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**The Works of Dr.
John Tillotson,
Late Archbishop of
Canterbury. Vol.
04.**

John Tillotson



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The Works of Dr. John Tillotson, Late Archbishop of Canterbury. Vol. 04.

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Contents

Title Page.	1
Prefatory Material.	3
Contents to Vol. V.	3
Sermons.	5
Sermon LV. Of Sincerity Towards God and Man.	6
Sermon LVI. The Excellency of Abraham's Faith and Obedience.	19
Sermon LVII. Moses' Choice of Afflicted Piety, Rather Than a Kingdom.	33
Sermon LVIII. Of Constancy in the Profession of the True Religion.	45
Sermon LIX. Of Constancy in the Profession of the True Religion.	54
Sermon LIX. Of Constancy in the Profession of the True Religion.	63
Sermon LX. Of Constancy in the Profession of the True Religion.	73
Sermon LXI. Of Constancy in the Profession of the True Religion.	83
Sermon LXII. Of Constancy in the Profession of the True Religion.	94
Sermon LXIII. The Christian Life, a Life of Faith.	105
Sermon LXIV. The Danger of Apostacy from the True Religion.	114
Sermon LXV. Of Self-Denial and Suffering for Christ's Sake.	125
Sermon LXVI. Of Self-Denial and Suffering for Christ's Sake.	134
Sermon LXVII. Good Men Strangers and Sojourners upon Earth.	144
Sermon LXVIII. Good Men Strangers and Sojourners upon Earth.	153
Sermon LXIX. The Presence of the Messias, the Glory of the Second Temple.	161
Sermon LXX. Christ Jesus the Only Mediator between God and Men.	173
Sermon LXXI. Christ Jesus the Only Mediator between God and Men.	181
Sermon LXXII. Christ Jesus the Only Mediator between God and Men.	189
Sermon LXXIII. The General and Effectual Publication of the Gospel by the Apostles.	199
Sermon LXXIV. The Nature, Office, and Employment of Good Angels.	210

Sermon LXXV. The Reputation of Good Men After Death.	223
Sermon LXXVI. The Duty of Imitating the Primitive Teachers and Patterns of Christianity.	231
Sermon LXXVII. The Encouragement to Suffer for Christ, and the Danger of Denying Him.	240
Sermon LXXVIII. The Blessedness of Good Men after Death.	250
Sermon LXXIX. The Blessedness of Good Men after Death.	259
Sermon LXXX. The Vanity and Wickedness of Honouring Dead Saints, and Persecuting the Living.	268
Sermon LXXXI. The Danger of Zeal without Knowledge.	275
Sermon LXXXII. The Best Men Liable to the Worst Treatment from Mistaken Zealots.	284
Sermon LXXXIII. The Duty and Reason of Praying for Governors.	293
Sermon LXXXIV. The Love of God to Men in the Incarnation of Christ.	303
Indexes	312
Index of Scripture References	313
Greek Words and Phrases	317
Latin Words and Phrases	319
Index of Pages of the Print Edition	321



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THE
WORKS
OF

DR. JOHN TILLOTSON,
LATE
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

WITH THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY
THO^S. BIRCH, M.A.

ALSO
A COPIOUS INDEX, AND THE TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE CAREFULLY
COMPARED.

IN TEN VOLUMES.—VOL. IV.



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
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CONTENTS TO VOL. IV.

SERMONS.

	Page
LV. Of Sincerity towards God and Man	1
LVI. The Excellency of Abraham's Faith and Obedience	26
LVII. Moses's Choice of afflicted Piety rather than a Kingdom	51
LVIII. LIX. LX. LXI. LXII. Of Constancy in the Profession of the true Religion	73. 89. 106. 124. 143. 163
LXIII. The Christian Life a Life of Faith	183
LXIV. The Danger of Apostacy from the true Religion	200
LXV. LXVI. Of Self-denial; and Suffering for Christ's Sake	220. 237
LXVII. LXVIII. Good Men Strangers and Sojourners upon Earth	254. 271
LXIX. The Presence of the Messias the Glory of the second Temple	287
LXX. LXXI. LXXII. Christ Jesus the only Mediator between God and Men	309. 325. 339
LXXIII. The general and effectual Publication of the Gospel by the Apostles	358
LXXIV. The Nature, Office, and Employment of good Angels	375
LXXV. The Reputation of good Men after Death	403
LXXVI. The Duty of imitating the primitive Teachers and Patterns of Christianity	418
LXXVII. The Encouragement to suffer for Christ, and the Danger of denying him	 435
LXXVIII. LXXIX. The Blessedness of good Men after Death	453. 469

LXXX. The Vanity and Wickedness of honouring dead Saints, and persecuting the living	485
LXXXI. The Danger of Zeal without Knowledge	498
LXXXII. The best Men liable to the worst Treatment from mistaken Zealots	515
LXXXIII. The Duty and Reason of praying for Governors	532
LXXXIV. The Love of God to Men in the Incarnation of Christ	555

SERMONS

SERMON LV.

[Preached at Kingston, July 29, 1694.]

OF SINCERITY TOWARDS GOD AND MAN.

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.—John i. 47.

WHO this Nathanael was, upon whom our Saviour bestows this extraordinary character, doth not certainly appear, his name being but once more mentioned in the whole history of the gospel: for certain, he was a good man who deserved this extraordinary commendation; and none but our Saviour, who knew what was in man, and needed not that any should tell him, could have given it, especially of one, whom he had never seen before that time: for when Jesus saw him “coming to him, he saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed.”

The whole nation of the Jews were Israelites by natural descent, being the seed of Jacob or Israel; but, in a special and more excellent sense, none are esteemed the true posterity of Israel, but those who resembled this father of their nation in true piety and goodness; for (as the apostle reasons) “they are not all Israel who are of Israel;” they only are Israelites indeed who resemble good old Jacob in the sincerity of his piety, and the simplicity of his temper and disposition: for our Saviour seems here to allude to that character which is given of Jacob, (*Gen. xxv. 27.*) that “he was a plain man,” or, as the Hebrew word signifies, “a perfect and sincere man,” in opposition to his brother Esau, who is said to be cunning: so that, to be an Israelite indeed, is to be a downright honest man, without fraud and guile, without any arts of hypocrisy and deceit.

In speaking of this virtue of sincerity, which is the highest character and commendation of a good man, I shall consider it as it respects God and man. As it respects God, so it imports the truth and sincerity of our piety and devotion towards him. As it regards men, so it signifies a simplicity of mind and manners in our carriage and conversation one towards another: both these are included, and very probably were intended in the character which our Saviour here gives Nathanael.

I. I shall consider this grace or virtue of sincerity, as it respects God, and so it imports the truth and sincerity of our piety towards him, that we heartily believe, and fear, and honour him, and that the outward expressions of our piety and obedience to him are the genuine issue of our inward apprehensions of him, and affections towards him; and this no doubt our Saviour intended in the first place, in the character of this good man; that he was a man of a real, and substantial, and unaffected piety, and in truth what he appeared to be: that he did sincerely love God and his truth, and was ready to embrace it whenever it was



fairly proposed to him, as did plainly appear in his carriage towards our Saviour: for when Philip invited him to come and see him, he did not conceal the prejudice and objection he had against him, grounded upon a common, but uncharitable, proverb, that “out of Nazareth ariseth no prophet;” but, having an honest and sincere mind, he was not so carried away by a popular prejudice, as not to have patience to be better informed, and therefore was easily persuaded to go and see our Saviour, and to discourse with himself; and, being satisfied that he was the Messiah, he presently owns him for such, calling him “the Son of God and the King of Israel.” And because sincerity is the very heart and substance of religion, it concerns us not only to endeavour after this temper and disposition, but to inquire into the nature and properties of it, that we may know when we have it, and may have the comfort of it. I shall mention five or six properties of a sincere piety, by which men may sufficiently know the integrity of their hearts towards God.

1. Our piety is then sincere, when the chief reasons and predominant motives of it are religious; and I call that a religious or rational motive, which regards God and another world, in opposition to men and to our present temporal advantages; when the principal and swaying motives of our piety, are a sense of God’s authority over us, and of our duty and obligation to him; a fear of his displeasure and threatenings, and the hopes of the glorious reward which he hath promised to obedience: these motives are properly religious, because they respect God, and are the arguments to obedience which he himself offers to us, to persuade us to our duty; and that is, a sincere piety which is wrought in us by these considerations, how unequally soever mixed: for even in the most of men, fear does many times prevail more than love, and, in case of great temptation, may preserve men from sin, when perhaps no other consideration will do it. On the contrary, that is an unsincere piety, to which we are moved merely by the regard of men, and the consideration of some temporal advantages; and, when these have the chief influence upon us, it is easy for any man to discern in himself; for he that will carefully observe himself, can hardly be ignorant of the true spring and motive of his own actions: but there is one sign whereby a man may certainly know that his heart is not right towards God, and that is—if, when these motives are absent, our piety and zeal for the true religion doth either cease, or is sensibly cooled and abated; as if impiety, or popery, or any thing else that is bad, begin to be in fashion, and to have the countenance of great examples; if those whom we fear, and upon whom we depend, do discover any inclination that way; if the garb of religion cease to be for our interest, or, in the revolution of things, happen to be contrary to it: if in any of these cases we let fall the profession of our religion, or neglect the practice of it, this is a plain and undeniable demonstration of the insincerity of our former piety.

2. A sincere piety must be rooted in the heart, and be a living principle within us; for, as the apostle reasons in another case, “he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but he who is



one inwardly, and in the heart;” and without this all outward acts of piety and devotion are hypocrisy, a picture of religion, and a form of godliness, without the life and power of it.

3. A third evidence of a sincere piety is, when men are religious in private and in secret, as well as in public and in the open view of men. He is truly devout, who is so in his family, and in his closet, where he hath no witness but God, and his own soul, as well as in the church. He is a downright honest man, who will make good his word, and perform his promise, when no proof can be made of it, and no law compel him to it, as readily as if there had been an hundred witnesses of it. He is sincerely just, who will not detain from another his right, though he be ignorant of it; nor wrong any man, though he could do it with all the secrecy and safety in the world; who will not impose upon another’s ignorance or unskillfulness, though never so much to his own benefit and advantage. He is truly charitable, who would not only as soon, but rather sooner give his alms in secret, than in the sight of men: and he is truly grateful, who, when there is occasion and opportunity, will acknowledge a kindness and requite a benefit to the relations of his deceased friend, though he be sure that all memory of the obligation died with him, and that none are conscious of it, but God and his own conscience. And indeed there is scarce any act of piety and virtue, the sincerity of which may not by this evidence be known by us: as, on the contrary, a man may for certain conclude himself a hypocrite, if he be not the same in the presence of God and his own conscience that he is in the sight of men.



4. Another evidence of a sincere piety is a constant tenor of goodness in the general course of our lives. I do not now speak of the first beginnings of piety in new converts, which are many times very imperfect, and such as afford little or no evidence of a man’s sincerity; but in those who have made any considerable progress in goodness; the habits of any known sin, and the wilful and deliberate neglect of our duties, and even the single acts of more heinous crimes, will bring in question our sincerity, and are by no means to be sheltered under the name of infirmity: for these the grace of God, if we be not wanting to ourselves, will enable us to subdue; and he is not sincerely good, who doth not seriously endeavour to be as good as he can, and does not make use of that grace which God is ready to afford to all the purposes, though not of a perfect, yet of a sincere, obedience to the laws of God.



5. Another evidence of a sincere piety is, that our obedience to God be uniform and universal, equally respecting all the laws of God, and every part of our duty, that it do not content itself with an especial regard to some precepts of the law, though never so considerable, and allow itself in the breach or neglect of the rest; no, nor with observing the duties of one table of the law, if it overlook the other; no, nor with obedience to all the commandments of God, one only excepted. St. James puts this case and determines, that, “he that keeps the whole law, saving that he offends in one point, is guilty of all;” that is, is not sincere in his obedience to the rest. And, therefore, we must take great heed that we do not set the commandments of God at odds, and dash the two tables of the law against one another, lest,

as St. James says, we “break the whole law:” and yet I fear this is too common a fault, even amongst those who make a great profession of piety, that they are not sufficiently sensible of the obligation and necessity of the duties of the second table, and of the excellency of those graces and virtues which respect our carriage and conversation with one another. Men do not seem to consider, that God did not give laws to us for his own sake, but our’s; and therefore, that he did not only design that we should honour him, but that we should be happy in one another; for which reason he joins with our humble and dutiful deportment towards himself the offices of justice and charity towards others. (*Mich. vi. 8.*) “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” And, *1 John iv. 21.* “This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also.” And yet it is too visible that many, who make a great profession of piety towards God, are very defective in moral duties; very unpeaceable and turbulent in their spirits, very peevish and passionate, very conceited and censorious, as if their profession of godliness did exempt them from the care and practice of Christian virtues. But we must not so fix our eye upon heaven, as to forget that we walk upon the earth, and to neglect the ordering of our steps and conversation among men; lest, while we are gazing upon the stars, we fall into the ditch of gross and foul immorality.

It is very possible, that men may be devout and zealous in religion, very nice and scrupulous about the worship and service of God, and yet because of their palpable defect in points of justice and honesty, of meekness and humility, of peace and charity, may be gross and odious hypocrites. For men must not think for some acts, either of outward or inward piety, to compound with God for the neglect of mercy and judgment, or to demand it as a right from men to be excused from the great duties and virtues of human conversation; or pretend to be above them, because they relate chiefly to this world, and to the temporal happiness of men: as if it were the privilege of great devotion, to give a licence to men to be peevish and froward, sour and morose, supercilious and censorious in their behaviour towards others. Men must have a great care, that they be not intent upon the outward parts of religion, to the prejudice of inward and real goodness, and that they do not so use the means of religion, as to neglect and lose the main end of it: that they do not place all religion in fasting and outward mortification; for though these things be very useful and necessary in their place, if they be discreetly managed, and made subservient to the great ends of religion; yet it is often seen, that men have so unequal a respect to the several parts of their duty, that fasting and corporal severity, those meagre and lean duties of piety, in comparison, do, like Pharaoh’s lean kine, devour and eat up almost all the goodly and well-favoured, the great and substantial duties of the Christian life: and therefore men must take great heed, lest, whilst they are so intent upon mortifying themselves, they do not mortify virtue and



goodnature, humility and meekness and charity, things highly valuable in themselves, and amiable in the eyes of men, and in the sight of God of great price.

For the neglect of the moral duties of the second table is not only a mighty scandal to religion, but of pernicious consequence many other ways. A fierce and ill-governed, an ignorant and injudicious zeal for the honour of God, and something or other be longing necessarily, as they think, to his true worship and service, hath made many men do many unreasonable, immoral, and impious things, of which history will furnish us with innumerable instances in the practice of the Jesuits, and other zealots of the church of Rome; and there are not wanting too many examples of this kind amongst ourselves: for men that are not sober and considerate in their religion, but give themselves up to the conduct of blind prejudice, and furious zeal, do easily persuade themselves that any thing is lawful, which they strongly fancy to tend to the honour of God, and to the advancement of the cause of religion. Hence, some have proceeded to that height of absurdity in their zeal for their religion and church, as to think it not only lawful, but highly commendable and meritorious, to equivocate upon oaths, and break faith with heretics, and to destroy all those that differ from them; as if it were piety in some cases to lie for the truth, and to kill men for God's sake.

So that, if we would approve the integrity of our hearts to God, and evidence to ourselves the sincerity of our obedience, we ought impartially to regard all the laws of God, and every part of our duty; and, if we do not, our heart is not upright with God. It is observable, that sincerity in Scripture is often called by the name of integrity and perfection, because it is integrated and made up of all the parts of our duty.

6. The last evidence I shall mention of the sincerity of our religion is, if it hold out against persecution and endure the fiery trial. This is the utmost proof of our integrity when we are called to bear the cross, to be willing then to expose all our worldly interest, and even life itself, for the cause of God and religion. This is a trial which God doth not always call his faithful servants to; but they are always to be prepared for it, in the purpose and resolution of their minds. This our Saviour makes the great mark of a true disciple: "If any man (saith he) will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." This is a certain sign, that men have "received the word into good ground," and are well rooted in their religion, when they are not shaken by these fierce assaults; "for many (as our Saviour tells us) hear the word, and with joy receive it; but having no root in themselves, they endure but for a while, and when persecution and tribulation ariseth because of the word, presently they are offended:" nay some, when they see persecution coming at a distance, wheel off and bethink themselves of making their retreat in time, and of agreeing with their adversary whilst he is yet in the way.

So that constancy to our religion, in case of danger and suffering for it, is the best proof of our sincerity. This is "the fiery trial," as the Scripture calls it, which will try what materials we are made of, and whether we love God and his truth in sincerity.

And thus I have considered sincerity as it respects God, and imports true piety and religion towards him; and I proceed to the second consideration.

II. Of sincerity, as it regards men; and so it signifies a simplicity of mind and manners in our conversation, and carriage one towards another; singleness of heart, discovering itself in a constant plainness and honest openness of behaviour, free from all insidious devices, and little tricks, and fetches of craft and cunning: from all false appearances and deceitful disguises of ourselves in word or action; or, yet more plainly, it is to speak as we think, and do what we pretend and profess, to perform and make good what we promise, and, in a word, really to be what we would seem and appear to be.

Not that we are obliged to tell every man all our mind; but we are never to declare any thing contrary to it: we may be silent and conceal as much of ourselves, as prudence, or any other good reason requires; but we must not put on a disguise, and make a false appearance and empty shew of what we are not, either by word or action. Contrary to this virtue is, I fear, most of that compliment which is current in conversation, and which, for the most part, is nothing but words to fill up the gaps, and supply the emptiness, of discourse, and a pretence to that kindness and esteem for persons, which either in truth we have not, or not to that degree which our expressions seem to import; which, if done with design, is that which we call flattery—a very odious sort of insincerity, and so much the worse, because it abuses men into a vain and foolish opinion of themselves, and an ill-grounded confidence of the kindness and good-will of others towards them; and so much the more dangerous, because it hath a party within us, which is ready to let it in: it plays upon our self-love, which greedily catcheth at any thing that tends to magnify and advance us; for, God knows, we are all too apt to think and make the best of our bad selves, so that very few tempers have wisdom and firmness enough to be proof against flattery: it requires great consideration and a resolute modesty and humility to resist the insinuations of this serpent; yea, a little rudeness and moroseness of nature, a prudent distrust and infidelity in mankind, to make a man in good earnest to reject and despise it.

Now, besides that, all hypocrisy and insincerity is mean in itself, having falsehood at the bottom; it is also often made use of, to the prejudice of others, in their rights and interests. For not only dissimulation is contrary to sincerity, because it consists in a vain shew of what we are not, in a false muster of our virtues and good qualities, in a deceitful representation and undue character of our lives: but there are likewise other qualities and actions more inconsistent with integrity, which are of a more injurious and mischievous consequence to our nature, as false hood and fraud, and perfidiousness, and infinite little crafts and arts of deceit, which men practise upon one another in their ordinary conversation and intercourse. The former is great vanity: but this is gross iniquity.

And yet these qualities, dexterously managed, so as not to lie too plain and open to discovery, are looked upon by many as signs of great depth and shrewdness, admirable in-



struments of business, and necessary means for the compassing our own ends and designs; and though in those that have suffered by them, and felt the mischief of them, they are always accounted dishonest, yet among the generality of lookers on, they pass for great policy; as if the very skill of governing and managing human affairs did consist in those little tricks and devices: but he that looks more narrowly into them, and will but have the patience to observe the end of them, will find them to be great follies, and that it is only for want of true wisdom and understanding, that men turn aside to tricks, and make dissimulation and lies their refuge. It is Solomon's observation, that, "he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but the folly of fools is deceit." "The folly of fools;" that is, the most egregious piece of folly that any man can be guilty of, is to play the knave: the vulgar translation renders this clause a little otherwise, but yet towards the same sense, *sed stultas divertit ad dolos*, "but the fool turns aside to tricks;" to make use of these, is a sign the man wants understanding to see the plain and direct way to his end. I will not deny but these little arts may serve a present turn, and perhaps successfully enough; but true wisdom goes deep, and reacheth a great way farther, looking to the end of things, and regarding the future as well as the present, and, by judging upon the whole matter and sum of affairs, doth clearly discern that craft and cunning are only useful for the present occasion; whereas integrity is of a lasting use, and will be serviceable to us upon all occasions, and in the whole course of our lives; and that dissimulation and deceit, though they may do some present execution in business, yet they recoil upon a man terribly afterwards, so as to make him stagger, and by degrees to weaken, and at last to destroy, his reputation, which is a much more useful and substantial and lasting instrument of prosperity and success in human affairs, than any tricks and devices what soever. Thus have I considered this great virtue of sincerity, both as it regards God, and the mutual conversation and intercourse of men one with another.

13

And now having explained the nature of sincerity to God and man, by declaring the properties of it, and in what instances we ought chiefly to practise it, and what things are contrary to it; that which remains is, to persuade men to endeavour after this excellent quality, and to practise it in all the words and actions of their lives.

Let us then, in the first place, be sincere in our religion, and serve God in truth and uprightness of heart, out of conscience of our duty and obligations to him, and not with sinister respects to our private interest or passion, to the public approbation or censure of men. Let us never make use of religion to serve any base and unworthy ends, cloaking our designs of covetousness, or ambition, or revenge, with pretences of conscience and zeal for God; and let us endeavour after the reality of religion, always remembering that a sincere piety doth not consist in shew, but substance, not in appearance, but in effect; that the spirit of true religion is still and calm, charitable and peaceable, making as little shew and stir as is possible; that a truly and sincerely good man does not affect vain ostentation, and an unseasonable discovery of his good qualities, but endeavours rather really to be than to seem religious,

14

and, of the two, rather seeks to conceal his piety than to set it out with pomp; gives his alms privately, prays to God in secret, and makes no appearance of religion, but in such fruits and effects as cannot be hid; in the quiet and silent virtues of humility and meekness, and patience, of peace and charity; in governing his passions, and taking heed not to offend with his tongue, by slander and calumny, by envious detraction or rash censure, or by any word or action that may be to the hurt and prejudice of his neighbour: but, on the contrary, it is a very ill sign, if a man affect to make a great noise and bustle about religion; if he blow a trumpet before his good works, and by extraordinary shews of devotion summon the eyes of men to behold him, and do, as it were, call aloud to them to take notice of his piety, “and to come and see his zeal for the Lord of Hosts.” It is not impossible but such a man, with all his vanity and ostentation, may have some real goodness in him; but he is as the hypocrites are, and does as like one as is possible; and, by the mighty shew that he makes, to wise and considerate men, greatly brings in question the sincerity of his religion.

And with the sincerity of our piety towards God, let us join the simplicity and integrity of manners in our conversation with men. Let us strictly charge ourselves to use truth and plainness in all our words and doings; let our tongue be ever the true interpreter of our mind, and our expressions the lively image of our thoughts and affections, and our outward actions exactly agreeable to our inward purposes and intentions.

Amongst too many other instances of the great corruption and degeneracy of the age wherein we live, the great and general want of sincerity in conversation is none of the least. The world is grown so full of dissimulation and compliment, that men’s words are hardly any signification of their thoughts; and if any man measure his words by his heart, and speak as he thinks, and do not express more kindness to every man, than men usually have for any man, he can hardly escape the censure of rudeness and want of breeding. The old English plainness and sincerity, that generous integrity of nature and honesty of disposition, which always argues true greatness of mind, and is usually accompanied with undaunted courage and resolution, is in a great measure lost amongst us: there hath been a long endeavour to transform us into foreign manners and fashions, and to bring us to a servile imitation of none of the best of our neighbours, in some of the worst of their qualities. The dialect of conversation is now-a-days so swelled with vanity and compliment, and so surfeited (as I may say) with expressions of kindness and respect, that if a man that lived an age or two ago, should return into the world again, he would really want a dictionary to help him to understand his own language, and to know the true intrinsic value of the phrase in fashion, and would hardly at first believe at what a low rate the highest strains and expressions of kindness imaginable do commonly pass in current payment; and when he should come to understand it, it would be a great while before he could bring himself, with a good countenance, and a good conscience, to converse with men upon equal terms, and in their own way.



And, in truth, it is hard to say, whether it should more provoke our contempt or our pity, to hear what solemn expressions of respect and kindness will pass between men, almost upon no occasion; how great honour and esteem they will declare for one whom perhaps they never heard of or saw before; and how entirely they are all on the sudden devoted to his service and interest, for no reason; how infinitely and eternally obliged to him for no benefit; and how extremely they will be concerned for him, yea, and afflicted too, for no cause. I know it is said, in justification of this hollow kind of conversation, that there is no harm, no real deceit, in compliment, but the matter is well enough, so long as we understand one another; et verba valent ut nummi, “words are like money,” and when the current value of them is generally understood, no man is cheated by them. This is something, if such words were any thing; but being brought into the account, they are mere ciphers. However, it is still a just matter of complaint, that sincerity and plainness are out of fashion, and that our language is running into a lie, that men have almost quite perverted the use of speech, and made words to signify nothing; that the greatest part of the conversation of mankind, and of their intercourse with one another, is little else but driving a trade of dissimulation; insomuch that it would make a man heartily sick and weary of the world, to see the little sincerity that is in use and practice among men, and tempt him to break out into that melancholy complaint and wish of the prophet, (*Jer. ix.*) “O that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them; for they are all adulterers, and an assembly of treacherous men; and they bend their tongue like their bow for lies, but have no courage for the truth upon earth. Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; one speaketh peaceably to his neighbour, but in his heart he lieth in wait. Shall not I visit for these things, saith the Lord? and shall not my soul be avenged of such a nation as this?”

Such were the manners of the people of Israel at that time, which were both the forerunner and the cause of those terrible calamities which befel them afterwards; and this character agrees but too well to the present age, which is so wretchedly void of truth and sincerity: for which reason there is the greater need to recommend this virtue to us, which seems to be fled from us, that “truth and righteousness may return, and glory may dwell in our land, and God may shew his mercy upon us, and grant us his salvation, and righteousness and peace may kiss each other.” To this end give me leave to offer these following considerations.

First, That sincerity is the highest commendation, and the very best character, that can be given of any man; it is the solid foundation of all virtue, the heart and soul of all piety and goodness; it is in Scripture called perfection, and frequently joined with it; and throughout the Bible there is the great est stress and weight laid upon it: it is spoken of as the sum and comprehension of all religion. “Only fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth, says Joshua to the people of Israel, (*Josh. xxiv. 14.*) God takes great pleasure in

17

18

it; so David assures us: (1 Chron. xxix. 17.) “I know, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness:” and, again, “Thou lovest truth in the inward parts.”

To this disposition of mind the promises of Divine favour and blessing are particularly made: (Psal. xv. 1, 2) “Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? he that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth from his heart.” (Psal. xxxii. 2.) “Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth no sin, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”

And it is observable, that this character of our Saviour here given of Nathanael, is the only full and perfect commendation that we read was ever given by him of any particular person. He commends some particular acts of piety and virtue in others, as St. Peter’s confession of him, the faith of the centurion, and of the woman that was healed by touching the hem of his garment, the charity of the woman that cast her two mites into the treasury, and the bounty of that other devout woman, who poured upon him a box of precious ointment; but here he gives the particular character of a good man, when he says of Nathanael, that he was “an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile.” And the apostle mentions this quality as the chief ingredient in the character of the best man that ever was—our blessed Saviour, “who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.”

Secondly, The rarity of this virtue is a farther commendation of it. A sincerely pious and good man, without any guile or disguise, is not a sight to be seen every day. Our Saviour, in the text, speaks of it as a thing very extraordinary, and of special remark and observation, and breaks out into some kind of wonder upon the occasion, as if to see a man of perfect integrity and simplicity were an occurrence very rare and unusual, and such as calls for our more special attention and regard. “Be hold (saith he) an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.”

Thirdly, The want of sincerity will quite spoil the virtue and acceptance of all our piety and obedience, and certainly deprive us of the reward of it. All that we do in the service of God, all our external obedience to his laws, if not animated by sincerity, is like a sacrifice without a heart, which is an abomination to the Lord.

Fourthly, Hypocrisy and insincerity is a very vain and foolish thing; it is designed to cheat others, but is in truth a deceiving of ourselves. No man would flatter or dissemble, did he believe he were seen and discovered; an open knave is a great fool, who destroys at once both his design and reputation; and this is the case of every hypocrite: all the disagreement which is between his tongue and his thoughts, his actions and his heart, is open to that eye from which nothing can be hid; “for the ways of men are before the eyes of the Lord, and he seeth all his goings; there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.”

Fifthly, Truth and reality have all the advantages of appearance, and many more. If the shew of any thing be good for any thing, I am sure sincerity is better; for why does any man

dissemble, or seem to be that which he is not, but because he thinks it good to have such a quality as he pretends to? for to counterfeit and dissemble, is to put on the appearance of some real excellency. Now the best way in the world for a man to seem to be any thing, is really to be what he would seem to be. Besides, that it is many times as troublesome to make good the pretence of a good quality, as to have it; and if a man have it not, it is ten to one but he is discovered to want it, and then all his pains and labour to seem to have it is lost. There is something unnatural in painting, which a skilful eye will easily discern from native beauty and complexion.

It is hard to personate and act a part long; for where truth is not at the bottom, nature will always be endeavouring to return, and will peep out and betray herself one time or other. Therefore if any man think it convenient to seem good, let him be so indeed, and then his goodness will appear to every body's satisfaction; for truth is convincing, and carries its own light and evidence along with it, and will not only commend us to every man's conscience, but which is much more, to God, who searcheth and seeth our hearts; so that upon all accounts sincerity is true wisdom. Particularly as to the affairs of this world, integrity hath many advantages over all the fine and artificial ways of dissimulation and deceit; it is much the plainer and easier, much the safer and more secure way of dealing in the world; it hath less of trouble and difficulty, of entanglement and perplexity, of danger and hazard in it; it is the shortest and nearest way to our end, carrying us thither in a straight line, and will hold out and last longest. The arts of deceit and cunning do continually grow weaker and less effectual and serviceable to them that use them; whereas integrity gains strength by use, and the more and longer any man practiseth it, the greater service it does him, by confirming his reputation, and encouraging those with whom he hath to do, to repose the greater trust and confidence in him, which is an unspeakable advantage in the business and affairs of life.

But a dissembler must always be upon his guard, and watch himself carefully, that he do not contradict his own pretence; for he acts an unnatural part, and therefore must put a continual force and restraint upon himself. Truth always lies upper most, and if a man do not carefully attend, he will be apt to bolt it out; whereas he that acts sincerely hath the easiest task in the world, because he follows nature, and so is put to no trouble and care about his words and actions; he needs not invent any pretences beforehand, nor make excuses after wards, for any thing he hath said or done.

But insincerity is very troublesome to manage; a man hath so many things to attend to, so many ends to bring together, as make his life a very perplexed and intricate thing. *Oportet mendacem esse memorem*, "A liar had need of a good memory," lest he contradict at one time what he said at another: but truth is always consistent with itself, and needs nothing to help it out; it is always near at hand, and sits upon our lips, and is ready to drop out before we are aware: whereas a lie is troublesome, and sets a man's invention upon the rack, and



one trick needs a great many more to make it good. It is like building upon a false foundation, which continually stands in need of props to shore it up, and proves at last more chargeable than to have raised a substantial building at first upon a true and solid foundation: for sincerity is firm and substantial, and there is nothing hollow and unsound in it; and, because it is plain and open, fears no discovery of which the crafty man is always in danger, and when he thinks he walks in the dark, all his pretences are so transparent, that he that runs may read them: he is the last man that finds himself to be found out; and, whilst he takes it for granted that he makes fools of others, he renders himself ridiculous.

Add to all this, that sincerity is the most compendious wisdom, and an excellent instrument for the speedy dispatch of business; it creates confidence in those we have to deal with, saves the labour of many inquiries, and brings things to an issue in few words: it is like travelling in a plain beaten road, which commonly brings a man sooner to his journey's end than by ways, in which men often lose themselves. In a word, whatsoever convenience may be thought to be in falsehood and dissimulation, it is soon over; but the inconvenience of it is perpetual, because it brings a man under an ever lasting jealousy and suspicion, so that he is not believed when he speaks truth, nor trusted, when perhaps he means honestly. When a man hath once forfeited the reputation of his integrity, he is set fast, and nothing will then serve his turn, neither truth nor falsehood.

And I have often thought, that God hath in great wisdom hid from men of false and dishonest minds the wonderful advantages of truth and integrity to the prosperity even of our worldly affairs: these men are so blinded by their covetousness and ambition, that they cannot look beyond a present advantage; nor forbear to seize upon it, though by ways never so indirect; they cannot see so far as to the remote consequences of a steady integrity, and the vast benefit and advantages which it will bring a man at last. Were but this sort of men wise and clear sighted enough to discern this, they would be honest, out of very knavery, not out of any love to honesty or virtue, but with a crafty design to promote and advance more effectually their own interest; and therefore, the justice of the Divine Providence hath hid this truest point of wisdom from their eyes, that bad men might not be upon equal terms with the just and upright, and serve their own wicked designs by honest and lawful means.

Indeed, if a man were only to deal in the world for a day, and should never have occasion to converse more with mankind, never more need their good opinion, or good word, it were then no great matter (speaking as to the concernments of this world) if a man spent his reputation all at once, and ventured it at one throw; but if he be to continue in the world, and would have the advantage of conversation whilst he is in it, let him make use of truth and sincerity in all his words and actions, for nothing but this will last and hold out to the end; all other arts will fail, but truth and integrity will carry a man through, and bear him out to the last.

23

24

It is the observation of Solomon, ([Prov. xii. 19.](#)) “The lip of truth is established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.” And the wiser any man is, the more clearly will he discern how serviceable sincerity is to all the great ends and purposes of human life; and that man hath made a good progress, and profited much in the school of wisdom, who valueth truth and sincerity according to their worth. Every man will readily grant them to be great virtues and arguments of a generous mind; but that there is so much of true wisdom in them, and that they really serve to profit our interest in this world, seems a great paradox to the generality of men; and yet I doubt not but it is undoubtedly true, and generally found to be so in the experience of mankind.

Lastly, Consider that it is not worth our while to dissemble, considering the shortness, and especially the uncertainty, of our lives. To what purpose should we be so cunning, when our abode in this world is so short and uncertain? Why should any man, by dissembling his judgment, or acting contrary to it, incur at once the displeasure of God, and the discontent of his own mind? especially if we consider, that all our dissimulation shall one day be made manifest and published on the open theatre of the world, before God, angels, and men, to our ever lasting shame and confusion: all disguise and vizards shall then be plucked off, and every man will appear in his true colours. For “then the secrets of men shall be judged, and God will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil. Nothing; is now covered, which shall not then be revealed, nor hid, which shall not then be known.”

Let us then be now what we would be glad to be found in that day, when all pretences shall be examined, and the closest hypocrisy of men shall be laid open and dashed out of countenance; when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and all the hidden works of darkness shall be revealed, and all our thoughts, words, and actions, shall be brought to a strict and severe trial, and be censured by that impartial and infallible judgment of God, which is according to truth: “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.”

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory now and for ever. Amen.

25

26

SERMON LVI.

[Preached at Whitehall 1686, before the Princess Anne.]

THE EXCELLENCY OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH AND OBEDIENCE.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son: of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.—Heb. xi. 17, 18, 19.

THE design of this Epistle to the Hebrews is to recommend to them the Christian religion, to which they were but newly converted, and to encourage them to constancy in the profession of it, notwithstanding the sufferings which attended it. He sets before them in this chapter several examples in the Old Testament of those, who, though they were tinder a much more imperfect dispensation, yet by a stedfast belief in God and his promises, had performed such wonderful acts of obedience and self-denial.

He begins with the patriarchs before the flood; but insists chiefly upon the examples of two eminent persons of their own nation, as nearest to them, and most likely to prevail upon them—the examples of Abraham and Moses: the one the father of their nation, the other their great lawgiver; and both of them the greatest patterns of faith, and obedience, and self-denial, that the history of all former ages, from the beginning of the world, had afforded.

I shall, at this time, by God's assistance, treat of the first of these—the example of Abraham, the constancy of whose faith, and the cheerfulness of whose obedience, even in the difficultest cases, is so remarkable above all the other examples mentioned in this chapter. For, at the command of God he left his kindred and his country, not knowing whither he should go: by which eminent act of obedience he declared himself to be wholly at God's disposal, and ready to follow him. But this was no trial in comparison of that here in my text, when God commanded him to offer up his only son: but such was the immutable stedfastness of his faith, and the perfect submission of his obedience, that it does not appear that he made the least check at it; but, out of perfect reverence and obedience to the authority of the Divine command, he went about it as readily and cheerfully, as if God had bid him do some small thing: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac."

For the explication of which words, it will be requisite to consider two things:

First, The trial or temptation in general.

Secondly, The excellency of Abraham's faith and obedience upon this trial.

First, The trial or temptation in general: it is said, that "Abraham, when he was tried;" the word is *πειραζόμενος*, "being tempted;" that is, God intending to make trial of his faith and obedience: and so it is expressed, [Gen. xxii. 1.](#) where it is said, that "God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Take now thy son, thine only son."



Now there are two difficulties concerning this matter. It seems contrary to Scripture, that God should tempt any man; and contrary to reason: because God, who knows what every man will do, needed not to make trial of any man's faith and obedience.

First, It seems contrary to Scripture, which says, "God tempts no man:" and it is most true, that God tempts no man, with a design to draw him into sin; but this doth not hinder, but he may try their faith and obedience with great difficulties, to make them the more illustrious. Thus God tempted Abraham; and he permitted Job, and even our blessed Saviour himself, to be thus tempted.

Secondly, It seems contrary to reason, that God, who knows what any man will do in any circumstances, should go to make trial of it. But God does not try men for his own information; but to give an illustrious proof and example to others of faith and obedience: and though after this trial of Abraham, God says to him, "Now I know that thou lovest me, because thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me;" yet we are to understand this as spoken after the manner of men; as God elsewhere speaks to Abraham concerning Sodom; "I will go down now to see whether they have done altogether according to the cry which is come up unto me; and, if not, I will know."

I proceed to the second thing I proposed—the excellency of Abraham's faith and obedience upon this trial: "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." God accepts of it, as if he had done it; because he had done it in part, and was ready to have performed the rest, if God had not countermanded him.

And this act of faith and obedience in Abraham will appear the more illustrious, if we consider these three things:

- I. The firmness and stedfastness of his faith, notwithstanding the objections against it.
- II. The constancy of his resolution, notwithstanding the difficulty of the thing.
- III. The reasonableness of his faith, in that he gave satisfaction to himself in so hard and perplexed a case.

I. The firmness and stedfastness of his faith will appear, if we consider what objections there were in the case, enough to shake a very strong faith. There were three great objections against this command, and such as might in reason make a wise and good man doubtful whether this command were from God.

The horrid nature of the thing commanded. The grievous scandal that might seem almost unavoidably to follow upon it.

And the horrible consequence of it, which seemed to make the former promise of God to Abraham void. First, The horrid nature of the thing commanded, which was, for a father to kill his own child. This must needs appear very barbarous and unnatural, and look liker a sacrifice to an idol than to the true God.

It seemed to be against the law of nature, and directly contrary to that kindness and affection, which God himself had planted in the hearts of parents towards their children.

And there is no affection more natural and strong than this: for there are many persons that would redeem the lives of their children with the hazard of their own. Now that God hath planted such an affection in nature, is an argument that it is good, and therefore it could not but seem strange that he should command any thing contrary to it; and in this case there were two circumstances that increased the horror of the fact—that his son was innocent, and that he was to slay him with his own hands.

1. That his son was innocent. It would grieve the heart of any father to give up his son to death, though he were never so undutiful and disobedient.

So passionately was David affected with the death of his son Absalom, as to wish he had died for him, though he died in the very act of rebellion, and though the saving of his life had been inconsistent with the peace of his government.

How deep then must it sink into the heart of a father to give up his innocent son to death? and such a son was Isaac, for any thing that appeared to the contrary. God himself gave him this testimony, that he was “the son whom his father loved, and there is no intimation of any thing to the contrary. Now this could not but appear strange to a good man, that God should command an innocent person to be put to death. But,

2. That a father should be commanded, not only to give up his son to death, but to slay him with his own hands; not only to be a spectator, but to be the actor in this tragedy. What father would not shrink and start back at such a command? What good man, especially in such a case, and where nature was so hard pressed, would not have been apt to have looked upon such a revelation as this, rather as the suggestion and illusion of an evil spirit, than a command of God? And yet Abraham's faith was not staggered, so as to call this revelation of God in question.

Secondly, The grievous scandal that might seem almost unavoidably to follow upon it, was another great objection against it. The report of such an action would in all appearance blemish the reputation, even of so good a man, amongst all sober and considerate persons, who could hardly forbear to censure him as a wicked and unnatural man.

And this was a hard case, for a man to be put to sacrifice at once two of the clearest things in the world—his reputation and his son: nor could he have easily defended himself from this imputation, by alleging an express revelation and command of God for it; for who would give credit to it?

A revelation to another man is nothing to me, unless I be assured that he had such a revelation, which I cannot be, but either by another immediate revelation, or by some miracle to confirm it.

The act had an appearance of so much horror, that it was not easily credible that God should command it; and if every man's confident pretence to revelation be admitted, the worst actions may plead this in their excuse. So that this pretence would have been so far



from excusing his fault, that it must rather have been esteemed an high aggravation of it, by adding the boldest impiety to the most barbarous inhumanity.

But Abraham was not stumbled at this, nor at the advantage which the enemies of his religion would make of such an occasion, who would be ready to say, "Here is your excellent good man, and likely to be a friend of God, who was so cruel an enemy to his own son!" All this, it is probable, he might consider; but it did not move him, being resolved to obey God, and to leave it to his wisdom to provide against all the inconveniences that might follow upon it.

Thirdly, The strongest objection of all was, the horrible consequence of the thing, which seemed to clash with former revelations, and to make void the promise which God had before made to Abraham, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed; which promise was expressly limited to Isaac and his posterity, who had then no son.

And of this difficulty the apostle takes express notice in the text, that "he that had received the promises, (that is, was persuaded of the truth and faithfulness of them) offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called."

And this objection is really so strong, that if Abraham could not have given himself satisfaction about it, he might justly have questioned the truth of the revelation. For no man can possibly entertain two contradictory revelations as from God, but he must of necessity question one or both of them: but so strong was Abraham's faith, as not to be shaken by the seeming contradiction of these two revelations.

II. We will consider the constancy of his resolution to obey God, notwithstanding the harshness and difficulty of the thing. Though Abraham were firmly persuaded, that this command to kill his son was really from God, yet it is no easy matter for a man to bring himself to obey God in so difficult a case; and, out of mere reverence to the Divine authority, to divest himself of his nature, and to thwart the strongest inclinations of it: a man would be very apt to confer with flesh and blood in such a case. Let but any man that knows what it is to be a father, lay his hand upon his heart, and consider his own bowels, and he will be astonished at Abraham's obedience as well as his faith.

To take his son, his only son, his son whom he loved, and in whom he placed all his hopes of a happy posterity, and with his own hands to destroy him and all his hopes together! It must be a strong faith that will engage a man to obedience in so difficult an instance.

There is one circumstance more especially, which renders Abraham's obedience very remarkable—the deliberateness of the action. It had not been so much, if so soon as he had received this command from God, he had upon a sudden impulse and transport of zeal done this.

But that his obedience might be the more glorious, and have all the circumstances of advantage given to it, God would have it done deliberately, and upon full consideration;



and therefore he bade him go to the mountain, three days journey from the place where he was, and there to offer up his son.

It is in acts of virtue and obedience, as in acts of sin and vice; the more deliberate the sin is, and the more calm and sedate temper the man is in when he commits it, the greater is the fault; whereas, what is done by surprise, in the heat of temptation, or transport of passion, hath some excuse from the suddenness and indeliberateness of it.

So it is in acts of virtue and obedience, especially if they be attended with considerable difficulty; the more deliberately they are done, the more virtuous they are, and the greater praise is due to them.

Now, that Abraham's obedience might want no thing to heighten it, God seems on purpose to have put so long a space betwixt the command and the performance of it; he gives him time to cool upon it, to weigh the command, and to look on every side of this difficult duty; he gives scope for his reason to argue and debate the case, and opportunity for natural affection to play its part, and for flesh and blood to raise all its batteries against the resolution which he had taken up.

And now we may easily imagine what conflict this good man had within himself during those three days that he was travelling to the mountain in Moriah; and how his heart was ready to be rent in pieces, betwixt his duty to God and his affection to his child; so that every step of this unwelcome and wearisome journey, he did, as it were, lay violent hands upon himself.

He was to offer up his son but once; but he sacrificed himself and his own will every moment for three days together; and when he came thither, and all things were ready, the altar, the wood, the fire, and the knife, it must needs be a stabbing question, and wound him to the heart, which his innocent son so innocently asked him, "where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?"

It must be a strong faith indeed, and a mighty resolution, that could make him to hold out three days against the violent assaults of his own nature, and the charming presence of his son, enough to melt his heart, as often as he cast his eyes upon him: and yet nothing of all this made him to stagger in his duty, but "being strong in faith, he gave glory to God," by one of the most miraculous acts of obedience that ever was exacted from any of the sons of men.

III. In the third and last place, I come to consider the reasonableness of his faith, in that he was able to give satisfaction to himself in so intricate and perplexed a case. The constancy of Abraham's faith, was not an obstinate and stubborn persuasion, but the result of the wisest reasoning, and soberest consideration.

So the text says, that "he counted," the word is λογισάμενος, "he reasoned with himself, that God was able to raise him up from the dead;" so that he debated the matter with himself,

and gave himself satisfaction, concerning the objections and difficulties in the case; and, being fully satisfied that it was a Divine command, he resolved to obey it.

As for the objections I have mentioned:

1. The horrid appearance of the thing, that a father should slay his innocent son. Why should Abraham scruple the doing this, at the command of God, who, being the author of life, hath power over it, and may resume what he hath given, and take away the life of any of his creatures when he will, and make whom he pleaseth instruments in the execution of his command?

It was indeed a hard case, considering natural affection; and therefore God did not permit it to be executed.

But the question of God's right over the lives of men, and of his authority to command any man to be the instrument of his pleasure in such a case, admits of no dispute.

And though God hath planted strong affections in parents towards their children; yet he hath written no law in any man's heart to the prejudice of his own sovereign right. This is a case always excepted, and this takes away the objection of injustice.

2. As to the scandal of it, that could be no great objection in those times, when the absolute power of parents over their children was in its full force, and they might put them to death without being accountable for it. So that then it was no such startling matter to hear of a father putting his child to death. Nay, in much later times we find, that in the most ancient laws of the Romans, (I mean those of the twelve tables) children are absolutely put in the power of their parents, to whom is given, *jus vita et necis*, "a power of life and death" over them; and likewise to sell them for slaves.

And though amongst the Jews this paternal power was limited by the law of Moses; and the judgment of life and death was taken out of the father's hands, except in case of contumacy and rebellion; (and even in that case the process was to be before the elders of the city) yet it is certain, that in elder times the paternal power was more absolute and unaccountable, which takes off much from the horror and scandal of the thing, as it appears now to us who have no such power.

And therefore we do not find in the history, that this objection did much stick with Abraham; it being then no unusual thing for a father to put his child to death upon a just account.

And the command of God, who hath absolute dominion over the lives of his creatures, is certainly a just reason; and no man can reasonably scruple the doing of that, upon the command of God, which he might have done by his own authority, without being accountable for the action, to any but God only.



3. As to the objection from the horrible consequence of the thing commanded, that the slaying of Isaac seemed to overthrow the promise which God had made before to Abraham, that in Isaac his seed should be called: this seems to him to be the great difficulty, and here he makes use of reason, to reconcile the seeming contradiction of this command of God to his former promise. So the text tells us, that "he offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; reasoning that God was able to raise him up from the dead." So that, though Isaac were put to death, yet he saw how the promise of God might still be made good by his being raised from the dead, and living afterwards to have a numerous posterity.

There had then indeed been no instance, or example, of any such thing in the world, as the resurrection of one from the dead, which makes Abraham's faith the more wonderful: but he confirmed himself in this belief, by an example as near the case as might be: he reasoned, "that God was able to raise him from the dead, from whence also he had received him in a figure."

This, I know, is by interpreters generally understood of Isaac's being delivered from the jaws of death, when he was laid upon the altar, and ready to be slain. But the text seems not to speak of what happened after; but of something that had passed before, by which Abraham confirmed himself in this persuasion, that if he were slain, God would raise him up again.

And so the words *ὅθεν ἐκομίσσαστο* ought to be rendered, in the past time, "from whence also he had received him in a figure." So that this expression plainly refers to the miraculous birth of Isaac, when his parents were past the age of having children; which was little less than a resurrection from the dead.

And so the Scripture speaks of it, (*Rom. iv. 17.*) "Abraham believed God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth the things which are not, as if they were; and not being weak in faith, he considered not his own body which was dead;" (and a little before the text, speaking of the miraculous birth of Isaac) "and therefore sprang there of one, and him as good as dead, as many as the stars of heaven."

From whence (as the apostle tells us) Abraham reasoned thus: that God, who gave him Isaac at first in so miraculous a manner, was able by another miracle to restore him to life again, after he was dead, and to make him the father of many nations. He reasoned, "that God was able to raise him up from the dead, from whence also he had received him in a figure."

Thus you see the reasonableness of Abraham's faith; he pitched upon the main difficulty in the case, and he answered it as well as was possible: and in his reasoning about this matter he gives the utmost weight to every thing that might tend to vindicate the truth and faithfulness of God's promise, and to make the revelations of God consistent with one another; and

this, though he had a great interest and a very tender concernment of his own to have biased him.

For he might have argued with great appearance and probability the other way: but as every pious and good man should do, he reasoned on God's side, and favoured that part. Rather than disobey a command of God, or believe, that his promise should be frustrate, he will believe any thing that is credible and possible, how improbable soever. Thus far faith will go; but no farther. From the believing of plain contradictions and impossibilities, it always desires to be excused.

Thus much for explication of the words; which I hope hath not been altogether unprofitable, because it tends to clear a point which hath something of difficulty and obscurity in it, and to vindicate the Holy Scripture, and the Divine revelation therein contained, from one of the most specious objections of infidelity.

But I had a farther design in this text; and that is, to make some observations and inferences from it, that may be of use to us. As,

First, That human nature is capable of clear and full satisfaction, concerning a Divine revelation. For if Abraham had not been fully and past all doubt assured that this was a command from God, he would certainly have spared his son. And no thing is more reasonable, than to believe, that those, to whom God is pleased to make immediate revelations of his will, are some way or other assured that they are Divine; otherwise they would be in vain, and to no purpose.

But how men are assured concerning Divine revelations made to them, is not so easy to make out to others: only these two things we are sure of.

1. That God can work in the mind of man a firm persuasion of the truth of what he reveals, and that such a revelation is from him. This no man can doubt of, that considers the great power and influence, which God, who made us, and perfectly knows our frame, must needs have upon our minds and understandings.

2. That God never offers any thing to any man's belief, that plainly contradicts the natural and essential notions of his mind; because this would be for God to destroy his own workmanship, and to impose that upon the understanding of man, which, whilst it remains what it is, it cannot possibly admit.

For instance, we cannot imagine, that God should reveal to any man any thing that plainly contradicts the essential perfections of the Divine nature; for such a revelation can no more be supposed to be from God, than a revelation from God, that there is no God; which is a downright contradiction.

Now to apply this to the revelation which God made to Abraham, concerning the sacrificing of his son: this was made to him by an audible voice, and he was fully satisfied by the evidence which it carried along with it, that it was from God.

For this was not the first of many revelations that had been made to him; so that he knew the manner of them, and had found, by manifold experience, that he was not deceived, and upon this experience was grown to a great confidence in the truth and goodness of God. And, it is very probable, the first time God appeared to Abraham, because it was a new thing, that to make way for the credit of future revelations, God did shew himself to him in so glorious a manner, as was abundantly to his conviction.

And this St. Stephen does seem to intimate: ([Acts vii. 2.](#)) "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia." Now by this glorious appearance of God to him at first, he was so prepared for the entertainment of after-revelations, that he was not staggered even at this, concerning the sacrificing of his son, being both by the manner of it, and the assurance that accompanied it, fully satisfied, that it was from God.

Secondly, I observe from hence the great and necessary use of reason in matters of faith. For we see here, that Abraham's reason was a mighty strengthening and help to his faith. Here were two revelations made to Abraham, which seemed to clash with one another; and if Abraham's reason could not have reconciled the repugnancy of them, he could not possibly have believed them both to be from God; because this natural notion or principle, that "God cannot contradict himself," every man does first, and more firmly believe, than any revelation whatsoever.

Now Abraham's reason relieved him in this strait. So the text expressly tells us: "he reasoned with himself, that God was able to raise him from the dead."

And this being admitted, the command of God, concerning the slaying of Isaac, was very well consistent with his former promise, that—in Isaac his seed should be called.

I know there hath a very rude clamour been raised by some persons (but of more zeal, I think, than judgment), against the use of reason in matters of faith: but how very unreasonable this is, will appear to any one that will but have patience to consider these following particulars:

1. The nature of Divine revelation; that it doth not endow men with new faculties, but propoundeth new objects to the faculties, which they had before. Reason is the faculty whereby revelation is to be discerned; for when God reveals any thing to us, he reveals it to our understanding, and by that we are to judge of it. Therefore St. John cautions us, ([1 John iv. 1.](#)) "Not to believe every spirit; but to try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world;" that is, there are many that falsely pretend to inspiration: but how can these pretenders be tried and discerned from those that are truly inspired, but by using our reason, in comparing the evidence for the one and the other?

2. This will farther appear, if we consider the nature of faith. Faith (as we are now speaking of it) is an assent of the mind to something as revealed by God: now all assent must be grounded upon evidence; that is, no man can believe any thing, unless he have or thinks

he hath some reason to do so. For to be confident of a thing without reason, is not faith; but a presumptuous persuasion and obstinacy of mind.

3. This will yet be more evident, if we consider the method that must of necessity be used to convince any man of the truth of religion. Suppose we had to deal with one that is a stranger and enemy to Christianity, what means are proper to be used to gain him over to it? The most natural method surely were this—to acquaint him with the Holy Scriptures, which are the rule of our faith and practice. He would ask us, Why we believe that book? The proper answer would be, Because it is the word of God: this he could not but acknowledge to be a very good reason, if it were true: but then he would ask, Why we believed it to be the word of God, rather than Mahomet's Alcoran, which pretends no less to be of Divine inspiration?

If any man now should answer, that he could give no reason why he believed it to be the word of God, only he believed it to be so, and so every man else ought to do without inquiring after any farther reason, because reason is to be laid aside in matters of faith; would not the man presently reply, that he had just as much reason as this comes to, to believe the Alcoran, or any thing else; that is, none at all?

But certainly the better way would be to satisfy this man's reason by proper arguments, that the Scriptures are a Divine revelation, and that no other book in the world can with equal reason pretend to be so: and if this be a good way, then we do and must call in the assistance of reason for the proof of our religion.

4. Let it be considered farther, that the highest commendations that are given in Scripture to any one's faith, are given upon account of the reasonableness of it. Abraham's faith is famous, and made a pattern to all generations, because he reasoned himself into it, notwithstanding the objections to the contrary, and he did not blindly break through these objections, and wink hard at them: but he looked them in the face, and gave himself reasonable satisfaction concerning them.

The centurion's faith is commended by our Saviour, ([Matth. viii. 9.](#)) because when his servant was sick, he did not desire him to come to his house, but to speak the word only, and his servant should be healed: for he reasoned thus, "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." Now if he, that was himself under authority, could thus command those that were under him, much more could he, that had a Divine power and commission, do what he pleased by his word. And our Saviour is so far from reprehending him for reasoning himself into this belief, that he admires his faith so much the more for the reasonableness of it. ([Ver. 10.](#)) "When Jesus heard this he marvelled, and said to them that followed him, Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel."

43

44

In like manner our Saviour commends the woman of Canaan's faith, because she inforced it so reasonably. (*Matt. xv. 22.*) She sued to him to help her daughter: but he answered her not a word: and when his disciples could not prevail with him to mind her, yet still she pressed him, "saying, Lord help me;" and when he repulsed her with this severe answer, "It is not meet to take the children's meat and cast it to dogs;" she made this quick and modest reply, "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table/ She acknowledgeth her own unworthiness; but yet believes his goodness to be such, that he will not utterly reject those who humbly seek to him: upon which he gives her this testimony—"O woman, great is thy faith!"

The apostles were divinely inspired; and yet the Bereans are commended, because they inquired and satisfied themselves in the reasons of their belief, before they assented to the doctrine which was delivered to them, even by teachers that certainly were infallible.

5. None are reprov'd in Scripture for their unbelief, but where sufficient reason and evidence was offer'd to them. The Israelites were generally blamed for their infidelity; but then it was after such mighty wonders had been wrought for their conviction.

The Jews, in our Saviour's time, are not condemn'd simply for their unbelief; but for not believing when there was such clear evidence offer'd to them. So our Saviour himself says, "If I had not done amongst them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin."

Thomas, indeed, is blamed for the perverseness of his unbelief, because he would believe nothing but what he himself saw.

Lastly, To shew this yet more plainly, let us consider the great inconvenience and absurdity of declining the use of reason in matters of religion. There can be no greater prejudice to religion, than to decline this trial.

To say we have no reason for our religion, is to say it is unreasonable. Indeed, it is reason enough for any article of our faith, that God hath revealed it; because this is one of the strongest and most cogent reasons for the belief of any thing. But when we say God hath revealed any thing, we must be ready to prove it, or else we say nothing. If we turn off reason here, we level the best religion in the world with the wildest and most absurd enthusiasms.

And it does not alter the case much, to give reason ill names, to call it blind and carnal reason. Our best reason is but very short and imperfect: but since it is no better, we must make use of it as it is, and make the best of it.

Before I pass from this argument, I cannot but observe, that both the extremes of those who differ from our church, are generally great declaimers against the use of reason in matters of faith. If they find their account in it, it is well; for our parts we apprehend no manner of inconvenience, in having reason on our side; nor need we to desire a better evidence, that any man is in the wrong, than to hear him declare against reason, and thereby



to acknowledge that reason is against him. Men may vilify reason as much as they please; and though being reviled she reviles not again, yet in a more still and gentle way, she commonly hath her full revenge upon all those that rail at her.

I have often wondered that people can with patience endure to hear their teachers and guides talk against reason; and, not only so, but they pay them the greater submission and veneration for it. One would think this but an odd way to gain authority over the minds of men; but some skilful and designing men have found by experience, that it is a very good way to recommend them to the ignorant; as nurses use to endear themselves to children, by perpetual noise and nonsense.

Thirdly, I observe, that God obligeth no man to believe plain and evident contradictions, as matters of faith. Abraham could not reasonably have believed this second revelation to have been from God, if he had not found some way to reconcile it with the first. For though a man were never so much disposed to submit his reason to Divine revelation, yet it is not possible for any man to believe God against God himself.

Some men seem to think, that they oblige God mightily, by believing plain contradictions. But the matter is quite otherwise. He that made man a reasonable creature, cannot take it kindly from any man to debase his workmanship, by making himself unreasonable. And therefore, as no service, or obedience; so no faith is acceptable unto God, but what is reasonable: if it be not so, it may be confidence or presumption; but it is not faith. For he that can believe plain contradictions, may believe any thing, how absurd soever, because nothing can be more absurd, than the belief of a plain contradiction; and he that can believe any thing, believes nothing upon good grounds, because to him truth and falsehood art all one.

Fourthly. I observe, that the great cause of the defect of men's obedience is the weakness of their faith. Did we believe the commands of God in the gospel, and his promises and threatenings, as firmly as Abraham believed God in this case; what should we not be ready to do, or suffer, in obedience to him?

If our faith were but as strong and vigorous as his was, the effects of it would be as great and conspicuous. Were we verily persuaded, that all the precepts of our religion are the express laws of God, and that all the promises and threatenings of the gospel will one day be verified and made good; "what manner of persons should we be in all holy conversation and godliness?" How would the lively thoughts of another world raise us above the vanities of this present life; and set us out of the reach of the most powerful temptations that this world can assault us withal; and make us to do all things with regard to eternity, and that solemn and dreadful account which we must one day make to God, the judge of all?

It is nothing but the want of a firm and steady belief of these things that makes our devotion so dead and heartless, and our resolutions of doing better so weak and inconsistent. This it is that makes us so easy a prey to every temptation; and the things of this world to look so much bigger than they are, the enjoyments of it more tempting, and the evils of it



more terrible than in truth they are; and in all disputes betwixt our conscience and our interest, this makes us hold the balance so unequally, and to put our foot upon the lighter scale, that it may seem to weigh down the other.

In a word, in proportion to the strength or weakness of our faith, our obedience to God will be more or less constant, uniform and perfect; because faith is the great source and spring of all the virtues of a good life.

Fifthly, We have great reason to submit to the ordinary strokes of God's providence upon ourselves, or near relations, or any thing that is dear to us. Most of these are easy, compared with Abraham's case; it requires a prodigious strength of faith to perform so miraculous an act of obedience.

Sixthly, and lastly, We are utterly inexcusable, if we disobey the easy precepts of the gospel. "The yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden light," in comparison of God's former dispensations. This was a grievous commandment which God gave to Abraham, to sacrifice his only son: it was a hard saying indeed; and which of us could have been able to bear it?

But if God think fit to call us to the more difficult duties of self-denial, and suffering for his truth and righteousness sake, we must, after the example of faithful Abraham, not think much to deny, or part with any thing for him, no not life itself. But even this, which is the hardest part of religion, is easier than what God put upon Abraham.

For it doth not offer near the violence to nature, to lay down our life in a good cause, as it would do to put a child to death with our own hands. Besides the consideration of the extraordinary comfort and support, and the glorious rewards, that are expressly promised to our obedience and self-denial in such a case; encouragement enough to make a very difficult duty easy.

And whilst I am persuading you and myself to resolution and constancy in our holy religion, notwithstanding all hazards and hardships that may attend it, I have a just sense of the frailty of human nature, and of human resolution: but withal, a most firm persuasion of the goodness of God, that he will not suffer those who sincerely love him and his truth, "to be tempted above what they are able."

I will add but one consideration more, to shew the difference betwixt Abraham's case and our s. God commanded him to do the hardest thing in the world, to sacrifice his only son; but he hath given us an easy commandment; and that he might effectually oblige us to our duty, he hath done that for us which he required Abraham to do for him; he hath not spared his own Son, his only Son; but hath given him up to death for us all: "and hereby we know, that he loveth us, that he hath given his Son for us."

What God required of Abraham, he did not intend should be executed; but one great design of it was to be a type and figure of that immense love and kindness which he intended to all mankind in the sacrifice of his Son, as a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

And as the most clear and express promise of the Messiah was made to Abraham; so the most express and lively type of the Messiah that we meet with in all the Old Testament, was Abraham offering up his son. And, as St. Hierom tells us (from an ancient and constant tradition of the Jews), the mountain in Moriah, where Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac, was Mount Calvary, where our Lord also was crucified and offered up, "that by this one sacrifice of himself, once offered, he might perfect for ever them that are sanctified, and obtain eternal redemption for us."



"Now to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain; to God, even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, the first begot ten from the dead; to the Prince of the kings of the earth; to him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; to him be glory, and honour, thanksgiving and power, now and for ever. Amen."



SERMON LVII.

[Preached at Whitehall 1687, before the Princess Anne.]

MOSES' CHOICE OF AFFLICTED PIETY, RATHER THAN A KINGDOM.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.—Heb. xi. 24, 25.

THE text sets before us a great pattern of self-denial: for our better understanding whereof I will give a brief account of the history of Moses, to which our apostle in this passage doth refer.

When Moses was born, his parents (for fear of the cruel law which Pharaoh had made, that all the male children of the Hebrews, so soon as they were born, should be put to death) after they had hid him three months, did at last expose him in an ark of bulrushes upon the river Nile, and committed him to the providence of God, whom they despaired to conceal any longer by their own care.

Pharaoh's daughter, coming by the river side, espied him, and had compassion on him; and, guessing him to be one of the Hebrew children, called for an Hebrew nurse to take care of him, who, as the providence of God had ordered it, proved to be the child's own mother. As he grew up, Pharaoh's daughter took care of his education in all princely qualities, and adopted him for her son: and Pharaoh (as Josephus tells us) being without a son, designed him heir of his kingdom.

Moses refused this great offer. But why did he refuse it, when it seemed to be presented to him by the providence of God, and was brought about in so strange a manner; and when by this means he might probably have had it in his power to have eased the Israelites of their cruel bondage, and perhaps have had the opportunity of reducing that great kingdom from the worship of idols to the true God? Why would he refuse a kingdom which was offered to him with so fair an opportunity of doing so much good?

That which seems to have prevailed with Moses was this, that he could not accept the offer without forsaking God, and renouncing his religion; for, considering how strangely the Egyptians were addicted to idolatry, he could never hope to be accepted for heir of that kingdom, unless he would violate his conscience, either by abandoning or dissembling his religion.

And how unlikely it was, that he should prevail with them to change their religion, he might easily judge by the example of Joseph, who, though he had so much authority and esteem amongst them, by having been so great a benefactor to their nation; yet he could never move them in the least in that matter.

Now seeing he had no hopes of attaining, or enjoying that dignity, without sinning grievously against God, he would not purchase a kingdom at so unconscionable a price.

And as for the deliverance of his people, he was content to trust the providence and promise of God for that; and in the mean time was resolved rather to take a part in the afflictions of God's people, "than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

From the words, thus explained, I shall take occasion to consider these four things:

I. Moses' self-denial, in preferring and choosing a state of afflicted piety, before any sinful enjoyments whatsoever, before the greatest earthly happiness and prosperity, when it was not to be attained and enjoyed upon other terms than of sinning against God.

II. I shall consider those circumstances of this self-denial of Moses, which do very much commend and set off the virtue of it.

III. The prudence and reasonableness of this choice, in preferring a state of afflicted piety and virtue, before the greatest prosperity and pleasure of a sinful course.

IV. Supposing this choice to be reasonable, I shall inquire how it comes to pass, that so many make another choice.

I. We will consider Moses' self-denial, in preferring a state of afflicted piety before the greatest earthly happiness and prosperity, when it is not to be enjoyed upon other terms, than of sinning against God. He was adopted heir of the kingdom of Egypt (one of the greatest and most flourishing kingdoms then in the world); but he could not hope to attain to this dignity, and to secure himself in the possession of it, upon other terms, than of complying with that nation, in their idolatrous religion and worship.

Now being brought up in the belief of the true God, the God of Israel, by his mother, to whom Pharaoh's daughter had committed him, he could not, without great violence to his conscience, and the principles of his education, renounce the true God, and fall off to the idolatry of the Egyptians: and for this reason "he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction" with the worshippers of the true God, than to have the temporary enjoyment of any thing that was not to be had without sin; for so the word ought to be rendered ἢ πρόσκαιρον ἔχειν ἀμαρτίας ἀπόλαυσιν, "than to have the temporary enjoyment of sin." So here was Moses' self-denial, that he chose rather to suffer affliction with the worshippers of the true God, than to gain a kingdom, by the renouncing of God and religion.

II. We will consider those circumstances of his self-denial, which do very much commend and set off the virtue of it.

1. What it was he refused to be called; "the son of Pharaoh's daughter;" that is, to be heir of one of the greatest and most flourishing kingdoms in the world: a temptation so great, that the devil himself could not find but one much greater, when he set upon the Son of God to tempt him to fall down and worship him.

And when we consider for what inconsiderable things some men sell their religion and their consciences, we shall think it no small temptation which Moses here resisted. *Si violandum est jus, regnandi causa violandum est*; "If a man would do any unjust thing, and

violate his religion and conscience, he would not do it for less than a kingdom;" and it would be a very hard bargain, even upon those terms.

2. Consider not only what he refused, but what he chose in the place of it—a state of great affliction and suffering. Had he refused a kingdom, and chosen the quiet condition of a subject of middle rank, (beneath envy and above contempt) his self-denial had not been so great; nay, perhaps he had made a wise choice, in the account of the wisest men, in preferring a plentiful and quiet retirement, before the cares of a crown, and the burden of public government.

But it is very rare to find a man that would choose rather to be oppressed and persecuted, than to be a prince, and to have the sweet power to use others as he pleased.

3. Consider how fair a prospect he had of enjoying this kingdom, if he could but have come up to the terms of it. He did not reject it, because he despaired of attaining it: for he had all the right that a good title could give him, being adopted heir to it; and yet he refused it.

To which I may add, that his breeding was such as might easily kindle ambitious thoughts in him. He was brought up in Pharaoh's court, and was the darling and favourite of it; exceeding beautiful (as Josephus tells us) and "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians;" than which no two qualities are more apt to puff up and swell a man with big thoughts of himself.

They that are bred in a low condition, never think of a kingdom; men not being apt to aspire to things which are remote, and at a great distance from them.

But nothing is more rare in persons of great and generous minds, than such a self-denial as this.

4. Let it be considered, in the last place, that this was a deliberate choice, not any rash and sudden, determination made by him when he was of incompetent age to make a true judgment of things. And this the apostle takes notice of in the text, as a very memorable circumstance, that "when he was come to years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." And St. Stephen tells us, that he was "full forty years old" when he made this choice. ([Acts vii. 23.](#)) "When he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel." When he was of ripest judgment, and in the height of his prosperity and reputation, he made this choice; for it is said in the verse before, that "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in word and deed;" that is, he was in great reputation for his wisdom and valour.

This seems to refer to other passages of his life, which are not recorded in Scripture history, but related at large by Josephus, out of historians extant in his time. For he tells, that when the Ethiopians had invaded Egypt, and almost over-run it, Pharaoh was directed by the oracle at Memphis to make Moses his general, who by his extraordinary conduct and courage overthrew the Ethiopians, and drove them out of Egypt.

This Moses did not think fit to relate of himself; but St. Stephen seems to allude to it, when he says, that “he was mighty in word and deed:” and then it follows; “and when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel;” that is, when he was at full maturity of judgment, and in the height of his prosperity and reputation, he quitted the court of Egypt, and went to visit his afflicted brethren, and chose rather to take part with them in their sufferings, than to accept those great offers that were made to him.

There is likewise another passage in Josephus concerning Moses, which seems to be a forerunner of the contempt which he shewed afterwards of the crown of Egypt; that when Moses was about three years old, Thermuthis, the daughter of Pharaoh, brought the child to him, who took him in his arms, and put his diadem upon his head; but Moses took it off, and cast it to the ground, and trampled it under his feet. This was but a childish act, and they who saw it would easily believe, that, for all his childish contempt of it then, if it were put upon his head in good earnest, when he came to be a man, he would hold it on faster, and use it with more respect.

And it is not improbable, but that the apostle might have some regard to this, when he says, that “Moses when he came to years;” intimating, that he did not only trample upon the diadem of Pharaoh, when he was a child; but when he was come to years, and was capable of judging better of those things, “he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.”

But before I proceed any farther, I cannot but take notice of an objection, which may seem to reflect greatly upon the integrity of Moses. Can we think him so very conscientious a man, who persuaded the people of Israel, and pretended God’s direction in the case, to cheat the Egyptians of their jewels, under a fraudulent pretence of borrowing them? There is some difficulty in the thing, as at first sight it appears: and yet I doubt not, with your favourable attention, and free from prejudice, to vindicate Moses clearly in this matter.

And I shall not insist upon that which is commonly and truly said in this case; that God, who is the supreme Lord of all things, may transfer the rights of men from one to another; because the objection doth not lie against God’s right to take away from any man what he hath given him; but against the fraudulent manner of doing it, which seems unworthy of God to command or encourage.

Now this matter, I think, is capable of another and much clearer answer; which, in short, is this, and grounded upon the history, as we find it related, [Exod. xii](#). The providence of God did, it seems, design by this way to make some reparation to the Israelites, for the tyrannical usage which they had received from the Egyptians; and that first (as the text expressly tells us) “in giving them favour with the Egyptians;” who, in truth, for their own ends, and to get rid of such troublesome guests, were disposed to lend them any thing they had.

Thus far all is right; here is nothing but fair borrowing and lending: and if the Israelites acquired a right to those things afterwards, there was then no obligation to restitution.

Let us see then how the providence of God brought this about: namely, by permitting the Egyptians afterwards, without cause, and after leave given them to depart, to pursue them, with a design to have destroyed them; by which hostility and perfidiousness they plainly forfeited their right to what they had only lent before. For this hostile attempt, which would have warranted the Israelites to have spoiled them of their jewels, if they had been in the possession of the Egyptians, did certainly warrant them to keep them when they had them; and by this means they became rightful possessors of what they had only by loan before, and could not have detained without fraud and injustice, if this hostility of the Egyptians had not given them a new title and clear right to them.

But I proceed to the third thing I proposed, which was, to vindicate the prudence and reasonableness of this choice. And in speaking to this, I shall abstract from the particular case of Moses, and shew in general, that it is a prudent and reasonable thing, to prefer even an afflicted state of piety and virtue, before the greatest pleasures and prosperity of a sinful course; and this will appear, if we consider these two things:

I. The sufferings of good men upon account of religion, together with the reward of them.

II. The temporary enjoyment of sin, with the mischiefs and inconveniences consequent upon them.

I. The sufferings of good men upon the account of religion, together with the reward of them. This Moses had in his eye, when he made this choice; for therefore "he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season," because "he had respect to the recompense of reward." And though he had but a very imperfect discovery in comparison of the future state; yet, it seems, he had so much assurance of the goodness of God, as firmly to believe, that he should be no loser at the last, by any thing that he suffered for God and religion.

Indeed, if there were no life after this, and we had no expectation beyond this world, the wisest thing we could do would be, to enjoy as much of the present contentment of this world as we could make ourselves masters of. But if we be designed for immortality, and shall be unspeakably happy or intolerably miserable in another world, according as we have demeaned ourselves in this life; then certainly it is reasonable, that we should take the greatest care of the longest duration, and be content to dispense with some present inconveniences for an eternal felicity; and be willing to labour and take pains for a little while, that we may be happy for ever. And this is accounted prudence in the account of the wisest men, to part with a little in present, for a far greater future advantage.

But the disproportion betwixt time and eternity is so vast, that, did we but firmly believe, that we shall live for ever, nothing in this world could reasonably be thought too good to part withal, or too grievous to suffer, for the obtaining of a blessed immortality. And upon this belief and persuasion of a mighty reward, beyond all their present sufferings, and that

they should be infinite gainers at the last, the primitive Christians were kept from sinking under their present sufferings, and fortified against all that the malice and cruelty of the world could do unto them. And if we would consider all things together, and mind the invisible things of another world, as well as the things which are seen, we should easily discern, that he who suffers for God and religion does not renounce his happiness, but put it out to interest upon terms of greatest advantage, and does wisely consider his own best and most lasting interest. This is the first.

II. This will yet more evidently appear, if we consider the temporary enjoyments of sin, together with the mischiefs and inconveniences attending, and consequent upon them; that, as to the nature of them, they are mixed and imperfect; as to the duration of them, they are short, and but for a season; and as to the final issue and consequence of them, that they end in misery and sorrow.

1. As to the nature of them, all the pleasures and enjoyments of sin are mixed and imperfect. A wicked man may make a shew of mirth and pleasure, "but even in laughter his heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness." There can be no true and sincere pleasure in any sinful and vicious course, though it be attended with all the pomp and splendour of outward happiness and prosperity; for wherever sin and vice is, there must be guilt; and wherever guilt is, the mind will be restless and unquiet.

For there are two very troublesome and tormenting passions, which are naturally consequent upon guilt—shame and fear: shame, arising from the apprehension of the danger of being discovered; and fear, from the apprehension of the danger of being punished: and these do continually haunt the sinner, and fill him with inward horror and confusion in his most secret retirements. And if sin were attended with no other trouble but the guilt of it, a wise man would not commit it, if it were for no other reason, but merely for the peace and quiet of his own mind.

2. The enjoyments of sin, as to the duration of them, are but short. Upon this consideration, Moses set no price and value upon them, but preferred affliction and suffering in good company, and in a good cause, before "the temporary enjoyments of sin."

If the enjoyments of this world were perfect in their nature, and had no mixture; of trouble and sorrow in them; yet this would be a great abatement of them, that they are of so short and uncertain a continuance. The pleasure of most sins expires with the act of them; and, when that is done, the delight vanisheth.

I cannot deny but that there are several worldly advantages to be purchased by sin, which may perhaps be of a longer continuance; as riches and honours, the common purchase of covetousness and ambition, and of that long train of inferior vices which attend upon them, and minister unto them: but even those enjoyments are, in their own nature, of an uncertain continuance; and much more uncertain for being purchased by indirect and ill means. But if the enjoyment of these things were sure to be of the same date with our lives;

61

62

yet how short a duration is that compared with eternity? Make the utmost allowance to these things that can be, yet we can but enjoy them whilst we are in this world. When we come into the world of spirits, it will signify nothing to us to have been rich or great in this world. When we shall stand before that highest tribunal, it will not avail us in the least to have been princes, and great men, and judges on the earth; the poorest man that ever lived in this world will then be upon equal terms with the biggest of us all.

For all mankind shall then stand upon a level, and those civil distinctions of rich and poor, of base and honourable, which seem now so considerable, and make such a glaring difference amongst men in this world, shall all then be laid aside, and moral differences shall only take place. All the distinctions which will then be made, will be betwixt the good and the bad, the righteous and the wicked; and the difference betwixt a good and bad man, will be really much greater than ever it seemed to be betwixt the highest and meanest persons in this world.

And, if this be so, why should we value the enjoyments of sin at so high a rate, which, at the best, are only considerable (and that only in the imagination of vain men) during our abode in this world; but bear no price at all in that country where we must live for ever: or, if they did, we cannot carry them along with us. The guilt of them, indeed, will follow us with a vengeance; the injustice and all the ill arts we have used for the getting or keeping of them, especially, if at once we have “made ship wreck of faith and a good conscience.”

If we have changed our religion, or, which is much worse, if continuing in the profession of it, we have betrayed it, and the interest of it, for the gaining or securing of any of these things; we shall find, to our sorrow, that though “the enjoyments of sin were but for a season,” the guilt of it will never leave us nor forsake us; but will stick close to us, and make us miserable for ever. But this belongs to the

III. Third thing I proposed to speak to, namely, The final issue and consequence of a sinful course; which is misery and sorrow many times in this world, but most certainly in the next.

1. In this world, the very best issue and consequence of a sinful course that we can imagine, is repentance: and even this hath a great deal of sensible pain and trouble in it; for it is many times (especially after great sins, and a long continuance in them) accompanied with much regret and horror; with deep and piercing sorrow; with dismal and despairing thoughts of God's mercy; and with fearful apprehensions of his wrath and vengeance. So that, if this were the worst consequence of sin, (which indeed is the best) no man that considers and calculates things wisely, would purchase the pleasure of any sin, at the price of so much anguish and sorrow as a true and deep repentance will cost him; especially, since a true repentance does, in many cases, oblige men to the restitution of that which hath been gained by sin, if it hath been got by the injury of another.

63

64

And this consideration quite takes away the pleasure and profit of an ill-gotten estate. Better never to have had it, than to be obliged to refund it. A wise man will forbear the most pleasant meats, if he know beforehand that they will make him deadly sick, and that he shall never be at ease till he have brought them up again.

No man that believes the threatenings of God, and the judgments of another world, would ever sin, but that he hopes to retrieve all again by repentance. But it is the greatest folly in the world to commit any sin upon this hope: for that is to please one's self for the present, in hopes to have more trouble afterwards than the pleasure comes to. But, especially no man would be guilty of an act of injustice and oppression, in hopes to repent of it afterwards; because there can be no repentance for such sins without restitution; and it is perfect madness for a man to run the hazard of his soul to get an estate, in hopes of restoring it again; for so he must do that truly repents of such a sin. But,

2. In the other world, the final issue and consequence of all the pleasures of sin unrepented of, will certainly be misery and sorrow. How quietly soever a sinner may pass through this world, or out of it, misery will certainly overtake him in the next, unspeakable and eternal misery, arising from an apprehension of the greatest loss, and a sense of the sharpest pain; and those sadly aggravated by the remembrance of past pleasure, and the despair of future ease.

From a sad apprehension and melancholy reflection upon his inestimable loss. In the other world, the sinner shall be eternally separated from God, who is the fountain of happiness. This is the first part of that miserable sentence which shall be passed upon the wicked—"Depart from me."

Sinners are not now sensible of the joys of heaven, and the happiness of that state, and therefore are not capable of estimating the greatness of such a loss: but this stupidity and insensibleness of sinners, continues only during this present state, which affords men a variety of objects and pleasures to divert and entertain them: but when they are once entered upon the other world, they will then have nothing else to take up their thoughts, but the sad condition, into which by their own wilful negligence and folly they have plunged themselves. They shall then "lift up their eyes," and, with the rich man in the parable, at once "see the happiness of others, and feel their own misery and torment."

But this is not all. Besides the apprehension of so great a loss, they shall be sensible of the sorest and sharpest pains; and how grievous those shall be we may conjecture by what the Scripture says of them in general; that they are the effects of a mighty displeasure, of anger and omnipotence met together, far greater than can be described by any pains and sufferings which we are acquainted withal in this world: "for who knows the power of God's anger," and the utmost of what omnipotent Justice can do to sinners? "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

One would think, this were misery enough, and needed no farther aggravation: but yet it hath two terrible ones—from the remembrance of past pleasures, and the despair of any future ease and remedy.

The remembrance of past pleasure makes present sufferings more sharp and sensible. For as nothing commends pleasure more, and gives a quicker relish to happiness, than precedent pain and suffering (for perhaps there is not a greater pleasure in the world, than in the sudden ease which a man finds after a sharp fit of the stone): so nothing enrageth affliction more, and sets a keener edge upon misery, than to pass into great pain immediately out of a state of ease and pleasure. This was the stinging aggravation of the rich man's torment, that "in his lifetime he had received his good things, and had fared so deliciously every day."

But the greatest aggravation of all is, the despair of any future ease and remedy. The duration of this misery is set forth to us in Scripture, by such expressions as do signify the longest and most indeterminable duration. "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire." ([Matth. xxv.](#) and [Mark ix. 43.](#)) "Where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched." And in the Revelation it is said, that "the wicked shall be tormented day and night, for ever and ever," without intermission, and without end. And this surely is the perfection of misery, for a man to lie under the greatest torments, and to be in despair of ever finding the least ease.

Let us now compare things together: on the one hand, the sufferings of good men, for a good conscience, and the reward that follows them; and, on the other hand, the enjoyments of sin, and the mischief and misery that attend them, and will certainly overtake them in this world, or in the next: and then we shall easily discern which of these is to be preferred in a wise man's choice.

And indeed the choice is so very plain, that a man must be very strangely forsaken of his reason, and blinded by sense, who does not prefer that course of life, which will probably make him happier in this world, but most certainly in the next.

IV. There remains now only the fourth and last particular to be spoken to; viz. supposing this choice to be reasonable, to inquire whence it comes to pass, that so many make a quite contrary choice. How is it, that the greatest part of mankind are so widely mistaken, as to prefer the temporary enjoyments of sin before conscience and religion; especially, if it be attended with great afflictions and sufferings? and of this I shall give you as brief an account as I can, and so conclude this discourse.

This wrong choice generally proceeds from one or both of these two causes; from want of faith, or from want of consideration, or of both.

1. One great reason why men make so imprudent a choice, is unbelief; either the want of faith, or the weakness of it. Either men do not believe the recompenses of another life, or they are not so firmly persuaded of the reality of them. If men do not at all believe these things, there is no foundation for religion; for "he that cometh unto God (that is, he that

thinks of being religious) must believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," as the apostle reasons in the beginning of this chapter.

