but by relinquishing my temporal estate, relinquish it I must, or never obtain it.”

Here observe, that his reason having convinced itself, beyond all evasion, of the truth of Christ's words, and consequently of the necessity of his own obedience; his will not being able to comply with that command as good and convenient, which his reason did enforce as true and necessary, he departed sorrowful; there was a tumult in his soul, his judgment and his will were together by the ears: and hereupon he was full of secret trouble and horror, upon the terrifying, irksome, lashing presages of a miserable eternity.

And thus much for the first general head, viz. to shew, whence it is that an enlightened reason finds such regret in its rejection of Christ.

But now it may be naturally inquired, that if there is so much trouble and reluctancy upon an awakened reason, when it breaks and parts with Christ; whence comes it to pass that they break and part at all? If they cannot bid farewell but with tears in their eyes, what necessity is there but that they may forbear parting, and so prevent the sorrow?

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And this introduces me to the second general head proposed to be insisted on, which is,

II. To shew the causes, that, notwithstanding all this remorse of conscience, the soul is yet brought in the issue to reject, and shake hands with Christ.

(1.) The first cause is from this, that the perceptions of sense overbear the discourses of reason. Reason discoursing upon grounds of religion, builds only upon another world; but sense fixes upon this. And since religion borrows much from reason, and reason itself has all conveyed to it by sense; it is no wonder, if all knowledge and desire resolves into sense, as its first foundation.

And here it is unfortunately verified, that *the elder must serve the younger*; that understanding must veil to sense; that the eye must do obeisance to the window, and discourse submit to sensation.

Yet thus it is, sense rebels against reason, and like those captains among the Israelites, it slays its master, and reigns in his stead. Though reason would argue the soul into obedience, by mediums grounded upon divine revelation; yet sense more forcibly persuades to sin, upon the undeniable experiment of the sweetness of worldly objects: which indeed prevail not because they are more convincing, but because more suitable; not that they satisfy our judgment, but that they close with our condition.

And herein properly consists the difficulty of believing; that we must part with a good, which we see, taste, and enjoy, for a good that is invisible, and of which there is no idea conveyed to the apprehension; which therefore comes recommended to our desires at a great disadvantage.

The happiness of heaven, for which we are to forego all, is said to be the vision of God, which we find hardly desirable, because not intelligible. For we cannot imagine, and frame in our minds, what it is to see God, since he never was nor can be seen by our senses.

The young man desired eternal life; but he had no notion of the pleasure of it, what kind of thing it was: but he knew and found the sweetness of an estate, so that the sensible impressions of this quickly overcame and swallowed up the weak and languid conceptions that he had of the other.

In short, the very condition of our nature stakes us down, both to the judgment and the inclination of sense: for as there is nothing to any purpose in the understanding, but what was first in the sense; so there is scarce any thing in the will, but what has first passed the appetite.

And this is the reason, that men, though convinced of the excellency of Christ, yet rather choose the world, of which they have such strong, lively, and warm apprehensions. Sense and appetite out vote reason, in which thing alone is summed up the misery of our nature,



and the very cause that so few are saved. For what man almost is there in the world, who, upon due observation of his actions, does not find, that his appetite oftener foils his judgment, than his judgment overrules his appetite?

(2.) The second cause or reason of this final rejection of Christ, is from the prevailing opposition of some corrupt affection: which being predominant in the soul, commands the will, and blears the eye of the judgment; shewing it all things in its own colour, by a false and a partial representation. It is through the tyranny of these affections, that when the will goes one way, the practice is forced another.

Come to the sensual and voluptuous person, and convince him that there is a necessity of his bidding farewell to all inordinate pleasure, in order to his future happiness; perhaps you gain his reason, and in some measure insinuate into his will: but then his sensual desire interposes, and outvotes and unravels all his convictions. As when by much ado a vessel is forced and rowed some pretty way contrary to the tide, presently a gust of wind comes, and beats it further back than it was before.

Come to a covetous, worldly man, and convince him, that Christ invites him, and he must come; yet covetousness will stand forth, and tell you, that he has bought a farm or a yoke of oxen, and they draw him another way, and he cannot come. And the truth is, it is impossible that he should, till his corruption is subdued, and the bias of his affections turned.

If Christ ever wins the fort of the soul, the conquest must begin here: for the understanding and will seem to be like a castle or fortified place; there is strength indeed in them, but the affections are the soldiers who manage those holds; the opposition is from these: and if the soldiers surrender, the place itself, though never so strong, cannot resist.

And this probably was the case of this young man: had his affection been true to his reason, had he not been worldly as well as rich, Christ and he had never parted for a piece of land, that is, for such a compass of dirt. But the ruling corruption of his mind, the peculiar minion of his affections, was worldliness; and to tell this temper of mind of selling all, that he might be happy, it would have been to that as absurd and ridiculously incredible, as if he had bid him sell and give away all, that he might be rich.

This therefore is the second cause, that though reason and judgment would veil to Christ, yet the man does not, because his affections lord it. It is indeed natural for a man to have the dominion over the acts of his will: but he is in this thing like the centurion; though he has some under him, and bids such an one go, and he goes, yet he is also a man under authority himself: though he commands his will, yet he is commanded by his affections.

And perhaps this may be one reason, not contemptible, of the different judgments of men concerning the freedom or servitude of the will; that they are not so much determined by arguments from without, as by experience from within; that some have strong natural passions and affections, others but weak and moderate: the former of which finding their



will so potently swayed by such passions, think it is not free, and cannot but do what it does. Others finding their affections to have so small an ascendant over their will, by reason of this their natural weakness, are apt to think that they have free will, and a perfect indifference to all actions, to accept or to refuse whatsoever is proposed to them. This doubtless may be one great cause of men's disagreement in this point.

In sum, the economy of the soul in this case is like a public council sitting under an armed force; let them consult and vote what they will, yet they must act as the army and the tumult will have them. In this sense every soldier is a commander: in like manner, let both the judgment and the will be for Christ, yet the tumult of the affections will carry it; and when they cannot out-reason the conscience, they will out-cry it.

(3.) The third cause, inducing men to relinquish Christ contrary to the judgment of their conscience, is the force and tyranny of the custom of the world. It is natural for all men to live more by example than precept; and it is the most efficacious enforcement of duty, to clothe it in a precedent. As a physician by his receipts, persuasions, and discourses cannot win a froward patient to take a bitter potion; but by drinking of it himself, he presently overcomes and shames him into an imitation.

It is the world, and the fashion of it, that ruins souls. It is the shame of men, and the vogue of the times, that frights men out of their consciences: and could we see the secret movings and reasonings of men's hearts, when Christ by the convictions of his Spirit debates the case between himself and the soul, we should see the non-conversion of most men chargeable upon this very cause, and that they miss of salvation upon no other account in the world, than that it is the fashion to be damned.

Christ easily runs down the swearer, the drunkard, and the epicure, and convinces them of the wretched destructive consequences of their riots: but then, this whispers them another lesson; What would the world say of me, should I renounce my garb and jollity, and sneak into a course of severe and religious living? How would my companions despise and post me for a base, pusillanimous spirit, as void of the generosity and air of courtship, and a stranger to the genius of true nobility!

And this temptation is so much the stronger, because it is founded upon the most unyielding corruption of our nature, which is pride; a quality, which will put a man upon doing any thing to keep up the post of his station and reputation in the world: hereupon, if it comes to a jumble and competition, gentility must go before Christianity, and fashion take the wall of religion.

It was this that made the Jews suppress their convictions; [John xii. 42, 43](#), *Many believed in Christ, but they did not profess him openly, because they feared being put out of the synagogue; for it is added, they loved the praise of men.* This sent Nicodemus to Christ by night; the struggles of his conscience between conviction and shame made him, upon the former of these, venture to do what the latter of these would not let him own.

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And amongst other dissuasives from following of Christ, the young man could not but be assaulted with such as these: What! part with all for a new notion of another world? sell land to buy hope? be preached out of my estate, and worded out of such fair farms and rich possessions? And all this to follow a despised person, hungry and naked, and perhaps come at length to beg an alms at my own door? to be the talk of every table, to be scorned of my enemies, and not pitied by my friends; to be counted a fool, an idiot, and fit to be begged, did I not beg myself? No, I cannot bear it; this is intolerable.

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Now observe, here was the eye of the needle that could not be passed; here Christ and he broke; the power of custom, and the quick apprehensions of shame, staved him off from salvation. He would do like the world, though he perished with it; swim with the stream, though he was drowned in it; rather go sociably to hell, than in the uncomfortable solitude of precise singularity to heaven; the jollity of the company made him overlook the broadness and danger of the way.

Precedency is not only alluring, but authentic: for can a man have any greater warrant for the reasonableness of an action, than the practice of the universe? But certainly, there will be a time one day, when a man shall curse himself for not having had the courage to - outbrave and trample upon the common apprehensions and censures of the world, when Christ and that stood rivals for his soul; and for having been so stupidly a coward, as to be baffled of his salvation by words and opinion.

Now the inferences and deductions from the words thus discussed are these.

1. We gather hence the great criterion and art of trying our sincerity; which is, by the test of such precepts as directly reach our peculiar corruptions. Observe the excellent method that Christ took to convince this person. Had he tried him by a precept of temperance, chastity, or just dealing, he had never sounded the bottom of his heart; for the civility of his life would have afforded a fair and satisfying reply to all these: but when he came close to him, and touched upon his heart-string, his beloved possessions, the man quickly shews himself, and discovers the temper of his spirit more by the love of one particular, endeared sin, than by his forbearance of twenty, to which he stood indifferent.

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Every man's sincerity is not to be tried the same way. He that should conclude a man pious, because not covetous, would bring but a short argument; for perhaps he may be lustful or ambitious, and the stream be altogether as strong and violent, though it runs in a different channel.

The reason of this assertion is, because no man bears an equal propensity to all sins. There is not only a contrariety between vice and virtue, but also between one vice and another. Nay, perhaps, the distance between the two latter is far the greater; forasmuch as there is a longer passage from extreme to extreme, than from an extreme to the middle, which we know is the situation of virtue. No wonder, therefore, since a man's corrupt appetite

bears not an equal inclination to all sins, that it is not equally to be tried by all precepts. Things peculiar and specific are those that must distinguish and discover.

Now as in a tree, it is the same sap and juice that spreads itself into all that variety of branches; some straight, some crooked, some of this figure, some of that: so it is the same stock and furniture of natural corruption, that shoots forth into that great diversity of vices, that exert such different operations in different tempers. And as it is the grand office of judgment to separate and distinguish, and so to proportion its applications; so here in is the great spiritual art of a prudent ministry, first to learn a man's proper distemper, and then to encounter it by a peculiar and suitable address. Reprehensions that are promiscuous are always in effectual.

But much more ineffectual, if not also absurd, is a reprehension misplaced. He that should preach damnation to prodigality and intemperance before a company of usurers, what did he else but administer indirectly an occasion to them, to measure their piety by their distance from that vice; while, in the mean time, they stood chargeable with a worse. A man may, with as much propriety, and success of action, angle for birds, or lay lime-twigs to catch fish, as think to convince a man of the sin of prodigality, by loud and sharp declamations against covetousness.

Both, indeed, are sins; but their particular quality makes their agreement, in the general nature of sin, scarce considerable. Was a minister to deal with a luxurious, debauched congregation, how toothless and insipid would it be to make harangues against faction; a sin wholly of another nature, and dwelling in another disposition.

When Paul preached before Felix, he might have directed his sermon against idolatry and superstition, against heresy, or against rebellion; but he chose rather to discourse of *justice, temperance, and of judgment to come*. Why? but because he determined his subject by the temper of his auditor, whose injustice in taking bribes, and whose lust in keeping another man's wife, made him fit to be charged home with a severe and searching discourse of the contrary virtues? Which we know so struck his conscience, like lightning, both for its force and insinuation, that it sent him away trembling: as Christ before him, by the like methods of discourse, sent this young man away sorrowful.

Now it concerns every man to get the best assurance he can of his sincerity; to attain which, he must follow the method that Christ used towards this young candidate for eternal life. He must arraign his corruption before that precept that particularly strikes at it; otherwise he will find, that he puts a fallacy upon his conscience, if he misapplies the rule; and if his sin being theft, he tries himself by a law made against murder.

2. The issue of the whole action, in the young man's not closing with Christ's proposals about eternal life, and his sorrowful departure thereupon, lays before us a full account of that misery which attends a final dereliction of Christ. Now the happiness that man is capable

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of being twofold, temporal and eternal, and misery being properly a privation of happiness, the greatness of this misery consists in this, that it adequately deprives a man of both these.

(1.) Of that which is eternal. I mention this first, because it is the greatest, and the best. Unbelief eternises nothing but our miseries. The terms are short and absolute. No leaving possessions, no eternal life; no casting away our goods, no escaping the shipwreck.

Our dearest corruptions are to be mortified, our fairest enjoyments relinquished; this world to be left, or no admission into a better. Yet though the proposal be so evident, and the arguments enforcing it so strong and rational; men, for all this, will not be brought to bend under the power and necessity of this truth: but the heart is still apt to relieve itself with a secret persuasion, that Christ and possessions, future happiness and present ease, are consistent; and that all assertions to the contrary are but the brainsick notions of melancholy spirits, that would impose unnecessary penance upon the world; and therefore they must have their pleasures, their humours, their profits, and their garb, and that in the most eager and slavish pursuit of them; though truth itself has expressly said, that we cannot serve God and mammon. And I am sure, that if they cannot be served, they cannot be so enjoyed together.

But certainly we shall one day find, that the strait gate is too narrow for any man to come bust ling in, thracked with great possessions, and greater corruptions.

These are interests that can never be joined: continual pleasure here and hereafter are incompatible. Heaven and earth are at too great a distance to be united. And, if so, then we see where our unbelief leaves us, even in the regions of horror and despair, in that place of torment and separation from God; where, who knows but this unhappy young heir, with the other rich ones of the world, is now weeping and wailing over his present estate, cursing and crying out of his soul-ruining possessions.

The sorrow he felt before was only an earnest of this damnation, a taste and prelibation of future wrath. If men would but consider that sad retinue of consequences which attends the final resolutions of infidelity, the happiness it bereaves of, and the misery that it infallibly condemns to; surely they would not stand and condition with Christ, before they surrendered their pleasures, honours, and possessions; but they would throw them up, and count it not a loss, but an escape. But unbelief will never be counted unseasonable, till it has made the unbeliever perfectly miserable.

(2.) But, secondly, it bereaves even of temporal happiness also; even that which it promises, and which only it designs, and for the retaining of which it brings a man to part with his hopes of that which is future and eternal. That it does so is evident; for what delight, what taste or relish is there in the greatest affluence of all a man's worldly possessions, when a grim, offended conscience shall stand by him, and protest against all his pleasures? And however men may put the best face upon things, yet certainly there is no such pain or torment, as an aching, angry conscience, under a merry aspect.

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When a man shall look upon his rich farms and fair houses, and his conscience in the mean time whisper him, that this is all that he must expect for ever; when he shall eat and drink the price of his soul, and pay down eternity for every morsel; so that he never sits down to his full table, but, like Esau, he sees his birthright served up to him in a mess: when, by whatsoever he looks upon, whatsoever he wears, upon whatsoever he treads, the remembrance of the sad price is still revived upon his conscience: this takes away the heart and life of the comfort; and the mirth of the feast is checked by the consideration of the reckoning.

Now this certainly is the sum of all miseries; and since we can go no further, we may conclude that unbelief is entertained upon very hard terms, when it robs the unbeliever of his last modicum; even of that little slender remain of happiness, that he promised himself in this world: and not only condemns him to die, but also, as it were, feeds him with bread and water till his execution; and so leaves him wretched and destitute, even in that place, where the wicked themselves have an inheritance.

Now to Him who is able to make us wise in our choice here, and happy in our enjoyment here after, the great consequent of a wise choice here; even to Him be rendered and ascribed, as is most due, all praise, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for evermore. Amen.



SERMON XXII.

1 PETER ii. 23.

Who, being reviled, reviled not again.