But I hope, there are but few that are, or can be, infidels, as to these great and fundamental principles of religion. But it is to be feared, that the faith of a great many is but weak and wavering; their faith is rather negative; they do not disbelieve these things, but they are not firmly persuaded of them; their faith is rather an opinion, than a rooted and well-grounded persuasion; and therefore, no wonder, if it be not so strong and vigorous a principle of action, like the faith of Abraham and Moses, and other worthies mentioned in this chapter. For where faith is in its full strength and vigour, it will have proportionable effects upon the resolutions and wills of men: but where it is but weak, it is of little or no efficacy. And this is the true reason, why so many forsake religion, and cleave to this present world; and, when it comes to the push, choose rather to sin than to suffer; and will rather quit the truth, than endure persecution for it.

These are they whom our Saviour describes, "who receive the word with joy, and endure for a while; but when tribulation and persecution ariseth be cause of the word, presently they are offended:" not that they did not believe the word; but their faith had taken no deep root, and therefore it withered. The weakness and wavering of men's faith, makes them unstable and inconstant in their course; because they are not of one mind, but divided betwixt two interests, that of this world and the other; and "the double-minded man (as St. James tells us) is unstable in all his ways."

It is generally a true rule; so much wavering as we see in the actions and lives of men, so much weakness there is in their faith; and therefore, he that would know what any man firmly believes, let him attend to his actions more than to his professions.

If any man live so as no man that heartily believes the Christian religion can live, it is not credible, that such a man doth firmly believe the Christian religion. He says he does; but there is a greater evidence in the case than words; there is *testimonium rei*, the man's actions are to the contrary, and they do best declare the inward sense of the man. Did men firmly believe, that there is a God that governs the world, and that "he hath appointed a day wherein he will judge it in righteousness;" and that all mankind shall shortly appear before him, and give an account of themselves, and all their actions, to him; and that those who have "kept the faith and a good conscience," and have "lived soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world," shall be unspeakably and eternally happy; "but the fearful and unbelieving," those who, out of fear or interest, have deserted the faith, or lived wicked lives, "shall have their portion in the lake, which burns with fire and brimstone:" I say, were men firmly persuaded of these things, it is hardly credible, that any man should make a wrong choice, and forsake the ways of truth and righteousness, upon any temptation whatsoever.

Faith, even in temporal matters, is a mighty principle of action, and will make men to attempt and undergo strange and difficult things. The faith of the gospel ought to be much



more operative and powerful, because the objects of hope and fear, which it presents to us, are far greater, and more considerable, than any thing that this world can tempt or terrify us withal.

Would we but by faith make present to our minds the invisible things of another world, the happiness of heaven, and the terrors of hell; and were we as verily persuaded of them, as if they were in our view, how should we despise all the pleasures and terrors of this world; and with what ease should we resist and repel all those temptations, which would seduce us from our duty, or draw us into sin!

A firm and unshaken belief of these things, would effectually remove all those mountains of difficulty and discouragement, which men fancy to themselves in the ways of religion. "To him that believeth all things are possible," and most things would be easy.

2. Another reason of this wrong choice is want of consideration; for this would strengthen our faith, and make it more vigorous and powerful: and, in deed, a faith which is well rooted and established doth suppose a wise and deep consideration of things; and the want of this is a great cause of the fatal miscarriage of men; that they do not sit down and consider with themselves seriously, how much religion is their interest, and how much it will cost them to be true to it, and to persevere in it, to the end.

We suffer ourselves to be governed by sense, and to be transported with present things; but do not consider our future and lasting interest, and the whole duration of an immortal soul. And this is the reason why so many men are hurried away by the present and sensible delights of this world, because they will not take time to think of what will be hereafter.

For it is not to be imagined, but that the man who hath seriously considered what sin is, the shortness of its pleasure, and the eternity of its punishment, should resolve to forsake sin, and to live a holy and virtuous life.

To conclude this whole discourse. If men did but seriously believe the great principles of religion; the being and the providence of God; the immortality of their souls; the glorious rewards, and the dreadful punishments of another world; they could not possibly make so imprudent a choice, as we see a great part of mankind to do; they could not be induced to forsake God and religion for any temporal interest and advantage; to renounce the favour of heaven, and all their hopes of happiness in another world, for any thing that this world can afford; nay, not for the whole world, if it were offered to them: for, as our Saviour reasons in this very case, of forsaking our religion for any temporal interest, or consideration; "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Whenever any of us are tempted in this kind, let that solemn declaration of our Saviour and our Judge be continually in our minds; "He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven: but whosoever shall be ashamed of me



and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels.”

And we have great cause to thank God, to see so many in this day of trial, and hour of temptation, to adhere with so much resolution and constancy to their holy religion, and to prefer the keeping of faith, and a good conscience, to all earthly considerations and advantages.

And this very thing, that so many hold their religion so fast, and are so loath to part with it, gives great hopes that they intend to make good use of it, and to frame their lives according to the holy rules and precepts of it; which alone can give us peace whilst we live, and comfort when we come to die; and after death secure to us the possession of a happiness, large as our wishes, and lasting as our souls. To which, God of his infinite goodness bring us all, for his mercies sake, in Jesus Christ: to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.



SERMON LVIII.

OF CONSTANCY IN THE PROFESSION OF THE TRUE RELIGION.

Let us holdfast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that hath promised.—Heb. x. 23.

THE main scope and design of this Epistle to the Hebrews is to persuade the Jews, who were newly converted to Christianity, to continue steadfast in the profession of that holy and excellent religion which they had embraced; and not to be removed from it, either by the subtle insinuations of their brethren the Jews, who pretended that they were in possession of the true ancient religion, and the only true church of God upon earth; or by the terror of the heathen persecution, which was so hot against them at that time. And to this end the author of this Epistle doth by great variety of arguments demonstrate the excellency of the Christian religion above the Jewish dispensation; and shews at large, that in all those respects upon which the Jews valued themselves and their religion (as, namely, upon the account of their lawgiver, their high-priests, and their sacrifices) the Christian religion had every way the advantage of them.

And having made this clear, he concludes this with an earnest exhortation to them to continue steadfast in the profession of this excellent religion, which was revealed to them by the Son of God, the true propitiatory sacrifice, and the great high-priest of their profession, and into which they had solemnly been initiated and admitted by baptism. [Ver. 19, 20, 21, 22.](#) “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an High-priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith;” that is, let us sincerely serve God with a firm persuasion of the truth and excellency of this holy religion, into the profession whereof we were solemnly admitted by baptism; for that is undoubtedly the meaning of the following words: “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water;” the water with which our bodies are washed in baptism, signifying our spiritual regeneration, and the purging our consciences from dead works, to serve the living God. From all which he concludes, “let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” This refers to that solemn profession of faith, which was made by all Christians at their baptism, and which is contained in the ancient creed of the Christian church, called by the ancient fathers, “the rule of faith.”

Let us hold fast, κατέχωμεν, “let us firmly retain;” the same with κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας. ([Chap. iv. 14.](#)) “Seeing then we have a great High-priest which is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us take fast hold of our profession.” So here in the text, the apostle upon the same consideration exhorts Christians to retain, or hold fast, τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος, “the confession, or profession of their hope;” that is, the hope of the



resurrection of the dead, and everlasting life, which was the conclusion of that faith or creed, whereof in baptism they made a solemn profession. “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith or hope, without wavering;” the word is ἀκλινη, inflexible, unmoveable, steady, and not apt to waver and be shaken by every wind of contrary doctrine, nor by the blasts and storms of persecution.—“For he is faithful that hath promised.” If we continue faithful and steady to God, he will be “faithful,” to make good all the promises he hath made to us.

In the words, thus explained, there are two things which I shall distinctly consider.

First, The exhortation: “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering:” and,

Secondly, The argument or encouragement used to enforce it; “He is faithful that hath promised.” I begin with the

First, The exhortation to be constant and steady in the profession of the Christian religion: “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” In the handling of this, and that we may the better understand the true meaning of this exhortation here in the text, I shall do these two things:

I. I shall shew negatively, wherein this constancy and steadiness in the profession of the true religion does not consist. And here I shall remove one or two things, which are thought by some to be inconsistent with constancy and steadfastness in religion.

II. I shall shew positively what is implied in a constant and steady profession of the true religion.

I. I shall shew negatively, what constancy and steadfastness in the profession of the true religion does not imply. And there are two things which are thought by some to be implied in “holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”

First, That men should not take the liberty to examine their religion, and inquire into the grounds and reasons of it.

Secondly, That men should obstinately refuse to hear any reasons that can be brought against the true religion, as they think, which they have once entertained.

First, That men should not take the liberty to examine their religion, and inquire into the grounds and reasons of it. This, I think, is so far from being forbidden in this exhortation, that, on the contrary, I doubt not to make it appear, that a free and impartial inquiry into the grounds and reasons of our religion, and a thorough trial and examination of them, is one of the best means to confirm and establish us in the profession of it: I mean, that all persons that are capable of it, should do it, and that they will find great benefit and advantage by it. For I do not think, that this is a duty equally and indifferently incumbent upon all; nor indeed fit and proper for all persons; because all are not equally capable of doing it. There are two sorts of persons that are in a great measure incapable of doing it:

1. Children.

2. Such grown persons as are of a very mean and low capacity and improvement of understanding.

Children are not fit to examine, but only to learn and believe what is taught them by their parents and teachers. They are fit to have the fear of God, and the principles of the true religion, instilled into them; but they are by no means fit to discern between a true and false religion, and to choose for themselves, and to make a change of their religion; as hath of late been allowed to them in a nation not far from us, and by public edict declared, that children at seven years old are fit to choose and to change their religion: which is the first law I ever heard of, that allows children at that age to do any act for themselves, that is of consequence and importance to them, for the remaining part of their lives, and which they shall stand obliged to perform and make good. They are indeed baptized, according to the custom and usage of the Christian church, in their infancy: but they do not enter into this obligation themselves: but their sureties undertake for them, that when they come to age, they shall take this promise upon themselves, and confirm and make it good. But surely, they can do no act for themselves, and in their own name, at that age, which can be obligatory. They can neither make any contracts that shall be valid, nor incur any debt, nor oblige themselves by any promise, nor choose themselves a guardian, nor do any act that may bring them under an inconvenience, when they shall come at age. And can we think them of discretion sufficient at that time, to do a thing of the greatest moment and consequence of all other; and which will concern them to all eternity; namely, to choose their religion? There is indeed one part of one religion (which we all know) which children at seven years of age are fit (I do not say to judge of, but) to be as fond of, and to practise to as good purpose, as those of riper years; and that is, to worship images, to tell their beads, to say their prayers, and to be present at the service of God in an unknown tongue; and this they are more likely to choose at that age, than those who are of riper and more improved understandings; and if they do not choose it at that time, it is ten to one they will not choose it afterwards. I shall say no more of this, but that it is a very extraordinary law, and such as perhaps was never thought of before from the beginning of the world. Thus much for children.

As for grown persons, who are of a very low and mean capacity of understanding, and either by reason of the weakness of their faculties, or other disadvantages which they lie under, are in little or no probability of improving themselves: these are always to be considered as in the condition of children and learners, and therefore must, of necessity, in things, which are not plain and obvious to the meanest capacities, trust and rely upon the judgment of others. And it is really much wiser and safer for them so to do, than to depend upon their own judgments, and to lean to their own understandings; and such persons, if they be modest and humble, and pray earnestly to God for his assistance and direction, and are careful to practise what they know, and to live up to the best light and knowledge which they have, shall not miscarry merely for want of those farther degrees of knowledge, which

77

78

they had no capacity nor opportunity to attain, because their ignorance is unavoidable, and God will require no more of them than he hath given them, and will not call them to account for the improvement of those talents which he never committed to them. And if they be led into any dangerous error, by the negligence or ill conduct of those under whose care and instruction the providence of God permitted them to be placed, God will not impute it to them as a fault; because in the circumstances in which they were they took the best and wisest course that they could, to come to the knowledge of the truth, by being willing to learn what they could of those whom they took to be wiser than themselves.

But for such persons, who, by the maturity of their age, and by the natural strength and clearness of their understandings, or by the due exercise and improvement of them, are capable of inquiring into, and understanding the grounds of their religion, and discerning the difference betwixt truth and error (I do not mean in unnecessary points, and matters of deepest learning and speculation, but in matters necessary to salvation), it is certainly very reasonable, that such persons should examine their religion, and understand the reasons and grounds of it.

And this must either be granted to be reasonable, or else every man must continue in that religion in which he happens to be fixed by education, or for any other reason to pitch upon, when he comes to years, and makes his free choice: for if this be a good principle, that no man is to examine his religion, but take it as it is, and to believe it, and rest satisfied with it; then every man is to remain in the religion which he first lights upon, whether by choice or the chance of his education. For he ought not to change but upon reason; and reason he can have none, unless he be allowed to examine his religion, and to compare it with others, that by the comparison he may discern which is best, and ought in reason to be preferred in his choice. For to him that will not, or is not permitted to search into the grounds of any religion, all religions are alike; as all things are of the same colour to him that is always kept in the dark; or if he happens to come into the light dares not open his eyes, and make use of them to discern the different colours of things.

But this is evidently and at first sight unreasonable; because at this rate, every man that hath once entertained an error, and a false religion, must for ever continue in it: for if he be not allowed to examine it, he can never have reason to change; and to make a change without reason, is certainly unreasonable, and mere vanity and inconstancy.

And yet, for aught I can see, this is the principle which the church of Rome doth, with great zeal and earnestness, inculcate upon their people; discouraging all doubts and inquiries about their religion, as temptations of the devil; and all examinations of the grounds and reasons of their religion as an inclination and dangerous step towards heresy: for what else can they mean by taking the Scriptures out of the hands of the people, and locking them up from them in an unknown tongue, by requiring them absolutely to submit their judgments, and to resign them up to that which they are pleased to call the catholic church, and implicitly

to believe as she believes, though they know not what that is? This is, in truth, to believe as their priest tells them; for that is all the teaching part of the church, and all the rule of faith that the common people are acquainted with.

And it is not sufficient to say in this matter, that when men are in the truth, and of the right religion, and in the bosom of the true church, they ought to rest satisfied, and to examine and inquire no farther. For this is manifestly unreasonable, and that upon these three accounts:

1. Because this is a plain and shameful begging of the thing in question; and that which every church, and every religion, doth almost with equal confidence pretend to; that their's is the only right religion, and the only true church. And these pretences are all alike reasonable to him that never examined the grounds of any of them, nor hath compared them together. And therefore, it is the vainest thing in the world for the church of Rome to pretend, that all religions in the world ought to be examined but their's; because their's, and none else, is the true religion. For this which they say so confidently of it, that it is the true religion, no man can know till he hath examined it, and searched into the grounds of it, and hath considered the objections which are against it. So that it is fond partiality to say, that their religion is not to be examined by the people that profess it, but that all other religions ought to be examined, or rather, be cause they are different from that which they presume to be the only true religion, ought to be condemned at all adventures, without any farther inquiry: this, I say, is fond partiality; because every religion, and every church, may (for aught that appears to any man that is not permitted to examine things impartially) say the same for themselves, and with as much reason; and, if so, then either every religion ought to permit itself to be examined; or else no man ought to examine his own religion, whatever it be: and, consequently, Jews, and Turks, and heathens, and heretics, ought all to continue as they are, and none of them to change; because they cannot reasonably change without examining both that religion which they leave, and that which they embrace instead of it.

2. Admitting this pretence were true, that they are the true church, and have the true religion; this is so far from being a reason why they should not permit it to be examined, that, on the contrary, it is one of the best reasons in the world why they should allow it to be examined, and why they may safely suffer it to be so. They should permit it to be tried, that men may upon good reason be satisfied that it is the true religion: and they may safely suffer it to be done; because, if they be sure that the grounds of their religion be firm and good, I am sure they will be never the worse for being examined and looked into. But I appeal to every man's reason, whether it be not an ill sign that they are not so sure that the grounds of their religion are solid and firm, and such as will abide the trial, that they are so very loath to have them searched into and examined? This cannot but tempt a wise man to suspect, that their church is not founded upon a rock, and that they themselves know some thing

81

82

that is amiss in their religion, which makes them so loath to have it tried, and brought to the touch.

3. It is certain among all Christians, that the doctrine preached by the apostles was the true faith of Christ; and yet they never forbade the Christians to examine whether it was so or not: nay, on the contrary, they frequently exhort them to try and examine their religion, and whether that doctrine which they had delivered to them was the true faith of Christ. So St. Paul, (2 Corinth. xiii. 5.) “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.” And, again, (1 Thess. v. 21.) “Prove all things, hold fast that which is good;” intimating to us, that in order to the holding fast the profession of our faith, it is requisite to prove and try it. And so likewise St. John’s 1st Ep. iv. 1. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” And he gives a very notable mark whereby we may know the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. The spirit of error carries on a worldly interest and design, and the doctrines of it tend to secular power and greatness: (ver. 5.) “They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.” (Acts xvii. 11.) St. Luke commends it, as an argument of a more noble and generous spirit in the Bereans, that they examined the doctrine which the apostles preached, whether it were agreeable to the Scriptures; and this without disparagement to their infallibility: “These (saith he,) were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so.” They were ready to receive the word; but not blindly, and with an implicit faith, but using due care to examine the doctrines which they were taught, and to see if they were agreeable to that Divine revelation of the Holy Scriptures which they had before received. It seems they were not willing to admit and swallow contradictions in their faith. And we desire no more of the church of Rome, than that they would encourage the people to search the Scriptures daily, and to examine whether their doctrines be according to them. We would be glad to hear the pope, and a general council commend to the people the searching of the Scriptures, and to try their definitions of faith and decrees of worship by that rule, to see whether what they have defined, and decree to be believed and practised, be agreeable to it—their worship of images; their solemn invocation of angels, and of the blessed Virgin, and the saints departed; the sacrament under one kind only; the public prayers and service of God in an unknown tongue; the frequent repetition of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ’s body and blood in the mass. Had the Bereans been at the council of Trent, and pleaded their right to “search the Scriptures, whether these things were so,” I doubt they would have been thought very troublesome and impertinent, and would not have been praised by the pope and council for their pains, as they are by St. Luke.

You see then, upon the whole matter, that it is a very groundless and suspicious pretence of the church of Rome, that, because they are infallibly in the right, and their’s is the true



religion, therefore their people must not be permitted to examine it. The doctrine of the apostles was undoubtedly the true faith of Christ; and yet they not only permitted the people to examine it, but exhorted and encouraged them so to do, and commended them for it: and any man, that hath the spirit of a man, must abhor to submit to this slavery, not to be allowed to examine his religion, and to inquire freely into the grounds and reasons of it; and would break with any church in the world upon this single point; and would tell them plainly, If your religion be too good to be examined, I doubt, it is too bad to be believed.

If it be said, that the allowing of this liberty is the way to make people perpetually doubting and unsettled; I do utterly deny this, and do on the contrary with good reason affirm, that it is apt to have the contrary effect; there being in reason no better way to establish any man in the belief of any thing, than to let him see that there are very good grounds and reasons for what he believes; which no man can ever see, that is not permitted to examine whether there be such reasons or not. So that, besides the reasonableness of the thing, it is of great advantage to us; and that upon these accounts:

1. To arm us against seducers. He that hath examined his religion, and tried the grounds of it, is most able to maintain them, and make them good against all assaults that may be made upon us, to move us from our steadfastness: whereas, he that hath not examined, and consequently does not understand, the reasons of his religion, is liable to be “tossed to and fro, and to be carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness of those that lie in wait to deceive.” For when he is attempted, he will either defend his religion, or not: if he undertake the defence of it, before he hath examined the grounds of it, he makes himself an easy prey to every crafty man that will set upon him; he exposeth at once himself to danger and his religion to disgrace. If he decline the defence of it, he must be forced to take sanctuary in that ignorant and obstinate principle—that, because he is of an infallible church, and sure that he is in the right, therefore he never did nor will examine whether he be so or not. But how i he, or can he, be sure that he is in the right, if he 1 have no other reason for it, but his confidence, and his being “wiser in his own conceit, than seven men that can render a reason?” It is a shameful thing in a wise man, who is able to give a good reason of all other actions and parts of his life, to be able to say nothing for his religion, which concerns him more than all the rest.

2. To examine and understand the grounds of our religion, will be a good means (by the assistance of God’s grace) to keep us constant to it, even under the fiery trial. When it comes to this, that a man must suffer for his religion, he had need to be well established in the belief of it; which no man can so well be, as he that in some measure understands the grounds and reasons of his belief. A man would be well assured of the truth and goodness of that for which he would lay down his life; otherwise, “he dies as a fool dies”—he knows not for what. A man would be loath to set such a seal to a blank, I mean to that which he hath no sufficient ground and reason to believe to be true; which, whether he hath or not,

85

86

no man that hath not examined the grounds of his religion can be well assured of. This St. Peter prescribes, as the best preparative for suffering for righteousness sake, in his first Epistle, [iii. 14, 15](#). “But, if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts (that is, make him the great object of your dread and trust), and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.”

Secondly, “The holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering,” doth not imply, that men should obstinately refuse to hear any reason against that religion, which they have embraced, and think to be the true religion. As men should examine before they choose; so, after they have chosen, they should be ready to be better informed, if better reason can be offered. No man ought to think himself so infallible as to be privileged from hearing reason, and from having his doctrines and dictates tried by that test.

Our blessed Saviour himself, the most infallible person that ever was in the world, and who “declared the truth which he had heard of God,” yet he offered himself and his doctrine to this trial. ([John viii. 46.](#)) “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” that is, of falsehood and error? “And if I speak the truth, why do ye not believe me?” He was sure he spake the truth; and yet, for all that, if they could convince him of error and mistake, he was ready to hear any reason they could bring to that purpose. Though a man be never so sure that he is in the true religion, and never so resolved to continue constant and steadfast in it; yet reason is always to be heard, when it is fairly offered. And as we ought always to be “ready to give an answer to those who ask a reason of the hope and faith that is in us,” so ought we likewise to be ready to hear the reasons which others do fairly offer against our opinion and persuasion in religion, and to debate the matter with them; that if we be in the right, and they in the wrong, we may rectify their mistake, and “instruct them in meekness, if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.”

We are not only to examine our religion, before we peremptorily fix upon it; but after we are, as we think upon the best reason, established and settled in it. Though we ought not to doubt and waver in our religion upon every slight and trifling objection that can be brought against it; yet we ought always to have an ear open to hear reason, and consider any thing of weight and moment that can be offered to us about it. For it is a great disparagement to truth, and argues a distrust of the goodness of our cause and religion, to be afraid to hear what can be said against it; as if truth were so weak, that in every conflict it were in danger to be baffled and run down, and go by the worst; and as if the reasons that could be brought against it, were too hard for it, and not to be encountered by those forces which truth has on its side.

We have that honest confidence of the goodness of our cause and religion, that we do not fear what can be said against it; and therefore, we do not forbid our people to examine the objections of our adversaries, and to read the best books they can write against it. But

87

88

the church of Rome are so “wise in their generation,” that they will not permit those of their communion to hear or read what can be said against them: nay, they will not permit the people the use of the Holy Scriptures, which they, with us, acknowledge to be at least an essential part of the rule of faith. They tell their people, that after they are once of their church and religion, they ought not to hear any reasons against it; and though they be never so strong, they ought not to entertain any doubt concerning it; because all doubting is a temptation of the devil, and a mortal sin. But surely that church is not to be heard, which will not hear reason: nor that religion to be much admired, which will not allow those that have once embraced it, to hear it ever after debated and examined. This is a very suspicious business, and argues, that either they have not truth on their side; or that truth is a weak, and pitiful, and sneaking thing, and not able to make its party good against error.

I should now have proceeded, in the second place, to shew positively what is implied in “holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering;” and then to have considered the argument and encouragement hereto—“because he is faithful that promised.” But I shall proceed no farther at this time.



SERMON LIX.

OF CONSTANCY IN THE PROFESSION OF THE TRUE RELIGION.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that hath promised.—Heb. x. 23.

I HAVE already made entrance into these words, which I told you do contain in them, First, An exhortation to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”

Secondly, An argument or encouragement there to; “because he is faithful that promised.” If we continue steadfast and faithful to God, we shall find him faithful to us, in making good all the promises which he hath made to us, whether of aid and support, or of recompense and reward of our fidelity to him.

I have begun to handle the first part of the text, viz. The apostle’s exhortation to Christians to be constant and steady in their religion: “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” The word ἀκλινη, which we render “without wavering,” signifies inflexible and unmoveable, not apt to waver and to be shaken with every wind of contrary doctrine, nor by the blasts and storms of persecution. And that we might the better comprehend the full and true meaning of this exhortation, I propounded to do these two things:

I. To shew negatively, wherein this constancy and steadiness in the profession of the true religion doth not consist. And,

II. To shew positively, what is implied and intended here by the apostle in “holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”

I. To shew negatively, wherein this constancy and steadiness in the profession of the true religion doth not consist. This I spake to the last day; and shewed at large, that there are two things which are not contained and intended in this exhortation.

1. That men should not have the liberty to examine their religion, and to inquire into the grounds and reasons of it; such I mean as are capable of this examination and inquiry; which some, I shewed, are not; as children, who, while they are in that state, are only fit to learn and believe what is taught them by their parents and teachers: and likewise such grown persons, as, either by the natural weakness of their faculties, or by some great disadvantage of education, are of a very low and mean capacity and improvement of understanding. These are to be considered, as in the condition of children and learners, and therefore must of necessity trust and rely upon the judgment of others.

2. This “holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering,” does not imply, that when men upon examination and inquiry are settled, as they think and verily believe, in the true religion, they should obstinately refuse to hear any reason that can be offered against them. Both these principles I shewed to be unreasonable, and arguments of a bad cause and religion.



I shall now proceed to explain the meaning of this exhortation, to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering,” by shewing, in the

Second place, What it is that is implied in the constant and steady profession of the true faith and religion: namely, that when upon due search and examination, we are fully satisfied, that it is the true religion which we have embraced, or, as St. Peter expresses it, [1st Epistle, v. 12.](#) that “this is the true grace of God, wherein we stand;” that then we should adhere steadfastly to it, and hold it fast, and not suffer it to be wrested from us, nor ourselves to be moved from it, by any pretences, or insinuations, or temptations whatsoever: for there is a great deal of difference between the confidence and steadfastness of an ignorant man, who hath never considered things, and inquired into the grounds of them; and the assurance and settlement of one, who hath been well instructed in his religion, and hath taken pains to search and examine to the bottom, the grounds and reasons of what he holds and professeth to believe. The first is mere wilfulness and obstinacy. A man hath entertained and drank in such principles of religion by education, or hath taken them up by chance; but he hath no reason for them: and yet, however he came by them, he is resolved to hold them fast, and not to part with them. The other is the resolution and constancy of a wise man. He hath embraced his religion upon good grounds, and he sees no reason to alter it: and therefore is resolved to stick to it, and to hold fast the profession of it steadfastly to the end. And to this purpose there are many exhortations and cautions scattered up and down the writings of the holy apostles; as that we should be “steadfast and unmoveable, established in the truth, rooted and grounded in the faith,” and that we should “hold fast that which is good,” and not suffer ourselves “to be carried to and fro with every wind of doctrine, through the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness of those that lie in wait to deceive;” that we should “not be removed from him that hath called us unto the grace of Christ, unto another gospel;” that we should “stand fast in one spirit and one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel, and be in nothing terrified by our adversaries;” and that, if occasion be, we should “contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints;” and here in the text, that we should “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” For the explaining of this, I shall do two things:

I. Consider what it is that we are to hold fast; namely, “the profession of our faith;” and,
II. How we are to hold it fast, or what is implied in “holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”

I. What it is that we are to hold fast; namely, “the profession of our faith;” *i. e.* of the Christian faith or religion; for, I told you before, that this profession or confession of our faith, or hope (as the word properly signifies), is an allusion to that profession of faith, which was made by all those who were admitted members of the Christian church by baptism; of which the apostle makes mention immediately before the text, when he says, “let us draw near in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our

91

92

bodies washed with pure water:” and then it follows, “let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” The profession of faith; which we made in our baptism, and which by the ancient fathers is called the rule of faith, and which is now contained in that which we call the Apostles’ Creed, and which is called by St. Paul, ([Rom. vi. 17.](#)) “the form of doctrine which was delivered to them,” t. e. to all Christians; and ([2 Tim. i. 13.](#)) the “form of sound words:” “hold fast (saith he) the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus;” and, by St. Jude, “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

93

So that it is the first and ancient faith of the Christian church, delivered to them by Christ and his apostles, which we are here exhorted to “hold fast;” the necessary and fundamental articles of the Christian faith; and by consequence all those truths which have a necessary connexion with those articles, and are implied in them, and by plain consequence are to be deduced from them. It is not the doubtful and uncertain traditions of men; nor the partial dictates and doctrines of any church, since the primitive times, which are not contained in the Holy Scriptures and the ancient creeds of the Christian church, but have been since declared and imposed upon the Christian world, though with never so confident a pretence of antiquity in the doctrines, and of infallibility in the proposers of them: these are no part of that faith which we are either to profess or to hold fast; because we have no reason to admit the pretences, by virtue whereof those doctrines or practices are imposed; being able to make it good, and having effectually done it, that those doctrines are not of primitive antiquity; and that the church, which proposeth them, hath no more claim to infallibility, than all other parts of the Christian church; which since the apostles time is none at all.

In a word, no other doctrines, which are not sufficiently revealed in Scripture, either in express terms, or by plain and necessary consequence; nor any rites of worship, nor matters of practice, which are not commanded in Scripture, are to be esteemed any part of that faith in religion, the profession whereof the apostle here commands all Christians to “hold fast without wavering;” much less any doctrines or practices which are repugnant to the word of God, and to the faith and practice of the first ages of Christianity; of which kind I shall have occasion in my following discourse to instance in several particulars. In the mean time I shall only observe, that that faith and religion which we profess, and which, by God’s grace, we have ever held fast, is that which hath been acknowledged by all Christian churches in all ages, to have been the ancient catholic and apostolic faith, and cannot (as to any part or tittle of it) be denied to be so, even by the church of Rome herself.

94

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II. Second thing which I proposed to consider; namely, How we are to hold fast the profession of our faith, or what is implied by the apostle, in this exhortation, “to hold fast

the profession of our faith without wavering.” And I think, these following particulars may very well be supposed to be implied in it:

1. That we should hold fast the profession of our faith, against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support their confidence.

2. And much more against the confidence of men, contrary to Scripture, and reason, and the common sense of mankind.

3. Against all the temptations and terrors of the world.

4. Against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition, and groundless hopes of getting to heaven upon easier terms in another religion.

5. Against all the cunning arts and insinuations of busy and disputing men, whose design it is to unhinge men from their religion, and to gain proselytes to their own party and faction. I shall go over these with as much clearness and brevity as I can.

1. We should hold fast the profession of our faith, against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support that confidence. All religion is either natural or instituted. The rule of natural religion is the common reason of mankind: the rule of instituted religion is Divine revelation, or the word of God; which all Christians before the council of Trent did agree to be contained in the Holy Scriptures. So that nothing can pretend to be religion, but what can be proved to be so, one or both of those ways; either by Scripture, or by reason, or by both. And how confident soever men may be of opinions destitute of this proof, any man that understands the grounds of religion will without any more ado reject them, for want of this proof; and, notwithstanding any pretended authority or infallibility of the church that imposed them, will have no more consideration and regard of them, than of the confident dictates and assertions of any enthusiast whatsoever; because there is no reason to have regard to any man’s confidence, if the arguments and reasons which he brings bear no proportion to it. We see in experience, that confidence is generally ill-grounded, and is a kind of passion in the understanding, and is commonly made use of, like fury and force, to supply for the weakness and want of argument. If a man can prove what he says by good argument, there is no need of confidence to back and support it. We may at any time trust a plain and substantial reason, and leave it to make its own way, and to bear out itself. But if the man’s reasons and arguments be not good, his confidence adds nothing of real force to them, in the opinion of wise men, and tends only to its own confusion. Arguments are like powder, which will carry and do execution according to its true strength; and all the rest is but noise. And generally none are so much to be suspected of error, or a design to deceive, as those that pretend most confidently to inspiration and infallibility; as we see in all sorts of enthusiasts, who pretend to inspiration, although we have nothing but their own word for it: for they work no miracles; and all pretence to inspiration and infallibility, without miracles, whether it be in particular persons, or in whole churches, is enthusiastical: *i. e.* a pretence to inspiration, without any proof of it.



And therefore Si. Paul was not moved by the boasting and confidence of the false apostles; because they gave no proof and evidence of their Divine inspiration and commission, as he had done; for which he appeals to the sense of men, whether he had not wrought great miracles; which the false apostles had not done, though they had the confidence to give out themselves to be apostles as well as he. (2 Cor. xii. 11, 12.) “I am (says he) become a fool in glorying, ye have compelled me. And truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds.” And (Rev. ii. 2.) Christ there commends the church of Ephesus, because she had tried them which said they were apostles, but were not; and had found them liars. And as we are not to believe every one that says he is an apostle, so neither every one that pretends to be a successor of the apostles, and to be endowed with the same spirit of infallibility that they were; for these also, when they are tried, whether they be the successors of the apostles or not, may be found liars. And, therefore, St. John cautions Christians not to believe every spirit (that is, every one that pretends to Divine inspiration, and the Spirit of God); “but to try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (1 John iv. 1.) And, therefore, the confidence of men in this kind ought not to move us, when their pretence to infallibility is destitute of the proper proof and evidence of it, which is a power of miracles; and when their doctrines and practices have neither the evidence of reason or Scripture on their side.

97

For instance, that—the church of Rome is the mother and mistress of all churches, which is one of the new articles of Pope Pius the IVth’s creed, and yet there is not one syllable in Scripture tending to this purpose. And in reason it cannot be, that any but that which was the first Christian church should be the mother of all churches; and that the church of Rome certainly was not, and the church of Jerusalem undoubtedly was.

And then, that the bishop of Rome, as successor of St. Peter there, is the supreme and universal pastor of Christ’s church by Divine appointment, as he assumes to himself; and that it is necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the bishop of Rome, as is declared in their canon law by a constitution of Pope Boniface VIII. which constitution is confirmed in the last Lateran council; of all which there is not the least mention in Scripture, nor any Divine appointment to that purpose to be found there. And it is against reason that all the world should be obliged to trudge to Rome for the decision of causes and differences, which, in many and the most weighty matters, are reserved to the decision of that see, and can be determined no where else. And against reason likewise it is to found this universal supremacy in his being successor of St. Peter, and to fix it in the bishop of Rome, rather than at Antioch, when it is certain, and granted by themselves, that St. Peter was first bishop of Antioch, and out of all question, that he was bishop of Antioch; but not so, that he was bishop of Rome.

98

Nor is there any thing in Scripture for the deliverance of souls out of purgatory by the prayers and masses of the living. The whole thing is groundless, and not agreeable to the

constant sup positions of Scripture concerning a future state. Nor is there any reason for it besides that which is not fit to be given—the wealth and profit which it brings in.

The invocation and worship of the blessed virgin, and of all the saints departed, is destitute of all Scripture warrant or example, and confessed by themselves not to have been owned or practised in the three first ages of the church, because it looked too like the heathen idolatry, which deserves to be well considered by those who pretend to derive their whole religion from Christ and his apostles by a continued and uninterrupted succession. And this practice is likewise destitute of all colour of reason, unless we be assured that they hear our prayers in all places, which we cannot be, unless they be present in all places, which they themselves do not believe; or that God doth some way or other reveal and make known to them the prayers which are made to them, which we cannot possibly be assured of, but by some revelation of God to that purpose, which we no where find, nor doth the church of Rome pretend to it.

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II. Second thing, namely, that we should much more “hold fast the profession of our faith” and religion against the confidence of men, contrary to Scripture and reason and the common sense of mankind. For these are the chief grounds of certainty which we can have for or against any thing; and if these be clearly on our side, we ought not to be much moved by the confidence of men, concerning any doctrines or practices of religion, which are plainly contrary to these. If in points wherein we have this advantage on our side, we do not “hold fast the profession” of our religion, our error and folly are capable of no excuse. And this advantage we plainly have in several points and controversies between us and the church of Rome.

As in the worship of images, which is as expressly and clearly forbidden in the second commandment, and that without any distinction, as any other thing is forbidden in the whole Bible. And that it is so forbidden in this commandment, and that this commandment is still in force among Christians, was the universal sense of the ancient Christian church.

Prayers and the service of God in an unknown tongue, are directly contrary to the very nature and end of religious worship, which ought to be a reasonable service; which it cannot be, if it be not directed by our understandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections: but if it be performed in an unknown tongue, our understanding can have no part in it; and if we do not understand it, it cannot move our affections. And this likewise is plainly contrary to Scripture, namely, to a large discourse of St. Paul’s almost throughout a whole chapter, where he purposely sets himself to shew the unprofitableness and gross absurdity of praying, or celebrating any other part of religious worship, in an unknown tongue. If any part of our religion had been half so clearly condemned in Scripture, as this is, (which yet is the constant and general practice of the church of Rome) we must have lain down in our shame, and confusion would have covered us; and we must either have rejected the authority

of the Bible, or have renounced that point of our religion, whatever it had been; though it had been dear to us as our right hand, and our right eye, we must, upon such plain evidence of Scripture against it, have cut it off, and plucked it out, and cast it from us.

The like may be said of locking up the Scriptures from the people in an unknown tongue, contrary to the command of the Scriptures themselves, and to the great end and design of Almighty God in the writing and publishing of them; and contrary to the perpetual exhortations and councils of all the ancient fathers of the Christian church for a great many ages, not one excepted. They are hardly more frequent, and copious, and earnest, in any argument, than in persuading people of all ranks and conditions to the constant and careful reading of the Holy Scriptures: and contrary to the common reason and sense of mankind. For what should men be persuaded to be acquainted withal, if not with that which is the great instrument of our salvation? That book, which was written on purpose to reveal and convey to men the knowledge of God, and of his will, and their duty? What should men be allowed to know, if not that which is the best and most effectual means to direct and bring them to heaven, or turn them from sin, and to preserve them from eternal misery? When our Saviour would represent the best and most effectual means of bringing men to happiness, and saving them from the eternal torments of hell, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, he brings in Abraham, giving the best advice he could to the rich man, who was in hell, concerning his brethren that were upon earth, how they might prevent their coming into that place of torment, and he directs them to the Scriptures, as the best and most effectual means to that purpose: "They have (says he) Moses and the prophets, let them hear them."

Now if in the church of God, among the Jews, the same course had been taken that is now in the church of Rome, the rich man might, and in all reason ought, to have replied, "Nay, father Abraham, but they have not Moses and the prophets, nor are they permitted to read them in a language that they can understand, and, therefore, this advice is of no use to them;" and then he might with reason have pressed him, as he did, that "one might be sent to them from the dead, to testify unto them." But it appears, that Abraham was very positive and peremptory in this advice, and that he prefers the knowledge of the Scriptures to any other way and means that could be thought of, and that if this had not its effect to persuade men to repentance, and to preserve them from hell, he did not know any thing else that was so likely to do it; for he concludes, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." And this is the conclusion of the parable, which plainly shews what was the main scope and design of our Saviour in it; namely, to recommend to us the use of the Holy Scriptures, as the best and most effectual means which the wisdom of God hath provided for the salvation of mankind.

And now any man would be apt to think, that the declared judgment of our Saviour in the case should go a great way, even with the most infallible church in the world. However, this we must say, that it is in truth a very hard case, to which the church of Rome hath reduced

men; that it will neither allow them salvation out of their church, nor the best and most effectual means of salvation when they are in it. I might say much more upon this head; but this I hope may be sufficient.

The next instance shall be in the doctrine of transubstantiation; which is contrary to the Scriptures, which, after consecration, so frequently call the elements bread and wine, and which, without reason or necessity, puts an absurd and impossible sense upon those words of our Saviour, "This is my body;" which do no more prove transubstantiation than those words, "This cup is the New Testament," do prove, that the material cup which was used in the sacrament was substantially changed into the New Testament; and no more than those texts, which affirm God to have eyes, and ears, and hands, do prove that he really hath so. But besides the contrariety of this doctrine to Scripture, nothing can be more repugnant to reason. It is so big with contradictions, and so surfeited of impossibilities, that it would be endless to reckon them up. And, besides all this, it plainly contradicts the clear and constant evidence of four of our five senses, which, whoever contradicts, undermines the foundation of all certainty.

And then the communion in one kind is plainly contrary to our Saviour's institution of the sacrament in both kinds, as they themselves acknowledge. And therefore the council of Constance, being sensible of this, was forced to decree it with an express *non obstante* to the institution of Christ, and the practice of the apostles and the primitive church. And their doctrine of concomitancy (as if the blood were in the flesh, and together with it) will not help the matter: because in the sacrament Christ's body is represented as broken, and pierced, and exhausted, and drained of its blood; and his blood is represented as shed and poured out; so that one kind can by no means contain and exhibit both.

The next instance is, the repetition of Christ's propitiatory sacrifice in the mass, so often as that is celebrated: against all reason; because the sacrifice of Christ once offered upon the cross, was a full and perfect propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and therefore ought not, because it needs not, to be again repeated for that end, in any manner whatsoever. And it is directly contrary to the main scope of a great part of this Epistle to the Hebrews, which shews the excellency of the gospel above the law in this respect, that the expiatory sacrifice of the gospel was offered once for all; whereas the sacrifices of the law were perpetually repeated. [Chap. vii. 27.](#) speaking of Christ: "who needs not daily, as those high-priests, to offer up sacrifices; first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once when he offered up himself. ([Chap. ix. 26.](#)) But once in the end of the world hath he appeared, to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself: and as it is appointed for all men once to die; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." And, [chap. x. 10.](#) "By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." And, [verse 12.](#) "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God." And, [verse 14.](#) "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanc-

tified.” There cannot be plainer texts for any thing in the Bible, than this propitiatory sacrifice was never to, be repeated.

And whereas they say, that the sacrifice of the mass is an unbloody sacrifice: this, instead of bringing them off, doth but entangle the matter more. For if blood be offered in the sacrifice of the mass, how is it an unbloody sacrifice? What can be more bloody than blood? And if blood be not offered, how is it propitiatory? Since the apostle lays it down for a certain rule, that “with out shedding of blood, there is no remission” of sins; *i. e.* there can be no propitiation for the sins of the living or the dead; which the church of Rome affirms there is.

I might have added one or two instances more; and then should have proceeded to shew, in the third place, that we are to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering,” against all the temptations and terrors of the world: which is more especially and principally here intended by the apostle in this exhortation.

But I shall proceed no farther at present.



SERMON LIX.

OF CONSTANCY IN THE PROFESSION OF THE TRUE RELIGION.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith with out wavering; for he is faithful that promised.—Heb. x. 23.

IN these words, I have told you, are contained,

First, An exhortation to “hold fast the profession of our faith,” or hope, “without wavering.”

Secondly, An argument or encouragement thereto; “because he is faithful that promised.” I am yet upon the first of these; the exhortation to Christians, to be constant and steady in the profession of their religion: “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” And that we might the better comprehend the true and full meaning of this exhortation, I shewed,

First, Negatively, what is not meant and intended by it. And I mentioned these two particulars:

1. The apostle doth not hereby intend, that those who are capable of inquiring into, and examining the grounds of their religion, should not have the liberty to do it. Nor,

2. That when upon due inquiry and examination, men are settled, as they think and verily believe, in the true faith and religion, they should obstinately refuse to hear any reason that can be offered against their present persuasion. Both these I shewed to be unreasonable, and arguments of a bad cause and religion: and therefore neither of them can be intended by the apostle in this exhortation.

Secondly, I proceeded positively to explain the meaning of this exhortation. And to this purpose I proposed,

- I. To consider what it is that we are to hold fast, viz. the confession or profession of our faith. The ancient Christian faith, of which every Christian makes profession in his baptism: for of that the apostle here speaks, as appears by the context; not the doubtful and uncertain traditions of men, nor the impious dictates and doctrines of any church not contained in the Holy Scriptures, imposed upon the Christian church; though with never so confident a pretence of the antiquity of the doctrines proposed, or of the infallibility of the proposers of them. And then I proceeded in the

- II. Second place, to shew, How we are to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” And I mentioned these following particulars, as probably implied in the apostle’s exhortation.

1. That we should “hold fast the profession of our faith,” against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support their confidence.

2. And much more against the confidence of men, against Scripture and reason, and the common sense of mankind.



3. Against all the temptations and terrors of the world.

4. Against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition, and groundless hopes of getting to heaven upon easier terms in another religion.

5. Against all the cunning arts and insinuations of busy and disputing men, whose design is to unhinge men from their religion, and to gain proselytes to their party and faction.

1. We are to “hold fast the profession of our faith,” against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support their confidence. And of this I gave several instances, as in the pretence of the church of Rome to infallibility, without any proof or evidence of it, either by Scripture or miracles: I mean such miracles as are sufficiently attested. For as for their legends, since the wisest among themselves give no credit to them, I hope they do not expect that we should believe them, or be moved by them. And then their pretence that the church of Rome is the mother and mistress of all churches; which is now made an article of their creed. And that the bishop of Rome, as successor of St. Peter there, is by Divine appointment the supreme and universal pastor of Christ’s church. And that it is necessary to salvation, for every human creature to be subject to him. And, lastly, their invocation and worship of the blessed virgin and saints departed; without any warrant or example of any such thing, either in Scripture, or in the practice of the first ages of the Christian religion: and without sufficient ground to believe that they hear the prayers which are put up to them.

2. Much more are we “to hold fast the profession of our faith,” against the confidence of men, contrary to Scripture and reason, and the common sense of mankind. And here I instanced in the worship of images, the locking up of the Scriptures from the people, and celebrating the public prayers and service of God in an unknown tongue; and their doctrine of transubstantiation, their communion in one kind, and their daily repetition, in the sacrifice of the mass, of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ; which was offered “once for all,” and is of eternal virtue and efficacy; and therefore ought not, because it needs not, like the Jewish sacrifices under the law, to be repeated.

To these instances, which I have already spoken to, I shall add one or two more; as, namely, that to the due administration of the sacraments, an intention in the minister at least to do what the church does is requisite. This is expressly defined, and under an *anathema* upon all that shall say otherwise, by the council of Trent. Sess. the 7th, Can. 11th; which is to make the validity and virtue of the sacraments to depend upon the intention of the priest or minister. So that if, in the administration of baptism, he do not intend to baptize the party he pretends to baptize, then it is no baptism, and consequently the person baptized is not made a member of Christ’s church; nor is any grace or special benefit conferred upon him, nor is he a Christian. So likewise in the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, if the priest do not intend to consecrate the host, then is it no sacrament; and they that receive it receive no benefit by it; and (which according to their opinion is a dreadful consequence) by the words of consecration there is no change made of the elements into the body and blood of



Christ, and consequently, they that give adoration to the sacrament in such cases, worship bread and wine for God; which is idolatry. And so, likewise, in their sacrament of penance, though the priest pronounce the words of absolution, yet if he do not intend to absolve the penitent, though he be never so truly penitent, and God on his part is ready to forgive him, yet if the priest do not intend to do so, there is nothing done, and the man is still in his sin. So, likewise, in ordination, (which is another of their sacraments) if the bishop do not intend to ordain the man, he is no priest, and all that he does as a priest afterwards, either in administration of baptism or the Lord's supper, or the absolution of penitents, all is vain, and of no effect. Nay, in marriage, (which they will needs have to be a sacrament too) if the intention of the priest be wanting, there is nothing done, the contract is nulled, and they that are so married do really live in adultery, though they do not know it, nor have any suspicion of it.

Now this is contrary to Scripture and the whole tenor of the gospel, which promiseth the benefit and efficacy of the sacraments, to all those that perform the conditions of the covenant, which are required on their parts, and declares forgiveness of sins to those who confess them to God, and truly repent of them.

And there is not the least intimation given in the Bible, that the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments does depend upon the intention of him that administers them, or that the forgiveness of sins is suspended upon the intention or absolution of the priest, but only upon the sincere resolution of the penitent. And surely nothing can be more absurd, and contrary to reason, than that when men have performed all the conditions which the gospel requires, yet they should, notwithstanding this, be deprived of all the blessings and benefits which God hath promised, and intends to confer upon them, because the priest hath not the same intention. So that when a man hath done all he can to work out his own salvation, he shall never be the nearer, only for want of that which is wholly out of his power—the right intention of the priest.

Besides, that after all the boasts of the safe condition of men in their church, and the most certain and infallible means of salvation to be had in it, this one principle (that the intention of the priests is necessary to the validity and virtue of the sacraments) puts the salvation of men upon the greatest hazard and uncertainty; and such as it is impossible for any man either to discover or prevent, unless he had some certain way to know the heart and intention of the priest. For, upon these terms, who can know whether any man be a priest, and really ordained, or not? Nay, whether he be a Christian, and have been truly baptized, or not? and, consequently, whether any of his administrations be valid, and we have any benefit and advantage by them? because all this depends upon the knowledge of that which we neither do nor can know.

So that when a man hath conscientiously done all that God requires of any man to make him capable of salvation, yet without any fault of his, the want of intention in an idle-minded man may frustrate all: and though the man have been baptized, and do truly believe the

110

111

gospel, and hath sincerely repented of his sins, and lived a most holy life, yet all this may signify nothing, and after all he may be no Christian, because his baptism was invalid; and all the promises of God to the means of salvation, which his goodness and wisdom hath prescribed, may be of no efficacy, if the priest do not intend in the administration of the sacraments to do that which God and the church intend.

Now if this be true, there is certainly no church in the world in which the salvation of men runs so many hazards; and yet all this hazard and uncertainty has its rise from a scholastical point, which is directly contrary to all the notions of mankind concerning the goodness of God, and to the clear reason of the thing, and to the constant tenor of the gospel, and which was never asserted by any of the ancient fathers, much less defined by any council before that of Trent; so that it is a doctrine new and needless, and in the necessary consequences of it, unreasonable and absurd to the utmost degree.

The last instance I shall mention, is their rule of faith. The rule of faith universally received and acknowledged by the Christian church in all ages, before the council of Trent, was the word of God, contained in the canonical books of Holy Scripture; which were therefore by the church called canonical, because they were the rule of faith and manners, of the doctrines to be believed, and the duties to be practised, by all Christians. But when the errors and corruptions of the Romish church were grown to the height, and the Pope and his council of Trent were resolved not to retrench and reform them, they saw it necessary to enlarge and lengthen out their rule; because the ancient rule of the Holy Scriptures would by no means reach several of the doctrines and practices of that church, which they were resolved to maintain and make good by one means or other: as, namely, the doctrine of transubstantiation, of purgatory, and of the seven sacraments; and the practice of the worship of saints and images; of the Scriptures, and the service of God, in an unknown tongue; of indulgences, and the communion in one kind; and several other superstitious practices in use among them.

Now, to enlarge the rule to the best advantage for the justification of these doctrines and practices, they took these two ways:

First, They have added to the canonical books of the Old Testament, which were received by the Jewish church (to whom “were committed the oracles of God”); I say, to these they have added several apocryphal books, not warranted by Divine inspiration, because they were written after prophecy and Divine inspiration had ceased in the Jewish church; Malachi being the last of their prophets, according to the general tradition of that church. But, because the addition of these books did not make a rule of faith and practice large enough for their purpose, in imitation of the Jews, in the time of the greatest confusion and degeneracy of that church, they added, in the

Second place, to their books of Scripture, which they call the “written word,” an “unwritten word,” which they call “oral tradition” from Christ and his apostles; which they declare

to be of equal authority with the Holy Scriptures themselves; and that it ought to be received with the same pious veneration and affection: of which traditions, they being the keepers and judges, they may extend them to what they please; and having them in their own breasts, they may declare whatever they have a mind to, to have been a constant and universal tradition of their church; though it is evident to common sense, that nothing can be more uncertain, and more liable to alteration and mistake, than tradition, at the distance of so many ages, brought down by word of mouth, without writing, and passing through so many hands. He that can think these to be of equal certainty and authority with what is delivered by writing, and brought down by books, undertakes the defence of a strange paradox; viz. That general rumour and report of things said and done fifteen hundred years ago, is of equal authority and credit with a record, and a written history.

114

By which proceeding of the council of Trent, concerning the rule of faith and practice, it is very evident, that they had no mind to bring their faith to the ancient rule, the Holy Scriptures. That they knew could not be done; and therefore they were resolved to fit their rule to their faith. And this foundation being laid in their first decree, all the rest would afterwards go on very smoothly. For do but give men the making of their rule, and they can make good any thing by it. And accordingly, the council of Trent having thus fixed and fitted a rule to their own purpose; in the conclusion of that decree, they give the world fair warning, upon what grounds, and in what ways they intend to proceed in their following decrees of practice and definitions of faith. *Omnes itaque intelligant, quo ordine et via ipsa synodus post jactum fidei confessionis fundamentum sit progressura, &c.* “Be it known therefore to all men, in what order and way the synod, after having laid this foundation of the confession of faith, will proceed; and what testimonies and proofs she chiefly intends to make use of, for the confirmation of doctrines, and reformation of manners in the church.” And no doubt, all men do see very plainly to what purpose this foundation is laid of so large a rule of faith. And this being admitted, how easy is it for them to confirm and prove whatever doctrines and practices they have a mind to establish?

But, if this be a new, and another foundation, than that which the great author and founder of our religion hath laid and built his church upon, viz. the foundation of the prophets and apostles; it is no matter what they build upon it. And if they go about to prove any thing by the new parts of this rule; by the apocryphal books which they have added to the ancient canon of the Scriptures, brought down to us by the general tradition of the Christian church; and by their pretended unwritten traditions—we do with reason reject this kind of proof, and desire them first to prove their rule, before they pretend to prove any thing by it: for we protest against this rule, as never declared and owned by the Christian church, nor proceeded upon by the ancient fathers of the church, nor by any council whatsoever, before the council of Trent.

115

In vain then doth the church of Rome vaunt it self of the antiquity of their faith and religion, when the very foundation and rule of it is but of yesterday; a new thing never before known or heard of in the Christian world: whereas the foundation and rule of our religion is the word of God, contained in the Holy Scriptures; to which Christians in all ages have appealed, as the only rule of faith and life.

I proceed now to the

Third thing I proposed, viz. That we are “to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering,” against all the temptations and terrors of the world. And this seems more especially and principally to be here intended by the apostle in this exhortation.

I shall first speak of the temptations of the world. And they are chiefly these two: the temptation of fashion and example; and of worldly interest and advantage.

1. Of fashion and example. This in truth and reality is no strong argument; and yet in experience and effect it is often found to be very powerful. It is frequently seen, that this hath many times too great an influence upon weak and foolish minds. Men are apt to be carried down with the stream, and to follow a multitude in that which is evil: but more especially men are prone to be swayed by great examples, and to bend themselves to such an obsequiousness to their superiors and betters, that, in compliance with them, they are ready not only to change their affection to persons and things as they do, but even their judgment also; and that in the greatest and weightiest matters, even in matters of religion, and the great concernments of another world. But this surely is an argument of a poor and mean spirit, and of a weak understanding, which leans upon the judgment of another, and is in truth the lowest degree of servility that a reason able creature can stoop to; and even beneath that of a slave, who, in the midst of his chains and fetters, doth still retain the freedom of his mind and judgment.

But I need not to urge this upon considerate persons, who know better how to value their duty and obligation to God, than to be tempted to do any thing contrary thereto, merely in compliance with fashion and example. There are some things in religion so very plain, that a wise and good man would stand alone in the belief and practice of them, and not be moved in the least by the contrary example of the whole world. It was a brave resolution of Joshua; though all men should forsake the God of Israel, and run aside to other gods, yet he would not do it: (*Joshua xxiv. 15.*) “If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” It was well resolved of Peter, if he had not been too confident of his own strength, when he said to our Saviour, “though all men forsake thee, yet will not I.”

2. Another sort of temptation, and which is commonly more powerful than example, is worldly interest and advantage. This is a mighty bait to a great part of mankind, and apt to work very strongly upon the necessities of some, and upon the covetousness and ambition of others. Some men are tempted by necessity, which many times makes them do ugly and

reproachful things, and, like Esau, for a morsel of meat to sell their birthright and blessing. Covetousness tempts others to be of that religion which gives them the prospect of the greatest earthly advantage, either for the increasing or securing of their estates. When they find that they “cannot serve God and Mammon,” they will “forsake the one and cleave to the other.” This was one of the great temptations to many in the primitive times, and a frequent cause of apostacy from the faith—an eager desire of riches, and too great a value for them; as St. Paul observes, (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.) “But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred,” or been seduced “from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” This was the temptation which drew off Demas from his religion; as St. Paul tells us, (2 Tim. iv. 10.) “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.”

Ambition is likewise a great temptation to proud and aspiring minds, and makes many men false to their religion, when they find it a hinderance to their preferment; and they are easily persuaded, that that is the best religion, which is attended with the greatest worldly advantages, and will raise them to the highest dignity. The devil understood very well the force of this temptation, when he set upon our Saviour, and therefore reserved it for the last assault. “He shewed him all the kingdoms of the earth, and the glory of them; and said to him, All this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” And when he saw this would not prevail, he gave him over in despair, and left him. But though this be a very dazzling temptation, yet there are considerations of that weight to be set over-against it, from the nature of religion, and the infinite concernment of it to our immortal souls, as is sufficient “to quench this fiery dart of the devil,” and to put all the temptations of this world out of countenance, and to render all the riches and glory of it, in comparison of the eternal happiness and misery of the other world, “but as the very small dust upon the balance.” What temptation of this world can stand against that argument of our Saviour, if it be seriously weighed and considered—“What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul: or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” If we would consider things impartially, and weigh them in a just and equal balance; the things which concern our bodies, and this present life, are of no consideration, in comparison of the great and vast concernments of our immortal souls, and the happy or miserable condition of our bodies and souls to all eternity.

And religion is a matter of this vast concernment; and therefore not be bargained away and parted with by us for the greatest things this world can offer. There is no greater sign of a sordid spirit, than to put a high value upon things of little worth; and no greater mark of folly, than to make an unequal bargain, to part with things of greatest price for a slender and trifling consideration: as if a man of great fortune and estate should sell the inheritance of it for a picture, which, when he hath it, will not perhaps yield so much as will maintain

118

119

him for one year. The folly is so much the greater in things of infinitely greater value; as for a man to quit God and religion, to sell the truth and his soul, and to part with his everlasting inheritance for a convenient service, for a good customer, and some present advantage in his trade and profession, or indeed for any condition which the foolish language of this world calls a high place, or a great preferment. The things which these men part with upon these cheap terms, God, and his truth and religion, are, to those who understand themselves, and the just value of their immortal souls, things of inestimable worth, and not to be parted with by a considerate man for any price that this world can bid. And those who are to be bought out of their religion upon such low terms, and so easily parted from it, it is much to be feared that they have little or no religion to hold fast.

Secondly, As we are to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering,” against the temptations and allurements of this world; so likewise against the terrors of it.

Fear is a passion of great force; and, if men be not very resolute and constant, will be apt to stagger them, and “to move them from their steadfastness:” and therefore, when the case of suffering and persecution for the truth happens, we had need “to hold fast the profession of our faith.” Our Saviour, in the parable of the sower, tells us, that there were many “that heard the word, and with joy received it: but when persecution and tribulation arose because of the word, presently they were offended.”

And though, blessed be God, this be not our case, yet there was a time when it was the general case of Christians, in the first beginning of Christianity, and for several ages after, though with some intermission and intervals of ease. It was then a general rule, and the common expectation of Christians, that “through many tribulations they must enter into the kingdom of God,” and that, if “any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must suffer persecution.” And in several ages since those primitive times, the sincere professors of religion have, in divers places, being exposed to most grievous sufferings and persecutions for the truth. And even at this day, in several places, the faithful servants of God are exercised with the sharpest and sorest trials that perhaps were ever heard of in any age; and for the sake of God, and the constant profession of his true religion, are “tormented and killed all the day long, and are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” It is their hard lot to be called to these cruel and bitter sufferings, and our happy opportunity to be called upon for their relief; those of them I mean that have escaped that terrible storm and tempest, and have taken refuge and sanctuary here among us; and, out of his majesty’s great humanity and goodness, are by his public letters recommended to the charity of the whole nation, by the name of “distressed protestants.”

Let us consider, how much easier our lot and our duty is than their’s; as much as it is easier to compassionate the sufferings, and to relieve the distresses of others, than to be such sufferers, and in such distress ourselves. Let us make their case our own, and then we ourselves will be the best judges, how it is fit for us to demean ourselves towards them, and



to what degree we ought to extend our charity and compassion to them. Let us put on their case and circumstances, and suppose that we were the sufferers, and had fled to them for refuge: the same pity and commiseration, the same tender regard and consideration of our sad case, the same liberal and effectual relief, that we should desire and expect, and be glad to have shewn and afforded to ourselves, let us give to them; and then, I am sure, they will want no fitting comfort and support from us.

We enjoy (blessed be the goodness of God to us) great peace and plenty, and freedom from evil and suffering; and surely one of the best means to have these “blessings continued to us, and our tranquillity prolonged, is to consider and relieve those who want the blessings which we enjoy; and the readiest way to provoke God to deprive us of these blessings, is to “shut up the bowels of our compassion from our distressed brethren.” God can easily change the scene, and make our sufferings, if not in the same kind, yet in one kind or other, equal to their’s; and then we shall remember the afflictions of Joseph, and say, as his brethren did when they fell into trouble, “We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.”

God alone knows, what storms the devil may yet raise in the world, before the end of it: and therefore it concerns all Christians, in all times and places, who have taken upon them the profession of Christ’s religion, to consider well beforehand, and to calculate the dangers and sufferings it may expose them to, and to arm ourselves with resolution and patience against the fiercest assaults of temptation: considering the shortness of all temporal afflictions and sufferings, in comparison of the eternal and glorious reward of them; and the lightness of them too, in comparison of the endless and intolerable torments of another world; to which every man exposeth himself, who forsakes God, and renounceth his truth, and wounds his conscience, to avoid temporal sufferings.

And though fear, in many cases, especially if it be of death and extreme sufferings, be a great excuse for several actions, because it may, *cadere in constantem virum*, happen to a resolute man: yet in this case of renouncing our religion (unless it be very sudden and surprising, out of which a man recovers himself when he comes to himself, as St. Peter did; or the suffering be so extreme, as to put a man besides himself for the time, so as to make him say or do any thing); I say, in this case of renouncing God and his truth, God will not admit fear for a just excuse of our apostacy; which, if it be unrepented of (and the Scripture speaks of repentance in that case as very difficult) will be our ruin. And the reason is, because God has given us such fair warning of it, that we may be prepared for it, in the resolution of our minds: and we enter into religion upon these terms, with a professed expectation of suffering, and a firm purpose to lay down our lives for the truth, if God shall call us to it. “If any man will be my disciple, (says our Lord,) let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” And again, “He that loveth life itself more than me, is not worthy of me; and if any

man be ashamed of me and of my words, in this unfaithful generation, of him will I be ashamed before my Father and the holy angels.”

And therefore, to master and subdue this fear, our Saviour hath propounded great objects of terror to us, and a danger infinitely more to be dreaded, which every man runs himself wilfully upon, who shall quit the profession of his religion, to avoid temporal sufferings; ([Luke xii. 4, 5.](#)) “Fear not them that can kill the body, but after that have nothing that they can do: but I will tell you whom you shall fear. Fear him, who, after he hath killed, can destroy both body and soul in hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.” And to this dreadful hazard every man exposeth himself, who, for the fear of men, ventures thus to offend God. These are the fearful and unbelievers, spoken of by St. John, “who shall have their portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Thus you see, how we are to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering,” against all temptations and terrors of this world. I should now have proceeded to the next particular; namely, that we are to “hold fast the profession of our faith,” against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition, and groundless hopes of getting to heaven upon easier terms in some other church and religion:

But this I shall not now enter upon.



SERMON LX.

OF CONSTANCY IN THE PROFESSION OF THE TRUE RELIGION.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised.—Heb. x. 23.

IN these words, I have told you, are contained these two parts:

First, An exhortation to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”
Secondly, An argument or encouragement there to; “because he is faithful that promised.”
I am yet upon the

First of these; the exhortation to Christians, to be constant and steady in the profession of their religion: “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.” And that we might the better comprehend the true and full meaning of this exhortation, I shewed,

I. Negatively, what is not meant and intended by it. And I mentioned these two particulars:

1. The apostle doth not hereby intend, that those who are capable of inquiring into, and examining the grounds and reasons of their religion, should not have the liberty to do it.
Nor

2. That when upon due inquiry and examination, men are settled, as they think and verily believe, in the true faith and religion, they should obstinately refuse to hear any reason that can be offered against their present persuasion. For reason, when it is fairly offered, is always to be heard. I proceeded in the

II. Second place, positively, to explain the meaning of this exhortation. And to this purpose I proposed to consider,

First, What it is that we are to hold fast, viz. “the confession or profession of our faith;” the ancient Christian faith, which every Christian makes profession of in his baptism: not the doubtful and uncertain traditions of men, nor the imperious dictates and doctrines of any church (which are not contained in the Holy Scriptures) imposed upon the Christian world, though with never so confident a pretence of the antiquity of the doctrines, or of the infallibility of the proposers of them. And then I proceeded, in the

Second place, to shew, how we are “to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;” and I mentioned these following particulars, as probably implied and comprehended in the apostle’s exhortation:

1. That we should “hold fast the profession of our faith,” against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support that confidence.

2. And much more against the confidence of men, contrary to plain Scripture, and reason, and the common sense of mankind; under both which heads I gave several instances of doctrines and practices imposed with great confidence upon the world, some without, and others plainly against Scripture, and reason, and the common sense of mankind.

3. Against all the temptations and terrors of the world—the temptations of fashion and example, and of worldly interest and advantage; and against the terrors of persecution and suffering for the truth. Thus far I have gone; I shall now proceed to the two other particulars, which remain to be spoken to.

4. We are to “hold fast the profession of our faith,” against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition, and groundless hopes of getting to heaven upon easier terms in some other church and religion. God hath plainly declared to us in the Holy Scriptures, upon what terms and conditions we may obtain eternal life and happiness, and what will certainly exclude us from it; that, “except we repent,” *i. e.* without true contrition for our sins, and forsaking of them, “we shall perish;” that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord;” that “no fornicator, or adulterer, or idolater, or covetous person, nor any one that lives in the practice of such sins, shall have any inheritance in the kingdom of God or Christ.” There is as great and impassable a gulf fixed between heaven and a wicked man, as there is betwixt heaven and hell. And when men have done all they can to debauch and corrupt the Christian doctrine, it is impossible to reconcile a wicked life with any reasonable and well-grounded hopes of happiness in another world. No church hath that privilege, to save a man upon any other terms, than those which our blessed Saviour hath declared in his gospel. All religions are equal in this—that a bad man can be saved in none of them.

The church of Rome pretends their church and religion to be the only safe and sure way to salvation; and yet, if their doctrine be true, concerning the intention of the priest (and if it be not, they are much to blame in making it an article of their faith), I say, if it be true, that the intention of the priest is necessary to the validity and virtue of the sacraments; then there is no religion in the world, that runs the salvation of men upon more and greater hazards and uncertainties, and such as, by no care and diligence of man in “working out his own salvation,” are to be avoided and prevented.

As for the easier terms of salvation which they offer to men, they signify nothing, if they be not able to make them good; which no man can reasonably believe they can do, that hath read the Bible, and doth in any good measure understand the nature of God, and the design of religion. For instance; that after the long course of a most lewd and flagitious life, a man may be reconciled to God, and have his sins forgiven at the last gasp, upon confession of them to the priest, with that imperfect degree of contrition for them, which they call attrition, together with the absolution of the priest.

Now attrition is a trouble for sin, merely for fear of the punishment of it. And this, together with confession, and the absolution of the priest, without any hatred of sin for the evil and contrariety of it to the holy nature and law of God, and without the least spark of love to God, will do the sinner’s business, and put him into a state of grace and salvation, without any other grace or disposition for salvation, but only the fear of hell and damnation. This, I confess, is easy: but the great difficulty is, to believe it to be true. And certainly, no

126

127

man, that ever seriously considered the nature of God and religion, can ever be persuaded to build the hopes of his salvation upon such a quicksand. The absolution of all the priests in the world will not procure the forgiveness of God for any man, that is not disposed for his mercy by such a repentance as the gospel requires; which, I am sure, is very different from that which is required by the council of Trent.

They that offer heaven to men upon so very large and loose terms, give great cause to suspect, that they will never make good their offer; the terms are so unreasonably cheap and easy, that there must be some fraud and false dealing. And on the other hand, nothing ought to recommend our religion more to a wise and considerate man, than that the terms of salvation which we propose to men, viz. faith, and repentance, and a sincere obedience to the precepts of the gospel, manifested in the tenour of a holy and virtuous life, are not only perfectly agreeable to the plain and constant declaration of Holy Scripture; but do likewise naturally tend to engage men most effectually to a good life, and thereby to make them “meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” And therefore every body ought to be afraid of a religion, which makes such lavish offers of salvation, and to take heed how he ventures his soul upon them. For if, after all the hopes that are given of salvation upon such and such terms, the sinner doth really miscarry and miss of heaven; it is but very ill comfort to him to be put into a fool’s paradise, for a minute or two before he leaves the world, and the next moment after to find himself in the place of torments. I proceed to the

5. Fifth and last particular I mentioned, as implied in the exhortation here in the text, viz. That we should “hold fast the profession of our faith with out wavering,” against all the cunning arts and insinuations of busy and disputing men, whose design it is to unhinge men from their religion, and to gain proselytes to their party and faction. To this purpose there are several cautions given by our blessed Saviour and his apostles. ([Matth. xxiv. 4.](#)) “Take heed, that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, and shall deceive many.” ([Eph. iv. 14.](#)) “That ye henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men; εν τῇ κυβείᾳ, (the word signifies the cunning of gamesters at dice;) by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” And [chap. v. 6.](#) “Let no man deceive you with vain words.” ([Col. ii. 8.](#)) “Beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit;” that is, by sophistry and vain reasoning, under a pretence of philosophy. ([Heb. xiii. 9.](#)) “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.” (2 Pet. iii. 17.) “Beware, lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.” And this caution is enforced by an express prediction of a great apostacy, which should happen in the Christian church, by which many should be seduced by pretence of miracles, and by several arts of deceit and falsehood. This apostacy St. Paul expressly foretels, [2 Thess. ii. 1, 2, 3.](#) “We beseech you, brethren, by the coining of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye be not soon shaken in mind,

or be troubled, neither by spirit, (that is, by pretence to inspiration) nor by word, (or message) nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." And, after a particular description of him, he adds, (ver. 9.) "Whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and in all deceitfulness of unrighteousness in them that perish." From all which he concludes, (ver. 15.) "Therefore, brethren, stand fast."

The particular nature and kind of this apostasy the same apostle describes more fully, 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2, 3. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall apostatize from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisy, (*i. e.* under a great pretence of sanctity spreading their pernicious errors) forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats." This is a very lively and pat description of that great apostasy in the Christian church, which began in the western part of it, and hath spread itself far and wide. For there the spirit of error and falsehood has prevailed, under an hypocritical pretence of their being the only true church and true Christians in the world. There marriage, and several sorts of meats, are forbidden to several ranks and orders of men. All the difficulty is, what is here meant by doctrines of devils; and these certainly can be no other than doctrines tending to idolatry, which the Scripture every where doth in a particular manner ascribe to the devil, as the inventor and great promoter of it. And this is very much confirmed by what we find added in some ancient Greek copies in this text, which runs thus: "In the latter times some shall apostatize from the faith; for they shall worship the dead, as some also in Israel worshipped." And then it follows, "giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." So that the particular kind of idolatry, into which some part of the Christian church should apostatize, is here pointed at; that they should worship souls departed, or the spirits of dead men; which was part of the heathen idolatry, into which the people of Israel did frequently relapse. So that the Spirit of God doth here foretel such an apostasy in some part of the Christian church, as the people of Israel were guilty of, in falling into the heathen idolatry. "They shall be worshippers of the dead, as the Israelites also were."

And this is the great and dangerous seduction which the Christians are so much cautioned against in the New Testament, and charged to hold fast the profession of the faith against the cunning arts and insinuations of seducing spirits; not but (as I said before) that we are always to have an ear open to reason, and to be ready to hearken and to yield to that, whenever it is fairly proposed: but to be overreached and rooted out of one's religion, by little sophisticated arts and tricks, is childish and silly. After we are, upon due trial and examination of the grounds of our religion, settled and established in it, we ought not to suffer ourselves to be removed from it, by the groundless pretences of confident people to infallibility, and to be practised upon by cunning men, who lie at catch to make proselytes to their



party. This is to be “like children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.”

And we ought to be the more careful of ourselves; because there never was any time wherein seducing spirits were more bold and busy to pervert men from the truth. Against these we should hold fast our religion, as a man would do his money in a crowd. It passeth in the world for a great mark of folly, when a man and his money are soon parted: but it is a sign of much greater folly, for a man easily to quit his religion; especially to be caught by some such gross methods, as the seducers I am speaking of commonly use, and which lie so very open to suspicion; such as ill-designing men are wont to practise upon a young heir, when they have insinuated themselves into his company to make a prey of him. They charge him to tell nobody in what company he hath been; nor to ask the counsel and advice of his friends concerning what they have been persuading him to; because they for their own interest will be sure to dissuade him from it. Just thus do these seducers practise upon weak people. They charge them not to acquaint their minister with whom they have been; nor what discourse they have had about religion; nor what books have been put into their hands: because then all their kind design and intention towards them will be defeated. But above all they must be sure to read no books on the other side, because they are no competent judges of points of faith; and this reading on both sides will rather confound than clear their understandings. They tell them that they have stated the matter truly, and would not for all the world deceive them; and they may easily perceive, by their earnest application to them, that nothing but charity and a passionate desire of the salvation of their souls, makes them take all these pains with them. But this is so gross a way of proceeding, that any man of common understanding must needs discern, by this kind of treatment, that these men can have no honest design upon them.

To come then to a more particular consideration of the arts and methods which they use (I mean particularly those of the church of Rome) in making proselytes to their religion: as,

1. In allowing them to be very competent and sufficient judges for themselves, in the choice of their church and religion (that is, which is the true church and religion, in which alone salvation is to be had), and yet telling them, at the same time, that they are utterly incapable of judging of particular doctrines, and points of faith and practice; but for these they must rely upon the judgment of an infallible church, when they are in it; otherwise they will certainly run into damnable errors and mistakes about these things.

And they must of necessity allow them to be sufficient judges for themselves in the choice of their religion; as will be evident, by considering in what method they proceed with their intended proselyte.

They propose to him to change his church and his religion, because he is in the wrong; and they will shew him a better, and such a one as is the only true one, and in which alone

salvation is to be had. To persuade him hereto, they offer him some reasons and arguments, or give him books to read containing arguments to move him to make this change, to satisfy him of the reasonableness, and to convince him of the necessity of it.

Now by this way of proceeding (and they can take no other) they do, whether they will or no, make the person, whom they are endeavouring to convert, a judge for himself, which church and religion is best; that which they would have him embrace and come over to, or that which they would persuade him to forsake. For to what end else do they offer him reasons and arguments to persuade him to leave our church, and to come over to theirs; but that he may consider the force and weight of them; and having considered them, may judge whether they be of force sufficient to overrule him to make this change? So that as unwilling as they are to make particular persons judge for themselves about points of faith, and about the sense of Scripture confirming those points (because this is to leave every man to his own private spirit and fancy, and giddy brain), yet they are compelled by necessity, and against their own principles, to allow a man in this case of choosing his religion, to be a judge of the reasons and arguments which they offer to induce him thereunto. So that, whether they will or no, they must permit him to be a judge for himself for this once, but not to make a practice of it, or to pretend this privilege ever after; for in acknowledgment of this great favour, of being permitted to judge for himself this once (which they do unwillingly grant him, and upon mere necessity) he is for ever after to resign up his judgment to the church. And though this liberty be allowed *pro hac vice*, and properly to serve a turn, *i. e.* in order to the changing of his religion; yet he is to understand, that he is no fit and competent judge of particular points of faith; all these he must learn from the true church when he is in it, and take them upon her authority, and in so doing he shall do very prudently, because she is infallible, and cannot be deceived; but he may.

But is there any sense in all this, that a man should be very fit and able to judge of that which they esteem the main and fundamental point of all, namely, which is the true church and religion; and of the reasons and arguments whereby they pretend to demonstrate it; and of the true meaning of those texts of scripture whereby they pretend to prove theirs to be the only true church: and yet should be wholly unable to judge of particular points of faith; or of the true sense of any texts of scripture that can be produced for the proof of those points? Is it so very prudent, in all the particular points of faith, for a man to rely upon the judgment of the church, because she is infallible; and not to trust his own judgment about them, because he is fallible and may be deceived? And is it prudent likewise for this man to trust his own judgment in the main business of all; namely, which is the true church and religion; concerning which he is as fallible in his judgment, and as liable to be deceived, as in the particular points? And if he be mistaken in the main point, they must grant his mistake to be fatal; because his sincerity, as to all the rest, depends upon it. This is a great mystery and riddle, that every particular man should have so sufficient a judgment as to this main

134

135

and fundamental business, which is the true church and religion; and should have no judgment at all about particular points, fit to be trusted and relied upon: as if there were a certain judgment and prudence, *quoad hoc*; and as if all men's understandings were so framed, as to be very judicious and discerning in this main point of religion; but to be weak and dangerous, and blind, as to all particular points: or, as if a man might have a very good judgment, and be fit to be trusted and relied upon, before he come into their church; but from the very moment he enters into it, his judgment were quite lost and good for nothing: for this in effect and by interpretation they say, when they allow a man to be very able to judge which is the true church and religion; but so soon as he hath discovered and embraced that, to have no judgment of his own afterwards of any point of religion what soever; and a very tempting argument it is to any man that hath judgment to enter into that church.

2. Another art they use with their intended proselyte, in order to his making a right choice of his religion, is to caution him, to hear and read only the arguments and books which are on one side. But now admitting their designed proselyte to be just such a judge, and so far they will allow him to be, and no farther, viz. which is the true church; but to have no fitness and ability at all to judge of particular points of faith: yet methinks they put a very odd condition and untoward restraint upon this judge, in telling him (as they certainly use to do those whom they would pervert), that he must have no discourse, nor read any books, but only on that side which they would gain him to; because that is the way to perplex and confound him, so that he shall never be able to come to a clear judgment and resolution in the matter. But will any man admit this way of proceeding in a temporal case? This is just as if in a cause of the greatest consequence, the counsel on one side should go about to persuade the judge, that it is only fit to hear what he hath to say in the case; that he will open it very plainly, and state the matter in difference so clearly and impartially, and bring such strong reasons and proofs for what he says, that he shall not need to hear any thing on the other side, but may proceed to judgment without any more ado: but if, when the matter is thus laid before him so plainly, and is even ripe for judgment, he will trouble himself needlessly to hear the other side; this will cast them back where they first began, and bring the matter to an endless wrangling, and so confound and puzzle his understanding, that he shall never be able to pass any clear judgment in the cause.

What, think we, would a judge say to such a bold and senseless pleader? The case is the same, and the absurdity every whit as gross and palpable, in pressing any man to make a judgment in a matter which infinitely more concerns him, upon hearing only the reasons and arguments on one side.

3. Another art which they use in making proselytes, is to possess them, that there is but one thing that they are mainly concerned to inquire into, and that is this: since there is but one true catholic church of Christ upon earth, out of which there is no salvation to be had; which that true church is? And when they have found that out, that will teach them in a

136

137

most infallible way the true faith and religion, and all things that are necessary to be believed or done by them, in order to their salvation: so that they have nothing to do, but to satisfy themselves in this single inquiry, which is the true catholic church of Christ? This is the *unum necessarium*, the one thing necessary: and, when they have found out this, and are satisfied about it, they need to inquire no farther; this church will fully instruct and satisfy them in all other things. And this I cannot deny to be a very artificial way of proceeding, and to serve their purpose very well; for they have these two great advantages by it.

1. That it makes the work short, and saves them a great deal of labour, by bringing the whole business to one single inquiry: and when they have gained this point, that this single question is all that they need to be satisfied in; then they have nothing to do, but to ply and puzzle the man with their motives of credibility, and marks of the true church; and to shew, as well as they can, how these marks agree to their church, and are all to be found in it, and in no other; and to set out to the best advantage the glorious privileges of their church, the miraculous things that have been, and are still daily done in it, and the innumerable multitude of their saints and martyrs; and if these general things take and sink into them, their work is in effect done.

2. Another great advantage they have by it, is, that by bringing them to this method, they divert and keep them off from the many objections against their church and religion, namely, the errors and corruptions which we charge them withal. For this is the thing they are afraid of, and will by no means be brought to, to vindicate and make good their innovations in faith and practice, so plainly in many things contrary to Scripture, and to the faith and practice of the primitive church; as the doctrines of transubstantiation, of purgatory, the pope's supremacy, of the infallibility of their church, of their seven sacraments instituted by Christ, and of the intention of the priest being necessary to the validity and virtue of the sacraments. And then several of their practices; as of the worship of images, of the invocation of angels and saints, of the service of God and the Scriptures in an unknown tongue, and the communion in one kind; and several other things, so plainly contrary to the Scriptures, and the practice and usage of the primitive church, that almost the meanest capacity may easily be made sensible and convinced of it. These are sore places, which they desire not to have touched, and therefore they use all possible artifice to keep men at a distance from them; partly, because the particular discussion of them is tedious, and it requires more than ordinary skill, to say any thing that is tenable for them, and so to paint and varnish them over, as to hide the corruptions and deformities of them; but chiefly because they are conscious to themselves, that as in all these points they are upon the defensive, so they are also upon very great disadvantages; and therefore to avoid, if it be possible, being troubled with them, they have devised this shorter, and easier, and more convenient way of making proselytes.

138

139

Not that they are always able to keep themselves thus within their trenches; but are sometimes, whether they will or no, drawn out to encounter some of these objections: but they rid themselves of them as soon and as dexterously as they can, by telling those that make them, that they will hereafter give them full satisfaction to all these matters, when they are gotten over the first and main inquiry, which is the true church? For if they can keep them to this point, and gain them to it, they can deal with them more easily in the rest: for when they can once swallow this principle, that the church of Rome is the one true catholic church, and consequently, as they have told them all along, infallible: this infallibility of the church once entertained, will cover a multitude of particular errors and mistakes; and it will very much help to cure the weakness and defects of some particular doctrines and practices, and at last to silence and over rule all objections against them. So that the benefit and advantage of this method is visibly and at first sight very great; and therefore, no wonder they are so steady and constant to it, and do so obstinately insist upon it. But how convenient so ever it be to them, it is, I am sure, very unreasonable in itself; and that upon these accounts.

1. Because the true church doth not constitute and make the true Christian faith and doctrine; but it is the true Christian faith and doctrine, the profession whereof makes the true church; and therefore, in reason and order of nature, the first inquiry must be, what is the true faith and doctrine of Christ, which by him was delivered to the apostles, and by them published and made known to the world, and by their writings transmitted and conveyed down to us? And, this being found, every society of Christians, which holds this doctrine, is a true part of the catholic church; and all the Christians throughout the world, that agree in this doctrine, are the one true catholic church.

2. The inquiry about the true church can have no issue, even according to their own way of proceeding, without a due examination of the particular doctrines and practices of that church, the communion whereof they would persuade a man to embrace. We will admit at present this to be the first inquiry, which is the true church? Let us now see in what way they manage this, to gain men over to their church. They tell them, that the church of Rome is the one true catholic church of Christ. The truth of this assertion we will particularly examine afterwards, when we come to consider the next step of their method in dealing with their converts. At present I shall only take notice in the general, what way they take to prove this assertion; namely, that the church of Rome is the one true catholic church; and that is, by the notes and marks of the true church, which they call their motives of credibility; because, by these they design to persuade them, that the church of Rome is the one true catholic church. I shall not now reckon up all the notes and marks which they give of the true church; but only observe, that one of their principal marks of the true church is this: that the faith and doctrine of it be agreeable to the doctrine of the primitive and apostolic church, *i. e.* to the doctrine delivered by our Saviour and his apostles: and this Bellarmine makes one of the marks of the true church. And they must unavoidably make it so; because the

140

141

true faith and doctrine of Christ is that which indeed constitutes the true church. But if this be an essential mark of the true church, then no man can possibly know the church of Rome to be the true church, till he have examined the particular doctrines and practices of it, and the agreement of them with the primitive doctrine and practice of Christianity; and this necessarily draws on and engages them in a dispute of the particular points and differences betwixt us; which is the very thing they would avoid by this method, and which I have now plainly shewed they cannot do, because they cannot possibly prove their church to be the true church, with out shewing the conformity of their doctrines and practices to the doctrine and practice of the primitive and apostolic church; and this will give them work enough; and will, whether they will or no, draw them out of their hold and fastness, which is to amuse people with a general inquiry which is the true church, without descending to the examination of their particular doctrines and practices. But this they must of necessity come to, before they can prove by the notes and marks of the true church, that theirs is the true church.

And this is a demonstration, that their method of satisfaction, as it is unnatural and unreasonable, so it cannot serve the purpose they aim at by it; which is, to divert men from the examination of the particular points in difference between the church of Rome and us, and to gain them over to them, by a wile and trick; because the very method they take to prove themselves to be the true catholic church, will enforce them to justify all their particular doctrines and practices, before they can finish this proof.

And here we fix our foot, that the single question and point upon which they would put the whole issue of the matter, cannot possibly be brought to any reasonable issue, without a particular discussion and examination of the points in difference betwixt their church and our's: and when they can make out these to be agreeable to the primitive doctrine and practice of the Christian church, we have reason to be satisfied, that the church of Rome is a church, in the communion whereof a man may be safe; but, till that be made out, they have done nothing to persuade any man that understands himself, that it is safe, much less necessary to be of their communion. But if particular points must be discussed and cleared, before a man can be satisfied in the inquiry after the true church; then they must allow their intended convert to be a judge likewise of particular points; and if he be sufficient for that too, before he comes into their church, I do not see of what use the infallibility of the church will be to him, when he is in it.

142

143

SERMON LXI.

OF CONSTANCY IN THE PROFESSION OF THE TRUE RELIGION.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised.—[Heb. x. 23.](#)

I HAVE already made a considerable progress in my discourse upon these words, in which I told you there is an exhortation to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;” and an argument or encouragement thereto, because “he is faithful that promised.” I am yet upon the first of these, the exhortation “to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;” by which, I told you, the apostle doth not intend, that those who are capable of examining the grounds and reasons of their religion, should not have the liberty to do it; nor that, when, upon due inquiry, they are, as they verily believe, established in the true faith and religion, they should obstinately refuse to hear any reason that is fairly offered against their present persuasion.

And then I proceeded to shew positively,

First, What it is that we are exhorted to hold fast, viz. “the confession,” or “profession of our faith;” the ancient Christian faith, of which every Christian makes profession in his baptism. For it is of that the apostle here speaks, as appears plainly by the context.

Secondly, How we are to “hold fast the profession of our faith.” And of this I gave account in these following particulars:

1. We should “hold fast the profession of our faith,” against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support that confidence.

2. And much more against the confidence of men, contrary to plain Scripture and reason, and the common sense of mankind; of which I gave you particular instances.

3. Against all the temptations and terrors of the world.

4. Against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition, and groundless hopes of getting to heaven upon easier terms in some other church and religion. I am now upon the

5th and last particular I mentioned, namely, that we are to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering,” against all the cunning arts and insinuations of busy and disputing men, whose design it is to unhinge men from their religion, and to make proselytes to their party and faction. I have already mentioned some of the arts which they use, (I mean particularly them of the church of Rome) in making proselytes to their religion; and I have shewn the absurdity and unreasonableness of them. As,

First, In allowing men to be very competent and sufficient judges for themselves, in the choice of their religion (i. e. which is the true church and religion in which alone salvation is to be had); and yet telling them, at the same time, that they are utterly incapable of judging of particular doctrines and points of faith. As for these, they must rely upon the judgment

of an infallible church; and, if they do not, they will certainly run into damnable errors and mistakes.

And they must of necessity allow them the first, a sufficient ability to judge for themselves in the choice of their religion: otherwise in vain do they offer them arguments to persuade them to their's, if they cannot judge of the force of them. But now, after this, to deny them all ability to judge of particular doctrines and points of faith, is a very absurd and inconsistent pretence.



Secondly, Another art they use, in order to their making a right choice of their religion, is earnestly to persuade them to hear and read only the arguments and books on their side: which is just as if one should go about to persuade a judge, in order to the better understanding and clearer decision of a cause, to hear only the counsel on one side.

Thirdly, They tell them, that the only thing they are to inquire into, is, which is the true church, the one catholic church mentioned in the creed, out of which there is no salvation; and when they have found that, they are to rely upon the authority of that church, which is infallible, for all other things. And this method they wisely take, to avoid particular disputes about the innovations and errors which we charge them withal. But I have shewn at large, that this cannot be the first inquiry: because it is not the true church that makes the true Christian faith and doctrine; but the profession of the true Christian faith and doctrine, which makes the true church.

Besides, their way of proving their church to be the only true church, being by the marks and properties of the true church, of which the chief is, the conformity of their doctrines and practices with the primitive and apostolical church, this unavoidably draws on an examination of their particular doctrines and practices, whether they be conformable to those of the primitive and apostolical church, before their great inquiry, "which is the true church?" can be brought to an issue; which, it is plain, it can never be, without entering into the ocean of particular disputes, which they desire above all things to avoid. So that they are never the nearer by this method: they can neither shorten their work by it, nor keep off the examination of their particular errors and corruptions; which are a very sore place, and they cannot endure we should touch it.



I shall now proceed to discover some other arts and methods which they use in seducing people to their church and religion, and shall be as brief in them as I can.

Fourthly, They pretend, that the Roman church is the catholic church, *i. e.* the visible society of all Christians, united to the bishop of Rome, as the supreme pastor and visible head of Christ's church upon earth: from whence it clearly follows, that it is necessary to all Christians to join themselves to the communion of the Roman church; otherwise they cannot be members of the catholic church of Christ, out of which there is no salvation.

We grant the consequence, that if the Roman church be the catholic church it is necessary to be of that communion; because out of the catholic church there is ordinarily no salvation

to be had. But how do they prove, that the Roman church is the catholic church? They would fain have us so civil, as to take this for granted: because if we do not, they do not well know how to go about to prove it. And, indeed, some things are obstinate, and will not be proved without so much trouble and difficulty, that it is better to let them alone; and by the confident assertion of them, by importunity, and by any other fair means, to get them bettered, without proof of this stubborn sort of propositions, which will admit of no proof. This is one that a part is the whole; or, which is all one, that the Roman church is the catholic church. For that it is but a part of the Christian church, and not the best part neither, but perhaps the very worst and most corrupt of all the rest, is no difficult matter to prove, and hath been often done. But now to prove the church of Rome to be the catholic church, that is, the whole society of all true Christians in the world, these following particulars ought to be clearly shewn and made out.

147

1. A plain constitution of our Saviour, whereby St. Peter, and his successors at Rome, are made the supreme head and pastors of the whole Christian church. For St. Peter first:—Can they shew any such constitution in the gospel, or can they produce the least proof and evidence out of the history of the Acts and the Epistles of the Apostles, that St. Peter was acknowledged for such by the rest of the apostles? Nay, is there not clear evidence there to the contrary, that in the first council of the Christian church at Jerusalem, St. James, the bishop of Jerusalem, was, if not superior, at least equal to him? Does St. Paul acknowledge any superiority of St. Peter over him? Nay, does he not upon several occasions declare himself equal to the chiefest apostles, even to St. Peter himself? And is this consistent with a plain constitution of our Lord's making St. Peter supreme head and pastor of the Christian church?

But suppose this to have been so; where doth it appear, by any constitution of our Saviour, that this authority was derived to his successors? and if it were, why to his successors at Rome, rather than at Antioch, where he was first, and unquestionably bishop? They must acknowledge, that when he was bishop of Antioch, he was the supreme head and pastor of the whole Christian church; and then the style must have been, the Antiochian catholic church, as it is now the Roman catholic. But do they find any footsteps of such a style in ecclesiastical history?

148

2. To make good this proposition, that the Roman church is the catholic church, they are in consequence obliged to affirm and believe, that the churches of Asia, which were excommunicated by the bishops of Rome, for not keeping Easter as they did; and the churches of Asia and Africa, which were excommunicated by the same bishop, upon the point of re-baptizing heretics; that all these, by being turned out of the communion of the Roman church, were also cut off from the catholic church, and from a possibility of salvation. This the church of Rome themselves will not affirm; and yet, if to be cast out of the communion of the Roman, and the catholic church, be all one, they must affirm it.

3. In consequence of this proposition, that the church of Rome is the catholic church, they ought to hold, that all baptism out of the communion of their church is void and of none effect. For if it be good, then it makes the persons baptized members of the catholic church; and then those that are out of the communion of the Roman church, may be true members of the catholic church; and then the Roman, and the catholic church are not all one. But the church of Rome holds the baptism of heretics, and of those that are out of the communion of their church, to be good; which is a demonstration, that the Roman church neither is the catholic church; nor, if she believe consistently, can she think herself to be so.

4. In consequence of this proposition, all the Christians in the world, which do not yield subjection to the bishop of Rome, and acknowledge his supremacy, are no true parts of the catholic church, nor in a possibility of salvation. And this does not only exclude those of the reformed religion from being members of the catholic church: but the Greeks, and the eastern churches; *i. e.* four or five patriarchal churches of the Christian world; which, taken together, are really greater than those in communion with the church of Rome. And this the church of Rome does affirm, concerning all those churches and Christians, which refuse subjection to the bishop of Rome, that they are out of the communion of the catholic church, and a capacity of salvation. But surely it is not possible, that the true catholic church of Christ can have so little charity as this comes to; and to a wise man there needs no other demonstration than this, that the church of Rome is so far from being the whole Christian church, that it is a very arrogant and uncharitable part of it.

5. And lastly; In consequence of the truth of this proposition, and of the importance of it to the salvation of souls, and to the peace and unity of the Christian church, they ought to produce express mention of the Roman catholic church, in the ancient creeds of the Christian church. For if this proposition, that the Roman church is the catholic, be true; it was always so, and always of the greatest importance to the salvation of men, and the peace and unity of the Christian church: and if it were so, and always believed to be so, by the Christian church, as they pretend, what reason can be imagined, why the ancient Christian church should never say so, nor put an article of such consequence and importance in express words in their creeds; nor why should they not have used the style of Roman catholic as familiarly then, as they do now in the Roman church? a plain evidence that this is a new style which they use when they give themselves the title of the Roman catholic church; and that the ancient Christian church knew better, than to call one part of the catholic church the whole. I am sure, that Æneas Sylvius (who was afterwards Pope Pius the Second) says, that before the council of Nice, little respect was had to the Roman church. But how does this consist with their present pretence, that the Roman church is, and always hath been the catholic church; and that the bishop of Rome is, by Christ's appointment, the supreme pastor, and visible head of the whole Christian church? Is it possible, that this should be believed in the Christian church before the council of Nice; and yet little respect to be had

149

150

at that time to the Roman church? This indeed was said by Æneas Sylvius before he sat in the infallible chair; but is never the less true for that.

Fifthly, The next step of their method is, that the Roman church is infallible; and by this means they have a certain remedy against heresy, and a judge of controversies, from which there is no appeal, which we want in our church. And this is a glorious privilege indeed, if they could prove that they had it, and that it would be so certain a remedy against heresy, and give a final decision to all controversies. But there is not one tittle of all this, of which they are able to give any tenable proof: for,

1. All the pretence for their infallibility relies upon the truth of the former proposition, that the church of Rome is the catholic church, and that they say is infallible: and I have already shewn, that that proposition is not only destitute of any good proof; but is as evidently false, as that a part of a thing is the whole.

2. But supposing it were true, that the Roman church were the catholic church; yet it is neither evident in itself, nor can be proved by them, that the catholic church of every age is infallible, in deciding all controversies of religion. It is granted by all Christians that our Saviour and his apostles were infallible, in the delivery of the Christian doctrine, and that they proved their infallibility by miracles; and this was necessary at first for the security of our faith: but this doctrine being once delivered and transmitted down to us in the Holy Scriptures, written by the evangelists and apostles who were infallibly assisted by the Holy Ghost; we have now a certain and infallible rule of faith and practice, which, with the assistance and instruction of those guides and pastors which Christ hath appointed in his church, is sufficiently plain in all things necessary. And as there is no evidence of the continuance of infallibility in the guides and pastors of the church, in the ages which followed the apostles, because miracles are long since ceased: so there is no need of the continuance of it, for the preservation of the true faith and religion; because God hath sufficiently provided for that, by that infallible rule of faith and manners which he hath left to his church in the Holy Scriptures, which are every way sufficient and able to make both pastors and people “wise unto salvation.”

3. As for a certain remedy against heresy, it is certain God never intended there should be any; no more than he hath provided a certain remedy against sin and vice; which surely is every whit as contrary to the Christian religion, and therefore as fit to be provided against, as heresy: but it is certain in experience, that God hath provided no certain and effectual remedy against sin and vice; for which I can give no other reason, but that God does that which he thinks best and fittest, and not what we are apt to think to be so.

Besides that, infallibility is not a certain remedy against heresy. The apostles were certainly infallible; and yet they could neither prevent nor extinguish heresy; which never more abounded than in the apostles' times. And St. Paul expressly tells us, (1 Cor. xi. 19.) “That there must be heresies; that they which are approved may be made manifest.” And St. Peter,



(the [2d Epist. ii. 1.](#)) “That there should be false teachers among Christians, who should privily bring in damnable heresies; and that many should follow their pernicious ways.” But now, if “there must be heresies,” either the church must not be infallible, or infallibility in the church is no certain remedy against them.

I proceed to the next step they make, viz.

Sixthly, That Christ hath always a visible church upon earth: and that they can shew a church, which, from the time of Christ and his apostles, hath always made a visible profession of the same doctrines and practices which are now believed and practised in the church of Rome: but that we can shew no visible church, that, from the time of Christ and his apostles, hath always opposed the church of Rome, in those doctrines and practices which we now revile and find fault with in their church.

That Christ hath always had, and ever shall have to the end of the world, a visible church, professing and practising his true faith and religion, is agreed on both sides: but we say, that he hath nowhere promised, that this shall be free from all errors and corruptions in faith and practice. This the churches planted by the apostles themselves were not, even in their times, and during their abode amongst them; and yet they were true parts of the Christian catholic church. In the following ages, errors and corruptions and superstitions did by degrees creep in and grow up in several parts of the church; as St. Augustine, and others of the fathers complain of in their times. Since that, several famous parts of the Christian church, both in Asia and Africa, have not only been greatly corrupted, but have apostatized from the faith; so that in many places there are hardly any footsteps of Christianity among them. But yet still Christ hath had in all these ages a visible church upon earth; though perhaps no part of it at all times free from some errors and corruptions; and in several parts of it great corruptions both in faith and practice; and in none I think more and longer than in the church of Rome, for all she boasts herself, like old Babylon, ([Isa. xlvii. 7, 8.](#)) “That she is a lady for ever; and says in her heart, I am, and none else besides me;” and like the church of Laodicea, ([Rev. iii. 17.](#)) which said “I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of no thing;” when the spirit of God saith, that “she was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and knew it not.”

Thus the church of Rome boasts, that she hath in all ages been the true visible church of Christ, (and none besides her) free from all errors in doctrine, and corruptions in practice; and that, from the age of Christ and his apostles, she hath always professed the same doctrines and practices which she does at this day. Can any thing be more shame less than this? did they always believe transubstantiation? let their pope Gelasius speak for them; who expressly denies, that in the sacrament there is any substantial change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Was this always an article of their faith, and necessary to be believed by all Christians? let Scotus, and several other of their schoolmen and learned writers speak for them. Was purgatory always believed in the Roman church as it is now defined in the

council of Trent? let several of their learned men speak. In what father, in what council before that of Trent, do they find Christ to have instituted just seven sacraments, neither more nor less? And for practices in their religion, they themselves will not say, that in the ancient Christian church the Scriptures were withheld from the people, and locked up in an unknown tongue; and that the public service of God, the prayers and lessons were read, and the sacraments celebrated, in an unknown tongue; and that the sacrament of the Lord's supper was given to the people only in one kind. Where do they find in Holy Scripture, or in the doctrine and practice of the ancient Christian church, any command or example for the worship of images, for the invocation of saints and angels, and the blessed Virgin, which do now make a great part of their religion? Nay, is not the doctrine of the Scriptures, and of the ancient fathers, plainly against all these practices? With what face then can it be said, that the church of Rome hath made a constant visible profession of the same faith and practice in all ages, from the time of Christ and his apostles? or would the primitive church of Rome, if it should now visit the earth again, own the present church of Rome to be the same in all matters of faith and practice, that it was when they left it?

155

And whereas they demand of us, to shew a visible church from the time of Christ and his apostles, that hath always opposed the church of Rome, in those points of doctrine and practice which we object to them; what can be more impertinent than this demand? when they know, that in all these points we charge them with innovations in matters of faith and practice, and say that those things came in by degrees, several ages after the apostles time, some sooner, some later; as we are able to make good, and have done it. And would they have us shew them a visible church, that opposed these errors and corruptions in their church, before ever they appeared? this we do not pretend to shew. And supposing they had not been at all opposed, when they appeared, nor a long time after, nor till the Reformation; yet, if they be errors and corruptions of the Christian doctrine, and contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and to the faith and practice of the primitive church, there is no prescription against truth. It is never too late for any church to reject those errors and corruptions, and to reform itself from them.

The bottom of all this matter is, they would have us to shew them a society of Christians, that in all ages has preserved itself free from all such errors and corruptions as we charge them withal; or else we deny the perpetual visibility of the catholic church. No such matter. We say, the church of Christ hath always been visible in every age since Christ's time; and that the several societies of Christians, professing the Christian doctrine, and laws of Christ, have made up the catholic church; some parts whereof have in several ages fallen into great errors and corruptions; and no part of the catholic into more and greater than the church of Rome; so that it requires the utmost of our charity, to think that they are a true, though a very unsound and corrupt part of the catholic church of Christ.

156

We acknowledge, likewise, that we were once involved in the like degeneracy; but, by the mercy of God, and pious care and prudence of those that were in authority, are happily rescued out of it: and though we were not out of the catholic church before, yet since our reformation from the errors and corruptions of the church of Rome, we are in it upon better terms, and are a much sounder part of it; and I hope, by the mercy and goodness of God, we shall for ever continue so.

So that to the perpetual visibility of Christ's church, it is not necessary, that the whole Christian church, nor indeed that any part of it, should be free from all errors and corruptions. Even the churches planted by the apostles in the primitive times were not so. St. Paul reproves several doctrines and practices in the church of Corinth, and of Colosse, and of Galatia; and the Spirit of God, several things in the seven churches of Asia: and yet all these were true parts and members of the catholic church of Christ, notwithstanding these faults and errors; because they all agree in the main and essential doctrines of Christianity. And when more and greater corruptions grew upon the church, or any part of it, the greater reason and need there was of a reformation. And as every particular person hath a right to reform any thing that he finds amiss in himself, so far as concerns himself; so much more every national church hath a power within itself, to reform itself from all errors and corruptions, and by the sanction of the catholic authority to confirm that reformation; which is our case here in England. And whatever part of the church, how great and eminent soever, excludes from her communion such a national church, for reforming herself from plain errors and corruptions, clearly condemned by the word of God, and by the doctrine and practice of the primitive Christian church, is undoubtedly guilty of schism. And this is the truth of the case between us and the church of Rome. And no blind talk about a perpetual visible church can render us guilty of schism, for making a real reformation; or acquit them of it, for casting us out of their communion for that cause.

Seventhly, and lastly, (to mention no more) They pretend, that we delude the people, by laying too much stress upon the Scripture, and making it the only rule of faith and manners: whereas Scripture and tradition together make up the entire rule of faith; and not Scripture interpreted by every man's private fancy, but by tradition carefully preserved in the church. So that it ought to be no wonder, if several of their doctrines and practices cannot be so clearly made out by Scripture, or perhaps seem contrary to it, as it may be expounded by a private spirit; but not as interpreted by the tradition of the church, which can only give the true sense of Scripture. And therefore they are to understand, that several of those doctrines and practices, which we object against, are most clearly proved by the tradition of their church, which is of equal authority with Scripture.

In this objection of their's, which they design for the cover of all their errors and corruptions, there are several things distinctly to be considered, which I shall do as briefly as I can.



First, Whereas it is suggested., that we delude the people by laying too much stress upon the Scripture (which certainly we cannot well do, if it be the word of God), it ought to be considered, whether they do not delude and abuse them infinitely more, in keeping the Scriptures from them, and not suffering them to see that which they cannot deny to be at least a considerable part of the rule of Christian doctrine and practice. Doth it not by this dealing of their's appear very suspicious, that they are extremely afraid that the people should examine their doctrine and practice by this rule? for what other reason can they have to conceal it from them?

Secondly, Whereas they affirm, that Scripture alone is not the rule of Christian faith and practice, but that Scripture and oral tradition preserved in the church, and delivered down from hand to hand, make up the entire rule: I would fain know, whence they learned this new doctrine of the rule of faith. I know that the council of Trent declares it for the rule they intend to proceed upon, and make use of, for the confirmation and proof of their following determinations and decrees. But did any of the ancient councils of the Christian church lay down this rule, and proceed upon it? Did not Constantine the emperor, at the opening of the first general council, lay the Bible before them, as the only rule, according to which they were to proceed? and this with the approbation of all those holy fathers that were assembled in that council? And did not following councils proceed upon the same rule? Do any of the ancient fathers ever mention any rule of Christian faith and practice, besides the Holy Scriptures, and the ancient creed; which, because it is an abridgment of the necessary articles of Christian faith contained in the Holy Scriptures, is by them frequently called "the rule of faith?" Do not the same fathers frequently and expressly say, that the Scriptures are a perfect rule, and that all things are plainly contained in them, which concerns faith and life; and that whatever cannot be proved by testimony of Scripture is to be rejected? All this I am sure I can make good, by innumerable express testimonies of the ancient fathers, which are well known to those that are versed in them. By what authority then hath the council of Trent set up this new rule, unknown to the Christian church for one thousand five hundred years? and who gave them this authority? The plain truth is, the necessity of it for the defence of the errors and corruptions which they had embraced, and were resolved not to part with, forced them to lengthen out the rule; the old rule of the Holy Scriptures being too short for their purpose.

Thirdly, Whereas they pretend that Holy Scripture, as expounded by a private spirit, may not seem so favourable to some of their doctrines and practices; yet, as interpreted by tradition, which can only give the true sense of Scripture, it agrees very well with them. I suppose they mean, that whereas a private spirit would be apt to understand some texts of Scripture, as if people were to search and read the Scripture; tradition interprets those texts in a quite other sense, that people are not to be permitted to read the Holy Scriptures. A private spirit would be apt to understand St. Paul's discourse, in the 14th of the first to the



Corinthians, to be against celebrating prayer and the service of God in an unknown tongue, as being contrary to edification, and indeed to common sense; for he says, "If one should come and find them speaking and praying in an unknown tongue, will they not say, Ye are mad?" But now tradition, which only knows how to give the true sense, can reconcile this discourse of St. Paul very easily with the practice of the church of Rome in this matter. And so likewise the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians, with the worship of angels; and the Epistle to the Hebrews, with offering the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ in the mass a thousand times every day. And to give but one instance more:—whereas a man, by his private spirit, would be very apt to understand the second commandment to forbid all worship of images; tradition discovers the meaning of this commandment to be, that due veneration is to be given to them. So that at this rate of interpreting Scripture by tradition, it is impossible to fix any objection from Scripture, upon any doctrine or practice which they have a mind to maintain.

Fourthly, Whereas they pretend the tradition of their church, delivered from the mouth of Christ, or dictated by the Holy Spirit, and brought down to them, and preserved by continual succession in the church, to be of equal authority with the word of God; for so the council of Trent says, that "the holy synod doth receive and venerate these traditions with equal pious affection and reverence as they do the written word of God;" this we must declare against, as unreasonable in itself, to make tradition, conveyed by word of mouth from one to another, through so many ages, and liable to so many mistakes and miscarriages, to be, at the distance of one thousand five hundred years, of equal certainty and authority with the Holy Scriptures, carefully preserved and transmitted down to us; because this (as I said before) is to make common rumour and report of equal authority and certainty with a written record. And not only so; but hereby they make the Scriptures an imperfect rule; contrary to the declared judgment of the ancient fathers and councils of the Christian church; and so, in truth, they set up a new rule of faith, whereby they change the Christian religion; for a new rule of faith and religion makes a new faith and religion. This we charge the church of Rome with, and do challenge them to shew this new rule of faith before the council of Trent; and, consequently, where their religion was before that council; to shew a religion, consisting of all those articles which are defined by the council of Trent as necessary to salvation, and established upon this new rule, professed by any Christian church in the world before that time. And as they have pitched upon a new rule of faith, so it is easy to see to what end; for take Pope Pius the Fourth's creed, and we may see where the old and new religion parts; even at the end of the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed, which was the ancient Christian faith; to which are added, in Pope Pius's creed, twelve articles more, defined in the council of Trent, and supported only by tradition: so that as the Scripture answers for the twelve old articles, which are plainly contained there, so tradition is to answer for the twelve new ones. And, therefore, the matter was calculated very exactly, when they make

161

162

tradition just of equal authority with the Scriptures; because as many articles of their faith were to be made good by it, and rely upon it, as those which are proved by the authority of Scripture. But that tradition is of equal authority with the Scriptures, we have nothing in the whole world for it but the bare assertion of the council of Trent.

I should now have added some other considerations, tending to confirm and establish us in our religion, against the pretences and insinuations of seducing spirits: but I shall proceed no farther at present.



SERMON LXII.

OF CONSTANCY IN THE PROFESSION OF THE TRUE RELIGION.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised.—[Heb. x. 23.](#)

THESE words contain an exhortation to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering,” and an argument or encouragement thereto, because “he is faithful that promised.” By the exhortation to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering,” is not meant, that those who are capable of examining the grounds and reasons of their religion should blindly hold it fast against the best reasons that can be offered; because upon these terms every man must continue in the religion in which he happens to be fixed by education, or an ill choice, be his religion true or false, without examining and looking into it, whether it be right or wrong; for, till a man examines, every man thinks his religion right. That which the apostle here exhorts Christians to hold fast, is the ancient faith, of which all Christians make a solemn profession in their baptism, as plainly appears from the context. And this “profession of our faith” we are to hold in the following instances, which I shall but briefly mention, without enlarging upon them.

1. We are to “hold fast the profession of our faith,” against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support that confidence.

2. And much more against the confidence of men, contrary to plain Scripture and reason, and to the common sense of mankind.

3. Against all the temptations and terrors of the world—against the temptations of fashion and example, and of worldly interest and advantage; and against all terrors and sufferings of persecution.

4. Against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition, and groundless hopes of getting to heaven upon easier terms than the gospel has proposed, in some other church and religion.

Lastly, We are to “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering,” against all the cunning arts and insinuations of busy and disputing men, whose design it is to unhinge men from their religion, and to make proselytes to their party and faction.

But, without entering into these particulars, I shall, in order to our establishment in the reformed religion, which we profess, in opposition to the errors and corruptions of the church of Rome, apply myself at this time to make a short comparison between the religion which we profess and that of the church of Rome, that we may discern on which side the advantage of truth lies; and, in making this comparison, I shall insist upon three things, which will bring the matter to an issue, and are, I think, sufficient to determine every sober and considerate man, which of these he ought in reason, and with regard to the safety of his soul, to embrace: and they are these:—



I. That we govern our belief and practice, in matters of religion, by the true ancient rule of Christianity, the word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures; but the church of Rome, for the maintenance of their errors and corruptions, have been forced to devise a new rule, never owned by the primitive church, nor by the ancient fathers and councils of it.

II. That the doctrines and practices in difference betwixt us and the church of Rome, are either contrary to this rule, or destitute of the warrant and authority of it, and are plain additions to the ancient Christianity, and corruptions of it.

III. That our religion hath many clear advantages of that of the church of Rome, not only very considerable in themselves, but very obvious and discernible to an ordinary capacity, upon the first proposal of them. I shall be as brief in these as I can.

I. That we govern our belief and practice in matters of religion, by the true ancient rule of Christianity, the word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures: but the church of Rome, for the maintaining of their errors and corruptions, have been forced to devise a new rule, never owned by the primitive church, nor by the ancient councils and fathers of it; that is, they have joined with the word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures, the unwritten traditions of their church, concerning several points of their faith and practice, which they acknowledge can not be proved from Scripture, and these they call the unwritten word of God; and the council of Trent hath decreed them to be “of equal authority with the Holy Scriptures,” and that they do “receive and venerate them with the same pious affection and reverence;” and all this contrary to the express declaration and unanimous consent of all the ancient councils and fathers of the Christian church (as I have already shewn); and this never declared to be a point of faith, till it was decreed, not much above a hundred years ago, in the council of Trent. And this, surely, if any thing, is a matter of great consequence—to presume to alter the ancient rule of Christian doctrine and practice, and to enlarge it, and add to it at their pleasure. But the church of Rome having made so great a change in the doctrine and practice of Christianity, it became consequently necessary to make a change of the rule: and therefore, with great reason, did the council of Trent take this into consideration in the first place, and put it in the front of their decrees, because it was to be the foundation and main proof of the following definitions of faith, and decrees of practice, for which, without this new rule, there had been no colour.

II. The doctrines and practices in difference betwixt us and the church of Rome, are either contrary to the true rule, or destitute of the warrant and authority of it, and plain additions to the ancient Christianity, and corruptions of it. The truth of this will best appear by instancing in some of the principal doctrines and practices in difference betwixt us.

As for their two great fundamental doctrines, of the supremacy of the bishop of Rome over all the Christians in the world, and the infallibility of their church, there is not one word in Scripture concerning these privileges; nay, it is little less than a demonstration that they have no such privileges, that St. Paul, in a long epistle to the church of Rome, takes no



notice of them, that the church of Rome either then was, or was to be soon after, the mother and mistress of all churches, which is now grown to be an article of faith, in the church of Rome; and yet it is hardly to be imagined that he could have omitted to take notice of such remarkable privileges of their bishops and church, above all in the world, had he known they had belonged to them. So that in all probability he was ignorant of those mighty prerogatives of the church of Rome; otherwise it cannot be, but that he would have written with more deference and submission to this seat of infallibility and centre of unity; he would certainly have paid a greater respect to this mother and mistress of all churches, where the head of the church, and vicar of Christ, either was already seated, or by the appointment of Christ was designed for ever to fix his throne and establish his residence; but there is not one word, or the least intimation of any such thing throughout this whole Epistle, nor in any other part of the New Testament.

167

Besides that both these pretended privileges are omitted, by plain fact and evidence of things themselves; their supremacy, in that the far greatest part of the Christian church, neither is at this day, nor can be shewn by the records of any age, ever to have been subject to the bishop of Rome, or to have acknowledged his authority and jurisdiction over them: and the infallibility of the pope, whether with or without a general council, about which they still differ, though infallibility was devised on purpose to determine all differences; I say, this infallibility, wherever it is pretended to be, is plainly confuted by the contradictory definitions of several popes and councils; for if they have contradicted one another, as is plain, beyond all contradiction, in several instances, then there must of necessity be an error on one side; and there can be no so certain demonstration, that any one is infallible, as evident error and mistake is of the contrary.

Next, their concealing both the rule of religion, and the practice of it in the worship and service of God, from the people, in an unknown tongue; and their administering the communion to the people in one kind only, contrary to clear Scripture, and the plain institution of our blessed Saviour. And then their worship of images, and invocation of angels and saints, and the blessed Virgin, in the same solemn manner, and for the same blessings and benefits which we beg of God himself; contrary to the express word of God, which commands us to worship the Lord our God, and to serve him only; and which declares, that as there is but one God, so there is but “one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus;” but one mediator, not only of redemption, but of intercession too; for the apostle there speaks of a mediator of intercession, by whom only we are to offer up our prayers, which are to be put up to God only; and which expressly forbids men to worship any image or likeness. And the learned men of their own church acknowledge, that there is neither precept nor example for these practices in Scripture, and that they were not used in the Christian church for several ages; and this acknowledgment we think very considerable, since so great a part of their religion, especially as it is practised among the people, is contained in these points.

168

For the service of God in an unknown tongue, and withholding the Scriptures from the people, they do not pretend so much as one testimony of any father for the first six hundred years; and nothing, certainly, can be more unreasonable in itself, than to deny people the best means of knowing the will of God, and not to permit them to understand what is done in the public worship of God, and what prayers are put up to him in the church.

The two great doctrines of transubstantiation and purgatory are acknowledged, by many of their own learned writers, to have no certain foundation in Scripture: and that there are seven sacraments of the Christian religion, though it be now made an article of faith by the council of Trent, is a thing which cannot be shewn in any council or father for above a thousand years after Christ. And we find no mention of this number of the sacraments, till the age of Peter Lombard, the father of the school men.

That the church of Rome is the mother and mistress of all churches, though that also be one of the new articles of Pope Pius the Fourth's creed, which their priests are by a solemn oath obliged to believe and teach; and yet it is most evidently false. That she is not the mother of all churches is plain, because Jerusalem was certainly so; for there certainly was the first Christian church, and from thence all the Christian churches in the world derive themselves: that she is not (though she fain would be) the mistress of all churches, is as evident; because the greatest part of the Christian church does, at this day, and always did deny, that she hath any authority or supremacy over them. Now these are the principal matters in difference betwixt us; and if these points, and a few more, be pared off from popery, that which remains of their religion, is the same with our's; that is, the true ancient Christianity.

III. I shall shew that our religion hath many clear advantages of their's, not only very consider able in themselves, but very obvious and discernible to an ordinary capacity, upon the very first proposal of them; as,

1. That our religion agrees perfectly with the Scriptures, and all points both of our belief and practice, esteemed by us as necessary to salvation, are there contained, even our enemies themselves being judges. We "worship the Lord our God, and him only do we serve." We do not fall down before images and worship them: we address all our prayers to God alone, by the only mediation and intercession of his Son Jesus Christ, as he himself hath given us commandment, and as St. Paul doth plainly direct, giving us this plain and substantial reason for it—because, as there is but one God, so there is but "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."

The public worship and service of God is performed by us in a language which we understand, according to St. Paul's express order and direction, and the universal practice of the ancient church, and the nature and reason of the thing itself. We administer the sacrament of the Lord's supper in both kinds, according to our Saviour's example and plain institution,



and the continual practice of all the Christian churches in the world for above a thou sand years.

2. We believe nothing as necessary to salvation, but what hath been owned in all ages to be the Christian doctrine, and is acknowledged so to be by the church of Rome itself; and we receive the whole faith of the primitive Christian church, viz. whatever is contained in the Apostles' Creed, and in the explications of that in the creeds of the four first general councils. By which it plainly appears, that all the points of faith in difference betwixt us and the church of Rome are mere innovations and plain additions to the ancient Christian faith: but all that we believe, is acknowledged by them to be undoubtedly the ancient Christian faith.

3. There is nothing wanting in our church and religion, whether in matter of faith or practice, which either the Scripture makes necessary to salvation, or was so esteemed by the Christian church for the first live hundred years; and we trust, that what was sufficient for the salvation of Christians in the best ages of Christianity, for five hundred years together, may be so still; and we are very well content to venture our salvation upon the same terms that they did.

4. Our religion is not only free from all idolatrous worship, but even from all suspicion and probable charge of any such thing: but this the church of Rome is not, as is acknowledged by her most learned champions, and as no man of ingenuity can deny; and the reason which the learned men give, why the worship of images and the invocation of angels and saints departed, were not practised in the primitive church for the first three hundred years, is a plain acknowledgment that these practices are very liable to the suspicion of idolatry: for they say, that the Christians did then forbear those practices because they seemed to come too near to the pagan idolatry, and lest the heathen should have taken occasion to have justified themselves, if these things had been practised among Christians; and they cannot now be ignorant, what scandal they give by these practices both to the Jews and Turks, and how much they alienate them from Christianity by this scandal; nor can they choose but be sensible, upon how great disadvantage they are in defending these practices from the charge of idolatry, and that by all their blind distinctions, with which they raise such a cloud and dust, they can hardly make any plausible and tolerable defence of themselves from this charge; insomuch, that to secure their own people from discerning their guilt in this matter, they have been put upon that shameful shift of leaving out the second commandment in their common catechisms and manuals, lest the people, seeing so plain a law of God against so common a practice of their church, should upon that discovery have broken off from them.

5. Nor is our religion encumbered with such an endless number of superstitious and troublesome observances, as their's infinitely is, even beyond the number of the Jewish ceremonies, to the great burden and scandal of the Christian religion, and the diverting of



men's minds from the spiritual part of religion, and the more weighty and necessary duties of the Christian life; so that, in truth, a devout pastor is so taken up with the external rites and little observances of his religion, that he hath little or no time to make himself a good man, and to cultivate and improve his mind in true piety and virtue.

6. Our religion is evidently more charitable to all Christians that differ from us, and particularly to them who, by their uncharitableness to us, have done as much as is possible to discharge and damp our charity towards them. And charity, as it is one of the most essential marks of a true Christian, so it is likewise the best mark and ornament of a true church; and of all things that can be thought of, methinks the want of charity in any church should be a motive to no man to fall in love with it, and to be fond of its communion.

7. Our religion doth not clash and interfere with any of the great moral duties to which all mankind stand obliged by the law and light of nature; as fidelity, mercy, and truth. We do not teach men to break faith with heretics or infidels; nor to destroy and extirpate those who differ from us, with fire and sword: no such thing as equivocation or mental reservation, or any other artificial way of falsehood, is either taught or maintained, either by the doctrine, or by the casuists of our church.

8. Our religion and all the doctrines of it are perfectly consistent with the peace of civil government, and the welfare of human society. We neither exempt the clergy from subjection to the civil powers, nor absolve subjects upon any pretence whatsoever from allegiance to their princes; both which points, the necessity of the one, and the lawfulness of the other, have been taught and stiffly maintained in the church of Rome, not only by private doctors, but by popes and general councils.

9. The doctrines of our religion are perfectly free from all suspicion of a worldly interest and design; whereas the greatest part of the erroneous doctrines with which we charge the church of Rome, are plainly calculated to promote the end of worldly greatness and dominion.

The pope's kingdom is plainly of this world; and the doctrines and maxims of it, like so many servants, are ready upon all occasions to fight for him. For most of them do plainly tend, either to the establishment and enlargement of his authority; or to the magnifying of the priests, and the giving them a perfect power over the consciences of the people, and the keeping them in a slavish subjection and blind obedience to them. And to this purpose do plainly tend the doctrines of exempting the clergy from the secular power and jurisdiction, the doctrine of transubstantiation; for it must needs make the priest a great man in the opinion of the people, to believe that he can make God, as they love to express it, without all reason and reverence. Of the like tendency is the communicating of the laity only in one kind, thereby making it the sole privilege of the priest to receive the sacrament in both: the withholding the Scripture from the people, and celebrating the service of God in an unknown tongue: the doctrine of an implicit faith, and absolute resignation of their judgments to their

teachers: these do all directly tend to keep the people in ignorance, and to bring them to a blind obedience to the dictates of their teachers. So likewise the necessity of the intention of the priest, to the saving virtue and efficacy of the sacraments; by which doctrine, the people do upon the matter depend as much upon the good-will of the priest, as upon the mercy of God for their salvation. But, above all, their doctrine of the necessity of auricular and private confession of all mortal sins committed after baptism, with all the circumstances of them, to the priest; and this not only for the ease and direction of their consciences, but as a necessary condition of having their sins pardoned and forgiven by God; by which means they make themselves masters of all the secrets of the people, and keep them in awe by the knowledge of their faults, *scire volunt secreta domus atque inde timeri*. Or else their doctrines tend to filthy lucre, and the enriching of their church: as their doctrines of purgatory and indulgences, and their prayers and masses for the dead, and many more doctrines and practices of the like kind, plainly do.

10. Our religion is free from all disingenuous and dishonest arts of maintaining and supporting itself. Such are clipping of ancient authors, nay, and even the authors and writers of their own church, when they speak too freely of any point; as may be seen in their *indices expurgatorii*, which much against their wills have been brought to light. To which I shall only add these three gross forgeries, which lie all at their doors, and they cannot deny them to be so.

1. The pretended canon of the council of Nice in the case of appeals, between the church of Rome and the African church; upon which they insisted a great while very confidently, till at last they were convinced by authentic copies of the canons of that council.

2. Constantine's donation to the pope, which they kept a great stir with, till the forgery of it was discovered.

3. The decretal epistles of the ancient popes; a large volume of forgeries compiled by Isidore Mercator, to countenance the usurpations of the bishop of Rome, and of which the church of Rome made great use for several ages, and pertinaciously defended the authority of them, till the learned men of their own church have at last been forced for very shame to disclaim them, and to confess the imposture of them. A like instance whereto is not, I hope, to be shewn in any Christian church. This is that which St. Paul calls *κυβεία*, "the sleight of men," such as gamesters use at dice; for to allege false and forged authors in this case, is to play with false dice, when the salvation of men's souls lies at stake.

11. Our religion has this mighty advantage: That it doth not decline trial and examination, which, to any man of ingenuity, must needs appear a very good sign of an honest cause; but if any church be shy of having her religion examined, and her doctrines and practices brought into the open light, this gives just ground of suspicion that she hath some distrust of them; for truth doth not seek corners, nor shun the light. Our Saviour hath told us who they are that love "darkness rather than light," viz. "they whose deeds are evil;" "for every one (saith



he) that doth evil, hateth the light; neither cometh he to the light, Jest his deeds should be reproved and made manifest.” There needs no more to render a religion suspected to a wise man, than to see those who profess it, and make such proud boasts of the truth and goodness of it, so fearful that it should be examined and looked into, and that their people should take the liberty to hear and read what can be said against it.

12. We persuade men to our religion by human and Christian ways, such as our Saviour and his apostles used, by urging men with the authority of God, and with arguments fetched from another world, the promise of eternal life and happiness, and the threatening of eternal death and misery, which are the proper arguments of religion, and which alone are fitted to work upon the minds and consciences of men. The terror and torture of death may make men hypocrites, and awe them to profess with their mouths what they do not believe in their hearts; but this is no proper means of converting the soul, and convincing the minds and consciences of men; and these violent and cruel ways cannot be denied to have been practised in the church of Rome, and set on foot by the authority of councils, and greatly countenanced and encouraged by popes themselves; witness the many crusades for the extirpation of heretics, the standing cruelties of their inquisition, their occasional massacres and persecutions, of which we have fresh instances in every age.

But these methods of conversion are a certain sign that they either distrust the truth and goodness of their cause, or else that they think truth and the arguments for it are of no force, when dragoons are their *ratio ultima*, the last reason which their cause relies upon, and the best and most effectual it can afford.

Again, we hold no doctrines in defiance of the senses of all mankind; such as is that of transubstantiation, which is now declared in the church of Rome to be a necessary article of faith, so that a man cannot be of that religion, unless he will renounce his senses, and believe against the clear verdict of them in a plain sensible matter: but after this, I do not understand how a man can believe any thing, because by this very thing he destroys and takes away the foundation of all certainty. If any man forbid me to believe what I see, I forbid him to believe any thing upon better and surer evidence. St. Paul saith, that “faith cometh by hearing;” but if I cannot rely upon the certainty of sense, then the means whereby faith is conveyed is uncertain; and we may say as St. Paul doth in another case, “then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.”

Lastly, (to mention no more particulars) as to several things used and practised in the church of Rome, we are on much the safer side, if we should happen to be mistaken about them, than they are, if they should be mistaken; for it is certainly lawful to read the Scriptures, and lawful to permit to the people the use of the Scriptures in a known tongue; otherwise we must condemn the apostles and the primitive church for allowing this liberty. It is certainly lawful to have the public prayers and service of God celebrated in a language which all that join in it can understand. It is certainly lawful to administer the sacrament of the Lord’s

177

178

supper to the people in both kinds; otherwise the Christian church would not have done it for a thousand years. It is certainly lawful not to worship images, not to pray to angels, or saints, or the blessed Virgin; otherwise the primitive church would not have forborne these practices for three hundred years, as is acknowledged by those of the church of Rome.

Suppose a man should pray to God only, and offer up all his prayers to him only by Jesus Christ, without making mention of any other mediator or intercessor with God for us, relying here in upon what the apostle says concerning our high-priest, Jesus the Son of God, ([Heb. vii. 25.](#)) that “he is able to save them to the uttermost, who come unto God by him,” *i. e.* by his mediation and intercession, “since he ever liveth to make intercession for them;” might not a man reasonably hope to obtain of God all the blessings he stands in need of by addressing himself only to him, in the name and by the intercession of that “one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus?” Nay, why may not a man reasonably think, that this is both a shorter and more effectual way to obtain our requests, than by turning ourselves to the angels and saints, and importuning them to solicit God for us? especially if we should order the matter so, as to make ten times more frequent addresses to these, than we do to God and our blessed Saviour; and, in comparison of the other, to neglect these. We cannot certainly think any more able to help us and do us good, than the great God of heaven and earth, “the God (as the psalmist styles him) that heareth prayers,” and therefore “unto him should all flesh come.” We cannot certainly think any intercessor so powerful and prevalent with God, as his only and dearly-beloved Son, offering up our prayers to God in heaven, by virtue of that most acceptable and invaluable sacrifice, which he offered to him on earth. We cannot surely think, that there is so much goodness any where as in God; that in any of the angels or saints, or even in the blessed mother of our Lord, there is more mercy and compassion for sinners, and a tenderer sense of our infirmities, than in the Son of God, “who is at the right hand of his Father, to appear in the presence of God for us?” We are sure that God always hears the petitions which we put up to him; and so does the Son of God, by whom we put them up to the Father, because he also is God, blessed for ever more. But we are not sure that the angels and saints hear our prayers, because we are sure that they are neither omniscient nor omnipresent; and we are not sure, nor probably certain, that our prayers are made known to them any other way, there being no revelation of God to that purpose. We are sure that God hath declared himself to be a “jealous God,” and that “he will not give his honour to another;” and we are not sure but that prayer is part of the honour which is due to God alone; and if it were not, we can hardly think but that God should be so far from being pleased with our making so frequent use of those other mediators and intercessors, and from granting our desires the sooner upon that account, that, on the contrary, we have reason to think he should be highly offended, when he himself is ready to receive all our petitions, and hath appointed a great mediator to that purpose, to see more addresses made to, and by the angels and saints, and blessed Virgin, than to himself by his

179

180

blessed Son: and to see the worship of himself almost justled out, by the devotion of people to saints and angels, and the blessed mother of our Lord; a thing which he never commanded, and which, so far as appears by Scripture, never came into his mind. I have been the longer upon this matter, to shew how unreasonable and needless, at the best, this more than half part of the religion of the church of Rome is; and how safely it may be let alone.

But now, on the other hand, if they be mistaken in these things, as we can demonstrate from Scripture they are, the danger is infinitely great on that side; for then they oppose an institution of Christ, who appointed the sacrament to be received in both kinds; and they involve themselves in a great danger of the guilt of idolatry, and our common Christianity in the scandal and reproach of it; and this without any necessity, since God hath required none of these things at our hands; and, after all the bustle which hath been made about them, the utmost they pretend (which yet they are not able to make good) is, that these things may lawfully be done; and at the same time they cannot deny, but that if the church had not enjoined them, they might lawfully be let alone. And can any thing be more unreasonable, than so pertinaciously to insist upon things so hard, I may say impossible, to be defended or excused, and which, by their own acknowledgment, are of no great weight and necessity: in which we are certainly safe in not doing them, if they should prove lawful; but if they do not prove so, they are in a most dangerous condition. So that here is certain safety on the one hand, and the danger of damnation on the other; which is as great odds as is possible.

And they must not tell us that they are in no danger, because they are infallible, and cannot be mistaken; they must prove that point a great deal better than they have yet done, before it can signify any thing either to our satisfaction or their safety.

I might have insisted more largely upon each of these particulars, any one of which is of weight to incline a man to that religion, which hath such an advantage on its side; but all of them together make so powerful an argument to an unprejudiced person, as must almost irresistibly determine his choice; for most of the particulars are so evident, that they cannot, upon the very mention and proposal of them, be denied to be clear advantages on our side.

And now, to use the words of St. Peter, “I testify unto you that this is the true grace of God wherein you stand;” that the reformed religion which we profess, and which by the goodness of God is by law established in this nation, is the true ancient Christianity, the faith which was at first delivered to the saints, and which is conveyed down to us in the writings of the apostles and the evangelists of our Lord and Saviour. “Remember therefore how ye have received and heard; and hold fast; for he is faithful that hath promised;” which is the second part of the text: the encouragement which the apostle gives us “to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering—he is faithful that hath promised” to give us his Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, to establish, strengthen, and settle us in the profession of it, to support and comfort us under all trials and temptations, “and to seal us up to the

day of redemption;” and “he is faithful that hath promised” to reward our constancy and fidelity to him and his truth, with “a crown of everlasting life and glory.” “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord;” “for he is faithful that hath promised,” and let us provoke one another to charity and good works, which are the great ornament and glory of any religion, and (t so much the more, because the day approacheth in which God will judge” the belief and lives of “men, by Jesus Christ;” not according to the imperious and uncharitable dictates of any church, but according to the gospel of his Son, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for ever.

Now the God of peace, which brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good word and work, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.



SERMON LXIII.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, A LIFE OF FAITH.

For we walk by faith, not by sight.—2 Cor. v. 7.

IN the latter part of the former chapter, the apostle declares what it was that was the great support of Christians under the persecutions and sufferings which befel them—viz. the assurance of a blessed resurrection to another life: (ver. 14.) “Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus;” “for which cause (saith he, ver. 16.) we faint not; but though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day;” that is, though our bodies, by reason of the hard ships and sufferings which we undergo, are continually decaying and declining; yet our minds grow every day more healthful and vigorous, and gain new strength and resolution, by contemplating the glory and reward of another world, and as it were feeding upon them by faith; “for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, whilst we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.”

And he resumes the same argument again at the beginning of this chapter: “For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;” that is, we are firmly persuaded, that when we die, we shall but exchange these earthly and perishing bodies, these houses of clay, for a heavenly mansion, which will never decay nor come to ruin: from whence he concludes, (ver. 6.) “Therefore we are always confident;” *θαῤῥοῦντες οὐν πάντοτε*, therefore whatever happens to us, we are always of good courage, and see no reason to be afraid of death: “knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord;” that is, since our continuance in the body is to our disadvantage, and while we live, we are absent from our happiness, and when we die we shall then enter upon the possession of it. That which gives us this confidence and good courage, is our faith; for though we be not actually possessed of this happiness which we speak of, yet we have a firm persuasion of the reality of it, which is enough to support our spirits, and keep up our courage under all afflictions and adversities whatsoever: (ver. 7.) “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

These words come in by way of parenthesis, in which the apostle declares in general, what is the swaying and governing principle of a Christian life; not only in case of persecution and affliction, but under all events, and in every condition of human life; and that is faith in opposition to sight and present enjoyment: “We walk by faith,” and “not by sight.” “We walk by faith:” whatever principle sways and governs a man’s life and actions, he is said to walk and live by it. And as here a Christian is said to “walk by faith,” so elsewhere the just is said to “live by faith.” Faith is the principle which animates all his resolutions and actions.

And “not by sight.” The word is *εἶδους*, which signifies, the thing itself in present view and possession, in opposition to a firm persuasion of things future and invisible. Sight is

the thing in hand, and faith the thing only in hope and expectation. Sight is a clear view and apprehension of things present and near to us, faith an obscure discovery and apprehension of things at a distance: so the apostle tells us, (1 Cor. xiii. 12.) “Now we see through a glass darkly;” this is faith; “but then face to face,” this is present sight, as one man sees another face to face: and thus likewise the same apostle distinguisheth betwixt hope and sight, (Rom. viii. 24, 25.) “Hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man sees, why doth he yet hope for it? but if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” Sight is the possession and enjoyment; faith is the firm persuasion and expectation of a thing; and this the apostle tells us was the governing principle of a Christian’s life; “For we walk by faith, and not by sight:” from which words I shall observe these three things.

185

I. That faith is the governing principle, and that which bears the great sway in the life and actions of a Christian: “we walk by faith;” that is, we order and govern our lives in the power and virtue of this principle.

II. Faith is a degree of assent inferior to that of sense. This is sufficiently intimated in the opposition betwixt faith and sight. He had said before, that “whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord;” and gives this as a reason and proof of our absence from the Lord, “for we walk by faith,” and “not by sight;” that is, whilst we are in the body, we do not see and enjoy, but believe and expect; if we were present with the Lord, then faith would cease, and be turned into sight; but though we have not that assurance of another world, which we shall have when we come to see and enjoy these things, yet we are firmly persuaded of them.

III. Notwithstanding faith be an inferior degree of assurance, yet it is a principle of sufficient power to govern our lives; “we walk by faith;” it is such an assurance as hath an influence on our lives.

186

I. That faith is the governing principle, and that which bears the great sway in the life and actions of a Christian. “We walk by faith;” that is, we order and govern our lives in the power and virtue of this principle. A Christian’s life consists in obedience to the will of God; that is, in a readiness to do what he commands, and in a willingness to suffer what he calls us to; and the great arguments and encouragements hereto, are such things, as are the objects of faith and not of sense; such things as are absent and future, and not present, and in possession. For instance, the belief of an invisible God, of a secret power and providence, that orders and governs all things, that can bless or blast us, and all our designs and undertakings, according as we demean ourselves towards him, and endeavour to approve ourselves to him; the persuasion of a secret aid and influence always ready at hand to keep us from evil, and to strengthen and assist us to that which is good; more especially the firm belief, and expectation of the happiness of heaven, and the glorious rewards of another world, which, though they be now at a distance, and invisible to us, yet being grounded upon the promise of God “that cannot lie,” shall certainly be made good.

And this faith, this firm persuasion of absent and invisible things, the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, was the great principle of the piety and virtue of good men from the beginning of the world. This he calls, (*chap. xi. ver. 1.*) the ὑπόστασις, or “the confident expectation of things hoped for, and the proof or evidence of things not seen,” viz. a firm persuasion of the being and providence of God, and of the truth and faithfulness of his promises. Such was the faith of Abel; he believed “that there was a God, and that he was a rewarder of those that faithfully serve him.” Such was the faith of Noah, who being warned of God, of things at a great distance, and not yet seen as yet, notwithstanding believed the Divine prediction concerning the flood, and prepared an ark. Such also was the faith of Abraham, concerning numerous posterity by Isaac, and the inheritance of the land of Canaan; and such likewise was the faith of Moses, as he did as firmly believe the invisible God, and the recompense of reward, as if he had beheld them with his eyes.

187

And of this recompense of reward, we Christians have a much clearer revelation, and much greater assurance, than former ages and generations had; and the firm belief and persuasion of this, is the great motive and argument to a holy life; “The hope which is set before us” of obtaining the happiness, and the fear of incurring the misery of another world. This made the primitive Christians, with so much patience to bear the sufferings and persecutions, with so much constancy to venture upon the dangers and inconveniences which the love of God and religion exposed them to.

Under the former dispensation of the law, though good men have received good hopes of the rewards of another life, yet these things were but obscurely revealed to them, and the great inducements to obedience were temporal rewards and punishments, tin promises of long life, and peace, and plenty, and prosperity, in that good land which God had given them, and the threatenings of war and famine, and pestilence, and being delivered into captivity. But now, under the gospel, “life and immortality are brought to light;” and the great arguments that bear sway with Christians, are the promises of everlasting life and the threatenings of eternal misery; and the firm belief and persuasion of these is now the great principle that governs the lives and actions of good men: for what will not men do, that are really persuaded, that as they do demean themselves in this world, it will fare with them in the other? “That the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal?” I proceed to the

188

Second observation, namely, that faith is a degree of assent inferior to that of sense. This is intimated in the opposition betwixt faith and sight; “We walk by faith, and not by sight;” that is, we believe these things, and are confidently persuaded of the truth of them, though we never saw them, and consequently cannot possibly have that degree of assurance concerning the joys of heaven, and the torments of hell, which those have who enjoy the one and endure the other.

There are different degrees of assurance concerning things, arising from the different degrees of evidence we have for them. The highest degree of evidence we have for any thing is our own sense and experience; and this is so firm and strong, that it is not to be shaken by the utmost pretence of a rational demonstration; men will trust their own senses and experience, against any subtilty of reason whatsoever: but there are inferior degrees of assurance concerning things, as the testimony and authority of persons every way credible: and this assurance we have in this state concerning the things of another world; we believe, with great reason, that we have the testimony of God concerning them, which is the highest kind of evidence in itself: and we have all the reasonable assurance we can desire that God hath testified these things; and this is the utmost assurance which things future, and at a distance are capable of.

189

But yet it is an unreasonable obstinacy to deny, that this falls very much short of that degree of assurance which those persons have concerning these things who are now in the other world, and have the sense and experience of these things. And this is not only intimated here in the text, in the opposition of faith and sight, but is plainly expressed in other texts of Scripture; (1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10.) “We know now but in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.” That degree of knowledge and assurance which we have in this life is very imperfect, in comparison to what we shall have hereafter; and (ver. 12.) “We now see, as through a glass darkly,” ἐν αἰνίγματι, as in a riddle, in which there is always a great deal of obscurity; all which expressions are certainly intended by way of abatement and diminution to the certainty of faith; because it is plain, that by “that which is in any part,” or imperfect, the apostle means faith and hope, which he tells us shall cease, “when that which is perfect,” meaning vision and sight, “is come.” We see likewise in experience, that the faith and hope of the best Christians in this life is accompanied with doubting concerning these things, and all doubting is a degree of uncertainty; but those blessed souls who are entered upon the possession of glory and happiness, and those miserable wretches who lie groaning under the wrath of God and the severity of his justice, cannot possibly, if they would, have any doubt concerning the truth and reality of these things.

190

But however contentious men may dispute against common sense, this is so plain a truth, that I will not labour in the farther proof of it; nor indeed is it reasonable, while we are in this state, to expect that degree of assurance concerning the rewards and punishments of another life, which the sight and sensible experience of them would give us; and that upon these two accounts:

1. Because our present state will not admit it; and,
2. If it would, it is not reasonable we should have it.

1. Our present state will not admit it. For while we are in this world, it is not possible we should have that sensible experiment and trial how things are in the other. The things of the other world are remote from us, and far out of our sight, and we cannot have any

experimental knowledge of them, till we ourselves enter into that state. Those who are already passed into it, know how things are; those happy souls who live in the reviving presence of God, and are possessed of those joys which we cannot now conceive, understand these things in another manner, and have a more perfect assurance concerning them, than it is possible for any man to have in this world; and those wretched and miserable spirits who feel the vengeance of God, and are plunged into the horrors of eternal darkness, do believe upon irresistible evidence, and have other kind of convictions of the reality of that state, and the insupportable misery of it, than any man is capable of in this world.

2. If our present state would admit of this high degree of assurance, it is not fit and reasonable that we should have it. Such an overpowering evidence would quite take away the virtue of faith, and much lessen that of obedience. Put the case that every man, some considerable time before his departure out of this life, were permitted to visit the other world, to assure him how things are there, to view the mansions of the blessed, and to survey the dark and loathsome prisons of the damned, to hear the lamentable outcries of miserable and despairing souls, and to see the inconceivable anguish and torments they are in; after this, what virtue would it be in any man to believe these things? he that had been there and seen them, could not disbelieve them if he would. Faith in this case would not be virtue, but necessity; and therefore it is observable, that our Saviour doth not pronounce them blessed, who believed his resurrection, upon the forcible evidence of their own senses, “but blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” They might be happy in the effects of that faith, but there is no praise, no reward belongs to that faith which is wrought in man by so violent and irresistible an evidence. It was the great commendation of Abraham’s faith, that “against hope he believed in hope,” he believed the promise of God concerning a thing in itself very improbable: but it is no commendation at all to believe the things which we have seen, because they admit of no manner of dispute; no objection can be offered to shake our assent, unless we will run to the extremity of scepticism; for if we will believe any thing at all, we must yield to the evidence of sense. This does so violently enforce our assent, that there can be no virtue in such a faith.

And as this would take away the virtue of faith, so it would very much lessen that of our obedience. It is hardly to be imagined, that any man who had seen the blessed condition of good men in another world, and had been an eye-witness of the intolerable torments of sinners, should ever be tempted knowingly to do any thing that would deprive him of that happiness, or bring him into that place of torment. Such a sight could not choose but affect a man as long as he lived; and leave such impressions upon his mind, of the indispensable necessity of a holy life, and of the infinite danger of a wicked course, that we might sooner believe that all the men in the world should conspire to kill one another, than that such a man, by consenting to any deliberate act of sin, should wilfully throw himself into those flames: no, his mind would be continually haunted with those furies he had seen tormenting



sinners in another world, and the fearful shrieks and outcries of miserable souls would be perpetually ringing in his ears; and the man would have so lively and terrible an imagination of the danger he was running himself upon, that no temptation would be strong enough to conquer his fears, and to make him careless of his life and actions, after he had once seen how “fearful a thing it was to fall into the hands of the living God:” so that in this case, the reason of men’s obedience would be so violent, that the virtue of it must be very little; for what praise is due to any man, not to do those things which none but a perfect madman would do? for certainly that man must be besides himself, that could by any temptation be seduced to live a wicked life, after he had seen the state of good and bad men in the other world; the glorious rewards of holiness and virtue, and the dismal event of a vicious and sinful course. God hath designed this life for the trial of our virtue, and the exercise of our obedience; but there would hardly be any place for this, if there were a free and easy passage for us into the other world, to see the true state of things there. What argument would it be of any man’s virtue to forbear sinning after he had been in hell, and seen the miserable end of sinners? But I proceed to the

Third and last observation; namely, that notwithstanding faith be an inferior degree of assent, yet it is a principle of sufficient force and power to govern our lives: “We walk by faith.” Now that the belief of any thing may have its effect upon us, it is requisite that we be satisfied of these two things.

1. Of the certainty; and, 2. Of the great concernment of the thing. For if the thing be altogether uncertain, it will not move us at all; we shall do nothing towards the obtaining of it, if it be good; nor for the avoiding and preventing of it, if it be evil: and if we are certain of the thing, yet if we apprehend it to be of no great moment and concernment, we shall be apt to slight it, as not worth our regard. But the rewards and punishments of an other world, which the gospel propounds to our faith, are fitted to work upon our minds, both upon account of the certainty and concernment of them. For,

1. We have sufficient assurance of the truth of these things, as much as we are well capable of in this state. Concerning things future and at a distance, we have the dictates of our reason arguing us into this persuasion, from the consideration of the justice of the Divine Providence, and from the promiscuous and unequal administration of things in this world; from whence wise men in all ages have been apt to conclude, that there will be another state of things after this life, wherein rewards and punishments shall be equally distributed. We have the general consent of mankind in this matter: and to assure us that these reasonings are true, we have a most credible revelation of these things, God having sent his Son from heaven to declare it to us, and given us a sensible demonstration of the thing, in his resurrection from the dead, and his visible ascension into heaven; so that there is no kind of evidence wanting, that the thing is capable of, but only our own sense and experience of these things, of which we are not capable in this present state. And there is no objection

against all this, but what will bring all things into uncertainty, which do not come under our senses, and which we ourselves have not seen.

Nor is there any considerable interest to hinder men from the belief of these things, or to make them hesitate about them. For as for the other world, if at last there should prove to be no such thing, our condition after death will be the same with the condition of those who disbelieve these things; because all will be extinguished by death: but if things fall out otherwise (as most undoubtedly they will) and our souls after this life do pass into a state of ever lasting happiness or misery, then our great interest plainly lies, in preparing ourselves for this state; and there is no other way to secure the great concernments of another world, but by believing those things to be true, and governing all the actions of our lives by this belief. For as for the interests of this life, they are but short and transitory, and consequently of no consideration in comparison of the things which are eternal; and yet (as I have often told you) setting aside the case of persecution for religion, there is no real interest of this world, but it may be as well promoted and pursued to as great advantage, nay, usually to a far greater, by him that believes these things, and lives accordingly, than by any other person: for the belief of the rewards and punishments of another world, is the greatest motive and encouragement to virtue; and as all vice is naturally attended with some temporal inconvenience, so the practice of all Christian virtues doth in its own nature tend both to the welfare of particular persons, and to the peace and prosperity of mankind.

But that which ought to weigh very much with us, is, that we have abundantly more assurance of the recompence of another world, than we have of many things in this world, which yet have a greater influence upon our actions, and govern the lives of the most prudent and considerate men. Men generally hazard their lives and estates upon terms of greater uncertainty than the assurance which we have of another world. Men venture to take physic upon probable grounds of the integrity and skill of their physician; and yet the want of either of these may hazard their lives: and men take physic upon greater odds; for it certainly causeth pain and sickness, and doth but uncertainly procure and recover health; the patient is sure to be made sick, but not certain to be made well; and yet the danger of being worse, if not of dying, on the one hand, and the hope of success and recovery on the other, make this hazard and trouble reasonable. Men venture their whole estates to places which they never saw; and that there are such places, they have only the concurrent testimony and agreement of men; nay, perhaps have only spoken with them that have spoken with those that have been there. No merchant ever insisted upon the evidence of a miracle to be wrought, to satisfy him that there were such places as the East and West Indies, before he would venture to trade thither: and yet this assurance God hath been pleased to give the world of a state beyond the grave, and of a blessed immortality in another life.

Now, what can be the reason that so slender evidence, so small a degree of assurance, will serve to encourage men to seek after the things of this world with great care and industry;



and yet a great deal more will not suffice to put them effectually upon looking after the great concerns of another world, which are infinitely more considerable? No other reason of this can be given, but that men are partial in their affections towards these things. It is plain they have not the same love for God and religion, which they have for this world and the advantages of it; and therefore it is, that a less degree of assurance will engage them to seek after the one, than the other; and yet the reason is much stronger on the other side: for the greater the benefit and good is, which is offered to us, we should be the more eager to seek after it, and should be content to venture upon less probability. Upon excessive odds a man would venture upon very small hopes; for a mighty advantage, a man would be content to run a great hazard of his labour and pains upon little assurance. Where a man's life is concerned, every suspicion of danger will make a man careful to avoid it. And will nothing affright men from hell, unless God carry them thither, and shew them the place of torments, and the flames of that fire which shall never be quenched?

197

I do not speak this, as if these things had not abundant evidence; I have shewn that they have; but to convince men how unreasonable and cruelly partial they are about the concerns of their souls, and their eternal happiness.

2. Supposing these things to be real and certain, they are of infinite concernment to us. For what can concern us more, than that eternal and, unchangeable state, in which we must be fixed and abide for ever? If so vast a concern will not move us, and have no influence upon the government of our lives and actions, we do not deserve the name of reasonable creatures. What consideration can be set before men, who are not touched with the sense of so great an interest, as that of our happy or miserable being to all eternity? Can we be so solicitous and careful about the concernment of a few days; and is it nothing to us what becomes of us for ever? Are we so tenderly concerned to avoid poverty and disgrace, persecution and suffering in this world; and shall we not much more "flee from the wrath which is to come," and endeavour "to escape the damnation of hell?" Are the slight and transitory enjoyments of this world worth so much thought and care? and is an eternal inheritance in the heavens not worth the looking after? As there is no proportion betwixt the things which are temporal, and the things which are eternal; so we ought in all reason to be infinitely more concerned for the one than for the other.

The proper inference from all this discourse is, that we would endeavour to strengthen in ourselves this great principle of a Christian life, the belief of another world, by representing to ourselves all those arguments and considerations which may confirm us in this persuasion. The more reasonable our faith is, and the surer grounds it is built upon, the more firm it will abide, when it comes to the trial, against all the impressions of temptations, and assaults of persecution. If our faith of another world be only a strong imagination of these things, "so soon as tribulation ariseth, it will wither; because it hath no root in itself." Upon this account the apostle so often exhorts Christians, to endeavour "to be established in the truth,

198

to be rooted and grounded in the faith,” that, when persecution comes, they may “continue steadfast and unmoveable.” The firmness of our belief will have a great influence upon our lives: if we be “steadfast and unmoveable” in our persuasion of these things, we shall be “abundant in the work of the Lord.” The apostle joins these together: (1 Cor. xv. 58.) “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.” “Steadfast and unmoveable,” in what? In the belief of a blessed resurrection; which the more firmly any man believes, the more active and industrious will he be in the work and service of God.

And that our faith may have a constant and powerful influence upon our lives, we should frequently revolve in our minds the thoughts of another world, and of that vast eternity which we shall shortly launch into. The great disadvantage of the arguments fetched from another world, is this—that these things are at a distance from us, and not sensible to us, and therefore we are not apt to be so affected with them; present and sensible things weigh down all other considerations. And therefore, to balance this disadvantage, we should often have these thoughts in our minds, and inculcate upon ourselves the certainty of these things, and the infinite concernment of them: we should reason thus with ourselves—If these things be true, and will certainly be, why should they not be to me, as if they were actually present? Why should not I always live, as if heaven were open to my view, and “I saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God,” with crowns of glory in his hands, ready to be set upon the heads of all those who continue faithful and obedient to him? And why should I not be as much afraid to commit any sin, as if “hell were naked before me,” and I saw the astonishing miseries of the damned?

Thus we should, by frequent meditation, represent these great things to ourselves, and bring them nearer to our minds, and oppose, to the present temptations of sense, the great and endless happiness and misery of the other world. And if we would but thus exercise ourselves about “the things which are not seen,” and make eternity familiar to ourselves, by a frequent meditation of it, we should be very little moved with present and sensible things; we should walk and live by faith, as the men of the world do by sense, and be more serious and earnest in the pursuit of our great and everlasting interest, than they are in the pursuit of sensual enjoyments; and should make it the great business of this present and temporal life, to secure a future and eternal happiness.

SERMON LXIV.

THE DANGER OF APOSTACY FROM THE TRUE RELIGION.

But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.—Heb. x. 38.

THE great design of this Epistle (whoever was the author of it, which I shall not now inquire into) is plainly this—to confirm the Jews, who were but newly converted to Christianity, in the steadfast profession of that faith which they had embraced, and to arm them against that temptation which Christians were then exposed to, viz. the fierce and cruel persecutions which threatened those of that profession.

And to this purpose he represents to them the excellency of that religion, above any other former revelation, that God had made of himself to the world, both in respect of the author and revealer of it, who was the Son of God, and in respect of the revelation itself; which, as it contains better and more perfect directions for a good life, so likewise more powerful and effectual motives thereto, better promises, and more terrible threatenings, than were annexed to the observation of the Jewish law, or clearly and certainly discoverable by the light of nature. From these considerations, he earnestly persuades them, all along throughout this Epistle, to continue constant in the profession of this faith, and not to suffer themselves to be frightened out of it by the terror of persecution: ([chap. ii. ver. 1.](#)) “Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip;” and ([chap. iv. 1.](#)) “Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should come short of it;” and ([ver. 23.](#) of this chapter), “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering;” and to encourage them to constancy, he sets before them the glorious rewards and recompences of the gospel, ([ver. 35.](#)) “Cast not away therefore your confidence,” τὴν παρρησίαν ὑμῶν, “your free and open profession of Christianity, which hath great recompence of reward.”

And then, on the other hand, to deter them from apostacy from this profession, he represents to them the horrible danger of it here in the text: “But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”

I shall briefly explain the words, and then prose cute that which I mainly intended in them. “If any man draw back,” Ἐὰν ὑποστείληται: these words, with the foregoing, are cited out of the prophet Habakkuk, ([chap. ii. 3, 4.](#)) and they are cited by the apostle according to the translation of the LXX. which differs somewhat from the Hebrew; and the difference ariseth from the various readings of the Hebrew word, which is rendered by the LXX. “to draw back;” but by the change of a letter, signifies “to be lifted up,” as we render it in the prophet; but however that be, the apostle follows the translation of the LXX. and accommodates it to his purpose. Ἐὰν ὑποστείληται, “if any man draw back;” the word signifies to keep back, to withdraw, to sneak and slink away out of fear, to fail or faint in any enterprise: and

thus this word is rendered in the New Testament. ([Acts xx. 20.](#)) οὐδέν ὑποεστειλάμην, “I did not withhold,” or “keep back any thing that was profitable for you;” and so it is said of St. Peter, ([Gal. ii. 12.](#)) ὑπέστελλεν ἑαυτὸν, “he slunk away,” or “withdrew himself, fearing them of the circumcision;” and the Hebrew word which is here rendered by the LXX. “to draw back,” is rendered elsewhere ἐκλείπειν, which is “to fail,” or “faint;” from all which it appears, that by “drawing back,” the apostle here means, men’s quitting their profession of Christianity, and slinking out of it, for fear of suffering for it.

“My soul shall have no pleasure in him:” these words are plainly a μείωσις, and less is said than is meant; for the meaning is, that God will be extremely displeased with them, and punish them very severely. The like figure to this you have [Psal. v. 4](#): “Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness;” which in the next verse is explained, by his hatred and detestation of those who are guilty of it, “Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity.” So that the plain sense of the words is this, that apostacy from the profession of God’s true religion, is a thing highly provoking to him, and will be most severely punished by him.

In speaking to this argument, I shall consider these four things.

I. The nature of this sin of apostacy from religion.

II. The several steps and degrees of it.

III. The heinousness of it.

IV. The great danger of it, and the terrible punishment it exposeth men to. And when I have spoken to these, I shall conclude all with a short exhortation, “to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”

I. We will consider the nature of this sin of apostacy from religion: and it consists in forsaking or renouncing the profession of religion, whether it be by an open declaration in words, or a virtual declaration of it by our actions; for it comes all to one in the sight of God, and the different manner of doing it does not alter the nature of the thing. He indeed that renounceth religion by an open declaration in words, offers the greatest and boldest defiance to it; but he is likewise an apostate, who silently withdraws himself from the profession of it, who quits it for his interest, or for fear disowns it and sneaks out of the profession of it, and forsakes the communion of those who own it. Thus Demas was an apostate, in quitting Christianity for some worldly interest; “Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world,” saith St. Paul, ([2 Tim. iv. 10.](#))

And those whom our Saviour describes, ([Matt. xiii. 20, 21.](#)) “who received the word into stony ground,” were apostates out of fear—“they heard the word, and with joy received it; but having no root in themselves, they endured but for a while, and when tribulation and persecution ariseth because of the word, presently they fall off.”

And there is likewise a partial apostacy from Christianity, when some fundamental article of it is denied, whereby, in effect and by consequence, the whole Christian faith is overthrown. Of this Hymeneus and Philetus were guilty, of whom the apostle says, that they

“erred concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection was past already, and thereby overthrew the faith of some;” (2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.) that is, they turned the resurrection into an allegory, and did thereby really destroy a most fundamental article of the Christian religion.

So that to make a man an apostate, it is not necessary that a man should solemnly renounce his baptism and declare Christianity to be false; there are several other ways whereby a man may bring himself under this guilt; as by a silent quitting of his religion, and withdrawing himself from the communion of all that profess it; by denying an essential doctrine of Christianity; by undermining the great end and design of it, by teaching doctrines which directly tend to encourage men in impenitence, and a wicked course of life; nay, to authorize all manner of impiety and vice, in telling men that whatever they do they cannot sin; for which the primitive Christians did look upon the Gnostics as no better than apostates from Christianity; and though they retained the name of Christians, yet not to be truly and really so. And there is likewise a partial apostacy from the Christian religion; of which I shall speak under the

II. Second head I proposed, which was, to consider the several sorts and degrees of apostacy. The high est of all is, the renouncing and forsaking of Christianity, or of some essential part of it, which is a virtual apostacy from it: but there are several tendencies towards this, which they who are guilty of, are in some degree guilty of this sin. As,

1. Indifferency in religion, and want of all sort of concernment for it; when a man, though he never quitted his religion, yet is so little concerned for it, that a very small occasion or temptation would make him do it; he is contented to be reckoned in the number of those who profess it, so long as it is the fashion, and he finds no great inconvenience by it; but is so indifferent in his mind about it, (like Gallio “who minded none of those things”) that he can turn himself into any other shape, when his interest requires it; so that though he never actually deserted it, yet he is a kind of apostate in the preparation and disposition of his mind: and to such persons, that title which Solomon gives to some may fitly enough be applied—they are “backsliders in heart.”

2. Another tendency to this sin, and a great degree of it, is withdrawing from the public marks and testimonies of the profession of religion, by forsaking the assemblies of Christians for the worship and service of God; to withdraw ourselves from those, for fear of danger or suffering, is a kind of denial of our religion. And this was the case of some in the apostles time, when persecution grew hot, and the open profession of Christianity dangerous; to avoid this danger, many appeared not in the assemblies of Christians, for fear of being observed and brought into trouble for it. This the apostle taxeth some for in this chapter, and speaketh of it as a letting go our profession, and a kind of deserting of Christianity: (ver. 23. 25.) “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering—not forsaking the assem-

204

205

bling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.” He doth not say they had quitted their profession, but they had but a loose hold of it, and were silently stealing away from it.

3. A light temper of mind, which easily receives impressions from those who lie; in wait to deceive and seduce men from the truth. When men are not well rooted and established in religion, they are apt to be inveigled by the crafty insinuations of seducers, to be moved with every wind of doctrine, and to be easily shaken in mind by every trifling piece of sophistry that is confidently obruded upon them for a weighty argument.

Now this is a temper of mind which disposeth men to apostacy, and renders them an easy prey to every one that takes a pleasure and a pride in making proselytes. It is true, indeed, a man should always have a mind ready to entertain truth, when it is fairly proposed to him; but the main things of religion are so plainly revealed, and lie so obvious to every ordinary capacity, that every man may discern them; and when he hath once entertained them, ought to be steadfast and unmoveable in them, and not suffer himself to be whiffled out of them by an insignificant noise about the infallibility of a visible church; much less ought he to be moved by any man’s uncharitableness and positiveness in damning all that are not of his mind.

There are some things so very plain, not only in Scripture, but to the common reason of mankind, that no subtilty of discourse, no pretended authority, or even infallibility of any church, ought to stagger us in the least about them; as, that we ought not, or cannot believe any thing in direct contradiction to sense and reason; that the people ought to read and study the Holy Scriptures, and to serve God and pray to him in a language which they understand; that they ought to receive the sacrament as our Saviour instituted and appointed it—that is in both kinds; that it can neither be our duty, nor lawful, to do that which God hath forbidden, as he hath done the worship of images in the second commandment, as plainly as words can do it. Upon any one of these points, a man would fix his foot, and stand alone against the whole world.

4. Another degree of apostacy is, a departure from the purity of the Christian doctrine and worship in a gross and notorious manner. This is a partial, though not a total apostacy from the Christian religion; and there have been, and still are some in the world, who are justly charged with this degree of apostacy from religion; namely, such as, though they retain and profess the belief of all the articles of the Christian faith, and worship the only true God, and him whom he hath sent, Jesus Christ, yet have greatly perverted the Christian religion, by superinducing and adding new articles of faith, and gross corruptions and superstitions in worship, and imposing upon men the belief and practice of these as necessary to salvation. And St. Paul is my warrant for this censure, who chargeth those who added to the Christian religion, the necessity of circumcision, and observing the law of Moses, and thereby perverted the gospel of Christ, as guilty, in some degree, of apostacy from Christianity; for he calls it preaching another gospel, (*Gal. i. 7, 8.*) “There be some that trouble you, and would pervert

206

207

the gospel of Christ: but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you, than that which we have preached, let him be accursed.” And those who were seduced by these teachers, he chargeth them with having in some sort quitted the gospel of Christ and embraced another gospel: (ver. 6.) “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel.” So that they who thus pervert and corrupt the Christian doctrine or worship, are plainly guilty of a partial apostacy from Christianity; and they who quit the purity of the Christian doctrine and worship, and go over to the communion of those who have thus perverted Christianity, are in a most dangerous state, and, in the judgment of St. Paul, are in some sort removed “unto another gospel.” I shall now proceed, in the



III. Third place, to consider the heinousness of this sin. And it will appear to be very heinous, if we consider what an affront it is to God, and how great a contempt of him. When God hath revealed his will to mankind, and sent no less person than his own Son out of his own bosom to do it, and hath given such testimonies to him from heaven, by signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost; when he hath transmitted down to us so faithful a record of this revelation, and of the miracles wrought to confirm it in the books of the Holy Scriptures; and when we ourselves have so often declared our firm belief of this revelation: yet, after all this, to fall from it, and deny it, or any part of it, or to embrace doctrines and practices plainly contrary to it; this certainly cannot be done without the greatest affront and contempt of the testimony of God himself; for it is in effect, and by interpretation, to declare, that either we do not believe what God says, or that we do not fear what he can do. So St. John tells us (1 Ep. v. 10.), “He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record which God hath given of his Son.”

And all along in this Epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle sets himself to aggravate this sin, calling it “an evil heart of unbelief to depart from the living God;” (chap. iii. 12.) And he frequently calls it so, κατ’ ἑξοχήν, and by way of eminency, as being of all sins the greatest and most heinous: (Chap. x. 26.) “If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth.” That the apostle here speaks of the sin of apostacy, is plain from the whole scope of his discourse; for having exhorted them before, (ver. 23.) “to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together,” he immediately adds, “for if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth;” that is, if we fall off from Christianity after we have embraced it. And (chap. xii. 1.) “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us;” that is, the great sin of apostacy from religion, to which they were then so strongly tempted by that fierce persecution which attended it; and therefore he adds, “let us run with patience the race which is set before us;” that is, let us arm ourselves with patience against the sufferings we are like to meet with in our Christian course. To oppose the truth, and resist the clear evidence of it, is a great sin, and men are justly condemned for it. (John iii. 19.) “This is the condemnation, that light is



come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light:” but to desert the truth after we have been convinced of it, to fall off from the profession of it after we have embraced it, is a much greater sin. Opposition to the truth, may proceed in a great measure from ignorance and prejudice, which is a great extenuation; and therefore St. Paul tells us, that, after all his violent persecution of Christianity, he found mercy because he .did it “ignorantly and in unbelief.” To revolt from the truth after we have made profession of it; after we have “known the way of righteousness, to turn from the holy commandment;” this is the great aggravation. The apostle makes wilfulness an usual ingredient into the sin of apostacy, “If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth.”