IF we run over the whole train and catalogue of duties that are incumbent upon a Christian, we shall find that they are fully comprised under these two heads; his active and his passive obedience. Concerning which, it may be doubted whether of the two, as to the worth and value of the thing itself, ought to have the preeminence. For though all duties expressly enjoined, are by virtue of such injunction equally necessary, yet it follows not that they are in themselves equally excellent. If we here measure the greatness of the virtue by the difficulty of its exercise, passive obedience will certainly gain the precedency: for that this is the most difficult appears undeniably from this reason, that there is much in human nature that inclines a man to action, so that without it there would be no enjoyment; but, on the contrary, there is no proneness or inclination in nature to suffer, but a great abhorrence and aversion from it. So that every instance of voluntary passive obedience must commence entirely upon a dereliction of our own will, and a compliance with a superior.

The Spirit of God in this portion of scripture reads us a lecture of patience from the living command of Christ's example; who, by enduring the wrath of his Father, and the affronts and contumelies of men, made it evident to the world, that he was able, not only to do, but also to suffer miracles. He that never provoked God's justice, could yet submit himself to the stroke of his anger: and he that never dispensed any thing but blessings amongst men, could yet endure cursings and revilings from them.

Before I enter upon the words, it may be questioned, whether or no this particular instance of Christ's patience may be a sufficient ground for our general imitation. For as in matters of argument we cannot from a particular infer an universal conclusion; so there seems to be the same reason in matters of action, that the particular example of one should not oblige the practice of all.

But to this it may be answered, that divines usually reduce all Christ's actions to these three sorts.

1. His miraculous actions, such as issued from his divine nature. As, his raising the dead, stilling the sea and the winds with a word, and feeding thousands with a few loaves. In all these it is our duty to admire, not to imitate him; for by these he shews us not what we were to do after him, but only what we were to believe concerning him.

2. The second sort were his mediatorial actions; such as concerned his offices, to which he was advanced as mediator. As, his governing and disposing of all the world for the good of his church: his dispensing of the gifts and graces of the Spirit, which are acts of his kingly



office: his satisfying for sin, and his continual intercession, which are acts of his priestly function. And lastly, his teaching of the saints outwardly by his word, and inwardly by his Spirit; which he did as the great prophet, sanctified, and sent into the world for that purpose. In all these, it is no more our duty to do as Christ did, than to be what Christ was.

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3. The third and last sort were his moral actions, which he both did himself, and also commanded others to do. Such were his praying, his giving alms, and his gentle behaviour to all men: and to these we are all equally engaged. And the reason is, because Christ performed all these duties, under that relation in which we all stand obliged, as well as Christ.

He performed them as a man, as a rational creature subject to the law of his Creator; and so we are all. Now under this rank comes his patient endurance of the injurious behaviour of men. And in this respect every Christian should be not only a disciple to his doctrine, but a representative of his person: he should transcribe him in his practice, and make his life a comment and illustration upon his master s.

Having thus answered this query, let us now enter upon the words themselves; the scope and design of which is to recommend to us one excellent branch of the great evangelical virtue of patience: the entire exercise of which adequately lies in these two things.

First, In our behaviour towards God.

Secondly, In our converse with men.

And this is that which is now to be discoursed of: that composedness of mind, that temper of spirit, that displays itself in a quiet, undisturbed endurance of scoffs, slanders, and all the lashes of contumelious tongues. For though the words speak negatively, yet this is a known rule in divinity, that there is no command that runs in the strain of negatives, but couches under it a positive duty.

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Having thus shewn the design and purport of the words, I shall endeavour to give a full account of it, in the ensuing discussion of these three particulars.

I. I shall shew what is implied in the extent of this duty, of *not reviling again*.

II. I shall shew how the observation of this duty comes to be so exceeding difficult.

III. I shall shew by what means a man may work himself to such a composure and temper of spirit, as to be able to observe this so difficult a duty. Of each of which in their order. And,

I. For the first of these; what is implied in the duty here expressed to us by *not reviling again*. We must here observe, that as every outward, sinful action is but the consummation of a sin long before conceived in the thoughts, fashioned in the desires, and then ripened in the affections; from whence it comes to birth, by issuing forth in actual commission: so there is no way to secure the soul from the danger of the commission, but by dashing it in the places of its conception and antecedent preparation; and so to keep it from seeing the world, by stifling it in the womb.

Accordingly this command implies two things.

(1.) The not entertaining the impression of injuries with acrimony of thought and internal resentment.

(2.) The not venting any such resentment in virulent, vindictive language.

Or briefly thus;

1. A suppressing of our inward disgusts.
2. A restraint of our outward expressions.

1. Concerning the first of which; no sooner does the foul tongue give us the alarm, hut straight all the powers of the mind are awakened, the concerns of reputation begin to rise, thoughts of defiance to take up arms, and the whole soul boils within itself, grows big with the injury, and would fain discharge and disburden itself in a full revenge.

This is the posture of the mind in this case; and it will quickly proclaim itself by a loquacity of countenance, and a significance of gesture: and though the tongue perhaps should forbear, yet a man will speak his mind with his very face; he will look satires, and rail with every glance of his eye.

If the mind be full and embittered, it will assuredly have its vent, and, like unsettled liquors, work over into froth and foulness. But admit that it refrains, yet still the man shall find a civil war within himself, a great scuffle and disturbance, his thoughts divided between contrary principles, the clashings of prudence and revenge.

But now all these must be composed; for God hears the language of the heart, the outcry and tumult of the affections, the slander of the thoughts, and the invectives of the desires. And that man that can entertain the anger that he dares not utter, and hug the distastes that he will not speak; so that, in that respect, his heart is never at his mouth: he may indeed have more prudence, but never the less malice; or his malice may be buried, but not dead.

For suppose that his concealed wrath never flies out in words, yet the virulence and ugliness of the mind, the anarchy and confusion of the passions, is still the same. It is like thunder without a shower. The inward chafings and ravings of the heart make it a very unfit seat for reason or religion. Christ and religion are usually asleep in such a storm, and do not actually exert themselves in such a soul.

Wrath is wrath, and has all the deformities of that passion, whether it frets in a concealed disgust, or speaks out in open slander and calumny. As a body is altogether as unsound while it festers by an inward putrefaction, as when it casts abroad its rottenness by flux and suppuration.

2. There is required a restraint of the outward expressions. We must hush our discontents, put our mouths in the dust, and there bury our passion.

I confess, when anger and the tongue, that is, the two unruliest things in the world, and both so impatient of control, do meet and concur, the restraint must needs be difficult and arduous; yet the command of Christ is here indispensable, the precept high and exact. We



must be all ear, to hear our own disgraces; and be as quietly attentive to an injurious slander, as to an homily of patience, or a lecture of perfection.

If a man vents his anger against his brother, even by those undervaluing terms of *fool* and *rascal*, Christ awards him the sentence of hell and judgment, [Matt. v. 22](#). *The tongue* (as St. James says, [chap. iii. 6](#)) *is set on fire of hell*. And here we see, by a kind of vicissitude and return, it kindles hell itself for the calumniator.

Has anger therefore prevailed so far as to fire our thoughts? Let it not proceed further, to inflame our expressions. If it has been our unhappiness to be surprised with the beginnings, let us at least cut short the progress. It is an untamed beast, and needs a bridle, without a metaphor. It is loud and destructive, and, like a lion, first it roars, and then it devours. Certainly, therefore, it concerns us to stop our own mouths, and that to keep in our peace, our happiness, our reputation from flying out; and not, in gratification of a silly, angry humour, to word away our souls, or declaim ourselves into perdition.

But here, for our regulation both in the apprehension and practice of this duty, I shall subjoin this caution: namely, that a due expression of asperity against the enemies of God, the king, and the public peace, is not the reviling mentioned or intended in the text: the scene of which is properly private revenge; not a zealous espousal of the public injuries.

He that treats a rebel, and a murderer of his prince, in terms suitable to those actions, is not a reviler. But he that conceals or smooths a villain in the execrable practices of a public mischief, he is truly a reviler and a slanderer; for he reviles his conscience, and slanders his religion. It is a duty that every man owes to the public, to call vice and villainy by its own name; which name, if it be in famous, the cause is in him that deserves, not in him that bestows it.

For observe, that the great standard by which the text bids us measure ourselves in this duty, is Jesus Christ: who though in his own cause, in his own personal affronts, *opened not his mouth*, but passed over all with a meek and a silent sufferance; yet with what fervour and sharpness did he interpose his rebukes in the public concerns of piety and religion!

When St. Peter himself went to cross him in the great business of the world's redemption, his passion and crucifixion, in what language did Christ answer him? No appellation but that of *Satan* was thought fit for him.

With what severity of speech did he also treat those public enemies of piety, and patrons of hypocrisy, the scribes and pharisees! *Whited walls, rotten sepulchres, generation of vipers*, with other such like terms, were their constant titles: and may indeed serve indifferently for the scribes and pharisees of all ages; even those of ours also, did they not prevail above their progenitors in the several arts and more improved methods of hypocrisy.

By warrant therefore of the grand exemplar of meekness and patience, we are empowered to give great and public villains, and disturbers of society, names proper to their actions and merits. He that called Herod *fox*, does not command us to call a fox a sheep, nor a vulture



a dove; nor to give rebels and murderers occasion to think themselves innocent, by never telling them that they are otherwise. To soothe and flatter such persons, would be just as if Cicero had spoke commendatories of Antony, or made panegyrics upon Catiline.

He that commends a vile person, upbraids the virtuous; whose virtue never receives so fair a character, as by an impartial representment of the ugly lineaments and appearances of vice. Nay, he that commends a villain, is not an approver only, but a party in his villainy. Besides, the fruitless frustraneous vanity of such an essay; for bring all the force of rhetoric in the world, yet vice can never be praised into virtue: a rotten thing cannot be painted sound. A false gloss is but a poor corrective of a bad text.

And what I say against a commendation, or smoothing of such unworthy persons, I may with the same reason affirm of a degenerate passing over and concealing their base actions: to bury them in silence, is to give them too honourable a funeral.

To what purpose is a ministry, if the ambassador of God must come with a tongue and conscience enslaved to the guilt and pleasure of an obnoxious auditory? when conscience must be reduced to that which fools call prudence, and even that prudence measured by a sordid compliance?

Must robbers and usurpers carry away the prey and booty, without so much as an hue and cry raised after them? It is a pitiful thing to imitate the lamb in nothing else, but in *being dumb before those that have sheared us*.

Let this therefore be fixed upon for the right stating of this duty; that it reaches not the sharp reprehensions of public persons, (as all lawful preachers are,) directed against public malefactors; but is properly a restraint of the expresses of a man's private revenge. In which, we confess, a man ought to be wholly passive, to lie open to the wrong, and to turn both ears to the railer, as well as both cheeks to the smiter; answering him as David did Shimei, *Let him rail on*; give him scope, till he runs himself out of breath, and wearies himself into silence, and a better behaviour.

Having thus declared the extent and nature of the duty enjoined in the words, and expressed in this negative term, of *not reviling again*; and with al annexed a caution for its due limitation; I come now to,

II. The second general thing proposed; which is to shew whence it is, that this duty comes to be so exceeding difficult.

It is so, I conceive, upon these grounds and causes.

1. From the peculiar, provoking quality of ill language. Upon observation, we shall find that most of the bitter hatreds and irreconcilable enmities that disturb the world, and sour the converse of mankind, have commenced merely upon the score of vilifying words.

And what the reason of it is, I know not; yet certain it is, that men are more easily brought to forgive injuries done, than injuries said against them. One undervaluing speech shall

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dash the service of many years, and be looked upon as a sufficient forfeit of all the hopes of a laborious and long attendance.

Have not most of the duels that were ever fought, been undertaken upon the affront of provoking words? Have they had any trumpet to alarm them into the field, but that of a reviling tongue?

But we shall have a more lively discovery of the provocation of such virulent language, above real acts of injury, by comparing it with the contrary effects of smooth and fawning speeches. What a strange bewitchery is there in flattery! How, like a spiritual opium, does it intoxicate and abuse the understanding, even sometimes of men wise and judicious! So that they have knowingly, with their reason awake, and their senses about them, suffered themselves to be cheated and ruined by a sycophantical parasite, and even to be tickled to death, only for love of the pleasure of being tickled.

Nay, I have known men, grossly injured in their affairs, depart pleased, at least silent, only because they were injured in good language, ruined in caresses, and kissed while they were struck under the fifth rib. And therefore it has been observed, that the greatest usurpers and the falsest deceivers have still been fair spoken; in the strength, or at least in the gloss of which, they have usurped and deceived successfully.

And, according to the difference of men's tempers this way, it is really true, that some judges shall with less offence pronounce sentence against a man, than some for him. To be condemned with words of softness and commiseration, is more pleasing than to be absolved with taunting gibes, insulting sarcasms, and imperious, domineering exprobrations.

The world is generally governed by words and shows: for men can swallow the same thing under one name, which they would abominate and detest under another. The name of *king* was to the old Romans odious and insufferable; but in Sylla and Julius Caesar they could endure the power and absoluteness of a king, disguised under the name of *dictator*.

Certainly therefore there is some peculiar energy, some charm in words, that they are able thus to overrule the very discourses of men's reason, and the clearest discernments of sense.

And I hope that, both by the very nature of the thing, and the advantage of its contrary, I have discovered a more than ordinary force, a strange power in these verbal assaults; a power that is operative beyond the seeming nature and proportions of the thing: that a mere word should cut keener than a razor, and strike deeper than a dart; that a man should immediately swell, upon the hearing of it, as if he were bit by an adder, or poisoned by an asp. And this may be one reason that renders the duty of *not reviling again* so difficult.

2. Another reason of its difficulty is, because nature has deeply planted in every man a strange tenderness of his good name, which, in the rank of worldly enjoyments, the wisest of men has placed before life itself. For indeed it is a more enlarged and diffused life, kept up by many more breaths than our own. It is the soul that keeps the body sweet, and a good



name that keeps the soul. It is this that recommends us to converse, and preserves us from being noisome to society.

A good name is properly that reputation of virtue that every man may challenge as his right and due in the opinions of others, till he has made forfeit of it by the viciousness of his actions. But now every slander is an invasion upon that, and puts a virtuous person into the same condition of disrepute with the vicious, leaving him the severities and difficulties of being virtuous, without the reward of being thought so.

No wonder, therefore, if the mind of man rises with all its might against such as would make an inroad upon the prime enjoyment and most endeared part of its happiness. No wonder if it catches at all means to repel or retaliate so destructive an opposition, and so comes, at length, to the remorseless retribution of *an eye for an eye, reviling for reviling*; and to bear away the spoils of another's reputation, to revenge, or at least to alleviate, the loss of its own.

A man's reputation is his freehold, his birthright, and no man will endure to be tamely bereaved of it by the aspersion of a calumny, who has wit enough to resent, and power to revenge it. He that tears away a man's good name, tears his flesh from his bones, and, by letting him live, gives him only a cruel opportunity of feeling his misery, of burying his better part, and surviving himself.

When a man is dead indeed, he is the portion of rottenness and worms, and whatsoever else will gnaw upon or insult over him; but while he is alive, it is but the privilege of his nature to defend himself. When he shall be laid in his grave, men may fling what dirt they will upon him; but while he is above ground, no marvel if, to keep himself clean, he throws it back again.

And with the more care and solicitousness may we allow him to manage his own preservation in this respect; forasmuch as a good name, though, while it continues whole and entire, it is bright and glistering, yet it has the other property of glass, to be also very brittle, and being once broke, to admit of no repair, no perfect soldering, and making up the breach.

And thus much for the grounds and reasons upon which I conclude it so hard and irksome a thing for a man, being slandered and reviled, *not to revile again*, and return the slander. Indeed, nothing under that amazing Christian duty of absolute self-denial, can work a man to an unconcerned behaviour in this case, and to suffer so dear a portion of himself to be rent away from him, without repelling the violence, and revenging the hand that did it.