And as this sin is one of the greatest affronts to God, so it is the highest and most effectual disparagement of religion: for it is not so much considered, what the enemies of religion speak against it, because they speak evil of the things which they know not, and of which they have had no trial and experience; but he that falls off from religion, after he hath made profession of it, declares to the world that he hath tried it, and dislikes it, and pretends to leave it, because he hath not found that truth and goodness in it which he expected, and, upon long experience of it, sees reason to prefer another religion before it. So that nothing can be more despiteful to religion than this, and more likely to bring it into contempt; and, therefore, the apostle (ver. 29, of this chapter) calls it a” trampling underfoot the Son of God, and making the blood of the covenant a profane thing, and offering despite to the Spirit of grace:” for we cannot put a greater scorn upon the Son of God, who revealed this doctrine to the world; nor upon his blood, which was shed to confirm and seal the truth of it; and upon the Holy Ghost, who came down in miraculous gifts to give testimony to it; than, notwithstanding all this, to renounce this doctrine, and to forsake this religion. But we shall yet farther see the heinousness of this sin, in the terrible punishment it exposeth men to; which was the

IV. Fourth and last thing I was to consider. And this is represented to us in a most terrible manner, not only in this Epistle, but in other places of Scripture. This sin is placed in the highest rank of pardonable sins, and next to the sin against the Holy Ghost, which our Saviour declares to be absolutely unpardonable. And indeed the Scripture speaks very doubtfully of the pardonableness of this sin, as being near akin to that against the Holy Ghost, being said to be an “offering despite to the Spirit of grace.” In the sixth chapter of this Epistle, ver. 4, 5, 6, the apostle speaks in a very severe manner concerning the state of those, who had apostatized from Christianity, after the solemn profession of it in baptism: “It is impossible for those who were once enlightened (that is, baptized) and have tasted of the heavenly gift, (that is regeneration) and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost; and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come (that is, have been instructed in the Christian religion, and endowed with the miraculous powers of the gospel age, for the Jews used to call the age of the Messias, *seculum futurum*, or “the world to come”); it is impossible

210

211

for those to be renewed again unto repentance;” where the least we can understand by *impossible* is, that it is extremely difficult; for so the word impossible is sometimes used; as when our Saviour says, “it is impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.” And ([chap. x. 26.](#)) the apostle, speaking of the same thing, says, “if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin;” that is, they who renounce Christianity, since they reject the only way of expiation, “there remains no more sacrifice for their sins.”

St. Peter likewise expresseth himself very severely concerning this sort of persons, ([2 Epist. ii. 20, 21.](#)) “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, (that is, after they have been brought from heathenism to Christianity) they are entangled therein again, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.” He seems loath to say how sad the condition of such persons is; but this he tells them, that it is much worse than when they were heathens before; and he gives the reason: “for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” And St. John calls this sin of apostacy, the “sin unto death;” and though he do not forbid Christians to pray for them that are guilty of it, yet he will not say, that they should pray for them: ([1 Epist. v. 16.](#)) “If any man see his brother sin a sin, which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death: there is a sin unto death; I do not say, that he shall pray for it.” Now that by this sin and death, the apostle means apostacy from the Christian religion to idolatry, is most probable from what follows: ([ver. 18.](#)) “We know that whosoever is born of God, sinneth not (that is, this sin unto death); but he that is begotten of God, keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not (that is, he is preserved from idolatry, unto which the devil had seduced so great a part of mankind); and we know that we are of God, and the whole world, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κέῖται, is under the dominion of that wicked one, (viz. the devil, whom the Scripture elsewhere calls the God of this world;) and we know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true:” (that is, hath brought us from the worship of false gods to the knowledge and worship of the true God;) and then he concludes, “Little children keep yourselves from idols:” which caution hath no manner of dependance upon what went before, unless we understand the “sin unto death” in this sense; and it is the more probable, that it is so to be understood, because apostacy is so often in this Epistle to the Hebrews called “the sin,” by way of eminency, as it is here by St. John: “Whosoever is born of God, sinneth not.”

So that, at the very best, the Scripture speaks doubtfully of the pardon of this sin; however, that the punishment of it, unrepented of, shall be very dreadful. It seems to be mildly expressed here in the text, “If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him:” but it is the more severe, for being expressed so mildly, according to the intention of the figure

212

213

here used: and therefore, in the next words, this expression, of God's taking no pleasure in such persons, is explained by their utter ruin and perdition: "But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition." And in several parts of this Epistle, there are very severe passages to this purpose: (*chap. ii. 2, 3.*) "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" And (*chap. x. 26, 27.*) "If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversary. He that despised Moses law, died without mercy, under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, that hath trodden under foot the Son of God? &c. For we know him who hath said, Vengeance is mine, I will recompense, saith the Lord." And, again, "the Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." What can be more severe and terrible than these expressions?

I will mention but one text more, and that is *Rev. xxi. 8.* where, in the catalogue of great sinners, those who apostatize from religion, out of fear, do lead the van: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things, (which is elsewhere in this book expressed by continuing "faithful unto the death;") and I will be his God, and he shall be my son: but the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake, which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." "The fearful, and unbelievers, and liars;" that is, they who out of fear relapse into infidelity, and abide not in the truth, shall be reckoned in the first rank of offenders, and be punished accordingly.

And thus I have done with the four things I propounded to speak to from these words: the nature of apostacy; the several steps and degrees of it; the heinous nature of this sin; the danger of it, and the terrible punishment it exposeth men to.

And is there any need now, to exhort men to hold fast the profession of faith, when the danger of drawing back is so evident, and so terrible? or is there any reason and occasion for it? certainly there is no great danger amongst us, of men's apostatizing from Christianity, and turning Jews, or Turks, or heathens: I do not think there is, but yet, for all that, we are not free from the danger of apostacy; there is great danger, not of men's apostatizing from one religion to another, but from religion to infidelity and atheism; and of this worst kind of apostacy of all other, I wish the age we live in had not afforded us too many instances. It is greatly to be lamented, that among those who have professed Christianity, any should be found that should make it their endeavour to undermine the great principles of all religion—the belief of a God and his providence; and of the immortality of the souls of men; and a state of rewards and punishments after this life; and to bring the most serious matters in the world into contempt, and to turn them into jest and raillery. This is not only a renouncing of Christianity, the religion which God hath revealed, but even of the religion which

is born with us, and the principles and notions which God hath planted in every man's mind: this is an impiety of the first magnitude, and not to be mentioned without grief and horror; and this, it is to be feared, hath had a great hand in those great calamities which our eyes have seen; and I pray God it do not draw down still more and greater judgments upon this nation: but I hope there are none here that need to be cautioned against this horrible impiety, and highest degree of apostacy from the living God. That which people are much more in danger of, is apostacy from the purity of the Christian doctrine and worship, so happily recovered by a regular reformation, and established among us by all the authority that laws, both ecclesiastical and civil, can give it; and which, in truth, is no other than the ancient and primitive Christianity; I say, a defection from this, to those gross errors and superstitions, which the reformation had pared off, and freed us from. I do not say, that this is a total apostacy from Christianity; but it is a partial apostacy and defection, and a very dangerous one; and that those, who, after they have received the knowledge of the truth, fall off from it into those errors and corruptions, are highly guilty before God, and their condition certainly worse, and more dangerous, than of those who are brought up in those errors and superstitions, and never knew better; for there are terrible threatenings in Scripture against those who fall away from the truth, which they once embraced, and were convinced of. "If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth," &c. and "if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

216

God considers ever man's advantages and opportunities of knowledge, and their disadvantages likewise; and makes all reasonable allowances for them; and for men to continue in the errors they have been always brought up in; or, which comes much to one, in errors which they were led into by principles early infused into them, before they were in any measure competent judges of those matters; I say, for such persons to continue in those errors, and to oppose and reject the contrary truths, against which, by their education, they have received so strong and violent a prejudice, this may be in a great degree excusable, and find pardon with God, upon a general repentance for all sins, both known and unknown, and can not be reasonably charged with the guilt of this great sin of apostacy: but not to abide in the truth, after we have entertained and professed it, having sufficient means and advantages of knowing it, hath no excuse.

I would not be rash in condemning particular persons of any society or communion of Christians, provided they be sincerely devout, and just, and sober to the best of their knowledge; I had much rather leave them to God, whose mercies are great, than to pass an uncharitable censure upon them, as to their eternal state and condition: but the case is far otherwise where the opportunities of knowledge are afforded to men, and men love darkness rather than light; for they who have the means and advantages of knowing their Master's will, are answerable to God as if they had known it; because if they had not been grossly negligent, and wanting to themselves, they might have known it.

217

And this, I fear, is the case of the generality of those who have been bred up to years of consideration and choice in the reformed religion, and forsake it; because they do it without sufficient reason, and there are invincible objections against it. They do it without sufficient reason; because every one amongst us knows, or may know upon very little inquiry, that we hold all the articles of the faith which are contained in the ancient creeds of the Christian church, and into which all Christians are baptized; that we inculcate upon men the necessity of a good life, and of sincere repentance, and perfect contrition for our sins, such as is followed with real reformation and amendment of our lives, and that, without this, no man can be saved by any device whatsoever.

Now what reason can any man have, to question whether he may be saved in that faith which saved the first Christians, and by believing the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed, though he cannot swallow the twelve articles which are added to it in the creed of Pope Pius IV. every one of which, besides many and great corruptions and superstitions in worship, are so many and invincible objections against the communion of the Roman church, as I could particularly shew, if it had not been already done, in so many learned treatises upon this argument? What is there then, that should move any reasonable man to forsake the communion of our church, and to quit the reformed religion?

There are three things chiefly with which they endeavour to amuse and art right weaker minds.

1. A great noise of infallibility, which, they tell us, is so excellent a means to determine and put an end to all differences. To which I shall at present only object this prejudice; that there are not wider and hotter d inferences among us, about any thing whatsoever, than are amongst them, about this admirable means of ending all differences; as, where this infallibility is seated, that men may know how to have recourse to it, for the ending of differences.

2. They endeavour to frighten men with the danger of schism. But every man knows, that the guilt of schism lies at their door, who impose sinful articles of communion; and not upon them, who, for fear of sinning against God, cannot submit to those articles; which we have done, and are still ready to make good, to be the case betwixt us and the church of Rome. But,

3. The terrible engine of all is, their positive and confident damning of all that live and die out of the communion of their church. This I hate fully spoken to upon another occasion, and therefore shall only say at present, that every man ought to have better thoughts of God, than to believe, that he, who delighteth not in the death of sinners, and would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth, will confirm the sentence of such uncharitable men, as take upon them to condemn men for those things, for which our Saviour in his gospel condemns no man. And of all things in the world, one would think that the uncharitableness of any church should be an argument to no man to run into its communion.

I shall conclude with the apostle's exhortation, [verse the 23d](#) of this chapter; "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; and provoke one another to charity and good works; and so much the more, because the day approacheth, in which God will judge the faith and lives of men by Jesus Christ, according to his gospel/"



SERMON LXV.

OF SELF-DENIAL AND SUFFERING FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.—Matt. xvi. 24.

“**T**HEN said Jesus to his disciples;” that is, upon occasion of his former discourse with them, wherein he had acquainted them with his approaching passion, that he must shortly go up to Jerusalem, and there suffer many things of the “elders and chief priests and scribes,” and at last be put to death by them: “then said Jesus to his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

“If any man will come after me,” or follow me; that is, if any man will be my disciple, and under take the profession of my religion; if any man choose and resolve to be a Christian; he must be so upon these terms, he must “deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me;” he must follow me in self-denial and suffering.

In the handling of these words, I shall do these four things.

I. I shall consider the way and method which our Saviour useth in making proselytes, and gaining men over to his religion. He offers no manner of force and violence to compel them to the profession of his religion; but fairly offers it to their consideration and choice, and tells them plainly, upon what terms they must be his disciples; and if they be contented and resolved to submit to these terms, well; if not, it is in vain to follow him any longer: for they cannot be his disciples.

II. I shall endeavour to explain this duty of self-denial, expressed in these words, “let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

III. I shall consider the strict and indispensable obligation of it, whenever we are called to it; without this we cannot be Christ's disciples: “If any man will come after me, or be my disciple, let him deny himself.”

IV. I shall endeavour to vindicate the reasonableness of this precept of self-denial and suffering for Christ, which at first appearance may seem to be so very harsh and difficult; and I shall go over these particulars as briefly as I can.

I. We will consider the way and method which our Saviour here useth in making proselytes, and gaining men over to his religion. He offers no manner of force and violence to compel men to the profession of his religion; but fairly proposeth it to their consideration and choice, telling them plainly upon what terms they must be his disciples; if they like them, and are content, and resolved to submit to them, well; he is willing to receive them, and own them for his disciples: if not, it is in vain to follow him any longer: for they cannot be his disciples. As, on the one hand, he offers them no worldly preferment and advantage to entice them into his religion, and to tempt them outwardly to profess what they do not inwardly believe; so, on the other hand, he does not hale and drag them by force, and awe



them by the terrors of torture and death to sign the Christian faith, though most undoubtedly true, and to confess with their mouths, and subscribe with their hands, what they do not believe in their hearts. He did not obtrude his sacraments upon them, and plunge them into the water to baptize them, whether they would or no, and thrust the sacrament of bread into their mouths; as if men might be worthy receivers of the blessed sacrament, whether they receive it willingly or no.



Our blessed Saviour, the author and founder of our religion, made use of none of these ways of violence, so contrary to the nature of man, and of all religion, especially of Christianity, and fitted only to make men hypocrites, but not converts; he only says, "If any man will be my disciple;" he useth no arguments, but such as are spiritual and proper to work upon the minds and consciences of men. For as his kingdom was not of this world, so neither are the motives and arguments, to induce men to be his subjects, taken from this world; but from the endless rewards and punishments of another. The weapons which he made use of to subdue men to the obedience of faith were not carnal; and yet they were "mighty through God," to conquer the obstinacy and infidelity of men. This great and infallible Teacher, who certainly came from God, all that he does, is to propose his religion to men, with such evidence and such arguments as are proper to convince men of the truth and goodness of it, and to persuade men to embrace it: and he acquaints them likewise with all the worldly disadvantages of it, and the hazards and sufferings that would attend it; and now if upon full consideration they will make his religion their free choice, and become his disciples, he is willing to receive them; if they will not, he understands the nature of religion better than to go about to force it upon men, whether they will or no.

II. I shall endeavour to explain this duty or precept of self-denial, expressed in these words, "Let him deny himself and take up his cross," These are difficult terms, for a man to deny himself, and take up his own cross, that is, willingly to submit to all those sufferings which the malice of men may inflict for the sake of Christ and his religion. For this expression of taking up one's cross, is a plain allusion to the Roman custom, which was this; that he that was condemned to be crucified, was to take his cross upon his shoulders, and to carry it to the place of execution: this the Jews made our Saviour to do, as we read [John xix. 17](#), till that, being ready to faint under it, and lest he should die away before he was nailed to the cross, they compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry it for him, as is declared by the other evangelists: and yet he tells them, they that will be his disciples must follow him, bearing their own cross; that is, being ready (if God call them to it) to submit to the like sufferings for him and his truth, which he was shortly to undergo for the truth and their sakes.



But though these terms seem very hard, yet they are not unreasonable, as I shall shew in the conclusion of this discourse. Some, indeed, have made them so, by extending this self-denial too far, at tending more to the latitude of the words, than to the meaning and scope of our Saviour's discourse: for there is no doubt but that there are a great many things

which may properly enough be called self-denial, which yet our Saviour never intended to oblige Christians to. It is, no doubt, great self-denial for a man, without any necessity, to deny himself the necessary supports of life; for a man to starve and make away himself: but no man, certainly, ever imagined that our Saviour ever intended by this precept to enjoin this kind of self-denial.

It is plain, then, that there is no reason or necessity to extend this precept of our Saviour, concerning self-denial, to every thing that may properly enough be called by that name; and therefore this precept must be limited by the plain scope and intendment of our Saviour's discourse; and no man can argue thus such a thing is self-denial, therefore our Saviour requires it of his disciples; for our Saviour doth not here require all kinds of self-denial, but limits it by his discourse to one certain kind, beyond which self-denial is no duty by virtue of this text; and therefore, for our clearer understanding of this precept of self-denial, I shall do these two things:

First, Remove some sorts of self-denial which are instanced in by some, as intended in this precept.

Secondly, I shall shew what kind of self-denial that is, which our Saviour here intends.

First, There are several things brought under this precept of self-denial, which were never intended by our Saviour. I shall instance in two or three things, which are most frequently insisted upon, and some of them by very devout and well-meaning men; as that in matters of faith, we should deny and renounce our own senses and our reason; nay, that we should be content to renounce our own eternal happiness, and be willing to be damned for the glory of God, and the good of our brethren. But all these are so apparently and grossly unreasonable, that it is a wonder that any one should ever take them for instances of that self-denial which our Saviour requires; especially considering that in all his discourse of self-denial, he does not so much as glance at any of these instances, or any thing like to them.

1. Some comprehend under self-denial the denying and renouncing our own senses in matters of faith: and if this could be made out to be intended by our Saviour in this precept, we needed not dispute any of the other instances. For he that renounceth the certainty of sense, so as not to believe what he sees, may after this renounce and deny any thing. For the evidence of sense is more clear and unquestionable than that of faith, as the Scripture frequently intimates, as ([John xx. 29.](#)) where our Saviour reproves Thomas for refusing to believe his resurrection upon any less evidence than that of sense—"Because thou hast seen thou hast believed: blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed;" which plainly supposeth the evidence of sense to be the highest and clearest degree of evidence. So likewise that of St. Paul: ([2 Cor. v. 7.](#)) "We walk by faith, and not by sight;" where the evidence of faith, as that which is more imperfect and obscure, is opposed to that of sight, as more clear and certain. So that to believe any article of faith, in contradiction to the clear evidence of



sense, is contrary to the very nature of assent, which always yields to the greatest and clearest evidence.

Besides that, our belief of religion is at last resolved into the certainty of sense: so that by renouncing that, we destroy and undermine the very foundation of our faith. One of the plainest and principal proofs of the being of God (which is the first and fundamental article of all religion) relies upon the certainty of sense; namely, the frame of this visible world, by the contemplation whereof we are led to the acknowledgment of the invisible Author of it. So St. Paul tells us, ([Rom. i. 20.](#)) that “the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.”

226

And the great external evidence of the Christian religion, I mean miracles, is at last resolved into the certainty of sense, without which we can have no assurance that any miracle was wrought for the confirmation of it.

And the knowledge likewise of the Christian faith is conveyed to us by our senses; the evidence whereof, if it be uncertain, takes away all certainty of faith. “How shall they believe, (saith St. Paul, [Rom. x. 14.](#)) how shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard?” and, [ver. 17.](#) “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” So that to deny and renounce our senses, in matters of faith, is to take away the main pillar and foundation of it.

2. Others, almost with equal absurdity, would comprehend under our Saviour's precept of self-denial, the denying and renouncing of our reason in matters of faith. And this is self-denial with a witness, for a man to deny his own reason; for it is to deny himself to be a man. This, surely, is a very great mistake; and, though the ground of it maybe innocent, yet the consequences of it, and the discourses upon it, are very absurd.

The ground of the mistake is this: men think they deny their own reason when they assent to the revelation of God in such things as their own reason could neither have discovered, nor is able to give the reason of: whereas, in this case, a man is so far from denying his own reason, that he does that which is most agreeable to it. For what more reasonable than to believe whatever we are sufficiently assured is revealed to us by God, who can neither be deceived himself, nor deceive us?

227

But though the ground of this mistake may be innocent, yet the consequences of it are most absurd and dangerous. For if we are to renounce our reason in matters of faith, then are we bound to believe without reason, which no man can do; or, if he could, then faith would be unreasonable, and infidelity reasonable. So that this instance, likewise, of self-denial, to renounce and deny our own reason, as it is nowhere expressed, so it can not reasonably be thought to be intended by our Saviour in this precept.

3. Nor doth this precept of self-denial require men to be content to renounce their own eternal happiness, and to be willing to be damned for the glory of God, and the good of their

brethren. If this were the meaning of this precept, we might justly say, as the disciples did to our Saviour, in another case, "This is a hard saying, and who can bear it? The very thought of this is enough to make human nature tremble at its very foundation. For the deepest principle that God hath planted in nature is, the desire of our own preservation and happiness: and into this the force of all laws, and the reason of all our duty, is at last resolved.

From whence it plainly follows, that it can be no man's duty in any case to renounce his own happiness, and to be content to be for ever miserable; because if once this be made a duty, there will be no argument left to persuade any man to it. For the most powerful arguments that God ever used to persuade men to any thing, are the promise of eternal happiness, and the terror of everlasting torments: but if this were a man's duty, to be content to be miserable for ever, neither of these arguments would be of force sufficient to persuade a man to it.

The first of these, namely, the promise of eternal happiness, could signify nothing to him that is to be eternally miserable; because, if he be to be so, it is impossible that he should ever have the benefit of that promise: and the threatening of eternal misery, could be no argument in this case; because the duty is just as difficult as the argument is powerful, and no man can be moved to submit to any thing, that is grievous and terrible, but by some thing that is more terrible: for if it be not, it is the same thing whether he submit to it, or not; and then no man can be content to be eternally miserable, only for the fear of being so; for this would be for a man to run himself upon that very inconvenience which he is so much afraid of: and it is madness for a man to die for fear of death. *Quis novus hic furor est, ne moriari, mori?*

By this it plainly appears, how unreasonable it is to imagine, that by this precept of self-denial, our Saviour should require men to renounce everlasting happiness, and to be content to be miserable for ever, upon any account whatsoever; because this were to suppose, that God hath imposed that upon us as a duty, to oblige us whereto there can be no argument offered that can be powerful enough.

As for the glory of God, which is pretended to be the reason, it is an impossible supposition; because it cannot be for the glory of God, to make a creature for ever miserable, that shall not by his wilful obstinacy and impenitence deserve to be so. But this is only cast in to add weight.

The other reason of the good and salvation of our brethren, is the only consideration for which there is any manner of colour from Scripture; and two instances are alleged to this purpose, of two very excellent persons, that seem to have desired this, and to have submitted to it; and therefore it is not so unreasonable as we would make it, that our Saviour should enjoin it as a duty. The instances alleged are these. Moses desired of God that he might be blotted out of the book of life, rather than the people of Israel, whom he had conducted and governed so long, should be destroyed: and, in the New Testament, St. Paul tells

us, that “he could wish that himself were accursed from Christ for his brethren;” so earnest a desire had he of their salvation.

But neither of these instances are of force sufficient to overthrow the reasons of my former discourse; for the desire of Moses amounts only to a submission to a temporal death, that his nation might be saved from a temporal ruin. For the expression of “blotting out of the book of life,” is of the same importance with those phrases, so frequently used in the Old Testament, of “blotting out from the face of the earth,” and “blotting out one’s name from under heaven,” which signify no more than temporal death and destruction; and then Moses’s wish was reasonable and generous, and signifies no more, but that he was willing, if God pleased, to die to save the nation.

As for St. Paul’s wish of “being accursed from Christ,” it is plainly an hyperbolical expression of his great affection to his countrymen the Jews, and his zeal for their salvation; which was so great, that if it had been a thing reasonable and lawful, he could have wished the greatest evil to himself for their sakes; and therefore it is observable, that it is not a positive and absolute wish, but expressed in the usual form of ushering in an hyperbole: “I could wish:” just as we are wont to say, when we would express a thing to the height, which is not fit nor intended to be done by us,—I could wish so or so; I could even afford to do this or that; which kind of speeches, no man takes for a strict and precise declaration of our minds, but for a figurative expression of a great passion.

And thus I have done with the first thing I proposed for the explication of this precept, or duty, of self-denial, which was to remove some sorts of self-denial, which by some are frequently instanced in, as intended by our Saviour in this precept. I proceed now to the

Second thing I proposed, which, is to declare positively, what that self-denial is, which our Saviour here intends; and it is plainly this, and nothing but this: that we should be willing to part with all earthly comforts and conveniences, to quit all our temporal interests and enjoyments, and even life it self, for the sake of Christ and his religion: this our Saviour means, “by denying ourselves;” and then (which is much the same with the other) that we should be willing to bear any temporal inconvenience and suffering upon the same account: this is to take up our cross and follow him.

And that this is the full meaning of these two phrases, of denying ourselves, and taking up our cross, will clearly appear, by considering the particular instances, which our Saviour gives of this self-denial, whenever he hath occasion to speak of it; by which you will plainly see, that these expressions amount to no more than I have said. Even here in the text, after our Saviour had told his disciples, that he that would come after him, must deny himself, and take up his cross; it follows immediately, “for whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” You see here, that he instanceth in parting with our lives for him, as the highest piece of self-denial which he requires. And he himself else where tells us, that “greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down



his life for his friend." Elsewhere he instanceth in quitting our nearest relations for his sake. (Luke xiv. 26, 27.) "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple; and whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, he cannot be my disciple."

Which expressions, of hating father and mother, and other relations, and even life itself, are not to be understood rigorously, and in an absolute sense, but comparatively; for it is an Hebrew manner of speech, to express that absolutely, which is meant only comparatively; and so our Saviour explains himself in a parallel text to this. (Matt. x. 37, 38.) "He that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me; he that loveth son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." In another place our Saviour instanceth in quitting our estates for his sake. (Matt. xix. 29.) "Every one that shall forsake houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake;" by all which it appears, that this self-denial which our Saviour here requires of his disciples, is to be extended no farther, than to a readiness and willingness, when ever God shall call us to it, to quit all our temporal interests and enjoyments, and even life itself, the dearest of all other, and to submit to any temporal inconvenience and suffering for his sake. And thus much for the explication of the precept here in the text. I proceed in the

III. Third place, to consider the strict and indispensable obligation of this precept of self-denial, and suffering for Christ and his truth, rather than to forsake and renounce them. "If any man will come after me, or be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me;" that is, upon these terms he must be my disciple, in this manner he must follow me; and in the text I mentioned before he declares again, that he that is not ready to quit all his relations, and even life itself, for his sake, is not worthy of him, and cannot be his disciple; and whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after him, cannot be his disciple; so that we can not be the disciples of Christ, nor be worthy to be called by his name, if we be not ready thus to deny ourselves for his sake: and, not only so; but if for fear of the cross, or of any temporal sufferings, we should renounce and deny him, he threatens to deny us before his Father which is in heaven, *i. e.* to deprive us of eternal life, and to sentence us to everlasting misery. (Matth. x. 32.) "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven: but whosoever shall deny me

before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven;" and (Mark viii. 38.) "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels:" that is, when he cometh to judge the world, they shall not be able to stand in that judgment; for that by his being ashamed of them, is meant, that they shall be condemned by him, is plain from what goes before: (ver. 36, 37.) "What shall it

profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" and then it follows, "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words."

But because some have the confidence to tell the world, that our Saviour doth not require thus much of Christians; but all that he obligeth us to, is to believe in him in our hearts, but not to make any outward profession of his religion, when the magistrate forbids it, and we are in danger of suffering for it; I shall therefore briefly examine what is pretended for so strange an assertion, and so directly contrary to the whole tenor of the gospel, and to the express words of our Saviour.

The author of the book called the Leviathan tells us, that we are not only not bound to confess Christ, but we are obliged to deny him, in case the magistrate requireth us so to do: his words are these—"What if the sovereign forbid us to believe in Christ?" He answers, "Such forbidding is of no effect, because belief and unbelief never follow men's commands. But what (says he) if we be commanded by our lawful prince to say with our tongues we believe not, must we obey such commands?" To this he answers, that "profession with the tongue is but an external thing, and no more than any other gesture, whereby we signify our obedience, and wherein a Christian, holding firmly in his heart the faith of Christ, hath the same liberty which the prophet Elisha allowed to Naaman. But what then (says he) shall I answer to our Saviour, saying, 'Whosoever denieth me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in heaven?' his answer is, "This we may say, that whatsoever a subject is compelled to in obedience to his sovereign, and does it not in order to his own mind, but the law of his country, the action is not his, but his sovereign's; nor is it he that in this case denies Christ before men, but his governor, and the laws of his country."

But can any man, that in good earnest pays any degree of reverence to our blessed Saviour and his religion, think to baffle such plain words by so frivolous an answer? there is no man doubts, but if the magistrate should command men to deny Christ, he would be guilty of a great sin in so doing: but if we must obey God rather than men, and every man must give an account of himself to God, how will this excuse him that denies Christ, or breaks any other commandment of God upon the command of the magistrate? And, to put the matter out of all doubt, that our Saviour forbids all that will be his disciples upon pain of damnation to deny him, though the magistrate should command them to do so, it is very observable, that in that very place, where he speaks of confessing or denying him before men, he puts this very case of their being brought before kings and governors for confessing him: ([Matt. x. 17.](#)) "Beware (says he) of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the gentiles." But what testimony would this be against them, if Christians were bound to deny Christ at their command? But our Saviour goes on, and tells them how they ought to demean themselves, when they are brought before

234

235

kings and governors: (ver. 19.) “But when they shall deliver you up, take ye no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that very hour what you shall speak.” But what need of any such extra ordinary assistance in this case, if they had nothing to do but deny him, when they were required by the magistrate to do it. And then (proceeding in the same discourse) he bids them: (ver. 28.) not to fear them that can “kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do;” that is, not to deny him, for fear of any temporal punishment or suffering the magistrate could inflict upon them; but to fear and obey him who can destroy body and soul in hell. And upon this discourse our Saviour concludes: (ver. 32, 33.) “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven: but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” And now can any thing be plainer, than that our Saviour requires his disciples to make confession of him before kings and governors, and not to deny him for fear of any thing which they can do to them? But let us inquire a little farther, and see how the apostles, who received this precept from our Saviour himself, did understand it. (Acts iv. 18.) We find Peter and John summoned before the Jewish magistrates, who “strictly commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” And when they still persisted in their course, notwithstanding the command of the magistrate, and were called again before the council, (chap. v. 28.) and “the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you, that you should not teach in this name? and behold ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine:” they return them again the same answer: (ver. 29.) “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”

And let any man now judge whether our Saviour did not oblige men to confess him even before magistrates, and to obey him rather than men. And, indeed, how can any man in reason think, that the great king and governor of the world should invest any man with a power to control his authority, and to oblige men to disobey and renounce him, “by whom kings reign, and princes decree judgment?” this is a thing so unreasonable, that it can hardly be imagined, that any thing but downright malice against God and religion could prompt any man to advance such an assertion.

I should now have proceeded to the fourth and last particular, which I proposed to speak to, namely, to vindicate the reasonableness of this precept of self-denial and suffering for Christ, which, at first appearance, may seem to be so very harsh and difficult. But this, together with the application of this discourse, shall be reserved to another opportunity.



SERMON LXVI.

OF SELF-DENIAL AND SUFFERING FOR CHRIST'S SAKE.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.—Matt. xvi. 24.

“THEN said Jesus to his disciples;” that is, upon occasion of his former discourse with them, concerning his approaching passion, and that he must shortly go up to Jerusalem, and there suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and at last be put to death by them; “then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me;” that is, if any man will be my disciple, and undertake the profession of my religion, he must do it upon these terms of self-denial and suffering.

In the handling of these words, I proceeded in this method.

First, I considered the way which our Saviour here useth in making proselytes, and gaining men over to his religion. He offers no manner of force and violence to compel men to the profession of it; but fairly proposeth it to their consideration and choice, telling them plainly, upon what terms they must be his disciples: if they like them, and be resolved to submit to them, well; if not, it is in vain to follow him any longer; for they cannot be his disciples. And to use any other way than this to gain men over to religion, is contrary both to the nature of man, who is a reasonable creature; and to the nature of religion, which, if it be not our free choice, cannot be religion.

Secondly, I explained this duty or precept of self-denial, expressed in these words, “let him deny himself, and take up his cross;” which phrase, of taking up one's cross, is an allusion to the Roman custom, which was, that the malefactor, that was to be crucified, was to take up his cross upon his shoulders, and to carry it to the place of execution.

Now, for our clearer understanding of this precept of self-denial, I told you, that it is not to be extended to every thing that may properly be called by that name, but to be limited by the plain scope and intendment of our Saviour's discourse; and therefore I did, in the

First place, remove several things which are instanced in by some, as intended and required by this precept. As,

1. That we should deny and renounce our own senses in matters of faith. But this I shewed to be absurd and impossible; because, if we do not believe what we see, or will believe contrary to what we see, we destroy all certainty, there being no greater than that of sense. Besides, that the evidence of faith being less clear and certain than that of sense, it is contrary to the nature of assent, which is always swayed and borne down by the greatest and clearest evidence. So that we cannot assent to any thing in plain contradiction to the evidence of sense.



2. Others would comprehend under this precept, the denying of our reason in matters of faith; which is in the next degree of absurdity to the other; because no man can believe any thing, but upon some reason or other; and to believe without any reason, or against reason, is to make faith unreasonable, and infidelity reasonable.

3. Others pretend, that by virtue of this precept, men ought to be content to renounce their own eternal happiness, and to be miserable for ever, for the glory of God, and the salvation of their brethren. But this I shewed cannot be a duty, for this plain reason: because, if it were, there is no argument left powerful enough to persuade a man to it. And as for the two scripture instances alleged to this purpose, Moses's wish of being blotted out of the book of life for the people of Israel, signifies no more than a temporal death; and St. Paul's, of being "accursed from Christ" for his brethren, is only an hyperbolical expression of his great passion and zeal for the salvation of his countrymen; as is evident from the form of the expression, such as is commonly used to usher in an hyperbole; "I could wish." And, in the

Second place, I shewed positively, that the plain meaning of this precept of self-denial is this, and nothing but this; that we should be willing to part with all our temporal interests and enjoyments, and even life itself, for the sake of Christ and his religion. This is to deny ourselves. And then that we should be willing to bear any temporal inconvenience and suffering upon the same account this is to take up our cross. And this I shewed from the instances which our Saviour gives of self-denial, whenever he had occasion to discourse upon it.

Thirdly, I considered the strict and indispensable obligation of this precept of self-denial, rather than to forsake Christ and his religion. Without this disposition and resolution of mind we cannot be his disciples; and if we deny him before men, he will also deny us before his Father which is in heaven. And this confession of him and his truth we are to make before kings and governors, and notwithstanding their commands to the contrary, which are of no force against the laws and commands of God. Thus far I have gone. There remains only the Fourth and last particular, which I proposed to speak to; viz. to vindicate the reasonableness of this self-denial and suffering for Christ, which at first appearance may seem to be so very difficult. And this precept cannot be thought unreasonable, if we take into consideration these three things:

I. That he, who requires this of us, hath himself given us the greatest example of self-denial that ever was. The greatest in itself, in that he denied himself more, and suffered more grievous things, than it is possible for any of us to do: and such an example as, in the circumstances of it, is most apt and powerful to engage and oblige us to the imitation of it, because all his self-denial and sufferings were for our sakes.



II. If we consider, that he hath promised all needful supplies of his grace to enable us to the discharge of this difficult duty of self-denial and suffering, and to support and comfort us therein.

III. He hath assured us of a glorious reward of all our sufferings and self-denial, beyond the proportion of them, both in the degree and duration of it. I shall go over these as briefly as I can.

I. If we consider, that he, who requires us thus to deny ourselves for him, hath given us the greatest example of self-denial that ever was. Our Saviour knowing how unwelcome this doctrine of self-denial and suffering must needs be to his disciples, and how hardly this precept would go down with them, to sweeten it a little, and take off the harshness of it, and to prepare their minds the better for it, he tells them first of his own sufferings, that by that means he might, in some measure, reconcile their minds to it, when they saw that he required nothing of them, but what he was ready to undergo himself, and to give them the example of it. And upon this occasion it was, that our Saviour acquaints them with the hard and difficult terms upon which they must be his disciples: (ver. 21.) the evangelist tells us, that "Jesus began to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests and scribes, and be killed."—"Then said Jesus unto his disciples;" that is, immediately upon this discourse of his own sufferings, as the fittest time for it, he takes the opportunity to tell them plainly of their own sufferings, and that, unless they were prepared and resolved to deny themselves so far, as to suffer all manner of persecution for his sake and the profession of his religion, they could not be his disciples. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me;" that is, let him reckon and resolve upon following that example of self-denial and suffering in which I will go before him. Now the consideration of this example of self-denial and suffering, which our Saviour hath given us, hath great force in it to reconcile us to this difficult duty, and to shew the reasonableness of it.

1. In that he who requires us thus to deny ourselves, hath himself in his own person, given us the greatest example of self-denial that ever was. And,

2. Such an example as, in all the circumstances of it, is most apt and powerful to engage and oblige us to the imitation of it; because all his self-denial and sufferings were for our sakes.

1. He, who requires us thus to deny ourselves, hath himself in his own person given us the greatest example of self-denial that ever was; in that he denied himself more, and suffered more grievous things, than any of us can do. He bore the insupportable load of all the sins of mankind, and of the wrath and vengeance due to them. "Never was sorrow like to his sorrow, wherewith the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; his visage was marred more than any man's, and his form more than the sons of men:" *i. e.* he underwent more



affliction, and had more contempt poured upon him, than ever was upon any of the sons of men: and yet he endured all this with incredible patience and meekness, with the greatest evenness and constancy of mind, and with the most perfect submission and resignation of himself to the will of God, that can be imagined.

Such an example as this should be of great force to animate us with the like courage and resolution in lesser dangers and difficulties. To see the Captain of our salvation going before us, and leading us on so bravely, and made perfect by greater sufferings than we can ever be called to, or are any ways able to undergo, is no small argument and encouragement to us, to take up our cross, and follow him. The consideration of the unknown sufferings of the Son of God, so great as we cannot well conceive of them, should make all the afflictions and sufferings that can befall us, not only tolerable, but easy to us. Upon this consideration it is, that the apostle animates Christians to patience in their Christian course, notwithstanding all the hardships and sufferings that attended it. ([Heb. xii. 2.](#)) "Let us run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who endured the cross, and despised the shame. For consider him, who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye also be weary and faint in your minds."

243

And this example is more powerful for our encouragement, because therein we see the world conquered to our hands, and all the terrors and temptations of it baffled and subdued, and thereby a cheap and easy victory over it obtained for us. By this consideration, our Saviour endeavours to inspire his disciples with cheerfulness and courage in this great conflict: ([John xvi. 33.](#)) "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but, be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

2. This example of our Saviour, is such as, in all the circumstances of it, is most apt and powerful to engage and oblige us to the imitation of it, because all his self-denial and sufferings were for our sakes, in pity and kindness to us, and wholly for our benefit and advantage. We are apt to have their example in great regard, from whom we have received great kindness and mighty benefits. This pattern of self-denial and suffering, which our religion proposeth to us, is the example of one, whom we have reason to esteem, and love, and imitate, above any person in the world. It is the example of our Lord and Master, of our sovereign and our Saviour, of the founder of our religion, and of "the author and finisher of our faith:" and surely such an example must needs carry authority with it, and command our imitation. It is the example of our best friend and greatest benefactor; of him, who laid down his life for us, and sealed his love to us with his dearest blood; and, even when we were bitter enemies to him, did and suffered more for us than any man ever did for his best friend. If we should be reduced to poverty and want, let us consider him, "who being Lord of all, had not where to lay his head; who being rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." If it should be our lot to "be persecuted for righteousness sake," and exercised with sufferings and reproaches, let us look "unto Jesus, the author and finisher of

244

our faith, who endured the cross, and despised the shame” for our sakes. In a word, can we be discontented at any condition, or decline it in a good cause, when we consider how contented the Son of God was in the meanest and most destitute, how meek and patient in the most afflicted and suffering condition? how he welcomed all events, and was so perfectly resigned to the will of his heavenly Father, that whatever pleased God pleased him?

And surely in no case is example more necessary than in this, to engage and encourage us in the discharge of so difficult a duty, so contrary to the bent and inclination of flesh and blood. A bare precept of self-denial, and a peremptory command to sacrifice our own wills, our ease, our pleasure, our reputation, yea, and life itself, to the glory of God, and the maintenance of his truth, would have sounded very harsh and severe, had not the practice of all this been mollified and sweetened by a pattern of so much advantage; by one, who in all these respects denied himself, much more than it is possible for us to do; by one, who might have insisted upon a greater right, who abased himself, and stooped from a greater height and dignity; who was not forced into a condition of meanness and poverty, but chose it for our sakes; who submitted to suffering, though he had never deserved it. Here is an example, that hath all the argument and all the encouragement that can be to the imitation of it,

Such an example is of greater force and authority than any precept or law can be: so that well might our Lord, thus going before us, command us to follow him, and say, “if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” For if he thus denied himself, well may we, who have much less to deny, but much more cause and reason to do it. He did it voluntarily, and of choice; but it is our duty. He did it for our sakes; we do it for our own. His own goodness moved him to deny himself for us; but gratitude obligeth us to deny ourselves in any thing for him. We did not in the least deserve any thing from him; but he hath wholly merited all this, and infinitely more from us. So that such an example as this is, in all the circumstances of it, cannot but be very powerful and effectual, to oblige us to the imitation of it. But the reasonableness of this precept will yet farther appear if we consider, in the

Third place, That God hath promised to all sincere Christians all needful supplies of his grace, to enable them to the discharge of this difficult duty of self-denial, and to support and comfort them therein. For the Spirit of Christ dwells in all Christians, and the same glorious power that raised up Jesus from the dead, works mightily in them that believe. (Eph. i. 19.) “That ye may know (saith St. Paul, speaking in general to all Christians) what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.” Of ourselves we are very weak, and the temptations and terrors of the world very powerful; but there is a principle residing in every true Christian, able to bear us up against the world, and the power of all its temptations. “Whatsoever is born of God (saith St John) overcometh the

245

246

world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”

And this grace and strength was afforded to the first Christians in a most extraordinary manner, for their comfort and support under sufferings; so that they were strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, unto all long-suffering with joyfulness, as St. Paul prays for the Colossians, [chap. i. 11](#). And these consolations of the Spirit of God, this joy in the Holy Ghost, was not peculiarly appropriated to the first times of Christianity; but is still afforded to all sincere Christians, in such degree as is necessary and convenient for them. And whenever God exerciseth good men with trials more than human, and such sufferings, as are beyond the ordinary rate of human strength and patience to bear, he hath promised to endue them with more than human courage and resolution. So St. Paul tells the Corinthians: ([1 Cor. x. 13.](#)) “He is faithful that hath promised; who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” And why should we be daunted at any suffering, if God be pleased to increase our strength, in proportion to the sharpness of our sufferings?

And, blessed be God, many of our persecuted brethren at this day have remarkably found this comfortable assistance and support; though many likewise have fallen through fear and weakness, as it also happened in the primitive times. But wherever this promise is not made good, it is (as I have formerly said) by reason of some fault and failing on our part. Either men were not sincere in the profession of the truth, and then no wonder if, “when tribulation and persecution ariseth, because of the word, they are offended,” and fall off. Or else they were too confident of themselves, and did not seek God's grace and assistance, and rely upon it as they ought; and thereupon God hath left them to themselves (as he did Peter), to convince them of their own frailty and rash confidence; and yet, even in that case, when there is truth and sincerity at the bottom, there is no reason to doubt, but that the goodness of God is such, as by some means or other to give to such persons (as he did to Peter) the opportunity of recovering themselves by repentance, and a more steadfast resolution afterwards

Fourthly, If we consider, in the last place, that our Saviour hath assured us of a glorious and eternal reward of all our self-denial and sufferings for him; a reward infinitely beyond the proportion of our sufferings, both in the degree and duration of it. Now the clear discovery of this is peculiarly owing to the Christian religion, and the appearance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel.

And as our blessed Saviour hath assured us of this blessed state of good men in another world; so hath he likewise assured us, that greater degrees of this happiness shall be the portion of those who suffer for him and his truth: ([Matth. v. 10, 11, 12.](#)) “Blessed are they

247

248

which are persecuted for righteousness sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you falsely, for my name's sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven." And nothing surely can be more reasonable, than to part with things of small value for things of infinitely greater and more considerable; to forego the transient pleasures and enjoyments, and the imperfect felicities of this world, for the solid and perfect and perpetual happiness of a better life; and to exchange a short and miserable life, for eternal life and blessedness: in a word, to be content to be driven home, to be banished out of this world into our own native country, and to be violently thrust out of this vale of tears, into those regions of bliss, where are "joys unspeakable and full of glory."

This consideration St. Paul tells us supported the primitive Christians under their sharpest and heaviest sufferings: (2 Cor. iv. 16) "For this cause (says he) we faint not, because our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; whilst we look not at the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." So that our sufferings bear no more proportion to the reward of them, than finite does to infinite, than temporal to eternal, between which there is no proportion.

All that now remains, is to draw some useful inferences from what hath been discoursed concerning this great and difficult duty of self-denial for the sake of Christ and his religion; and they shall be these following.

I. To acknowledge the great goodness of God to us, that all these laws and commands, even the hardest and severest of them, are so reasonable.

God, as he is our maker, and gave us our beings, hath an entire and sovereign right over us, and by virtue of that right might have imposed very hard things upon us, and this without the giving account to us of any of his matters, and without propounding any reward to us, so vastly disproportionate to our obedience to him. But in giving laws to us, he hath not made use of this right. The most severe and rigorous commands of the gospel are such, that we shall be infinitely gainers by our obedience to them. If we deny ourselves any thing in this world for Christ and his religion, we shall, in the next, be considered for it to the utmost, not only far beyond what it can deserve, but beyond what we can conceive or imagine; for this perishing life, and the transitory trifles and enjoyments of it, we shall receive "a kingdom which cannot be shaken, an incorruptible crown which fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens." For these are faithful sayings, and we shall find them to be true, that "if we suffer with Christ we shall also reign with him;" if we be persecuted for righteousness sake, great shall our reward be in heaven; if we part with our temporal life, we shall be made partakers of eternal life. He that is firmly persuaded of the happiness of the next world, and believes "the glory which shall then be revealed," hath no reason to be so much offended at "the sufferings of this present time," so long as he knows and believes, that "these light afflictions,



which are but for a moment, will work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

II. Seeing this is required of every Christian, to be always in a preparation and disposition of mind to deny ourselves, and to take up our cross; if we do in good earnest resolve to be Christians, we ought to sit down and consider well with ourselves, what our religion will cost us, and whether we be content to come up to the price of it. If we value any thing in this world above Christ and his truth, “we are not worthy of him.” If it come to this, that we must either renounce him and his religion, or quit our temporal interests, if we be not ready to forego these, nay, and to part with even life itself, rather than to forsake him and his truth, “we are not worthy of him.” These are the terms of our Christianity, and therefore we are required in baptism solemnly to renounce the world: and our Saviour, from this very consideration, infers, that all who take upon them the profession of his religion, should consider seriously beforehand, and count the cost of it. (Luke xiv. 28.) “Which of you, (says he) intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Or what king going to war with another king, cloth not sit down and consult, whether with ten thousand he be able to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand. So, likewise, whosoever he be, that forsaketh not all he hath, cannot be my disciple.” You see the terms upon which we are Christians: we must always be prepared in the resolution of our minds to deny ourselves, and take up our cross, though we are not actually put upon this trial.

III. What hath been said is matter of great comfort and encouragement to all those who deny themselves, and suffer upon so good an account: of whom, God knows, there are too great a number at this day, in several parts of the world; some under actual sufferings, such as cannot but move compassion and horror in all that hear of them; others who are fled hither, and into other countries, for refuge and shelter from one of the sharpest persecutions that perhaps ever was, if all the circumstances of it be duly considered. But, not to enlarge upon so unpleasant a theme, they who suffer for the truth and righteousness sake, have all the comfort and encouragement that the best example and the greatest and most glorious promises God can give. They have the best example in their view: “Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith, who endured the cross, and despised the shame.” So that how great and terrible soever their sufferings be, they do but tread in the steps of the Son of God, and of the best and holiest man that ever was; and he, who is their great example in suffering, will likewise be their support, and “their exceeding great reward.”

So that though suffering for Christ be accounted great self-denial, and he is graciously pleased so to accept it, because, in denying things present and sensible for things future and invisible, we do not only declare our affection to him, but our great faith and confidence in



him, by shewing that we rely upon his word, and venture all upon the security which he offers us in another world; yet, according to a right estimate of things, and to those who “walk by faith, and not by sight,” this which we call self-denial, is, in truth and reality, but a more commendable sort of self-love; because we do herein most effectually consult and secure and advance our own happiness.

IV. and lastly, Since God hath been pleased for so long a time to excuse us from this hardest part of self-denial, let us not grudge to deny ourselves, in lesser matters, for the sake of his truth and religion, to miss a good place, or to quit it upon that account; much less let us think much to renounce our vices, and to thwart our evil inclinations, for his sake. As Naaman's servant said to him concerning the means prescribed by the prophet for his cure, “If he had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much more, when he hath only said, Wash and be clean?” So, since God imposeth no harder terms upon us, than repentance and reformation of our lives, we should gladly and thankfully submit to them.

This I know is difficult to some, to mortify their earthly members, to “crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts” of it; it is like cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye. Some are so strongly addicted to their lusts and vices, that they could with more ease despise life, in many cases, than thus deny themselves. But, in truth, there is no more of self-denial in it, than a man denies himself when he is mortally sick and wounded, in being content to be cured, and willing to be well. This is not at all to our temporal prejudice and in convenience, and it directly conduceth to our eternal happiness; for there is no man that lives a holy and virtuous life, and in obedience to the laws of God, that can lightly receive any prejudice by it in this world. Since God doth not call us to suffer, we should do so much the more for him. Since he doth not put us to testify our love to him by laying down our lives for him, we should shew it by a greater care to keep his commandments.

God was pleased to exercise the first Christians with great sufferings, and to try their love and constancy to him and his truth, in a very extraordinary manner, by severity and contempt, by the spoiling of their goods, and the loss of all things; by bonds and imprisonments; by cruel mockings and scourgings; by the extremity of torments, and by resisting even unto blood; by being “killed for his sake all the day long, and appointed as sheep for the slaughter.” God was pleased to make their way to heaven very sharp and painful, and to “hedge it in,” as it were, “with thorns on every side,” so that they could not, but through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Thus we ought all to be in readiness and resolution to submit to this duty, if God should think fit at any time of our lives to call us to it. But if he be pleased to excuse us from it, and to “let this cup pass from us,” (which may lawfully be our earnest prayer to God, since we have so good a pattern for it) there will be another duty incumbent upon us, which will take

up the whole man, and the whole time of our life, and that is to “serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives.”



SERMON LXVII.

[Preached at Whitehall, before the Royal Family, Nov. 1, 1666.]

GOOD MEN STRANGERS AND SOJOURNERS UPON EARTH.

And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.—Heb. xi. 13.

The verse runs thus:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises; but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

THE apostle having declared, at the latter end of the foregoing chapter, that faith is the great principle whereby good men are acted, and whereby they are supported under all the evils and sufferings of this life, (ver. 38.) “now the just shall live by faith;” in this chapter he makes it his main business, to set forth to us at large the force and power of faith; and, to this purpose, he first tells us what kind of faith he means, viz. a firm persuasion of things not present and visible to sense, but invisible and future: (ver. 1.) “Now faith (saith he) is the confident expectation of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.” Faith represents to us the reality of things which are invisible to sense, as the existence of God and his providence; and of things which are at a great distance from us, as the future state of rewards and punishments in another world.

And then he proceeds to shew, by particular and famous instances, that the firm belief and persuasion of these things, was the great principle of the piety and virtue of the saints, and of good men in all ages of the world: by this, Abel and Enoch and Noah; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Joseph and Moses, and all the famous heroes of the Old Testament, “obtained a good report,” and pleased God; and did all those eminent acts of obedience and self-denial which are recorded of them. They “believed the being of God, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” They dreaded his threatenings, and relied upon his promises of future and invisible good things. They lived and died in a full persuasion and confidence of the truth of them, though they did not live to see them actually fulfilled and accomplished. “All these (saith he, speaking of those eminent saints which he had instanced in before,) died in faith, not having received the promises; but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.” This is spoken with a more particular regard to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom the promises of the conquest and possession of a fruitful land were made, and of a numerous offspring, among whom should be the Messias, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.

These promises they did not live to see accomplished and made good in their days; but they heartily believed them, and rejoiced in the hope and expectation of them, as if they had embraced them in their arms, and been put into the actual possession of them: “and they confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth.”



This saying and acknowledgment more particularly and immediately refers to those sayings of the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, which we find recorded [Gen. xxiii. 4](#); where Abraham says to the sons of Heth, “I am a stranger and a sojourner with you:” and [Gen. xlvii. 9](#); where Jacob says to Pharaoh, “the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred-and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.” These good men were “strangers and sojourners in a land which was promised to be theirs afterwards. They dwelt in it themselves as strangers, but were in expectation that it would one day become the inheritance of their posterity.



Now in this, as by a type and shadow, the apostle represents to us the condition of good men, while they are passing through this world. They are “pilgrims and strangers in the earth; they travel up and down the world for a time, as the patriarchs did in the land of Canaan; but are in expectation of a better and more settled condition hereafter: “they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly,” says the apostle at the sixteenth verse of this chapter.

That which I design from these words, is, to represent to us our present condition in this world, and to awaken us to a due sense and serious consideration of it. It is the same condition that all the saints and holy men that are gone before us were in, in this world; and every one of us may say with David, ([Psal. xxxix. 12.](#)) “I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.” It is a condition very troublesome and very unsettled, such as that of “pilgrims and strangers” used to be. This we must all acknowledge, if we judge rightly of our present state and condition. “They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth;” but yet it was not without the hope and expectation of a better and happier condition in reversion. So it follows just after; “they that say such things, (that is, that confess themselves to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth) declare plainly, that they seek a country.”



This bore up the patriarchs under all the evils and troubles of their pilgrimage, that they expected an inheritance, and a quiet and settled possession of that good land which God had promised to them. Answerably to which, good men do expect, after the few and evil days of their pilgrimage in this world are over, a blessed inheritance in a “better country, that is, an heavenly;” and with blessed Abraham, the father of the faithful, they “look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God, as it is said of that good patriarch at the tenth verse of this chapter.

It is very frequent not only in Scripture, but in other authors, to represent our condition in this world by that of pilgrims and sojourners in a foreign country: for the mind, which is the man, and our immortal souls, which are by far the most noble and excellent part of ourselves, are the natives of heaven, and but “pilgrims and strangers” here on earth; and when the days of our pilgrimage shall be over, are designed to return to that “heavenly country,” from which they came, and to which they belong. And therefore the apostle tells us, ([Phil. iii. 20.](#)) that Christians have relation to heaven, as their native place and country,

Ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει, “our conversation is in heaven;” so we render the words: but they properly signify, that Christians are members of that city and society which is above; and, though they converse at present here below, while they are passing through this world, yet heaven is the country to which they do belong, and whither they are continually tending, *sedes ubi fata quietas ostendunt*, where a quiet habitation, and a perpetual rest is designed and prepared for them. This acknowledgment David makes concerning himself, and all the people of God: (1 Chron. xxix. 15.) “For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers. Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.” So likewise St. Peter, (1 Pet. i. 17.) “Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear; and, (chap. ii. ver. 11.) “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts.”

And not only the inspired writers of Holy Scripture, but heathen authors, do frequently make use of this allusion. Plato tells us, it was a common saying, and almost in every man’s mouth, *παρεπιδημία τις ἐστὶν ὁ βίος*, “the life of man is a kind of pilgrimage.” And Tully, in his excellent discourse *De Senectute*, (concerning old age) brings in Cato describing our passage out of this world, not as a departure from our home, but like a man leaving his inn, in which he hath lodged for a night or two, *ex vita ista discedo tanquam ex hospitio, non tanquam ex domo; commorandi enim natura diversorium nobis, non habitandi dedit*: “when I leave this world (says he) I look upon myself as departing out of an inn, and not as quitting mine own home and habitation; nature having assigned this world to us as a place to sojourn, but not to dwell in.” Which is the same with what the apostle says in the text, concerning the patriarchs; “they confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth;” and concerning all Christians: (chap. xiii. 14.) “Here we have no continuing city; but we seek one to come.”

But I do not intend to follow the metaphor too close, and to vex and torture it by pursuing all those little parallels and similitudes, which a lively fancy might make or find, betwixt the condition of strangers and pilgrims, and the life of man during his abode and passage through this world. I will insist only upon two things, which seem plainly to be designed and intended by this metaphor, and they are these:—

I. That our condition in this world is very troublesome and unsettled: “they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

II. It implies a tendency to a future settling, and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition, into which we shall enter when we go out of this world. For so it follows in the very next words after the text; “they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth: for they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.” “They that say such things;” that is, they that acknowledge themselves to have lived in such a rest less and uncertain condition in this world, travelling from one place to another, as the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did, and yet pretend to be persuaded of the goodness of God,

and the faithfulness of his promise, in which he solemnly declared himself to be their God, do hereby plainly shew, that they expect some happier condition hereafter wherein that great promise of God will be made good to them to the full.

And these are two very weighty and useful considerations, that we should both understand our present condition in this world, and our future hope and expectation after our departure out of it, that so we may demean ourselves suitably to both these conditions; both as it is fit for those who look upon themselves “as pilgrims and sojourners” in this world; and likewise, as it becomes those who seek and expect a better country, and hope to be made partakers of a blessed immortality in another world. I shall briefly speak to both these; and then shew, what effect and influence the serious, meditation of these two points ought to have upon everyone of us.

I. That our condition in this world is very troublesome and unsettled. This I take to be principally intended in the metaphor of “strangers and pilgrims.” Such was the life of the patriarchs, which is here spoken of in the text: they had no constant abode and fixed habitation, but were continually wandering from one kingdom and country to another; in which travels they were exposed to a great many hazards and dangers, afflictions and miseries, affronts and injuries, as we read at large in the history of their travels in the Old Testament. And such is our condition in this world; it is often troublesome, and always uncertain and unsettled.

It is often very troublesome: not to insist upon the weak condition of infancy and childhood, the helplessness of that state, and insufficiency of it for its own preservation, and the supply of its natural wants and necessities: not to mention the dangerous vanity and desperate folly of youth, nor the infirmities and contempts, the many tedious and wearisome days and nights that old age is commonly grieved and afflicted withal, to that degree, as to make life not only unpleasant, but almost an intolerable burden to us. Not to dwell upon these, which yet take up and possess a great share and portion of our lives: if we look upon man in his best state, we shall find him as David hath long since pronounced on him, to be “altogether vanity.” We need not go a pilgrimage, and travel into remote countries, to make life more troublesome and uneasy. In what part of the world soever we are, even that which we improperly call our own home and native country, we shall meet with trouble and inconvenience enough to convince us, that we are but strangers in it. More especially good men are peculiarly liable to a great many evils and sufferings, upon account of their piety and virtue. “They are not of the world (as our blessed Saviour tells his disciples, [John xv. 19.](#)); and because they are not of the world, therefore the world hateth them,” and taketh all opportunities and occasions to vex and persecute them in one kind or other, either by doing all manner of evil to them, or by speaking all manner of evil of them.

But suppose we escape trouble upon this account, there are abundance of common and natural inconveniences, which render human life very uneasy. For either we must live alone,

or in the company and society of others: one of these two is necessary and unavoidable. Suppose we would live alone; how few are there that can enjoy themselves tolerably alone for any considerable time? For though there be a great deal too much of self-love in mankind, and men are generally extremely fond of themselves; yet I know not how it happens (though so it is) that very few men in the world care for their own company, or can endure, for any considerable time, to converse only with themselves; nay, for the most part, they are sooner glutted with themselves, and surfeited of their own conversation, than with the worst company they can meet with; a shrewd sign, as one would think, that they knew something worse of themselves than of any body else, or at least they know it more certainly. It is a wise and deep saying of Aristotle: “Whoever affects to be alone must be (ἢ Θεὸς, ἢ θηρίον,) either a god or a wild beast;” either he must be sufficient for himself, and want nothing; or of so wild and savage a disposition, as to destroy every thing that is weaker, and to run away from every thing that is stronger than himself. Now man is neither good enough to be contented and satisfied with himself, nor bad enough to hate and avoid every body else; and, therefore, he must enter into society, and keep company with other men.

And if we go abroad into the world, and try the conversation of men, it cannot but grieve us to see a great many things which yet we must see every day; the censoriousness, and uncharitableness, and insincerity of men one towards another, to see with what kindness they will treat one another to the face, and how hardly they will use them behind their backs. If there were nothing else, this one naughty quality, so common and reigning among mankind, were enough to make an honest and truehearted man, one that loves plainness and sincerity, to be heartily sick of the world, and glad to steal off the stage, where there is nothing native and sincere, but all personated and acted; where the conversation of a great part of men is all designing and insidious, full of flattery and falsehood, of good words and ill offices: “One speaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth; but in his heart he lieth in wait,” as it is in the prophet, [Jer. ix. 8](#). And when a man hath done all the good turns he can, and endeavoured to oblige every man, and not only to live inoffensively, but exemplarily; he is fairly dealt withal, and comes off upon good terms, if he can but escape the ill words of men for doing well, and obtain a pardon for those things which truly deserve praise.

But, setting aside these, and the like melancholy considerations, when we are in the health and vigour of our age, when our blood is warm, and our spirits quick, and the humours of our body not yet turned and soured by great disappointments, and grievous losses of our estates, or nearest friends and relations, by a long course of afflictions, by many cross events and calamitous accidents; yet we are continually liable to all these, and the perpetual fear and danger of them is no small trouble and uneasiness to our minds, and does, in a great measure, rob us of the comfort, and eat out the pleasure and sweetness of all our enjoyments; and, by degrees, the evils we fear overtake us; and as one affliction and trouble goes off, an-

262

263

other succeeds in the place of it, like Job's messengers, whose bad tidings and reports of calamitous accidents came so thick upon him, that they overtook one another.

If we have a plentiful fortune, we are apt to abuse it to intemperance and luxury, and this naturally breeds bodily pains and diseases, which take away all the comfort and enjoyment of a great estate. If we have health, it may be we are afflicted with losses or deprived of friends, or crossed in our interests and designs, and one thing or other happens to impede or interrupt the contentment and happiness of our lives. Sometimes an unexpected storm, or some other sudden calamity, sweepeth away, in an instant, all that which with so much industry and care we have been gathering many years. Or if an estate stand firm, our children are taken away, to whose comfort and advantage all the pains and endeavours of our lives were devoted. Or if none of these happen (as it is very rare to escape most, or some of them), yet for a demonstration to us that God intended this world to be uneasy, to convince us that a perfect state of happiness is not to be had here below, we often see in experience that those who seem to be in a condition as happy as this world can put them into, by the greatest accommodations towards it, are yet as far or farther from happiness as those who are destitute of most of those things wherein the greatest felicity of this world is thought to consist. Many times it so happens, that they who have all the furniture and requisites, all the materials and ingredients of a worldly felicity at their command, and in their power, yet have not the skill and ability out of all these to frame a happy condition of life to themselves. They have health, and friends, and reputation, and estate in abundance, and all outward accommodations that heart can wish; and yet, in the midst of all these circumstances of outward felicity, they are uneasy in their minds, and, as the wise man expresseth it, in their sufficiency they are in straits, and are, as it were, surfeited even with happiness itself, and do so fantastically and unaccountably nauseate the good condition they are in, that though they want nothing to make them happy, yet they cannot think themselves so; though they have nothing in the world to molest and disgust them, yet they can make a shift to create as much trouble to themselves out of nothing, as they who have the real and substantial causes of discontent.

Which plainly shews, that we are not to look for happiness here; it is not to be found in this land of the living; and, after our inquiries after it, we shall see sufficient reason to take up Solomon's conclusion, that all is vanity and vexation of spirit; which is much the same with that aphorism of David his father, which I mentioned before, that man in his best estate is altogether vanity.

But what happiness soever our condition in this world is capable of, it is most assuredly full of uncertainty and unsettlement; we cannot enjoy it long, and every moment we are in danger of being deprived of it. Whatever degree of earthly felicity we are possessed of, we have no security that it shall continue. There is nothing in this world but, when we are as sure of it as this world can make us, may be taken away from us by a thousand accidents. But suppose it to abide and continue; we ourselves shall be taken away from it: we must die,



and in that very day all our enjoyments and hopes, as to this world, will perish with us; for here is no abiding place, we have no continuing city: so that it is in vain to design a happiness to ourselves in this world when we are not to stay in it, but only travel and pass through it.

And this is the first, our condition in this world is very troublesome and unsettled.

II. Our condition in this world being a state of pilgrimage, doth imply a tendency to future settlement and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition hereafter. And so the apostle reasons immediately after the text: "They confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth; for they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country;" that is, they who acknowledge themselves to be pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and yet withal profess to be persuaded of the goodness of God, and the fidelity of his promise, do plainly declare that they seek another country. This is spoken of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who acknowledged themselves to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth; and thereby declared that they sought another country. Now, says the apostle, this cannot be the country from whence they first came, Ur of the Chaldees. (Ver. 15.) "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country, from whence they came out, they might have had an opportunity of returning thither." And, therefore, he concludes, that the country which they sought was a better country than any in this world. (Ver. 16.) "But now they desire a better country; that is, an heavenly. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city." This plainly refers to that famous declaration or promise of God to the patriarchs of being their God: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Now certainly this promise of God did signify some very great blessing and advantage to those faithful servants of God above others. This was not made good to them in this world; for they confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth. Where, then, is the blessing spoken of and signified by the great words of that promise, that God was their God? They met with no such condition in this world, as was answerable to the greatness of that promise. From hence the apostle argues, that they had a firm persuasion of a future happiness: "For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a better country; that is, an heavenly. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, since he hath prepared for them a city." And though the promise of God to Abraham did immediately design the land of Canaan, and the earthly Jerusalem; yet the apostle extends it to that which was typified by it, viz. an heavenly country, the Jerusalem which is above, which, at the tenth verse of this chapter, is called "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." And now, seeing God hath designed and prepared so great a happiness for them in another world, well might he be called their God, notwithstanding that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth; that is, though the full meaning and importance of this promise was not made good to them in this world, yet it was accomplished to the full in the happiness which was designed for them in another life. And God need not be ashamed to be called their God; implying, that if nothing had been meant by it beyond this world, this promise, of God's

266

267

being their God, would have fallen shamefully short of what it seemed to import. And this I conceive to be the true reason why our Saviour lays so much weight upon this promise, as to pitch upon it for the proof of the resurrection; that is, of a future state of happiness in another world.

There are many considerations apt to persuade good men of another life after this; as that mankind is generally possessed with this hope and persuasion; and that the more wise and virtuous men have been, the more plainly have they apprehended the hopes of immortality, and the better have they been contented to leave this world; as if, seeing farther than other men, they had a clearer prospect of the happiness they were entering upon; but, above all, that God hath made our condition in this world so troublesome and unsettled, as if he had designed on purpose to make us seek for happiness elsewhere, and to elevate and raise our minds to the hopes and expectation of a condition better and more durable, than any that is to be met with in this world; which, considering the goodness of God, and his gracious providence and care of good men, is a thing of itself extremely credible.

Having thus, as briefly as I could, dispatched the two particulars which I propounded to speak to for the explication of the text, I should now shew what influence these considerations ought to have upon our lives and practice.

And if this be our condition in this world, and these our hopes and expectations as to another life; if we be “pilgrims and strangers on the earth,” and “look for a better country, that is, an heavenly;” this ought to have a great influence upon us in these following respects, which I shall at present but very briefly mention.

1. Let us entangle and incumber ourselves as little as we can in this our pilgrimage; let us not engage our affections too far in the pleasures and advantages of this world; for we are not to continue and settle in it, but to pass through it. A little will serve for our passage and accommodation in this journey; and, beyond that, why should we so earnestly covet and seek more?

2. If we be “pilgrims and strangers;” then it concerns us to behave ourselves blamelessly and inoffensively, remembering, that the eyes of people are upon us, and that those among whom we live will be very curious and observant of our manners and carriage.

3. Let us be cheerful and patient under the troubles and afflictions of this present life. They who are in a strange country, must expect to encounter many injuries and affronts, and to be put to great difficulties and hazards, which we should endeavour to bear with that cheerfulness, as men that are upon a journey use to bear foul ways and bad weather, and inconvenient lodging and accommodations.

4. The consideration of our present condition and future hopes should set us above the fondness of life, and the slavish fear of death. For our minds will never be raised to their true pitch and height, till we have in some good measure conquered these two passions, and made them subject to our reason. As for this present life, and the enjoyments of it, what do

we see in them, that should make us so strangely to dote upon them? *Qua lucis miseris tam dira cupido?* This world, at the best, is but a very indifferent place; and he is the wisest man that bears himself towards it with the most indifferent affection; that is always willing to leave it, and yet patient to stay in it as long as God pleases.

5. We should always prefer our duty and a good conscience before all the world; because it is in truth more valuable, if our souls be immortal, and do survive in another world. For (as our Saviour argues) “What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” And thus St. Paul reasoned with himself from the belief of a resurrection of the just and unjust. “For this cause (saith he) I exercise myself alway to have a conscience void of offence both toward God and to ward man.”

Lastly, If we be sojourners and travellers, we should often think of our end, and carefully mind the way to it. Our end is everlasting happiness; and the way to it is a constant and sincere and universal obedience to the commandments of God. When the young man in the gospel inquired of our Saviour the way to eternal happiness, saying, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?” His answer to him was, “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” We may easily mistake our way; “for strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads to life, and few there be that find it.” Therefore we should often pray to God, as David does: ([Psalm cxix. 19.](#)) “I am a stranger in the earth, hide not thy commandments from me.” And [Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.](#) “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

270

271

SERMON LXVIII.

GOOD MEN STRANGERS AND SOJOURNERS UPON EARTH.

And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.—Heb. xi. 13.

The verse runs thus:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises; but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

I HAVE lately in this place (upon a particular day and occasion) begun to handle these words; I shall briefly give you the heads of what hath been already delivered, and proceed to what remains. And that which I designed from this text was, to represent to us our present condition in this world, and to awaken our minds to a due sense and consideration of it. It is the same condition, that all the saints and holy men that have gone before us were in in this world; and we may all of us say with David, (*Psal. xxxix. 12.*) “I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.”

It is very frequent, not only in Scripture, but in other authors, to represent our condition, in this world, by that of pilgrims and sojourners in a far country. For the mind, which is the man, and our immortal souls, which are by far the more noble and excellent part of ourselves, are the natives of heaven, and but pilgrims and strangers here on the earth; and when the days of our pilgrimage shall be accomplished, are designed to return to that heavenly country from which they came, and to which they belong. And for the explication of this metaphor, I insisted only upon two things, which seem plainly to be designed and intended by it.

I. That our condition in this world is very troublesome and unsettled; “they confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth.”

II. It implies a tendency to a future settlement, and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition, into which we shall enter when we go out of this world.

And these I told you are two very weighty and useful considerations; that we should both understand our present condition in this world, and our future hopes and expectation after our departure out of it; that so we may demean ourselves suitably to both these conditions; both as is fit for those who look on themselves as pilgrims and sojourners in this world; and likewise as it becomes those who seek and expect a better country, and hope to be partakers of a blessed immortality in another world.

I. That our condition in this world is very troublesome and unsettled; and this is principally intended by the metaphor of pilgrims and strangers. Such was the life of the patriarchs here spoken of in the text; they had no constant abode and fixed habitation, but were continually wandering from one kingdom and country to another; in which travels they were exposed to a great many dangers and sufferings, affronts and injuries; as we read at large in



the history of their travels in the Old Testament. And such is our condition in this world: it is often troublesome, and always uncertain and unsettled; so that whatever degree of worldly felicity any man is possessed of, he hath no security that it shall continue for one moment.

II. Our condition in this world being a state of pilgrimage, it implies a tendency to a future settlement, and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition, into which we shall enter so soon as we leave this world. For so it follows immediately after the text: "They confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth; for they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country." They that say such things; that is, they that acknowledge themselves to have lived in such a restless and uncertain condition in this world, travelling from one place to another, as the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did; and yet pretend to be persuaded of the goodness of God, and the faithfulness of his promise, in which he so solemnly declares himself to be their God; do hereby plainly shew, that they expect some happier condition here after, wherein that great promise of God will be made good to them to the full: so that he need not be ashamed to have been called their God.

Having handled at large these two particulars, I come now to shew, what influence the consideration of them ought to have upon our lives and practices. And if this be our condition in this world, and these our hopes and expectations as to another life; if we be pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and look for a better country, that is, an heavenly; this ought to have a great influence upon us in these following respects, which I did but briefly mention before, but shall now prosecute and press more largely.

I. Let us entangle and incumber ourselves as little as we can in this our pilgrimage: let us not engage our affections too far in the pleasures and advantages of this world, because we are not to stay in it, but to pass through it. Upon this consideration, the apostle St. Peter doth so earnestly exhort Christians to preserve themselves from fleshly lusts: (*I Pet. ii. 11.*) "Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts: which war against the soul/ The gratifying of our inordinate lusts, and our carnal and sensual inclinations, is directly opposite both to the nature of our immortal spirits, and to their great design and business in this world. Fleshly lusts do not only pollute and defile, but even quench and extinguish our diviner part, and do work the ruin and destruction of it: they sink our affections into the mud and filth of this world, and do entangle and detain them there: in a word, they do wholly indispose and unfit us for that pure, and spiritual, and Divine life, which alone can qualify us for our heavenly country and inheritance. And, therefore, while our souls are sojourning in this world, we should abstain from them, and preserve ourselves unspotted and untainted by them, as being altogether unuseful, and perfectly contrary to the laws and manners of our heavenly country. If we wallow in brutish and filthy lusts, as we pass through this world; our native country, when our souls think to return to it, will reject us and cast us out: when we come to heaven's gate, and knock there, expecting



to be admitted, and shall cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us;" he will bid us to depart from him, because we have been workers of iniquity. Nothing that is unclean can enter into heaven. He who is to receive us into those blessed mansions, hath declared it to be his immutable resolution and decree, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord. And therefore, as ever we hope to see God in that happy and blissful state, we must "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God;" that having rendered ourselves as like him as we can in this world, we may be capable of the blessed sight and enjoyment of him in the other.

And as for the advantages in this world, let us not pursue them too eagerly; we may take the conveniences which fairly offer themselves to us, and be content to want what we cannot honestly have, and without going out of the way of our duty, considering that we are travellers, and that a little will serve for our passage and accommodation in our pilgrimage. And beyond that why should we so earnestly covet more, and trouble ourselves for that which is not necessary to our journey? why should we at any time deal unjustly to attain any of this world's goods? They will stand us in stead for so little a while, that we can have no temptation to injure or oppress any man, to break the peace of our consciences, and to wound our souls for the attaining of them. If the providence of God offer them to us, and bring them to our hands, in the use of honest diligence and lawful means; as we are not to refuse them, so neither are we to set our hearts upon them, nor to suffer our affections to be entangled in them.

The wisest use we can make of them, will be, to do like those who traffic in foreign parts, to consign our estates into our own native country, to send our treasures before us into the other world, that we may have the benefit of them when we come there. And this we may do by alms and charity, Whatever we spend upon the flesh, we leave behind us and it will turn to no account to us in our own country; but whatever we lay out for the relief of the poor, is so much treasure laid out and secured to ourselves against another day. So our blessed Saviour assures us, ([Luke xii. 33.](#)) that giving of alms is providing for ourselves "bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not."

II. If we be "pilgrims and strangers," then it concerns us to behave ourselves with great caution, and to live blamelessly and inoffensively; remembering that the eyes of people are upon us, and that those, among whom we sojourn, will be very prying and curious, and narrow observers of our manners and carriage. They that are in a strange country, are not wont to take that liberty and freedom which the natives of the place may do, but to keep a perpetual guard upon themselves, knowing how strictly they are observed, and that they live among those who bear no good-will to them, and that every bad thing we do reflects upon our nation, and is a reproach to the country to which we belong. "Ye are not of the world (says our Lord); if ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but ye are not of the world; therefore the world hateth you." Upon this account the apostle chargeth

275

276

Christians to be harmless and blameless, and as it becomes the sons of God to be, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom we should shine as lights. The same argument St. Peter useth: (1 Pet. ii. 11, 12.) “I beseech you, as pilgrims and strangers, to abstain from fleshly lusts, having your conversation honest among the gentiles;” that is, considering that you are among strangers and enemies, and therefore ought to be very careful to bring no scandal upon your holy profession, among those who will be ready to take all advantages against you. Particularly, we who pretend to the same heavenly country, must be kind to one another, and whilst we live among strangers, have no quarrels amongst ourselves. In a strange country, it useth to be a mighty endearment of men to one another, that they are of the same country and fellow-citizens, and this alone is commonly sufficient to unite their affections, and link their interests together. But how little of this is to be seen among Christians! How shame fully do they quarrel among themselves, in the midst of enemies and strangers! as if they had no relation to one another, and never expected to meet at last in the same country, and there to live together for ever.

277

III. Let us be as patient and cheerful as we can, under all the troubles and afflictions which we meet with in this life. They who are in strange countries must expect to encounter many injuries and affronts, and to be put to great difficulties and hard ships. Those which are lighter and more tolerable, we must bear with cheerfulness. Upon a journey men use to put on all the pleasantness they can, and to make sport of all the inconveniences of the ways and weather, and little cross accidents that befall them: and thus, if we had but the art and wisdom to do it, many of the lesser inconveniences of human life might well enough be played off, and made matter rather of mirth and diversion, than of melancholy and serious trouble.

But there are some evils and calamities of human life, that are too heavy and serious to be jested withal, and require the greatest consideration, and a very great degree of patience to support us under them, and enable us to bear them decently; as the loss of friends and dearest relations; as the loss of an only son, grown up to be well fixed and settled in a virtuous course, and promising all the comfort to his parents that they themselves can wish: these certainly are some of the greatest evils of this world, and hardest to be borne. For men may pretend what they will to philosophy, and contempt of the world, and of the perishing comforts and enjoyments of it; to the extirpation of their passions, and an insensibility of these things, which the weaker and undisciplined part of mankind keep such a wailing and lamentation about: but when all is done, nature hath framed us as we are, and hath planted in our nature strong inclinations and affections to our friends and relations; and these affections are as naturally moved upon such occasions, and pluck every string of our hearts as violently, as extreme hunger and thirst do gnaw upon our stomachs.

278

And therefore it is foolish for any man to pretend to love things mightily, and to rejoice greatly in the enjoyment of them; and yet to be so easily contented to lose them, and to be

parted from them. This is to separate things which nature hath strongly linked together. Whatever we mightily love, does thereby, in some sort, become part of ourselves, and it cannot hang loose to us, to be separated and divorced from us without trouble; no more than a limb, that is vitally and by strong ligaments united to the body, can be dropped off when we please, or rent from the body without pain. And whoever pretends to have a mighty affection for any thing, and yet at the same time does pretend that he can contentedly, and without any great sense or signification of pain, bear the loss of it, does not talk like a philosopher, but like a hypocrite; and, under a grave pretence of being wise, is in truth an ill-natured man. For most certainly, in proportion to our love of any thing, will be our trouble and grief for the loss of it.



So that under these great and heavier strokes, we had need both of faith and patience. And, in deed, nothing but the firm belief of “a better country, that is an heavenly,” of another life after this, and a blessed immortality in another world, is sufficient to support a man in the “few and evil” days of his pilgrimage, and to sustain his spirit under the great evils and calamities of this life. But this fully answers all—that “the afflictions and sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Nay, that if we bear these afflictions patiently, and with a due submission to the will of God (especially our sufferings for his truth and cause), it will certainly increase our happiness in the other world, and “work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

IV. The consideration of our present condition, and of our future hopes, should set us above the fondness of life, and the slavish fears of death. For our minds will never be raised to their true pitch and height, till we have, in some good measure, conquered these two passions, and made them subject to our reason.

As for this present life, and the enjoyment of it, what is it that we see in them that should make us so strangely to dote upon them? *Quae lucis miseris tam dira cupido!* This world, at the best, is but a very indifferent place, and he is the wisest man, that bears himself towards it with the most indifferent mind and affection, that is always willing to leave it, and yet patient to stay in it as long as God pleaseth. And, as for death, though the dread of it be natural, yet why should the terrors of it be so very surprising and amazing to us, after we have considered, that to a good and pious soul, it is no other but the gate of heaven, and an entrance into eternal life? We are apt to wonder to see a man undaunted at the approach of death, and to be not only contented, but cheerful at the thoughts of his departure out of this world, this sink of sin, and vale of misery and sorrow. Whereas, if all things be duly considered, it is a greater wonder that men are so patient to live, and that they are not glad of any fair excuse and opportunity of getting out of this strange country, and retiring home, and of ridding themselves of the troubles and inconveniences of life. For, considering the numerous troubles and calamities we are liable to in a long pilgrimage, there are really but three considerations that I can readily think of, that can make this world, and our present



condition in it, in any good measure tolerable to a wise man; viz. that God governs the world; that we are not always to stay in it; that there is a happiness designed and reserved for us in another place, which will abundantly recompense and make amends to us for all the troubles and sufferings of this life.

And yet it is strange to see how fast men cling to life; and that even in old age, how they catch at every twig that may but hold them up a little while, and how fondly they hanker after a miserable life, when there is nothing more of pleasure to be enjoyed, nothing more of satisfaction to be expected and hoped for in it. When they are just putting into the port, and one would think, should rejoice at their very hearts that they see land; yet how glad would they be then of any cross wind that would carry them back into the sea again, as if they loved to be tossed, and were fond of storms and tempests.

Nay, the very best of us, even after we have made that acknowledgment of David “I am a stranger and a sojourner with thee, as all my fathers were,” are apt, with him, to be still importuning God for a little longer life: “O spare me a little, that I may recover strength before I go hence, and be no more.” And when God hath granted us this request, then we would be spared yet “a little longer.”

But let us remember, that God did not design us to continue always in this world; and that he hath on purpose made it so uneasy to us, to make us willing to leave it; and that so long as we linger here below, we are detained from our happiness; “while we are present in the body we are absent from the Lord.” This consideration made St. Paul so desirous to be dissolved, because he knew, that when his “earthly house of this tabernacle” was dissolved, he should have a much better habitation, “a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” This was that which made him so full of joy and triumph at the thoughts of his leaving the world: (2 Tim. iv. 6.) “I am now ready (says he) to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand; 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 the righteous Judge shall give me in that day.”

Nay, the consideration of this (though but obscurely apprehended by them) did raise the spirits of the wiser and better heathen, and till them with great joy and comfort at the thoughts of their dissolution. With what constancy and evenness of mind did Socrates receive the sentence of death! and with what excellent discourse did he entertain his friends just before he drank off the fatal cup; and, after he had taken it down, whilst death was gradually seizing upon him! One can hardly, with out a very sensible transport, read Cato’s discourse concerning his death, as it is represented by Tully in his book of Old Age. “I am (says he) transported with a desire of seeing my forefathers, those excellent persons, of whom I have heard, and read, and written; and now I am going to them, I would not willingly be drawn back into this world again. *Quod si quis Deus mihi largiatur, ut ex hac aetate repuerescam, et in cunis vagiam, valde recusem.* “If some god would offer me, at this age, to be a child

281

282

again, and to cry in the cradle, I would earnestly refuse it, and upon no terms accept it. And now that my race is almost run, and my course just finished, how loth should I be to be brought back, and made to begin again! For what advantage is there in life? Nay, rather, what labour and trouble is there not in it? But let the benefit of it be what it will, there is certainly some measure of life, as well as of other things, and men ought to know when they have enough of it.”—*O praeclarum diem, cum in illud animorum concilium caetumque proficiscar, et cum ex hac turba et colluvione discedam.* “O blessed and glorious day, when I shall go to that great council and assembly of spirits, and have got out of this crowd and rabble!” And if a heathen, who had but some obscure glimmerings of another life, and of the blessed state of departed souls, could speak thus cheerfully of death, how much more may we, who have a clear and undoubted revelation of these things, and to whom “life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel.”

283

V. We should always prefer our duty, and the keeping of a good conscience, before all the world; because it is, in truth, infinitely more valuable, if so be our souls be immortal, and do survive in another world, and we must there give a strict account of all the actions done by us in this life, and receive the sentence of eternal happiness or misery, “according to the things done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.” For as our Saviour argues concerning the case of denying him and his truth, to avoid temporal suffering and death; “what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” When we are tempted by temporal interest and advantage, or by the fear of present loss and suffering, to deny or dissemble our religion, to do any thing that is sinful in any kind, and contrary to our duty and conscience, let us ask ourselves what will be the profit and advantage of it? what, if for fear of men, and what they can do to me, I incur the wrath and displeasure of Almighty God? This is infinitely more to be dreaded, and his frowns are a thousand times more terrible, than the bitterest wrath and cruellest malice of men. What if, to preserve this frail and mortal body, I shall evidently hazard the loss of my immortal soul, and, to escape a temporal inconvenience, I forfeit everlasting happiness, and plunge myself into eternal misery and ruin? would not this be a wild bargain, and a mad exchange, for any temporal gain and advantage to lose the things that are eternal? and for the pleasing of ourselves for a little while, to make ourselves miserable for ever?

284

If we confess ourselves to be “pilgrims and strangers on the earth,” and are persuaded of the promises of God concerning a “heavenly country,” where we hope to arrive after the few and evil days of our pilgrimage are over; let us not, by complying with the humours of strangers, and the vicious customs and practices of an evil world, bar ourselves of our hopes, and banish ourselves from that happy place, to which we all profess we are going.

We pretend to be travelling towards heaven: but if we “make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience,” we destroy our own hopes of ever arriving at that happy port. We do not

live up to our expectation of a future happiness, if the unseen glories of another world do not raise us above all the temptations and terrors of sense. Our faith and hope have not their due and proper influence upon us, if they do not govern our lives and actions, and make us steadfast in the profession of our holy religion, and in the conscientious practice of it. St. Paul reasoned himself into this holy resolution, from the hopes of a blessed resurrection: ([Acts xxiv. 15, 16.](#)) “I have hope (says he) towards God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust; ἐν τούτῳ δὲ, for this cause therefore, I exercise myself always to have a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men.”

VI. And lastly, If we be sojourners and travellers in this world, we should often think of our end, and carefully mind the way to it. Our end is everlasting happiness, and the direct way to it is by a constant and sincere and universal obedience to the laws and commandments of God. And this itself is so plain a way, that a sincere and honest man can hardly err in it. And, therefore, we must not suffer ourselves to be led and trained out of it, upon any pretence whatsoever; not by the wildfire of pretended illuminations and enthusiasms, nor by the confident pretence of an infallible guide, that will needs shew us another way, and persuade us to follow him blindfold in it. Let us not quit the infallible rule of God’s word, to follow any guide whatsoever. “If an apostle, or an angel from heaven, preach any other doctrine” and way to heaven, “let him be accursed.” He who is “the way, and the truth, and the life,” when he was consulted with about the way to eternal happiness, knew no other but this. For when the young man asked him—“Good Master, what good things shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?” his answer was, “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” It is true, indeed, that by reason of our corrupt inclinations within, and powerful temptations without, this way (especially at our first setting out) is rugged and difficult. So our Lord hath forewarned us, telling us, that “strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth to life,” and that there be few that find it; therefore, we should “strive to enter in,” take great care and pains to discern the right way, and to overcome the difficulties of our first entrance into it; and should often pray to God as David did: ([Psal. cxix. 19.](#)) “I am a stranger in the earth; hide not thy commandments from me. ([Psal. cxxxix. 23, 24.](#)) “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Thus, if we would always have our end in our eye, it would both be a direction to us in our way, and an encouragement to quicken our pace in it; there being no more powerful motive to a good life, than to be assured that, “if we have our fruit unto holiness, our end shall be everlasting life.”

285

286

287

SERMON LXIX.

THE PRESENCE OF THE MESSIAS, THE GLORY OF THE SECOND TEMPLE.

For thus saith the Lord of hosts, yet once, it is a little, while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.—Haggai ii. 6-9.

THE author of this prophecy was the first of the three prophets, which God sent to the people of Israel after the captivity; and this prophecy contains several messages from God, to the princes, and elders, and people of Israel, in which he reproves their slackness and negligence in the building of the temple, and encourageth them thereto, by the promise of his assistance; and tells them, that how ever in respect of the magnificence of the building, and the rich ornaments of it, it should be incomparably short of Solomon's temple (which some that were then alive had seen in its glory) yet in other respects it should far excel it: for the time would come, that this second temple should be graced with the presence of the Messiah, which would be a greater glory to it, than all the riches of Solomon's temple.

And this is fully expressed in the words which I have read unto you: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, yet once it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."

Now, that it is some very great thing which is here foretold and promised, for the honour of this second temple, no man can doubt that considers in what a solemn manner it is here expressed; this great and glorious title, "the Lord of hosts," being no less than five several times used within the compass of these four verses; the like instance whereto is not, perhaps, in the whole Bible: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth." (ver. 6.) And I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts, (ver. 7.) The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts;" (ver. 8.) and twice, (ver. 9.) "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." So that by the solemn manner of expressing it, we may imagine, that it is some very great thing which is spoken of, and such as the like had never been before; and such was the incarnation and coming of the Messiah.



I know that the modern Jews will by no means have this text to be understood of the Messiah, and not without cause; for he that is spoken of in the text was to come into the second temple, which hath now been destroyed above one thousand six hundred years ago; and they do not believe the Messiah to be yet come; and therefore whatever shift they make, they must interpret this text of some other person than the Messiah: but then it is plain for what reason they do so, it being evident from their own Talmud, that the ancient Jews did understand it of the Messiah; but being hardened in their unbelief, they pervert all those texts where by they might be convinced, that Jesus our blessed Saviour was the true Messiah.

289

And, indeed, whoever carefully considers the several expressions and circumstances of this prediction, cannot understand it of any other. To make this evident I shall explain the several expressions in the text: “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, yet once, it is a little while. Yet a little while,” so it is in the Hebrew. “Yet once more,” so the LXX render it, and so it is quoted from the LXX in the New Testament, ([Heb. xii. 26.](#)) and this sense the Hebrew word may likewise bear, and our translation of the text takes them both in; “yet once it is a little while.”

If we take the words in the first sense, “yet a little while,” they signify, that God was then beginning those changes in the world, which were to precede and make way for the coming of the Messiah. This indeed was not till about four hundred years after; but a great while before that time God began those changes in the world, which were to prepare the way for his coming; and, considering the long time which was past from the first promise made to Abraham, four hundred years in comparison of that may seem but a little while. But I rather choose the latter sense of this phrase, “yet once more; 1 because the Hebrew will bear it, and because it is so quoted in the New Testament; as if the prophet had said, that God had before done a great thing in the world, and accompanied with great commotions, both in Egypt, by bringing the people of Israel out from thence with a mighty hand, and by destroying the nations before them, whose land God gave them for a possession; but now he would do one greater thing more—the sending of the Messiah, and the planting his religion in the world; in order whereunto there should be much greater and more universal commotions and changes in the world, and more and greater miracles wrought. “Yet once more, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations.” From which words the apostle to the Hebrews argues the abolishing of the Jewish dispensation, and the bringing in of another that should be unalterable. ([Heb. xii. 27.](#)) “And this word, yet once more, (says the apostle) signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” And this I shall have occasion to explain more fully in the following parts of this discourse.

290

“Yet once more I will shake the heavens and the earth,” &c. For the understanding whereof we are to consider, that the Hebrews have no one word whereby to express the

world, and therefore they do it by an enumeration of the principal parts of it. So ([Gen. i.](#)) when Moses would express the creation of the world, he says, “in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” And so St. Peter, when he would express the revolution of all things, after the universal conflagration of the world, calls it, a new heaven and a new earth. (2 Pet. iii. 13.) “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth;” that is, a new world, a quite other frame and state of things, than that which we now see. And so the prophet here in the text, to express the great commotions and changes that should be in the world before the coming of the Messiah, says, that God “will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;” that is, he would cause great revolutions in the world; there should be great wars and confusions, and the empires of the world should pass from one hand to another. And thus we find this expression interpreted, ([ver. 21, 22.](#)) of this chapter: “I will shake the heavens and the earth, and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations.” And to shew that, by shaking the heavens and the earth, is meant great changes in the world, and as it were an universal commotion of it, he adds in the text, by way of farther explication, “and I will shake all nations.”

291

And then it follows, and the desire of all nations shall come.” This we (as the ancient Jews also did) take to be a plain character and description of the Messiah: he is “the desire of all nations;” he whom all nations had reason to desire, because of those great blessings and benefits which he was to bring to the world. Thus interpreters generally understand these words, and it is very true the Messiah was so: but this does not seem to be the true importance of this phrase: for the Hebrew word signifies expectation as well as desire, and so I should rather choose to render it, “the expectation of all nations shall come;” which signifies, that about the time of the coming of the Messiah, not only the Jews, but other nations, should be in a general expectation of some great prince then to appear; which was most eminently accomplished in our blessed Saviour, as I shall shew by and by.

292

” And I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts,” speaking of the second temple, which was then in building, which though it fell very much short of Solomon’s in point of state and magnificence; yet by being honoured with the presence of the Messiah, it should be much more glorious than Solomon’s temple. “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts;” not that God wanted the command of gold and silver, to have made the second temple equal to Solomon’s in outward glory and splendour; he could easily have made it so in that respect: and Josephus tells us, that not long before the time of our Saviour’s coming, Herod had built and beautified it to that degree, that in some respects it excelled Solomon’s; and of this some understand the next words: “the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former;” namely, that this was accomplished in that beauty and magnificence which was added to it, when it was re-edified by Herod the Great: but

how ever that be, this is certain, that it was much more glorious in another respect, namely, that it entertained the Messiah, “the great expectation and blessing of all nations.”

” And in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.” Some understand this of that universal peace which was throughout the world, when our Saviour was born in the reign of Augustus Caesar. Others with great probability interpret this of the Messiah himself, who is called here by the name of Peace; and so some of the ancient Jews understood it; “in this place will I give peace,” that is, the Messiah. For the Hebrew word signifies all kind of happiness, and so it includes all those blessings and benefits, that happiness and salvation, which the Messiah brought to the world. And this will appear very probable, if we consider, how frequently in Scripture this title is given to the Messiah. (*Isai. ix. 6.*) He is called “the Prince of Peace; and (*Zach. ix. 10.*) it is said of him, that he should speak peace to the nations: and the apostle to the Hebrews parallels him with Melchisedech in this particular, that “he was King of Salem,” that is, “King of Peace;” and, which is very little different from this, he is frequently in Scripture called “Salvation,” which signifies the happiness of being rescued and delivered from all kind of evil; as peace signifies all kind of good. (*Isai. xlix. 6.*) “I will also give thee for a light to the gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the end of the earth:” and (*Luke ii. 30.*) when Simeon had our blessed Saviour in his arms, when he was first brought into the temple, he calls him the Salvation of God; “mine eyes (saith he to God) have seen thy Salvation;” and (*John iv. 22.*) “Salvation is of the Jews;” that is, the Messiah was to be of that nation. But, which is more express, Christ is called “our peace.” (*Eph. ii. 14.*) Nay, he is expressly called—peace, or the peace. (*Micah v. 5.*) “And this man (speaking of the Messiah) shall be the peace;” that is, one of his names or titles shall be “Peace.” So that I make little doubt, but that in this expression in the text, of “giving Peace,” is meant, giving the Messiah; and that this is rendered as the reason, why the glory of the second temple should be greater than of the first, because in that place the Messiah should appear, and remarkably shew himself. God could have given this second temple, if he had thought fit, as much outward glory and beauty as that of Solomon’s building; for “silver and gold are his,” and all the riches of the world are at his command; but he chose to put a far greater honour upon it than that of silver and gold, and to make it much more glorious in another respect, “the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former;” because in this place I will give the Messiah, the peace, and happiness, and salvation of mankind, and incomparably the greatest blessing that ever was given to the world.

The words being thus explained, it will now be easier to shew how the several parts of this prediction do agree to our blessed Saviour, and to no other.

I. That there should be great changes and commotions in the world before his coming: “I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations;” and then he should come.

293

294

II. That about the time of his coming, the world should be in general expectation of him; “and the expectation of all nations shall come.”

III. That he should come during the continuance of the second temple; for it was his coming that should fill that house with glory, and in that place the Messiah, who is called peace, is promised to be given: “and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.”

IV. That this coining of the Messiah should be the last dispensation of God for the salvation of men, and consequently should be perpetual and unalterable: “yet once more, and I will shake the heavens and the earth—yet once more,” from whence the apostle to the Hebrews argues, that the gospel should be a perpetual and unalterable dispensation. Of these I shall speak severally, and as briefly as I can.

I. Here is a prediction of great changes and commotions in the world before the coming of the Messiah: “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come;” plainly signifying hereby, that before the coining of the Messiah (who is here called the desire and expectation of all nations) there should be very great commotions and changes in the world, that the empire of the world should be overturned; for so I have told you, that this expression of shaking the heavens and the earth is explained, ([ver. 21.](#)) of this chapter: “I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and will overthrow the throne of kingdoms.” And this was fulfilled in a most remarkable manner, between the time of this prophecy, and the coming of our blessed Saviour, during which time (though it was but four hundred years) there happened greater commotions, and much more considerable revolutions, in the great kingdoms of the world, than had done in above two thousand years before, and in almost one thousand seven hundred years since: so that it is no wonder, that the prediction of these things is by God himself expressed in so very solemn a manner, as I observed before.

At the time of this prophecy, the empire of the world was newly translated from the Assyrians to the Medes and Persians; and, not long after, the Grecians, under Alexander the Great, quite over threw the Persian empire, and that by as sudden a change as was ever perhaps made in the world, possessing themselves by so swift and speedy a conquest of a great part of the then known world, as if to pass through it and to conquer it had been all one.

After the death of Alexander, the empire of the Grecians was shared among his great captains, whom the Romans by degrees conquered, besides a great many other kingdoms which Alexander never saw, and some of them perhaps had never heard of. And at last the empire of the world, in all its greatness and glory, was possessed by Augustus, in whose time our blessed Saviour was born.

So that here were mighty commotions in the world, wonderful changes of kingdoms and empires, before the coming of the Messiah; far greater, and of much larger extent, than those that were in Egypt and Palestine, at the bringing of the children of Israel out of Egypt,



and the giving of the law from mount Sinai. And these did not only go before the coming of the Messiah, but they made way for the more easy propagation of his doctrine and religion; for the Grecians, and especially the Romans, settled their conquests in such a manner, as in a good measure to propagate their language among the nations which they conquered; and particularly the Romans did make the ways for travel and commerce much more easy and commodious than ever they were before, by employing their armies, when they had no other work, to make high- ways, for the convenience of passage from the station of one legion to another; the benefit and effect whereof we in England enjoy to this day (a pattern to all princes and states that have necessary occasion for armies how to employ them): and this very thing proved afterwards a mighty advantage for the more easy and speedy spreading of Christianity in the world.

II. Another part of this prophecy is, that about the time of the coming of the Messiah, the world should be in a general expectation of him; “and the expectation of all nations shall come:” and I doubt not but this character of the Messiah is taken out of that famous prophecy concerning him: ([Gen. xlix. 10.](#)) “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah till Shiloh come: (and by Shiloh, the ancient Jews generally understood the Messiah) “and to him shall the gathering of the people be;” or, as it is rendered by the Septuagint, and several other translations, “and he shall be the expectation of the nations.” In allusion to which ancient prophecy concerning him, he is here in the text called, “the expectation of all nations;” and so by the prophet Malachi ([chap. iii. ver. 1.](#)) “And the Lord whom ye expect,” or look for, “shall suddenly come into his temple.” Now this part of the prediction in the text was most eminently fulfilled in our blessed Saviour: for about the time of his coming, the Jews were in a general expectation of him, as appears not only from that ancient and general tradition of their’s from the school of Elias, that “at the end of the second two thousand years of the world, the, Messiah should come” (and our blessed Saviour’s coming did accordingly happen at that time); but likewise from that particular computation of the Jewish doctors, not long before our Saviour’s coming, who, upon a solemn debate of the matter, did determine that the Messiah would come within fifty years. And this is farther confirmed, from the great jealousy which Herod had concerning a king of the Jews, that was expected to be born about that time; and from that remarkable testimony in Josephus, who tells us, that “the Jews rebelled against the Romans, being encouraged thereto by a famous prophecy in their Scriptures, That about that time a great Prince should be born among them, that should rule the world:” and Josephus flattered Vespasian so far as to make him believe that he was the man; and thereupon persuaded him to destroy the line of David, out of which the tradition was, that the Messiah should spring; as if the accomplishment of a Divine prediction could be hindered by any human endeavour.

And this was not only the general expectation of the Jews about that time, but of a great part of the world; as appears from those two famous testimonies of two of the most eminent

Roman historians, Suetonius and Tacitus. The words of Suetonius are these: *Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut Judaea profecti rerum potirentur*. “There was an ancient and general opinion, famous throughout all the eastern parts, that the fates had determined that there should come out of Judea those that should govern the world;” and he adds what I quoted before out of Josephus. *Id Judaei ad se trahentes rebellarunt*. That “the Jews taking this to themselves, did thereupon rebel.” Now it is very remarkable, that the very words of this tradition seem to be a verbal translation of that prophecy in Micah, that “out of Judah shall come the Governor.” *Ut Judaea profecti rerum potirentur*. The other testimony is out of Tacitus, and his words are these: (lib. 21. § 13.) *luribus persuasio inerat antiquis sacerdotum libris contineri, eo ipso tempore fore, ut valesceret oriens, profectique Judaea rerum potirentur*: “A great many (says he) were possessed with a persuasion that it was contained in the ancient books of the priests, that at that very time the east should prevail, and that they, who should govern the world, were to come out of Judea.” By the “ancient books of the priests,” he in all probability means the ancient prophecies of Scripture; for the last expression is the same with that of Suetonius, taken out of the prophet Micah; and the other, that “the east should prevail,” does plainly refer to that title given to the Messiah by the prophet Zachary, ([chap. vi. 12.](#)) where he is called “the man whose name is צמח,” which signifies *oriens* and *germen*, both the *east* and a *branch*: our translation hath it, “the man, whose name is the Branch;” but it might as well be rendered, “the man, whose name is the East. “Thus you see this character of our Saviour in this prophecy most literally fulfilled, that he was “the expectation of all nations.” I proceed to the

III. Third circumstance of this prediction, That he, who is here foretold, should come during the continuance of this second temple; because it was his presence that should “fill that house with glory;” and it was in that place that the Messiah, who is called—the peace, is promised to be given: “and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.” And this is likewise most expressly foretold by the prophet Malachi: ([chap. iii. 1.](#)) “Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom ye look for, shall suddenly come into his temple; even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts:” and accordingly Jesus, our blessed Saviour, came during the second temple: he was presented there by his parents, and owned by Simeon for the Messiah: he disputed there, and taught frequently there, and by his presence “filled that house with glory.” For that the Son of God taught publicly there, was a greater honour to it, than all the silver and gold of Solomon’s temple.

And not long after his death (according to his express prediction) this second temple was destroyed to the ground: “so that not one stone of it was left upon another.” And when, some hundred years after, it was attempted to be rebuilt three several times, the last whereof was by Julian, the apostate, in opposition to Christianity, and to our Saviour’s prediction, fire came out of the foundation; and destroyed the workmen: so that they desisted in great

terror, and durst never attempt it afterwards. And this not only the Christian writers of that age, in great numbers, do testify, but Ammianus Marcellinus (a heathen historian who lived in that time), does also give us a very particular account of this memorable matter. So that if by “the expectation of the nations” be here meant the Messiah (as I have plainly shewn), then he is long since come, and was no other than Jesus, our blessed Saviour, who, according to this prophecy, was “to fill the second temple with glory;” which hath now been demolished above one thousand six hundred years, and the rebuilding whereof hath been so often and so remarkably hindered from heaven. The consideration of all which were sufficient to convince the Jews of their vain expectation of a Messiah yet to come, were they not so obstinately rooted and fixed in their infidelity. There remains now the

IV. Fourth and last circumstance of this prophecy, viz. That the coming of the Messiah was to be the last dispensation of God, for the salvation of men, and consequently, was to be perpetual and unchangeable: “Yet once more, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: and I will shake all nations, and the expectation of all nations shall come.—Yet once more;” from which words the apostle to the Hebrews argues the perpetuity of the gospel, and that it was the dispensation which should never be changed. (Heb. xii. 27.) “And this word, yet once more, signifies, the removing of those things which are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which can not be shaken may remain.” And then it follows, “Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved,” &c. It was usual with the Jews to describe the times of the gospel, by “the kingdom of the Messiah;” and accordingly the apostle here calls the dispensation of the gospel, “a kingdom which can not be moved:” in opposition to the law, which was an imperfect and alterable dispensation. For this is plainly the scope of the apostle’s reasoning; namely, to convince the Jews that they were now under a more gracious and perfect dispensation than that of the law. (ver. 18.) “Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire;” meaning mount Sinai, which was a sensible literal mountain, “a mountain that might be touched,” in opposition to the mystical and spiritual mount Sion, by which the dispensation of the gospel is described: which, by the way, prevents the objection of its being called “the mountain that might be touched,” when it was forbidden to be touched upon pain of death: “Ye are not come to the mount that might be touched;” that is, I am not now speaking of a literal and sensible mountain, such as was mount Sinai, from whence the law was given; but of that spiritual and heavenly dispensation of the gospel, which was typified by mount Sion and by Jerusalem: “but ye are come to mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.” And then he cautions them to take heed how they reject him that came from heaven, to make this last revelation of God to the world, which, because of the clearness and perfection of it, should never need to receive any change, (ver. 25.) “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on the earth, (viz. Moses, who delivered the law from mount

301

302

Sinai) much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven; whose voice then shook the earth: (alluding to the earthquake at the giving of the law) but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more, I shake not the earth only, but also heaven;” that is, the whole world, in order to the coming of the Messiah, and the planting of the gospel in the world: and then he argues from the words “once more,” that the former dispensation should be removed, to make way for that which should perpetually remain.

And indeed there is no need of any farther revelation after this, nor of any change of that religion which was brought from heaven by the Son of God; because of the perfection of it, and its fitness to reform the world, and to recover mankind out of their lapsed and degenerate condition, and to bring them to happiness; both by the purity of its doctrine and the power of its arguments, to work upon the minds of men, by the clear discovery of the mighty rewards and punishments of another world.

And now the proper inference from all this discourse, is the very same with that which the apostle makes, from the consideration of the perfection and excellency of this revelation, which God hath made to the world by his Son. “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for how shall we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven?” And at the [28th verse](#) of that chapter, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom, which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear;” that is, let us live as becomes those to whom God hath made so clear and perfect a revelation of his will. We have all the advantages of the Divine revelation which the world ever had, and the last and most perfect that the world ever shall have: we have not only Moses and the prophets, but that doctrine which the Son of God came down from heaven on purpose to declare to the world; God hath vouchsafed to us that clear and complete revelation of his will, which he denied to “many prophets and righteous men, who desired to see the things which we see, but could not see them, and to hear the things which we hear, but could not hear them.” There were good men in the world under those imperfect revelations which God made to them; but we have far greater advantages, and more powerful arguments to be good than ever they had. And as we ought thank fully to acknowledge these blessed advantages; so ought we likewise, with the greatest care and diligence, to improve them.

And now how does the serious consideration of this condemn all impenitent sinners under the gospel, who will not be reclaimed from their sins, and persuaded to goodness, by all that God can do; by the most plain declaration of his will to the world, by the most perfect precepts and directions for a good life; by the most encouraging promises to obedience, and by the most severe threatenings of an eternal and unutterable ruin, in case of disobedience; by the “wrath of God, revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;” by the terrors of the great day, and the vengeance of eternal fire; by the wonderful and amazing condescension of the Son of God appearing in our nature; by his merciful undertaking for the redemption of lost and sinful man; by his cruel sufferings for our sins,



and by the kindest offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood, and by the glorious hopes of eternal life.

What could God have done more for us, than he hath done? What greater concernment could he shew for our salvation, than to send his own Son, his only Son, to seek and save us? And what greater demonstration could he give of his love to us, than to give the Son of his love to die for us? This is the last effort that the Divine mercy and goodness will make upon mankind. So the apostle tells us in the beginning of this Epistle, [chap. i. 1](#); that “God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son:” and if we will not hear him, he will speak no more; after this it is not to be expected that he should make any farther attempts for our recovery, he can send no greater and dearer person to us than his own Son. If we despise him, whom will we reverence? If we reject him, and the great salvation which he brings and offers to us, we have all the reason in the world to believe that our case is desperate, and that we shall die in our sins. This was the condemnation of the Jews, that they did not receive and believe on him whom God had sent. And if we who profess to believe on him, and to receive his doctrine, be found disobedient to it, in our lives, we have reason to fear that our condemnation will be far heavier than theirs: for since the appearance of the Son of God for the salvation of men, the wrath of God is “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,” especially against those who detain “the truth of God in unrighteousness;” that is, against those who entertain the light of God’s truth in their minds, but do not suffer it to have its proper effect and influence upon their hearts and lives; and make that a prisoner which would make them free. So our Lord tells us, that “the truth shall make us free;” but if, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, we are still the servants of sin, our condemnation is much worse than if the Son of God had never come: for the Christian religion hath done nothing, if it do not take men off from their sins, and teach them to live well.

Especially at this time, when we are celebrating the coming of the Son of God, to destroy the works of the devil, we should take great heed that we be not found guilty of any impiety or wickedness; because this is directly contrary to the main design of “the grace of God which brings salvation, and hath appeared to all men (and the appearance whereof we do at this time commemorate) for that teacheth men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly and righteously, and godly, in this present world:” and we cannot gratify the devil more, than by shewing ourselves more diligent than ordinary to uphold his works, at this very time when the Son of God was manifested on purpose to dissolve them: we cannot possibly choose a worse, a more improper season to sin in, than when we are celebrating the birth of the blessed Jesus, who came to save us from our sins. This is, as if a sick man, for joy that a famous physician is come to his house, should run into all manner of excess, and so do all he can to inflame his disease and make his case desperate. Not but that

305

306

our inward joy may lawfully be accompanied with all outward innocent expressions of it: but we cannot be truly thankful, if we allow ourselves at this time in any thing contrary to the purity and sobriety of the gospel. It is matter of just and sad complaint, being of great scandal to our Saviour and his holy religion, that such irregular and extravagant things are at this time commonly done by many who call themselves Christians; and done under a pretence of doing honour to the memory of Christ's birth; as if, because the Son of God was at this time made man, it were fit for men to make themselves beasts.

If we would honour him indeed, we must take care that our joy do not degenerate into sin and sensuality, and that we do not express it by lewdness and luxury, by intemperance and excess, by prodigal gaming and profuse wasting of our estates, as the manner of some is; as if we intended literally to requite our Saviour, "who, being rich, for our sakes became poor." This is the way of parting with houses and land, and becoming poor for his sake, for which he will never thank nor reward us. This is not to commemorate the coming of our Saviour, but to contradict it, and openly to declare that we will uphold the works of the devil in despite of the Son of God, who came to destroy them. It is for all the world like that lewd and senseless piece of loyalty, too much in fashion some years ago, of being drunk for the king. Good God! that ever it should pass for a piece of religion among Christians, to run into all manner of excess for twelve days together in honour of our Saviour! A greater aggravation of sin cannot easily be imagined, than to abuse the memory of the greatest blessing that ever was,—Christ coming into the world to take away sin, into an opportunity of committing it; this is to represent the Son of God as a patron of sin and licentiousness, and to treat him more contumeliously than the Jews did, who bowed the knee to him and mocked him, and called him king, and spat upon him; and under a pretence of rejoicing for his birth, to "crucify to ourselves afresh the Lord of life and glory, and to put him to an open shame."

I will conclude all with the apostle's exhortation: ([Rom. xiii. 12, 13, 14.](#)) "Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk decently as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof."

Now to our most gracious and merciful God, the great friend and lover of souls, who regarded us in our low and lost condition, and cast an eye of pity upon us, when we were in our blood, and no other eye pitied us, and when we had lost and ruined ourselves, was pleased, in tender compassion to mankind, to send his only-begotten Son into the world, to seek and save us; and, by the purity of his doctrine, and the pattern of his life, and the sacrifice of his death, to purchase eternal life for us, and to direct and lead us in the way to it: and to him also, the blessed Saviour and Redeemer of mankind, who came down from heaven, that he might carry us thither, and took human nature upon him, that we thereby might be made partakers of a Divine nature; and humbled himself to death, even the death



of the cross, that he might exalt us to glory and honour; and whilst we were bitter enemies to him, gave such a demonstration of his love to us, as never any man did to his best friend: “Unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain; to God, even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, the first begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth; to Him, who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to Him be glory and honour, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.”



SERMON LXX.

[Preached at St. Peter's, Cornhill, on the feast of the Annunciation, 1691.]

CHRIST JESUS THE ONLY MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MEN.

For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all.—1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.

THESE words contain in them these four propositions; three of them express, and the fourth of them sufficiently implied in the text.

I. That “there is one God.”

II. That “there is one mediator between God and men; Christ Jesus.”

III. That he “gave himself a ransom for all.”

IV. That the mediation or intercession of Jesus Christ, is founded in the redemption of mankind. For this seems to be the reason why it is added, that he “gave himself a ransom for all,” to signify to us, that because he “gave himself a ransom for all,” therefore he intercedes for all. In virtue of that sacrifice which he offered to God for the salvation of men, he offers up our prayers to God; and therefore it is acceptable to him, that we should pray for all men. This seems to be the true connexion of the apostle's discourse, and the force of his reasoning, about our putting up public prayers for all men.

I have in a former discourse handled the first of these. I proceed now, to the

II. Second, That “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” “One¹ mediator,” that is, but one; for the expression is the very same concerning one God, and one mediator; and therefore, if the apostle when he says, “there is one God,” certainly means that there is but one God; it is equally certain, that when he says, “there is one mediator between God and men,” he means, there is but one mediator, viz. Christ Jesus. He is the only mediator between God and men.

In the handling of this argument, I shall proceed in this method.

I. I shall endeavour to shew, that God hath appointed but one mediator, or advocate, or intercessor in heaven for us; in whose name, and by whose mediation and intercession, we are to offer up our prayers and services to God.

II. That this is most agreeable to one main end and design of the Christian religion, and of our Saviour's coming into the world.

III. That it is likewise evident from the nature and reason of the thing itself, that there is but one mediator and intercessor in heaven for us, to offer up our prayers to God; and that there can be no more. And then,

IV. And lastly, I shall endeavour to shew, how contrary to the doctrine of the Christian religion, concerning one mediator and intercessor in heaven for us, the doctrine and practice

1 See Sermon XLVIII. concerning the Unity of the Divine Nature, Vol. iii. p. 409.

of the church of Rome in this matter is, in their invocation of angels, and the blessed Virgin, and the saints, and making use of their mediation and intercession with God for sinners; as likewise how contrary it is to the doctrine and practice of the primitive Christian church: and then I shall answer their several pretences for this doctrine and practice; and shew that this practice is not only needless, but useless and unprofitable; and not only so, but very dangerous and impious.



First, I shall endeavour to shew, that God hath appointed but one mediator, or advocate, or intercessor in heaven for us, in whose name, and by whose intercession, we are to offer up all our prayers and services to God.

Besides that it is expressly said here in the text, “there is but one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,” and that the Scripture no where mentions any other: I say, besides this, we are constantly directed to offer up our prayers and thanksgivings, and to perform all acts of worship in his name, and no other; and with a promise, that the prayers and services, which we offer up in his name, will be graciously answered and accepted: ([John xiv. 13, 14.](#)) “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do; that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.” And [chap. xvi. 23, 24.](#) “And in that day ye shall ask me nothing: verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” “In that day;” that is, when I have left the world, and am gone to my Father, as he explains it in the 28th verse, “In that day ye shall ask me nothing; but “whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.” That is, you shall not need to address your prayers to me, but to my Father in my name. And, ([ver. 26, 27.](#)) “At that day ye shall ask in my name;” that is, from the time that I am ascended into heaven, ye shall put up all your prayers and requests to God, in my name; “and I say unto you, that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you;” that is, I need not tell you (though I shall certainly do it) that I will intercede with the Father for you; for he of himself is kindly disposed and affected towards you, for my sake; the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me.



St. Paul likewise commands Christians to perform all acts of religions worship in the name of Christ: ([Col. iii. 10, 17.](#)) “Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord, and whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of our Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” And giving this precept of addressing all our prayers and thanksgivings to God, by Jesus Christ, as the only mediator between God and us, is the more remarkable, because it is given in opposition to the worshipping of God by any other mediators and intercessors in heaven for us; and to that superstition which had begun so early to prevail among some Christians at Colosse and Laodicea, of worshipping God by the mediation and intercession of angels, against which he had cautioned in the former chapter: ([ver. 18, 19.](#)) “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility, and worshipping of angels,

not holding the head.” Intimating, that for Christians to address themselves to God, by any other mediator but Jesus Christ only, was a defection from Christ “the head, and high priest of our profession.” And that this is the apostle’s meaning, Theodoret assures us, in his comment upon this place, where he tells us, that some who maintained an observance of the law, together with the gospel, asserted also, that angels were to be worshipped, saying, that the law was given by them. And this custom, he tells us, remained a long time in Phrygia and Pisidia, and that upon this account it was, that the synod of Laodicea in Phrygia (about the middle of the fourth century) forbade Christians, by a law, to pray to angels. And yet more expressly in his comment upon those words, ([chap. iii. ver. 17.](#)) “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” For, “because (^says he) they (meaning those of whom St. Paul warns the Colossians to beware; because they) did command men to worship angels, he enjoins the contrary; that they should adorn both their words and actions with the memory (or mention) of the name of Christ their Lord: and send ye up (saith he) thanksgiving to God and the Father by him, and not by the angels.” And then he makes mention of the canon of the synod of Laodicea, “which (says he) in pursuance of this rule, and being desirous to cure that old disease, made it a law, that none should pray unto angels, nor forsake the Lord Jesus Christ.” It seems then that some relics of that impious custom, of praying to angels, which Theodoret here calls “that old disease,” had continued from St. Paul’s time, to the council of Laodicea, which was the occasion of that severe canon then made about that matter: the very words whereof I will set down, because they are remarkable; viz. “That Christians ought not to forsake the church of God, and go away from it, and to invoke angels, and to make conventicles, all which are forbidden. If any therefore be found giving himself to this secret idolatry, let him be anathema; because he hath forsaken our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and is gone over to idolatry.” What shall be said to them, who do not only secretly, and in their private devotions, but in the public assemblies of Christians, and in the most public offices of their church, invoke angels, and pray to them? So that it was praying to angels (or making use of them as mediators and intercessors with God for us) which St. Paul here reproveth so severely in the Colossians, as a defection from Christ and the Christian religion.

And indeed, considering how frequently the Scripture speaks of Christ, as “our only way to God, and by whom alone we have access to the throne of grace,” we cannot doubt but that God hath constituted him our only mediator and intercessor, by whom we are to address all our requests to God. ([John xiv. 6.](#)) Jesus there saith unto Thomas, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life;” that is, the true and living way to the Father (which the apostle calls “a new and living way.” [Heb. x. 19, 20.](#) “Having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way; which he hath consecrated for us.”) “No man cometh to the Father but by me;” that is, we can have no access to God by prayer, or by any

313

314

other acts of religious worship but by him. So St. Paul tells us, ([Eph. ii. 18.](#)) “For through him (speaking of Christ) we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father.” “We both;” that is, both Jews and gentiles. Under the law the Jews had access to God by their high priest, who interceded with God, and offered up prayers in behalf of the people. The gentiles, they addressed themselves to God by innumerable mediators, by angels, and the souls of their departed heroes, which were the pagan saints. Instead of all these, God hath appointed one mediator and intercessor in heaven for us, Jesus the Son of God, and by him all mankind, both Jews and gentiles, have “access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

315

And we have no need of any other, as the apostle to the Hebrews reasons: ([chap. vii. 24, 25.](#)) “But this person (speaking of Christ) because he continueth for ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood, ἀπαράβατον, a priesthood which doth not pass from one to another,” as the priesthood under the law did, when upon the death of one high priest, another succeeded in his place; but our high priest under the gospel, “since he abides for ever, is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us.” So that Jesus Christ is an all-sufficient mediator, and able to carry on and accomplish the work of our salvation from first to last: and as we do not find that God hath appointed any other; so we are sure that there needs no other, since he is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God by him, and that he lives for ever to make intercession for us.”

Secondly, I proceed now in the second place to shew, that this doctrine or principle of one mediator between God and man, is most agreeable to one main end and design of the Christian religion, and of our Saviour’s coming into the world, which was to destroy idolatry out of the world; which St. John calls “the works of the devil,” ([1 John iii. 8.](#)) “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might ἵνα λύσῃ, that he might dissolve or demolish the works of the devil;” by which St. John does more especially mean the idolatrous worship of the heathen, which consisted in the multitude of their gods, and the bloody and barbarous rites and sacrifices, whereby they worshipped them; and likewise in the multitude of their mediators between the gods and men, who were also esteemed by them an inferior sort of deities. Both these kinds of idolatry had strangely prevailed, and overrun the world before the appearance of our Lord and Saviour, who came on purpose to deliver mankind from the horrible superstition and slavery of the worship of false gods, to pull down this kingdom of the devil, and to demolish that fabric which he had been so long a rearing, and to beat him out of those strong holds, which he thought had been impregnable.

316

God indeed gave some check to these many ages, and not long after their first appearance, by the Jewish religion, which was on purpose introduced and confirmed and established by so many and such mighty miracles, to preserve and keep alive in the world the primitive tradition and belief of the one true God: and likewise to be (as it were) some shadow and rude draught of that more perfect dispensation of the Christian religion, which, by one sacrifice once offered, and by one mediator between God and men. was to put an end to the

infinite superstitions of the heathen worship, and all the bloody and barbarous rites of it, and likewise to the idolatry they were guilty of, in the worship of their inferior deities, whom they looked upon as a middle sort of powers between the gods and men, and therefore addressed themselves to them, as mediators between the superior and heavenly gods, and men here on earth. This was plainly one of the great designs of the Christian religion, and therefore it concerns Christians to understand it, and to be very careful that they do not suffer themselves to be deluded by any specious pretences whatsoever, to bring these things back again into the Christian religion, for the ruin and extirpation whereof, it was purposely designed and intended.

317

And this seems plainly to be the meaning of that caution, wherewith St. John concludes his catholic or general epistle, namely, that Christians should be very careful that they were not carried back again into the heathen idolatry, by the confident pretences of the Gnostic heretics to higher decrees of knowledge and illumination than other Christians had; that is, by their pretending to be the infallible church, and the only true and genuine Christians. For it is against this sect, that this epistle is plainly designed, which St. John thus concludes, ([chap. v. from verse the 18th to the end](#);) “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not;” meaning that he doth not commit “the sin unto death,” which he had spoken of just before (viz. apostacy from Christianity to the heathen idolatry, or that which was very like it); “whosoever is born of God doth not commit this sin, but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one teacheth him not;” that is, he preserveth himself from the contagion of idolatry, into which the devil was so busy to seduce mankind. “And we know that we are of God/ that is, do be long to the true God, and are worshippers of him: “And the whole world lieth in wickedness, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, is in the power, or under the dominion, of that wicked one;” that is, the greatest part of mankind was sunk into idolatry, and the worship of the devil. “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true.” “We know,” that is, we Christians are better taught by the Christian religion, to acknowledge and worship the only true God: “And we are in him that is true, in (or by) his Son Jesus Christ;” that is, we worship the only true God, by his Son Jesus Christ. And then he concludes, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols;” intimating hereby, that the worshipping of any other, besides this only true God, and by any other mediator than Jesus Christ, is idolatry.

318

There were, indeed, two very ancient and common notions, both amongst Jews and gentiles, of the original whereof it is hard to give any certain account; only this is certain, that they did prevail very early, and did very generally possess mankind: and they were these: First, That God was not to be appeased towards sinners, merely upon their repentance, without the death and suffering of some other in their stead; and that God would accept of this vicarious punishment and suffering, instead of the death of the sinner himself. And this seems to have given the original to the sacrifices of living creatures, to appease the wrath of

God towards sinners; which, in process of time, as the worship of false gods prevailed in the world, did proceed to that degree of superstition and barbarous inhumanity, that, by the instigation of the devil, men offered up the blood of their children, and sacrificed their sons and daughters to their idols and false gods. Secondly, Another common notion, which had likewise possessed mankind was, that God was not to be immediately approached by sinful men; but that their prayers were to be offered up to the Deity by certain mediators and intercessors, that were to procure for them the favour of the gods, and the gracious answer and acceptance of their prayers. And this was the original of that other sort of heathen idolatry, which consisted in the worship of their demons and heroes, that is, of angels and souls departed, viz. of such eminent persons as had been great benefactors to mankind, and, for their worthy deeds upon, earth, were canonized, and translated into the number of their inferior gods: by these, as the chief courtiers and favourites of heaven, they addressed their prayers and supplications to the superior gods.

Now with these notions, which had generally possessed mankind (how imperfect soever) God was pleased to comply so far, as, in the frame of the Jewish religion, (which was designed for a type of the more perfect institution of the Christian religion, and a preparation for it:) I say, God was pleased to comply so far with these notions, as to appoint sacrifices to be slain and offered up for the sinner; and likewise a high priest, that once a year should enter into the holy of holies, with the blood of sacrifices that were offered up for the people, to make expiation for them; and, in virtue of that blood, should intercede for the people, as the apostle to the Hebrews does declare at large. And when God sent his Son in the fulness of time, he was pleased likewise, in the dispensation of the gospel, (that perfect institution which was never to be altered) to have so much regard to these common notions and apprehensions of mankind, as to provide for the supply of those two great wants, which they seemed always to have laboured under, and concerning which they were at so great a loss; viz. an effectual expiatory sacrifice for sins upon earth, and a powerful mediator and intercessor with God in heaven: and both these by the same person, Jesus Christ, “who appeared in the end of the world, to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself;” and in the merit and virtue of that sacrifice, “appearing in heaven in the presence of God for us,” is become a perpetual advocate, and a most powerful intercessor with God in heaven for us. So that, instead of the endless sacrifices of the Jewish religion, which were ineffectual to the real expiation of sin, and only types and shadows of the true expiatory sacrifice, and instead of the bloody and inhuman sacrifices of the heathen idolatry; the Son of God hath “by one sacrifice for sin once offered, perfected for ever them that are sanctified, and obtained eternal redemption for us.” And instead of the mediation of angels, and the souls of their departed heroes, which the heathen made use of to offer up their prayers to the gods, we have “one mediator between God and men,” appointed by God himself, Jesus the Son of God, who in our nature

is ascended into heaven, “to appear in the presence of God for us.” And who so fit to be our patron and advocate as he who was our sacrifice and propitiation?

Thus the method of our redemption, as it was by the wisdom of God admirably suited to the common apprehensions of mankind; concerning the necessity of a sacrifice to make expiation of sin, and of a mediator to intercede with God for sinners; so was it likewise excellently fitted, not only to put an end to the Jewish sacrifices, but likewise to abolish the barbarous sacrifices and rites of the heathen idolatry, and to cashier that infinite number of mediators and intercessors, by whom they addressed their prayers to the Deity; and, instead of all this, to introduce a more reasonable and spiritual worship, more agreeable to the nature and perfections of God and the reason of mankind; which was one of the main and principal designs of the Christian religion: and therefore, to bring in any other mediators, to intercede in heaven for us (whether angels or saints) and by them to offer up our prayers to God, is directly contrary to the design of the Christian religion.

Thirdly, It is likewise evident from the nature and reason of the thing itself, that there is but one mediator and intercessor in heaven, who offers up our prayers to God, and that there can be no more. Because under the gospel there being but one high priest, and but one sacrifice once offered for sin; and intercession for sinners being founded in the merit and virtue of the sacrifice, by which expiation for sin is made, there can be no other mediator of intercession, but he who hath made expiation of sin, by a sacrifice offered to God for that purpose; and this Jesus Christ only hath done. He is both our high priest and our sacrifice; and therefore he only, in the merit and virtue of that sacrifice, which he offered upon earth, can intercede in heaven for us, and offer up our prayers to God. Others may pray to God for us; as our brethren upon earth do, and perhaps the angels and saints in heaven; but none of these can offer up our prayers to God, and procure the acceptance of them; for that can only be done in virtue of a sacrifice first offered, and by him that offered it; this being the peculiar office and qualification of a mediator or intercessor, properly so called.

It is the plain design of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, to prove that Christ is our only mediator in heaven, in virtue of that sacrifice for sin, which he offered upon earth: and that he alone appears in the presence of God for us, to present our requests to him, and obtain a gracious answer of them: and he shews at large how this was particularly typified by the Jewish high priest, who, upon the great day of expiation, after the sacrifice was slain without, entered alone into the holy of holies, with the blood of the sacrifices, in virtue whereof he made intercession for the people. Answerably to this, Jesus, the high priest of our profession, offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of men, and, in virtue of that sacrifice, “is entered into the high place not made with hands,” that is, into heaven itself, “there to appear in the presence of God for us, where he lives forever to make intercession for us,” in virtue of that eternal redemption which he hath obtained for us, by the price of his blood, as the apostle declares in several chapters of that Epistle. So that this intercession being



founded in the merit of a sacrifice, which he alone offered, he is of necessity “the only mediator between God and men.”

And for this reason it is, that the mediation and intercession of Christ is so frequently in Scripture mentioned together with the expiation which he made for the sins of men, or (which is the same) with the price which he paid for the redemption of mankind; because the one is founded in the other, and depends upon it. So we find, [1 John ii. 1, 2](#). “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” And here likewise in the text, “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all;” therefore “the only mediator between God and men,” because he only gave himself a ransom for all men.” The efficacy and prevalency of his mediation, being founded in the merit and virtue of the ransom of his blood.

And the force of these texts, and this reasoning from them, is not to be avoided and turned off, by distinguishing between a mediator of redemption and of intercession, and by saying, that it is true, that Christ is the only mediator of redemption, but there may be many mediators of intercession: for if the force of his being advocate or intercessor be founded in the virtue of his ransom and propitiation (as I have plainly shewn, to the conviction of any that are not strongly prejudiced, and that will read and consider what the Scripture says in this matter without prepossession); then it is plain, that none can be a proper mediator of intercession, but he that paid the price of our redemption: so that the mediator of our redemption, and our mediator of intercession, must of necessity be one and the same person; and none can appear in the quality of our advocate with the Father, but he only who is “the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.”

I should now have proceeded to

The fourth thing I proposed in the handling of this argument; namely, to shew how contrary to this doctrine of the Christian religion, concerning one only mediator and intercessor in heaven for us, the doctrine and practice of the church of Rome is in this matter; namely, in their invocation of angels, and the blessed Virgin, and the saints, and flying to their help, and making use of their mediation and intercession with God for sinners: as likewise how contrary all this is to the doctrine and practice of the Christian church, for several of the first ages of it. And then I should have answered their chief pretences and excuses for these things, and shewed that this practice of theirs is not only needless (being nowhere commanded by God) but useless also, and unprofitable; and not only so, but very dangerous and impious, being contrary to the Christian religion, and highly derogating from the virtue and merit of Christ’s sacrifice, and from the honour of “the only mediator between God and men.” But of this another time.

323

324

325

SERMON LXXI.

CHRIST JESUS THE ONLY MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MEN.

For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all.—1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.

IN these words are four propositions: three expressed, and the fourth implied.

I. That “there is one God.”

II. That “there is one mediator between God and men: Christ Jesus.”

III. That he “gave himself a ransom for all.”

IV. That the mediation or intercession of Jesus Christ, is founded in his redemption of mankind: that because he “gave himself a ransom for all men,” therefore he, and he only, is qualified to intercede for all men, in virtue of that sacrifice which he offered for the salvation of all mankind.

The second of these I spake to the last time, and endeavoured to shew,

1. That God hath appointed but “one mediator,” or advocate or intercessor in heaven for us; by whose mediation we are to offer up all our prayers and services to God.

2. That this doctrine of one mediator is most agreeable to one main end and design of the Christian religion, and of our Saviour’s coming into the world, which was to destroy idolatry.

3. That from the nature and reason of the thing (*viz.* because intercession for sinners is founded in the merit of that sacrifice, by which expiation of sin is made), there can be no other mediator of intercession, but he who hath made expiation for sin, by a sacrifice offered to God for that purpose; and this Jesus Christ only hath done. Thus far I hare gone: I proceed now to

The fourth thing which I proposed in the hand ling of this argument, namely, To shew how contrary to this doctrine of the Christian religion, concerning one only mediator and intercessor in heaven for us, the doctrine and the practice of the church of Rome is in this matter; namely, in their invocation of angels, and the blessed Virgin, and the saints, and flying to their help, and making use of their mediation and intercession with God for sinners.

And that I may proceed more distinctly in this argument, I shall handle it under these particular heads.

First, I shall endeavour to shew, that the doctrine and practice of the church of Rome, in this matter, is contrary to the doctrine of the Christian religion, concerning one only mediator and intercessor in heaven for us.

Secondly, That it is contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Christian church, for several of the first ages of it.

Thirdly, I shall endeavour to answer their chief pretences and excuses for this doctrine and practice.

Fourthly, To shew that this doctrine and practice of theirs is not only needless, being no where commanded by God, but useless also, and unprofitable.

Fifthly, And not only so, but very dangerous and impious; because contrary, to the Christian religion, and greatly derogating from the virtue and merit of Christ's sacrifice, and from the honour of "the only mediator between God and men."

First, I shall endeavour to shew, that the doctrine and practice of the church of Rome in this matter, is contrary to the doctrine of the Christian religion concerning one only mediator and intercessor in heaven for us; namely, in their invocation of angels, and the blessed Virgin, and the saints, and flying to their help, and making use of their mediation and intercession with God for sinners.

That Jesus Christ is our only mediator and intercessor with God in heaven, by whom we have access to God in any action of religious worship, and that all our prayers and services are to be offered up to God only by him, and in his name and mediation, and no other, I have plainly shewed from Scripture, and proved it by an invincible argument, taken likewise from Scripture; namely, because the efficacy and prevalency of his mediation and intercession is founded in the virtue and merit of his sacrifice; and, that he is, therefore, "the only mediator between God and men," because he only "gave himself a ransom for all;" he is therefore "our only advocate with the Father," because "he only is the propitiation for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world."

I have shewed likewise, that the Scripture excludes angels from being our mediators with God, from the main scope and design of the Epistle to the Colossians; and much more are the saints departed excluded from this office, being inferior to the angels, not only in the dignity and excellency of their beings, but very probably in the degree of their knowledge.

In short, prayer is a proper act of religious worship, and therefore peculiar to God alone, and we are commanded to a worship the Lord our God, and to serve him only;" and no where in Scripture are we directed to address our prayers and supplications and thanksgivings to any but God alone, and only in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ. Our blessed Saviour himself hath taught us, to put up all our prayers to God our heavenly Father: ([Luke xi. 12.](#)) "When you pray, say, Our Father, which art in heaven." Which plainly shews, to whom all our prayers are to be addressed; and unless we can call an angel, or the blessed Virgin, or a saint, "Our Father," we can pray to none of them. And elsewhere he as plainly directs us, by whom we are to apply ourselves to God, and in whose name and mediation we are to put up all our requests to him: ([John xiv. 6.](#)) "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me:" and then it follows, ([ver. 13, 14.](#)) "And what soever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." Nothing is clearer in the whole Bible, than "one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus;" and that he is "our only advocate and intercessor" with God in heaven for us.

327

328

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew, that the doctrine and practice of the church of Rome in this matter, is contrary to that of the Christian church, for several of the first ages of it.

As for the ages of the apostles, it hath been already proved out of their writings. That it was not practised in the three first ages, we have the acknowledgment of Cardinal Perron, and others of their learned writers; and they give a very remarkable reason for it; namely, because the worship and invocation of saints and angels, and addressing our prayers to God by them, might have seemed to have given countenance to the heathen idolatry. From whence I cannot forbear, by the way, to make these two observations. 1. That the invocation of saints and angels, and the blessed Virgin, and addressing ourselves to God by their mediation, was not in those primitive ages esteemed a duty of the Christian religion; because, if it had, it could not have been omitted for fear of the scandal consequent upon it; and if it was not a duty then, by what authority or law can it be made so since? 2. That this practice is very liable to the suspicion of idolatry; and surely every Christian cannot but think it fit, that the church of Christ should, like a chaste spouse, not only be free from the crime, but from all suspicion of idolatry.

And for the next ages after the apostles, nothing is plainer, than that both their doctrine and practice were contrary to the doctrine and practice of the present church of Rome in this matter. The most ancient fathers of the Christian church do constantly define prayer to be an address to God; and therefore it cannot be made to any but God only: and after the rise of Arianism, they argued for the divinity of Christ, against the Arians, from our praying to him; which argument were of no force, if prayers might be made to any but God; and this was in the beginning of the fourth age.

And we nowhere find any mention of those distinctions, of gods by nature, and gods by participation (as Bellarmine calls the angels and saints), or of a supreme and inferior religious worship; or of a mediator of redemption, and a mediator of intercession; which are so commonly made use of by the church of Rome in this controversy.

And, which is as considerable as any of the rest, the ancient fathers were generally of opinion, that the saints were not admitted to the beatific vision till after the day of judgment; and this is acknowledged by the most learned of the church of Rome. But this very opinion takes away the foundation of praying to saints; because the church of Rome grounds it upon their reigning with Christ in heaven, and upon the light and knowledge which is communicated to them in the beatific vision; and if so, then they who believed the saints not yet to be admitted to this vision, could have no reason or ground to pray to them.

And lastly, The ancient church prayed for saints departed, and for the blessed Virgin herself; and therefore, could not pray to them, as intercessors for them in heaven, for whom they themselves interceded upon earth. And therefore the church of Rome, in compliance with the change which they have made in their doctrine, have changed the Missal in that

329

330

point, and instead of praying for St. Leo (one of their popes) as they were wont to do in their ancient Missal, in this form, “Grant, O Lord, that this oblation may be profitable to the soul of thy servant Leo;” the collect is now changed in the present Roman Missal into this form, “Grant, O Lord, that, by the intercession of blessed Leo, this offering may be profitable to us:” and (as the gloss upon the canon law observes) this change was made in their Missal upon very good reason; “because anciently they prayed for Leo, but now they pray to him:” which is an ingenious acknowledgment, that both the doctrine and practice of their church are plainly changed, from what they anciently were in this matter.

What the doctrines and practices of the church of Rome are in this matter, all the world sees; and they themselves are so ashamed of them, that of late all their endeavours have been, to represent them otherwise than in truth they are, and to obtrude upon us a new popery, which they think themselves better able to defend than the old; which yet they have not shewn that they are so well able to do; and therefore now, instead of defending the true doctrines and practices of their own church, they would fain mince and disguise them, and change them into something that comes nearer to the protestant doctrine in those points: as if they had no way to defend their own doctrines, but by seeming to desert them, and by bringing them as near to ours as possibly they can.

But take them, as they have mollified them and pared them, to render them more plausible and tenable; that which still remains of them, I mean the solemn invocation of saints and angels, as mediators and intercessors with God in heaven for us, is plainly contrary both to the doctrine and practice of the primitive ages of Christianity.

As for the age of the apostles, I have already shewn it; and the matter is as clear for several of the next following ages, as I shall briefly shew, from a few very plain testimonies.

In the next age to the apostles, we have an epistle of one of the seven churches (I mean the church of Smyrna); in which, in vindication of themselves from that calumny which was raised against them by the Jews, among the heathen, “that if they permitted the Christians to have the body of the martyred Polycarp, they would leave Christ to worship Polycarp;” I say, in vindication of themselves from this calumny, they declare themselves thus: “Not knowing (say they) that we can neither leave Christ, who suffered for the salvation of the world of those that are saved, nor worship any other;” or (as it is in the old Latin translation) “nor offer up the supplication of prayer to any other person; for as for Jesus Christ, we adore him, as being the Son of God, but as for the martyrs, we love them, as the disciples and imitators of the Lord.” So that they plainly exclude the saints from any sort of religious worship, of which prayer or invocation was always esteemed a very considerable part.

Irenaeus likewise tells us, (*l. 2.*) that “the church doth nothing (speaking of the miracles which were wrought) by the invocation of angels, nor by enchantment, nor by any other wicked arts; but by prayers to the Lord, who made all things, and by calling on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here all invocation of angels, and, by the same or greater reason, of

331

332

the saints, is excluded. And Clemens Alexandrinus delivers it as the doctrine of the church, that “since there is but one good God, therefore both we and the angels pray to him, both for the giving, and the continuance of good things.”

In the next age, Origen is so full and express in this matter, that it is not possible for any protestant to speak more positively and clearly, *l. 8. contr. Celsum*; where he does on set purpose declare and vindicate the Christian doctrine and practice in this matter: “We worship (says he) the one only God, and his one only Son, and word, and image, with our utmost supplications and honours, bringing our prayers to the God of all things, through his only-begotten Son;” and afterwards: “Away (says he) with Celsus’s counsel, that says, we must pray to demons (or angels); for we must pray only to God, who is above all; we must pray to the only begotten and first born of every creature, and we must beseech him to offer up our prayers which we make to him to his God and our God:” and again (speaking of an gels), “As for the favour of others (if that be to be regarded) we know, that thousands of thousands stand before him, and ten thousand times ten thousand minister unto him; these are our brethren, and friends; who, when they see us imitating their piety towards God, work together to the salvation of those who call upon God, and pray as they ought to do, (that is) to God only:” and (*l. 5.*) where Celsus urges him with this, that “the Scriptures call angels gods;” he tells him, that “the Scriptures do not call the angels gods, with any design to require us to worship and adore them instead of God, who are ministering spirits, and bring messages and blessings down to us from God; for (says he) all supplications and prayer, and intercession, and giving of thanks, must be sent up to God, who is above all, by the high priest who is above all angels, and is the living Word and God.” And though angels be only here mentioned, yet, by the same reason, all other creatures are excluded, from being the objects of our religious worship and invocation, or mediators of intercession with God for us; because “all supplication and prayer, and intercession, and thanksgiving, must be sent up to God by our high priest who is the living Word and God. Let us then also (as he goes on) make supplication to the Word himself: and intercession, and giving of thanks, and prayer: but to invoke angels is not reasonable; since we do not comprehend the knowledge of them, which is above us; and if we could comprehend the knowledge of them, which is wonderful and secret, this very knowledge, which declares to us their nature and office, would not allow us to presume to pray to any other, but to the God who is Lord over all, and abundantly sufficient for all, by our Saviour the Son of God;” where he gives two plain reasons why we ought to pray only to God, and to offer up our prayers only by the mediation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and our Saviour: First, because he only “is Lord over all,” and therefore the worship of prayer is to be given to him only. And then, Secondly, because we have no need of any other patron and benefactor, or of any other mediator and advocate, “he is abundantly sufficient for all, by our Saviour the Son of God.”

333

334

In the same age Novatian, in his book concerning the Trinity, makes use of this argument to prove the divinity of Christ; because he hears our prayers, when we call upon him. “If Christ (says he) be only a man, how can he be present every where to those that call upon him; since this is not the nature of man, but of God, to be able to be present every where? If Christ be only a man, why do we in our prayers call upon him as mediator; since prayer to a man is deemed ineffectual to help or save us? If Christ be only man, why do we put up our hope in him; since hope in a man is accursed in Scripture.”

In the fourth century, apostolical constitutions, under the name of *Clemens Romanus* (but undoubtedly written in that age) give us a pregnant negative testimony in this matter; for though a great many of the public prayers are there set down at large, yet they are all directed to God alone, and not the least intimation there of any prayer made to the angels or saints, or even to the Virgin Mary; not of their intercession or aid; which now makes so great a part of the public devotions of the church of Rome.

Athanasius, in his fourth oration against the Arians, proves the unity of the Father and the Son from [1 Thess. iii. 11](#). “Now God himself and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.” From whence he argues thus: “One would not pray to receive any thing from the Father and the angels, or from any other creature; nor would one say, God and the angels give thee this; but one would pray to receive any thing from the Father and the Son because of their unity and uniform gift; for all things that are given by the Father, are given by the Son, and there is nothing which the Father doth not work by the Son;” and then concludes, “that it doth not belong to any, but to God alone, to bless and grant deliverances.” This I take to be a very remarkable testimony against the church of Rome, who in their public offices join the blessed Virgin with God, and our Saviour, in the same breath, and sometimes put her before her Son—“Let Mary and her Son bless us,” as it is in the office of the blessed Virgin; in direct contradiction to what I just now cited out of Athanasius: and nothing so common in their mouths as *Jesu Maria*; Jesus and Mary; nothing more frequent in their most eminent writers, than to join them together in their doxologies and thanksgivings; “Glory be to God, and the blessed Virgin, and to Jesus Christ,” says Gregory de Valencia. And Bellarmine himself concludes his disputations, concerning the worship of saints, in these words: “Praise be to God and the blessed Virgin mother Mary; likewise to Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, be praise and glory.” And in the very Roman Missal itself, they make confession of their sins to God Almighty, and the blessed Virgin Mary, to St. Michael the archangel, and to all the saints. And in their absolution they join together the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and the merits of the blessed Virgin, and of all the saints, for the remission of sins. And is not this the very thing which Athanasius doth so severely condemn?

I have mentioned before the council of Laodicea; which, about the middle of this century, condemns the worship of angels, and praying to them, as down right idolatry; and towards



the end of this fourth age, and in the beginning of the fifth, when it is pretended that praying to saints did begin (though it was rather by way of apostrophe and rhetorical address, than of formal invocation), there are express testimonies against it of the most eminent fathers of that time. I will instance but in three, Epiphanius, St. Chrysostom, and St. Augustine.

Epiphanius, in his confutation of the heresy of the Collyridians (which he calls the heresy of the women, because they first began the worship of the Virgin Mary), declares most expressly against the worship of any creature whatsoever; “for neither (says he) is Elias to be worshipped, though he is reckoned among the living (meaning that he was taken up into heaven, body and soul) nor John, nor any other of the saints:” and as for the Virgin Mary, he particularly adds, that “if God will not have us to worship the angels, how much more would he not have us to worship her that was born of Anna?” and concludes, “Let Mary be had in honour; but let the Lord be worshipped.”

St. Chrysostom, in a long discourse, persuades men to address their prayers immediately to God, and not as we address ourselves to great men by their officers and favourites; and tells us, that “there is no need of such intercessors with God, who is not so ready to grant our petitions, when we intreat him by others, as when we pray to him ourselves.”

Lastly, St. Augustine, because the Scriptures pronounce him accursed that putteth his trust in man; from thence he argues that, “therefore we ought not to ask of any other, but of our Lord God, either the grace to do well, or the reward of it.” The contrary to which I am sure is done in several of the public prayers used in the church of Rome. And, (lib. 22. de civ. Dei) he expressly tells us, that “the names of the martyrs were recited in their prayers at the altar; but they were not invocated by the priest who did celebrate Divine service. And in the third council of Carthage (which was in St. Augustine’s time) it is enjoined (can. 33.) that, “all prayers that were made at the altar should be directed to the Father.” Which how it is observed in the church of Rome we all know.

To conclude this matter, it cannot be made appear, that there were any prayers to saints in the public offices of the church, till towards the end of the eighth century; for in the year 754 the invocation of saints was condemned by a council of three hundred and thirty-eight bishops at Constantinople, as is acknowledged by the second council of Nice, which first established this superstition in the year 787; and this very council was condemned seven years after, in a council at Francfort, and declared void, and to be no otherwise esteemed of, than the council of Ariminum.

Thus you see, when this doctrine and practice, so contrary to the doctrine and practice of a great many of the first ages of the Christian church, was first established, namely, at the same time with the worship of images, and when the first foundation of transubstantiation was laid; which, as they began at the same time, so they are very fit to go together.

337

338

I should now have proceeded to the next thing which I proposed, namely, to answer the chief pretences which are made for this doctrine and practice; but of that in the following discourse.



SERMON LXXII.

CHRIST JESUS THE ONLY MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MEN.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all.—1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.

IN the two former discourses upon this text, I have treated on the second proposition I laid down from these words: viz. that there is but “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” In treating of this proposition, I shewed,

First, That it is agreeable to Scripture.

Secondly, That it is agreeable to one great end and design of the Christian religion, and of our Saviour’s coming into the world, which was, to destroy idolatry out of it.

Thirdly, That, from the nature and reason of the thing, there can be but one mediator or intercessor in heaven with God for sinners; and that he can be no other than Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, I shewed how contrary to this doctrine the doctrine and practice of the church of Rome is, in their invocation of angels and the blessed Virgin, and the saints, and making use of their mediation and intercession with God for sinners.

This I endeavoured to do, by shewing first, How contrary this is to the doctrine of the Scriptures. Secondly, How contrary to the doctrine and practice of the church, for several of the first ages of it. And thus far I have gone.

I proceed now, in the third place, to answer the chief pretences and excuses which are made by those of the church of Rome for this doctrine and practice.

As, 1. That they only say, that it is lawful to pray to angels and saints; but do not enjoin and require it. To this I answer two things:

(1.) In saying that it is lawful to pray to saints and angels (if they went no farther) they say that which they can never make good; because prayer is an act of religious worship, and peculiar and proper to God only, and therefore cannot be given to any creature, angel or saint. This I have proved from Scripture, where our Saviour commands us, when we pray, to say, “Our Father, which art in heaven;” that is, to direct and address our prayers to God only. And St. Paul likewise forbids the worshipping angels, by invoking of them, and making use of them as mediators between God and us, in his Epistle to the Colossians; which Theodoret expressly interprets concerning the invocation of angels, and applying ourselves to them, as mediators and intercessors with God in heaven for us. And the council of Laodicea declares this practice to be idolatry. Besides that, the ancient fathers of the Christian church, for above three hundred years, never spake of praying to any but God only; and do expressly condemn the invocation of angels, much more of the saints, who are inferior to them; and therefore, they always define prayer to be an address to God, a conversing and discoursing with God; which would be a false definition of prayer, if it were lawful to pray to any but to



God only. All which considered, one may justly wonder at the confidence of some men, who would have it taken for granted, without any proof that the invocation of saints and angels is lawful.

(2.) If it were true, that it is lawful to pray to angels and saints; it is not true, that the church of Rome does only declare it to be lawful, but does not require and enjoin it, as some of their late writers pretend.

With what face can this be said, when there are so many prayers to angels and saints, and especially to the blessed Virgin, in the public offices of their church, in which all are supposed to join, as much as in the prayers which are put up to God by the priest? It is true, indeed, the people understand neither; but they are present at both, and join in both alike; that is, as much as men can be said to join in that which they do not understand; as that church supposeth people may do, and receive great edification also, by joining with the priest in a service which they do not understand. But how they can be edified by what they do not understand, I must confess myself as little able to understand as they do their prayers. But whether they understand them or not, it is certain that if the people have any part in the public prayers of the church, they are bound to pray to angels and saints.

And if the Creed of Pope Pius IV. framed by virtue of an order of the council of Trent, be of any authority with them, one of the articles of it is, that "I do firmly hold, that the saints, which reign together with Christ, are to be worshipped and invocated, and that they do offer up prayers to God for us." And this Creed all the governors of cathedrals and superior churches, and all who hold any dignity, or benefice, with cure of souls from them, are bound solemnly to make profession of, and swear to, and carefully to cause it to be held, and taught, and preached by all that are under their charge: so that they are to teach the people, that the saints, which reign together with Christ, are to be worshipped and prayed to. And, therefore, unless people are not bound to do that which they are to be taught it is their duty to do, they are, by virtue of this article, required to worship and pray to saints. And if the public office of their church be the public worship, and Pope Pius's Creed the public faith of the Romish church, no man can be either of the faith or in the communion of that church, who does not only hold it lawful, but his duty, to worship the saints in heaven, and to pray to them, and accordingly does join in the worship of them and prayers to them, as much as in any other part of Divine service.

2. Another pretence for this doctrine and practice is, that the saints in heaven do pray for us, and what is this but to be mediators and intercessors with God for us? And, if so, why may we not pray to them, to intercede with God for us? To this I answer four things:—

(1.) We do not deny that the saints in heaven pray for us that are here upon earth, because they may do so, for any thing we know; but that they do so, is more than can be proved, either by clear testimony of Scripture, or by any convincing argument from reason, and therefore no doctrine or practice can be safely grounded upon it.

341

342

(2.) Though it were certain, that the saints in heaven do pray for us; yet they are not mediators and intercessors, properly so called: for all intercession, strictly and properly so called, is in virtue of a sacrifice offered by him that intercedes; and therefore he only, by whom expiation of sin is made upon earth, can be properly an intercessor with God in heaven; but this, no angel or saint hath done, nor can do.



And (as I have shewed in some of the former discourses) it is the plain scope of a great part of the Epistle to the Hebrews to prove this very thing, that under the gospel we have an High Priest that lives for ever, “and appears in the presence of God for us,” in the virtue of that blood which he shed, and that sacrifice which he offered upon the cross for the expiation of sin:” and that by this High Priest only we have access, with freedom and confidence to the “throne of grace,” and by him do offer up all our prayers and thanksgivings, and all other acts of religious worship, to God: and this the apostle shews was typified, in an imperfect manner, by the Jewish high priest under the law, who was but one, and none but he only could enter into the holy of holies, with the blood of the sacrifices that were slain and burnt without, by which blood he made an atonement and interceded for the people;” and, though every priest might pray for the people, and the people for one another, which is a kind of intercession; yet that peculiar kind of intercession, which was performed by the high priest in the holy of holies, in virtue of the sacrifice that was slain without, could not be made, but by the high priest only. By all which was typified our High Priest under the gospel, who only hath made expiation of sin, by the sacrifice of himself, and is entered into heaven, to “appear in the presence of God for us,” where he lives for ever to make intercession for us, in virtue of that blood, which was shed for the expiation of sin, and which can only be presented to God by him that shed it. And this is properly intercession, like that of the high priest under the law for the people of Israel; and this kind of intercession can be made by none in heaven for us, but only by “the High Priest of our profession, Jesus the Son of God,” and by none else can we offer up our prayers and services to God; and, consequently, we cannot address ourselves to any other, angels or saints, as mediators with God for us.



(3.) Supposing it certain, that the saints do pray for us; yet we may not address solemn prayer to them to pray for us, because prayer and solemn in vocation is a part of that religious worship which is peculiar to God.

(4.) Supposing it not only certain, that the saints in heaven do pray for us, but likewise that they might be proper mediators and intercessors with God, for us; yet we ought not to pray to them, because they cannot hear us, as I shall have occasion to shew fully by and by.

Another of their pretences or excuses for this practice is, that praying to saints to pray for us, is no more than what we do to good men upon earth, when we desire them to pray for us. So the late expounder of the catholic faith, namely, the Bishop of Meaux, tells us, that “they pray to the saints in heaven, in the same order of brotherly society with which we intreat our brethren upon earth to pray for us.”

But that this is not a true representation, either of their doctrine or practice in this matter, will appear by these following considerations:

(1.) That they pray to the angels and saints in heaven with the same solemn circumstances of religious worship that they pray to God himself, in the same place, and in the same humble posture, and in the same religious offices and services, in which they pray to God; which surely is never done by any to their “brethren upon earth.”

(2.) That in their prayers and thanksgivings, they join the angels and the blessed Virgin and the saints together with God and Christ, as if (to use their own phrase) it were “in the same order of brotherly society,” and as if they were all equally the objects of our invocation and praise; of which, in my last discourse, I gave several plain instances; but this also is never done to “our brethren upon earth.”

(3.) That in the Creed of Pope Pius IV. it is expressly said, that “the saints, which reign together with Christ, are to be worshipped and invocated:” but this surely they will not allow to be done to “our brethren upon earth.” And the council of Trent does expressly ground the worship and invocation of saints, upon their reigning with Christ in heaven; and therefore, this worship and invocation of saints must necessarily be something more than “according to the same order of brotherly society, with which we intreat our brethren upon earth to pray for us:” otherwise the reason given by the council of their reigning with Christ in heaven, would be frivolous, if the same thing may be done to “our brethren upon earth.”

(4.) In the public offices of their church, they do not only pray to the saints to pray for them, but they direct their prayers and thanksgivings immediately to them, for all those blessings and benefits which they ask of God, and thank him for. Of which innumerable examples might be given out of their public offices; particularly in the “Office of the blessed Virgin,” they pray to the angels thus: “Deliver us, we beseech you, by your command, from all our sins.”

And the words of the Decree of the council of Trent, [*ad eorum orationes, opem, auxiliumque confugere*, “to flee to their prayers, aid, and help,”] unless we will make them a mere tautology, must of necessity signify something more than begging of them to pray for us. And, indeed, those words of their aid and help, seem to be added on purpose to give countenance to those direct prayers which are made to the saints, for all spiritual and temporal blessings, and which still remain without any change in their public offices; and unless we will understand them contrary to the plain and obvious sense of those prayers, they must signify something more than praying to the saints to pray for us.

’Tis true, indeed, that the Catechism, which was framed by order of the council of Trent, for the explaining of their doctrines, makes the difference between their prayers to God, and to the saints, to lie in this, that “we say to God, Have mercy on us, or hear our prayers; but to the saints, Pray for us.” But I have shewn before, that this is not the constant form of praying to saints, but that frequently they make direct addresses to them for their help and

345

346

aid. And this the compilers of the Catechism were sensible of, and therefore they add: “although it be lawful in another manner to ask of the saints themselves, that they would have mercy on us; because they are very merciful.” And is not God so too? And then where is the difference between their prayers to God, and to the saints? If it neither lie in the matter of them, nor in the form, nor in the reason of them; if we pray to them for the same thing, and in the same form, “Have mercy on us,” and our prayers to them be grounded upon the same reason that our prayers to God are, namely, “because they are merciful;” where then is the difference between them?

3. I will mention but one pretence more, which is that, by praying to the saints in heaven, they do not make them gods; and therefore there can be no suspicion or danger of idolatry in the case.

To this I shall answer two things:

(1.) That praying to them in all places, and at all times, and for all sorts of blessings, does suppose them to have the incommunicable perfections of the Divine nature imparted to them, or inherent in them; namely, his omnipotence, and omniscience, and immense presence; and, to whatever being we ascribe these perfections, in so doing we make it God; for prayer to God is no otherwise an acknowledgment of his omnipotence, omniscience, and immense presence, than as we do in all places, and at all times, pray to him for all things; and so they do to the saints, and that not only with vocal but with mental prayer, which the council of Trent allows, and in so doing, necessarily supposeth them to know our hearts, directly contrary to the reason which Solomon gives, why we should put up all our prayers and supplications to God: (1 Kings viii. 39.) “for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men.”

(2.) Bellarmine is so sensible of the dint of this argument, that he is forced to acknowledge the saints which reign with Christ in heaven to be gods by participation (that is, a sort of inferior gods, as the heathen supposed their mediators to be) and that therefore we may fly to their aid and help, as well as to their intercession and prayers. And is this also to pray to the saints in heaven, “in the same order of brotherly society, with which we intreat our brethren upon earth to pray for us?” This methinks is great familiarity, to treat gods by participation, just in the same manner as we do “our brethren upon earth.” Certainly, either Bellarmine hath raised the saints in heaven too high, when he makes them gods by participation; or the Bishop of Meaux hath sunk them too low, when he thinks they are to be treated and addressed to, in the same rank of brotherly society with mortal men here upon earth.

One cannot but think the Decree of the council of Trent to be very obscure and ambiguous, when it can admit of two so very different explications. If the infallible judge of controversies can speak no plainer, I think we had even best stick to the Bible, and hear what God says in his word, and endeavour to understand it as well as we can.

347

348

I proceed now to the fourth thing which I proposed, namely, To shew that this practice of their's, of addressing ourselves to angels and saints, and making use of their mediation, to offer up our prayers and thanksgivings to God, is not only needless, being no where commanded by God; but use less also, and unprofitable.

They are so far from pretending, that it is commanded by God, that several of their later writers would fain make us believe, that it is not enjoined by their councils; but only declared to be lawful, or at most but recommended as profitable. Nor is there any example of praying to saints, either in the Old or New Testament: not in the Old (as they of the church of Rome confess) "because the saints were not then admitted into heaven:" nor in the New, for fear of scandalizing the Jews, and of making the gentiles think they proposed new gods, and new mediators to them, instead of the old; which are the reasons given by their own writers.

And it is needless likewise; because the mediation of Jesus Christ alone is sufficient for us, and more than the intercession of millions of saints and angels. He alone "is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God by him," as the apostle to the Hebrews speaks. Hath not he made a clear and full promise to us, that whatever we ask in his name shall be granted us? And have we any reason to doubt, either of his inclination and good will, or of his power and interest to do us good? What need then is there to sue for the favour, or to take in the assistance of any other, even of those who are thought to be most powerful, and the chief ministers and favourites in that heavenly court? After such an assurance that my business will be effectually done there, by that great "advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;" why should I apply myself to St. Peter, though he be said to keep the keys of heaven; or to Michael, the archangel, though he be the chief of the ministering spirits; or to the blessed Virgin herself, notwithstanding those glorious titles of the Queen of Heaven, and the Mother of Mercy; which they of the church of Rome are pleased to bestow upon her, without her consent, and as may reasonably be presumed, against her will.

I will put a case, which may help to render this matter a little more plain and sensible to us, so as every man may be able to judge of it. Suppose a king should constitute his son the great master of requests; with this express declaration and assurance, that all petitions, that were addressed to him by his son, should be graciously received and answered: in this case, though every man might use his own discretion, at his own peril, and take what course he pleased, yet I should most certainly prefer all my petitions to the king, in the way which he had so plainly directed, and should trouble never a courtier of them all with my business; for fear the king should think, that I did either distrust his royal word, or despise his son, by my soliciting the aid and help of every little courtier, after I had put my petition into the hands of this great master of requests.

And now I will not distrust any of your understandings so far as to make the application. I will only add, that it is an eternal rule of truth, and which never fails in any case, *frustra fit per plura quod fieri potest per pauciora*, "it is in vain to attempt that by more ways and

349

350

means which may as well and as effectually be done by one;” because this would be perfect loss of time and pains: and therefore they who would send us so far about, as to trouble all the saints and angels in heaven with our petitions, when they cannot deny but that our great Mediator is alone sufficient, do seem to me to send us upon a very sleeveless errand: so that if, with all their skill in fencing, they could defend this practice from being unlawful, yet this one thing is a sufficient objection in reason against it, that it is perfectly needless.

Or if we could imagine any need of this, all addresses to them must be vain and unprofitable, if they do not know our wants, and hear our prayers that are put up to them; which St. Augustine thought they do not know and hear, *fatendum est* (saith he *Lib. de Cura pro mortuis*) *ne scire quidem mortuos, quid hic agatur*; “it must be acknowledged that the dead are ignorant of what is done here.” This was his opinion; but we are certain that they cannot know our wants, nor hear our prayers, at all times and in all places; unless they can either be present every where, which no finite being can be; or else God be pleased in some supernatural way to communicate to them the knowledge of our wants, and of the prayers which we put up to them; which we can never know that he does, unless he hath communicated to us, that he is pleased to do so, of which the Scripture nowhere gives us the least intimation.

But because they pretend, that the Scripture gives us some hints of this, I shall briefly examine what they say about this matter.

I. That the angels know our condition here below, because they are said to “rejoice at the conversion of a sinner;” and therefore the saints do likewise know our condition, because they shall be like the angels. But this is not said of them till after the resurrection, when we shall have no occasion to pray to them. Besides that, it may well enough be supposed, that God may reveal both to the angels and saints in heaven, the conversion of a sinner, because it may contribute to the increase of their joy and happiness: but will it hence follow, that God reveals to them all other circumstances of our condition, our dangers and temptations and troubles, our sins and our sufferings, the knowledge whereof would no ways contribute to the increase of their happiness? And yet, in order to their intercession with God for us, their knowledge of these things would be most beneficial to us.

II. Because the rich man was concerned in hell for the salvation of his relations on earth, they argue that it is much more probable, that the saints in heaven are concerned for us, and are ready to pray for us; and therefore it is very credible, that some way or other they have the knowledge of our condition and wants, though we cannot certainly tell what that particular way is.

To which I answer,

(1.) That it is a known rule among all divines, that no certain argument can be drawn from the circumstances of a parable, but only from the main scope and intention of it; nor is it so likely that the wicked in hell should have any share in that, which St. Paul tells us is the great virtue of the saints in heaven—I mean charity; and if they have it not, then no ar-

gument can be drawn from it. Some of their commentators think, that this motion of the rich man to Abraham concerning his brethren, did not proceed from charity to them, but to himself; lest his torment and punishment should be increased by their coming to hell, by the means of the ill example which he had given them when he was upon earth; and Cardinal Cajetan thinks, that he was concerned for his brethren out of pride and ambition, and because it would be for the honour of his family, to have some of them in that glory (so far above any thing in this world) which he saw Abraham and Lazarus possessed of. This is a reason, which I confess I should not have thought on; and yet perhaps it might be likely enough to enter into the mind of a Cardinal. And I cannot but observe, by the way, that this petition or request, which the rich man in hell made to Abraham, is the only instance we meet with in Scripture, of any thing like a prayer that was put up to any of the saints in heaven.

Well! but suppose that the rich man in hell had this charity for his brethren, and we will easily agree, that the saints in heaven have much more charity, not only for their kindred, but for all men here upon earth; let us now consider the particular way and manner which the great divines of the church of Rome (I mean the schoolmen, who cannot be content to be ignorant of any thing) do assign of the knowledge which the saints in heaven have of the condition and wants of men here below.

They tell us that they know all our prayers and wants in the glass of the Deity, or trinity; which metaphor, of the glass of the Deity, or trinity, if it have any meaning, it must be this, that the saints in heaven beholding the face of God, or the Divine essence, in which the knowledge of all things is contained, they may in that glass see all things that God knows: but then they spoil all this fine speculation again, by telling us, that this glass does not necessarily represent to them all that knowledge which is in the Divine mind; but that it is a kind of voluntary glass, in which the saints are only permitted to see so much as God pleaseth; but how much that is, they cannot tell us. Which amounts to no more than this, that the saints in heaven know as much of our condition here upon earth, as God is pleased to reveal to them: and if this be all, it is as good a reason why we should pray to good men in the East or West Indies, to pray for us and help us, because they also know as much of our necessities, and prayers, as God thinks fit to reveal to them.

But if the saints must have a revelation from God of our prayers, before that they know that we pray to them: then the shortest and surest way both, is to pray to God and not to them; or however (as Bellarmine confesseth) it were very fit to pray to God, before every prayer we make to the saints, that he would be pleased to reveal that prayer to them, that, upon this signal and notice given them by God, they may betake themselves to pray to God for us. But unless it were very clear from Scripture, that God had appointed this method, it is in reason such a way about, as no man would take that could help it: and it seems to me to as little purpose; for why should not a man think God as ready to grant him all his other requests, without the mediation and intercession of saints, as this one request of revealing

353

354

our prayers and wants to them? And if this way be not thought so convenient, I know but one more, and that is, to pray to the saints to go to God, and beg of him, that he would be pleased to reveal to them our supplications and wants, that they may know what to pray to him for in our behalf; which is just such a wise course, as if a man should write a letter to his friend that cannot read, and in a postscript desire him, that as soon as he hath received it, he would carry it to one that can read, and entreat him to read it to him. So that which way soever we put the case, what course soever we take in this matter, it will be so far from seeming reasonable, that we shall have much ado, and must handle the business very tenderly to hinder it from appearing very ridiculous.

Thus I have examined their chief pretences from Scripture, for the countenancing this doctrine and practice, and have shewn how little, or rather nothing at all, is there to be found for it; and that alone is reason enough against it, though there were nothing in Scripture against it, that there is nothing in Scripture for it: but I have already produced clear proof out of the New Testament, against it. And because they think the least show and probability from Scripture a good argument on their side, I will offer them a probable argument out of the Old Testament, upon which, though I will lay no absolute stress, yet I believe it would puzzle them, upon their principles, to give a clear answer to it; and it is from [2 Kings ii. 9.](#) where Elijah just before he was taken up into heaven, says to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee;” thereby intimating (as one would think) that then was the last opportunity of asking any thing of him: but if Elijah had understood the matter right (as the church of Rome does now) he should rather have directed him to have prayed to him when he was in heaven, where he would have a more powerful interest, and be in a better capacity to do him a kindness. For the reason the church of Rome gives, why they did not pray to the saints under the Old Testament (namely, because they were not then admitted into heaven), will not hold in the case of Elijah, who was taken up into heaven body and soul; and consequently, in as good circumstances to be prayed to as any of the saints and martyrs that have gone to heaven since.