III. I come now to the third and last thing, which is, to shew by what means a man may work himself to such a composure and temper of spirit, as to be able to observe this great and excellent duty. And here, when we consider what obstructions are to be conquered and removed, we must acknowledge, that nothing under an omnipotent grace can subdue the heart to such a frame. But as the workings of God do not exclude the subordination of our

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endeavours, so something must be done on our part towards it: and the best course that reason can find out is to discipline and check our unruly passions by a frequent consideration of, and serious reflection upon, the disadvantages of the humour we contest against, and to discommend this of returning railing for railing, slander for slander, both to our practice and affection. I shall fasten only upon this one consideration, namely, that it is utterly useless to all rational intents and purposes: and this I shall make appear inductively, by recounting the several ends and in tents to which, with any colour of reason, it may be designed; and then, by shewing how utterly unfit it is to reach or effect any of them.

1 . The first reason that would induce a man, upon provocation, to do a violent action by way of return, should be, to remove the cause of that provocation. But the cause that usually provokes men to revile are words and speeches; that is, such things as are irrevocable. Such an one vilified me; but can I, by railing, make that which was spoke, not to have been spoke? Are words and talk to be reversed? Or can I make a slander to be forgot, by rubbing up the memory of those that heard it with a reply?

Nay, if we look further, and state the cause of our anger, not upon the slander itself, but upon the malicious temper that was the cause of it; this is so far from being removed, that it is heightened, blown up, and inflamed by such a return.

Possibly that malignity that first threw the slander, not being exasperated by the rebound of an other, would have vanished and expired in silence, perhaps in the ingenuities of repentance; and it is not impossible but that, to make amends, it might, by a kind of antiperistasis, have turned into friend ship: for injuries dissembled not unusually are exchanged for courtesies.

But the injury being once owned by a retribution, and advanced by defiance, like an opposed torrent it tumultuates, grows higher and higher, begins to fix, and so, by an improvement of the humour, that which at first was but a sudden motion, rises into a violent rage, and from thence passes into a settled revenge.

2. Another end, inducing a man to return *reviling for reviling*, may be, by this means to confute the calumny, and to discredit the truth of it. But this course is so far from having such an effect, that it is the only thing that gives it colour and credibility: all people being prone to judge, that an high resentment of a calumny proceeds from concernment, and that from guilt, which makes the sore place tender and untractable. *Convitia, si irascaris, agnita videntur*, says Tacitus.

The way of refelling calumnies is very different; they are weakened with contempt, confuted with innocence. If the calumniator bespatters and belies me, I will endeavour to convince him by my life and manners, but not by being like himself. It was a noble conclusion that Gains Marius made against all the descants of men's tongues whatsoever; no speech, he said, could hurt him: *quippe vera, necesse est bene praedicet; fulsam vita moresque mei superant*.



He that returns *reviling for reviling* does not confute the railer, but outdo him: and thus to second him, is to authorize and countenance the action: for either it is good, and then why do I revenge it? or it is unworthy and vile, and then why do I imitate it? That certainly is fit first to be done, that is fit after to be followed.

If it is a base thing to revile, do not I, by reviling again, repeat that baseness, and credit an ill copy by transcribing it? Or do I think to disgrace an ugly face by drawing its picture? Surely that will be but a poor expedient, since the picture is still worse than the original. And therefore, if it looks ill in my enemy, it cannot but be much more uncomely in my self, who had an argument to avoid and hate the ill, by first seeing the ugliness of it represented in an other.

And why should I degrade myself so much below my enemy, as to judge that fit and handsome in my self, which I first judged so indecent in him? and while I hate him, eagerly practise that thing for which I esteem him hateful?

3. But thirdly, a third end for which a man may pretend to give himself this liberty is, because in so doing he thinks he takes a full and proper revenge of him that first reviled him. But certainly there is no kind of revenge so poor and pitiful: for every dog can bark; and he that rails, makes another noise in deed, but not a better. What boy, what woman in the streets, cannot act as full and as shrewd a revenge as the valiantest soldier or the deepest politician in the world, if it lay only in the arts of contumely and reproachful language? When Goliath began to despise David, and to look upon him as a boy, then, and not before, he gives him a puerile, suitable defiance; that is, he reviles and scoffs at him.

Natural instinct has suggested to every creature to endeavour its own defence by the use of that part or faculty in which it has a peculiar strength and force. But surely a man's strength does not lie in his treasures of ill words, in a voluble dexterity of throwing out scurrilous, abusive terms: no, he has a head to contrive, and valour to execute a nobler and more effectual revenge. But loudness and scurrility are the reproach, not the defence of men.

Nay, were I to argue against this intemperance of reviling, even to the revengeful person, I need no other arguments than what are deducible from the very topic of his own sin.

He that gives ill language does not prejudice his enemy, but forewarn him: he gives him fair admonition to double his guards, to increase his circumspection, and consequently to frustrate all assaults of his adversary. The cur that barks gives me opportunity to provide myself that he shall never bite me.

Revenge must not be heard, but felt, and never discovered, but in the execution; and therefore he gave shrewd counsel to the revengeful, who said, a man should never act a revenge upon his enemy, unless he did it so thoroughly as to disable him from a retaliation.

Upon which ground, let it rather lie still, and wait its season; the longer it sleeps, the more strength it will gather against the time that it comes to rise and exert itself. But he that lets it fly out in angry words, and spreads his heart upon his lips, he is a trifler in this action;

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he betrays his design, and loses the opportunities of a well-ripened, satisfactory revenge; and so contracts only the guilt, but reaches not the supposed gallantry of the sin.

4. In the fourth and last place, peradventure a man thinks, by thus repaying slander for slander, to manifest a generous greatness of spirit in shewing himself impatient of an affront. But in this very thought there is a gross, though usual mistake; for the scene of greatness and generosity lies as much in patience as in action. Contempt naturally implies a man's esteeming of himself greater than the person whom he contemns: he therefore that slights, that contemns an affront, is properly superior to it; and he conquers an injury, who conquers his resentments of it. Socrates being kicked by an ass, did not think it a revenge proper for Socrates to kick the ass again.

Contempt is a noble and an innocent revenge, and silence the fullest expression of it. Except only storms and tempests, the great things of the world are seldom loud. Tumult and noise usually rise from the conflict of contrary things in a narrow passage; and just so does the loudness of wrath and reviling argue a contracted breast; such an one as has not room enough to wield and manage its own actions with stillness and composure.

What a noise and a buzz does the pitiful little gnat make, and how sharply does it sting, while the eagle passes the air in silence, and never descends but to a noble and an equal prey! He therefore that thinks he shews any nobleness or height of mind by a scurrilous reply to a scurrilous provocation, measures himself by a false standard, and acts not the spirit of a man, but the spleen of a wasp.

And thus, I think, I have unravelled all the pleas that reason can make for a defensive reviling; and I am sure there is no sanctuary for it in religion. We read of none in scripture that used it in any manner, but are transmitted to us with a brand of a lasting infamy. Shimei, Rabshakeh, and one of the crucified thieves, are remarked to us for their railing. And the apostle Paul would have us shun the converse of such an one, as the fatal blasts of a pest, or a walking contagion; [1 Cor. v. 11](#), *I have written to you not to keep company., if any one that is called a brother be an extortioner or a railer, with such an one no not to eat*; but especially at the Lord's table. This is his condition, this is his sentence: and certainly he who is thus excommunicated and excluded from the company of the saints in this world, is not like to be thought fit for the society of angels in the next.



SERMON XXIII.

PSALM xc. 11.

Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.

THIS description of God's anger, set forth by such a pathetic exclamation, seems to come from a person that spoke not only his thoughts, but his experience; even from Moses, who had felt the sad effects of his own anger, and therefore might well be sensible of the weight of God's. When God shewed himself as a legislator, it was with all the pomps of terror, and the circumstances of dread; but here we have him in the grimmer dress of a revenging judge. Then the mountain smoked, but now it flames. And Moses seems so possessed with an awful reflection upon the amazing terrors of the divine anger, that he can scarce look up; but with fear and distance, as it were, avoids the sight, and seems to have recourse to his veil, and to hide his face, not from being seen by men, but from seeing God.

Before we proceed upon the words, it will concern us to see how anger can be ascribed to God: for an infinite and divine nature cannot be degraded to those affections and weaknesses that attend ours. Anger is a passion, but God is impassible. Anger is always with some change in the person that has it, but God is unchangeable.

Crellius, in his treatise of God's attributes, asserts the affections of anger, love, hope, and the like, to be really and properly in God. Thus they in a preposterous manner deny Christ to be God, and yet make God to be a man. For they make him subject to those passions which the Stoics will not allow in him who is perfectly wise, and a philosopher; but assert them to be weaknesses dwelling in vulgar breasts, that have not yet lopped off the excrescencies of the sensitive appetite, nor subdued their passions to the lure and dictates of right reason.

Certainly, therefore, anger, and the like affections, can by no means be ascribed to the infinitely perfect God in the proper and usual acceptation of the words, but only by an anthropopathy; attributing that to God, which bears some analogy and proportion to what we find in men. Thus God is said to be angry, when he does some things that bear a similitude to those effects that anger produces in men.

It is therefore in God, not as a perfection inherent in his nature, but only as an effect of his will. In deed it is not in him at all, but is only an extrinsical denomination from a work wrought without him; from the miseries and calamities which he inflicts upon a guilty creature.

I cannot see any thing else of difficulty in the words. The prosecution of them I shall manage in these following particulars.

- I. I shall lay down some preparatory considerations concerning God's anger.
- II. I shall shew those instances in which it does exercise and exert itself.



III. I shall consider those properties and qualifications, that declare and set forth the extraordinary greatness of it.

IV. I shall make some use and improvement of the whole.

I. For the first of these, I shall lay down these two preparatory, cautional observations.

1. That every harsh and severe dispensation is not an effect of God's anger. The same effect, as to the matter of it, may proceed from very different causes. Love is sometimes put upon the rigour of those courses, which at the first aspect seem to carry in them the inscriptions of enmity and hostility.

God may sweep away a man's estate, snatch away a friend, stain his reputation; and yet the design of all this not be revenge, but remedy; not destruction, but discipline.

He sees perhaps something evil in us to be cured, and something worse to be prevented; some luxuriances to be abated, and some malignant humours to be evacuated; all which cannot be effected, but by sharp and displeasing applications. And in all the hard passages of Providence, when God strips a man of all his externals, God's intent may be, not to make him miserable, but to make him humble; not to ruin, but to reduce him.

If you look only upon the outside of an affliction, you cannot distinguish from what principle it may proceed; Gehazi's leprosy and Lazarus's sores may seem to be inflicted by the same displeasure; and yet one was a curse for hypocrisy, and the other a trial of humility.

David's and Saul's afflictions were dispensed with a very different hand: Saul could not pursue him so fast, but mercy followed him as close. St. Stephen was stoned as well as Achan; but certainly God did not with the same arm fling the stone at one, with which he did at the other.

Consider the saints in [Heb. xi. 37](#), *afflicted, tormented, nuked, destitute, sawn asunder*. And what could anger itself do more against them? And yet the God who did all this was not angry. That very love which makes God to be our friend, makes him sometimes to appear our enemy: to chastise our confidence, to raise our vigilance, and to give us safety instead of security.

Persons who are truly holy, and tender how they offend God, are yet very apt to look upon God's dealings on the wrong side, and to make hard conclusions concerning their own state and condition. David is much an example of this, who, through the transports, sometimes of diffidence, sometimes of impatience, is high in his expostulations with God. [Psalm lxxvii. 9](#), *Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* And in [Psalm lxxiv. 1](#), *Why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?*

Now all this, perhaps, was commenced upon the sense of some outward affliction, not considering (as he does elsewhere) that when God deals with his chosen ones, with *the sheep of his pasture*, his rod is still attended with his staff; and as with one he strikes, so with the other he supports.

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And as persons holy are, upon the sharp passages of Providence, very prone to conclude God's anger against themselves; so, on the other side, men of a morose, uncharitable, conscience-pretending temper, from such instances of outward miseries, are as ready to denounce God's anger against others. If such dogs meet with a Lazarus, instead of licking his sores, they will bite his person, bark at his name, and worry his reputation.

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Nothing can befall any man, besides themselves, but presently it is a judgment; and they have cried out *judgments! judgments!* so long, that they are even become judgments themselves: indeed the greatest and sorest that a nation can groan under.

Wherefore, let us rest assured of this, that the roughest of God's proceedings do not always issue from an angry intention: it is very possible, because very usual, that they may proceed from the clean contrary. The same clouds which God made use of heretofore to drown the earth, he employs now to refresh it. He may use the same means to correct and to better some, that he does to plague and to punish others. The same hand and hatchet that cuts some trees for the fire, may cut others into growth, verdure, and fertility. This is the first thing to be observed.

2. We must observe, that there is a great difference between God's anger and his hatred; as great as there is between the transient, expiring heat of a spark, and the lasting, continual fires which supply a furnace. The nature of hatred is to pursue its object to death, to a total extinction of its very being. And as it is said of God's love, so, I think, it may be also said of his hatred, that *whom he hates, he hates to the end.*

I do not desire to wade into the depths of God's decrees; for our notions about these are very uncertain, and therefore our determinations must needs be dangerous.

But surely we are exceeding ignorant of the actuality, simplicity, and immutability of the divine nature, if we think that God can alter his counsels, or revoke his purposes.

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But we shall not meddle with God's hatred as it is bound up in his purpose, but as it lies open and visible in the execution: and so, it is the pursuance of a standing enmity against a sinner, a gradual accomplishing of his final destruction, a disposal of all passages, all contingencies and circumstances of his life, to the ruin of his soul, and the fatal issues of damnation.

But God's anger is not of so malign and destructive an influence; the choicest of his saints have shared in some of the severest instances of it. God was angry with Moses, angry with David, angry with Hezekiah, and with his peculiar people; but we do not read that he hated them. The effects of his anger differ as much from the effects of his hatred, as the smart of a present pain from the corrosions of an abiding poison. It must indeed be confessed, that the heats of it are fierce and dreadful: but it is such a fire, as though it *burns*, yet it does not consume the bush; it may affright, but it will not destroy a Moses. Nevertheless, though it does not bring God's elect under the *power*, it may bring them into the *shadow of death*, into the suburbs of hell; and give them a glimpse of those horrors, a taste of those vials of wrath, that are poured out in full measure only upon the sons of perdition.

And thus much for the first general head.

II. I shall now, in the second place, shew what are those instances in which this unsupportable anger of God does exercise and exert itself.

I shall mention three.

1. First, it inflicts immediate blows and rebukes upon the conscience. There are several passages in which God converses with the soul immediately by himself; and these are always the most quick and efficacious, whether in respect of comfort or of terror.

That which comes immediately from God, has most of God in it. As the sun, when he darts his beams in a direct, perpendicular line, does it most forcibly, because most immediately.

Now there are often terrors upon the mind, which flow thus immediately from God, and therefore are not weakened or refracted by passing through the instrumental conveyance of a second cause: for that which passes through a thing, is ever contracted according to the narrowness of its passage. God's wrath, inflicted by the creature, is like poison administered in water, where it finds an allay in the very conveyance.

But the terrors here spoken of, not being inflicted by the intermediate help of any thing, but being darted forthwith from God himself, are by this in comparably more strong and piercing.

When God wounds a man by the loss of an estate, of his health, of a relation, the smart is but commensurate to the thing which is lost, poor and finite. But when he himself employs his whole omnipotence, and is both the archer, and himself the arrow, there is as much difference between this and the former, as when an house lets fall a cobweb, and when it falls itself upon a man.

God strikes in that manner that he swears; never so effectually, as when only *by himself*. A man striking with a twig does not reach so dreadful a blow, as when he does it with his fist; and so makes himself not only the striker, but the weapon also.

These immediate blows of God upon the soul, seem to be those things that in [Psalm xxxviii. 2](#) are called *God's arrows*: they are strange, sudden, invincible amazements upon the spirit, leaving such a damp upon it, as defies the faint and weak cordials of all creature-enjoyments. The wounds which God himself makes, none but God himself can cure. And thus much for the first way.