I should now have proceeded in the fifth and last place, to have shewn, that this practice is not only needless and useless, but very dangerous and impious, because contrary to the Christian religion, and greatly derogating from the merit and virtue of Christ’s sacrifice, and from the honour of the only “mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus.” And indeed how can we apply ourselves to any other mediators and intercessors with God in heaven for us, without a gross and apparent contempt of the “high priest of our profession, Jesus the Son of God?” As if we either distrusted his kindness and affection, or his power and interest in heaven, to obtain at God’s hand all those blessings which we stand in need of. The apostle to the Hebrews tells us expressly, that “he is able to save to the utmost all those that come to God by him;” that is, who address their prayers and supplications to God in his name and mediation. But if we will choose other mediators for ourselves, of whom we are

355

356

not sure that they can either hear or help us, we may fall short of that salvation, which the apostle tells us we are secure of by the mediation of Jesus Christ; “for he is able,” &c.

But this hath been shewn so abundantly in the former part of this discourse, and is so clearly consequent from the whole, that I shall here close my discourse upon the second proposition I laid down from the words of my text, viz. that “there is but one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

As to the third proposition contained in the text, viz. That this “one mediator Jesus Christ, gave himself a ransom for all,” I have treated on that subject particularly on another occasion.²

And as to the fourth and last proposition, viz. That the mediation or intercession of Jesus Christ is founded in his redemption of mankind; and because he gave himself a ransom for all, therefore he and he only is qualified to intercede for all men, in virtue of that sacrifice which he offered for the salvation of mankind; I judge nothing more needful to be added to what has fallen in concerning that subject, in my handling the second proposition, in this and the two former sermons.



² See Sermon XLVII. concerning the Sacrifice and Satisfaction of Christ, Vol. iii. p. 382.

SERMON LXXIII.

[Preached on Ascension-day, 1688.]

THE GENERAL AND EFFECTUAL PUBLICATION OF THE GOSPEL BY THE APOSTLES.

So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.—Mark xvi. 19, 20.

IN these words you have these two great points of Christian doctrine:

I. Our Saviour's ascension into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God; "he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."

II. The effect or consequence of his ascension and exaltation, which was the general and effectual publication of the gospel; "they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." And both these are very proper for this day; but I shall at this time handle the latter point, namely, the effect or consequence of our Saviour's ascension into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God; "they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following."

And these words contain two things in them.

I. The general publication of the gospel by the apostles; "They went forth and preached every where."

II. The reason of the great efficacy and success of it; namely, the Divine and miraculous power which accompanied the preaching of it; "The Lord wrought with them, and confirmed the word with signs following."

I. The general publication of the gospel by the apostles; "They went forth and preached every where." And, indeed, the industry of the apostles and the other disciples, in publishing the gospel, was almost incredible. What pains did they take! what hazard did they run! what difficulties and discouragements did they contend withal in this work! And yet their success was greater than their industry, and beyond all human expectation: as will appear, if we consider these five things.

1. The vast spreading of the gospel in so short a space.
2. The wonderful power and efficacy of it upon the lives and manners of men.
3. The weakness and meanness of the instruments that were employed in this great work.
4. The powerful opposition that was raised against it.
5. The great discouragements to the embracing the profession of it. I shall speak briefly to each of these.

1. The vast spreading of the gospel in so short a space. This is represented ([Rev. xiv. 6.](#)) by “an angel flying through the midst of heaven, and preaching the everlasting gospel to every nation and kindred, and tongue, and people.” No sooner was the doctrine of the Christian religion published and made known to the world, but it was readily embraced by great numbers, almost in all places where it came. And, indeed, so it was foretold in the prophecies of the Old Testament. ([Gen. xlix. 10.](#)) “That when Shiloh (that is, the Messiah) should come, to him should the gathering of the people be:” and ([Isa. ii. 2.](#)) that “in the last days the mountain of the Lord’s house should be established in the top of the mountains, and be exalted above the hills, and that all nations should flow unto it.” [Isa. lx. 8.](#) The prophet, speaking of men’s ready submission to the gospel, and the great number of those that should come in upon the preaching of it, they are said “to fly as a cloud, and as the doves to the windows.”



So quick and strange a progress did this new doctrine and religion make in the world, that, in the space of about thirty years after our Saviour’s death, it was not only diffused through the greatest part of the Roman empire, but had reached as far as Parthia and India. In which we see our Saviour’s prediction fully verified, that, before the destruction of Jerusalem, the gospel should be preached in all the world: ([Matt. xxiv. 14.](#)) “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.” But this is not all; men were not only brought into the profession of the gospel; but,

2. This doctrine had likewise a wonderful power and efficacy upon the lives and manners of men. The generality of those that entertained the gospel, were obedient to it in word and deed, as the apostle tells us, concerning the Gentiles that were converted to Christianity. ([Rom. xv. 18.](#)) Upon the change of their religion, followed also the change of their manners, of their former course of life. They that took upon them the profession of Christianity, “did thenceforth not walk as other gentiles did, in the lusts of the flesh, and according to the vicious course of the world; but did put off, concerning their former conversation, the old man which was corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and were renewed in the spirit of their mind, and did put on the new man, which after God was created in righteousness and true holiness.” So strange an effect had the gospel upon the lives of the generality of the professors of it, that I remember Tertullian, in his apology to the Roman emperor and senate, challengeth them to instance in any one that bore the title of Christian, that was condemned as a thief, or a murderer, or a sacrilegious person; or that was guilty of any of those gross enormities, for which so many pagans were every day made examples of public justice, and punished and executed among them.



And this certainly was a very admirable and happy effect, which the gospel had upon men, to work so great and sudden a change in the lives of those who entertained this doctrine, to take them quite off from those vicious practices which they had been brought up in and

accustomed to; to change their spirits and the temper of their minds; and of lewd and dishonest, to make them sober and just, and “holy in all manner of conversation;” of proud and fierce, contentious and passionate, malicious and revengeful, to make them humble and meek, kind and tender-hearted, peaceable and charitable.

And that the primitive Christians were generally good men, and of virtuous lives, is credible, because their religion did teach and oblige them to be such; which, though it be not effectual now, to make all the professors of it such, as it requires they should be; yet it was a very forcible argument then, in the circumstances in which the primitive Christians were: for Christianity was a hated and persecuted profession: no man could then have any inducement to embrace it, unless he were resolved to practise it, and live according to the rules of it; for it offered men no rewards and advantages in this world; but, on the contrary, threatened men with the greatest temporal inconveniences and sufferings; and it promised no happiness to men in the other world upon any other terms, than of denying “ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and “of living soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

And besides this consideration, we have the best testimony in the world of their unblamable lives, viz. the testimony of their professed enemies, who did not persecute them for any personal crimes which they charged particular persons withal, but only for their religion, acknowledging them otherwise to be very innocent and good people. Particularly Pliny, in his letter to Trajan the emperor (who had given him in charge, to make particular inquiry concerning the Christians), gives this honourable report of them: “That there was no fault to be found in them, besides their obstinate refusal to sacrifice to the gods; that at their religious meetings it was an essential part of their worship to oblige themselves by a solemn sacrament, against murder, and theft, and adultery, and all manner of wickedness and vice.” No Christian historian could have given a better character of them than this heathen writer does. But,

3. The success of the gospel will appear yet more strange, if we consider the weakness and meanness of the instruments that were employed in this great work. A company of plain and illiterate men, most of them destitute of the advantages of education, went forth upon this great design, weak and unarmed, unassisted by any worldly interest, having no secular force and power on their side, to give countenance and authority to them; and this not only at their first setting out, but they remained under these disadvantages for three ages together.

The first publishers of the Christian religion offered violence to no man; did not go about to compel any by force to entertain the doctrine which they preached, and to list themselves of their number: they were not attended with legions of armed men to dispose men for the reception of their doctrine, by plunder and free quarter, by violence and tortures: this modern method of conversion was not then thought of; nor did they go about to attempt and allure men to their way, by the promises of temporal rewards, and by the hopes of riches

362

363

and honours; nor did they use any artificial insinuations of wit and eloquence to gain upon the minds of men, and steal their doctrines into them: but delivered themselves with the greatest plainness and simplicity; and without any studied ornaments of speech, or fine arts of persuasion, declared plainly to them the doctrine and miracles, the life, and death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, promising life and immortality to them that did believe and obey his doctrine, and threatening eternal woe and misery in an other world to the despisers of it.

And yet these contemptible instruments, notwithstanding all these disadvantages, did their work effectually, and, by the power of God going along with them, gained numbers every day to their religion, and in a short space drew the world after them.

Nor did they only win over the common people, but also several persons considerable for their dignity, and eminent for their learning, who afterwards became zealous assertors of Christianity, and were not ashamed to be instructed in the saving knowledge of the gospel, by such mean and unlearned persons as the apostles were; for they saw something in them more Divine, and which carried with it a greater power and persuasion, than human learning and eloquence.

4. We will consider the mighty opposition that was raised against the gospel. At its first appearance it could not be otherwise, but that it must meet with a great deal of difficulty and opposition, from the lusts and vices of men, which it did so plainly and so severely declare against, and likewise from the prejudices of men that had been brought up in a contrary religion; no prejudice being so strong as that which is founded in education; and of all the prejudices of education, none so obstinate and so hard to be removed, as those about religion, yea, though they be never so absurd and unreasonable: "Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods?" Men are very hardly brought off from the religion which they have been brought up in, how little ground and reason soever there be for it; the being trained up in it, and having a reverence for it implanted in them in their tender years, supplies all other defects.

Had men been free and indifferent in religion, when Christianity first appeared in the world, and had they not had their minds prepossessed with other apprehensions of God and religion, and been inured to rites and superstitions of a quite different nature from the Christian religion; or had they at that time been weary of the superstitions of their idolatrous worship, and been inquiring after a better way of religion; then, indeed, the Christian religion had appeared with great advantage, and would in all probability have been entertained with a readiness of mind proportionable to the reasonableness of it. But this was not the case: when the doctrine of the gospel was first published in the world, the whole world, both Jews and gentiles, were violently prejudiced against it, and fixed in their several religions.

The Jews indeed, in former times, had been very prone to relinquish the worship of the true God, and to fall into the heathen idolatry: but after God had punished them severely

364

365

for that sin, by a long captivity, they continued ever after very strict and firm to the worship of the true God; and never were they more tenacious of their religion and law, than at that very time when our Saviour appeared in the world: and though he was foretold in their law, and most particularly described in the authentic books of their religion, the prophets of the Old Testament; yet, by reason of certain groundless traditions, which they had received from the interpreters of their law, that their Messiah was to be a great temporal prince, they conceived an invincible prejudice against our Saviour, upon account of the mean circumstances in which he appeared; and upon this prejudice they rejected him, and put him to death, and persecuted his followers: and though their religion was much nearer to the Christian than any of the heathen idolatries; yet, upon this account, of our Saviour's mean appearance, they were much more averse to the entertainment of it, than the grossest idolaters among the nations.

Not but that their prejudice also was very great; the common people being strongly addicted to the idolatry and superstitions of their several countries; and the wiser, and more learned (whom they called philosophers) were so puffed up with a conceit of their own knowledge and eloquence, that they despised the rudeness and simplicity of the apostles, and looked upon their doctrine of a crucified Saviour as ridiculous, and the story of his resurrection from the dead, as absurd and impossible. So St. Paul tells us, that "the cross of Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness."

But, besides the opposition which the gospel met withal, from the lusts and prejudices of men, the powers of the world did strongly combine against it. Among the Jews, the chief priests and rulers did, with all their force and malice, endeavour to stifle it in the birth, and to suppress it in its first rise; and several of the Roman emperors, who were then the great governors of the world, engaged all their authority, and their whole strength, for the extirpation of it, and raised such a storm of persecution against it, as swept away greater numbers of mankind than any famine, or plague, or war that ever was in the Roman empire: and yet this religion bore up against all this opposition, and made its way through all the resistance, that the lusts and prejudices of men, armed with the power and authority of the whole world, could make against it, And this brings me to the

5. And last consideration I mentioned, the great discouragement that was given to the entrance of this religion.

There was nothing left to invite and engage men to it, but the consideration of another world; for all the evils of this world threatened every one that took the profession of Christianity upon him. Whoever was known to be a Christian, was liable to reproach and ruin, to cruel mockings and scourgings, to banishment, or imprisonment and confiscation of estate; but these were slight and tolerable evils, in comparison of others that were commonly inflicted upon them; they were condemned to the mines, and to the lions, and all imaginable cruelties were exercised upon them; the most exquisite torments that could be devised, and death in

366

367

all its fearful shapes was presented to them, to deter men from embracing this religion, and to tempt them to quit it: and yet they persisted in the profession of their religion, and for the sake of it did not only take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, but the most barbarous usage of their persons; and demeaned themselves, not only with patience and courage, but with exultation and triumph, under those tortures, which no man can hear or read of without horror; and they did not only bear up thus man fully for one brunt; but when these violent persecutions were renewed and repeated upon them, Christianity supported itself under all these daunting discouragements for almost three hundred years, and held out, till the very malice of their persecutors was out of breath, and their cruelty had tired itself.

Nay, it did not only support itself, under all these oppositions, but grew and prospered, and the blood of martyrs became the seed of the church, and Christians sprang up faster, than any persecution could mow them down: for men by degrees became curious to inquire into the cause of such sufferings, and the reason of so much constancy and patience under them; and upon inquiry were satisfied, and became Christians themselves; and many times their very persecutors were ready to sacrifice their lives the next day, for that very cause for which but the day before they had put others to death.

And it cannot here be reasonably objected, that Christians yielded up themselves to all these sufferings, upon the same account that some brave spirits among the heathen laid down their lives for their country; namely, out of a desire of fame, and to perpetuate their names in after ages; this, I say, cannot reasonably be said in this case; because these sufferers were not the great and ambitious spirits, the flower and select part of mankind, but the common people, and many of them of the tenderer sex and age, who have usually a greater sense of pain than of glory; and yet so were they animated by their religion, and transported beyond themselves, as not only to submit, but many times to offer themselves to those sufferings, by declaring themselves to be Christians, when no man accused them, and when they knew they should die, for making that profession; so that it is harder to justify their forwardness to suffer, than the sincerity of their sufferings. Besides that, nothing could be more foolish, and unreasonable, than for men to hope to get a name by suffering in a crowd, and to be particularly remembered to posterity, when they died in such multitudes, that no man knew the names of the greatest part of the sufferers.

You see then how strongly the gospel prevailed, how soon this new religion overran the world, how suddenly it subdued the spirits, and changed the manners, of men; and by what mean and despicable instruments, to all human appearance, this great work was done; and how, in despite of all opposition and discouragements, it was carried on. Can any one of the false religions of the world pretend to have been propagated and established in such a manner, merely by their own force, and the evidence and power of truth upon the minds of men; and to have borne up and sustained themselves so long under such fierce assaults, as Christianity hath done?

368

369

As for the religion of Mahomet, it is famously known to have been planted by force at first, and to have been maintained in the world by the same violent means. So that great impostor openly declares, that he “came not to plant his religion by miracles, but the sword.”

And as for the idolatries of the heathen, they came in upon the world by insensible degrees, and did not oppose the corruptions of men, but grew out of them; and being suited to the vicious temper and disposition of mankind, they easily gained upon their ignorance and superstition, by custom and example. They were just such a corruption of natural religion, in such times of darkness and ignorance, and by such insensible steps, as there hath been since, of the Christian religion in some parts of the world, which we all know. But no sooner did the light of the gospel shine out upon the world, but the idolatry and superstition of the heathen fell before it, like Dagon before the ark of God; and though it had the power of the world, and countenance of authority on its side, yet it was not able to maintain its ground; and no sooner was that prop taken away, which was the only support of it, but it presently sunk and vanished; it was not driven out of the world by violence and persecution, but upon the breaking in of so great a light, it silently withdrew, as being ashamed of itself: and when afterwards the Emperor Julian endeavoured to retrieve it, by his wit and authority, and used all imaginable arts and stratagems, to suppress and extinguish Christianity, he was able to effect neither; for the Christian religion kept its ground, and paganism, after it had made a little blaze, died with him.

Now to what cause shall we ascribe this wonderful success and prevalency of the gospel in the world? there can but these two be imagined; the excellency of the Christian religion, and the power and presence of the Divine Spirit accompanying it.

1. The excellency of the Christian religion, which, both in respect of the goodness of its precepts, and the assurance of its rewards, hath plainly the advantage of any religion, that ever yet appeared in the world. And this is a great advantage indeed: but by this alone it could never have been able to have broken through all that mighty opposition and resistance which was made against it; and therefore, that it might be able to encounter this with success,

2. God was pleased to accompany the first preaching of it, with a mighty and sensible presence and power of his Spirit. And this brings me to the

Second part of the text—the reason of the wonderful efficacy and success, which the apostles had in the preaching of the gospel; “the Lord wrought with them, and confirmed the word with signs following.” Which words express to us that miraculous power of the Holy Ghost, which accompanied the first preaching of the gospel; by which I do not intend to exclude the inward operation of God’s Holy Spirit upon the minds of men, secretly moving and inclining those to whom the gospel was preached to embrace and entertain it; which the Scripture elsewhere speaks frequently of, and may possibly be intended in the first of these expressions, “the Lord working with them;” and the latter may only be meant of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, with regard to which God is said to “confirm the word

370

371

with signs following,” or accompanying it. But I rather think they are both intended to express the same thing, and that the latter is only added by way of explication of the former, to shew more particularly how the Lord wrought with them; namely, by giving confirmation to their doctrine, by those miraculous gifts and powers of the Spirit, which they were endowed withal, “the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following;” that is, with those miracles, which accompanied the first preaching of the gospel. For these words do plainly refer to the promise of the Spirit at the [17th verse](#); “and these signs shall follow them that believe;” which is the reason why they are here called “signs following;” that is, miracles which accompanied the word that was preached.

And that this is the full meaning of this text, will appear by comparing it with one or two more, ([Rom. xv. 18, 19.](#)) where St. Paul, speaking of the things which Christ had wrought by him, to make the gentiles obedient to the gospel, he says, “they were done through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God;” which is the same with that which is said here in the text, of “the Lord’s working with the apostles, and confirming the word with signs following.” So likewise ([Heb. ii. 3, 4.](#)) the apostle there tells us, that “the gospel which was first spoken by the Lord, was confirmed by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost.” So that the great confirmation, which is said here to be given to the gospel, was by “the miraculous gifts of the Spirit,” which were poured forth upon the apostles and primitive Christians.

In speaking of which, I shall briefly do these two things:

I. Give an account of the nature of these gifts, and of the use and end to which they served: and then shew, in the

II. Second place, how the gospel was confirmed by them.

I. For the nature of these gifts, and the use and end to which they were designed.

They are those miraculous powers which, by the descent of the Holy Ghost, upon the day of Pentecost, the apostles were endowed withal, to qualify them to publish the gospel with more speed and success. Such was the gift of speaking divers languages, (and these two gifts were not necessarily united in the same person, for the apostle tells us, that some had the one, and some the other;) the gift of prophecy and foretelling things to come, which was always a sign of a person divinely inspired; the miraculous powers of healing diseases, of raising the dead, and of casting out devils; a power of inflicting corporal diseases, and punishments, upon scandalous and obstinate Christians, who would not submit to the apostles authority and government; which is in Scripture called, “a delivering up to Satan, for the destruction,” or tormenting, “of the body, that the soul may be saved;” nay, in some cases, this power extended to the inflicting of death itself, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira.

Not that all these miraculous powers were given to every one of the apostles, or that they could exercise them at all times; some were bestowed upon one, and some upon another,

372

373

according to God's good pleasure, and as was most expedient for the use and benefit of the church, and most subservient to those ends for which God gave them; only we find that all the apostles had the gift of tongues; and that the power of "casting out devils in the name of Christ," was common to every Christian, and continued in the church for a long time after the other gifts were ceased; as Tertul. Arnob. and Min. Felix do testify, even of their own times.

But, II. I shall briefly shew how the gospel was confirmed by these miraculous gifts.

Now, besides the particular uses and ends of those miraculous gifts (as the gift of tongues, did evidently serve for the more speedy planting and propagating of the Christian religion in the world; and the power of inflicting corporal punishments, in a miraculous manner, upon scandalous and disobedient Christians, did maintain the power and authority of the apostles, and was instead of an ordinary magistratical power, which Christians were destitute of, whilst the Roman empire continued heathen:) I say, besides the particular ends and uses of all these miraculous gifts, they did all in general, as they were miracles, serve for the confirmation of the gospel.

The apostles delivered the doctrine of Christ, and were witnesses of his resurrection from the dead, "as the great miracle," whereby his doctrine was confirmed; now there was all the reason in the world to believe them, to whom God was pleased to give such a testimony from heaven; for who could make any doubt of the truth of their testimony, concerning the resurrection of Christ, who were enabled to raise others from the dead, and by many other wonderful things which they did, gave such clear testimony that "God was with them?"

Never had any religion fewer worldly advantages to recommend it, and so little temporal countenance and assistance to carry it on; but what it wanted from men, it had from God; for "he gave witness to it with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." God seems on purpose to have stripped it of all secular advantages, that the Christian religion might be perfectly free from all suspicion of worldly interest and design, and that it might not owe its establishment in the world to the wisdom and contrivance of men, but to the arm and power of God.

The inferences I shall at present make from this discourse shall be these:

I. To give us satisfaction of the truth and divinity of the doctrine of the Christian religion, which hath had so eminent a confirmation given to it from heaven, and did at its first setting out so strangely prevail in the world, against all human probability; "not by might, nor by power; but by the Spirit of the Lord." .

No man can well suppose a religion in circumstances of greater disadvantage, and, upon all human accounts, more unlikely to sustain and bear up it self, than the Christian religion was, The first appearance of it was so mean, and its beginnings so small, that no man but would have thought it would presently have come to nothing; and no other account

can be given of the strange success and prevalency of it, but that “it was of God,” and therefore it could not be overthrown.

II. This discourse may likewise satisfy us of the reason why this miraculous power, which accompanied the gospel at first, is now ceased; because there is not the like reason and necessity for it, which there was at first.

It was highly necessary then, to introduce the Christian religion into the world, and to be a sensible evidence to men of the divinity of that new doctrine which was preached to them; but now that the gospel is generally entertained, there is not the same reason why this miraculous power should still be continued. *Acquisito fine, cessant media ad finem*, when the end is once obtained, the means cease; and the wise God, who is never wanting in what is necessary, does not use to be lavish in that which is superfluous. Now that the Christian religion hath got firm footing in the world, God leaves it to be propagated and advanced by its own rational force, upon the minds of men: now that the prejudices of education in a contrary religion are removed, and the powers of the world are reconciled to Christianity; there is no need of such violent and extraordinary means for the continuance of it: now that it stands upon equal advantages with other religions; God hath left it to be carried on, in more human and ordinary ways, and such as are more level and accommodate to the nature of man.

That miracles are long since ceased, is acknowledged by the fathers, who lived an age or two after the ceasing of them; particularly by St. Chrysostom, who gives the same reason for it which I have just now assigned. But the church of Rome would still bear us in hand, that this miraculous power does still continue in their church, and, according to Bellarmine, must always continue; because he makes it an inseparable property and mark of the true church.

But we pretend to no such power, nor have we any reason so to do; because all the doctrines of our religion are the ancient doctrines of Christianity, delivered by our Saviour, and by his apostles published to the world; and these are sufficiently confirmed already, by the miracles which our Saviour and his apostles wrought in the primitive times of Christianity. But the church of Rome hath great occasion and need of new miracles, to confirm their new doctrines; and therefore, as they have reason, they usually apply them to the confirmation of their new doctrines; some to confirm purgatory, and to give countenance to indulgences; others to encourage the worship of the blessed Virgin, and the saints; others to confirm that which all the miracles in the world are not sufficient to confirm I mean the doctrine of transubstantiation; which, because it overthrows the certainty of sense, is, in the nature of it, peculiarly incapable of being confirmed by a miracle.

III. and lastly, The consideration of what has been said, does justly upbraid us, that this religion, which was so powerful at first, and hath such characters of divinity upon it, coming

down to us confirmed by so many miracles, should yet have so little effect upon most of us who call ourselves Christians.

We have all the advantages of the Christian religion, having* been educated and brought up in it; and yet it hath less effect upon us, than it had upon those whose minds were prejudiced, and whose manners were depraved, by the principles of a false religion: for those who were reduced from paganism to Christianity, did on a sudden become better men, and were more holy and virtuous in their lives, than the greatest part of us, who have been instructed and trained up all our lives in the doctrine of Christianity.

The true reason of which is, that many of us are Christians upon the same account that they were at first heathens; because it was the religion of their country, and they were born and bred up in it. But Christianity was the religion of their choice, and there were no motives to persuade them to the profession of that religion, but what were as powerful to oblige them to the practice of it. Let us also be Christians, not only by custom, but by choice; and then we shall live according to our religion.

He that takes up a religion for any other reason than to obey and practise it, does not choose a religion, but only counterfeits the choice of it. We have, beyond comparison, the best and most reason able religion in the world; a religion that hath the greatest evidence of its truth, that contains the best precepts, and gives men the greatest assurance of a future happiness, and directs them to the surest way of attaining it. Now the better our religion is, the worse are we, if we be not made good by it. The philosophy of the heathen made some virtuous: and there were many eminent saints under the imperfection of the Jewish institution. What degrees then of holiness and virtue may be expected from us, upon whom the glorious light of the gospel shineth so brightly!

I will conclude all with the words of the apostle: ([Heb. ii. 1, 2, 3, 4.](#)) "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angel's was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience receive a just recompence of reward: how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him: God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"

377

378

379

SERMON LXXIV.

[Preached on the feast of St. Michael.]

THE NATURE, OFFICE, AND EMPLOYMENT OF GOOD ANGELS.

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?—Heb. i. 14.

THIS is spoken of good angels, whose existence, as well as that of evil spirits, the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, do every where take for granted, no less than they do the being of God, and the immortality of the soul. And well they may, since they are all founded upon the general consent of all ages, derived down to us from the first spring and original of mankind; of which general consent and tradition, it is one of the hardest things in the world to assign any good reason, if the things themselves were not true. Therefore I shall not go about to force my way into this argument concerning the existence of spirits, and beings distinct from matter, by dint of dispute (which perhaps would neither be so proper, nor so profitable for this assembly), but shall take the thing as I find it received by a general consent of mankind. And so the books of Divine revelation do; nor was there reason to proceed in any other method, than to suppose these things, and take them for granted, as generally assented to by mankind, without either asserting them for new discoveries, or attempting to prove what was so universally believed. The Scriptures indeed have more particularly declared the nature of these spirits, as also their order and employment; as in the words which I have read to you, where the office and employment of good angels is more particularly discovered; “Are they not all (says the text) ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”

The author of this Epistle to the Hebrews having had occasion, in comparing the two dispensations of the law and the gospel, to speak of the angels, by whose ministry the law was given, did not think fit to entertain those to whom he wrote with any nice and curious speculations (for school divinity was not then in fashion) about the nature and order of angels; but tells us, what it concerns us more to know, namely, what their office and employment is in regard to us. Concerning their nature, he only tells us, that they are spirits; as to their office and employment, he says, in general, that they are “ministering spirits;” that is, that they stand before God to attend upon him, ready to receive his commands, and to execute his pleasure; more particularly, that they are upon occasion appointed and set forth by God to minister on the behalf, and to do good offices “for them that shall be heirs of salvation.” Which last words are a description of pious and good men, such as had sincerely embraced the Christian religion, and were thereby become the children of God, and heirs of eternal salvation. So that these words are a brief summary of the doctrine of good angels, and of what the Scripture has thought fit to reveal to us concerning them: which may be referred to these three heads:



First, Their nature; “Are they not spirits?”

Secondly, Their general office and employment; “Are they not ministering spirits?”

Thirdly, Their special office and employment, in regard to good men; “they are sent forth to minister for them (that is, in their behalf, and for their benefit) who shall be heirs of salvation.”

And this is as much as is necessary for us to know concerning them; and all this is very agreeable to the general apprehension of mankind; but the Scripture hath very much cleared and confirmed to us, that which was more obscure and less certain before. I shall briefly explain and illustrate these three heads, and then draw some useful inferences from the whole.

First, For their nature, they are spirits. This is universally agreed by all that acknowledge such an order of beings, that they are spirits: but whether they are pure spirits, divested of matter, and all kind of corporeal vehicle (as the philosophers term it), hath been a great controversy, but I think of no great moment and consequence. Not only the ancient philosophers, but some of the ancient Christian fathers, did believe angels to be clothed with some kind of bodies, consisting of the purest and finest matter; which they call ethereal. And this opinion seems to be grounded upon a pious belief, that it is the peculiar excellency and prerogative of the Divine nature, to be a pure and simple spirit, wholly separate from matter: but the more current opinion of the Christian church (especially of latter times) hath been, that angels are mere and pure spirits, without any thing that is material and corporeal belonging to them; but yet so, that they have power to assume thin and airy bodies, and can when they please appear in human shape, as they are frequently in Scripture said to have done. And this seems most agreeable to the Scripture account of them; though I think it is no necessary article of faith, either to believe that they are clothed with some kind of bodies, or that they are wholly divested of matter.

But however this be, they are described in Scripture to be endowed with great excellences and perfections; they are said to excel in strength, ([Psal. ciii. 20.](#)) and in knowledge and wisdom. Hence are those expressions of being “as an angel of God to discern good and bad,” ([2 Sam. xiv. 17.](#)) “Wise, according to the wisdom of an angel,” ([ver. 20.](#)) To be of great activity and swiftness in their motions; hence it is that they are represented in Scripture, as “full of wings:” and to excel in purity and holiness; hence is that title given them in Scripture, of “the holy angels.” This is the sum of what the Scripture hath in several places delivered to us, concerning the nature and properties of good angels; and beyond this, all our knowledge of them is mere conjecture and uncertainty; and the nice speculations concerning them, idle and wanton curiosities. Indeed the Scripture gives sufficient intimation of several ranks and orders among them, by calling Michael an archangel, and chief prince, and by distinguishing them by the names of principalities, and powers, and thrones, and dominions: but what the difference of these names imports, though some have attempted to explain, yet I



do not find that they have discovered any thing to us, besides their own ignorance and arrogance, in pretending to be wise above what is written; “intruding into those things which they have not seen, being vainly puffed up in their fleshly minds;” as the apostle censures some in his time.

Secondly, We have here their general office and employment; they are “ministering spirits;” they are (as I may say) domestic servants, and constant attendants upon that great and glorious King, whose throne is in the heavens, and whose kingdom ruleth over all; they stand continually before him, to be hold his face, expecting his commands, and in a constant readiness to do his will; for though the omnipotence of God, and his perfect power of acting, be such, that he can do all things immediately by himself, “whatever he pleaseth in heaven and in earth;” can govern the world, and steer the affairs of it, and turn them which way he thinks best, by the least nod and beck of his will, without any instruments or ministers of his pleasure; yet his wisdom and goodness has thought fit to honour his creatures, especially this higher and more perfect rank of beings, with his commands; and to make them, according to their several degrees and capacities, the ordinary ministers of his affairs, in the rule and government of this inferior world; and this not for his own ease (for to infinite power no thing can be difficult or troublesome) but for their happiness; and he therefore employs them in his work and service, that they may be capable of his favour and rewards.

And that the angels of God are the great ministers of his providence here in the world, hath not only been the constant tradition of all ages, but is very frequently and plainly asserted in Scripture. In the Old Testament we often read that God employed his angels to be the messengers of his will and pleasure to men; and to carry good tidings and comfortable news to them upon several occasions: as, to Abraham, to foretel the miraculous birth of his son Isaac; and afterwards to rescue him from being sacrificed: to Jacob, when lie was so afraid of his brother Esau: to Manoah and his wife, to foretel the birth of Sampson, the great deliverer of Israel from the Philistines: and upon that great occasion of bringing the people of Israel out of Egypt, and conducting them through the wilderness, he sent a great and mighty angel (called “the angel of his presence”) to go before them, and guide them in their way: and the apostle tells us, that “the law was delivered to them upon Mount Sinai by the disposition of angels.”

On the other hand, God frequently made them the messengers of his wrath, and instruments of his vengeance. Thus he sent them to foretel, and to execute, that terrible destruction upon Sodom and Gomorrhah. And he sent a destroying angel to brandish his sword in a visible manner over Jerusalem, and to smite them with the pestilence for David’s sin in numbering the people. And by the ministry of an angel he slew, in the camp of the Assyrians, in one night, a hundred and eighty-five thousand. And, ([Acts xii. 23.](#)) it is said, that “the angel of the Lord smote Herod” for receiving the blasphemous acclamations of the people.

383

384

Nay, the angels shall be the instruments and executioners of God's vengeance upon the wicked at the judgment of the great day. So the judge himself tells us: ([Matt. xiii. 49, 50.](#)) "So shall it be at the end of the world; the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

And that particular angels do preside over empires and kingdoms, and sway the weighty affairs of them; and by a secret and invisible hand manage and bring about great changes and revolutions, both Jews and Christians have collected, with great probability and consent, from [Daniel x.](#) where there is mention made of the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstanding the angel that was sent to Daniel, and of Michael, a chief prince, assisting him. And of this ministry of angels, in the government of kingdoms, Clemens Alexandrinus speaks, as of a thing out of all controversy. I proceed to the

Third thing which I principally intended, and seems to be chiefly designed in the text; and this is the special office and employment of good angels in regard to good men; and for this the apostle expressly tells us, that "they are sent forth to minister for them (that is, in their behalf and for their benefit) who shall be heirs of salvation." In which words there are three things very considerable for our instruction and comfort.

1. Their particular designation and appointment for this employment, expressed in these words, "sent forth," ἀποστελλόμενοι, as if they were particularly commissioned and appointed by God for this very end. God himself doth superintend all affairs, and by his particular designation and command, the angels do fulfil his word, and execute the pleasure of his good-will towards us. Hence it is so frequently said in Scripture that God sent his angel to such or such a person for such and such purposes.

2. You have here the general end of their employment—for good men; they are sent forth on our behalf, and for our benefit; to take care of us and protect us, to succour and comfort, to direct and assist, to rescue and deliver us.

3. Here is the more special end of their employment, in regard to good men, intended in those words, "for them who shall be heirs of salvation;" hereby signifying, that the angels are employed about good men, with regard more particularly to their eternal happiness, and for the conducting and furthering of the great affair of their everlasting salvation. This certainly is our greatest concernment; and therefore they have a more particular charge and care of us in regard to this.

It was a common opinion among the heathen, and a constant and firmly believed tradition among the Jews (the Sadducees only excepted, who did not believe there were angels or spirits), that every man, at least every good man, had a guardian angel appointed him by God to take a special care of him and his concernments, both spiritual and temporal; to guard him from dangers, to direct and prosper him in his way, and to comfort and deliver him in his affliction and distress. And, therefore, we find among the Jewish prayers, used

385

386

by them at this day, a particular prayer, wherein they request of God, “to command the angels who have the care of human affairs, to help and assist, to preserve and deliver them.” But especially they believed good angels, in their attendance upon good men, to be very active and diligent to incline them to good, and to encourage them therein, by holy emotions and suggestions, by secret comfort and assistances, and by opposing evil spirits, and defending us against their assaults and by countermining their malicious designs and attempts upon us. And accordingly we find, that the best men among the Jews did steadfastly believe, if not the particular guardianship of angels, and that every good man had his particular angel assigned to him by God, to take the particular charge of him; yet the common ministry of good angels about good men, and their more especial care of particular persons, upon particular and great occasions, to protect them from temporal evils, and to promote and prosper their temporal affairs and concernments.



Of this, Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God, was most firmly persuaded (at least in matters of great moment and concernment to us), as appears by his discourse with his steward, when he was sending him to treat of a match for his son: ([Gen. xxiv. 40.](#)) “The Lord (says he) before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way.” And David, the “man after God’s own heart,” does more than once declare his confident belief of the watchful care and ministry of angels about good men: ([Psal. xxxiv. 7.](#)) “The angel of the Lord incampeth about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” And, ([Psal. xci. 11, 12.](#)) speaking of the good man, who putteth his trust and confidence in God, he tells him, for his comfort and security, that the holy angels have a particular charge of him to preserve him from all the mischiefs and dangers to which he is exposed: “he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways; they shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

So that, according to the persuasion of those two excellent persons, and of greatest renown for piety in all the Old Testament, very much of the safety and the success of good men, even in their temporal concernments, is to be ascribed to the vigilant care and protection of good angels. And though this be seldom visible and sensible to us, yet we have great reason, upon so great testimonies, to assent to the truth of it. And there is no reason, I think, to doubt, but that God’s care extends now to Christians as well as it did to the Jews; and that the angels have as much kindness for us, as they had for the Jews; and there is no reason to think, that the angels are now either dead or idle.



Our Saviour tells us, that they cannot die; and our reason tells us, that a pure spirit is an active principle; and the Scripture represents angels as all flame and wings. Evil spirits are believed by Christians to be as active now to all purposes of harm and mischief as ever: and why should any man imagine, that good spirits are not as intent and busy to do good? The apostle, I am sure, tells us in the text, that the angels in common (all of them) do employ

their service about us, and wait to do good offices to us; “Are they not all (says he) ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation?”

And our Saviour ([Matt. xviii. 10.](#)) seems to approve and confirm the tradition of the Jews, concerning particular guardian angels belonging to every one that believed in him; that is, to every Christian; “Take heed (says he) that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” And this seems likewise to have been a received opinion among the first Christians; for we find ([Acts xii. 15.](#)) that when Peter was miraculously released out of prison by an angel, and came to the house where the Christians were assembled to pray for him, and one told them that Peter was at the door, they said it was his angel, thinking that he himself was fast in prison: for which saying there could be no reason, had there not been a current opinion among them of guardian angels.

And because the providence of God is more peculiarly concerned in conducting men to eternal happiness; it is very credible, that God should more especially ordain the ministry of angels about good men, for the furtherance of their salvation. And so the apostle tells us in the text; “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation?” Nay, our Saviour, in that remarkable place I mentioned before, ([Matt. xviii. 10.](#)) seems to intimate, that angels, of a higher rank and quality, are assigned guardians and guides to those that believed on him; “but I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father, which is in heaven:” an allusion to the manner of earthly kings, upon whom not all their servants, but the chief of the nobility do more immediately attend, and stand continually in their presence; for “to behold the face of the king,” and “to stand in his presence,” are phrases used in Scripture to signify immediate attendance upon his person. So that by this manner of expression, our Saviour doth most significantly intimate, in what esteem good men are with God, whose care and protection he commits to the chief of the angels, to those who are nearest to him, and in highest favour and honour with him; as if he had said, their angels are not of the ordinary rank, but such as are admitted to a more immediate attendance, upon the great King and Governor of the world.

And no doubt it is for no mean end, that such high and glorious spirits are employed about us; it is chiefly for the furtherance of our salvation; for the purchasing whereof, the Son of God himself, “whom all angels of heaven worship,” came down from heaven, and appeared and suffered in our nature, that we may one day “be made like to the angels,” and dwell where they are, and may “continually behold the face of our Father which is in heaven,” as they do. And in order to this end, it is very probable, that good angels are ready to do good offices, just contrary to those of evil spirits; that is, to employ their best diligence and endeavour for the salvation of men; and that they are very sedulous and officious to restrain and pull them back from sin, and to excite and solicit them to that which is good; and, in a word, to do all they can to help for ward the repentance and conversion of sinners. And this

389

390

may reasonably be collected from that passage of our Saviour, ([Luke xv. 10.](#)) where he tells us, that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth.” And if they be so glad of the repentance of a sinner; we may easily imagine how forward they are to further and promote so good a work. And when sinners are brought to repentance, we have no reason to doubt, but that the angels are as ready to assist their progress in goodness.

It hath been a general, and, I think, not ill-grounded opinion, both of the Jews and heathens, that good angels are more especially present with us, and observant of us, and assistant to us, in the performance of all acts of religion; that they are particularly present at our prayers; and therefore the Jews speak of a particular angel for this purpose, whom they call “the angel of prayer;” that they observe our vows, and our breach or performance of them. So Solomon seems to intimate: ([Eccl. v. 4, 6.](#)) “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou hast vowed: suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin;” that is, do not entangle thy life with a rash vow, which the frailty of human nature may make thee afterwards to break; “neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error;” that is, do not in the presence of the angel who attends upon thee, and observes thee, betray thine own error and rashness. This I take to be the meaning of this difficult passage, “let not thy mouth cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error.”

But the angels are yet more particularly present in the places, and at the times, of God’s public worship. The placing of the cherubims in “the holy of holies,” seems to signify the presence of the angels in our most religious addresses to God. And Plutarch says, that “the angels are the overseers of Divine service.” And therefore we ought to behave ourselves with all modesty, reverence, and decency in the worship of God, out of regard to the angels who are there present, and observe our carriage and behaviour. And to this the apostle plainly hath respect in that place, which by interpreters hath been thought so difficult, ([1 Cor. xi. 13.](#)) where he says, “that for this cause,” in the assemblies of Christians for the worship of God, “the woman ought to have a veil upon her head,” in token of subjection to her husband, “because of the angels:” that is, to be decently and modestly attired in the church, because of the presence of the holy angels; before whom we should compose ourselves to the greatest external gravity and reverence, which the angels behold and observe, but cannot penetrate into the inward devotion of our minds, which God only can do; and therefore with regard to him who sees our hearts, we should more particularly compose our minds to the greatest sincerity and seriousness in our devotion. Which I would to God we would all duly consider, all the while we are exercised in the worship of God, who chiefly regards our hearts. But we ought likewise to be very careful of our external behaviour, with a particular regard to the angels, who are present there, to see and observe the outward decency and reverence of our carriage and deportment: of which we are very careful in the presence even of an earthly

391

392

prince, when he either speaks to us, or we make any address to him. And surely much more ought we to be so, when we are in the immediate presence of God, and of his holy angels, every one of whom is a much greater prince, and of greater power, than any of the princes of this world. But how little is this considered (I speak to our shame), and by how few among us!

And as angels are helpful to good men, in working out of their salvation throughout the course of their lives; so at the hour of death they stand by them, to comfort them and assist them in that needful and dismal time, in that last and great conflict of frail mortality with death and the powers of darkness; to receive their expiring spirits into their charge, and to conduct them safely into the mansions of the blessed. And to this purpose also the Jews had a tradition, that the angels wait upon good men at their death, to convey their souls into paradise: which is very much countenanced by our Saviour in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, ([Luke xvi. 22.](#)) where it is said, “that when “Lazarus died, he was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.”

Nay, that the angels have some charge and care of the bodies of good men after death, may not improbably be gathered from that passage in St. Jude, ([ver. 9.](#)) where Michael the archangel is said to have contended with the devil, about the body of Moses. What the ground of this controversy betwixt them was, may be most probably explained, by a passage, ([Deut. xxxiv. 6.](#)) where it is said, “that God took particular care,” probably by an angel, “concerning the burying of Moses in a certain valley;” and it is added, “but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.” The devil, it seems, had a fair prospect of laying a foundation for idolatry in the worship of Moses after his death; if he could have gotten the disposal of his body, to have buried it in some known and public place. And no doubt it would have gratified him not a little, to have made him, who was so declared an enemy to idolatry all his life, an occasion of it after his death. But this God thought fit to prevent, in pity to the people of Israel, whom he saw upon all occasions so prone to idolatry; and for that reason committed it to the charge of Michael the archangel, to bury his body secretly; and this was the thing which Michael the archangel contended with the devil about.

But before I pass from this, I cannot but take notice of one memorable circumstance in this contest, mentioned likewise by St. Jude, in these words, “yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation.” His duty restrained him from it, and probably his discretion too: as he durst not offend God, in doing a thing so much beneath the dignity and perfection of his nature; so he could not but think, that the devil would have been too hard for him at railing; a thing to which, as the angels have no disposition, so I believe that they have no talent, no faculty at it. The cool consideration whereof should make all men especially those who call themselves divines, and especially in controversies about religion, ashamed and

393

394

afraid of this manner of disputing; since Michael the archangel, even when he disputed with the devil, “durst not bring against him a railing accusation.”

But to proceed: this we are sure of, that the angels shall be the great ministers and instruments of the resurrection of our bodies, and the re-union of them to our souls: for so our blessed Saviour has told us, ([Matt. xxiv. 30, 31.](#)) that “when the Son of man shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, he shall send his angels to gather the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

Thus I have as briefly as I could, and so far as the Scripture hath gone before us to give us light in this matter, endeavoured to shew the several ways wherein good angels do minister in behalf of “them who shall be heirs of salvation.” All that now remains, is to draw some inferences from this discourse, and so I shall conclude.

First, What hath been said upon this argument, and so abundantly proved from Scripture, may serve to establish us in the belief of this truth, and to awaken us to a due consideration of it. That the angels are invisible to us, and that we are seldom sensible of their presence, and the good offices they do us, is no sufficient reason against the truth and reality of the thing, if by other arguments we are convinced of it. For by the same reason we may almost as well call in question the existence of God, and of our own souls; neither of which do fall under the notice of our senses; and yet by other arguments we are sufficiently convinced of them both. So in this case, the general consent and tradition of mankind, concerning the existence of angels, and their ministry about us, especially being confirmed to us, by clear and express testimony of Holy Scripture, ought to be abundant evidence to us, when we consider that so general a consent must have a proportionable cause; which can be no other but a general tradition grounded at first upon revelation, and derived down to all succeeding ages, from the first spring and original of mankind; and since confirmed by manifold revelations of God, both in the Old and New Testament.

But yet I am sensible, that all this is no conviction to the perverse and contentious. Men will not believe even the evidence of sense itself, when they are strongly prepossessed and prejudiced to the contrary: for do we not see great numbers of men, even so many as have the face to call themselves the catholic church, that can make a shift, when they have a mind, either to believe or disbelieve things contrary to the plainest evidence of their senses? All that I shall say farther about this matter, is, that this doctrine of angels is not a peculiar doctrine either of the Jewish or Christian religion, but the general doctrine of all religions that ever were; and therefore cannot be objected against by any but the atheists.

And yet, after all, I know not whence it comes to pass, that this great truth, which is so comfortable to mankind, is so very little considered by us. Per haps the corruption of so great a part of the Christian church, in the point of the worship of angels, may have run us so far into the other extreme, as scarcely to acknowledge any benefit we receive by them.



But surely we may believe they do us good, without any obligation to pray to them; and may own them as the ministers of God's providence, without making them the objects of our worship.

I confess it seems to me a very odd thing, that the power of the devil, and his influence upon men, and the particular vigilancy and activity of evil spirits to tempt us to sin, should be so readily owned, and so sensibly talked of among Christians; and yet the assistance of good angels should be so little taken notice of and considered by us. The Scripture speaks plainly of both, and the reasons of believing both are equal: for God forbid but that good angels should be as officious and forward to do us good, as the devil and his angels are malicious and busy to do us mischief. And indeed, it would be very hard with mankind, if we had not as much reason to hope for the assistance and protection of good spirits, as we have cause to fear the malice and fury of the bad. Good angels are certainly as powerful, and have as strong a propension and inclination to do us good, as the devil has to do harm; and the number of good angels is probably much greater than of evil spirits. The biggest numbers that are used in Scripture, are applied to good angels; ([Dan. vii. 10.](#)) it is said of the angels about God's throne, that "thousand thou sands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him," And ([Revelation v. 11.](#)) the number of them is said to be "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thou sands." And the apostle to the Hebrews, ([chap. xii. 22.](#)) calls them "an innumerable company of angels."

What then should be the reason, that men should be so apt to own the snares and temptations, which the devil lays before us, in all our ways; but take so little notice of the attendance and good offices done to us by good spirits? I can imagine but these two reasons, and I am sorry I can find no better; that we are more mindful of injuries than of benefits; and are glad to take in others for the excuse of our faults, but are loath any should come in for a share in the good that is done by us. And yet methinks it should be a very comfortable consideration to us, against the enmity and cunning of the devil, and his angels; that the holy angels of God are as intent and industrious to do us good, and to help forward our salvation, as evil spirits can be to work our ruin and destroy us.

Secondly, We should with great thankfulness acknowledge the great goodness of God to us, who takes such care of us, as to appoint his angels, and to give them particular commission and charge concerning us, to protect and assist us in all our ways, and especially to promote the great concernment of our eternal happiness: and that, not only some particular and inferior spirits, but the chief ministers of this great King of the world, those that "stand in his presence, and behold his face;" and not a few of these, but the whole order of them are employed about us. So the apostle seems to say, by the question which he puts in the text, "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister?" that is, all at one time or other. And though they be principally appointed to minister to us, in order to our salvation; yet we have no reason to doubt but God employs them many times for our temporal safety,

396

397

and makes use of them more especially in those great revolutions, in which his cause and religion are more immediately concerned.

In such a case, it is not at all incredible, that God should give his angels a particular charge concerning those that fight his battles; to pitch about their camps, and secretly to assist them against their enemies, and to ward off and put by many dangerous blows and thrusts which are made at them, and wonderfully to preserve them, when the instruments of death fly about them, and do execution on every side of them. To what can we ascribe such and so many remarkable deliverances of a person upon whom so much depends; but either to the immediate hand of God, or to the ministry of angels? And where God is provided so abundantly with such powerful beings and ministers of his will; though they may be invisible to us, yet there is great reason to believe, that he very seldom works with out them.

And now what an astonishing regard is this, which the great God is pleased to have for the sons of men, that he should make the whole creation serviceable to us; not only the visible creation, for the support of our bodies, and the diversion of our minds; but even the noblest of all his creatures, the great and glorious inhabitants of the invisible world, mightily surpassing us mortal men, in the simplicity and purity of their nature, in the quickness and largeness of their understandings, and in their power and vigour of acting; I say, that God should give these excellent and glorious beings the charge over us, and send them forth to minister to us, for the safeguard of our persons, for the success of our affairs, and for the security and furtherance of our eternal salvation! “Lord what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him,” that when “thou madest him lower than the angels, thou shouldst yet make the angels to minister unto him!”

Thirdly, If the angels have the particular charge of good men, we should take heed how we despise, or be any way injurious to them: for how despicable soever they may appear to us, they are certainly very dear to God; since he deems them so considerable, as to employ his chief ministers about them, and to commit the charge of them to those, who, by their office, do more immediately attend upon himself. This is our Saviour’s own argument: ([Matt. xviii.](#)) “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, their angels do continually behold the face of your Father which is in heaven.” With how much contempt soever we may look upon a poor man, he hath friends and patrons of a higher sort, than any of the princes of this world.

Fourthly, If God appointed angels to be ministering spirits on our behalf; we may thence very reasonably conclude, that God did not intend that we should worship them. This seems to be a clear consequence, if the reasoning of the angel in the Revelation be good; where he forbids St. John to worship him, because he was his fellow-servant. Yea, the consequence seems to be yet stronger from the text; that if they be not only fellow-servants, but do in some sort minister unto us, then we are not to worship them.

398

399

And yet this practice is openly avowed in the church of Rome; though it be reprov'd so very severely by the apostle, as an apostacy from Christianity: (*Coloss. ii. 18, 19.*) "Let no man (says he) deceive you, in a voluntary humility, and worship ping of angels; not holding the head;" as if it were a renouncing of Christ, out of a pretended humility, to make use of other mediators besides him to the Father. And notwithstanding also that the angel in the Revelation does so vehemently forbid it, ὅρα μὴ, "by no means, upon no terms do it;" and he for bids it for such a reason as makes it for ever unlawful; namely, that we ought not to worship those who serve and worship God together with us: "Do it not, (says the angel,) I am thy fellow-servant, worship thou God." In which words, he plainly directs us to the sole and proper object of our worship.



Bellarmino, the great champion of the popish cause, never used more gross and apparent shuffling than in answer to this text. He says first, "Why are we reprov'd for doing what St. John did?" to which the answer is very easy; because St. John himself was reprov'd by an angel for doing what he did. And now that his question is answered, one might, methinks, ask him a cross question or two. Why does the church of Rome presume to do that, which an angel does so expressly forbid to be done? Or, was it fit for St. John to worship one, who (according to Bellarmine) was so ignorant in the doctrine of the catholic church, as to reprove him for doing his duty? as is evident from his second crafty answer to this text, that "St. John did well to give due worship to the angel;" and yet it is plain from this text, that the angel did not think the worship which St. John gave him to be his due.

It is very hard to imagine, but that a man of Bellarmine's understanding did intend to give up the cause, in his answers to this text: but if he was in earnest, then the matter is brought to this plain and short issue—whether it be fitter for us to believe a cardinal of Rome, or an angel of God?

Lastly, We should imitate the holy angels, by endeavouring to serve God as they do, in ministering to the good of others. Whilst we are in the body, in this state of infirmity and imperfection, though we cannot serve God with the same activity and vigour that the blessed angels do, yet we may in the same sincerity, and with the same true pleasure and delight.



And we should learn also of them, to condescend to the meanest services for the good of others. If the angels, who are no ways allied to us, and do so much excel us, in the dignity and perfection of their nature (for though David says, that God made man "a little lower than the angels," his meaning is, that he made him next below the angels in the rank of beings, but yet very distant from them in perfection:) I say, if those glorious creatures, who are the chief of the ways and works of God, do not think much to humble themselves to be ministers on our behalf, shall we be so proud as to think much to stoop to the lowest offices, to serve one another?

You see, my brethren, what is the constant work and employment of the blessed spirits above; to do good to men, especially in order to their eternal happiness; and this is the

highest degree of charity, and charity is the highest perfection of men and angels. So that to employ ourselves, with all our minds, and with all our might, to help forward the salvation of others, is to be good angels (I had almost said, to be a kind of gods) to men.

I hope that we all of us do hope one day to be like the angels, in the purity and perfection of their nature. So our Saviour has told us, that “at the resurrection we shall be like the angels.” Now as they are the patterns of our hope and happiness, so let us make them the examples of our duty and obedience; according as our Saviour hath taught us to pray, that God’s will may “be done on earth, as it is in heaven;” that is, that we may serve God, and do his will here on earth (so far as the infirmity of our nature and of our present state will admit) with the same readiness and diligence, with the same cheerfulness and zeal, that the holy and blessed angels do in heaven. And let us aspire continually in our minds, after that blessed time, when we shall be free from sin and sorrow, from affliction and pain, from diseases and death; when we shall serve God without distraction, and do his will without weariness, and shall “be for ever with the Lord, amidst an innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect.”

Finally, Let us bless God, as for all the visible effects of his merciful providence towards us, so, likewise, for the invisible aids and protection of his holy angels, many times probably vouchsafed to us when we are but little aware of it. But, above all, let us bless him for his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who “was made a little lower than the angels;” that is, a mortal man, that, by the suffering of death for our sakes, “he might be clothed with glory and honour, according to the working of that mighty power which God wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities and powers, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. To him, O Father, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.”

402

403

SERMON LXXV.

[Preached on St. Luke's Day.]

THE REPUTATION OF GOOD MEN AFTER DEATH.

The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.—Psal. cxii. 6.

AS the desire and hope of immortality, which is implanted in human nature, is some evidence of the thing, so likewise, that natural desire which is in men to have a good name perpetuated, and to be remembered, and mentioned with honour, when they are dead and gone, is a sign that there is in human nature some presage of a life after death; in which they hope, among other rewards of well doing, to meet with this also, to be well spoken of to posterity: and though probably we should not know the good that is said of us when we are dead, yet it is an encouragement to virtue, to be secured of it beforehand, and to find by experience, that they who have done their part well in this life go oft with applause, and that the memory of their good actions is preserved and transmitted to posterity.

And among the many advantages of piety and virtue, this is not altogether inconsiderable, that it reflects an honour upon our memory after death; which is a thing much more valuable than to have our bodies preserved from putrefaction: for that I think is the meaning of Solomon, when he prefers a good name before precious ointment: (Eccl. vii. 1.) “A good name is better than precious ointment.” This they used in embalming of dead bodies, to preserve them from noisomeness and corruption: but a good name preserves a man's memory, and makes it grateful to posterity; which is a far greater benefit than that of a precious ointment, which serves only to keep a dead body from stench and rottenness.

I shall briefly explain the words, and then consider the matter contained in them; “The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.” By the righteous, is probably here meant the good man in general; for though justice and righteousness are in Scripture frequently used for that particular virtue, whereby a man is disposed to render to every man his own, which is known by the name of justice; yet it is less frequently, and perhaps in this place, used in a larger sense, so as to comprehend all piety and virtue. For so the righteous man is described at the beginning of this Psalm, “Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments:” and he is opposed to the wicked man, (ver. 10.) “the wicked shall see it and be grieved;” that is, he shall be troubled to see the prosperity of the righteous; the manifold blessings of his life, and the good name he shall leave behind him at his death; which is the meaning of his being “in everlasting remembrance;” that is, long after he is dead, perhaps for many ages, he shall be well spoken of, and his name mentioned with honour, and his good deeds recorded and remembered to all posterity.

So that the sense of the words amounts to this—that eminently good men do commonly leave a good name behind them, and transmit a grateful memory of themselves to after-

ages. I say, commonly, for so we are to understand this kind of sayings; not that they are strictly and universally true, without exception; but usually, and for the most part. It is possible that a good man may soon be forgotten by the malice of men, or, through the partiality and iniquity of the age, may have his name blemished after death, and be misrepresented to posterity: but for the most part it is otherwise; and though the world be very wicked, yet it seldom deals so hardly and unjustly with men of eminent goodness and virtue, as to defraud them of their due praise and commendation after death. It very frequently happens otherwise to good men, whilst they are alive; nay, they are then very seldom so justly treated as to be generally esteemed and well spoken of, and to be allowed their due praise and reputation: but after death, their good name is generally secured and vindicated, and posterity does them that right, which perhaps the age wherein they lived denied to them. Therefore, in the prosecution of this argument, I shall inquire into these two things:

First, Whence it comes to pass, that good men are very often defrauded of their just praise and reputation, whilst they are alive: and,

Secondly, What security they have of a good name after death.

First, Whence it comes to pass, that good men are so frequently defrauded of their just praise and reputation, while they are alive. And to give ourselves full satisfaction in this matter, two things are fit to be inquired into.

1. From what cause this proceeds.
2. For what reason the providence of God doth often permit it.

(1.) From what cause it proceeds, that good men have so often the hard fate to be ill spoken of, and to be severely censured, and to have their worth much detracted from, while they are alive.

And this proceeds, partly from good men themselves, and partly from others.

1. Good men themselves are many times the cause of it. For the best men are imperfect; and present and visible imperfections do very much lessen and abate the reputation of a man's goodness. It cannot be otherwise, but that the lustre of a great piety and virtue should be somewhat obscured, by that mixture of human frailty which does necessarily attend this state of imperfection: and though a man by great care and consideration, by great vigilancy and pains with himself, be arrived to that degree and pitch of goodness, as to have but a very few visible failing?, and those small, in comparison; yet when these come to be scanned and commented upon, by envy or ill-will, they will be strangely inflamed and magnified, and made much greater, and more than in truth they are. But there are few persons in the world of that excellent goodness, but, besides the common and more pardonable frailties of humanity, they do now and then discover something, which might perhaps justly deserve a severe censure, if some amends were not made for it, by many and great virtues.

Very good men are subject to considerable imprudences and sudden passions; and especially to an affected severity and moroseness of carriage; which is very disgusting, and apt

405

406

to beget dislike. And they are the more incident to these kind of imperfections; because, out of a just hatred of the vicious customs and practices of the world, and to keep out of the way of temptation, they think it safest to retire from the world as much as they can; being loath to venture themselves more than needs in so infectious an air. By this means, their spirits are apt to be a little sour, and they must necessarily be ignorant of many points of civility and good-humour, which are great ornaments of virtue, though not of the essence of it.

407

Now two or three faults in a good man, if an uncharitable man have but the handling and managing them, may easily cast a considerable blemish upon his reputation; because the better the man is, so much the more conspicuous are his faults; as spots are soonest discovered, and most taken notice of, in a pure and white garment. Besides that, in matters of censure, mankind do much incline to the harder side; and but very few persons are so charitable and equal, as to construe things to the best sense, and to consider a man altogether; and fairly to set the good that is in him, against his faults and imperfections. But,

2. Though good men many times contribute too much to the lessening of their own reputation, with those among whom they live, yet the principal cause of their suffering in this kind, is not from themselves, but others; and that upon these three accounts:

1. From the hatred and opposition of bad men to holiness and virtue; and these are commonly the greatest number, and make the loudest cry. They are declared enemies to goodness; and then, how can it be expected, they should have any great kindness for good men? They want virtue themselves; and therefore they think themselves upbraided by the good qualities of others.

This enmity of wicked men against the righteous, and the true reason of it, is very well expressed in the Wisdom of Solomon: ([chap. ii. ver. 12.](#)) "Let us (say they) lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn, and is clean contrary to our doings; he upbraideth us with our offending the law, and he objecteth, to our infamy, the sins of our youth: he was made to reprove our thoughts, therefore he is grievous unto us, even to behold; for his life is not like other men, he is quite of another fashion; we are esteemed of him as reprobate silver; he abstaineth from our ways, as from filthiness." This is that which filleth the minds of wicked men with malice against the righteous; and malice will easily invent ways to blast any man's reputation. Good men do sometimes, as it is their duty, reprove those that are bad; or if they do it not in word, yet they upbraid them in their actions, and contrary course of life; and both these are grievous and provoking to them. Not but that wicked men are many times in their consciences convinced of the real goodness of those whom they speak against; but they will not own it, lest in so doing they should condemn themselves.

408

2. Another cause of this, is the envy of those who perhaps have some degree of goodness themselves. For great virtue is apt to raise envy in those who fall short of it; and this makes those who are but imperfectly good, to detract from the eminent worth of others; because

they are sensible they are outshined by them, and that it occasions a disadvantageous comparison, and makes their defects taken notice of.

They can endure a man that is moderately good, and keeps pace with his neighbours: but if he endeavour to outstrip them, they presently combine against him, and take all opportunities to undermine his reputation; and will be very glad, either to find a blot in his escutcheon, or to fix one there.

3. There is something in the very presence and nearness of goodness and virtue, which is apt to lessen it.

In matters of sense, the nearer the object is, the bigger it appears; and the farther distant it is from us, the less it seems to be: but here it is quite otherwise; men are not so apt to value present worth, when [yet they will reverence it mightily at a distance.

I know not whence it comes to pass, but so we certainly find it, that men are more sensible of the goodness and excellency of any thing, under the want of it, than while they enjoy it; and do usually value it more when it is gone, than they did whilst it was present with them. Whilst we live with good men, and converse with them every day, we take but little notice of them; but no sooner are they departed, but we admire them, and every man's mouth is open to celebrate their good qualities. Perhaps familiarity, and acquaintance, and conversation does insensibly beget something of contempt; but whatever the reason of it be, we find the thing most certainly true in experience.

(2.) Let us consider in the next place, for what reasons the providence of God permits it thus to be. I shall mention but these two.

1. To keep good men humble, and, as the expression is in Job, "to hide pride from men."

God's providence, in the disposal and ordering of things in this world, seems rather to consult our safety, than our satisfaction; and the security of our virtue, than the full reward of it. Now, if good men should always meet with that clear esteem and reputation which their goodness deserves, they would be in great danger of being puffed up with a proud conceit of themselves; and pride is enough to supplant the greatest virtue in the world; such a dead fly, as this, were sufficient to spoil a box of the most precious ointment. For man is an ambitious creature, and vain above all things; so vain, as not only to be covetous of praise, but even patient of flattery: and the best of men lie too open on this blind side of human nature; and therefore, God, who knows our frame, and how apt dust and ashes are to be proud, hath in his wise and merciful providence so disposed things, that good men are seldom exposed to the full force of so strong a temptation. And for this reason he lets loose envious and malicious tongues to detract from good men, for a check to the vanity of human nature, and to keep their virtue safe, under the protection of humility.

And this is the way likewise to secure the reputation which they have, and which otherwise would be in danger of being lost: for he that is once proud of the esteem he hath got, takes the readiest way to fall into contempt; and certainly it is better of the two, that our

reputation should suffer a little by the malice of others, than be ruined by our own pride and vanity.

God does not envy good men the reputation of their goodness and virtue; but he knows the weakness of human nature, and “will not suffer it to be tempted, above what it is able.” When good men are grown up to perfection, and able to bear it, as they will be when they come to heaven, their good name shall be fully vindicated, and they shall have praise not only from men, but from angels, and from God himself.

2. This life is not the proper season of reward, but of work and service.

In this life, God is pleased to give some present encouragement to piety and virtue, but reserves the main of our recompence to be bestowed upon us at the end of our work. When our course is finished, then, and not before, we must expect our crown; when our accounts are cast up and stated, and it appears what improvement we have made of our talents, then will come the *Euge bone serve*, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” In the mean time, good men must be content with such a portion of esteem, as an envious and ill-natured world will afford them.

And thus I have done with the first thing I proposed to inquire into—whence it comes to pass that good men are frequently defrauded of their due praise and reputation while alive. I proceed to the

Second inquiry, namely, What security good men have of a good name after death,

And the true account of this is to be given, partly from the providence of God, and partly from the nature of the thing.

(1.) From the providence of God; which is concerned herein, upon a twofold account.

1. In respect of the equity of it.

2. In regard of the example of it.

1. In respect of the equity of it. God, who will not be behindhand with any man, concerns himself, to secure to good men the proper reward of their piety and virtue. Now praise is one of the most proper recompences of good and virtuous actions; this good men seldom meet with in this life, with out a great deal of allay and abatement; and therefore the providence of God hath so ordered things, that it should come in the properest season, when our work is done, and when we are out of the danger of the temptation of it.

2. In regard of the example of it. It is a great argument to virtue, and encouragement to men to act their part well, to see good men applauded, when they go off the stage. Every man, that hath any spark of generosity in him, is desirous of fame; and though men care not how soon it comes, yet they will be glad to have it after death, rather than not at all. Piety and virtue would be but very melancholy and uncomfortable things, if they should always be so unfortunate, as never to meet with due esteem and approbation; but when men are assured that they shall have this reward one time or other, and observe it to be so in experience, this is a great spur and encouragement to do virtuously: and a great mind, that

411

412

hath a just sense of reputation and a good name, will be content to lay in for it before hand; and patiently to wait the time which God knows fittest for the bestowing of it.

(2.) The other part of the account of this truth, is to be given from the nature of the thing: because death removes and takes away the chief obstacle of a good man's reputation. For then his defects are out of sight, and men are contented that his imperfections should be buried in his grave with him. Death hath put him out of the reach of malice and envy; his worth and excellency does now no longer stand in other men's light; his great virtues are at a distance, and not so apt to be brought into comparison, to the prejudice and disadvantage of the living; *mortui non mordent*; the example of the dead, is not so cutting a reproof to the vice of the living; the good man is removed out of the way, and his example, how bright soever, is not so scorching and troublesome at a distance; and therefore men are generally contented, to give him his due character.

Besides that, there is a certain civility in human nature, which will not suffer men to wrong the dead, and to deny them the just commendation of their worth. Even the scribes and pharisees (as bad a sort of men as we can well imagine), though they were just like their fathers in persecuting and slaying the prophets, while they were alive; yet had they a mighty veneration for their piety and virtue after they were dead, and thought no honour too great to be done to them. They would be at the charge of raising monuments to the memory of those good men whom their fathers had slain; and whom they would certainly have used in the very same manner, had they either lived in the days of those prophets, or those prophets had lived in their days, as our Saviour plainly told them.

All that now remains is to draw some inferences from what hath been said by way of application; and they shall be these three.

1. To vindicate the honour and respect which the Christian church, for many ages, hath paid to the memory of the first teachers and martyrs of our religion.

2. To encourage us to piety and goodness, from this consideration; that "the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance."

3. That when we pretend to honour the memory of good men, we would be careful to imitate their holiness and virtue.

1. To vindicate the honour which the Christian church hath for many ages done to the first teachers and martyrs of our religion; I mean more especially to the holy apostles of our Lord and Saviour; to whose honour the Christian church hath thought fit to set apart solemn times, for the commemoration of their piety and suffering, and to stir up others to the imitation of them.

This certainly can with no good colour, either from Scripture or reason, be pretended to be unlawful; and when David here says, "the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance," he cannot certainly be thought to exclude the most solemn way of commemorating their piety and virtue.

I do not pretend this custom can be derived from the very first ages of Christianity; but surely it is sufficient, for the lawfulness of it, that it is no where forbidden; nay, it is rather required here in the text; the best way to preserve the memory of good men, being thus to commemorate them. And it may be of great use to us, if it be not our own fault; the setting before our eyes the holy lives of excellent men, being in its own nature apt to excite us to the imitation of them.

Besides that, I could tell you, that though this can not be proved so ancient, as some vainly pretend, yet it is of great antiquity in the church, and did begin in some of the best ages of Christianity, *Memoriae martyrum*, the meetings of Christians at the tombs of the martyrs—was practised long before the degeneracy of the western church; and the Christians were wont, at those meetings, solemnly to commemorate the faith and constancy of those good men, and to encourage themselves from their examples.

I know, very well, that this did in time degenerate into gross superstition, which afterward gave colour and occasion to that gross and idolatrous practice in the church of Rome, of worshipping saints. But this abuse is no sufficient reason for us to give over the celebrating of the memory of such holy men, as the apostles and martyrs of Christ were; and propounding them to ourselves for our patterns. We may still lawfully give them their due honour; though the church of Rome hath so overdone it, as to rob God of his.

2. Let this consideration, that “the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance,” be an encouragement to us to piety and goodness. This, to a generous nature, that is sensible of honour and reputation, is no small reward and encouragement. Before the happiness of heaven was clearly revealed, and life and immortality brought to light by the gospel, one of the greatest motives to worthy and virtuous deeds, was the earnest desire which men had of leaving a good name behind them, and of perpetuating the fame and glory of their action to after-ages. Upon this ground, chiefly, many of the bravest spirits among the heathen were animated to virtue, and, with the hazard of their lives, to do great and glorious exploits for their country.

And certainly it is an argument of a great mind to be moved by this consideration, and a sign of a low and base spirit to neglect it. He that hath no regard to his fame, is lost to all purposes of virtue and goodness; when a man is once come to this, not to care what others say of him, the next step is, to have no care what he himself does. *Quod conscientia est apud Deum, id fama est apud homines*; “what conscience is in respect of God, that is fame in respect of men.” Next to a good conscience, a clear reputation ought to be to every man the dearest thing in the world. Men have generally a great value for riches; and yet the Scripture pronounceth him the happier man that leaves a good name, than him that leaves a great estate behind him. (*Prov. xxii. 1.*) “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.”

If then we have any regard to a good name, the best way to secure it to ourselves, is by the holy and virtuous actions of a good life. Do well, and thou shalt be well spoken of; if not

now, yet by those who shall come after: the surest way to glory, and honour, and immortality, is by a patient continuance in well-doing. God hath engaged his promise to us to this purpose: (1 Sam. ii. 30.) “Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.” “The name of the wicked shall rot,” says Solomon, (Prov. x. 7.) But God doth usually take a particular care to preserve and vindicate their memory, who are careful to keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them.

3dly, and lastly, Whenever we pretend to do honour to the memory of good men, let us charge ourselves with a strict imitation of their holiness and virtue. The greatest honour we can do to God, or good men, is to endeavour to be like them; to express their virtues, and represent them to the world in our lives. Upon these days, we should propound to ourselves, as our patterns, all those holy and excellent persons, who have gone before us; the apostles of our Lord and Saviour, and all those blessed saints and martyrs, who were faithful to the death, and have received a crown of life and immortality.

We should represent to ourselves the piety of their actions, and the patience and constancy of their sufferings, that we may imitate their virtues, and “be followers of them, who through faith and patience, have inherited the promises; and, seeing we are compassed about with such a cloud of witnesses,” we should “lay aside every weight, and run with patience the race that is set before us.”

Let us imagine all those great examples of piety and virtue, standing about us in a throng, and fixing their eyes upon us: how ought we to demean ourselves in such a presence, and under the eye of such witnesses! and how should we be ashamed to do any thing that is unworthy of such excellent patterns, and blush to look upon our own lives, when we remember their's! Good God! at what a distance do the greatest part of Christians follow those examples; and, while we honour them with our lips, how unlike are we to them in our lives!

Why do we thus reproach ourselves with these glorious patterns! Let us either resolve to imitate their virtues, or to make no mention of their names; for while we celebrate the examples of saints and holy men, and yet contradict them in our lives, we either mock them, or upbraid ourselves.

Now the God of, peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, &c.



SERMON LXXVI.

[Preached on All Saints Day, 1684.]

THE DUTY OF IMITATING THE PRIMITIVE TEACHERS AND PATTERNS OF CHRISTIANITY.

Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.—[Heb. xiii. 7.](#)

The verse runs thus:

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

THE great scope and design of this Epistle, is to persuade the Jews, who were newly converted to Christianity, to continue steadfast in the profession of it, notwithstanding all the sufferings and persecutions it was attended withal; and to encourage them hereto, among many other arguments which the apostle makes use of, he doth several times in this Epistle propound to them the examples and patterns of saints and holy men, that were gone before them; especially those of their own nation, who, in their respective ages, had given remarkable testimony of their faith in God, and constant adherence to the truth. ([Chap. vi. 11, 12.](#)) “And we desire, that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope, unto the end; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” And ([chap. xi.](#)) he gives a catalogue of the eminent heroes and saints of the Old Testament, who by faith had done such wonders, and given such testimony of their patience and constancy, in doing and suffering the will of God; from whence he infers, ([chap. xii. 1.](#)) that we ought to take pattern and heart from such examples, to persevere in our Christian course: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of (martyrs, or) witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us;” especially since they had greater examples than these, nearer to them, and more fresh in memory; the great example of our Lord, the founder of our religion; and of the first teachers of Christianity, the disciples and apostles of our Lord and Saviour. The example of our Lord himself, the captain and rewarder of our faith ([ver. 2.](#) of that twelfth chapter): “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame: ([ver. 3.](#)) for consider him, who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. This indeed is the great pattern of Christians, and, in regard of the great perfection of it, surpasseth all other patterns, and seems to make them useless; as having in it the perfection of the Divinity, not in its full brightness (which would be apt to dazzle rather than direct us), but allayed and shadowed with the infirmities of human nature; and, for that reason, more accommodate and familiar to us than the Divine perfections abstractedly considered.



But yet, because our blessed Saviour was God as well as man, and clear of all stain of sin (for though he was clothed with the infirmities, yet he was free from the corruption of human nature), therefore the examples of mere men, liable to sin as we are, may in many respects be more suitable and accommodate to encourage us to the imitation of those virtues, which are attainable by us, in this state of imperfection; for which reason the apostle hath thought fit likewise to propose to us the highest examples of that kind, the first teachers of our religion; for of these he seems to speak here in the text, namely, those apostles, or apostolical men, by whom they had been instructed in the faith of Christ, but who were now departed this life; it being very probable, that the apostle here speaks of such as were dead, when he says, "Remember them which have the rule over you, (or, those that have been your guides) who have spoken to you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."

420

I say this is very probable, because he minds them to remember, which supposeth them to be absent; but especially, because he minds them to "consider the end of their conversation;" by which, surely, he means the blessed state of those good men after death; which is elsewhere called "the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls." (1 Pet. i. 9.) So, likewise, (Rom. vi. 22.) this is said to be the end of a holy life: "Ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." And it very much favours this interpretation, that the apostle afterwards speaks of the living guides and governors of the church: (ver. 17.) "Obey them which have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls."

So that it is highly probable, that the apostle here speaks of such guides and governors of the church, as had once been over them, but were now departed this life; and therefore he might, with more freedom and less envy, recommend their example to them, and bid them call to mind their faith and exemplary conversation among them, and propose it for a pattern to themselves, considering the happy end of it, viz. the blessed state they were now in, and the glorious reward they were made partakers of in another life.

421

In the words thus explained, you have,

I. A duty enjoined; which is, to propose to ourselves, for our imitation, the examples of good men that have gone before us; especially the primitive patterns of Christianity, and the first teachers of our religion. "Remember them which have been your guides, and have spoken to you the word of God, whose faith follow."

II. The motive or encouragement to it, from the consideration of the reward of it; "considering the end of their conversation."

I. The duty enjoined; which is, to propose to ourselves, for our imitation, the example of good men that have gone before us; especially the primitive patterns of Christianity, and first teachers of our religion. "Remember them that have had the rule over you, that have been your guides, and have spoken to you the word of God, whose faith follow." In which words the apostle bids them call to mind their first guides and instructors in Christianity,

whom they had known, and heard, and conversed with in this world, but who were now rested from their labours, and were receiving the reward of them; to remember the doctrines they had heard from them, and the virtues they had seen in them; and to embrace the one, and imitate the other.

Thus we cannot remember the primitive teachers, and patterns of Christianity, the apostles of our Lord and Saviour; because we did not personally know them, and converse with them, living at the distance of many ages from their time; but we may do that which is equivalent, and a kind of remembrance of them; we may commemorate their faith, and the virtue and holiness of their lives; and, what we hear and read of them, we may propose for patterns to ourselves, and copy them out in our lives and actions: and this is our duty, and the same in Substance with theirs, who had the happiness to know and converse with those excellent persons, to hear them preach, and to see the rules and precepts of that holy doctrine, which they taught, exemplified in their lives.

In the handling of this argument, I shall do these three things:

First, Shew why, amongst all the examples of good men, we should more especially propose to our imitation the primitive teachers and patterns of our religion.

Secondly, Wherein we should imitate them. The apostle expresseth it in one word, in their faith; “whose faith follow.”

Thirdly, The encouragement to this, from the consideration of the happy state they are in, and the glorious rewards they are made partakers of; “considering the end of their conversation.”

First, I shall endeavour to shew why, among all the examples of good men, we should more especially propose to our imitation the primitive teachers and patterns of our religion; I mean, the holy apostles of our Lord and Saviour, whose faith we should endeavour to follow, and to imitate the holiness and virtue of their conversation. For these certainly come nearest to that most perfect and excellent pattern of all goodness, our blessed Saviour, and are the fairest transcripts of that unblemished original. Hence it is that St. Paul so frequently exhorts Christians to imitate his example, and the example of the other apostles; it being reasonable to presume, that they came nearest to the pattern of our Lord: (1 Cor. xi. 1.) “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” (Phil. iii. 17.) “Brethren, be ye followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample. For our conversation is in heaven.”

And this is reasonable, that the first in every kind should be the rule and pattern of the rest, and of all that follow after, because it is likely to be most perfect. In process of time, the best institutions are apt to decline, and by insensible degrees to swerve and depart from the perfection of their first state; and therefore it is a good rule, to preserve things from corruption and degeneracy, often to look back to the first institution, and by that to correct those imperfections and errors, which almost unavoidably creep in with time.



If we would preserve that purity of faith and manners, which our religion requires, we should have frequent recourse to the primitive teachers and patterns of Christianity, and endeavour to bring our belief and lives to as near a conformity with theirs as is possible. Who so likely to deliver the faith and doctrine of Christ pure, and uncorrupted, as the primitive teachers of it, who received it from our Lord himself; and were, by an extraordinary assistance of the Holy Spirit, secured from error and mistake in the delivery of it? And who so likely to bring their lives and conversations to an exact conformity with his holy doctrine, as they, who were so thoroughly instructed in it by the best Master, and shewn the practice of it in the most perfect example of holiness and virtue? Great reason there is, therefore, why all Christians should follow their faith, and make their conversation more especially the patterns of their lives.

424

The want of a due regard to these fountains of Christian doctrine, and the first and best patterns of Christian practice, hath been the great cause of that foul degeneracy of the Romish church, both in the doctrine and practice of Christianity—they do not follow the faith of the apostles, the first fathers and teachers of Christianity; but of the fathers of the council of Lateran and Trent. Thus have they “forsaken the fountain of living waters,” the Holy Scriptures, “and have hewn to themselves broken cisterns, that will hold no water;” the doctrines and traditions of men. Nay, they have stopped up this “fountain of living waters” from the people, and forbid them to come to it; and forced them to drink of those impure and puddled streams, which they let out to them; and, instead of the lives of the holy apostles, and those eminent graces and virtues which shined forth in them, they represent to them the patterns of new saints; some of which neither they nor their fathers knew, and indeed never were in being; as St. Almanach, and St. Synoris, and several others; many of them so far from being saints, that they may be reckoned among the worst of men; (for instance, our countryman Thomas a Becket, who for pride and rebellion may almost vie with Lucifer himself; and yet this ill man, and worst of subjects, was canonized to that height, as for two hundred years together to engross the worship of these western parts of the world, and to impoverish the shrines of all other saints, even of the blessed Virgin herself:) others, such idiots, or hot-headed fanatics, that he that reads their lives would take them to be fools and madmen rather than saints (as Francis and Dominic, and Ignatius Loyola, and several others of the same stamp; and many, the very best of them, so disguised by their legends, that instead of the substantial virtues of a good life, their story is made up of false and fantastical miracles, and ridiculous freaks of superstition.

425

All which considered, there is great reason why we should have recourse to the primitive patterns of faith and holiness, and be followers of them, who we are sure were followers of Christ. I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed, namely, Wherein we should imitate these patterns. And the apostle expresseth it in one word, in their faith, “whose faith follow.” And the word faith is

frequently in the New Testament used so largely, as to comprehend the whole condition of the gospel; a firm belief of the doctrine of it, and the fruit and effect of this belief, in a good conversation. And that faith here in the text, takes in a holy life, is evident from what follows: “whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation;” from whence it is evident, that the apostle speaks of such a faith, as shews forth it self in a good conversation.

So that we may very well suppose the apostle hereto recommend the primitive faith to our imitation in these four respects.

1. In regard of the sincerity and purity of it.
2. In regard of the firmness and stability of it.
3. Of their constancy and perseverance in it.

4. Of the efficacy and fruitfulness of it, in a good conversation. All these may be collected from the expressions and circumstances of the text.

1. We are to imitate these primitive patterns, in the sincerity and purity of their faith; i mean, that the faith which we profess be the sincere doctrine of Christianity, and the pure word of God, free from all mixture of human additions and inventions, and not made up, as the faith of the Pharisees was among the Jews, and theirs of the church of Rome is at this day, of the word of God and the doctrines and traditions of men; not like the Creed of Pope Pius IV. (which is now the standard of the Roman faith) consisting of the twelve old articles of the Christian faith, delivered to us by Christ and his apostles, and as many new ones, coined and stamped by their later councils. This is not to follow the faith of the apostles, and first patterns of Christianity, the faith once delivered to the saints, as St. Jude calls it. This is to have our faith stand upon the authority of men, and not on the word of God; whereas we are to follow the faith of the first guides of the Christian church, who spake unto them the word of God, as the apostle expressly chargeth here in the text.

2. We are to imitate them, in the stability and firmness of our faith, and not suffer ourselves to be shaken, and removed from it, by every wind of new doctrine; the faith of Christ being unchangeable as Christ himself. And that by following the faith of the primitive guides and teachers of Christianity, the apostle here means, that we should be steadfast and unmoveable in it, is plain from what follows immediately after the text; “whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines: for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace,” that is, in the doctrine of the gospel, which is frequently called the grace of God.

3. We are to imitate them, in the constancy and perseverance of their faith; and that notwithstanding all the discountenance and opposition, the persecution and suffering, which attend the profession of this faith; which the apostle sufficiently intimates in this Epistle, to have been the condition of those Christians, to whom he wrote; and therefore he proposeth so many examples to them, of constant and patient suffering for God and his truth; and it



is probable enough, that the apostle here recommends the example of those who were the primitive martyrs, as well as teachers of Christianity. He had before proposed to them the living examples of those, who were under actual persecution and sufferings for the gospel: (ver. 3.) “Remember those that are in bonds, and those that suffer adversity;” and here, in the seventh verse, he seems to propose the pattern of those, who had laid down their lives and died for the faith: “Remember those who have been your guides, and have spoken to you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation,” τὴν ἐκβασιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς, which may be rendered, the last act of their lives, the manner of their going out of the world, perhaps by martyrdom; as if he had said, imitate them in their constancy and perseverance in the faith, even to the last, in laying” down their lives for it. And thus we should be ready to do, if God calls us to it. How ever, it is certain the apostle meant their constancy and perseverance in the faith to the last, and their dying *in*, if not *for* the faith of Christ. And this is necessary, if we expect the crown of life, and hope for the same happy end, which they had; for none but they, that continue to the end, shall be saved.

4. We should imitate them in the efficacy and fruitfulness of their faith, in the practice and virtues of a good life; “whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation,” that is, their perseverance in a holy course to the end. And these must never be separated; a sound faith, and a good life. With out this our faith is barren and dead, as St. James tells us, chap. ii. ver. 17. Our knowledge and belief of the Christian doctrine, must manifest itself in a good conversation. “Who is a wise man (says the same St. James, chap. iii. ver. 13.) and endowed with knowledge amongst you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works.” — “This is a faithful saying (saith St. Paul to Titus, chap. iii. ver. 8.) and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God, be careful to maintain good works.”

And herein the apostles of our Lord and Saviour were eminent examples. They lived as they taught, and practised the doctrine which they preached. So St. Paul strictly chargeth Timothy, (1 Tim. iv. 12.) “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity.” And our Saviour tells us, that hereby chiefly false prophets and teachers might be known from the true apostles of Christ. (Matt. vii. 20.) “By their fruits ye shall know them.” And indeed we do not follow the faith of those excellent persons, if we do not abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which by Jesus Christ are to the praise and glory of God. I come now to the

Third and last thing I proposed, viz. the encouragement to this, from the consideration of the happy state of those persons, who are proposed to us for patterns, and the glorious reward which they are made partakers of in another world. “Considering the end of their conversation,” τὴν ἐκβασιν, their egress or departure out of this life into a blessed and glorious state, where they have received the crown and reward of their faith and patience, and pious conversation in this world; or else (which comes much to one) considering the

428

429

conclusion of their lives, with what patience and comfort they left the world, and with what joyful assurance of the happy condition they were going to, and were to continue in for ever.

And this is a great encouragement to constancy and perseverance in faith and holiness, to see with what cheerfulness and comfort good men die, and with what a firm and steady persuasion of the happiness they are entering upon. For who would not be glad to leave the world, in that calmness and serenity of mind, and comfortable assurance of a blessed eternity? Bad men wish this, and are ready to say with Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." But if we would have the comfort of such a death, we must live such lives, and imitate the faith and good conversation of those whom we desire to resemble in the manner of their death, and to go into the same happy state that they are in after death. If we do not make their lives our pattern, we must not expect to be conformable to them, in the happy manner of their death. When we hear of the death of an eminently good man, we do not doubt but he is happy; and are confident that he will meet with the reward of his piety and goodness in another world. If we believe this of him, let us endeavour to be like him; that we may attain the same happiness, which we believe him to be possessed of, and, as the apostle exhorts, ([chap. iv. 12.](#)) "Let us not be slothful; but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Let us shew the same diligence that they did; that we may have the same full assurance of hope unto the end, which they had.

430

The inference from this discourse, which I have made upon this argument, is, to shew what use we ought to make of these excellent examples, which are set before us, of the first founders and teachers of our religion, and what is the proper honour and respect, which we ought to pay to their memory: not invocation and adoration; but a zealous imitation of their faith and good conversation. The greatest honour we can do them, the most acceptable to God, the most grateful to them, and the most beneficial to ourselves, is to endeavour to be like them: not to make any images and likeness of them, to fall down before them, and worship them; but to form the image of their faith and virtues upon our hearts and lives: not to pray to them; but to praise God for such bright and glorious examples, and to endeavour with all our might to imitate their faith and patience, and piety, and humility, and meekness, and charity, and all those other virtues which were so resplendent in them. And this is to remember the founders of our religion as we ought, to follow their faith, and to consider "the end of their conversation."

431

Had the Christian religion required, or intended any such thing, as of later times hath been practised in the world, it had been as easy for the apostle to have said,—Remember them that have been your guides, and have spoken to you the word of God, to erect images to them, and to worship them with due veneration, and to pray to them, and make use of their intercession. But no such thing is said, or the least intimation given of it, either in this text, or any other in the whole Bible; but very much to the contrary.

Their example, indeed, is frequently recommended to us, for our imitation and encouragement; and, for this reason, the providence of God hath taken particular care, that the memory of the apostles, and so many primitive Christians and martyrs, should be transmitted to posterity; that Christians in all succeeding ages might propound these patterns to themselves, and have perpetually before their eyes the piety and virtue of their lives, and their patient and constant sufferings for the truth; that when God shall please to call us to the like trial, we may not be wearied and faint in our minds; but being compassed about with such a cloud of witnesses, having so many examples in our eye of those, “who through faith and patience inherit the promises,” and do now as it were look down from their happy state upon us here below, who are combating with manifold temptations, to see how we behave and acquit ourselves in our Christian course, we may take encouragement to ourselves from such examples, and such spectators, to run with patience the race which is set before us.

I know indeed that other use than this hath been, and is at this day, made of the memory of the saints and martyrs of former ages, very dishonourable to God, and very grievous to them, if they be sensible of what is done here below; I mean, to worship them, and to pray to them, and (to the great disparagement of the powerful intercession of our great High Priest, Jesus, the Son of God) to make them the mediators and intercessors in heaven with God for us. Of this the Scripture hath no where given us the least intimation; but hath expressly commanded the contrary, to worship the Lord our God, and him only to serve; and to pray to him alone, in the name of Jesus Christ, who is the only “mediator betwixt God and man.” Nor are there any footsteps of any such practice in the primitive church for the first three hundred years; as is acknowledged by our most learned adversaries of the church of Rome.

The Scripture no where propounds the saints to us for objects of our worship; but for the patterns of our lives. This is the greatest respect and veneration that we candor ought to pay to them; and, what ever is beyond this, is a voluntary humility, injurious to God and our blessed Saviour, and most certainly displeasing to those whom they pretend to honour; if they know how men play the fool about them here below.

Let us then endeavour to be like them, in the holy and virtuous actions of their lives, in their constant patience and suffering for the truth, if God shall call us thereto. And we may be like them, if we do but sincerely endeavour it, and pray to God for his grace and assistance to that end. For these examples were not left for our admiration only, but for our imitation. We frequently read the lives of the apostles and first founders of our religion: but I know not how it comes to pass, we choose rather lazily to admire them, than vigorously to follow them; as if the piety of the first Christians were miraculous, and not at all intended for the imitation of succeeding ages; as if heaven and earth, God and men, and all things were altered, since that time; as if Christianity were then in its youthful age and vigour, but is since decayed and grown old, and hath quite lost its power and virtue. And indeed the

432

433

generality of Christians live at such a faint and careless rate, as to make the world believe, that either all the Tories of the primitive Christians are fables; or else, that the force of Christianity is strangely abated, and that the Holy Spirit of God hath forsaken the earth, and is retired to the Father. But truth never grows old, and those laws of goodness and righteousness, which are contained in the gospel, are still as reasonable, and apt to gain upon the minds of men, as ever. God is the same he was, and our blessed Saviour is still at the right hand of God, interceding powerfully for sinners, for mercy and grace to help in time of need. The promises and threatenings of the gospel are still as true and powerful as ever; and the Holy Spirit of God is still in the world, and effectually works in them that believe.

Let us not then deceive ourselves in this matter. The primitive Christians were men like ourselves, subject to the same passions that we are, and compassed about with the same infirmities; so that al though that extraordinary spirit and power of miracles, which God endowed them withal, for the first planting and propagating of the gospel in the world, be now ceased, yet the sanctifying power and virtue of God's Holy Spirit does still accompany the gospel, and is ready to assist us in every good work.

In a word, we have all that is necessary to work the same graces and virtues in us, which were in them; and if we be not slothful, and wanting to ourselves, we may follow their faith, and at last attain the end of it, even the salvation of our souls.

Let us, then, from an idle admiring of those excellent patterns, proceed to a vigorous imitation of them, and be so far from being discouraged by the excellency of them, as to make even that matter and ground of encouragement to ourselves; according to that of Tertullian, *Admonetur omnis aetas fieri posse, quod aliquando factum est*—all ages to the end of the world may be convinced, that what has been done, is possible to be done. There have been such holy and excellent persons in the world, and therefore it is possible for men to be such.

Let us not, then, be slothful, but “followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Since we are compassed about with such a “cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us, and let us run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God.”



SERMON LXXVII.

[Preached on All-Saints Day.]

THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST, AND THE DANGER OF DENYING HIM.

It is a faithful saying; for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.—2 Tim. ii. 11, 12.

IN the beginning of this chapter, St. Paul encourageth Timothy to continue steadfast in the profession of the gospel, notwithstanding the sufferings which attended it: (ver. 1.) “Thou, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus;” and, (ver. 3.) “Thou, therefore, endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” And, to animate him in this resolution, he quotes a saying, which it seems was well known and firmly believed among Christians; a saying, on the one hand, full of encouragement to those who with patience and constancy suffered for their religion; and, on the other hand, full of terror to those who, for fear of suffering, denied it. “It is a faithful saying.” This is a preface used by this apostle, to introduce some remarkable sentence, of more than ordinary weight and concernment: (1 Tim. i. 15.) “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners:” and (chap. iv. 8, 9.) “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having a promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.” (Titus iii. 8.) “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works.” And here in the text, the same preface is used to signify the importance of the saying he was about to mention: “It is a faithful saying; if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us.”

The first two sentences are matter of encouragement to those who suffer with Christ, and for him, and are the very same in sense. “If we be dead with him,” that is, if we lay down our lives for the testimony of the truth, as he did, “we shall also live with him,” that is, we shall in like manner be made partakers of immortality, as he is: a “If we suffer,” or endure as he did, “we shall also reign with him” in glory.

The other sentence is matter of terror to those who deny him and his truth. “If we deny him, he also will deny us;” to which is subjoined another saying much to the same sense: “if we believe not, εἰ ἀπιστοῦμεν, if we be unfaithful; yet he remaineth faithful, he cannot deny himself;” that is, he will be as good as his word, and make good that solemn threatening which he hath denounced against those who shall for fear of suffering deny him, and his truth.

The words being thus explained, I shall begin with the first part of this remarkable saying: "If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him." This, it seems, was a noted saying among Christians, and whether they had it by tradition of our Saviour, or whether it was in familiar use among the apostles, as a very proper and powerful argument to keep Christians steadfast to their religion, I cannot determine. It is certain, that sayings to this sense are very frequent, especially in the epistles of St. Paul. (Rom. vi. 5.) "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." And, (ver. 8.) "Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." (2 Cor. iv. 10.) "Always bearing about in the body, the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." And (ver. 11.) "For we which live are always delivered unto death, for Jesus sake; that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." And (Rom. viii. 17.) "If so be that we suffer with him, that we maybe also glorified together." (Phil. iii. 10, 11.) "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death: if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.) "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

437

You see that the sense of this saying was in frequent use among the apostles, as a powerful argument to encourage Christians to constancy in their religion, notwithstanding the dangers and sufferings which attended it. "This is a faithful saying; if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him."

And the force of this argument will best appear, by taking into consideration these two things:

438

I. What virtue there is in a firm belief and persuasion of a blessed immortality in another world, to support and bear up men's spirits under the greatest sufferings for righteousness sake; and even to animate them, if God shall call them to it, to lay down their lives for their religion.

II. How it may be made out to be reasonable, for men to embrace and voluntarily to submit to present and grievous sufferings, in hopes of a future happiness and reward; concerning which we have not, nor perhaps are capable of having, the same degree of certainty and assurance which we have of the evils and sufferings of this present life.

I. What virtue there is in a firm belief and persuasion of a blessed immortality in another world, to support and bear up men's spirits under the greatest sufferings for righteousness sake; and even to animate them, if God shall call them to it, to lay down their lives for their religion.

If men do firmly believe that they shall change this temporal and miserable life for an endless state of happiness and glory, that they shall meet with a reward of their sufferings infinitely beyond the proportion of them, both in the weight and duration of it; this must needs turn the scales on that side, on which there is the greatest weight: and there is a sufficient ground for a firm belief of this. For if any thing can certainly be concluded from the providence of God, this may, that good men shall be happy one time or other: and because they are very often great sufferers in this life, that there is another state remains for them after this life, wherein they shall meet with a full reward of all their sufferings for righteousness' sake.

But besides the reasonableness of this, from the consideration of God's providence, we have now a clear and express revelation of it; life and immortality being brought to light by the gospel. This St. John tells us is the great promise of the gospel: (1 John ii. 25.) "This is the promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life." And this promise, our Saviour most expressly makes to those who suffer for him: (Matt. v. 10, 11, 12.) "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness* sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake, rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven." (Mark x. 29, 30.) "Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, with persecutions, (that is, so far as a state of persecution would admit) and in the world to come eternal life."

And if such a persuasion be firmly fixed in our minds; the faith of another world, and the assured hope of eternal life and happiness, must needs have a mighty force and efficacy upon the minds of sober and considerate men; because there is no proportion between suffering for a little while, and being unspeakably and eternally happy. So St. Paul tells us he calculated the matter: (Rom. viii. 18.) "I reckon (says he) that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." The vast disproportion between the sufferings of a few days, and the joys and glory of eternity, when it is once firmly believed by us, will weigh down all the evils and calamities of this world, and give us courage and constancy under them. For why should we faint, if we believe that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?" as the same St. Paul assures us, 2 Cor. iv. 17. If our minds be but thoroughly possessed with the hopes of a resurrection to a better and happier life; this will make death, attended even with extremity or terror, to be tolerable; as we read of some, in that long catalogue of saints and martyrs, Heb. xi. 35. "Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection." It would make a man to rejoice in the ruin and dissolution of "this earthly tabernacle," to be assured that, "when it is dissolved, we shall have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,"

439

440

as the same apostle assures us. (2 Cor. v. 1.) Thus you see what virtue there is in the firm belief and persuasion of a better life, to bear up men's spirits under those sufferings and torments which may seem unsupportable to human nature.

And so indeed they would be, without an extra ordinary grace and assistance of God to enable them to bear those sufferings, which his providence permits them to be exercised withal. But of this extraordinary grace, we are assured, not only from the consideration of the attributes and providence of God; but likewise from the express promises and declarations of his word.

The attributes of God and his providence give us good ground to believe, that he who loves goodness and righteousness, and hath a peculiar favour and regard for good men, will never suffer his faithful friends and servants to be brought into that distress for righteousness sake, that they shall not be able to endure those evils and afflictions which befall them upon that account: and if, in the course of his providence, any thing happen to them that is above the ordinary constancy and patience of human nature to bear, that in such a case, God will extraordinarily interpose, and give them strength and patience, support and comfort, proportionable to the evils and sufferings that are upon them; and that he will either lighten their burden, or add to their strength; he will either mitigate their pain, or increase their patience; either he will check and restrain the effect of natural causes, as in the case of the three children that were in the fiery furnace; and of Daniel who was cast into the den of lions: or else (which comes to the same issue) if he will suffer causes to have their natural course, he will afford supernatural comforts to balance the fury and extremity of them. This is very credible, from the mere consideration of God's goodness, and of the particular care and favour of his providence towards good men.

But, besides this, we have the express promise and declaration of God's word to this purpose, which puts us out of all doubt concerning that which we had good reason to hope and expect before, 1 Cor. x. 13. St. Paul there tells the Christians at Corinth, that though they had met with some troubles, yet they had not been tried with the extremity of suffering: but when that should happen, they had no cause to doubt, but God would enable them to bear it. "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man;" that is, you have not yet been exercised with any trial but what is human; what the ordinary strength and resolution of human nature is able to bear: but in case it should come to extreme suffering, and that they must either comply with the heathen idolatry, or endure extremity of torments; they had the promise of God's help to support them in that case. "God is faithful (says he), who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it;" and then it follows, "wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry;" that is, let no suffering that you are tempted withal make you guilty of this sin. And (1 Pet. iv. 14.) the presence of God's Spirit, in a very glorious manner, for our support and comfort, is promised to those who suffer for



him. "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you."

And this consideration of God's strength to support us under sufferings, makes the other, of the reward of them, a perfect and complete encouragement; which it could not be without it. For if, upon the whole matter, the present sufferings of good men were intolerable, and human nature were not divinely assisted to bear them; how great so ever the future reward promised to them should be, they that lay under them would be forced to consult their own present ease and deliverance. I proceed to the

II. Second thing I proposed to consider, namely, how it may be made out to be reasonable to embrace and voluntarily to submit to present and grievous sufferings, in hopes of future happiness and reward; concerning which we have not, nor perhaps are capable of having, the same degree of certainty and assurance, which we have of the evils and sufferings of this present life.

Now, granting that we have not the same degree of certainty concerning our future happiness, that we have of our present sufferings, which we feel, or see just ready to come upon us; yet prudence making it necessary for men to run this hazard, does justify the reasonableness of it. This I take to be a known and ruled case in the common affairs of life, and in matters of temporal concernment; and men act upon this principle every day. The husbandman parts with his corn, and casts it into the earth, in confidence that it will spring up again, and at the time of harvest bring him a considerable return and advantage. He parts with a certainty, in hope only of a great future benefit: and though he have no demonstration for the infallible success of his labour and hazard, yet he acts very reasonably; because, if he does not take this course, he runs a greater and more certain hazard of perishing by famine at last, when his present stock is spent. The case of the merchant is the same, who parts with a present estate, in hopes of a future improvement; which yet is not so certain as what he parts withal.

And if this be reasonable in these cases; then the hazard which men run, upon much greater assurance than either the husbandman or the merchant hath, is much more reasonable. When we part with this life in hopes of one infinitely better, that is, "in sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life;" and when we submit to present sufferings, to avoid an eternity of misery, which is much more to be dreaded than temporal want, this is reasonable; because here is a much greater advantage in view, and a more pressing necessity in the case; nothing being so desirable to one that must live for ever, as to be happy for ever; and no thing to be avoided by him with so much care, as everlasting misery and ruin. And, for our security of obtaining the one, and escaping the other, we have the promise of God, who cannot He; which is all the certainty and security that things future and invisible are capable of.



Nay, I will go lower. If God had made no express promise and declaration of a future happiness and reward, to those that serve him and suffer for him: yet if any man, out of a sincere love to God, and awful regard to his laws, endure trouble and affliction, if there be a God and providence, this is assurance enough to us, that our services and sufferings shall one time or other be considered and rewarded. For as sure as any man is, that there is a God, and that his providence regards the actions of men; so sure are we, that no man shall finally be a loser by any thing that he doth or suffers for him.

So that the matter is now brought to this plain issue, that if it be reasonable to believe there is a God, and that his providence regards and considers the actions of men; it is also reasonable to endure present sufferings, in hope of a future reward: and there is certainly enough in this case, to govern and determine a prudent man, that is in any good measure persuaded of another life after this, and hath any tolerable consideration of, and regard to, his eternal interest.

Indeed, if we were sure that there were no life after this; if we had no expectation of a happiness or misery beyond this world; the wisest thing that any man could do, would be to enjoy as much of the present contentments and satisfactions of this world, as he could fairly come at. For “if there be no resurrection to another life, the apostle allows the reasoning of the epicure to be very good—“Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.” But, on the other hand, if it be true, that we are designed for immortality, and that another state remains for us after this life, wherein we shall be unspeakably happy, or intolerably and eternally miserable, according as we have behaved ourselves in this world; it is then evidently reasonable, that men should take the greatest care of the longest duration, and be content to bear and dispense with some present trouble and inconvenience, for a felicity that will have no end; and be willing to labour and take pains, and deny our present ease and comfort for a little while, that we may be happy for ever. This is reckoned prudence in the account of this world, for a man to part with a present possession and enjoyment, for a much greater advantage in reversion: but surely the disproportion between time and eternity is so vast, that did men but firmly believe, that they shall live for ever, nothing in this world could reasonably be thought too good to part withal, or too grievous to suffer, for the obtaining of a blessed immortality.

In the virtue of this belief and persuasion, the primitive Christians were fortified against all that the malice and cruelty of the world could do against them; and they thought they made a very wise bargain, if through many tribulations they might at last enter into the kingdom of God; because they believed that the joys of heaven would abundantly recompense all their sorrows and sufferings upon earth. And so confident were they of this, that they looked upon it as a special favour and regard of God to them, to call them to suffer for his name. So St. Paul speaks of it: ([Phil. i. 29.](#)) “Unto you it is given, on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” Yea, they accounted them happy,

445

446

who upon this account were miser able in this world. So St. James expressly pronounceth of them: ([James i. 12.](#)) “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation (meaning the temptation of persecution and suffering); for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” And this consideration was that, which kept up their spirits from sinking under the weight of their greatest sufferings. So St. Paul tells us, ([2 Cor. iv. 14. 16.](#)) “Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” The sufferings of their bodies did but help to raise and fortify their spirits: nay, so far were they from fainting under those afflictions, that they rejoiced and gloried in them. So the same apostle tells us, ([Rom. v. 2, 3.](#)) that in the midst of their sufferings they rejoiced in hope of the glory of God; and that they gloried in tribulations, as being the way to be made partakers of that glory: and ([Heb. x. 34.](#)) that they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods; “knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.” And, for this reason, St. James ([chap. i. 2.](#)) exhorts Christians to account it all joy, when they fall into divers temptations (that is, various kinds of sufferings); because of the manifold advantages which from thence would redound to them.

Now, what was it that inspired them to all this courage and cheerfulness, but the belief of a mighty reward, far beyond the proportion of all their sufferings, and a firm persuasion that they should be vast gainers by them at the last? This consideration St. Paul urgeth with great force: ([2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.](#)) “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: whilst we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” If we could compare things justly, and attentively regard and consider the invisible glories of another world, as well as the things which are seen, we should easily perceive, that he who suffers for God and religion does not renounce happiness; but puts it out to interest, upon terms of the greatest advantage.

I shall now briefly speak to the

Second part of this remarkable saying in the text. “If we deny him, he also will deny us:” to which is subjoined in the words following, “if we believe not; εἰ ἀπιστοῦμεν, if we deal unfaithfully with him; yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself; that is, he will be constant to his word, and make good that solemn threatening which he hath denounced against those, who for fear of suffering shall deny him and his truth before men: ([Matth. x. 33.](#)) “Whosoever (saith our Lord there) shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” ([Mark viii. 38.](#)) “Whosoever therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” This is a terrible threatening, to be disowned by Christ at the day of judgment, “in the presence of God and his holy angels;” and this threatening will certainly be made good; and though we

447

448

may renounce him, and break our faith with him, yet he remains faithful, who hath threatened, and cannot deny himself.

This is matter of great terror, and ought seriously to be thought upon by those who are tempted to deny Christ and his truth, either by the hope of worldly advantage, or the fear of temporal sufferings. What worldly advantage can we propose to ourselves by quitting our religion, which can be thought an equal price for the loss of our immortal souls, and the happiness of all eternity? Suppose the whole world were offered us in consideration; yet “what is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” as our Saviour reasons. ([Matth. xvi. 26.](#))

And, on the other hand, if the fear of temporal suffering be such a terror to men, as to shake their constancy in religion, and to tempt them to renounce it; the fear of eternal torments ought to be much more powerful, to keep them steadfast to their religion, and to deter them from the denial of it. If fear will move us; then, in all reason, that which is most terrible ought to prevail most with us, and the great est danger should be most dreaded by us, according to our Saviour’s most friendly and reasonable advice: ([Luke xii. 4, 5.](#)) “I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear. Fear him, who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.” If there can be no doubt which of them is most to be dreaded, there can be no doubt what we are to do, in case of such a temptation.

I shall now draw some inferences from this discourse by way of application.

First, If this be a faithful saying, that “if we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; but if we deny him, he will also deny us;” the belief of it ought to have a mighty influence upon us, to make us steady and unmoveable in the profession and practice of our holy religion. This inference the apostle makes from the doctrine of a blessed resurrection. ([1 Cor. xv. 58.](#)) “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” If any thing will fix men in the profession of their religion, and make them serious in the practice of it, the belief of a glorious resurrection, and of the reward which God will then give to his faithful servants, must needs have a very powerful influence upon them to this purpose. Upon the same ground the apostle to the Hebrews exhorts them to hold fast the profession of their “faith, without wavering; because he is faithful that hath promised.” If we be constant in the profession and practice of our holy religion, God will be faithful to the promise which he hath made of “eternal life to those who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality.”

If, under the dark and imperfect dispensation of the law, good men shewed so much courage and constancy for God and religion, as we read in that long catalogue of heroes, [Heb. xi.](#) how much more should Christians, whose faith is supported much more strongly

449

450

than theirs was, by a much clearer evidence of another life, and a blessed immortality, than they had; by more express promises of Divine comfort and assistance under sufferings, than were made to them; and by the most Divine and encouraging example of the greatest patience under the greatest sufferings that the world ever had, in the death and passion of the Son of God, “who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God?” When we consider this glorious example of suffering, and the glorious reward of it, how can we be weary and faint in our minds! If the saints and apostles of the Old Testament did such great things, by virtue of a faith, which relied chiefly upon the attributes and providence of God; what should not we do, who have the security of God’s express promise for our comfort and encouragement! we certainly have much greater reason to take up our cross more cheerfully, and to bear it more patiently, than they did.

Secondly, We should always be prepared in the resolutions of our minds, to suffer for the testimony of God’s truth and a good conscience, if it should please God at any time to call us to it. This our Saviour hath made a necessary condition of his religion, and a qualification of a true disciple. “If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross, and follow me.” So that we are to reckon upon it, and to prepare for it; that if it comes we may not be surprised, as if some strange thing had happened to us; and may not be unresolved what to do in such a case. And God knows when we may be called to it: however it is wise, to forecast it in our minds, and to be always in a preparation and readiness to entertain the worst that may happen, that if it come, we may “be able to stand out in an evil day;” and, if it does not come, God will accept the resolution of our minds, and reward it according to the sincerity of it: he that knows what we would have done, will consider it as if we had done it.

Thirdly, The less we are called to suffer for God, the more we should think ourselves obliged to do for him; the less God is pleased to exercise our patience, we should abound so much the more in the active virtues of a good life; and our obedience to God should be so much the more cheerful, and we more “fruitful in every good work.” If there be no need of sealing the truth with our blood, we should be sure to adorn and recommend it by our lives.

Fourthly and lastly, If the hopes of immortality will bear men up under the extremity of suffering and torments, and give men courage and resolution against all the terrors of the world, they ought much more to make us victorious over the temptations and allurements of it. For certainly it is in reason much easier to forego pleasure, than to endure pain; to refuse or lay down a good place for the testimony of a good conscience, than to lay down our lives upon that account. And in vain does any man pretend that he will be a martyr for his religion, when he will not rule an appetite, nor restrain a lust, nor subdue a passion, nor cross his



covetousness and ambition, for the sake of it, and in hope of that eternal life, “which God, that cannot lie, hath promised.” He that refuseth to do the less, is not like to do the greater. It is very improbable, that a man will die for his religion, when he cannot be persuaded to live according to it. So that by this we may try the sincerity of our resolution concerning martyrdom. For what profession soever men make, he that will not deny himself the pleasures of sin, and the advantages of this world, for Christ, when it comes to the push, will never have the heart to take up his cross, and follow him. He that cannot take up a resolution to live a saint, hath a demonstration within himself, that he is never like to die a martyr.



SERMON LXXVIII.

[Preached on All-Saints Day.]

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOOD MEN AFTER DEATH.

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.—Rev. xiv. 13.

I WILL not trouble you with any nice dispute about the author of this book of the Revelation, or the authority of it, though both these were sometimes controverted; because it is now many ages since this book was received into the canon of the Scriptures, as of Divine authority, and as written by St. John. Nor shall I at this time inquire into the particular meaning of the several visions and predictions contained in it. It is confessedly, in several parts of it, a very obscure book: and there needs no other argument to satisfy us that it is so, than that so many learned and inquisitive persons have given such different interpretations of several remarkable passages in it; as particularly concerning the slaying of the two witnesses, and the number of the beast.

The words which I have read to you, though there be some difficulty about the interpretation of some particular expressions in them; yet in the general sense and intendment of them they are very plain, being a solemn declaration of the blessed state of good men after this life.

And that we may take the more notice of them, they are brought in with a great deal of solemn preparation and address, as it were on purpose to be speak our attention to them: “I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth.” And, for the greater confirmation of them, the special testimony of the Spirit is added to the voice from heaven, declaring the reason why they that die in the Lord are pronounced to be in so happy a condition: “yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

In the handling of these words, I shall first inquire into the particular sense and meaning of them.

Secondly, Prosecute the general intendment of them, which I told you is to declare to us “the blessed state of those that die in the Lord,” that is, of saints and good men, after they are departed this life.

First, I shall inquire into the particular sense and meaning of the words. To the clearing of which, nothing will conduce more than to consider the occasion of them, which was briefly this. In the visions of this and the foregoing chapter, is represented to St. John, the great straits that the Christians, the true worshippers of the true God, should be reduced to. On the one hand, they are threatened with death; or if they be suffered to live, they are interdicted all commerce with human society. (Chap. xiii. 15.) “And he had power to cause,



that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed:” and, (ver. 17.) “That no man may buy or sell, save he that had the mark of the beast.” And, on the other hand, they that do worship the beast are threatened with damnation: (chap. xiv. 9, 10.) “If any man do worship the beast, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone.” So that when ever this should happen, it would be a time of great trial to the sincere Christians, being threatened with extreme persecution on the one hand, and eternal damnation on the other; and therefore it is added in the 12th verse—“here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” This is represented in St. John’s visions, as the last and extremest persecution of the true worshippers of God, and which should precede the final downfall of Babylon. And, when this should happen, then he tells us, the patience of the saints would be tried to purpose, and then it would be seen, who are faithful to God, and constant to his truth; and upon this immediately follows the voice from heaven in the text; “and I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”



The main difficulty of the words depends upon the word ἀπάρτι, “from henceforth;” which interpreters do variously refer to several parts of the text. Some by changing the accent, and reading it, ἀπάρτι, would change the signification of the word into *omnino*; *omnino beati sunt*, “they are altogether blessed, very happy, who die in the Lord.” But this is altogether destitute of the countenance and warrant of any ancient copy. We will then suppose that the word is ἀπάρτι, and to be rendered as we translate it, “from henceforth, from this time.” All the difficulty is, to what part of the text we are to refer it. Some refer it to the word “blessed;” “blessed from henceforth are the dead which die in the Lord:” as if from this time, and not before, the souls of good men were, immediately after death, admitted into heaven, which many of the ancient fathers thought the souls of good men, who died before the coming of Christ, were not. But then this blessedness ought to have been dated, not from the time of St. John’s vision, but of Christ’s ascension; according to that of St. Ambrose, in the hymn called Te Deum; “when thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.”



Others refer it to dying in the Lord. “Blessed are the dead, that from henceforth die in the Lord.” But this hath no peculiar emphasis in it; because they were blessed that died in the Lord, before that time.

Others refer it to the words following, concerning the testimony of the Spirit: “yea, from henceforth saith the Spirit.” All these varieties agree in this sense in general—that some special blessedness is promised and declared to those who should die after that time; but what that is in particular, is not easy to make out.

But the most plain and simple interpretation, and that which seems to be most suitable to the occasion of these words, is this—that the word ἀπάρτι, “from henceforth,” is to be referred to the whole sentence, thus—“from henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord;” as if St. John had said, considering the extremity and cruel circumstances of this last and severe persecution, we may, from that time forward reckon those who are already dead (supposing that they died in the Lord) to be very happy; in that they did not live to see and suffer those things, which will then befall the faithful servants of God, when “the devil shall come, having great wrath, because he knoweth he hath but a short time.” Much in the same sense as Solomon, when he considered the oppressions that were “done under the sun,” says, (Eccl. iv. 2.) that he “praised the dead, which were already dead; more than the living, which were yet alive;” that is, considering the oppressions, which were so frequent in the world, he reckoned those happier that were out of it, than those who still lived in it.

457

And as this is very agreeable to the scope of what goes before, so it suits very well with what follows after, as the reason why those persons are declared to be so happy; “yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them;” that they may be at an end of their troubles and sufferings, and may not be tried beyond their strength and patience, under that terrible persecution which will reign at that time; and likewise, that they may receive the reward of all the good they have done, and the evils they have suffered in this world; in the very same sense that the righteous are said to be “taken away from the evil to come.” (Isai. lvii. 1, 2.) “The righteous is taken away from the evil to come, he shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness;” that is, enjoying the comfort of his integrity and sincerity towards God.

And now the main difficulty being over, we shall need to trouble ourselves the less about the other expressions in the text: yet there are two which I shall a little explain to you.

1. What is here meant by dying in the Lord. And this sort of phrase—in the Lord, in Christ, and in the name of Christ, is used in Scripture very variously. In general, it signifies, the doing or suffering any thing, with relation to Christ, and upon his account; and so to “die in the Lord,” doth most frequently signify to die in the faith of Christ, and in the profession of the Christian religion. Some times it signifies, to die for his cause, and to bear testimony to his truth, which is therefore called martyrdom, as St. Paul is said to be δέσμιος, ἐν κυρίῳ, (Eph. iv. 1.) “a prisoner in the Lord;” that is, for his cause. So, likewise, St. Peter: “if you be reproached (ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ) in the name of Christ, happy are ye:” and it is probable that the expression, (1 Cor. xv. 18.) “Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ,” is to be understood, of those that died for his cause; because it follows immediately, “if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable;” that is, considering how much Christians suffered for him in this life, they were in a most miserable condition, if there were nothing to be expected beyond it; but especially if we consider the parallel phrase, (1 Thess. iv. 14.) “So them also that sleep in Jesus, (διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ,) for Jesus

458

sake;” that is, them that have suffered martyrdom for him, will God bring with him. And in this sense many understand the phrase in the text, as spoken of martyrs: “blessed are the dead which die in the Lord;” that is, for his cause. And though I think the phrase may well enough be understood more generally, yet I shall not reject this sense; because it is not unsuitable to the scope and occasion of the words. For, considering that last and extreme persecution which he had described, it was not altogether improper to pronounce those happy that had suffered martyrdom already, and were taken away from those dreadful calamities, which in these last days of antichrist were to fall upon the faithful servants of Christ.

2. The other expression is the last in the text; “and their works do follow them.” So we render the word ἀκολουθεῖ, which yet does most properly signify to accompany, or go along with one; and so indeed the expression will rather be more emphatical: “they rest from their labours, and their works accompany them.” But whether the word be rendered to follow, or to accompany, the difference is not very material.

Thus you see what the particular sense and meaning of the words properly is—to declare the happy estate of those saints and martyrs, who were already dead, in and for the faith of Christ; and should not live to see those cruel and fearful sufferings, which should afterwards come upon the Christians. But then this is grounded upon that general truth, that they are happy that die in the Lord. And this is that which I intend now to prosecute, abstracting from the particular occasion, upon which these words were spoken; which brings me to the

Second thing I propounded, and chiefly designed to handle upon the occasion of this day; namely, The happy estate of good men after they have departed out of this life. And, in speaking to this, I shall confine myself to two particulars, which the text mentions, as the reasons and grounds why they “that die in the Lord,” are declared to be in so blessed a condition; “yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

1. Good men, when they are departed this life, are freed from all the labours and pains they were exercised with in this world; “that they may rest from their labours.”

2. They reap the comfort and reward of all the good which they have done in this world: “and their works do follow them,” or rather, go along with them, to receive the reward which God hath promised to them, “who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality.”

1. Those who “die in the Lord” are freed from the evils and miseries of this life. And this is so great a felicity, that some (and those who think themselves no small philosophers) have placed the chief happiness of man in freedom from pain and trouble. But, though happiness do not consist in this alone, yet it cannot be denied to be a great part of it: for though some have been so fantastically obstinate, as, against the reason and common sense of mankind, to maintain this paradox—that a wise man may be as happy on the rack, or in Phalaris’s bull, as in the greatest ease and freedom from pain that can be imagined; yet nature

459

460

cries shame of this hypocrisy: and there are none of those wise men they speak of, were ever such fools as to try the experiment, and to shew by their actions that it was indifferent to them, whether they laid themselves down upon their beds every night, or were stretched upon a rack; which yet ought to have been indifferent to them, had they believed themselves, and really esteemed that, which others account pain, to be as happy a condition as that which is commonly called ease.

But we need not trouble ourselves to confute so stupid a principle, which is confuted by nature, and by every man's sense and experience. I think we may take it for granted, that freedom from misery is a very considerable part of happiness; otherwise heaven and hell, if we consider only the torment of it, would be all one. But certainly it is no small endearment of religion, to the common sense of mankind, that it promiseth to us, in the next life, a freedom from all the evils and troubles of this. And by this the happiness of heaven is frequently described to us in Scripture. (*Isai. lvii. 2.*) Speaking of the righteous man, "he shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds." (*2 Thess. i. 7.*) Where the apostle, speaking of the reward of those who should suffer persecution for religion, "it is a righteous thing with God (says he) to recompense to you, who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." And the apostle to the Hebrews frequently describes the happiness of Christians by—entering into rest. And, (*Rev. xxi. 4.*) the state of the new Jerusalem is set forth to us, by deliverance from those troubles and sorrows which men are subject to in this world; "and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."

Thus it is with us in this world, we are liable to sorrow and pain and death: but when we are once got to heaven, none of these things shall approach us. "The former things are passed away;" that is, the evils, we formerly endured, are past and over, and shall never return to afflict us any more.

And is not this great comfort, when we are labouring under the evils of this life, and conflicting sorely with the miseries of it, that we shall one day be past all these, and find a safe refuge and retreat from all these storms and tempests; when we are loaded with afflictions, and even tired with the burden of them, and ready to faint and sink under it; to think that there remains a rest for us into which we shall shortly enter? How can it choose but be a mighty consolation to us, whilst we are in this vale of tears and troubles, to be assured, that the time is coming, when "God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying."

There are none of us but are obnoxious to any of the evils of this life; we feel some of them, and we fear more: our outward condition, it may be, is uncomfortable—we are poor and persecuted: we are destitute of friends, or have many enemies; we are despoiled of many of those comforts and enjoyments which we once had: our bodies perhaps are in pain, or

461

462

our spirits troubled; or though we have no real cause of outward trouble, yet our souls are ill-lodged, in the dark dungeon of a body; overpowered with a melancholy humour, which keeps out all light and comfort from our minds.

And is it not reviving to us to think of that happy hour, when we shall find a remedy and redress of all these evils at once; of that blessed place, where we shall take sanctuary from all those afflictions and troubles which pursued us in this world; where sorrow, and misery, and death are perfect strangers, and into which nothing that can render men in the least unhappy can ever enter? where our souls shall be in perfect rest and contentment, and our bodies after a while shall be restored and reunited to our souls; not to cloud and clog them, as they do here, but so happily changed, and refined to such a perfection, that they shall be so far from giving any disturbance to our minds, that they shall mightily add to their pleasure and happiness?

And when we are once landed in those blessed regions, what a comfort will it be to us, to stand on the shore, and look back upon those rough and dangerous seas which we have escaped? How pleasant to consider the manifold evils and calamities which we are freed from, and for ever secured against? To remember our past labours and suffering, and to be able to defy all those temptations, which were wont to assault us in this world with so much violence, and with too much success?

And this is the condition of the blessed spirits above. They find a perfect cessation of all afflictions and troubles, “they rest from their labours.” But this is not all; for,

2. They are not only freed from all the evils and sufferings they were exercised withal in this world, but they shall receive a plentiful reward of all the good they have done in it; “their works do accompany them.” When pious souls go out of this world, they do not only leave all the evils of the world behind them; but they carry along with them all the good they have done, to reap there the comfort and reward of it. Just as, on the other hand, wicked men, when they die, leave all the good things of this world, all the pleasures and enjoyments behind them; but the guilt and remorse of their wicked lives accompany them, and stick close to them, to torment them there, and that there they may be tormented for them.

Thus the Scriptures represent to us the different condition of good and bad men: ([Isai. iii. 10, 11.](#)) “Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.” Which is many times true in this world; but, however that happen, will most certainly and remarkably be made good in the other. And this is most emphatically expressed to us, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, ([Luke xvi. 25.](#)) where the rich man petitions Abraham for some ease, and Abraham returns him this answer: “Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.” What a change was here! how comfortable to the one, and how dismal to the other! Lazarus found rest from all his labours and suffer-



ings, and his piety and patience accompanied him into the other world, and conveyed him into Abraham's bosom. Whereas the rich man was parted from all his good things, and the guilt of his sins went along with him, and lodged him in the place of torment.

But my text confines me to the bright side of this prospect—the consideration of that glorious recompense which good men shall receive, for the good works which they have done in this world. Indeed, the text doth not expressly say, that their works shall be rewarded, but that they shall go along with them, and that they are blessed upon this account; and this implies that they shall receive a sure reward. For, as the apostle reasons, “God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love. Verily there is a reward for the righteous/ as sure as there is a God that judgeth in the earth.

But how great and glorious that shall be, I am not in any measure able to declare to you. It may suffice, that the Scripture hath assured us in general, that God is the rewarder of good men, and that he will make them happy, not according to what can now enter into our narrow thoughts, but according to the exceeding greatness of his power and goodness. If we are to receive our reward from God, we need not doubt, but it will be very large, and such as is every way worthy of him to bestow. For he is a great King, and of great goodness; and we may safely refer ourselves to him, in confidence that he will consider us, not according to the meanness of our service, but according to the vastness of his treasures, and the infinite bounty of his mind. If he hath promised to make us happy, though he hath not particularly declared to us wherein this happiness shall consist; yet we may trust him that made us to find out ways to make us happy; and may believe, that he who made us without our knowledge or desire, is able to make them happy beyond them both.

Only, for the greater encouragement of our holiness and obedience, though he hath promised to reward every good man far beyond the proportion of any good he hath or can do; yet he hath declared, that these rewards shall be proportionably greater or less, according to the degree of every man's piety and virtue. So our Saviour tells us, that they who are persecuted for righteousness sake, great shall be their reward in heaven. ([Matth. v. 12.](#)) That there will be a difference between the reward of a righteous man and a prophet; that is, of one who is more publicly and eminently useful for the salvation of others. And among those who are teachers of others, they that are most industrious, and consequently more likely to be successful in this work, shall have a more glorious reward; as we are told by the angel: ([Dan. xii. 3.](#)) “And they that are wise, (or as it is in the margin rendered, they that be teachers) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.” So likewise we find in the parable of the talents, that he that improved his talent to ten was made ruler over ten cities. And St. Paul, ([2 Cor. ix. 6.](#)) speaking of the degrees of men's charity and liberality towards the poor, says expressly, “he that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly; but he that soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully;” which by proportion of reason may be extended to the exercise of all other

465

466

graces and virtues. (1 Cor. xv. 41, 42.) The apostle there represents the different degrees of glory, which good men shall be invested with at the resurrection, by the different glory and splendour of the heavenly luminaries. “There is one glory of the sun, another of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory: so also is the resurrection of the dead.” So that the more any man suffers for God, and the more patiently he suffers, the more holy and virtuously, the more charitably and usefully, he lives in this world; the more good works will accompany him into the next, and the greater and more glorious reward he may hope to receive there; which, as the apostle reasons (in the conclusion of that chapter concerning the doctrine of the resurrection) ought to be a mighty encouragement to every one of us, not only to be steadfast and unmoveable (that is, fixed and resolute in the profession and practice of our religion), but abounding likewise “in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as we know, that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

Every degree of diligence and industry, in the work and service of God, will most certainly one day turn to a happy account. “Having therefore such promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” The more perfectly holy we are here on earth, the more perfectly happy we shall be in heaven, and continue so to all eternity.

I have now done with the two reasons, which are here given in the text, of the happiness that good men, such as die in the Lord, shall be made partakers of in another life; because they rest from their labours, and their works accompany them: they are freed from all the evils which they suffered, and shall receive the reward of all the good they have done in this life.

I should now have proceeded to make some inferences from this discourse; but those I will reserve for another discourse on this subject.

All that I shall add at present, as the application of what I have already said, is—that this should stir us up to a careful and zealous imitation of those blessed persons described in the text, who are dead in the Lord, and are at rest from their labours, and whose works do accompany them. Let us imitate them, in their faith and patience, in their piety and good works, and in their constancy to God and his truth, which was dearer to them than their lives.

Thus their virtues and sufferings are described in the visions of this book: (chap. xiii. 10.) “Here is the patience and the faith of the saints;” and (chap. xiv. 12.) “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus;” and chap. xii. 11. “And they overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”

In this way, and by these steps, all the saints and martyrs of all ages have ascended up to heaven, and attained to that blessed state which they are now possessed of, after all the evils which they suffered in this world. They are now at “rest from their labours,” and all

467

468

the good works which they have done are gone along with them; and they are now, and shall for ever be, receiving the comfort and reward of them. And if we tread in their steps, by a zealous imitation of the piety and holiness of their lives, and of the constancy and patience of their sufferings; we shall one day be translated into their blessed society, and made partakers with them of the same glorious reward. If we have our fruit unto holiness, our end shall be everlasting life. If we be faithful unto death, we shall receive a crown of life.

Let us, then, as the apostle to the Hebrews exhorts, ([chap. vi. 11, 12.](#)) “Every one of us shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope, unto the end: and let us not be slothful; but followers of them, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises.”

” Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good word and work, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight.”



SERMON LXXIX.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOOD MEN AFTER DEATH.

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.—Rev. xiv. 13.

IN my explication of these words, I told you that they are, in the general sense and meaning of them, a solemn declaration of the blessed estate of good men after this life; but delivered upon a special occasion, as is signified by that expression, “from henceforth;” that is, from the time of that vision, in which was represented to St. John the last and extremest persecution of the faithful servants of Christ, and which should precede the fatal downfall of Babylon; from that time, “blessed are the dead which die in the Lord;” that is, considering the extremity, and the cruel circumstances of this last and severest persecution, we may, from that time forward, reckon those who are already dead (supposing that they died in the Lord) to be very happy; in that they do not live to see and suffer those grievous things, which then will befall the faithful servants of God.

In my former discourse, I considered the words according to the general intention of them, abstracting from the particular occasion upon which they were spoken endeavouring to set forth the happy estate of good men after this life, from the two reasons and grounds mentioned in the text, namely, they “rest from their labours,” and because “their works do follow,” or accompany and go along with them; which two particulars constitute the happiness of the future state.

That which farther remains, and to which I now proceed, is to make some inferences from what I have said upon this subject. And, in doing this, I shall have an eye on the special occasion of the words, as well as on their general intention. And the inference shall be these following:

First, If those that “die in the Lord” are at “rest from their labours” and pains; then the text concludes directly against the feigned purgatory of the church of Rome, which supposeth a great number of those that “die in the Lord,” and have obtained eternal redemption by him from hell, not to pass immediately into happiness: but to be detained in the suburbs of hell, in great pain and torment, till their souls be purged, and the debt of temporary punishment, to which they are liable, be some way or other paid off and discharged.

Secondly, Here is a mighty encouragement to piety and virtue to consider, that all the good we do in this world will accompany us into the other.

Thirdly, It is a gnat encouragement to patience under the sufferings and persecutions which attend good men in this world; that how heavy and grievous soever they are at present, they will end with this life, and we shall then rest from all our labours.



Fourthly, The consideration of the extreme sufferings of Christians in the last times, and which, perhaps, are not far from us, should render us very indifferent to life, and all the enjoyments of it, so as even to esteem it a particular grace and favour of God, to be “taken away from the evil to come,” and by death to prevent (if he sees it good) those extremities of sufferings, which seem to be hastening upon the world.

I. If those that “die in the Lord” are at rest from all their labours and pains, then this text concludes directly against the feigned purgatory of the church of Rome, which supposed a great number, yea, the far greater part of those that “die in the Lord, “and have obtained eternal redemption by him from hell, not to pass immediately into happiness, but to be detained somewhere (they are not certain where. but most probably in the suburbs of hell) in great pain and torment, equal in degree to that of hell, and differing only in duration; I say, to be detained there till their souls be purged from the defilements they have contracted in this world, and the debt of temporary punishments, to which they are liable, be some way or other paid off and discharged.

They suppose, indeed, some very few holy men to be so perfect at their departure out of this life, that they do immediately, and without any stop, pass into heaven, because they need no purgation; and those likewise, who suffer martyrdom, because they discharge their debt of temporary punishments here; but the generality of Christians, “who die in the Lord,” they suppose so imperfect, as to stand in need of being purged by fire, and accordingly, that they are detained a longer or shorter time, as their debt of temporary punishments is greater or less.

And, indeed, they have a very considerable and substantial reason to exempt as few as possibly they can from going to purgatory; because the more they put in fear of going thither, the market of indulgences riseth the higher, and the profit thence accruing to the pope’s coffers; and the more and greater legacies will be left to the priests, to hire their saying of masses for the delivery of souls out of the place of torments: for, though the prayers of friends and relations will contribute something to this, yet nothing does the business so effectually as the masses and prayers of priests to that end.

But how is it, then, that St. John says, that those that “die in the Lord” are happy, because “they rest from their labours;” if so be the far greater part of those, who “die in the Lord,” are so far from resting from their labours, that they enter into far greater pains and torments than ever they endured in this world? And therefore Bellarmine, that their doctrine of purgatory may receive no prejudice from this text, would have “from henceforth,” in the text, to be dated from the day of judgment, when he supposeth the pains of purgatory will be at an end. But why “from henceforth” should take date from the day of judgment, he can give no reason, but only to save purgatory from being condemned by this text. For St. John plainly speaks of the happiness of those that should die after that time (whatever it be) which he there describes; but that time cannot be the day of judgment, because none shall die after



that time. Just thus Estius (one of their most learned commentators) deals with another text, which, by the generality of their writers, is urged as a plain proof of purgatory: “He shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” Upon which he says, “It is sufficient that there is nothing in this text against purgatory.” Sufficient! for what? Not to prove purgatory, as they generally pretend from this text, but to save it harmless from it; as if we had pretended that this text makes against it.

But there are others that make against it with a witness. Not only the perpetual silence of Scripture about it, when there are so many fair occasions of speaking of it; as in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where the future state is so particularly described, and yet no mention made, nor the least intimation given, of this third state. But, besides the silence of Scripture about it, there are several passages utterly inconsistent with it; as, namely, St. Paul’s discourse in the beginning of the fifth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, where he plainly declares the assurance he had, that all sincere Christians, so soon as they quit the body, do pass into happiness: “For we know (says he) that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

The plain meaning of which is, that so soon as we quit the one, we shall pass into the other. And this consideration, he tells us, made Christians weary of this world, and willing to die. (Ver. 2.) “For in this we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven;” and, (ver. 4.) “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.” But had Christians believed that the greatest part of them, when they left the body, were to go into purgatory, to be terribly tormented there, they would not have been in such haste to die, but would have protracted the time as long as they could, and have contentedly borne the burden of this earthly tabernacle, rather than to quit it for a condition a thousand times more intolerable. But St Paul expressly says, that Christians knew the contrary; and that as soon as ever they went out of the body they should be happy, and with the Lord; and that this gave them courage against the fears of death: (ver. 6.) “Therefore we are always Confident,” *θαῤῥοῦντες οὐν πάντοε, bono igitur animo sumus*; “Therefore we are always of good courage, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.” And, (ver. 8.) “We are of good courage, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord.” The plain sense of which is, that Christians were willing rather to die than to live; because they knew, that so soon as they left the body, and departed this life, they should be “present with the Lord.” But now if the doctrine of purgatory be true this whole reasoning of St. Paul proceeds upon a gross mistake; and therefore I am certain it is not true: and so does the “voice from heaven” here in the text: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, that they may rest from their labours;” for there is no reason to restrain this general expression, that “die in the Lord,” only to the martyrs; for though they

473

474

are certainly included, and, perhaps primarily intended in it, yet this phrase comprehends all those who die in the faith of Christ, and is most frequently so used in the New Testament.

But let this suffice to have been spoken of this matter; especially, since Bishop Fisher, and several of their own learned writers, do so frankly acknowledge, that their doctrine of purgatory hath no sufficient ground in Scripture. Other reasons I grant they have for it, which makes them very loth to quit it: it is a very profitable doctrine, and therefore they have taken care to have it more abundantly confirmed, by apparitions of souls from the dead, than any other doctrine whatsoever. In short, how little soever they can say for it, it is in vain to go about to persuade them to part with it. Demetrius, the silversmith, argued as well as he could for his goddess Diana, from the universal consent of the world in the worship of her; “the great goddess Diana, whom all Asia, and the world worshippeth.” But his trusty argument to his workmen was, “Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth, and this our craft is in danger to be set at nought.”

II. Here is a mighty encouragement to piety and virtue, to consider that all the good we do in this world will accompany us into the other. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; for their works accompany them.”

When we come to die, we can call nothing our own but the good works which, by the grace of God, we have been enabled to do in this life. These will stick by us, and bear us company into the other world, when we shall be stripped of all other things, and forced to part from them, whether we will or no. Our riches and our honours, our sensual pleasures and delights, will all take their leave of us when we leave this world; nay, many times they do not accompany us so far as the grave, but leave us very unkindly and unseasonably, when we have the greatest need and use of them.

There is one way, indeed, whereby we may secure our riches, and make sure friends to ourselves of them, by laying them out in charity. By this means we may send them before us, and consign them over to another world, to make way for our reception there. So our Lord assures us, ([Luke xii. 33.](#)) that by giving alms we provide ourselves “bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens which faileth not;” and ([Luke xvi. 9.](#)) that by this way we may “make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when we fail, they may receive us into everlasting habitations.” “The mammon of unrighteousness,” What is that? It is what the Scripture elsewhere calls deceitful riches; because in other ways, in which men commonly lay them out, they turn to no certain account, but one way or other do deceive and frustrate our expectation: but by disposing of them in charity, to the relief of the poor and persecuted, we make sure friends of them, and consign the effects of them to our certain benefit and advantage in another world.

And as charity, so likewise all other graces and virtues are “that good part” which cannot be taken away from us. All the good actions that we do in this life will go with us to the grave, and bear us company into the other world, and will stand by us, when we come to



appear before our Judge; and, through the merits of our blessed Saviour, will procure for us, at the hands of a gracious and merciful God, a most ample and eternal reward.

And what an encouragement is this to holiness and virtue, to consider that, it will be all our own another day, and turn to our unspeakable advantage at our great account! To be assured, that whoever serves God faithfully, lays up so much treasure for himself, which he may take along with him into the other world; and does provide for himself lasting comforts and faithful companions, which will never leave him nor forsake him; a happiness large as his desires, and durable and immortal as his soul!

Let us then do all the good that possibly we can, whilst we have opportunity: let us serve God industriously, and with all our might, knowing that no good action that we do shall be lost and fall to the ground, that no grace and virtue that we practise in this life, nor any degree of them, shall lose their reward. If we faithfully improve the talents, which are committed to us, to our Master's advantage; when he comes to call us to an account, and finds that we have done so, we shall not fail to receive both his approbation and reward. And what a comfort will it be to any one of us, to hear those blessed words from the mouth of our Lord—"Well done thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful in a little, I will make thee ruler over much; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" We shall not need to plead our services to him, and put him in mind of them: our Judge himself will celebrate our good deeds upon the theatre of the world, and commemorate them to our advantage; and interpret every good office we have done, to any of his poor and afflicted members, as if it had been a kindness immediately done to himself. So our Lord represents the proceedings of the great Judge and King of the world, in the great day of recompence. (*Matth. xxv. 34.*) "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee in any of these circumstances; hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and ministered unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Who would not be ambitious and glad to serve such a Prince, who will so benignly interpret, and so bountifully reward, the least service we do to him?

III. The consideration of this should likewise be a great argument and support to our patience, under all those evils, and sufferings, and persecutions, which many times attend good men in this world. They are for the present perhaps very heavy and grievous; but there is a time shortly coming when we shall be at ease, and perfectly freed from them; when we shall find rest from our labours and sufferings; when we shall enter into peace and rest in our beds, every one walking in his uprightness; that is, reaping the comfort and enjoying

477

478

the reward of his sincerity towards God, and constant suffering for his cause and truth. And therefore it was well said of a good man, “blessed be God that we are to die;” because to good men, that is a certain remedy of all the evils of this life, and will unquestionably put an end to them. The grave is a place of rest, and discharge from all trouble, as Job elegantly describes it: ([chap. iii. 17, 18, 19.](#)) “There the wicked cease from troubling; there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together, they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master.”

So soon as we enter into the other world, we are secure against the pursuit and danger of all those evils which afflicted us in this world; and nothing will remain but the joyful remembrance of our sufferings, and the plentiful reward of our constancy and patience under them. And the more our tribulations and persecutions have abounded, the greater will our comfort and happiness then be, which (saith St. Paul) is a manifest token, a clear demonstration, “of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be accounted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer; seeing it is a righteous thing with God, to recompense to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.” ([2 Thess. i. 5, 6, 7.](#))

IV. The consideration of the extreme sufferings which are to fall upon the faithful servants of Christ in the last times, and which seem now to be begun in the world, should make us very contented to leave this world, and glad of any fair opportunity and excuse to take our leave of it, and to be out of the reach and danger of those violent and more than human temptations, with which our faith and constancy may be assailed; nay, to esteem it a particular grace and favour of God to us, to be “taken away from the evil to come,” and to prevent (if God sees it good) those extremities of sufferings which are coming upon the world.

These seem now to be begun in some part of it: they in our neighbour nation have a bitter cup put into their hands; a cup of astonishment to all those that hear of it. Whether this be that last and extreme persecution spoken of here by St. John, I shall not pretend positively to determine. It is plainly distinguished in the visions, from that under the first beast, described [Rev. xiii. from verse the first to ver. 11, and chap. xvii.](#) There is a description of the beast upon which the woman sitteth, “on whose forehead is a name written, MYSTERY! BABYLON THE GREAT!” and this beast is there said to have “seven heads and ten horns,” which are thus explained by St. John: ([chap. xvii. 9, 10.](#)) “And here is the mind which hath wisdom; the seven heads are seven mountains upon which the woman sitteth; and there are seven kings;” that is, (as is generally agreed by interpreters) a succession of seven governments: (and [ver. 12, 13, 14.](#)) “And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings which have received no kingdoms as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast; and shall make war with the Lamb.” ([Ver. 18.](#)) “And the woman, which thou sawest, is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.”

479

480

So that this beast is plainly the Roman empire; and the woman that sitteth upon her, is the great city, standing upon seven mountains, “which reign eth over the kings of the earth;” which can be no other than Rome, as is agreed by interpreters on all sides. Bellarmine (*l. 2. c. 2. de Rom. Pontif.*) confesseth, that St. John, in the Revelation, every where calleth Rome, Babylon, as Tertullian (saith he) hath noted; and as is plain from [chap. xvii.](#) where Babylon is said to be seated on “seven mountains,” and to have dominion “over the kings of the earth:” there being no other city than Rome, which, in the time of St. John, had dominion “over the kings of the earth;” and that Rome was built upon seven hills is famous.—Thus much Bellarmine acknowledgeth, constrained by the force of truth; and, for another small reason, namely, because St. Peter writes his First Epistle from Babylon, by which, if Rome be not meant, they have no proof from Scripture that St. Peter was ever there.

Indeed they, of the church of Rome, would have it to be only Rome pagan. But that cannot be; because this beast, after his last head was wounded to death, and his deadly wound was healed, had power given him to continue two and forty months, or (as it is elsewhere expressed) twelve hundred and sixty days; that is, in the prophetic style, so many years; and, likewise, because it was not to begin till the ten kingdoms, into which the Roman empire upon its dissolution was divided, were set up; which was not till after the western empire was overthrown and destroyed by the Goths and Vandals. And, lastly, because this is that Rome, or Babylon, which should finally be destroyed, and cast as a millstone into the bottom of the sea, never to rise again; which is yet to come. And of this beast it is said, that he should “make war with the saints, and overcome them;” ([chap. xiii. 7.](#)) that is, that he should raise a long and great persecution against them, which should try their faith and patience: ([ver. 10.](#)) “Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.” The beast, then, with ten horns must be Rome, governing the ten kingdoms, into which the Roman empire was broken; and this can be nothing else but Rome papal, to which the ten kings are said to give their power, and to which they were in a most servile manner subject for several ages, as is plain from history.

And, to confirm this, it is very observable, that the ancient fathers generally agree that that which hindered the revealing of the wicked one (spoken of by St. Paul, [2 Thess. ii. 7, 8.](#)) was the Roman empire; and that being removed, the man of sin, or antichrist, was to succeed in its room. I shall produce a few testimonies to this purpose, but very remarkable ones. Tertullian, expounding what St. Paul means by him that withholdeth or letteth, hath these words: *Quis nisi Romanus status, &c.* Who is that but the Roman state, which being broken into ten kings, shall bring on antichrist? And then the “wicked one shall be revealed.” And in his Apology, he gives this reason, why the Christians should pray for the Roman emperors, and the whole state of the empire; because the greatest mischief hanging over the world is hindered by the continuance of it. St. Chrysostome speaking of that which hinders the revelation of the man of sin: This (says he) can be no other than the Roman empire: for as long as that stands, he dares not shew himself; but, upon the vacancy or ceasing of that,

481

482

he shall assume to himself both the power of God and man. St. Augustine, in his book *de civit. Dei*, No man (says he) doubts, but that the successor of the Roman emperor in Rome shall be the man of sin; and we know who hath succeeded him.

But now, after this, another beast is represented “coming out of the earth;” not succeeding in the place of the first beast, but appearing during his continuance, ([ver. 12.](#)) and he hath these remarkable characters, by which he may be known.

1. He is said to have but two horns; by which, according to the interpretation of the ten horns, signifying the ten kingdoms, into which the Roman empire after its dissolution should be divided, we are in all reason to understand two of these kingdoms, of which this beast, whoever he be, shall be possessed.

2. He is said to be like a lamb, but to speak like a dragon; that is, to pretend and make a shew of great lenity and mildness in his proceedings, but that really he shall be very cruel. It shall be pretended that he does all without violence, and with out arms; but he shall speak as a dragon, that is, in truth shall exercise great force and cruelty; either alluding to the cruelty of the dragon, literally so called, or perhaps prophetically pointing at a particular sort of armed soldiers, called by that name of dragons, or, as we according to the French pronunciation call them, dragoons.

3. He shall rise during the continuance of the first beast, and engage in his cause; but the first beast shall only stand by and look on: ([ver. 12.](#)) “and he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth, and them that dwell therein, to worship the beast, whose deadly wound was healed;” plainly declaring, that this persecution should not immediately arise from the first beast, which is said to come out of the sea, which in this prophecy denotes the state ecclesiastical; but from the second beast, which comes out of the earth, and denotes the temporal power. But yet all this ought to be acted in the sight of the first beast, and in his behalf to compel men to worship him.

4. That he shall be remark able for causing fire to come down from heaven to earth, in a wonderful manner, to the great terror and amazement of men: ([ver. 13.](#)) “And he doth great wonders; so that he maketh fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.”

5. That he should interdict all those, who would not worship the beast, all commerce with human society, the exercise of civil trades and professions: ([ver. 17.](#)) “And he causeth, that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark of the beast.”

6. And, lastly, (which seems to be the most peculiar and characteristical note of all the rest) that his number should be 666; that is, (as most of the ancients understand it) that the numeral letters of a certain word or name should, being computed, amount to that number. And it is expressly said to be the number of a man. ([Ver. 18.](#)) “Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man.” And, in the verse before, it is said to be the number of his name.



Now to whom all these characters do agree, and especially the last, concerning the number of his name, I shall not presume to conjecture; much less positively to determine, whether he be now in being; because it is said to require a particular wisdom and understanding to find it out. "Here is wisdom; let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast." However, the event, when the thing is fully accomplished, will clearly discover it. Thus much is certain, that this extreme persecution, whenever it shall be, will forerun the final destruction of Babylon, which will not then be far off. And concerning this it is that St. John speaks, ([chap. xiv. 12.](#)) when he says, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." And then he immediately adds, as it is in the text, "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do accompany them." Thus much may suffice to have been spoken on this text.



SERMON LXXX.

[Preached on All-Saints Day.]

THE VANITY AND WICKEDNESS OF HONOURING DEAD SAINTS, AND PERSECUTING THE LIVING.

Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation from the Hood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.—[Luke xi. 49, 50, 51.](#)

THE latter part of this chapter is a very sharp, but just invective, made by our Saviour against the hypocrisy of the scribes and pharisees, of which he gives many instances; and this among the rest for one, that they pretended a great honour and respect for the righteous men and prophets of former ages, whom their fathers had persecuted and slain; but yet were of the very same spirit and temper, and as ready to persecute good men as their fathers were. They raised, indeed, stately monuments to the memory of those saints and martyrs, and adorned them with great art and cost, and, it is likely, made a great shew of esteem and veneration for them: but all this while they were of the same disposition with their fathers, and bear the same implacable hatred and malice against the prophets and righteous men who then lived among them, (yea, against that great prophet, whom God had sent into the world—Jesus, the Son of God) which their fathers did against the good men of their times. And though they disclaimed the wickedness and cruelty of their fathers, with never so much zeal and vehemency, yet for all that they were ready to do the same things. Now this was so gross and odious a piece of hypocrisy in them, that our Saviour doth with great reason denounce so severe a woe against them: “Woe unto you; for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly, ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.” And then it follows: 4 therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple.”

There are considerable difficulties in both these passages. As to the former, “Woe unto you, for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly, ye bear witness, that ye allow the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.” The force of this reasoning is at first sight not easy to be discerned; and therefore expositors have gone several ways to explain it.

Some comparing this with the parallel place in St. Matthew's Gospel, (*chap. xxiii. 29.*) will not have our Saviour to mean, that by "building the sepulchres of the prophets," they expressed their approbation of their fathers killing them. They did indeed testify, by their usage of the righteous men that lived amongst themselves, that they were of the very same temper and spirit which their fathers had been of; and that they would have done just as their fathers did, if they had been in the same circumstances with their fathers; so that they were witnesses to themselves (as it is in St. Matthew) that they were children of them which killed the prophets; they owned themselves their children by descent, and their actions witnessed that they were their children also in resemblance; nay, (as it is there farther intimated) they seemed resolved to fill up the measure of their fathers, though all this while they pretended not to approve their father's behaviour; and, therefore, whilst they were building the tombs of the prophets, and garnishing the tombs of the righteous, they said, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. And the interpreters that go this way do accordingly render these words of St. Luke, not as they are in our translation, "ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers;" but "ye bear witness, and ye allow (or are well-pleased with) the deeds of your fathers;" that is, ye own that they were your fathers, who did these things; and though you do not in words allow what they did, yet your inward tempers and dispositions (whether you know it or no) are the very same with theirs, which you too plainly testify by your actions; so that when "you build the sepulchres of the prophets," you only expose the deceitfulness and hypocrisy of your hearts, your pretences and your actions directly contradicting each other. Thus some expositors give the sense of this passage.

But others think that our Saviour intended some what more, in St. Luke; namely, to retort upon them the honour which they seemed to do to the prophets, in building their sepulchres, as an argument that they rejoiced in their death; seeing they were so well content to be at the charge of a monument for them; like Herod, who, when he had murdered Aristobulus, made a magnificent monument for him; or as the Roman historians say of Caracalla, though he hated all good men whilst they were alive, yet he would pretend to honour them when they were dead. This, some think, our Saviour intended in these words: "Truly, ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres;" as if he had said, hereby ye testify that ye allow and like very well what your fathers did to the prophets. According to which latter exposition, there seems to be more force and greater sharpness in our Saviour's reproof; as not only charging them with the ill usage of the righteous men of their own times, but moreover making them, by their building the tombs, and garnishing the sepulchres of the ancient prophets, to become as it were accessaries to the murder of them.



But, leaving this digression, I now proceed to that which I primarily intended; namely, first, to explain the following words, which I have chosen as my present subject, and then to make some observations upon them.

“Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute; that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.”

There are three considerable difficulties in the words, which I shall endeavour to explain to you.

I. What is meant by “the wisdom of God.”

II. Who this Zacharias was, here mentioned by our Saviour; “from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, who perished between the altar and the temple.”

III. In what sense, and with what reason and justice it is here threatened, “that the blood of all the prophets and righteous men, shed from the foundation of the world, should be required of that generation.”

I. What is here meant by “the wisdom of God.” “Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles,” &c. In St. Matthew, our Saviour speaks this in his own name, “Wherefore, behold I send unto you prophets: for which reason, some think that by “the wisdom of God” our Saviour here designed himself; as if he had said, Therefore I, who am the “wisdom of God,” declare unto you. But this is not very probable, our Saviour no where else in the gospel speaking of himself in any such style; though St. Paul calls him “the power of God, “and “the wisdom of God.” Others think that our Saviour here refers to some prophecy of the Old Testament to this purpose: “therefore, the Wisdom of God hath said;” that is, the Holy Spirit of wisdom, which inspired the prophets in the Old Testament. But this conceit is utterly without ground, for we find no such passage, nor any thing to that sense, in any of the prophets of the Old Testament.

But the most plain and simple interpretation is this: “therefore hath the wisdom of God said;” that is, the most wise God hath determined to send among you such messengers and holy men, and I foresee that ye will thus abuse them, and thereby bring wrath and destruction upon yourselves. And whereas our Saviour says, in St. Matthew, “behold I send unto you prophets;” it is very probable, he speaks in God’s name, and that it is to be understood, Behold, says God, I send unto you. And this phrase of “the wisdom of God,” for the most wise God is very agreeable to other forms of speech, which we meet with in the Jewish writers; as, *dicit norma iudicii*, “the rule of judgment” says, that is, the most just and righteous God; which serves very well to explain the phrase in the text, “therefore, saith the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles.”



By apostles is here meant, all sorts of Divine messengers: for so St. Matthew expresseth it, "I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes;" that is, several holy and excellent men, endowed with all sorts of Divine gifts; "prophets, and wise men, and scribes;" which were the most glorious and admired titles among the Jews.

"And some of them they shall slay and persecute." St. Matthew expresseth it more particularly, "some of them ye shall kill and crucify;" as it was afterwards fulfilled in the two James's, and Stephen, who were slain by them, and in Simon the son of Cleophas, and before him in Jesus the Son of God, who were crucified; and "some of them ye shall scourge in your synagogues," as we read they did to Peter and John; and "persecute them from city to city," as they did Paul and Barnabas. The sending of these messengers of God among the Jews, and this ill usage of them, the all-wise and all-knowing God had determined and foreseen.

II. Who this Zacharias was, here mentioned by our Saviour. And there are so many of them (no less than four of this name) to whom it may with some probability be applied, but especially to two of them, that it is very hard to determine which of them our Saviour means. Three Zacharias's are mentioned in Scripture, and one more in the history of Josephus.

There was Zacharias the father of John the Baptist; but whose son he was we do not read: and though of his death the Scripture is silent, yet there are two traditions about it; one, that he was slain by Herod's officers, because he would not tell where his son John the Baptist was, when Herod sent for him. But the credit of this relies upon very doubtful authors. The other is mentioned by several of the fathers, and the substance of it is briefly this; that there being a place in the temple, where the virgins by themselves used to pray, the Virgin Mary coming to that place to pray among the virgins, was forbidden, because she had had a child; and that Zacharias, for maintaining her virginity, was set upon, "and killed between the temple and the altar." But this tradition is rejected by St. Jerome: and I doubt there is little ground for it.

Zacharias, one of the lesser prophets, was the son of Barachias, which agrees so far with St. Matthew's description of him: but there is no mention in Scripture that he was slain; nor could he well be in the temple, which was but building in his time; though the author of the Targum says, that Zacharias, the son of Ido, was slain by the Jews "in the house of the Lord's sanctuary," on the day of the propitiation; because he admonished them not to do evil before the Lord. Now Zacharias, the son of Barachias, was the grandson of Ido; but yet, I think, this was only lapse of memory, and that he means Zachary in the Chronicles, who was slain by Joash.

And he is the third Zacharias I mentioned, (2 Chron. xxiv. 21.) who, as he was reprovng the people "for transgressing the commandment of the Lord, was stoned with stones at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the Lord." And this our Saviour seems more particularly to reflect upon, immediately after the text: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,

thou that stonest the prophets," &c. Now this one would think was certainly the person intended by our Saviour, and fit to be mentioned with Abel, whose blood is said to have cried to the Lord. For of Zacharias, it is likewise said, that "when he died, he said, The Lord look upon it and require it." And Drusius cites a Jewish writer, speaking thus by way of complaint against the Jewish nation; "because in the midst of thee fell the priests of the Lord, and his prophets, and because before the holy temple in the midst of thee was slain the godly and righteous prophet Zacharias, who lay unburied, nor did the earth cover his blood, but to this day it goes up and speaks in the midst of thee." So that none could have been more fit to have been joined with Abel in this respect

But, as probable as this looks, there are two very great objections against it. One is, that St. Matthew calls the Zacharias spoken of by our Saviour, the son of Barachias; whereas this Zacharias, slain by Joash, was the son of Jehoiada; and though it be very considerable, which St. Jerome observes, that, in the Hebrew or Nazarene gospel, it is Zacharias, the son of Jehoiada; yet it is hard to rely upon that, against all the Greek copies. But a more difficult objection, in my opinion, is, that our Saviour seems to design to mention the two extremes, the first and last righteous man that was slain, and, between them two comprehended the good men of all ages, that were persecuted and slain; and, if so, then that Zacharias in the Chronicles, who was slain so long before, can by no means be the person.

There is yet a fourth Zacharias, (mentioned by Josephus, *lib.* 4.) the son of Baruch (which is probably enough the same name with Barachias), who was the last remarkable good man that was slain, immediately before the siege of Jerusalem, and that, as Josephus tells us, in the midst of the temple; which agrees with our Saviour's description of it, "between the altar and the temple;" not the altar of incense, but of burnt-offerings, which was in the outward court, before the ascent to the temple. So that Grotius thinks this was the man intended by our Saviour; yet so, that he does both allude to the history of the former Zacharias, and foretel the death of this. And there is but one objection against this; that our Saviour speaks of this as already past; "whom you have slain;" whereas this Zacharias was not slain till after our Saviour's death. But I think that a satisfactory answer may be given to this; viz. that our Saviour foretelling those future persecutions, which should fill up the measure of their sins, and bring final destruction upon them, he speaks of this as already past; because before that destruction should come upon them, it would be true. "they had slain him:" so that, speaking of the vengeance coming upon them, well might he say, that "upon them should come the blood of all the righteous men, from Abel to Zacharias, whom they had slain," &c.

III. The third difficulty remains: and that is. in what sense, and with what reason and justice it is here threatened, that "the blood of all the prophets and righteous men, shed from the foundation of the world." should be required of that generation. Some understand this more strictly: they should be charged with it, and formally punished for it, because, in imitating their cruel predecessors, they should be guilty of all their cruelty. But there is no neces-

sity of this. All that our Saviour seems to intend, is this: that their punishment in the destruction of Jerusalem, should be so horrible, as if God had once for all arraigned them of all the righteous blood that ever had been shed in the world, and brought the punishment of it upon them; though in truth the punishment did not exceed the desert of their own sins. And if this be the meaning of it, there is nothing harsh and unreasonable in it. And thus I have explained, as well as I can, the several difficulties in the text. I shall make two or three observations from the main scope and design of it, and so conclude.

I. That it hath been the lot of holy and righteous men, in most ages of the world, to meet with very bad usage, to be “persecuted and slain.” The devil began this work early. When there were but three men in all the world, and two of them brethren; the one slew the other, “because he was more righteous, and served God better than he did. And this trade hath continued, and been practised more or less, in most ages and generations of the world, as might be deduced through the history of the Old and New Testament, and of most ages since; though “the rod of the wicked hath not always abode upon the back of the righteous, lest at last piety should be quite discouraged, and “the faithful fail from among the children of men.” The people and the church of God have had many intervals of peace and prosperity; and sometimes, for a long continuance, the favour and countenance of authority, and the powers of the world, and the laws of nations on their side.

But yet there is a continual enmity between the seed of the woman and the serpent, between the righteous and the wicked, between those that serve God, and those that serve him not; because their ways are contrary one to another, and quite of another fashion, their principles and practices do contradict and clash with one another; the virtues of good men are a continual upbraiding of the bad, a living reproof and reproach to them: so that it is no wonder, that evil men do so violently hate and persecute the good, and do by all means endeavour to remove out of the way those who are so opposite and offensive to them.

II. We may observe likewise, hence, how great a sin they are guilty of who persecute the righteous, and how terrible a vengeance from God waits on them. Particular examples of this have been in all ages: but as the guilt of this sin never went higher than at this time foretold by our Saviour, when God sent to the Jews such “prophets, and wise men, and scribes,” and such a number of them as never upon any occasion were sent into the world, and they used them in that bloody and barbarous manner; no wonder, if the vengeance that came upon them was such as never had been before; and if, after they had filled up the measure of their sins, by crucifying the Lord Jesus, and persecuting his apostles, and stoning and killing all the prophets that were sent unto them, “the wrath of God came upon them to the utmost,” and such a terrible destruction from the Lord, as never befel any people; insomuch that our Saviour, upon the foresight and mention of it, forty years before it happened, could not but weep over them, and express himself in those compassion ate words, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem: thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are

495

496

sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate.”

III. From this whole passage of our Saviour, which I have been explaining to you, we may learn how vain it is for men to pretend to honour the dead saints, when they persecute the living. This was the great hypocrisy of the scribes and pharisees among the Jews in our Saviour’s time; and is at this day of the rulers and governors of the Roman church among us Christians; nay, they exceed the scribes and pharisees, not only in their veneration of the ancient saints and righteous men, but also, if it be possible, in their malice and cruelty towards the living. For they not only build costly monuments to their memory, which was the utmost the scribes and pharisees did, but they honour them with shrines and rich offerings, with prayers and vows to them, more frequent than to Almighty God himself, and our blessed Saviour: but then they hate and persecute the living, with as great violence and cruelty, as ever was used by any part of mankind towards one another. It is true they do it under the notion of heresy; and so did the scribes and pharisees too, as St. Paul witnesseth. “After the way which ye call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the law and in the prophets.” So they call us heretics; though we receive and believe all that is written in the Holy Scriptures, only rejecting their additions, whereby they would make the commandment of God of none effect. And as Rome is parallel with Jerusalem in many other respects; so especially in the bloody persecution of righteous men: and as Jerusalem is charged by our Saviour with the blood of all the prophets and righteous men of all ages; so St. John in the Revelation says of Rome, that “in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth: ([chap. xviii. 24.](#)) which is no less true of Rome Christian, than of Rome pagan. In all the churches and religions in the world, and perhaps in Rome pagan herself, hath not so much innocent blood been shed, as in Rome Christian and catholic, and that under a pretence of religion: and no doubt there is a day coming, when she shall be called to a heavy account for these things, “when the heavens shall rejoice over her, and the holy angels and prophets, because God hath avenged them on her.”



SERMON LXXXI.

[Preached Nov. 5, 1682.]

THE DANGER OF ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE.

I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God; but not according to knowledge.—[Rom. x. 2.](#)

HERE is nothing more commonly cried up than zeal in religion: and yet there is nothing in which men do more frequently and fatally mistake and miscarry, and in the expressions and effects whereof men ought to govern themselves with more care and caution. To speak the truth, zeal is as all other passions are, in its own nature indifferent, and of itself neither good nor bad, but according to the object and degree of it; for zeal is nothing else, but an earnest concernment for, or against, something, and a violent pursuit and prosecution of it. For if it be applied to a right object, so as we be earnestly concerned for things that are unquestionably good; and against things that are unquestionably evil, and in a due degree; that is, if the expression of it be proportionable to the less or greater good or evil of things; then it is a commendable quality or virtue: but if it be wrong placed, and we be earnestly concerned for that which is evil, and against that which is good, or about things which are of an indifferent or doubtful nature, as to the good and evil of them; or if we notoriously exceed in the degree of it, being more zealously concerned about things than they deserve, and zealously concerned about lesser things, to the prejudice of greater; in any of these cases, it is so far from being a virtue, that it is a vice, of a most pernicious and mischievous consequence, and many times hath as bad effects as can proceed from the worst principle or disposition of mind.

It is sometimes used in a good sense; but it is, when it is applied to the best things in which the honour of God and the salvation of men is concerned, to the great and unquestionable duties of religion. As zeal for the honour of God, and the place of his public worship, in opposition to profaneness: ([John ii. 17.](#)) “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up:” for an earnest desire of those gifts, whereby we are to edify the church: ([1 Cor. xii. 31.](#)) “But covet earnestly the best gifts,” so we render the words; “be zealous of the best gifts;” so it is in the Greek: for a forwardness and readiness to relieve the necessities of the saints: ([2 Cor. ix. 2.](#)) “I know the forwardness of your minds, and your zeal hath provoked very many.” And to the same purpose is that expression, ([Tit. ii. 14.](#)) “zealous of good works.” And then for a zeal for the salvation of men’s souls: ([2 Cor. xi. 2.](#)) “I am zealous of you with a godly zeal.”

But the word is much more frequently in Scripture used in a bad sense, for a malicious and furious rage, against the professors of Christianity: ([Acts v. 17, 18.](#)) “Then the high-priest, and they that were with him, were filled with indignation (the word is zeal) and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in prison.” And, ([chap. xiii. 45.](#)) it is said, “the



Jews were filled with zeal, and spake against those which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.” And, ([chap. xvii. 5.](#)) “The Jews, which believed not, moved with zeal, gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar.”

It is frequently reckoned amongst the works of the flesh, and mentioned in the company of the greatest vices and crimes: wrath, contention, division, sedition, murders, tumults, confusions: ([Rom. xiii. 13.](#)) “Let us walk honestly, as in the day, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and zeal.” ([1 Cor. iii. 3.](#)) “Whereas there is among you zeal, and strife, and divisions; are ye not carnal?” ([2 Cor xii. 20.](#)) “Lest there be debates, zeal, wrath, strife.” ([Gal. v. 19, 20, 21.](#)) “The works of the flesh are manifest;” among which the apostle reckons “hatred, variance, zeal, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders.” St. James calls it a “bitter zeal:” ([James iii. 14, 15, 10.](#)) “But if ye have bitter zeal and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above; but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where zeal and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” By which it appears, that zeal most frequently goes under a bad name and character in Scripture; zeal, I mean, in matters of religion; for of that most of the texts I have mentioned speak; and this is that which St. Paul means here in the text, by a “zeal of God;” that is, a zeal about religion and Divine things. “I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God; but not according to knowledge.”

In which words the apostle being desirous to say the best he could of his countrymen, the Jews, he commends the good meaning of their zeal, and blames the ill conduct of it. “I bear them record, μαρτυρῶ αὐτοῖς, I give this testimony on their behalf, that they have a zeal of God;” that is, that by all this fierceness against the Christian religion, they intend the honour of God, and think they do him service: but yet this zeal is greatly to be condemned; because it is a mistaken and misguided zeal not at all directed as it should be: “they have a zeal of God; but not according to knowledge.”

From which words I shall take into consideration these three things:

I. What are the qualifications and properties of a zeal “according to knowledge.”

II. By what marks and characters we may know that zeal, which here, and elsewhere in Scripture, is condemned, as not being “according to knowledge.”

III. How far the doing of any thing, out of a zeal for God, doth mitigate and extenuate the evil of it. For when the apostle here testifies concerning the Jews, that they had “a zeal of God;” he speaks this in favour of them, and by way of mitigation of their faults. When I have handled these three particulars, I shall apply my discourse to the present occasion of this day.