2. God's anger exerts itself by embittering of afflictions. Every affliction is of itself a grievance, and a breach made upon our happiness; but there is some times a secret energy, that so edges and quickens its afflictive operation, that a blow levelled at the body, shall enter into the very soul. As a bare arrow tears and rends the flesh before it; but if dipped in poison, as by its edge it pierces, so by its adherent venom it festers.



We do not know what strength the weakest creature has to do mischief, when the divine wrath shall join with it; and how easily a small calamity will sink the soul, when this shall hang weights upon it.

What is the reason that David is sometimes so courageous, that *though he walks through the shadow of death, yet he will fear no evil?* as in [Psalm xxiii. 4](#). And at another time, *God no sooner hides his face, but he is troubled*, as [Psalm xxx. 7](#). What is the cause that a man sometimes breaks through a greater calamity, and at another time the same person fails and desponds under a less of the same nature? I say, whence can this be, but that God infuses some more grains of his wrath into one than into the other?

Men may undergo many plagues from God, and yet by the enchantment of pleasures, the magic of worldly diversions, they may, like Pharaoh, harden their hearts, and escape the present sting of them. But when God shall arm a plague with sensible, lively mixtures of his wrath, believe it, this will not be enchanted away; but the sinner, like those magicians, (whether he will or no,) must be forced to confess, *that it is the finger of God*, and consequently must bend and lie down under it.

God may cast a man into prison, nail him to the bed of sickness, yet still he may continue master of his comforts; because the sun may shine, while the shower falls. The soul may see the light of God's countenance, while it feels the weight of his hand.

But for God to do all these things in anger, and to mark the prints of his displeasure and his indignation upon every blow; this alters the whole dispensation, and turns it from a general passage of Providence into a particular design of revenge.

It is like a deep water, scalding hot, which as it drowns, so at the same time it redoubles its fatal influence, and also burns to death. An unwholesome air will of itself make a man sick and indisposed; but when it is infected, and its native malignity heightened with a superadded contagion, then presently it kills.

And such a difference is there between afflictions in themselves, and afflictions as they are fired, poisoned, and enlivened with God's wrath. And thus much for the second way by which God's anger puts forth itself; it embitters afflictions.

3. It shews and exerts itself by cursing of enjoyments. We may, like Solomon, have all that wit can invent, or heart desire, and yet at last, with the same Solomon, sum up all our accounts in *vanity and vexation of spirit*.

There is a *pestilence that walks in darkness*, a secret, invisible blow, that smites the first-born of all our comforts, and straight we find them dead, and cold, and sapless; not answering the quickness of desire, or the grasp of expectation. God can send a worm to bite the gourd, while it flourishes over our heads; and while he *gives riches, deny an heart to enjoy them*.

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For whence is it else, that there are some who flourish with honours, flow with riches, swim with the greatest affluence of plenty, and all other the materials of delight; and yet they are as discontented, as dissatisfied, as the poorest of men?

Care rises up and lies down with them, sits upon their pillow, waits at their elbow, runs by their coaches; and the grim spirits of fear and jealousy haunt their stately houses and habitations.

I say, whence is this, but from a secret displeasure of God, which takes out the vitals, the heart, and the spirit of the enjoyment, and leaves them only the *caput mortuum* of the possession?

We may be apt to envy such or such an one's greatness, his estate, his happiness; but greatness is not always happiness. It is not impossible, but that he who has this, may rate it with another esteem, and perhaps feel that in it which we cannot see. The garment may present fair and handsome, and neat to the eye which beholds it; but still it may wring the body that wears it.

It was a notable speech of Haman, [Esther v. 11, 12, 13](#), reckoning up his riches, his substance, and all his grandeur; and then bringing up the rear of all with this sad conclusion: *Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.* God put in a little coloquintida, which spoiled the whole mess. A little spice of contempt from his rival in the king's favour, soured all the relish which he had from his other honours and enjoyments.

Christ determines the case fully and philosophically in those words, [Luke xiii. 15](#), *A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of those things which he does possess.* No; they are the smiles and favour of God the giver, that must animate and give life to the gift. As it is not such a number of hours and minutes, such a space of time, but it is the shining of the sun, which makes the day.

If God frowns and is angry, presently the whole scene of affairs is changed, all is overcast; power is a trouble, honour a vanity, riches a burden; and gold loses its brightness, and retains only its heaviness.

Is it any pleasure to a son to have his father reach him meat, if he does it with a frowning countenance, that looks as if he would devour, instead of feeding him? It makes that which is meat, not to be food; fit only to fill, but unable to nourish. God can make a man tumble and toss, and be disturbed upon a bed of down. He can make his silks sit uneasy, his cup bitter, and his delicacies tasteless and insipid, and spread a dulness and a lethargy over all his recreations.

Alas! it is not the body and the mass of those things which we call plenty, that can speak comfort, when the wrath of God shall blast and dispirit them with a curse. We may build our nest soft and convenient, but that can easily place a thorn in the midst of it, that shall check us in our repose.



And this is the third way, by which God's anger shews itself; it spoils and curses our enjoyments.

III. Come we now to the next general head proposed; namely, to shew those properties and qualifications, which declare and set forth the extraordinary greatness of God's anger.

I shall instance in these four.

1. The greatness of it appears in this, that it is fully commensurate to the very utmost of our fears, which is noted even in the words of the text; *according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.*

Now we must observe, that all the passions of the mind enlarge and greaten their objects, and stretch things from the just standard of truth to the compass of imagination. Hence love, fear, and hope, always speak in hyperboles, and return the object greater than they received it; being as it were the womb of the soul, where things are no sooner entertained, but they grow, and are always brought forth bigger than they were conceived.

From this it is, that experience judges short of the judgment of expectation; because expectation swells and widens according to the credulity of passion and desire: but every thing comes stript to its native truth and poorness, in the severe, impartial verdict of fruition.

And of all the passions, fear in this increasing faculty exceeds. Fear does not only tremble at shadows, but makes them; that is, it gives you some thing larger than the substance. Compare a danger feared and endured, and see how much the copy spreads beyond the original. Fear still supererogates and overdoes; and when it is to transcribe the truth of things, it gives a comment, instead of a translation.

What malefactor is condemned, who is not first executed by his fears? who does not both anticipate and enlarge those miseries, which truth and feeling would quickly contract to their own proper smallness? So that the execution endured, is not so much a punishment for his fault, as a release from his fears.

With how many blows does this kill, whereas death gives but one! Let a man have but a friend at sea, or in the wars, and how many storms and ship wrecks, wounds and battles, does this solicitous passion represent! Evils crueller than war, and larger than the sea; which, though of all other things the most remorseless, yet often spare those, upon whom fear has long since passed the sentence of death.

Let it run through the whole creation, it still adds, and would go a pitch beyond God and nature; not contracting the world into a map, but the world it self at largest is rather a map and an abridgment of our fears. And when at length it comes to God, it would do the same by him, were it not forestalled by infinity, that stops such attempts, and makes enlargements impossible. Such we see is the nature of this vast passion.

But now the wrath of God is the only thing which fear itself cannot enlarge; and eternity, which it can not multiply. This alone equals this passion, and bids defiance to all additions.



And here let any man call up his invention, and summon his fancy, the only creating faculty that is given to the creature, and which finds matter as well as form, and like a little deity creates things out of nothing: I say, let him give scope to his imagination, to rove over all terrors, and to represent to itself, not only things existent, but possible, and new ideas of things, and then unite them all into one apprehension of fear; yet here he shall find, that even imagination is still within the bounds of truth: the subject is so large, so inexhaustible, that there is reality enough in it to warrant the highest reaches of imagination.

Herein therefore does the divine wrath display its dreadfulness transcendently above all created terrors, that it verifies our fears, and realizes the utmost boundless suggestions of a fearful mind.

2. The greatness of God's anger appears in this, that it not only equals, but infinitely exceeds and transcends our fears. The misery of the wicked, and the happiness of the saints, run in an equal parallel; so that by one you may best measure the proportions of the other. And for the former of these, we have a lively description of it in [1 Cor. ii. 9](#); *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God has prepared for those that love him.* Why, the very same provisions of wrath he has made for those that hate him.

Now, what can be more unsatiable than the eye, greedier than the ear, wider and more comprehensive than thought? Yet, alas! both sight and intellect, sense and reason, are tired and swallowed up in the vast abyss of that wrath, which spreads itself into all the spaces of infinity. Endure it we may one day, (if mercy prevent not,) but never comprehend it; as the sun is known, not by our seeing his full bulk, which is here impossible, but by being scorched with his heat.

And herein sense goes a reach beyond understanding, which cannot discourse itself into a clear notion or theory of the divine wrath. For as God spoke to Job about his framing of the world, the like discourse we may address to any curious inquisitor about his wrath.

Where wert thou when God first sealed his decrees of election and reprobation? when he prepared the chambers of death, and the treasures of his wrath? when he laid the foundations of the infernal pit, and spread darkness over it, and covered it with the secret of horror for ever?

If we can answer these inquiries, and bring the matter we speak of under certain descriptions, then we may confess that our fear may reach the full compass of its object.

Our fear cannot be larger than our fancy; but even curiosity, and fancy itself, fails in the researches of an infinite. A thing not to be encountered, but by our faith; and of which, amazement, ecstasy, and astonishment are the best expressions.

3. The greatness of divine wrath appears in this, that though we may attempt it in our thoughts, yet we cannot bring it within the comprehension of our knowledge.



And the reason is, because things, which are the proper objects of feeling, are never perfectly known, but by being felt. We may speak indeed high words of wrath and vengeance, but pain is not felt in a discourse. We may as well taste a sound, and see a voice, as gather an intellectual idea of misery; which is conveyed, not by apprehension, but smart; not by notion, but experience.

Survey the expressions of scripture, and see it there clothed and set forth in *fire and brimstone, in the worm that never dies, in utter darkness, in weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*. But what are all these but shadows! mere similitudes, and not things! condescensions, rather than instructions to our understanding! poor figurative essays, where, contrary to the nature of rhetoric, the figure is still beneath the truth.

Fire no more represents God's wrath, than the picture of fire itself represents its heat: and for the proof of this, let the notional believer be an unanswerable argument, who reads, sees, and hears all these expressions, and yet is not at all moved by them; which sufficiently shews, that there is no hell in the description of hell.

But now, there is no man, who has actually passed under a full trial of God's wrath; none alive, who ever encountered the utmost of God's anger: and if any man should hereafter try it, he would perish in the trial, so that he could not report his experience. This is a furnace that consumes while it tries; as no man can experimentally inform us what death is, because he is destroyed in the experiment.

4. And lastly, we may take a measure of the greatness of God's anger, by comparing it with the anger of men. How dreadful is the wrath of a king! It is said in [Prov. xix. 12](#), *to be like the roaring of a lion*; and when he roars, all the beasts of the forest tremble. What a weak thing is the greatest and most flourishing favourite, when his prince shall frown him into confusion! Haman, as the greatest of them, found it so. And to take another instance; how horrible, how amazing is the wrath of a conquering enemy! when anger sits upon a victorious sword, who dares approach it, who does not fly before it?

Are we not sometimes astonished to read of whole fields strewed with carcasses, streets running down with blood, desolations of whole cities and countries; not so much as one stone being left to cover the ruins of another? And yet, all these are but the works of a pitiful, enraged, angry, mortal creature, whose breath is in his nostrils, and whose rage can not outlast it.

And if these are so terrible, what can be said of the terrors of an almighty wrath, of an infinite indignation? the voice of which, as the Psalmist tells us, [Psalm xxix](#). tears up the cedars, shakes the wilderness, divides the flames of fire, and removes mountains; so that the whole creation bends and cracks under it, and the strongest things in nature, confessing their weakness, return to their native dust, and crouch and sink into their first nothing.



Take and single out the most considerable man, endue him with as much power as mortality can wield, clothe him with as much majesty as can dwell upon human nature; and then let his anger swell up to an equal proportion to both these: yet still there is as vast a disparity between this and the divine wrath, as there is between the persons who are angry, between a finite and an infinite being.

And thus having despatched the third general head proposed, come we now, in the Fourth and last place, to make some improvement of the point; which may be various: as,

1. It may serve to discover to us the intolerable misery of such as labour under a lively sense of God's wrath for sin. Certainly they struggle with the quickest pains, and the most restless, vexatious troubles, that the nature of man is capable of lying under. Few do heartily commiserate the condition of such persons, because few have an experimental sense of God's wrath bringing the guilt of sin home, and binding it close to their consciences. Few know what it is to feel what they only hear and read; and to have the very flames of hell flashing in their guilty faces. Yet some there are in the world, whom God is pleased to deal with in this manner; such as he follows with all his storms, such as even weep away their eyes, and grow old in misery, *and from their youth up suffer his terrors with a troubled mind.* So that the whole course of their life is a certain wrestling with God, and a kind of grappling with the wrath of the Almighty, by which they are often foiled, and cast, and flung into the very depths of horror and desperation.

And thus God sometimes thinks fit to discipline even such as he loves, such as he designs for heaven and a glorious eternity, leading them through the vale of tears to the land of promise. For by this he serves many great purposes, both of his own glory and their happiness; it being the most sure, direct, and immediate way to possess the heart of such with a deep and quick sense of the intolerable evil of sin, and God's unspeakable detestation and abhorrence of it; that it should provoke him to lay on such heavy and afflictive strokes upon those whom he otherwise so dearly loves; that it seems, for a time, to shut up the bowels of mercy itself, and to represent a tender father in the guise and posture of the fiercest enemy.

2. This may serve also to discover to us the ineffable vastness of Christ's love to mankind in his sufferings for them. The whole burden of the divine wrath, which we have been hitherto discoursing of, he freely took upon his own shoulders; he intercepted the blow; he took the dreadful cup of God's fury out of our hands, and drank off the very dregs of it: and so great was the strength, so venomous was the mixture of it, that he sweat blood, cried out, and was amazed. All that we have been speaking of, and much more than we can speak, fell upon him like a pouring, thundering storm from heaven. A storm, from which there could be no flight nor shelter; so that it crushed and quite beat down his humanity, till the very extremity of pain and anguish dissolved the union between his innocent soul and body, bringing him into the blackest regions of death and darkness for a season. All the direful



stings of God's anger fastened upon him, all the poisoned darts of his vengeance struck into his soul; so that they even terrified him who was God, and, as it were, shook and staggered omnipotence itself. And all this befell him for the infinite love he bore to the sons of men, who must otherwise have perished by the justice which they had provoked. His love and his sufferings were both beyond all parallel; and from one you may well take the dimensions of the other. Never was any love equal to his love, because indeed never *was any sorrow like to his sorrow*. For certainly so great, so pressing, so insupportable was it, that nothing but an infinite power *could* undergo such a burden, and nothing but an infinite love would.

3. The foregoing discourse speaks terror to such as can be quiet, and at peace within themselves, after the commission of great sins. Nothing, upon a rational ground, can be so fearful, as such a stupid want of fear. For upon what solid principles of reason can such persons be secure? Do they think that their sins do not deserve the divine wrath? or that they can either endure or escape what they have so deserved? Do they conclude, that there is perfect peace between God and them, because the terrible effects of his fury do not actually roar against them? Are they therefore finally discharged, because they are not presently called to an account? No certainly, these are frail and fond considerations, for any rational person to build his peace upon: for every sin stands registered in the black book of heaven, and that with all its circumstances and particularities; and consequently has the same sting, and guilt, and destructive quality, as if it were actually tearing and lashing the sinner with the greatest horror and anguish of mind imaginable. And no man knows how soon God may awaken and let loose the tormenting power of sin upon his conscience; how soon he may set fire to all that fuel that lies dormant and treasured up in his sinful breast. This he may be sure of, that, whensoever God does so, it will shake all the powers of his soul, scatter his easy thoughts, and lay all the briskness and jollity of his secure mind in the dust. A murdering piece may lie still, though it be charged, and men may walk by it and over it safe, and without any fear, though all this while it has death in the belly of it; but when the least spark comes to fire and call forth its killing powers, every one will fly from its fatal mouth, and confess that it carries death with it. Just so it is with the divine wrath; nobody knows the force of it, till it be kindled.

But now God has, by a perpetual decree, awarded the sad sentence of *tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil*; Rom. ii. 9. So that, if he gives not the sinner his portion of sorrow here, it is to be feared he has it in full reserve for him hereafter. Upon which account, the present quiet of his condition is so far from ministering any just cause of satisfaction to him, that he has reason to beg upon his knees, that God would alter the method of his proceeding, and rather compound and strike him with some present horror for sin, than sink him under the insupportable weight of an eternal damnation. When a man must either have his flesh cut and burnt, or die with a gangrene, would he not passionately desire the surgeon to cut, and burn, and lance him, and account him his friend for all



these healing severities? This is the sinner's case; and therefore when, upon his commission of any great sin, God seems to be silent, and to connive, let him not be confident, but fear. For one may sometimes keep silence, and smile too, even out of very anger and indignation. If the present bill of his accounts be but small, it is a shrewd argument that there is a large reckoning behind.

4. In the fourth and last place, the most natural sequel and improvement of all that has been said of God's anger, is a warning against that cursed thing which provokes it. We see how dreadfully it burns; let us beware of the sin by which it is kindled.

Sin is the thing that exasperates goodness, that makes love angry, and puts mercy itself into a rage. God's anger never seizes upon any but a sinner. Christ himself could not feel it, till he was a sinner by imputation. It seizes upon the soul, as distempers use to do upon the body; which never fasten an infection, but where they meet with an inward corruption.

In a word, I have shewn how devouring and consuming the divine wrath is, and how sin is the only thing that it preys upon. And^ therefore all the advice that, I think, can be given, is, that men would begin here, and not expect to extinguish the flame, till they withdraw the fuel. Let them but do this, and God will not fail to do the other.

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



SERMON XXIV.

MATTHEW x. 28.

Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

CHRIST, who came into the world to engage in a spiritual war against the ways of the world, is here, like a provident commander, despatching a regiment, a little regiment of twelve apostles, for this evangelical expedition. And in the [first verse](#) of this chapter we have him reading to them their commission, which runs very full and large; extending to the cure of all maladies and distempers, and the subjugation of the powers of darkness. From the [second verse to the fourth](#), we have him taking a list or muster of their names: and then, from the fifth verse almost to the end of the chapter, we have a more full and determinate explication of their commission, as to its just latitude and extent. And that,

1. In respect of the place where they were to administer it; and that was within the precincts and bounds of Judea, in the [fifth and sixth verses](#). They were not to visit the Samaritans: the children were to be served before the servants.

2. In respect of the doctrine they were to preach; and this was a preparatory to the gospel, afterwards to be preached by Christ himself, [ver. 7](#); *The kingdom of heaven is at hand*.

Now, in order to their more vigorous execution of this commission, he does accordingly instruct and admonish them concerning those things which might lie as impediments and obstacles in their way.

His instructions are reducible to these two.

(1.) A caution against the luxury of the world, in the [ninth and tenth verses](#).

(2.) An encouragement against the cruelty of the world, from the [sixteenth verse](#) almost to the end of the chapter.

Thus he summed up his divine instructions, as Epictetus did his moral, in a compendious but comprehensive Ἀπέχου καὶ ἀνέχου, *Abstain and endure*; the one for the pleasures, the other for the troubles of the world.

(1.) He cautions them against the superfluities of the world; *Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, nor scrip for your journey*, [ver. 9, 10](#). Christ sent them forth as preachers (and that by his own special order) itinerant. Gold and silver, though they are sometimes convenient, yet they are always heavy: many travellers, while they have been anxiously troubled with the thoughts of securing their money, have missed of their way. Christ sends his disciples also as soldiers; and therefore bids them take neither scrip, nor cloaks, nor staves. We should look upon him as a strange soldier, that, when he is upon his march, and to go upon service, instead of his sword, should take his snapsack. These are all hinderances, clogs, and burdens, and, according to the proper Latin word, they are called *impedimenta bellica*. Christ would take them off from all worldly care; and therefore, to pursue the



metaphor, he provides them quarter, free quarter in his service. *The workman*, says he, *is worthy of his meat. And into whatsoever city or town ye come, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.* Christ knew it was not convenient for his ministers, while they should be engaging all the stress of their endeavours in so high an employment, to be carking and caring for a maintenance, and to be put upon providing for their own bodies, while they should provide for others souls.

(2.) He encourages them against the cruelty of the world. In the former, he forbids them to be luxurious; in this latter, to be fearful. Either of these are absolutely opposite to a military posture: and he fortifies them by an impartial acquainting them what they should endure. And this is a considerable piece of armour: for the mind of man is able to endure many an evil upon expectation, that it cannot upon surprise. Where, from Christ's method in sending his disciples to preach the gospel, we may gain this observation by the way, viz. that when a man enters upon the ministry, it is a matter of signal consequence to be forewarned of, and so in some measure to be forearmed against, all the discouragements that he is like to meet with in the faithful administration of his duty. *Behold*, says Christ, *I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.* In the [sixth verse](#), he had said that he sent them to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. They went to them indeed as to sheep, but they found them to be wolves: they were lost sheep; such as had lost their nature, and degenerated into a wolfish kind. Now there could not be a more discouraging speech than this. To send sheep abroad alone was discouragement enough; for there be others ready to oppose and wrong them, besides wolves; and if there was none, yet their own weakness and wandering were enough to scatter them: but to send them to wolves, who have a natural antipathy against them, an irreconcilable hatred, not to be satisfied but by their blood; this is the highest aggravation of a deplored estate. One wolf is able to destroy a flock of sheep; how then shall a poor handful of twelve sheep withstand whole herds of wolves? Yet Christ did well to let them know the worst of their entertainment, that amidst all their other miseries they might at least be kept from that disheartening misery of a disappointment. Every man who engages in Christ's service ventures himself amongst wolves; such as with remorseless fury will prey upon his reputation, tear his comforts, devour whatsoever is dear to him: and he who expects to find favour amongst such wolves, must first cease to be a sheep. But now Christ, as he tells them the danger, so he prescribes the remedy; and against the opposition of men, he tells them they must join the forces of prudence and innocence: in the [sixteenth verse](#), *Be ye wise as serpents, but harmless as doves.* The brasen, impregnable wall of a good conscience is that alone which is able to withstand and repulse the injuries of the world. If we must do penance, let us do it in the white of our own innocence. To be free from sin, is the only way to be free from fear.

But now Christ, to make his admonitions the more particular, and so the more effectual, descends to those particular things which he knew they chiefly feared. And these are three.

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1. Bodily torments.
2. Disgrace.
3. Death.

Christ lays in an antidote against the fear of each of these.

1. For bodily torments; he tells them, they should be brought before kings and governors, and be scourged for the profession of the truth, in the 17th verse: but in the 22d he gives the encouragement, *He that endures to the end shall be saved*. Salvation is a reward sufficient to crown the endurance of the most irksome calamity.

2. For disgrace; he tells them, they would fare but ill as to their reputations, but yet no worse than himself: they might be called factious, seditious; but when the master is called *devil*, the servant may well endure the name of *rascal*. Suetonius, among those few good things that he said Nero did in his reign, reckons his persecution of the Christians in these terms; *Affecti suppliciiis Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novae et maleficae*. Christ forearms them against these contumelies, by telling them, that he partook of the same slanders: and we know, society in affliction does alleviate it. However, the society of a master enduring the same with his servant, although it should afford no cause of comfort, yet it takes off all cause of complaint. (2.) He comforts them with the consideration of the day of judgment, ver. 26; at which time whatsoever is now covered should be revealed. Though they are at present aspersed with false calumnies, and their names darkened with the malign exhalations that come from the open sepulchres of reviling throats; as we may read in Minucius Felix, and a black catalogue of foul falsities charged upon the Christians: yet the day of judgment will clear their innocence, and wipe off all aspersions. The day is a discovering time; and that which lay hid in the dark night of persecution, will be laid open and manifest at the last day.

3. The third thing, which is the φοβερώτων φοβερώτατον, the *terrible of terribles*, is death; and this he cautions them against in the words of the text; and that upon the score of these three reasons.

(1.) Because it is but the death of the body, and therefore not the death of the man.

(2.) Because hell is more to be feared, and the greater fear swallows up the less.

(3.) Because they live under the special care of God's overseeing providence; and therefore cannot be taken away without his special appointment and permission. The argument runs strongly *a minore ad majus* in the 29th verse. If he takes so great care of so inconsiderable creatures as sparrows, so that the hand of the destroyer cannot reach so much as one of them without a warrant from his providence; how much more shall he preserve you, who have a perfection of nature much beyond theirs, and a profusion of grace beyond the perfection of your nature?



I shall resume some of these reasons in the handling of the doctrine that I shall raise; but before I deduce any doctrine from the words, I shall endeavour to clear off an objection: and it is this.

Obj. Christ commands his disciples here not to *fear those that can kill the body*. But how is this consistent with some other of his commands? as for instance, in the [17th verse](#), he bids them *beware of men*: and in the [23d verse](#), when they are *persecuted in one city*, he bids them *flee into another*. Now to flee from an enemy is something more than to fear him.

Ans. 1. The words, *Fear not them that can kill the body*, maybe understood comparatively; that is, Do not fear them that kill the body, so much as you fear him that is able to destroy the soul. And so this way of speaking carries in it an Hebraism; for the Hebrews usually express a comparison between two things in respect of some third, not by attributing of it in a greater degree to one, and in a less degree to the other, but by absolutely affirming it of one, and denying it of the other. As God says, *he will have mercy, and not sacrifice*; that is, he will rather have mercy than sacrifice. And this may be one way of interpreting the words.

2. We may distinguish of a twofold fear.

(1.) A fear of solicitous anxiety; such as makes us let go our confidence in God's providence, causing our thoughts so to dwell upon the dreadfulfulness of the thing feared, as to despair of a deliverance. And with such a kind of fear Christ absolutely forbids them to fear those that kill the body; it being very derogatory to God, as if his mercy did not afford as great arguments for our hope, as the cruelty of man for our fears.

(2.) The second sort of fear is a fear of prudential caution, whereby a man, from the due estimate of an approaching evil, endeavours his own security. And this kind of fear is not only lawful, but also laudable. For to what purpose should God have naturally implanted in the heart of man a passion of fear, if it might not be exercised and affected with suitable objects; that is, things to be feared? Now under this sort of fear we may reckon that to which Christ advises his disciples in these expressions, *Beware of men*, and, *Flee from one city into another*.

These things thus premised, the words of the text are full and pregnant with many great concerning truths. As,

1. That it is within the power of man to divest us of all our temporal enjoyments; for so much, according to the phrase of scripture, is comprehended in this word *body*. Christ bids them *not fear those that kill the body*; wherefore it is implied, that it is in their power to do so much: men may take away all our temporals. And this should much allay our affections to these things: for why should we set our mind upon that which is not? Happiness cannot be placed in these; inasmuch as one of the great properties of happiness, even according to Aristotle, is, that it should be in our power, οἰκεῖον ἀγαθόν: but these things are not. And why should we then open our arms, to embrace that which we cannot clasp? From the enjoyment of the least morsel of bread, even to life itself, we stand at the mercy of those who



oftentimes have no mercy; *Tuae vitae dominus est, quisquis est contemptor suae*, says Seneca: "He that is so desperate as to contemn his own life, has "made himself master of yours."

2. The second proposition deducible from the words is this, That the soul of man is immortal, *Fear not them that can kill the body, but cannot kill the soul*: this is beyond the reach of all created power. Now this is a foundation-truth, upon the removal of which, religion falls to the ground. Religion is that which awes the mind to the doing of good and the abstaining from evil, from hope of reward, and fear of punishment eternal. The thought of these has a persuasive, and almost a coercive influence upon all our actions. But if the soul dies with the body, the hope and fear of these will die before the soul. If the soul were mortal, our Saviour's exhortation and argument amounts to no thing.

3. The third observation that arises from the words is this; that God has an absolute and plenary power to destroy the whole man; *Fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*. This should silence the proud regrets and murmurings of our hearts, at the absolute-ness of God's decrees and purposes: for why may not his decree be as absolute as his power? If he can do what he will, why may not he decree what he will? But all these reasonings proceed from that innate self-love that we bear to the interest of our own natures. We would fain have that unjust for God to do, that is grievous for us to suffer.

4. The fourth observation, which takes in the sense of all the rest, and which I shall insist upon, is this; that the thought of damnation ought to have greater weight upon us to engage our fears, than the most exquisite miseries that the power or malice of man is able to inflict.

The prosecution of this will lie in these two things.

I. To shew what is in these miseries, which men are able to inflict, that may lessen our fears of them.

II. To shew what is that surpassing misery in damnation, that ought (as I may so speak) to engross our fears.

I. Concerning the first, there are seven considerations that may and ought to lessen our fears of those miseries that may be inflicted upon us by men.

(1.) As, first, that they are temporal, and concern only this life; and there is nothing that can render a being of an eternal duration miserable, but such a misery as is eternal: and nothing ought rationally to be feared, but such a thing as is inconsistent with the happiness of our nature. Now these three things, this triumvirate of misery, that we apprehend to be-reave us of our happiness, are either,

1. Loss of reputation. But, alas! what is that, but a malignant blast of a virulent mouth upon our names? And that which is but a blast, will pass away like a blast. Let envy and malice vomit out all the scandals and reproaches that they can invent, or the Devil suggest; let them pursue us with incessant scoffs all our days; yet our dust shall be at quiet, and our soul at rest.



2. Let it be loss of an estate; though a man has neither bread to feed, nor raiment to clothe him, yet still all these wants are only commensurate to his life; and when his life is but for a moment, his miseries cannot be long. He must go naked, and stript of all, out of the world; and if he is stript of his estate at present, he is only in a posture of leaving the world beforehand.

3. Let it be loss of life; yet this is quickly past. Aristotle observes, that generation and corruption are changes that are done in a moment: *generatio et corruptio fit in instanti*. And should the fear of that be continual, the endurance of which is but for an instant? The time of living is short, but the time of death is much shorter. When the misery passes away in a moment, a man has not time to be miserable. Let every Christian remember, that he is immortal; and let not these things dismay him. He shall live and abide, when these things are past and gone. This was a cutting reprehension to Peter; *What, Peter, canst not thou watch with me for an hour?* There is nothing that is momentary, which deserves either a man's affections or his fears. His miseries are like a river; while he looks upon them, they run from him. Still let him consider this, that as his life passes away, so do his calamities; which can no more abide, while this is in flight, than one in a coach can remain in this place, while the coach is going to another. Wherefore, since Providence hath contracted our calamities, let every man contract his fears. He is upon a career, as well hasting from the miseries as the happiness of this world. *He is like grass, and the flower of the field*, here to-day, and gone to-morrow; and what if he meets with a rub or two, some stinging calamity, yet the shortness of life secures him. The nettle can stand no longer than the grass. Let him hug himself in this thought, that he is a traveller, hasting through bad ways: his afflictions keep pace with his life; he runs the gauntlet; he does not stand still while he is struck. Disgrace, poverty, and death, those dreadful things to mortality, they are themselves but mortal. The blackest line shall have a period. Wherefore since the shortness of our affliction is just matter of refreshment, let us not make the affliction itself an argument of terror.

(2.) They are not to be feared, because they do not take away any thing from a man's proper perfections: for is any thing of the solid worth of his mind diminished, because his estate is impaired? Is a man at all the worse for this or that unjust disgrace? Is his skin ever the fouler, because a spot is fallen upon his clothes? Or is it any shame to die? These things cannot reach the soul, where all a man's worth and happiness is treasured. As honour is in honourance, in him that honours rather than in him that is honoured; so disgrace is in him that casts it, not in him that endures it. Our Saviour says, *that meats and drinks cannot defile a man, because they are received into him, and pass through him*; so the injuries and disgraces of this world can not hurt us, because they pass over us. And what I instance in this particular of disgrace, may be applied to all other calamities. But now sin and guilt, they are in the soul, and the wrath of God, that sinks into the soul, as oil into the bones; therefore they destroy it, and consequently ought to be feared. But miseries and afflictions hurt not the



soul, as being without it: they are like storms and hail rattling upon the outside of the house, not at all felt, and therefore not to be feared by those that are within. We ought to fear nothing, but that which can rob us of the happiness and perfection of our being, which is the conformity of our nature to God, and God has placed this out of the reach of man; it is intrusted in the keeping of the will, which is not to be forced by any outward compulsion. It is sin only, and the wrath of God for sin, that can bereave us of this. In the midst of chains, and prisons, and bonds, a man's will is free. In the midst of all Job's miseries, he may, with Job, keep his integrity; and hitherto he is an happy man. But sin enslaves; sin will bring him below the dunghill. The Stoics, being sensible that the perfection of a man was only in the virtuous disposition of his soul, which they called wisdom, held a wise man to be so far unconcerned in all the miseries of this life, that he might sing in Phalaris's bull, laugh upon the rack, smile upon a tyrant; because all these evils could not destroy the virtue of the soul, and therefore not the happiness of the soul. And certainly much happier is a conscientious Stephen amongst the stones, and a martyr in the flames, than an epicure upon a bed of roses. And shall a Christian droop under the fear of those evils, when a philosopher could sing under the endurance of them? Our fears indeed at present are correspondent to our apprehensions; and so much are we led by sense, that we can now hardly apprehend any thing to be misery, but that which is pain. But certainly the day of the Lord will reveal it to be far otherwise; there will be more sting and venom in sin, than ever we found in affliction: then we shall see, that when we were afraid of the greatest cruelty of man, we feared where no fear was; and when we engaged without fear in a way of sin, we ventured upon the very mouth of hell and destruction. Let no religious person, therefore, fear the threats or fury of men, as long as his innocence is in his own keeping, *his darling out of the power of the dog*. The archers of a wicked generation may shoot at him, and sorely grieve and hate him, as they did righteous Joseph; *but his bow shall abide in strength, and his arms be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob*. All the force, the rage, the spite of a wicked world, cannot force him to sin; and therefore cannot force him to be miserable.

(3.) The evils that men inflict are not to be feared, because in all these they are limited by God's over ruling hand. *The Lord reigns, though the earth be never so unquiet*.

In those very actions that oppose God and his glory, God has a commanding hand. The Devil himself could not go the least beyond God's prescriptions, in his vexing Job. The Devil, not only in his punishments, but in his actions, is held in chains. All the miseries we so fear, are entirely in God's disposal. He holds the stars in his hand, as well in respect of their malignant as their propitious influences. All the great ones of the world are only God's swordbearers; and because they bear the sword, we cannot hence conclude, that they have the power and use of the sword. How should this allay our fears and compose our jealousies, since our greatest enemies can do no more than what our best friend permits! A child is no more afraid when he sees a sword, than when he sees a staff in his father's hand. Be it a



mercy, or be it a judgment, why should we trouble ourselves? It is in God's management. This was an abundant satisfaction to David, that *his times were in God's hands*, [Psalm xxxi. 15](#). All his concernments, whether in prosperity or adversity, his persecution from house and home, as well as his advancement to a kingdom, they were all in God's ordering. The wicked are said to be God's *rod*, [Isaiah x. 5](#). They cannot strike a blow, but as managed by his arm. A weapon that is in nobody's hand cannot strike; and that which is in a friend's hand cannot hurt. *Thou didst it, therefore I kept silence*, says David, [Psalm xxxix. 9](#). It is an argument sufficient not only to silence our murmurings, but our complaints; not only to convince our reasons, but to confute our fears; *It is God that does it*. He says to this affliction, Go, and it goes; to this enemy, Persecute, and he persecutes; to another, Kill, and he kills: all attend the nod of his sovereignty. He holds the winds in his fists; he lets them fly into a storm, and again crushes them into a calm, as he pleases. This therefore is an argument of solid comfort, that in all the miseries we endure from our enemies, God is the chief actor; whose power is able to control their force, and his goodness to overrule their malice. There can be no cause in the sharpest torments to complain of cruelty, while we are under the hand of the surgeon; but especially if our father be the surgeon. So that this is a third reason to allay our fears of all miseries that may be inflicted by men, because they are overruled by the omnipotent arm of a merciful God.

(4.) The good that may be extracted out of such miseries as are inflicted by men, is often greater than the evil that is endured in them; therefore they are not to be feared, but rather prudently to be managed. The evil that is in them can only affect the body; but the good of them may really benefit the soul. We know vipers afford materials for the best medicines, as well as the strongest poison; and therefore as they are avoided by the fearful passenger, so they are sought for by the skilful physician. There is a spiritual Christianity, by which a soul may extract such an elixir out of worldly crosses, bring such a sight out of darkness, that they may prove greater comforts than ever they were troubles. I could instance in every particular calamity; but I shall pitch only upon one, which is virtually all, and that is death. Let us here rank the evils of it on one side, and the good of it on the other; and then see whether it may more deservedly exercise our fears, or incite our joys. Death puts a divorce between thy soul and thy body: yes, but it also separates between thy soul and thy sins. It snatches thee out of this world; but it translates thee into a better. It takes thee from converse with men; but then it lodges thee in the society of angels. It bereaves thee of the pleasures of life; but it also frees thee from the troubles of life. The emolument of it does so far overbalance the evil of it, that a Christian may, with much resolution, defy any persecutor; and instead of trembling under the fear of death, triumphantly cry out with Paul, *For me to die is gain*.

(5.) The fear of these evils seldom prevents them before they come, and never lessens them when they are come; therefore it is irrational. You must remember, according to the



premised distinctions, that I speak of a solicitous, anxious fear; such an one as is, for the most part, attended with a distrust of Providence. Fear is a passion designed by nature for the avoidance of evil; and where it does not enable us to avoid it, but rather augments it, there it is absurd. Continual fear of a calamity before it comes, will exhaust our strength and spirits so far, as to disenable us to grapple with it, when it is come. And this is all we gain by such fear; the burden of an affliction is still the same, and our ability to endure it is made less. As our Saviour said, *Can any of us, by taking thought, add one cubit to his stature?* So I may say. Can any one, by his solicitous fears, diminish aught from the malice of men, alleviate the pangs of death, or wipe off a reproach? Nay, it oftentimes betrays us into all these evils. *Mors et fugacem persequitur virum*, says the poet. He that trembles at the very sight of his burden, with what courage will he be able to stand under it? Can the trembling of the lamb keep off or mitigate the rage of the wolf? He that continually torments himself with the fear of an approaching evil, does anticipate his misery, not avoid it. Every strong apprehension of an object is a certain approximation of it to the soul. Fear makes the evil that is feared present to a man, in respect of its trouble, before it can be present in respect of its existence: wherefore it is so far from keeping off a calamity, that it brings it before its time. When Sennacherib approached to Jerusalem with a dreadful army, we read in [Isaiah xxxvi. xxxvii.](#) *that Hezekiah was amazed, and rent his clothes, and the people trembled.* But was it their trembling that kept off the enemy? No; it was not Hezekiah's fear of his enemy, but his confidence in his God, that did protect him. Thus we see it avails nothing to keep off a calamity. But will it diminish it, when it is actually upon us? No; says Job, *the evil that I feared is come upon me*, [Job iii. 25.](#) Job's antecedent fear did not at all lighten his present misery. And thus I have shewn the absurdity of this fear, which is a sufficient reason against it; and certainly that which is so notoriously contrary to reason, cannot have any agreement with religion.

(6.) These evils are not to be feared, because the all-knowing God, who knows the utmost of them better than men or angels, has pronounced them not to be feared. And certainly we may well venture our lives upon his word, upon which we venture our souls. God is too knowing to be ignorant of the utmost of these things, and too faithful to conceal what he knows. He that made the bow, knows how far it will carry. He that tempered the faculties and powers of man, knows that he did it with such an equality, that one man cannot do more than another can endure. We have God's word for it, that the tormentors of the body cannot hurt us; and should not this take off all pretence of fear? When our physician tells us that we may venture upon such or such a dish, we may do it with safety and confidence. Hear what encouragement God speaks in the most discouraging cases. [Isaiah vii.](#) Two mighty kings invade Ahaz; so that it is said, in the [second verse](#), *that his heart was moved and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.* For what in all likelihood could be expected from fury joined with force, but certain ruin and desolation, bloodshed



and captivity? Yet God says in the [fourth verse](#), *Fear not, neither be faint-hearted*. And the reason of it is at hand; for God could easily either divert these evils, as he did, or at least easily enable him to endure them. In [Isaiah xliii. 1, 2](#), God says to Israel, *Fear not; when thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee*. Fire and water are the most dreadful elements; but God bids his children *fear not*, while they are in the very jaws of these; for he is able to extinguish them, or at least to suspend their force: as he did when the Israelites passed through the seas; and when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, were cast in the fire. In St. James, [chap. i. 2](#), the Spirit bids us *count it all joy, when we fall Into divers temptations*. By temptations is meant the miseries and tribulations of the world. These things are so far from being just arguments of our fear, that, in God's esteem, they are real matter of our joy. Now there is no exception that can with any colour be framed against the reports that God himself shall make of any thing. Shall we, then, continue to multiply our fears of these evils, when we have the verdict of truth itself, that they are not to be regarded? when we have his testimony, who is too discerning of the nature of all things to be deceived, and too true to deceive? Now, when we have the deposition of an exact knowledge, joined with an infinite truth, we cannot in reason suspend our belief; and if we entertain a belief of these things, we cannot reasonably retain our fears.

(7.) The greatest of these evils have been endured, and that without fear or astonishment; and therefore they ought not to be feared. This is a maxim of a sure and never-failing verity: *Ab actu ad potentiam valet consequentia*: That which has actually been endured, may be endured. Experience is for the most part a convincing, but it is always a confirming argument. Examples ought to animate us. Many will venture upon some dangers which before they avoided, after once they have seen some body wade through them. Leaders in an army are not only for the direction, but also for the encouragement of those that follow. Let us take a survey of some examples: and, first, we shall find some heathens, who though they were not helped by grace, yet by a bare principle of moral honesty were lifted above the terrors of men. Regulus, rather than falsify his promise, could, with an undaunted courage, endure the barbarous cruelty of the Carthaginians. Socrates, rather than conceal a known truth, could, with much alacrity, suffer an ignominious death. And certainly these examples should make us courageous in the endurance of all worldly misery, if not out of religion, yet at least out of shame. But now, for those that have been elevated by an higher spirit, by a principle of Christianity, I could produce you multitudes, troops of martyrs; some triumphing at the stake; some with joy embracing the gibbet; some cheerfully enduring those torments that others could scarce conceive but with terror. I could instance in those three slighting the furnace and the rage of an incensed tyrant, Dan. in. 18. In Stephen patiently enduring a barbarous death, [Acts vii](#). In Paul enduring almost all that could be endured, [2 Cor. xi](#).

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23-26, &c. The history of his life is the history of his troubles. Now that Spirit, which enabled these heroes to conquer the fear of such miseries, is also ready to enable us. As God calls us to the same duty, so he will afford us the same assistance. Methinks there should be that magnanimity in every Christian, that he should scorn to be outbraved by any, in point of spiritual fortitude; and to make that noble resolution that Nehemiah did, in [chap. vi. 11](#), *Should such a man as I flee?* I, who have the armour of God, the helmet of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, and the Spirit to be my second, should such a one as I fear? especially when so many have gone before me, both with courage and success? I confess, that is a piece of daring valour, to encounter a new, unknown calamity; but examples and precedents take off from the dread of the greatest misery. And therefore we must know, that although a Christian's way through these calamities be a strait and narrow way, and so consequently troublesome; yet it is a beaten, trodden way, and therefore not terrible.

And thus much for the first thing, to shew what are those considerations that ought to lessen our fears of these worldly evils: I proceed now to the

Second thing, to shew what is implied in the destruction of the body and soul in hell, which makes it so formidable.

To demonstrate this, I could here enlarge upon several considerations, which, because vulgar, I shall not insist upon. As first, in opposition to the momentary duration of earthly torments, I could oppose the eternity of damnation; which is set forth in scripture by the grimmiest representations that can be, by the *worm that never dies*, [Mark ix. 44](#). Worms are the effects and signs of mortality; but this worm is the token of a miserable eternity. It is also expressed by fire, that is never quenched, in [Revelation xiv. 11](#), *And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever*. Who can think of eternity, but with horror? who can fancy a perpetuity, but with amazement? All the fear that nature has, is not sufficient to bestow upon such an object. An endless torment it is, such a thing as a man can scarce wield or master in his thoughts. Eternity is that which would make any thing but the enjoyment of God a misery; for since the mind of man is refreshed with variety, what pleasure is there, that a perpetual enjoyment would not make loathsome? How dismal then must it needs be, when a perpetuity concurs with a torment! I could here further illustrate the greatness of this misery from the quality of the torments: and that first for their positive part; they are so exquisite, so intense, that *neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the greatness* of them. Every faculty and power of the soul shall be then filled with God's wrath. We have read, that some have endured the greatest bodily torments without shrinking, without a tear: but there shall be no soul so sturdy, as to be able to endure the torments of hell without eternal *weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*. If the damned could now and then for a while shift their torments for the greatest that man can inflict, those changes would be so many recreations, so many lucid intervals; such an unspeakable difference is there between these miseries, and those that



they shall then endure. I could further shew the greatness of this punishment from the privative part, to wit, the total deprivation of God's presence, which presence would be able to turn a hell into a heaven, as the want of it would make a heaven become a real hell. The lost, undone sinner shall be then eternally divorced from the embraces of his God; not one act of mercy, not one smile of his countenance to be enjoyed for ever. No company to be had but those that weep under the same miseries, and the company of their cruel, implacable tormentors, who shall execute the wrath of God upon them, for those very sins which they tempted them to: and in the midst of these endless flames not one drop of water to alleviate the rage of them, to relieve the tongue of a distressed Dives. The miseries of hell are yet further set out in scripture by that which of all other evils is the most grievous to the nature of man; and that is, shame and contempt: *Dan. xii. 2. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.* From these and many other considerations, I could set forth the infinite misery of a condemned estate; but instead of exercising our inventions in describing these miseries, we should do well to exercise our wisdom in avoiding them.

But to pass by these considerations, there is one, I think, that gives weight and a sting to all the rest, and chiefly renders the destruction of the body and soul terrible; and it is this, because the destroying of the body and soul in hell is the utmost that the almighty God can do to a sinner. This is apparent from the opposition that is between the former and the latter part of the verse; for the killing of the body, which is there mentioned as the utmost that man can do, is opposed to the destroying of the body and soul, which from thence is intimated to be the utmost that God can do. Now when an omnipotence shall do its worst; when God shall rally up all the strength that an almighty power is able to inflict, who shall be able to stand under those strokes? Where there is no limitation of the power of him that punishes, there can be no end of the punishment. It is not an earthly judge, a king, a tyrant, but it is a God that we are to contest withal; they are not courts nor armies, but an infinite power that will attack us. All the ingredients that make a thing terrible are wrapt up in this one consideration: for first, here is an irresistible force, and then this irresistible force is fired with an implacable anger, both of which are to encounter the greatest weakness joined with the greatest guilt: and when a weak and guilty soul is to deal with an omnipotent, angry God, what is to be expected but the extremity of torment? What thought is able to reach the depth of this misery! When the living God shall cease to be God, then such a soul shall cease to be miserable.

But when I say that the destroying of the body and soul in hell is the utmost that God can do, it may be objected, that a total annihilation of its being would be a greater punishment, and a work that carries in it a greater evidence of God's power; for it argues a Deity more, to reduce an immortal soul to nothing, than of happy to make it miserable.



To this I answer, that although annihilation argues a greater power, or (to speak more properly) is a greater argument of power, than to render a thing miserable, yet it is not so great a punishment: for punishment is properly the inflicting of the evil of pain, for the evil of sin. But now after annihilation, there remains no being; and where there is no being, there can be no pain; and where there is no pain, there can be no punishment. It is clear therefore, that although the reduction of a being to a nonentity be the certain result of an infinite power; yet the reducing of it to an eternal misery is much the greater penalty. God will (as I may so speak) with one hand hold the soul in life and being, that he may smite it with the other; and that he may exercise his justice in punishing the sinner, he will exert his power in preserving him.

But it may be here further objected, that even in respect of the greatness of the punishment, to annihilate a soul is much more grievous, and consequently a severer punishment, than only to make it eternally miserable. For to be miserable, is only a diminution of being; but to be annihilated, implies a total privation of it. Now since the nature of God is not only the fountain, but also the standard of happiness, by which all created happiness is to be measured; according to our nearness to which perfection, or our distance from it, we are said to be happy or miserable: it is clear, that there is a greater distance between God and no being, than between God and a miserable being. Wherefore it is a greater punishment to be brought to nothing, than to be brought to misery.

In answer to this, I confess that this argument seems metaphysically to conclude. But as to the matter in hand, I shall first oppose our Saviour's words, which ought to have greater weight with us than all the arguments in the world; who in [Matt. xxvi. 24](#), speaking concerning the damnation of Judas, says, *that it had been good for him never to have been born*; which words St. Hierome so interprets, *Simpliciter dictum est, melius esse non subsistere, quam male subsistere*. From whence it is clear that our Saviour judged it much better not to be at all, than to be eternally miserable. And next to our Saviour's, I could add the judgment of Solomon, [Eccles. iv. 1, 2, 3](#). If Solomon could esteem it better of the two not to have been at all, than to have endured the miseries of this world; how much more did he prefer it before the endurance of those eternal miseries of the world to come!

(2.) But, in the second place, this maxim, upon which the argument is grounded, to wit, that the degree of diminution is better than the degree of privation; better to be miserable, than not to be at all; does not always hold true, but admits of many exceptions, (as a learned author of our own observes.) And one exception is, when the degree of diminution is more sensitive than the degree of privation. So that this answer falls in with the former; because *to be miserable* infers a greater pain and grief than *simply not to be*: therefore it is also the greater punishment, because the nature of punishments consists in the endurance of pain.

And thus I have finished the doctrinal part, wherein I have endeavoured to shew, what it is that may render the greatest miseries that men can bring upon us contemptible, and

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what it is that represents the destruction of the body and soul so dreadful. I shall now proceed to the

Application.

Though the words themselves are an exhortation, and so their own use, yet, to bring you fuller home, I shall repeat the exhortation in one word of serious advice, that when any one is discouraged from duty, or tempted to sin, by any man, or any thing that is in the power of man, (as who is not some time or other?) he would on this side conscientiously ponder man's inability, and on the other, God's infinite power to destroy. Shall the frowns of a poor, weak man like ourselves terrify us from duty, more than the anger of the almighty God command us to it? Shall the fear of racks or gibbets more forcibly drive us into the commission of sin, than the thoughts of the never-dying worm and the unquenchable fire keep us from it? Is the sword or prison more terrible than rivers of brimstone kindled by the breath of a sin-revenging God? Is a few days sorrow more dreadful than eternal weepings and waitings? The command lies before us: man says, Break it, or we die; God says, Perform it, or we die eternally. Let us consult, not so much our religion, as our reason; and then fear that which our reason shall tell us is most to be feared. Man, compared with God, is not only not terrible, but very contemptible; it is not his strength, but our weakness, that makes him dreadful. Take him at his best, he had always more infirmity than authority: nay, the greatest and most potent monarch upon earth does not owe so much to his own power, as to his subjects fear, that he is obeyed. But now God, upon the best terms of reason, may challenge our fears: for as an all-sufficiency is the only rational foundation of our hopes, as being that alone which is able to answer all our wants and desires; so an omnipotence is the only rational ground of our fear, as being that alone which is able to destroy our eternal happiness. How many duties have been neglected, how many hideous and vile actions committed, because men have not kept fresh upon their spirits a due apprehension of these things! Is not this the natural language of most hearts? Should I perform such a strict duty, I should be derided. Should I bear testimony to such a truth, I should offend such a great one. Should I testify to such a one's face of the vanity of his conversation, and the profaneness and frothiness of his discourse, I should disoblige him for ever: I dare not do it, Dare not do it? Then let such an one renounce his Christianity, but much more the ministry, or dare to be good when God commands, *temporibusque malis ausus es esse bonus*. The very heathen poet could make it the greatest and the surest test of sincerity, to embrace virtue in the midst of discouragements; but for a soul to be prevailed upon, by the terrors and persuasions of man, to slight the precepts and threatenings of the great God, what is this but, like that absurd Balaam, to run after the invitation of a mortal king, while God himself stands in the way with a drawn sword to oppose him? *He that denies me before men*, says Christ, that is, he that is afraid to own me and my ways, according to the strictness of them, in the midst of all the discouragements of the world, *him will I also deny before my Father in heaven*, [Matt.](#)

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x. 33. He that fears the face of man shall never with any comfort behold the face of God. Shall I draw forth this case in some instances, by which it shall appear, that a due apprehension of the terrors of the Lord, above the terrors of men, has been a preservative against the commission of many sins; and, on the contrary, that a fearing of man more than God has been a cause of the foulest rebellions?

1. For instances of the first sort: it was a full persuasion of the power of God to destroy beyond the power of the greatest men, that kept Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego from idolatry; that made them own the cause of God in spite of a furnace, in [Dan. iii.](#) which I have already mentioned. It was this that kept Joseph from that foul sin of adultery; for without question the solicitations of his mistress were seasoned with threatenings as well as entreaties. But he had his answer ready: *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* [Gen. xxxix. 9.](#) Here I am threatened with false reproaches, if I refuse to sin; but, on the other hand, God threatens me with eternal miseries, if I do commit it. Here indeed there is a dungeon; but there is a pit from whence there is no recovery. It was this also that caused the apostles to go on preaching the gospel in spite of all persecution, and to answer all the threatenings of men in power, hindering the propagation of it, with this short but pious resolution, [Acts v. 29,](#) *We ought to obey God rather than men.*

2. We shall see how the entertaining of a greater fear of men than of God was the cause of many notorious sins. It was this that caused Saul to neglect the command of God in destroying Amalek, to the ruin of his person and the loss of his kingdom. For in his confession he resolves his sin into the fear of man, as the cause of it, [1 Sam. xv. 24.](#) *And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.* It was a sinful fear of men that caused the father of the faithful, even Abraham himself, to stain his conscience with an equivocation little less than a lie, [Gen. xx. 2.](#) It was this that caused David to take that indirect, sinful, unbecoming course for his security, to feign himself mad, [1 Sam. xxi. 13.](#) And last of all, it was the fear of the Jews that plunged Peter into that woful sin of a treble denial of his master, which afterwards cost him so many bitter sighs and tears, [Matt. xxvi.](#) I could add many other examples: but since it appears sufficiently from these, how dangerous it is to fear those who can only kill the body, and in the mean time to neglect him that is able to destroy the soul, let us press that to our own hearts that Nehemiah did to the nobles of Judah, when they were engaged in the work of the Lord, and much affronted and discouraged by men, in [Nehem. iv. 14,](#) *Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible.*

2. I proceed to a second use; where, from the qualification of those persons to whom this exhortation was addressed, who were Christ's disciples, eleven of which were saints of God, secure as to their eternal [state,] such as were so kept by Christ, as that they could not be lost, [John xvii. 12,](#) we thence gather an use of information, that it is not absurd to give cautions and admonitions for the avoiding eternal death, even to those whose salvation is

sure, and sealed up in the purpose of God. This is the great argument of those who are enemies to the absolute decree of God's election, and the certain perseverance of the saints: For, say they, to what purpose do we bid those fear him that is able to destroy their bodies and souls in hell, who are sure never to come to hell? But this exception is not so considerable: for first, though they are sure never to come to hell, by reason of God's decree, yet they do not always know so much; and men's fears follow their knowledge and apprehensions. Secondly, by these cautions and admonitions this certainty of salvation is partly procured. If, indeed, we did assert such a certainty of their salvation as did not depend upon the use of means, then indeed this exception of theirs, Why should we use the means? why should we give cautions and admonitions against hell? would conclude something. But since we affirm such a certainty of salvation as depends upon and takes in the use of such means, this argument signifies little.

3. This speaks reproof to that slavish sort of sinners who are men-pleasers. Flattery of men always carries with it a distrust or a neglect of God. If to fear men be prohibited by God, then a servile pleasing of them must be equally hateful to him; forasmuch as this arises from fear. It is the most degenerate and pusillanimous temper of mind that can be. It is ignoble, as thou art a man, and irreligious, as thou art a Christian. Canst thou prostitute an immortal soul to the feeding of the ambition or revenge of a sinful man like thyself, by a servile admiration of his person, and a false accusation of others? How will it upbraid thee with thy former flatteries and thy fears, to see the person now so adored by thee one day as naked and obnoxious before God's tribunal as thyself, and perhaps answering for many of those injuries that he did to thee! It is to debase thyself, and to betray the privilege and dignity of thy soul, to flatter or fear any man. There is a spiritual grandeur that God would have every soul maintain; and it is below a man to adore or cringe to any thing but his Maker. To this intent, it is the design of the Spirit, throughout the whole scripture, to stain the glory of men with the most undervaluing expressions. *Cease from man: for wherein is he to be accounted of? Isa. ii. 22. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, Isa. xli. 14.* The life of man is said to be as a vapour, *James iv. 14.* And certainly, if his life is a vapour, his power cannot be considerable. What is that which the man whom thou so adorest can do for thee? Why, he may perhaps gratify thee with some puny gain or preferment. But is he able to speak that comfort to thee that arises from the conscience of a good action? Can he deliver thee from the hand of thy enemies, when God shall deliver thee into it? or can he cause thee to fall under thy enemies, when God shall rescue thee from them? If not, then adore and please him who is able to do these things. Conscientiously pursue that course of life which God has placed thee in, and trust thy concernments with Providence: disdain to step a foot out of it, to gather up the inconsiderable straws of human favours or preferments. The God whom thou servest is able to advance thee.



And remember this exhortation, which, with a little change of the words, makes for the purpose: Please not them who are only able to advance the body, but cannot in the least benefit the soul; but rather make it thy care and business to please him who is able with eternal bliss to advance both body and soul in heaven.

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



SERMON XXV.

HEBREWS ii. 16.

For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.

IF we reflect upon the state of the world before the coming of Christ, we shall find, that a long and a dark night of ignorance had overspread almost the whole universe for about the space of four thousand years before God was pleased to permit this great *Sun of righteousness* to arise upon it. The improvements of their reason were but mean, but their religion scandalous: the most advanced results of both amounting to no more but this; that they did, or at least might, by the force of natural reason, know that there was a God; and knowing him to be God, they could not but know him also to be infinitely wise, powerful, just, holy, and the like. Upon the knowledge of this, (as it is easy to glance from one contrary to the other,) they could not but consequentially know themselves to be impure, unjust, and unholy. And being so, whether, upon the stock of nature or tradition, they could proceed to collect further, that this holy God would be concerned to punish them for not being so too; and in case he should, whether yet he would not accept of some other thing as vicarious, to bear the blow of divine justice due to themselves; I say, whether they gathered this from the conclusions of reason or the reports of tradition, certain it is, that this persuasion put the world upon sacrifices, as the great propitiations of a Deity, and arts of recompence to an offended justice.

This was then the sum of their religion, for them to sin, and the poor beast to die; for the man to do like a beast, and the beast to suffer for the man. Nay, it improved even to homicide; and *to offer up the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul* was a sublime satisfaction. To expiate impiety by inhumanity; to kill the innocent (as it were) to get his innocence; to let others blood for our distempers; this was all the religion of a world acted by the dictates of ignorance and the overruling fallacy of a brutish, inveterate custom.

It was now time for God to commiserate the absurd and soul-ruining devotions of a besotted world, and for Christ to step forth and declare, that such *sacrifice and burnt-offerings God would not, and therefore that a body was to be prepared for himself.*

Hereupon, to rescue the deluded sons of men from their sins, and, what was much more sinful, from their religion; as the reserve of Providence, as the inheritance of the last ages; as it were to credit the concluding scene and last going off of the world, in the fulness of time, Christ was born, and sent by his Father, to be the great mediator and instructor of mankind; both to discourage and to expiate sin, and to teach the world the worship of their Maker.



And all this he was to effect by the strongest methods and most miraculous condescensions to our likeness, by being God *manifested*, or rather *hidden*, *in the flesh*; clothing his divine nature with all the frailties of the human, suppressing his glories, and, in a word, by *taking upon him the seed of Abraham*.

As for the words that I have here pitched upon, it must be confessed that the translation represents them very different from what they are in the original, which runs thus; Οὐ γὰρ δήπου ἐπιλαμβάνεται τοὺς ἀγγέλους. Where we find that what we render by the preter tense, *he took*, the original has by the present, *he takes*: and what we render *the nature of angels*, the original has only τοὺς ἀγγέλους, *angelos*. Neither is it clear, that *to take on him*, or *to assume*, is the genuine signification of ἐπιλαμβάνεται. This text in deed is generally used by divines, ancient and modern, to prove Christ's incarnation, or assuming the human nature, notwithstanding that this word ἐπιλαμβάνεται (as Camero well observes) is nowhere else in scripture taken in this sense. St. Paul uses it in 1 Tim. vi. 19, but with him there it signifies, *to apprehend*, *to attain*, or *compass a thing*. But its chief signification, and which seems most suitable to this place, is, *to rescue and deliver*; it being taken from the usual manner of rescuing a thing; namely, by catching hold of it, and so forcibly wringing it from the adversary. As David, when he rescued the lamb from the bear and the lion's mouth, might be properly said ἐπιλαμβάνεται. And Grotius observes, that the proper sense of this word is, *vindicare seu asserere in libertatem manu injecta*. Though, if he will needs have that to be the signification of the word in this place, it may be feared that he does it out of too much favour to a bad hypothesis.

Before we proceed any further therefore, it will, I think, be of moment to settle the right interpretation of the word, and to see whether ἐπιλαμβάνεται may be more properly rendered, *he takes hold of*, or *delivers*, or, *he takes on him*, or *assumes*. That the word will bear both, is certain; and it is also as certain, that if the text be considered in itself, abstracted from what follows, it will properly enough bear the former sense, of *delivering* or *taking hold of*: according to which, it will run thus; *Christ verily does not deliver or redeem angels, but he delivers and redeems the seed of Abraham*. Which interpretation surely does not offer any violence to the sense of the text.

Those who will not allow Christ to have had any existence antecedent to his conception, nor a divine nature, which did afterwards assume the human, are earnest for this interpretation, utterly excluding and rejecting the other. I have already granted, that the words thus rendered contain in them a truth; but then we must remember, that every true proposition drawn out of a text is not therefore the true interpretation of it. The fathers generally take ἐπιλαμβάνεται in the sense in which it is here translated; namely, *he assumed*, or *took on him the seed of Abraham*. And besides the influence that antiquity and general consent ought deservedly to have upon us in expounding scripture, I conceive, that there are not wanting

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also solid arguments to evince, that this is the proper sense of the word, as it is here used, and not the other.

For the proving of which, I shall premise this one note, (which indeed is clear of itself from the very illative particle *therefore*;) that this and the following verse are so joined together, as to make up one argument; of which argument this verse is the antecedent, and the other the consequent, or inference drawn from it.

Upon this consideration, I thus argue:

1. If in this verse is not signified Christ's taking on him our nature, how comes it to pass, that, in the next verse, which has an illative dependence upon this, the *seed of Abraham* are called *his brethren*? for his being their deliverer only would not make them his brethren; but *his taking of our nature* properly does. According to which, the argument proceeds fully thus; That since Christ was pleased, by assuming our nature, to be our brother, it became him to be like his brethren in all the circumstances of that nature.

2. In the following verse, which is argumentatively inferred from this, the thing designed to be proved is Christ's priesthood; but his being barely a deliverer is not a proper, specific medium to infer that; whereas his assuming of our nature is: forasmuch as a priest is to have a cognation or conjunction of nature with those for whom he is to offer sacrifices. For none but a man can be a priest to offer for men.

3. In the [fourteenth verse of this chapter](#), the apostle had already expressed the very same thing here contended for, in these words: *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same*. So that it is probable, that the apostle is here still pursuing the same subject, namely, Christ's incarnation, or investing of himself with the human nature. And therefore I cannot see what advantage it could be to any, to rend away this interpretation from the seventeenth verse, when the same sense is so clear and resplendent in the former verse, that it sets it above the attempts of any, either to pervert the meaning, or to evade the force of it.

Having thus given an exposition of the words, I shall cast the prosecution of them into these particulars.

I. To shew what is naturally inferred from Christ's *taking on him the seed of Abraham*.

II. To shew why Christ took on him this, rather than *the nature of angels*.

I. For the first of these, there are four things that follow, and are inferred upon it.

I. As, first, the divine nature of Christ is unavoidably consequent from hence. There are those who assert Christ to be a mere creature, and not at all to have existed before his conception in the womb of the Blessed Virgin: to cut asunder which blasphemous assertion, I need use no other argument than this; If Christ took upon him the seed of Abraham, or the human nature, then he had a being antecedent to the taking upon him this nature. The consequence is proved thus: Every action proceeds from some being or nature that does exist; but to assume the human nature is an action, and that not the action of the nature



assumed; therefore it must be the action of some nature that did exist before. That this act of assumption could not be the action of the human nature is evident; because in transient actions the same thing cannot be the agent and the object, in reference to the same action. And therefore since the act of assuming did terminate in the human nature, as the thing assumed, it could not issue from the same human nature as the agent assuming.

This argumentation is clear and undeniable, that Christ's *taking upon him the human nature* infers, that he did it by virtue of a nature preexistent to that, which, since it was not the nature of angels, (as is here expressly denied,) it follows, that it was a divine nature.

And truly, those who confess Christ the Saviour of the world, but allow him not this, make him a Saviour without a power to save. This is a work to be carried on against enemies and oppositions insuperable by any thing under a deity. Nothing can conquer and break asunder the bars of sin and death but the arms of omnipotence: the Devil could not be his captive, had he not been his creature.

No conquest to be had over the strong man, but by a stronger; and nothing stronger than the angelic nature, but the divine. *The strength of sin is the law*; and no strength can master the law, but that strength which made it. He must command the gates of heaven who lets sinners into it; otherwise the seed of Abraham may be like the stars indeed for number, but not for place.

2. Upon the same ground is inferred the reality of Christ's human nature. This certainly is so evident, that one would think it incapable of being denied: but, between the contrariety of error and the clashings of heretics, Christ shall be allowed to be neither God nor man. Incredibly strange and ridiculous, and even monstrous, are the several opinions of heretics concerning this matter. The Marcionites and the Valentinians affirmed that Christ had no real, but an imaginary, aerial, celestial body; and that he appeared only under the external form and shape of a man, but was never really united to man's nature. But this fancy is irrefragably refuted by this, that Christ is said so to have took upon him the nature of men, as not of angels; but that Christ, under the Old Testament, frequently appeared to the patriarchs as an angel, has been always held by the church. From whence it follows, that he took upon him the human nature, in a way much beyond a bare appearance under it; forasmuch as thus he might be said to have took upon him the nature of angels, under which, heretofore, he appeared so often.

The same Valentinians also, together with the Apollinarians, affirmed that Christ received not his body from the Blessed Virgin, but brought it with him from heaven. But how then could he have been said to have *took upon him the seed of Abraham*, since he could not do it any otherwise, but by descending from Abraham, according to the flesh; nor could he pretend to any such descent from him, but as he was the natural son of Mary?

Others, as the Arians and the Eunomians, admit ting that Christ took on him a real human body, yet denied that he took on him an human soul; asserting that his divine nature

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supplied the functions of that. But upon this supposition, with what shew of reason can it be affirmed that he took upon him our nature, since the human nature is adequately compounded and made up of body and soul, as its two essential, constituent parts: so that a body is no more a man's nature, without the concomitance of a rational soul, than a carcass is a man; or that two units can make up a perfect number of four.

Others, as the heretics of Armenia, affirmed that the body Christ had from his mother Mary was absolutely impassible; uncapable of suffering, or being injured by any external impression. Which, as it is a bold and absurd falsity, confuted by the whole history of Christ's life, which was nothing else but a series of sufferings; so it is particularly dashed in [Heb. iv. 15](#), where it is said, that *he was tempted like unto us in all things, sin only excepted*. And in the seventeenth and eighteenth verses of this second to the Hebrews it is eminently affirmed, that *he was made like unto his brethren, for this very cause, that he might suffer, and by his sufferings become a merciful high-priest*.

He took not only the privileges, the excellencies, and perfections of the human nature upon him, though these had been degradations enough to him, who was the express image of his Father's brightness; but he clothed himself with all its weaknesses and infirmities, bowed down his glories to the limited meanness of our faculties, to the poorness and affliction of our appetites: he hungered and thirsted, and was weary; lay open to all the stings of grief, and the invasions of pain. So that whatsoever the boldness or ignorance of heresy may affirm of him, by all the instances of a sad experience he found himself to be really a man.

3. The third thing deducible from the same ground, is the truth of his office and the divinity of his mission. For by thus being of the seed of Abraham, he gave one grand evidence that he was the promised Messiah: forasmuch as from the loins of Abraham was to issue this universal blessing, *the desire of the nations*, and the centre of all the promises and prophecies, uniting all the remote and scattered predictions in himself.

Now, as the thing that fulfils the prophecy proves the truth of it, so the prophecy mutually confirms and proves the truth of the thing that fulfils it. And therefore, as the old prophecies, finding an exact completion in Christ, yield an invincible argument against all atheists, (Machiavel himself confessing an utter impotence to resolve the problem of prophecies, without allowing a Deity;) so Christ's giving an event to them, undeniably proves, that he was intended by them against the Jews. Of whom, in this controversy, we have this vast advantage, that we profess not to prove Jesus Christ to be the Messiah, but by those records and arguments which they have in their own custody; nor to evince the truth of our New Testament, but by mediums drawn from their Old.

For is it imaginable, that all those various prophecies, commenced in such different periods of time, could meet so exactly in Christ by mere accident? and be drawn down through so many generations to a concurrence in his person, only by a lucky hit? Can chance, be so uniform, and casualty so certain? This is against the notions of reason, the course of



nature, and the voice of experience; and consequently, to any considering mind, incredible, be cause in itself morally impossible.

4. The fourth and last inference that we shall gather from hence, shall be to discover to us Christ's voluntary choice and design, to assume a condition here upon earth, low and contemptible. One would have thought, that if he had resolved to be a man, and to choose an alliance to dust and ashes; yet that he would at least have been framed out of the best clay, and cast into the noblest mould: but, that he might humble himself to the nethermost state of contempt, he chose to descend from *the seed of Abraham*; who, if we set aside their religious privileges, (which yet they enjoyed only, but neither improved nor deserved,) were certainly, both upon a moral and political account, the most sordid and degenerate race of men upon the earth.

For, first, to rate them by the reports made of them by the penmen of holy writ, who, being Jews themselves, cannot be supposed to have been partial in transmitting the infamy of their countrymen to posterity; yet, how ugly do they appear, even in their own story! their whole narrative containing nothing but a continued vicissitude of their idolatry, impurity, and rebellion. Who would have thought that men, with the remembrance of such prodigious miracles, and immediate discoveries of the divine power and favour to them in Egypt, new and fresh in their minds, could, as soon as ever Moses had turned his back, deify a golden calf, and debase their reason to such a low and ridiculous instance of idolatry? How were they always murmuring after mercies, and doubting after experience! No sooner had God done one miracle before them, but they doubted whether he could do another. How unworthily did they treat Moses and Aaron, and most of their deliverers! particularly Gideon; after his death deserting threescore of his lawful issue, and giving the kingdom to his base son! How causelessly did they relinquish David, and revolt to Absalom! and then, how ridiculously and meanly did they cringe to him, to resume the kingdom! It were infinite to pursue all their baseness. There was scarce a prophet or messenger of God sent to them, but they murdered him: and at length, to consummate and heighten their villainy to the utmost, they imbrued their hands in the blood of their long expected, but at length mistaken Messiah. And, which yet advances their sottishness, whereas they rejected Christ, notwithstanding that he had done those miracles, that were never done by any before him; yet when several impostors and false messias's rose up after him, who shewed them neither sign nor wonder, except of madness and impudence; yet (as appears out of their own Josephus) they were still acknowledged by a considerable number of followers.

And, to add the judgment of men to matters of fact, (of which those that have been mentioned are but very few,) there is no nation in the world, al most, but hates and contemns them. As early as the time of Jacob, we read, *that they were an abomination to the Egyptians*, [Gen. xliii. 32](#). And since, they have been successively loathed by all the great and civilized nations, as the Chaldeans, the Persians, the Grecians. And as for the Romans, no Latin writer



ever mentions them, but it is with scorn and contempt: Cicero, Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny, Lucius Florus, Martial, Juvenal, all have left them branded with a mark of ignominy. And at this very day, how much are they disgusted in all those kingdoms and dominions where they are dispersed! They are like dung upon the face of the earth; and that not so much for their being scattered, as for being so offensive.

Now certainly this may be rationally collected, that it could not be, that all nations, in all ages, should thus conspire in a detestation of them; but that there was some peculiar vileness essentially fixed in the genius of this people, contrary to those natural and generous principles of morality and converse, which universally possess and act the behaviour of the rest of mankind. Nothing could be more full and expressive than St. Paul's testimony of them, *1 Thess. ii. 15*, *They please not God, and are contrary to all men*. This is properly the Jewish temper and disposition.

I conclude, therefore, that it is one great instance of Christ's humiliation, that he derived his nativity from this race: so that the prophet Isaiah might justly say, *that he should spring up as a plant out of a dry ground*. As one that had drained all the worth and goodness of that nation into himself; which made those who lived both before and after him to have so little of it. He appeared amongst them, like a single star in a dark night; or, indeed, as a sun: and that not so much shining upon, as rather shining out of a dunghill.

II. I come now to the other general thing proposed for the handling of the words; namely, to shew why Christ took upon him the nature of man, and not of angels.

In things that are the immediate results of the divine will, it is a bold venture to search into the causes of them; and when we speak either of God or of the king, to assign an antecedent reason of their actions, and to be peremptory in alleging why they should do this or this.

The divine will is absolute; it is its own reason: it is both the producer and the ground of all its acts. It moves not by the external impulse or inclination of objects, but determines itself by an absolute autocracy.

And therefore as to the present inquiry, why Christ rather assumed the nature of men than that of angels; it is a full, abundant, and satisfactory answer, that so it seemed fit to the good pleasure of the all-wise God. Yet, since God is sometimes pleased, in his transacting with man, to descend some steps from the throne of his majesty, and to bring down his great counsels to the level of our apprehension, so as to submit his actions to be canvassed and cleared, even at the bar of reason itself; it will be found, that there are not wanting arguments to evince the reasonableness and equity of this his proceeding.

The reasons, therefore, why Christ took upon him the nature and the mediatorship of men, and not of angels, may be these two.

1. The transcendent greatness and malignity of the sin of the angels above that of men. What that particular sin was, for which the angels were thrown down from their station, is

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hard, and perhaps impossible, to be determined; yet men inquire after it as freely, as if it might: and some pitch it upon pride; though, in their confident asserting of that which is no where delivered, they seem to discover no small pride and arrogance themselves. But whatsoever that sin was, (which to determine is not here material,) certain it is, that it did much exceed the guilt and provoking qualities of the sin of man; and that in these two respects:

(1.) As being committed against a much greater light, which is to be the proper guide and ruler of the will in all its choices. The light of man's understanding, while innocent, was clear indeed, but small and diminutive, subject to the clouds of fallacy and inadvertency. But the angelical intellect was strong and intuitive, above the reach of those mists and clouds, that the lower region of the human faculties was subject to. Now, proportionable to the means of avoiding sin, is the guilt of falling into it. Man stumbled, and fell under the light and direction of a star; but the angels fell headlong under the light and guidance of a sun: so that no plea, no rational extenuation of their offence could be alleged. Whereas the different nature of man's transgression might afford such grounds to the ratiocinations of divine mercy, as though they did not excuse man's sin, yet might excite God's compassion.

(2.) The sin of the angels commenced upon a greater liberty of will and freedom of choice. There was no devil to tempt them to become devils; no seducer, of a stronger reason, to impose upon theirs. They moved entirely upon the motives of an intrinsic malice. But man was circumvented with fallacy, and tempted with importunity: and so great a share of the guilt may be devolved upon the temptation, that it is very possible, that if he had not been tempted, he had not fell. I confess, there is that inseparable prerogative of absoluteness in the will of every man, that it defies coaction, and cannot be forced by any external impression: for, indeed, if it might, so far it could not be said to sin, no action being sin that is not voluntary.

But then, the vehemence of persuasion, the restlessness of importunity, are great invasions upon this freedom and indifference of the will: and though they cannot wound or impair the faculty itself, yet they much hinder and perplex the actual use and exercise of it; and consequently, though they are not sufficient to acquit the sinner in an ill choice, yet they afford many grains of allowance, make great abatements, and alter the measures of his guilt. Strong and importunate persuasions have not the nature and formality of force; but they have oftentimes the effect of it: and he that solicits earnestly, sometimes determines as certainly as if he did force. The will of man, brought to sin by the tempter, is like a bowl running down an hill: its own weight and figure is, indeed, one cause of the motion; but the hand that threw it, is another.

2. The next, and perhaps the grand cause, that induced Christ to take upon him the nature and mediation of men, and not of angels, might be this; that, without such a Redeemer, the whole race and species of mankind had perished, as being all involved in the sin of their



representative: whereas though many of the angels sinned, yet as many, if not more, persisted in their innocence; so that the whole kind was not cashiered by an universal ruin, nor made unserviceable to their Creator, in the nobler instances of active obedience.

Which mankind was, and had so continued, as in that estate; having no other motives to act them, but an horrid despair, and expectation of future torment: the material issue of which could have been nothing but a confirmed malice against God, exerting itself in the lives of men, to the overflowing of the world with an uncontrolled torrent of the highest villainies and enormities.

But now, was it not a proportionable object for the designs of divine mercy to rescue so great and noble a part of the creation from a total perdition? Was it not pity, that so fair a writing should be all dashed, and for ever defaced by one blot? that sin should be able to do so much mischief, and, as it were, to counterwork the divine power and goodness, by lopping off one of the masterpieces of his work at a blow!

This had been more destructive than a deluge; it had been an universal ruin, without the mitigation of any exception. But this is not the genius and way of God's working, who designs particular mercies in the midst of general judgments. Still he has a reserve of favour; and the flood that drowns the world bears up the ark.

Christ saw us ruined in the loins of our first parents; and it moved his compassion to behold our death, earlier than our nativity. Even amongst men, if a woman with child be condemned, there is yet mercy for the unborn infant; and it extends so far as to relieve the guilty parent. No wonder then, if the divine mercy was not inferior in the methods of salvation, and if the mercies of a judge did not exceed the compassions of a saviour.

And now, what can the result and upshot of this whole transaction be, but to quicken, or rather transport us in our returns of gratitude; to advance gratitude into admiration, and admiration into astonishment? Why should the Son of God disrobe himself of his eternal excellencies, to come and wrap himself in dust and ashes, to converse with carcasses, with weakness and mortality, with vile creatures and viler sinners? and all this to rescue and pluck some wretched, smarting firebrands out of the eternal flame, where otherwise they must have lain consuming, but not consumed, for ever.

With what face or heart can any one, having this thought fresh upon him, resolve to sin? Has Christ passed over the fallen angels without any commiseration; so that, for want of a redeemer, they are passed into the state of devils? And shall we, by having and abusing a redeemer, make ourselves worse?

Still let us remember, that Christ so redeems us from wrath, that he will first redeem us from our vain conversation: and that, by this stupendous incarnation of the divine nature, he made himself *the Son of man*, that, by the change of our nature, we might become *the sons of God*.

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