I. What are the qualifications and properties of a zeal “according to knowledge.” I shall mention these three:

1. That our zeal be right, in respect of its object.



2. That the measure and degree of it be proportioned to the good or evil of things, about which it is conversant.

3. That we pursue it by lawful ways and means.

1. That our zeal be right, in respect of its object; I mean, that those things which we are zealous for, be certainly and considerably good; and that those things which we are zealous against, be certainly and considerably evil. A mistake in any of these quite mars our zeal, and spoils the virtue of it: and though it be never so much intended for God, it is not at all pleasing and acceptable to him; because it is a blind, and ignorant, and mistaken zeal: and the hotter the worse; it is not a heavenly fire, that comes down from above; but it is like the fire of hell, heat without light. If we mistake good and evil, and be zealously concerned against that which is good, or for that which is evil; the greater our zeal is, the greater is our fault; and instead of doing God and religion service and credit, we do the greatest mischief and dishonour we can to them both: or if the thing, about which our zeal is conversant, be of a doubtful and uncertain nature, this is not properly an object of zeal. Men should never be earnest for or against any thing, but upon clear and certain grounds, that what we contend so earnestly for, is undoubtedly good; and that which we are so violent against, is undoubtedly evil: if it be not, we are zealous for we know not what, and that I am sure is a zeal “not according to knowledge.”

And if the thing be certainly good or evil, which we are so concerned about, it must also be considerably so; otherwise it will not warrant our being zealous about it. All truth is good, and all error bad; but there are many truths so inconsiderable, and which have so small an influence upon practice, that they do not deserve our zeal and earnest contention about them; and so likewise are there many errors and mistakes of so slight and inconsiderable a nature, that it were better men should be let alone in them, than provoked to quarrel and contend about them.

Thus that great heat that was in the Christian church, about the time of observing Easter, was, in my opinion, a zeal “not according to knowledge.” They were on both sides agreed in the main, which was to celebrate the memory of our Saviour’s resurrection: but there were different customs about the time, which was a matter of no such consideration, as to deserve so much heat and zeal about it, especially considering the uncharitable and mischievous consequences of that difference.

2. That our zeal may be “according to knowledge,” the measure and degree of it must be proportioned to the good or evil of things, about which it is conversant. That is an ignorant zeal which is conversant about lesser things, and unconcerned for greater. Such was the zeal of the scribes and pharisees, who were mightily concerned about external and lesser matters; but took little or no care of inward purity, and real and substantial goodness: they were very careful, not to eat with unwashed hands, and to make clean the outside of the cup and platter; but then they were full of extortion, and all unrighteousness: they paid tithes of mint,

502

503

and anise, and cummin; but omitted the weightier things, judgment, mercy, and fidelity; or, as St. Luke expresseth it, they past over “judgment and the love of God.”

A zealous strictness about external rites and matters of difference, where there is a visible neglect of the substantial duties of religion, and the great virtues of a good life, is either a gross ignorance of the true nature of religion, or a fulsome hypocrisy. And so likewise is a loud and zealous outcry against rites and ceremonies, and the imposition of indifferent things in religion, when men can release themselves from the obligation of natural and moral duties, and pass over mercy, and justice, and charity.

3. A zeal that is “according to knowledge,” must be pursued and prosecuted by lawful and warrantable means. No zeal for God and his glory, for his true church and religion, will justify the doing of that which is morally and in itself evil. “Will ye speak wickedly for God, and talk deceitfully for him?” We do not know what belongs to the honour of God and religion, if we think to promote his glory by means so dishonourable and offensive to him. The apostle pronounceth it a damnable sin, for any to charge this doctrine upon Christianity, that evil may be done for a good end, and to promote the glory of God: (*Rom. iii. 8.*) “As we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say, Let us do evil that good may come: whose damnation is just.”

And yet nothing is more frequent, than for men, out of a zeal for God and religion, to overlook the evil and unlawfulness of the means they use, for the advancing so good an end. This is that which hath sanctified those refined arts of lying and perjury, by equivocation and mental reservation; those seditious ways of disturbing the peace of kingdoms, by treason and rebellion, by the excommunicating and deposing of princes, upon pretence of heresy; of extirpating those whom they please to call here tics, by inquisitions, and croisados, and massacres; and this, not only in the opinion of private persons, but in the judgment of popes, and of general councils. I proceed, in the

Second place, To shew by what marks and characters we may know the contrary zeal, that which is u not according to knowledge, which is condemned here in the text, and very frequently in other places of Scripture: and though this may be sufficiently known b y the contrary marks and properties (which I shall but briefly mention), yet to discover it more fully, I shall add one or two more very gross and sensible signs and instances of it.

1. It is a zeal without knowledge, that is mistaken in the proper object of it; that calls good evil, and evil good; a zeal for gross errors and superstitions, plainly contrary either to the revelation of God’s word, or the light of reason, or to common sense; any or all of these cannot be a zeal “according to knowledge.” A zeal for the worship of images, for praying to saints and angels, contrary to the plain law and word of God; a zeal for the sacrilegious depriving of the people of half the sacrament, contrary to our Saviour’s plain institution, and the acknowledged practice of the catholic church, for a thousand years; a zeal for that most absurd of all doctrines that ever was taught in any religion, I mean the doctrine of transub-

504

505

stantiation, not only without any sufficient authority from Scripture (as is acknowledged by several of the most learned of the Roman church), but contrary to reason, and in defiance of the sense of all mankind; a zeal for these, and many more like gross errors and practices, can not possibly be a zeal “according to knowledge.”

2. That is a zeal without knowledge, the degree whereof is manifestly disproportioned to the good or evil of things about which it is conversant; when there is in men a greater and fiercer zeal for the externals of religion, than for the vital and essential parts of it; for the traditions of men, than for the commandments of God; for bodily severities, than for the mortification of our lusts; for the means of religion, than for the end of it: a greater zeal against the omission and neglect of some senseless and superstitious practices, than against the practice of the grossest immoralities; and against the deniers of the doctrines of transubstantiation, and of the pope’s infallibility, an equal, if not a greater zeal (I am sure a more severe prosecution) than against those who deny our Saviour to be the true Messiah, and the Son of God: this certainly is not a zeal “according to knowledge.” Nor,

3. That which is prosecuted by unlawful and unwarrantable means. That cannot be “a zeal of God, according to knowledge,” which warrants the doing of evil, that good may come; the violating of truth and faith, and of the peace of human society, for the cause of the catholic church; and breaking the eternal and immutable laws of God, for the advancing of his glory. Nor,

4. An uncharitable zeal, which is an enemy to peace and order, and thinks itself sufficiently warranted to separate from the communion of Christians, and to break the peace of, the church upon every scruple, and upon every fancy and conceit of unlawful impositions, though in the most indifferent things; nay, upon this single point, because a thing which they acknowledge lawful, and indifferent in itself, is in the worship of God enjoined by authority; the most unreasonable principle that I think ever was avowed among Christians; not to do a thing which otherwise they might do, only because it is enjoined; and to fancy that an indifferent thing becomes presently unlawful, because it is commanded by lawful authority; and that it is a sin to do any thing, in the worship of God, which is not left to their liberty, whether they will do it or not. This is not only a zeal without knowledge, but contrary to common sense. Nor,

5. A furious and cruel zeal, which St. James calls a bitter or a wrathful zeal, and which tends to “confusion and every evil work,” which is blind with its own rage, and makes men, as St. Paul says of himself, when he persecuted the Christians, “exceedingly mad” against all that differ from them, and stand in the way of their fierce and outrageous zeal.

6. And, lastly, A zeal for ignorance is most certainly not a zeal “according to knowledge;” and this is a zeal peculiar to the church of Home, by such strict laws to forbid people the use of the Holy Scriptures in a known tongue; nay, not so much as to allow them to understand what they do in the service of God; to require them to be present at their public

506

507

prayers, and to join with them in them, without letting them know the meaning of them; to pretend to teach them, by reading lessons to them in an unknown tongue; and all this under pretence of increasing their devotion: as if the less men understand of the service of God, the more they would be affected with it, and edified by it.

And yet there is nothing in which the church of Rome hath been more zealously concerned, than to keep the people in ignorance: nothing they have opposed with more obstinacy, against the repeated application of princes and people, at the beginning of the Reformation, than to allow the people the use of the Scriptures, and their public prayers, in a known tongue. And their obstinacy in this point was not without reason; nothing being more certain, than that if the people were once brought to understand the Scriptures, they would soon quit their religion, which in so many things is so directly contrary to the word of God. The

Third and last thing remains to be spoken to; viz. How far the doing of things, out of a zeal for God, doth mitigate and extenuate the evil of them. For when the apostle here testifies concerning the Jews, that they had a zeal of God, he speaks this in favour of them, and by-way of mitigation of their fault. "I bear them record;" I, who was once acted by this ignorant and furious zeal, which now possesseth them, and persecuted the Christians in the same outrageous manner, as they still continue to do, and all this with a very good conscience, as I thought, and out of a zeal for God and the true religion. So he tells us, ([Acts xxvi. 9.](#)) "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." So that his zeal was sincere, and with a real intention to do service to God and religion; and yet for all that was very faulty and sinful, and, if he had persisted in it, damnable; so that his confidence, that he was in the right, and the sincerity of his zeal in acting according to the persuasion of his conscience, did not alter the nature of the actions he did out of this zeal, and make them less wicked in themselves; though it was some mitigation of the fault of the person, and rendered him more capable of the mercy of God by repentance, than if he had done contrary to his conscience, and the clear convictions of his own mind.

And therefore, the best way to understand the great evil and wickedness of this furious and blind zeal, will be, to consider the account which St. Paul, after his conversion, gives of his own doings, and what a load he lays upon himself, notwithstanding the sincerity of his zeal, and that he acted according to his conscience. [Acts viii.](#) and [ix.](#) you have the history at large of his outrageous doings, how "he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women to prison;" how he breathed "out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." ([Acts xxii. 4.](#)) "I persecuted (says he) this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women." (And [chap. xxvi. 10, 11.](#)) "Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them; and I punished them often in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even to strange cities." ([Gal. i. 13, 14.](#)) "Ye have heard (says he) of my conversation in times past, in the Jews

religion; how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it, being exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.” (1 Tim. i. 13.) “Who was before a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious.” So that he chargeth himself with the guilt of blasphemy and murder, and a most furious and outrageous persecution of good men; for which elsewhere he pronounceth himself “the chief of sinners.” From whence it evidently appears, that men may do the most wicked and damnable sins out of a zeal for God.

And this was the case of many of the Jews, as our Saviour foretold, that the time should come, when they should kill them, thinking they did God good service. But yet for all this, the apostles of our Lord make no scruple to charge them with down right murder: (Acts ii. 23.) speaking of their putting our Saviour to death, “whom ye by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” (And, Acts vii. 52.) “The just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.”

Yet notwithstanding their sin was of this high nature in itself, it was some mitigation of the fault of the persons, that they did these things out of an ignorant zeal, and rendered them more capable of the mercy of God, upon their repentance. And upon this account our Saviour interceded with God for mercy for them: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” St. Peter also pleads the same in mitigation of their fault: (Acts iii. 17.) “And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.” And St. Paul tells us, that he found mercy, upon his repentance, on this account: (1 Tim. i. 13.) “But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, and in unbelief.” But still, for all this, wicked things done out of conscience and zeal for God are damnable, and will prove so, without repentance.

I shall now draw some inferences from this discourse, by way of application.

1. If it be so necessary that our zeal be directed by knowledge, this shews us how dangerous a thing zeal is in the weak and ignorant sort of people. Zeal is an edge-tool, which children in understanding should not meddle withal; and yet it most frequently possesseth the weakest minds; and commonly by how much the less knowing people are, by so much the more zealous they are: and in the church of Rome, where knowledge is professedly discouraged, and suppressed in the common people, zeal is mightily countenanced and cherished. And they make great use of it; for this blind and furious zeal, is that which inspires them to do such cruel and barbarous things, as were hardly ever acted among the heathen. Zeal is only fit for wise men; but it is chiefly in fashion among fools.

Nay it is dangerous in the hands of wise men, and to be governed and kept in with a strict rein; otherwise it will transport them to the doing of undue and irregular things. Moses, one of the wisest and best of men, and most likely to govern and manage his zeal as he ought, and to keep aloof from all excess and extravagance, being the meekest man upon earth; yet he was so surprised, upon a sudden occasion, that in a fit of zeal he let fall the two tables of the law, which he had but just received from God, and dashed them in pieces. A true emblem

of an ungoverned zeal, in the transport whereof even good men are apt to forget the laws of God, and let them fall out of their hands, and to break all the obligations of natural and moral duties.

2. From hence we plainly see, that men may do the worst and wickedest things out of a zeal for God and religion. Thus it was among the Jews, who engrossed salvation to themselves, and denied the possibility of it to all the world besides; and the church of Rome have taken copy by them, as in an arrogant conceit of themselves, so in the blindness, and fury, and uncharitableness of their zeal towards all, who refuse to submit to their authority and directions.

And as the teachers and rulers of the Jewish church did of old, so doth the church of Rome now: “they take away the key of knowledge from the people, and will neither enter into the kingdom of heaven themselves, nor suffer those that would to enter in.” They brand for heretics those who make the Holy Scriptures the rule of their faith and worship; as St. Paul tells us the Jews did in his time. ([Acts xxiv. 14.](#)) “After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets.” They establish the merit of their own righteousness, “not submitting to the righteousness of God,” by the faith of Jesus Christ. So St. Paul tells us the Jews did, in the verse immediately after the text; “for they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.” And as the Jews anathematized and excommunicated the first Christians, and persecuted them to the death, as our Saviour foretold, that the time would come, when they should put them out of their synagogues, yea, and kill them, thinking they did God good service; so the church of Rome hath, for many ages, used the sincere professors of the same religion, persecuting them, first with excommunication, and then with fire and faggot: and with all the violence and fury in the world endeavouring the utter extirpation and ruin of them, by bloody croisados and a barbarous inquisition, by treacherous massacres, and all sorts of hellish plots and machinations: witness the monstrous design of this day, never to be remembered or mentioned without horror, to have destroyed at one blow, and have swallowed up in common ruin, our king, and prince, and nobles, and the representative body of the whole nation! witness the bloody massacre of Ireland, and all their wicked designs and practices continued to this very day!

3. And lastly, That zeal for God and religion does not alter the nature of actions done upon that account. Persecution and murder of the sincere professors of religion, are damnable sins, and no zeal for God and religion can excuse them, or take away the guilt of them: zeal for God will justify no action that we do, unless there be discretion to justify our zeal.

There is nothing oftener misleads men than a misguided zeal; it is an *ignis fatuus*, a false fire, which often leads men into bogs and precipices; it appears in the night, in dark and ignorant and weak minds, and offers itself a guide to those who have lost their way; it is one

512

513

of the most ungovernable passions of human nature, and therefore requires great knowledge and judgment to manage it, and keep it within bounds. It is like fire, a good servant, but a bad master; if it once get head, it consumes and devours all before it, and the great danger and mischief of it is, that it is most commonly found where it should not be, and possesses those most who are least fit to govern it, and most frequently employed about what it should not be; and ten to one but it is either mistaken in the object, or in the measure and degree of it; and even when it is a virtue, it is a nice and dangerous one: for the wisest men are apt to mingle their own passions and interests with their zeal for God and religion. So that it is not enough that men are acted by a zeal for God, and do sincerely follow the dictates of their consciences; but they must be careful to inform their consciences, and not suffer themselves to be violently transported and hurried on by their own passions and prejudice, and by a blind and furious zeal without knowledge.

But what then? Would we have men not follow their own consciences, or act contrary to them? No, by no means; for though conscience be not our rule, yet it is our immediate guide; and he does ill who does act against his conscience. But men must be careful how they settle their practical judgment of things, and conclude things to be lawful or unlawful duties or sins, without reason and good ground.

God hath given us understandings to try and examine things, and the light of his word to direct us in this trial; and if we will judge rashly, and suffer ourselves to be hurried by prejudice or passion, the errors of our judgment become faults of our lives; for God expects from us that we should weigh and consider what we do; and when he hath afforded us light enough to discern between good and evil, that we should carefully follow the direction of it; that we should be suspicious of ourselves, when our zeal carries us to do things that are furious and cruel, false and treacherous, and have a horrid appearance even to the light of nature; we should question that zeal which is so contrary to Christian goodness and meekness, to peace and charity, and which tends to confusion and every evil work.

I will conclude all with that excellent passage of St. James, which will shew us how little regard is to be had to many men's pretences of zeal for religion: ([James iii. 13.](#)) "Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge amongst you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works, with meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter zeal and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above; but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where zeal and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work. But the wisdom which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated; full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy: and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

514

515

SERMON LXXXII.

[Preached Nov. 5, 1686.]

THE BEST MEN LIABLE TO THE WORST TREATMENT FROM MISTAKEN ZEALOTS.

They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that lie doth God service.—John xvi. 2.

THESE words were spoken by our blessed Saviour, when he was about to leave the world; at the thoughts whereof, finding his disciples to be exceedingly troubled, he comforts them by the consideration of the great benefit and advantage which from thence would accrue to them; he tells them that he was going to heaven to intercede for them, and to make way for their admission there; and withal promiseth, that his Father would send the Holy Ghost, who should abundantly supply the want of his presence with them; but he tells them, at the same time, that they should meet with very ill entertainment and usage from the world: but so had he: ([chap. xv. 18.](#)) “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you;” and why should they expect to be better treated than he was? ([Ver. 20.](#)) “Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than the Lord; if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”

And at the beginning of this chapter, he tells them, that he did on purpose forewarn them of these things, to prepare their minds beforehand, and to arm them against the worst that might happen: ([ver. 1.](#)) “These things have I spoken unto you that you should not be offended.” And then he declares more particularly, how far the rage and malice of men should proceed against them, and in what kind they should suffer: “They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service.”

So that our Saviour here foretels two sorts of persecution, which his disciples should be exercised withal—excommunication: “they shall put you out of their synagogues;” and excision: “yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service.” And these, perhaps, were but several kinds and degrees of excommunication; for the clearer understanding whereof, it will be requisite briefly to explain the three degrees of excommunication among the Jews.

The first called *Niddui*, is that which our Saviour here means by putting out of the synagogue; and which he elsewhere expresseth by ἀφορισμος, or *separation*. ([Luke vi. 22.](#)) “Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company.” And the effect of this excommunication was to exclude men from the communion of the church and people of God, and from his service, which was a great disgrace; because after this sentence none of the Jews were to converse with them, but to look upon them as heathens and publicans.

The second degree of this censure was called *Cherem*; which included the first, but extended farther, to the confiscation of goods into the sacred treasury, and devoting them to God; after which there was no redemption of them. And of this we find express mention ([Ezra x. 7, 8.](#)) where it is said, that “they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; and that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the councils of the princes and elders, all his substance should be devoted, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.”

517

The third degree was *Shammatha*, when the rebellious and contumacious person was anathematized and devoted, and, as some conceive, according to the law ([Levit. xxvii. 29.](#)) was to be put to death; though other very knowing men in the Jewish learning think it amounted to no more than a final sentence, whereby they were left to the judgment of God, by some remarkable judgment of his to be cut off from the congregation of Israel.

Of the first and last of these degrees of excommunication our Saviour seems here to speak; but whether, in both instances in the text, he alludes in the one to the lowest, and in the other to the highest degree of excommunication among the Jews, is not so certain. To the first he plainly does, when he says, “they shall put you out of the synagogues:” and then he adds, that they should proceed much higher against them, even to put them to death: if the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service;” that is, they should not only think it lawful to kill them, but look upon it as a duty, as a high act of religion, as an acceptable piece of worship, and “a sacrifice well-pleasing to God.” For so, indeed, the word does not only import, but most properly signify, “Whosoever killeth you shall think,” *λατρείαν προσφέρειν τῷ Θεῷ*, “that he offers a sacrifice to God;” for so the word *λατρεία* is sometimes used for a sacrifice; but, being joined with *προσφέρειν*, seems necessarily to be determined to that sense.

518

From the words, thus explained, I shall make these following observations, very proper for our consideration upon the occasion of this day.

1. That the best of men may be separated and excluded from the communion of those who may assume to themselves to be the true and the only true church; yea, and suffer under the notion of very bad and criminal persons. This our Saviour here fore to Id of his apostles, some of the best men that ever lived: “They shall put you out of the synagogues.”

2. That they who are thus excommunicated by the pretended true church, may nevertheless be real members of the true church of Christ. Though the apostles were thus dealt withal by the Jewish church, they did not cease, for all that, to be members of the true church of God.

3. That from uncharitable censures men do easily and almost naturally proceed to cruel actions. After they had put the disciples of our Lord out of their synagogues, and thereby concluded them to be here tics and reprobates, they presently proceed to kill them, as not

worthy to live. "They shall put you out of their synagogues;" and when they have done that, they will soon after think it a thing not only fit, but pious and meritorious, to put you to death; the time will come, that they will think it a good service to God to kill you.

4. That men may do the vilest things, and the most wicked, not only under a grave pretence of religion, but out of a real opinion and persuasion that they do religiously. Murder is certainly one of the greatest and most crying sins; and yet our Saviour foretels, that the Jews should put his disciples to death, being verily persuaded that in so doing they offered a most acceptable sacrifice to God: "Yea the time shall come, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offers a sacrifice to God."

5. That such actions are nevertheless horribly impious and wicked, notwithstanding the good mind with which, and the good end for which, they are done. The Jews were not excused from the guilt of persecution and murder, for all they thought they did well in killing the disciples of our Lord.

6. I observe that the corruption of the best things is the worst. Religion is the highest accomplishment and perfection of human nature; and zeal for God and his truth an excellent quality, and highly acceptable to God: and yet nothing is more barbarous, and spurs men on to more horrible impieties, than a blind zeal for God, and false and mistaken principles in the matter of religion; as is plain from the instances here before us in the text. I shall speak as briefly as I can to these observations.

1. That the best of men may be separated and excluded from the communion of those, who may assume to be the true and only true church, and that under the notion of very bad and criminal persons. This our Saviour foretels in the text should be the fate of his apostles, some of the best and holiest persons that ever lived; "they shall put you out of the synagogues."

And what the Jews did in the beginning of Christianity to the apostles of our Lord and Saviour, hath been too frequently practised since, by some of the professors of Christianity towards one another; and very good men have in several ages fallen under the censure of excommunication, and have been separated from the external communion of the church, and branded with the odious names of heretics and apostates, by those who have arrogated to themselves to be the only orthodox and true church, and have got the external power and management of religion into their hands; witness the case of Athanasius and others, in the reign and prevalency of Arianism; and the ill treatment, that not only particular persons, eminent for their learning and piety, but whole churches have met with in this kind, from that haughty and uncharitable church, which makes nothing of thundering out this most fearful sentence of excommunication against persons, and churches much better and more Christian than herself, and against all that will not submit to her pretended infallibility, and usurped authority over the souls and consciences of men.



But it is our great comfort, that the apostles and disciples of our Lord and Master were thus used, by a church that made the same pretences that they do, and upon grounds every whit as plausible, as I could clearly shew, if I were minded to pursue and make out this comparison.

2. They who are thus excommunicated, by the pretended only true church, may nevertheless be true members of the church of Christ. Though the apostles were thus dealt withal by the Jewish church, they did not cease for all this to be real members of the true church of God. For it is not calling here tics first, that proves them that do so to be no heretics, or acquits them from the same or greater crimes, than those which they are so forward to charge upon other men; nor will God condemn all those who are excommunicated by men, and deny salvation to every one whom they shall please to separate from their society, and to call by some odious name. Men may be put out of the synagogue, and yet received into heaven; for the judgment of God is not according to the uncharitable censures of men, but according to truth and right.

The sentence of excommunication is certainly very dreadful where it is duly inflicted; and, next to the judgment of God, men ought to be afraid of justly incurring the danger of censure; and it ought to be upon very plain and evident grounds that men either separate themselves, or endanger their being cut off from the communion of the church they live in: but when it once comes to this, that a church is infected with gross errors and corruptions, plainly contrary to the word of God, especially if that church will impose her errors upon all that are of her communion; then those who refuse to comply, do not separate themselves, but are cut off; do not depart, but are driven out of the communion of that church; and separation in that case is as innocent and free from the guilt of schism, as the cause of it is; for the terms of communion are become such, that those who are convinced of those errors and corruptions can have no salvation, if they continue in that communion, and then I am sure their salvation will not be endangered by leaving it, or being excommunicated out of it; for that would be the hardest case in the world, that men should be damned for continuing in the communion of such a church, and damned likewise for being cast out of it.

Therefore no man ought to be terrified because of the boldness and presumption of those, who with so much confidence, and so little charity, damn all that are not in their communion; for we see plainly from the text, that men may be in the right and surest way to salvation, and yet be excommunicated by those who call themselves the true church, and will not allow salvation to any but those of their own communion. The disciples of our Lord and Saviour were certainly very good men, and in a safe way of salvation, though they were excommunicated, and put out of the synagogue by the chief priests and rulers of the Jewish church. I proceed to the

3d Observation, which was this, that from uncharitable censures, men do by an easy step and almost naturally proceed to cruel actions. After the Jews had put the disciples of

521

522

our Lord out of their synagogues, and thereby concluded them to be heretics and reprobates, no wonder they should proceed to kill those, whom they thought not worthy to live; “they shall put you out of their synagogues,” (says our Saviour) and when they have done that, they will soon think it a thing not only fit and reasonable, but pious and meritorious, and a good piece of service done to God, to put you to death. Uncharitableness naturally draws on cruelty, and hardens human nature towards those, of whom we have once conceived so ill an opinion, that they are enemies to God and his truth.

And this hath been the source of the most barbarous cruelties that hath been in the world; witness the severity of the heathen persecution of the Christians, which justified itself by the uncharitable opinion which they had conceived of them, that they were despisers of religion and the gods, and consequently atheists; that they were pertinacious and obstinate in their opinions; that is, in the modern style, they were heretics. And the like uncharitable conceit among Christians hath been thought a sufficient ground (even in the judgment of the infallible chair) for the justification of several bloody massacres, and the cruel proceedings of the inquisition against persons suspected of heresy; for after men are once sentenced to eternal damnation, it seems a small thing to torment and destroy their bodies.

4. Men may do the vilest and most wicked things, not only under a grave pretence of religion, but out of a real opinion and persuasion of mind, that they do religiously. Murder is certainly one of the great est and most crying sins; and yet our Saviour foretels, that the Jews should put his disciples to death, being verily persuaded that in so doing they should offer a most acceptable sacrifice to God; “yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offers a sacrifice to God.”

Not but that the great duties and virtues of religion are very plain and easy to be understood; and so are the contrary sins and vices: but then they are only plain to a teachable, and honest, and well-disposed mind; to those who receive the word with meekness, and are not blinded with wrath and furious zeal; to those that receive the truth into an honest heart, and entertain it in the love of it: they are plain to the humble and meek; for the humble God will guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his ways; such as these God seldom suffers to fall into fatal mistakes about their sin, or duty, so as to call good evil, and evil good; to call light darkness, and darkness light; to think uncharitableness a virtue, and downright murder a great duty.

But if men will give up themselves to be swayed by self-love and self-conceit, to be governed by any base or corrupt interest, to be blinded by prejudice, and intoxicated by pride, to be transported and hurried away by violent and furious passions, no wonder if they mistake the nature, and confound the differences of things, in the plainest and most palpable cases; no wonder if God give up persons of such corrupt minds to strong delusions to believe lies. It ought not to be strange to us, if such men bring their understandings to their wills and interests, and bend their judgments to their prejudices, make them stoop to

their pride, and blindly to follow their passions, which way soever they lead them; for God usually leaves such persons to themselves, as run away from him, and is not concerned to see cure those from splitting upon the most dangerous rocks, who will steer their course by no compass, but commit themselves to the wind and tide of their own lusts and passions.

In these cases men may take the wrong way, and yet believe themselves to be in the right; they may oppose the truth, and persecute the professors of it, and be guilty of the blackest crimes, and the most horrid impieties, malice and hatred, blasphemy and murder; and yet all the while be verily persuaded that they are serving God, and sacrificing to him.

Of this we have a plain and full instance in the scribes and pharisees, the chief priests and rulers among the Jews, who because they sought the honour of men and not that which was from God, and loved the praise of men more than the praise of God; because they were prejudiced against the meanness of our Saviour's birth and condition, and had upon false grounds (though, as they thought, upon the infallibility of tradition, and of Scripture interpreted by tradition) entertained quite other notions of the Messias, from what he really was to be; because they were proud, and thought themselves too wise to learn of him: and because his doctrine of humility, and self-denial, did thwart their interest, and bring down their authority and credit among the people; therefore they set themselves against him with all their might, opposing his doctrine, and blasting his reputation, and persecuting him to the death; and all this while did bear up themselves with a conceit of the antiquity and privileges of their church, and their profound knowledge in the law of God, and a great external shew of piety and devotion, and an arrogant pretence and usurpation of being the only church and people of God in the world: and, by virtue of these advantages, they thought they might do any thing; and that whosoever opposed the authority of so ancient and good a church, must needs be very bad men, and deserve to be proceeded against in the severest manner. As if any pretence of piety could give a privilege to do wickedly, and by how much the wiser and holier any man took himself to be, he might do so much the worse things.

There is another remarkable instance of this in St Paul, who, out of a blind furious zeal for the traditions of his fathers, persecuted the true church of God, by imprisonment and death, and all manner of cruelties; and all this while he verily thought that he was in the right, and that he ought to do all these things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And if God had not in a miraculous manner checked him in his course, and changed his mind, he would have spent his whole life in that course of persecution and cruelty, and would (with Pope Paul IV. upon his death-bed) have recommended the inquisition (or if he could have thought of any thing more severe), to the chief priests and rulers of the Jewish church.

I will not trouble you with nearer instances; though the Jewish church is not the only church in the world, that hath countenanced the destruction and extirpation of those who differ from them, as a piece of very acceptable service to God, and meritorious of the pardon of their sins.

525

526

5. I observe that such actions as these are nevertheless horribly wicked and impious, notwithstanding the good mind with which, and the good end for which, they are done. The Jews were not excused from the guilt of persecution and murder, for all they thought they did well in killing the disciples of our Lord.

For to make an action good and acceptable to God, the goodness of all causes, and of all circumstances, must concur; and any one defect in any of these does vitiate the whole action, and spoil the goodness of it. We must do it with a good mind, being verily persuaded that what we do is good and acceptable to God; in which sense St. Paul saith, "whatever is not of faith is sin;" and we must do it for a good end, for the honour of God, and the service of religion, and the benefit and edification of men. But there is one thing wanting yet, which is often forgotten, but is mainly considerable, viz. what we do with a good mind, and to a good end, must be good and lawful in itself, commanded or allowed, or at least not forbidden by God: if it be, what good circumstances soever may belong to the action, the whole action is stark naught; because the very matter and substance of it is evil, and unlawful, and damnable, though done for never so good an end. So St. Paul tells us, that they who say they might do evil, that good might come, their damnation was just. He tells us, indeed, that some would have charged this doctrine upon the Christians, and particularly upon himself; but he rejects it with the greatest detestation; and (which is not unworthy our observation) in his Epistle to the Roman church, as if the Spirit of God, to whom all times are present, had particularly directed him to give this caution to that church, that in future ages they might be warned against so pernicious a principle, and all wicked practices that are consequent upon it.

And we find that St. Paul, after his conversion, did think it no sufficient plea and excuse for himself, and his persecution of the Christian profession, that what he did was out of zeal for God, and his true religion, as he was verily persuaded; but, notwithstanding that, acknowledged! himself a murderer, and one of the greatest sinners; for which, without the great mercy of God, he had perished everlastingly.

6. And lastly, I observe, that the corruption of the best things is the worst. Religion is certainly the highest accomplishment and perfection of human nature; and zeal for God and his truth an excellent quality, and highly acceptable to God: and yet nothing is more barbarous, and spurs men on to more horrid impieties, than a blind zeal for God, and false and mistaken principles in the matter of religion.

Our Saviour compares the Christian religion, and the ministers and professors of it, to salt and light, the most useful and delightful things in the world, enlightens the minds of men, and directs them in the way wherein they should go; it seasons the spirits and manners of men, and preserves them from being putrefied and corrupted; but if the salt lose its savour, if that which should season other things be tainted itself, it is thenceforth the most insipid

527

528

and offensive thing in the world, “good for nothing, but to be cast upon the dunghill; if the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!”

Mistakes and false principles are no where so pernicious, and of such mischievous consequence, as in religion. A blind and misguided zeal in religion is enough to spoil the best nature and disposition in the world. St. Paul (for aught appears) was of himself of a very kind and compassionate nature; and yet what a fury did his mistaken zeal make him! It is hardly credible how madly he laid about him, but that he himself gives us the account of it: ([Acts xxvi. 9, 10, 11.](#)) “I verily thought with myself (says he) that I ought to do many things, contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth; which thing I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests. And when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them; and I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them, even to strange cities.”

I might descend lower, and give instances both of former and latter times, of emperors and princes, both heathen and Christian, that of themselves were mild and gentle; and yet through a mistaken zeal, and the instigation of the chief priests, have been carried to cruel and bloody things. And, indeed, nothing gives so keen an edge, even to the mildest tempers, as an erroneous and wild zeal for God and religion; it is like quicksilver in the back of a sword that is not very sharp of itself, which gives a mighty force and weight to its blow, and makes it cut terribly.

And it is very sad to consider, that the zealous prosecution of mistakes in religion, hath produced sadder and more barbarous effects in the world, and more frequently, than the ordinary corruptions and degeneracy of natural light is apt to do; as the decay of the richest and most generous wines makes the sourest vinegar: so that the pasquil, or libel against Pope Urban VIII. upon occasion of his taking off the brazen roof of the old capital (which had held out so many ages, and that notwithstanding Rome had been so often sacked by barbarous nations) and his selling it to enrich his family [*quod non fecerant Barbari, fecerunt Barberini*] may, with: changing the name and occasion, be applied to a great many others; that they have been guilty of those cruelties against Christians, upon account of difference in religion, which the most barbarous nations never exercised upon one another.

I have done with the observations and the text; and shall I now need to make any application of what hath been said to the occasion of this day? The thing applies itself; since the horrid design of this day was undertaken and carried on upon the same pretences and principles, upon which the Jews persecuted the disciples of our Lord, and much in the same method; for they first thundered out an excommunication against them, and then took it for granted, that it would be an acceptable sacrifice to God to destroy them.

I will not go about to aggravate the conspiracy of this day—it is past my skill; nor will I extend the blame and guilt of it any farther than the plain evidence and reason of the thing

529

530

does enforce. It is a thing so scandalous to human nature, and so great a reflection upon any church and religion, to be accessory to the contriving or countenancing of any such design, that I am very well contented that it should be confined to as narrow a compass as may be, and none esteemed guilty of it but those that were openly in it, or have since endeavoured to excuse it. All that we desire of others, is, that they would declare their hearty detestation of such abominable practices, and be as good as their word, and that they would not account it a service and sacrifice to God, to destroy all that cannot be of their mind.

So that in the inference from all this discourse, in short, shall be this, that men should take great care to inform their consciences aright, and to govern them by the plain rules of good and evil, the law of God written upon our hearts, and revealed in his word, which forbids such practices as I have been speaking of, as clearly as the sun shines at noon-day; and that we would always be afraid to do a bad thing, though gilded over with never so glorious colours, and specious pretences of zeal for God and his truth. For a man may do a thing with an honest mind, and for a religious end, and be commissioned and countenanced (as St. Paul was) by them who take themselves to be the only true church in the world, and yet at last prove to have been all the while a blasphemer and a murderer, and the greatest of sinners; for none of these pretences are sufficient to warrant and sanctify a wicked action: before this can be done, the immutable nature of good and evil must be changed.

I will conclude all with that gentle reproof of our blessed Saviour to his disciples, when their zeal for him had transported them to make that cruel request to him, that he would (as Elias had done upon a like occasion) call for fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans: “ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of man came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them;” hereby declaring to us the true temper and spirit of Christianity, and that they that act contrary to it, are ignorant of the Christian religion: “ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of man came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”



SERMON LXXXIII.

[Preached on the 29th of May, 1693.]

THE DUTY AND REASON OF PRAYING FOR GOVERNORS.

I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications and giving of thanks be made for all men: for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.—1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

I NEED not tell any here, that this day is appointed, by authority, for an anniversary solemnity, in a grateful commemoration of the great mercy of God to these nations, in putting an end to the intestine wars and confusions of many years, in restoring to us our own ancient government and laws, and in bringing home, as upon this day, the rightful heir of these kingdoms, to the crown and throne of his fathers: and though the glory of this day hath been not a little sullied and obscured by many things which have happened since that time, fitter now to be buried in silence and oblivion, than to be mentioned and raked up; yet it hath pleased God, in scattering those black clouds, which not long since hung over us, to restore this day to its first lustre and brightness; so that we may now with great joy look back upon it, as designed by the wise providence of God, to make way for the happiness which we now enjoy under their present majesties, by whom, under God, we have been delivered from that terrible and imminent danger which threatened our religion and laws, and the very constitution itself of our ancient government. And to this occasion, no kind of argument can be more proper and suitable than that which the text affords to our consideration, in this injunction of St. Paul to Timothy, to take care that in the public worship of God, supplications and thanksgivings be put up to God, “for kings, and all that are in authority.” “I exhort, therefore,” &c.

In which words there are four things considerable.

First, The duty here enjoined, which is prayer, -expressed to us in several words, which seem to denote the several kinds or parts of prayer; “I exhort, therefore, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men: for kings, and for all that are in authority,” &c. Some of these words are of a very near signification; and yet there seems some difference betwixt them, most probably this:

1. By δειήσεις, which we render supplications, is probably meant that part or kind of prayer, wherein we supplicate God for the pardon of our sins, and for the averting and removing of evils, whether temporal or spiritual, from ourselves or others.

2. By προσευχάς, which we render prayers, seem to be meant petitions for blessings and good things from God; and these are most properly called prayers.

3. By ἐντεύξεις, seems to be particularly meant pleadings and intercessions on the behalf of others.



4. By εὐχαριστίας, is certainly intended praise and thanksgivings to God, for his blessings and goodness to ourselves and others. This seems to be the difference between them, which, whether it be exactly so or not, is not very material, since these are unquestionably the several kinds or parts of prayer. All these several sorts of prayer, St. Chrysostom, in his comment upon this text, tells us, were publicly used in his time, in the daily service of the church: “This (says he) all communicants do know is done every day, morning and evening; how that we pray for all the world, ‘for kings, and all that are in authority.’”

534

Secondly, For whom we are to pray; in general, “for all men.” Our prayers are one of the greatest and best expressions of our charity, and therefore ought to be as large and extensive as our charity is. We are bound in common charity to love all men, and to wish well to them; but our bare wishes signify nothing, unless we direct them to God, who is able to confer upon them the blessings and good things which we wish to them.

And this is a charity which God hath put into every man’s power, and which the poorest man in the world, as well as the richest, is capable of exercising at all times, and upon all occasions; for the ear of God is open to the prayers of the poor, as well as of the rich, and they are every whit as prevalent with him; nay, the Scripture seems to say, that God hath a more particular regard to the prayers of the poor. So that we may be liberal and bountiful in our prayers to those to whom we are able to give nothing else; and when our hands can not reach to relieve them, we may pour out our hearts to God for them; we may pray for their spiritual and temporal good, and we may praise God for the good which befalls them, though it was out of our power to be any ways instrumental to procure it for them.

Thirdly, For whom we are more especially, and in the first place, to pray; viz. for those who have the greatest and most public influence of all others upon the peace and happiness of mankind, “for kings, and for all that are in authority;” that is, for the supreme magistrate, and for all inferior magistrates, who derive their power and authority from the supreme.

535

Government is necessary to the welfare of mankind, because it is the great band of human society, the guard of its peace, and the security of every man’s person and property; and, therefore, we are concerned, as much as is possible, both to pray for our governors, and to bless God for them; because without them we should be in a most wretched condition. Mankind would be unavoidably miserable without government; human society would presently disband, and all things would run into confusion. It is a remarkable saying of one of the Jewish masters, “pray for the happiness of the kingdom or government; for if it were not for the fear of that, men would devour one another alive.” And Josephus tells us, that “when the Jews were made subject to the Romans (though it was by conquest) twice a day they offered up sacrifices for the life and safety of the emperor.” And this was very agreeable to what God had commanded that people by his prophet, in a much like case, when the Jews were conquered by the King of Babylon, and carried away captives ([Jer. xxix. 7.](#)) “Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the

Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.” And surely the reason is much stronger why we should pray for our natural princes and governors. I come now to the

Fourth and last thing considered in the text, and which I principally design to speak to; namely, the reason or argument which the apostle uses, to engage us to pray for our princes, and for all that are in authority; “that we may live a quiet and peace able life, in all godliness and honesty.” The manifold benefits and advantages which redound to us from our governors, is a sufficient argument why we should pray to God for them, and praise him likewise for so great a blessing, and that in the first place: “I exhort, therefore, first of all,” (saith the apostle) &c. Now the apostle here in the text expresseth two great advantages of government, which upon the matter do comprehend all the rest.

1. That by government we are secured in our civil rights and interests, in the quiet and peaceable possession of what is our own.

2. That we may thereby be protected in the free practice and exercise of religion and virtue.

These are the two greatest and most desirable things to man; and neither of these can be had without government. I shall briefly consider these two particulars, and then endeavour to shew, what obligation the consideration of them lays upon us, both to pray to God in the behalf of our princes and governors, and likewise to praise God for them: and then I shall conclude all with a brief application of this whole discourse to the solemn occasion of this day.

First, I shall begin with the benefits and advantages of government mentioned in the text, namely, these two:

1. That by it we are secured in our civil rights and interests, in the quiet and peaceable possession of what is our own.

Without government there could be no such thing as property in any thing beyond our own persons; for nothing but laws can make property, and laws are the effect of government and authority: nay, without government, we have no security of our persons and lives, much less of any thing that be longs to us, and is at present in our possession. Were we not protected by Jaws (which are the effect of government) we could have no safety, no quiet enjoyment of any thing; but every man must be perpetually upon his guard against all the world, and exposed to continual violence and injuries from those, who are too many and too strong for him; so that all our quiet and security from fear and danger, from the fraud and oppression of those who are more crafty and powerful than ourselves, from end less confusions and distractions, and from a state of perpetual feud and war with all mankind, is entirely due and owing to civil government.

And this alone is so unspeakable a benefit, that without it, men, of all creatures, would be the most miserable; because all that wit and sagacity, all that cunning and contrivance, which mankind hath above the brute creatures, would but enable them to do so much the

536

537

more mischief to one another, and to devise and find out more powerful and effectual means and instruments to harm and destroy one another.

In short, that we live, and that we live well, in any tolerable condition either of safety or plenty, and that we are able to call any thing our own for one day, or for one hour; that we are not in perpetual terror and apprehension of mortal dangers, and that we are at any time free from the invasion of what we at present possess, by the fraud and force of others, is solely the effect of this great blessing and Divine appointment of government, to preserve the peace of human society, and by wise and wholesome laws, to tie up men's hands from mutual injuries and violence. Upon this all the comfort and all the security of human laws does depend. From hence it comes to pass (that, as the Scripture expresseth it,) we may "sit down every man under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree," and that there shall be none "to make us afraid." So that if security is necessary to the comfort and happiness of mankind; then government is so too: for without this, the societies of men would presently dissolve and fall in pieces, and all things would run into confusion and disorder.

2. Another great benefit which may reasonably be expected from government (though it does not always so happen) is, that men are protected by it in the free exercise and practice of religion and virtue. Therefore we should pray "for kings, and for all that are in authority, (says the apostle) that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty;" that is, in the practice of piety and devotion towards God; of sobriety and temperance in regard to ourselves, and of justice and charity toward all men.

It is true, indeed, (and so the apostles and first Christians found it by experience) that the edge and authority of laws may be, and sometimes is, turned upon the true religion, and the sincere professors of it: but even then, though good men may receive great harms and injuries from persecuting princes and governors \;as the primitive Christians did from several of the Roman emperors); yet then it so happens, that good men have some considerable benefit and protection from the civil government and laws, being for the most part preserved from the fury and rage of the multitude; so that, though particular persons undergo the trial of cruel sufferings, yet much greater numbers do escape and are preserved.

And which is very considerable in this matter, against several of the main and essential parts of religion, there never were any human laws made; as against inward love, honour and reverence of Almighty God, and the worshipping him in our hearts, and in secret; of this great part of religion human laws can make no cognizance: nay, farther yet, against humility and meekness, against modesty and patience, against temperance and chastity, against peaceableness and obedience to government, against justice and gratitude, against charity and forgiveness of injuries, against these and such-like virtues, the apostle has told us, there is no law. Against the practice of these (without some of which government could not possibly subsist) no persecution was ever raised, no, not by the worst of governors! on

538

539

the contrary, in the practice of these virtues, good men have been in all ages and times protected by law.

It is true, indeed, that good men have many times been grievously persecuted by the civil government and authority, for the external profession of revealed religion; which was the case of the Christians at that time, when the apostle commanded them to pray for kings, and all that were in authority; that, under their protection, they might lead quiet and peaceable lives, “in all godliness and honesty.” St. Paul knew very well, when he gave this injunction to them, that supplications and prayers be made for kings, “and for all that are in authority,” that the powers of the world did not at that time favour Christianity; but he knew, likewise, that government was necessary to the happiness of mankind, and that Christians, even in that state of persecution, did enjoy many considerable benefits and advantages by it, so that they were not perpetually exposed to popular rage and cruelty, and the violence of wicked and unreasonable men; which would not only have hindered the progress of Christianity, but would in a short time have endangered the extinguishing of it. Besides that, by the favour and protection of government, the Christians had many considerable intervals of peace and ease, which gave Christianity a breathing time, and opportunity to recover itself; and though the secular authority did for a long time discountenance Christianity, and keep it under hatches; that was but an accidental effect and abuse of government, and obedience was still due, and prayers for it so much the more necessary, yea, and thanksgivings to God for it very reasonable, upon account of the common benefits and advantages of it to human society.

Besides that, Christians did hope and believe, that the civil government might in time be gained to give its countenance and assistance to Christianity, and that kings and princes might become nursing fathers to the church, as was expressly foretold by the prophets, and afterwards in God’s due time was remarkably accomplished. In the mean time, Christians were patiently to obey and suffer, in expectation of those glorious rewards in another world, which were promised to their faith and patience; and to pray for the powers that persecuted them, that they also might be brought to the acknowledgment of the truth, and might use that power which God had committed to them for the protection of truth and innocency, and for the continuance and support of the true religion; which, blessed be God, was afterwards the case of Christianity for several ages. I proceed, in the

Second place, To shew what obligation the consideration of the mighty benefits and advantages of government lays upon us, both to pray to God on the behalf of princes and governors, and likewise to praise God for them.

Because in their welfare and prosperity the public peace and happiness doth chiefly consist, and in the public good consists the good of particular persons; and, above all, the piety and goodness of princes and magistrates (especially those who are in the highest place of authority) have a general good influence upon the manners of men, both for the discour-

540

541

tenancing of wickedness and vice, and for the encouragement of religion and virtue, which are the main pillars and foundation of public peace and prosperity. A king sitting “in the throne of judgment (saith Solomon, [Prov. xx. 8.](#)) scattereth away all evil with his eyes.” The pattern of a religious and good prince is a living law to his subjects, and more than the example of ten thousand others, to mould and fashion the manners of the people to a conformity to it.

Besides that, there is (as one expresseth it) a kind of moral connexion and communication of evil and of guilt betwixt princes and people, so that they are many times mutually rewarded for the virtues and good actions, and punished for the sins and faults, of one another. Of which proceedings of the Divine justice towards the people of Israel, there are many remarkable instances in Scripture, where God rewarded the piety of good princes with great blessings upon their people, and punished the personal faults of their kings with public judgments upon the whole nation. So that in truth it is the greatest kindness and charity to ourselves, to pray for our princes and governors; because our welfare is involved in theirs, and we suffer not only in all the misfortunes and calamities which befall them, but many times upon account of their personal faults and miscarriages. *Quicquid delirant reges, plectuntur achivi*—the extravagances of princes are punished in the misfortunes of their subjects. Thus David (otherwise a very good king) sinned in numbering the people, and the plague fell upon them; he was punished in the calamity of his people. And this was in no wise unjust, because there are always sins enough in any nation to deserve punishment, and God may take what occasion he pleases, to send his judgments upon them that deserve them; for princes and people make but one civil and political body, and what part of it soever is punished, the other suffers. And this is the true ground and reason of the communication of punishments betwixt princes and people.

Another consideration which should engage us to pray for those that are in authority, is, that we reap the great benefit of their care, and pains, and vigilancy for us—under their shadow we are safe. Our innocency and our rights are protected by their power and laws, and by the just punishments which they inflict upon evil-doers, and upon those who go about to violate our rights in any kind; so that we ought to pray and to praise God for them, as our great benefactors, and the chief instruments of our security and welfare; and therefore not only in duty, but in justice and gratitude, we are bound to wish all good to them, and to intercede with God for them, for the peace and prosperity of their government, and to bless God on their behalf: yea, we ought to do this out of love to ourselves; because their good and prosperity is our's, their goodness and righteousness, their personal piety and virtues extend to us, and have a mighty influence upon us, to excite and encourage us to follow their good example, and to “go and do likewise.”

And we ought likewise to do this out of charity and compassion to our princes and governors, whose condition is in truth rather to be pitied and envied, and whose high place

542

543

and dignity is much more to be dreaded than desired by a wise man, considering how heavy a burden they sustain, what dangers they are continually exposed to, what cares, and troubles, and censures, they daily undergo for our safety and ease. So that, whatever ambitious and inconsiderate men may think, wise men do certainly know and find by experience, that to discharge with care and faithfulness all the parts of a good governor, is a very difficult and troublesome province. Inferior magistrates find care and trouble enough, in that small share and part of it which they sustain; and, if so, then certainly the care and concernment of the whole must needs be a heavy burden indeed; and what abilities are sufficient for it what shoulders are strong enough to stand under it?

And as upon this account they have the greatest need of our prayers for God's direction and assistance in the discharge of their high office, so likewise for his powerful grace to preserve them from sin and evil, in the midst of those manifold temptations to which they are continually exposed, in appearance much beyond other men, from the height of their condition, to pride and insolency, to injustice and oppression; from the abundance of all things, which minister to luxury and excess, and from the officious servility of parasites and flatterers, who soothe them in their faults, and humour them in their passions, and comply with their corrupt and vicious inclinations, and are always ready at hand, and for ward instruments to execute their commands, and to serve their lusts and vices.

And, as princes greatly need our prayers upon these accounts; so it is just matter of praise and thankfulness to God, when a nation hath wise, just, and good princes, who lay to heart the interest of their people, and endeavour by all the wise methods and honest arts of government, effectually to procure it; who, by their authority and due execution of the law, do discountenance, and, as much as in them lies, restrain wickedness and vice; and by their own example encourage virtue and piety in their subjects; and thereby invite, and even provoke them to the like practices: the life of a good prince is a kind of public censure of ill manners, and reproof of wicked practices. And I do not know, whether there be a more delightful sight on this side heaven, than to see those, who are in eminent place and power, even if they might do whatever they would, yet continually choosing to do what they ought; as if their power were so far from being a temptation to them to do evil, that, on the contrary, the consideration of it is one of the best and strongest arguments to restrain them from it.

Weak minds are apt to measure their liberty by their power, and to think, that the higher and greater they are, so much the greater privilege they have to be more extravagantly bad than others; but, if the matter be really considered, the argument runs the other way; and he that reasons wisely, will certainly conclude with Tully—*In maxima quaque fortuna minimum licere*: that “they who are in the highest station and greatest power, have, of all others, the least liberty to do what they list.” Their power, supposing it never so uncontrollable and unaccountable, would be so far from being in reason a temptation to them to do what they ought not, that in truth it would set them above the temptation of doing any ill thing;

544

545

because they would stand in awe of no body, and there would be nothing that could hinder them from doing what is best, if they had a mind to it; and every one ought to have such a mind: and nothing can be more misbecoming, and more directly contrary to the nature of their office, and the power wherewith they are entrusted, than to give an example of breaking those laws, which they are to see put in execution.

God himself, because he hath all power, is therefore all goodness, and is therefore “holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works,” according to the reasoning of the author of the book of Wisdom, who argues thus with God: “It is not (says he) agreeable with thy power to condemn him that hath not deserved to be punished;” that is, it is not agreeable with infinite power, to do any thing that is unjust; “for thy power (saith he to God) is the beginning of righteousness, and because thou art the Lord of all, it maketh thee to be gracious unto all.” Infinite power is the foundation and principle of goodness and righteousness, and all-powerful being is good and righteous, not only from choice, but from a necessity of nature.

And this is the true ground and reason of that saying of St. James, that “God cannot be tempted with evil,” because his infinite power sets him above all temptation to it: for what reason can be imagined, why he that hath all power, shall have any inclination to be otherwise than good? What can tempt him thereto, since he that hath all power can neither have any hopes of being greater than he is, nor any fear of becoming less? And all temptation is founded either in hope or fear; and where neither of these can have any place, there can be no occasion, no possible motive or temptation to evil; for to be evil, and to do evil, is always an effect of weakness and want of power.

The sum of what I have said upon this argument, and the design indeed of it, is to shew, that the greater power and authority any one hath, the less liberty he hath to do any thing that is bad. And I have been the larger upon this, because I would fain imprint upon the minds of persons, whom the providence of God hath invested with great power and authority, that, as they have great opportunities of doing more good than others, so they have greater reason, and more advantages of doing it, and are more inexcusable if they do any thing that is bad; not only because their actions are of a more public influence and observation; but because their temptations to evil, how great soever they may seem to be, are in truth and reality much less than other men s. Happy are those princes that wisely consider this, and make their power and authority over others an argument to be so much better themselves, and to do so much more good to others; and because they are less subject to the coercive power of law, do for that reason think themselves so much the more obliged to be a law to themselves. Blessed be God for the happiness which we enjoy in this respect; and let us earnestly beseech him, that he would be pleased to bestow such a plentiful measure of his grace and Holy Spirit on our most gracious king and queen, as may effectually both engage and enable them to use their power to the best purposes for the public good.

546

547

And thus I have briefly gone over, and explained to you, the several particulars in the text: the duty of prayer here enjoined; for whom we are to pray, in general for all men; and for whom more especially, and, in the first place, “for kings, and all that are in authority;” and upon what considerations we are to pray for them; and to praise God in their behalf, because of the great benefits we receive by them, and because, both in respect of the dangers and difficulties of their condition, they stand in need of our prayers above other men; besides that in praying for their welfare and prosperity, we pray for our own peace and happiness.

And now to apply this to ourselves, and to the occasion of this day. By all that hath been said, we cannot but be convinced what cause we have to bless God for that happy government which we live under, that excellent constitution, under the gentle influences whereof we enjoy more liberty, more plenty, and more security from all manner of injury and oppression, than any nation this day on the face of the earth. Therefore, with what thankfulness should we this day commemorate the happy restoration of this government to us, after the miserable distractions and confusions of twenty years, by the restoration and return of our banished sovereign, in so peaceable, and yet so wonderful a manner, that a remembrance of it, even at this distance, is almost still matter of amazement to us!

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who alone doth wondrous things.”

And with our joyful praises let us join our most devout and fervent prayers to Almighty God, for the king’s and queen’s majesties, and for all that are in authority. And I may truly say, that there was hardly ever greater reason and occasion for it, from both our distractions at home, and our dangers from abroad; never was there greater need of our earnest supplications and prayers, than at this time, when our armies and fleets are in motion, and when God seems already to have given us some earnest of good success:—blessed be his great and glorious name!

We have indeed a great army, and a more powerful fleet, than ever this nation sent forth; but unless God be on our side, and favour our cause, in vain are all our preparations; for whenever his providence is pleased to interpose, “by strength shall no man prevail.” Have we not reason then to cry mightily unto God, when the only strength of the nation is at stake, when our sins and provocations are so many and great, and there lies so heavy a load of guilt upon us? when the person of his sacred majesty is exposed to so much hazard, not only in the high places of the field, but from the restless attempts of the malicious and implacable enemies of our peace and religion, that he would be graciously pleased to go forth with our armies and fleets, and not remember our iniquities against us, but save us for his mercies sake?

We are too apt to murmur and complain of miscarriages, and the ill management of affairs; but surely the best thing we can do, and that which best becomes us, is to look forward, and to turn our censures of our governors and their actions into humble supplications to God in their behalf, and in behalf of the whole nation; “that he would be pleased to turn us

every one from the evil of our ways, that he may return to us, and have mercy on us, that so iniquity may not be our ruin; that he may rejoice over us to do us good, and may at last think thoughts of peace towards us, thoughts of good and not of evil, to give us an expected end of our troubles.”

Let us then betake ourselves to the proper work of this day, hearty prayers and thanksgivings to Almighty God for the king and queen, and for all that are in authority; that as he hath been pleased by a wonderful providence to rescue us from the imminent danger we were in, and from all our fears, by the happy advancement of their majesties to the throne of these kingdoms; so he would of his infinite goodness still preserve and continue to us this light of our eyes, and breath of our nostrils, princes of that great clemency and goodness, which render them the true representatives of God upon earth, and the most gracious governors of men.

And let us earnestly beseech him, that he would confirm and strengthen them in all goodness, and make them wise as angels of God, to discern betwixt good and evil, that they may know how to go in and out before this great people; that he would give them the united affections of their people, and a heart to study and seek their good all the days of their lives.

And, finally, That he would be pleased to continue so great a blessing to us, and to grant them a long and prosperous reign over us: and that their posterity in this royal family may endure for ever, and their throne as the days of heaven; that under them the people of these nations, we and the generations to come, may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty; for his mercies sake in Jesus Christ, who is King of kings, and Lord of lords; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.



SERMON LXXXIV.

[Preached in the Chapel of Lambeth-house on Christmas-day, 1691.]

THE LOVE OF GOD TO MEN IN THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST.

In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.—John iv. 9.

THESE words contain a clear and evident demonstration of the love of God to us; “in this was manifested the love of God towards us;” that is, by this it plainly appears, that God had a mighty love for us, that he “sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” In which we may consider this threefold evidence of God’s love to mankind.

I. That he should be pleased to take our case into consideration, and to concern himself for our happiness.

II. That he should design so great a benefit to us, which is here expressed by life; “that we might live through him.”

III. That he was pleased to use such a means for the obtaining and procuring of this benefit for us; he “sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” Each of these singly is a great evidence of God’s love to us; much more all of them together.

I. It is a great evidence of the love of God to mankind, that he was pleased to take our case into consideration, and to concern himself for our happiness. Nothing does more commend an act of kindness, than if there be great condescension in it. We use to value a small favour, if it be done to us by one that is far above us, more than a far greater done to us by a mean and inconsiderable person. This made David to break out into such admiration, when he considered the ordinary providence of God towards mankind. “Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him; or the son of man, that thou shouldest consider him!” This is a wonderful condescension, indeed, for God to be mindful of man!

At the best we are but his creatures, and upon that very account at an infinite distance from him; so that were not he infinitely good, he would not be concerned for us, who are so infinitely beneath the consideration of his love and pity. Neither are we of the highest rank of creatures; we are much below the angels, as to the excellency and perfection of our beings; so that if God had not had a peculiar pity and regard to the sons of men, he might have placed his affection and care upon a much nobler order of creatures than we are, and so much the more miserable, because they fell from a higher step of happiness—I mean the lost angels; but yet, for reasons best known to his infinite wisdom, God passed by them, and was pleased to consider us. This the apostle to the Hebrews takes notice of, as an argument of God’s peculiar and extraordinary love to mankind, that “he sent his Son, not to take upon him the nature of angels, but of the seed of Abraham.”

Now that he, who is far above us, and after that we by wilful transgression had lost ourselves, had no obligation to take care of us, but what his own goodness laid upon him; that he should concern himself so much for us, and be so solicitous for our recovery, this is a great evidence of his kindness and good-will to us, and cannot be imagined to proceed from any other cause.



II. Another evidence of God's great love to us is, that he was pleased to design so great a benefit for us. This the Scripture expresseth to us by life; and it is usual in Scripture to express the best and most desirable things by life; because, as it is one of the greatest blessings, so it is the foundation of all other enjoyments: and therefore the apostle useth but this one word to express to us all the blessings and benefits of Christ's coming into the world; "God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."

And this expression is very proper to our case; because life signifies the reparation of all that which was lost by the fall of man. For man, by his wilful degeneracy and apostacy from God, is sunk into a state of sin and misery, both which the Scripture is wont to express by death. In respect of our sinful state we are spiritually dead; and in respect of the punishment and misery due to us for our sins, we are judicially dead, dead in law; for "the wages of sin is death." Now God hath sent his Son into the world, that in both these respects "we might live through him."

1. We were spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins, as the apostle speaks: ([Eph. ii. 1, 2.](#)) "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in times past ye walked, according to the course of this world." Every wicked man, though in a natural sense he be alive, yet in a moral sense he is dead. So the apostle, speaking of those who live in sinful lusts and pleasures, says of them that "they are dead while they live." ([1 Tim. v. 6.](#)) What corrupt humours are to the body, that sin is to the soul their disease and their death. Now God sent his Son to deliver us from their death, by renewing our nature, and mortifying our lusts; by restoring us to the life of grace and holiness, and "destroying the body of sin in us, that henceforth we should not serve sin." And that this is a great argument of the mighty love of God to us, the apostle tells us: ([Eph. ii. 4, 5.](#)) "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." It is an argument of the riches of God's mercy, and of his great love to us, to recover us out of this sad and deplorable case. It is a kindness infinitely greater than to redeem us from the most wretched slavery, or to rescue us from the most dreadful and cruel temporal death; and yet we should value this as a favour and benefit, that could never be sufficiently acknowledged: but God hath sent his Son to deliver us from a worse bondage, and a more dreadful kind of death; so that well might the apostle ascribe this great deliverance of mankind from the slavery of our lusts, and the death of sin, to the boundless mercy and love of God to us. "God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, hath quickened us together with Christ, even when we were dead in sins:" when our case was as



desperate as could well be imagined; then was God pleased to undertake this great cure, and to provide such a remedy, as cannot fail to be effectual for our recovery, if we will but make use of it.

2. We were likewise judicially dead in law, being condemned by the just sentence of it. So soon as ever we sinned, eternal death was by the sentence of God's law become our due portion and reward; and this being our case, God, in tender commiseration and pity to mankind, was pleased to send his Son into the world, to interpose between the justice of God and the demerits of men; and by reversing the sentence that was gone out against us, and procuring a pardon for us, to rescue us from the misery of eternal death; and not only so, but, upon the condition of faith and repentance, of obedience and a holy life, to bestow eternal life upon us; and by this means to restore us to a better condition than that from which we were fallen, and to advance us to a happiness greater than that of innocence.

And was not this great love, to design and provide so great a benefit and blessing for us; "to send his Son Jesus to bless us, in turning away every one of us from our iniquities?" Our blessed Saviour, who came from the bosom of his Father, and knew his tender affection and compassion to mankind, speaks of this as a most wonderful and unparalleled expression of his love to us: ([John iii. 16.](#)) "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son." "God so loved the world," so greatly, so strangely, so beyond our biggest hopes, nay, so contrary to all reasonable expectations, as to send his only-begotten Son to seek and to save the sinful sons of men.

If it had only in general been declared to us, that God was about to send his Son into the world upon some great design, and been left to us to conjecture what his errand and business should be; how would this have alarmed the guilty consciences of sinful men, and filled them with infinite jealousies and suspicion, with fearful expectations of wrath and fiery indignation to consume them? For considering the great wickedness and degeneracy of mankind, what could we have thought, but that surely God was sending his Son upon a design of vengeance to chastise a sinful world, to vindicate the honour of his despised laws, and to revenge the multiplied affronts which had been offered to the highest Majesty of heaven, by his pitiful and ungrateful creatures? Our own guilt would have been very apt to have filled us with such imaginations as these, that in all likelihood the Son of God was coming to judgment, to call the wicked world to an account, to proceed against his Father's rebels, to pass sentence upon them, and to execute the vengeance which they had deserved. This we might justly have dreaded; and, indeed, considering our case, how ill we have deserved at God's hands, and how highly we have provoked him; what other weighty matter could we hope for?

But the goodness of God hath strangely outdone our hopes, and deceived our expectation; so it follows in the next words, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world" (intimating that this we might justly have imagined and feared), but upon a quite contrary

555

556

design, “that through him the world might be saved.” What a surprise of kindness is here! that, instead of “sending his Son to condemn us,” he should “send him into the world to save us;” to rescue us from the jaws of death and of hell, from that eternal and intolerable misery which we had incurred and deserved!

And if he had proceeded no farther, this had been wonderful mercy and kindness: but his love stopped not here; it was not contented to spare us and free us from misery, but was restless till it had found out a way to bring us to happiness; for “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,” not only “that whosoever believes in him might not perish,” but “might have everlasting life.” This is the second evidence of God’s great love to us, the greatness of the blessing and benefit which he hath designed and provided for us, “that we might live through him;” not only be delivered from spiritual and eternal death, but be made partakers of eternal life.

III. The last evidence of God’s great love to us, which I mentioned, was this, that God was pleased to use such a means, for the obtaining and procuring of this great blessing and benefit; “he sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” And this will appear to be great love indeed, if we consider these four things:

1. The person whom he was pleased to employ upon this design; “he sent his only-begotten Son.”
2. How much he abased him, in order to the effecting and accomplishing of this design, implied in these words, “he sent him into the world.”
3. If we consider to whom he was sent, to the world. And,
4. That he did all this voluntarily and freely, out of his mere pity and goodness; not constrained hereto by any necessity, not prevailed upon by any application or importunity of ours, nor obliged by any benefit or kindness from us.

1. Let us consider the person whom God was pleased to employ in this design, “he sent his only-begotten Son;” no less person than his own Son, and no less dear to him than “his only-begotten Son.”

(1.) No less person than his own Son; and the dignity of the person that was employed in our behalf, doth strangely heighten and set off the kindness. What an endearment is it of the mercy of our redemption, that God was pleased to employ upon this design no meaner person than his own Son, his begotten Son; so he is called in the text, “his Son,” in so peculiar a manner as no creature is, or can be; the creatures below man are called the works of God, but never his children; the angels are in Scripture called the sons of God; and Adam likewise is called the son of God, because God made him after his own image and likeness in holiness and righteousness, and in his dominion and sovereignty over the creatures below him; but this title of “begotten Son of God” was never given to any of the creatures, man or angel; “for unto which of the angels said he, at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?” as the apostle reasons, ([Heb. i. 5.](#)) He must be a great person indeed to

whom this title belongs, of “the begotten Son of God;” and it must; be a mighty love indeed which moved God to employ so great a person, on the behalf of so pitiful and wretched creatures as we are. It had been a mighty condescension for God to treat with us at all; but that no less person than his own Son should be the ambassador, is an astonishing regard of Heaven to poor sinful dust and ashes.

(2.) The person was as dear to God as he was great; he was “his only-begotten Son.” It had been a great instance of Abraham’s love and obedience to God, to have sacrificed a son at his command; but this circumstance makes it much greater, that it was his only son: “Hereby I know that thou fearest God (says the angel), since thou hast not withheld thy soil, thine only son from me.” This is a demonstration that God loved us at a stupendous rate, when he would send “his only-begotten Son” into the world for us.

Before this, God had tried several ways with mankind, and employed several messengers to us; sometimes he sent his angels, and many times his servants the prophets; but in these last days he hath sent his Son* He had many more servants to have employed upon this message, but he had but one Son; and rather than mankind should be ruined and lost, he would send him. Such was the love of God towards us, that rather than our recovery should not be effected, he would employ in this work the greatest and dearest person to him both in heaven and earth, “his only-begotten Son:” “in this was the love of God manifested, that he sent his only-begotten Son, that we might live through him.”

2. Let us consider, how much this glorious and excellent person was abased in order to the effecting and accomplishing of this design, which is here expressed by sending him into the world; and this comprehends his incarnation, with all the mean and abasing circumstances of it. This the apostle declares fully to us: ([Phil. ii. 6, 7.](#)) though “he was in the form of God (that is, truly and really God), yet he made himself of no reputation,” ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσε, “he emptied himself;” was contented to be strangely lessened and diminished, and took upon him the form of a servant, or slave, and was made in the likeness of men; that is, did really assume human nature. Here was an abasement, indeed, for God to become man; for “the only-begotten Son of God to take upon him the form of a servant, and to become obedient to death, even the death of the cross,” which was the death of slaves and infamous malefactors! Here was love, indeed, that God was willing that his own dear Son should be thus obscured and diminished, and become so mean and so miserable for our sakes: that he should not only stoop to be made man and to dwell among us, but that he should likewise submit to the infirmities of our nature, and to be made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted; that he should be contented to bear so many affronts and indignities from perverse and unthankful men, and to endure such contradiction of sinners against himself; that “he, who was the brightness of his Father’s glory,” should be despised and rejected of men, “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs,” and rather than we should perish, should put himself into our place and be contented to suffer and die for us; and that God should be

559

560

willing that all this should be done to his only Son to save sinners. What greater testimony could he give of his love to us?

3. Let us consider, farther, to whom he was sent, which is also implied in these words: “he sent his Son into the world;” into a wicked world, that was altogether unworthy of him; and an ungrateful world, that did most unworthily use him.

First, Into a wicked world, that was altogether unworthy of him, that had deserved no such kindness at his hands. For what were we, that God should send such a person amongst us, that he should make his Son stoop so low, as to dwell in our nature and to become one of us? We were rebels and enemies, enemies to God by evil works, up in arms against heaven, and at open defiance with God our Maker. When the world was in this posture of enmity and hostility against God; then he sent his Son to treat with us, and to offer us peace. What can more commend the love of God than this, that he should shew such kindness to us when we were sinners and enemies? Herein “God hath commended his love towards us;” (says the apostle, [Rom. v. 8.](#)) in that “whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Secondly, Into an ungrateful world that did most unworthily use him, that gave no becoming entertainment to him (“the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests; but the Son of man had not where to lay his head”); that heaped all manner of contumelies and indignities upon him, that persecuted him all his life, and at last put him to a most painful and shameful death; in a word, that was so far from receiving him as the Son of God, that they did not treat him with common humanity, and like one of the sons of men.

4. He did all this voluntarily and freely; God sent his Son into the world, *mero motu*, of his own mere grace and goodness, moved by nothing but his own bowels, and the consideration of our misery; not overpowered by any force; (for what could offer violence to him “to whom all power belongs?”) not constrained by any necessity, for he had been happy, though we had remained for ever miserable; he might have chosen other objects of his love and pity, and have left us involved in that misery which we had wilfully brought upon ourselves.

Nor was he prevailed upon by any application from us, or importunity of ours to do this for us. Had we been left to have contrived the way of our recovery, this which God hath done for us could never have entered into the heart of man to have imagined, much less to have desired it at his hands. If the way of our salvation had been put into the hands of our own counsel and choice, how could we have been so impudent as to have begged of God that his only Son might descend from heaven and “become man,” be poor, despised, and miserable for our sakes? God may stoop as low as he pleaseth, being secure of his own majesty and greatness; but it had been a boldness in us, not far from blasphemy, to have desired of him to condescend to such a submission.

Nor, lastly, was he pre-obliged by any kindness or benefit from us; so far from that, that we had given him all possible provocation to the contrary, and had reason to expect the effect

of his heaviest displeasure: and yet, though he was the *pars laesa*, the party that had been disobliged and injured; though we were first in the offence and provocation, he was pleased to make the first overtures of peace and reconciliation; and though it was wholly our concernment and not his, yet he was pleased to condescend so far, to our perverseness and obstinacy, as to send his Son to us, and to beseech us to be reconciled.

Now “herein” (says the apostle, immediately after the text), “herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Herein is the love of God manifested, that the kindness began on his part, and not on ours; that being neither obliged nor desired by us, he did freely, and of his own accord, “send his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.”

What no remains but to apply this to ourselves?

1. Let us propound to ourselves the love of God for our pattern and example. This is the inference which the apostle makes in the next verse but one after the text: “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” One would have thought the inference should have been, if God so loved us, that we ought also to love him. But the apostle doth not speak so much of the affection as the effect of love; and his meaning is, if God hath bestowed such benefits upon us, we ought, in imitation of him, to be kind and beneficial one to another. Not but that we ought to “love God with all our hearts, and souls, and strength;” but in this sense we are not capable of it. We cannot be beneficial to him; because he is self-sufficient, and stands in need of nothing; and therefore the apostle adds this as a reason why he does not exhort men to love God, but one another: “No man hath seen God at any time;” he is not sensible to us, and therefore none of these sensible things can signify any thing to him. But he hath friends and relations here in the world, who are capable of the sensible effects of our love, and to whom we may shew kindness for his sake; we cannot be beneficial to God, but we may testify our love to him, by our kindness and charity to men, who are made after the image of God; and if we see any one miserable, that is consideration enough to move our charity. There was nothing but this in us to move him to pity us, “when we were in our blood, and no eye pitied us.”

God is a pattern of the most generous kindness and charity. Though he be infinitely above us, yet he thought it not below him to consider our case, and to employ his only Son to save us; he had no obligation to us, no expectation of advantage from us, and can never be in a possibility to stand in need of us; and yet he loved us, and hath conferred the greatest benefits upon us: so that no man can have deserved so ill at our hands, but that, if he be in want, and we in a condition to help him, he ought to come within the compass and consideration of our charity.

And this is the proper season for it, when we commemorate the greatest blessing and benefit that was ever conferred on mankind; “the Son of God sent into the world, on purpose to redeem and save us.” And therefore I cannot but very much commend the custom of



feeding and relieving the poor, more especially at this time, when the poor do usually stand most in need of it, and when we commemorate “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who being rich became poor for our sakes, that we through his poverty might be made rich.”

2. Let us readily comply with the great design of this great love of God to mankind. He hath sent his Son, “that we may live through him.” But though he hath done all this for us, though he hath purchased so great blessings for us, as the pardon of our sins, and power against them, and eternal life and happiness; yet there is something to be done on our parts, to make us partakers of these benefits. God hath not so loved us, as to send his Son into the world, to carry men to heaven whether they will or no; and to rescue those from the slavery of the devil, and the damnation of hell, who are fond of their fetters, and wilfully run themselves upon ruin and destruction. But the Son of God came to offer happiness to us, upon certain terms and conditions, such as are fit for God to propound, and necessary for us to perform, to make us capable of the blessedness which he offers; as namely, “repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;” a sincere and constant endeavour of obedience to the laws and precepts of our holy religion.

These are the terms of the gospel; and “the grace of God which brings salvation,” offers it only upon these terms, that we “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world:” then we may expect the blessed hope. But if we will not submit to these conditions, the Son of God will be no Saviour to us; for he is the author of eternal salvation only to them that obey him. If men will continue in their sins, the redemption wrought by Christ will be of no advantage to them; such as obstinately persist in an impenitent course, *ipsa si velit salus, servare non potest*, “salvation itself cannot save them.”

These are the conditions of our happiness, and if we submit to them we are “heirs of eternal life;” if we refuse, we are “sons of perdition,” eternally lost and undone; for we may assure ourselves, that these are the best and easiest terms that can ever be offered to us, because God sent them by his Son. This is the last effort of the Divine love and goodness, towards the recovery and salvation of men; so the apostle tells us ([Heb. i. 1, 2.](#)), that God, “who, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake to the fathers, by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son;” and if we refuse to hear him, he will speak no more. After this it is not to be expected, that God should make any farther attempts for our recovery; for he can send no greater nor dearer person to us than his own Son; and if we refuse him, whom will we reverence? If after this we still wilfully go on in our sins, “there remains no more sacrifice for sin; but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume us.”

3. With what joy and thankfulness should we commemorate this great love of God to mankind, in sending “his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him!”



This is the proper end of the blessed sacrament, which we are now going to receive, to represent to our minds the incarnation and passion of our dear Lord, by the symbols of his body broken, and by his blood shed for us. With what acknowledgments should we celebrate the memory of this wonderful love, which the Son of God hath shewn to the sons of men; endeavouring to make all the world in love with him, who hath so loved all mankind.

Whenever we see his blood poured forth, and his body broken for us, so moving a sight should raise strange passions in us, of love to our Saviour, and hatred to our sins; and should inspire us with mighty resolutions of service and obedience to him; and whenever the pledges and seals of these benefits are delivered into our hands, the sight of them should at once wound and revive our hearts, and make us cry out, "Lord, how unworthy am I, for whom thou shouldest do and suffer all this! I am overcome by thy love, and can no longer hold out, against the mighty force of such kindness! I render myself to thee, and will serve thee for ever, who hast redeemed me at so dear a rate."

"Now to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain; to God even our Father, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, the first begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth; unto Him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father; to Him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen."

END OF VOL. IV.

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Indexes

Index of Scripture References

Genesis

1 22:1 23:4 24:40 25:27 47:9 49:10 49:10

Exodus

12

Leviticus

27:29

Deuteronomy

34:6

Joshua

24:14 24:15

1 Samuel

2:30

2 Samuel

14:17 14:20

1 Kings

8:39

2 Kings

2:9

1 Chronicles

29:15 29:17

2 Chronicles

24:21

Ezra

10:7 10:8

Job

3:17-19

Psalms

3:20 5:4 15:1-2 19:19 19:19 32:2 34:7 39:12 39:12 39:23 39:23 91:11 91:12

112:6 112:10 139:24 139:24

Proverbs

10:7 12:19 20:8 22:1

Ecclesiastes

4:2 5:4 5:6 7:1

Isaiah

2:2 3:10 3:11 9:6 47:7 47:8 49:6 57:1 57:2 57:2 60:8

Jeremiah

9:2-9 9:8 29:7

Daniel

7:10 10 12:3

Micah

5:5 6:8

Habakkuk

2:3-4

Haggai

2:6 2:6-9 2:7 2:8 2:9 2:21 2:21-22

Zechariah

6:12 9:10

Malachi

3:1 3:1

Matthew

5:10 5:10 5:11 5:11 5:12 5:12 5:12 7:20 8:9 8:10 10:17 10:19 10:28 10:32
10:32-33 10:33 10:37 10:38 13:20 13:21 13:49 13:50 15:22 16:21 16:24 16:24
16:26 18 18:10 18:10 19:29 23:29 24:4 24:14 24:30 24:31 25 25:34

Mark

8:36-37 8:38 8:38 9:43 10:29 10:30 16:17 16:19-20

Luke

2:30 6:22 11:12 11:49-51 12:4 12:4 12:5 12:5 12:33 12:33 14:26 14:27 14:28
15:10 16:9 16:22 16:25

John

1:47 2:17 3:16 3:19 4:9 4:22 8:46 14:6 14:6 14:13 14:13-14 14:14 15:18 15:19
15:20 16:1 16:2 16:23-24 16:26-27 16:33 19:17 20:29

Acts

2:23 3:17 4:18 5:17 5:18 5:28 5:29 7:2 7:23 7:52 8 12:15 12:23 13:45 17:5
17:11 20:20 22:4 24:14 24:15 24:16 26:9 26:9 26:10 26:10-11 26:11

Romans

1:20 3:8 4:17 5:2 5:3 5:8 6:5 6:8 6:17 6:22 8:17 8:18 8:24 8:25 10:2 10:14
10:17 13:12 13:13 13:13 13:14 15:18 15:18 15:19

1 Corinthians

3:3 10:13 10:13 11:1 11:13 11:19 12:31 13:9 13:10 13:12 13:12 15:18 15:41
15:42 15:58 15:58

2 Corinthians

4:10 4:11 4:14 4:14 4:16 4:16 4:17 4:17 4:18 5:1 5:2 5:4 5:6 5:6 5:7 5:7 5:7
5:8 9:2 9:6 11:2 12:11-12 12:20 13:5

Galatians

1:6 1:7 1:8 1:13 1:14 2:12 5:19 5:20 5:21

Ephesians

1:19 2:1 2:2 2:4 2:5 2:14 2:18 4:1 4:14 5:6

Philippians

1:29 2:6 2:7 3:10 3:11 3:17 3:20

Colossians

1:11 2:8 2:18 2:18-19 2:19 3:10 3:17 3:17

1 Thessalonians

3:11 4:14 5:21

2 Thessalonians

1:5 1:6 1:7 1:7 2:1 2:2 2:3 2:7 2:8 2:9 2:15

1 Timothy

1:13 1:13 1:15 2:1-2 2:5-6 2:5-6 2:5-6 4:1 4:2 4:3 4:8-9 4:12 5:6 6:9 6:10

2 Timothy

1:13 2:1 2:3 2:11-12 2:17 2:18 4:6 4:10 4:10

Titus

2:14 3:8 3:8

Hebrews

1:1 1:1 1:2 1:5 1:14 2:1 2:1 2:2 2:2-3 2:3 2:3 2:4 2:4 3:12 4:1 4:14 6:4-6
6:11-12 6:11-12 6:12 7:24-25 7:25 7:27 9:26 10:10 10:12 10:14 10:19 10:19-21
10:20 10:22 10:23 10:23 10:23 10:23 10:23 10:23 10:23 10:23 10:23 10:23 10:25
10:26 10:26 10:26 10:29 10:34 10:35 10:38 10:38 11:1 11:1 11:1-40 11:1-40 11:13
11:13 11:15 11:16 11:17-19 11:24-25 11:35 12:1 12:1 12:2 12:2 12:3 12:18 12:22
12:25 12:26 12:27 12:27 12:28 13:3 13:7 13:7 13:9 13:14 13:17 27

James

1:2 1:12 2:17 3:10 3:13 3:13 3:14 3:15

1 Peter

1:9 1:17 2:11 2:11 2:12 3:14-15 4:12 4:13 4:14 5:12

2 Peter

2:1 2:20-21

1 John

2:1 2:2 2:25 3:8 4:1 4:1 4:1 4:5 4:21 5:10 5:16 5:18 5:18-21

Jude

1:9

Revelation

2:2 3:17 5:11 12:11 13:1-11 13:7 13:10 13:10 13:12 13:12 13:13 13:15 13:17
13:17 13:18 14:6 14:9-10 14:12 14:12 14:12 14:13 14:13 17:1-18 17:9 17:9-10
17:12-14 17:18 18:24 21:4 21:8

Wisdom of Solomon

[2:12](#)

Index of Greek Words and Phrases

εἰ ἀπιστοῦμεν: 240
Ἐὰν ὑποστείληται: 114 114
Ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει: 146
ὑπέστελλεν ἑαυτὸν: 115
ὑπόστασις: 107
ἀκλινῆ: 46 54
ἀκολουθεῖ: 253
ἀπάρτι: 251 251 251 252
ἀπαράβατον: 176
ἀποστελλόμενοι: 213
ἀφόρισμος: 284
δέσμιος, ἐν κυρίῳ: 252
δεήσεις: 293
διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ: 252
ἐκλείπειν: 115
ἐν αἰνίγματι: 108
ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ: 252
ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται: 120
ἐν τούτῳ δὲ: 160
ἐντῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται: 177
ἐντεύξεις: 293
ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε: 307
εἰ ἀπιστοῦμεν: 246
εἶδους: 105
ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ: 75
εὐχαριστίας: 294
ἢ Θεὸς, ἢ θηρίον: 148
ἢ πρόσκαιρον ἔχειν ἀμαρτίας ἀπόλαυσιν: 34
θάρροῦντες οὖν πάντοτε: 105
θάρροῦντες οὖν πάντοτε: 261
ἵνα λύση: 176
κατ' ἕξοχὴν: 118
κατέχωμεν: 45
κρατῶμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας: 45
κυβεία: 100

λατρεία: 285
λατρείαν προσφέρειν τῷ Θεῷ: 285
λογισάμενος: 23
μαρτυρῶ αὐτοῖς: 276
μείωσις: 115
ὄρα μή: 221
ὄθεν ἐκομίσασατο: 25
οὐδέν ὑποεστειλάμην: 115
παρεπιδημία τις ἐστὶν ὁ βίος: 146
πειραζόμενος: 19
προσευχὰς: 293
προσφέρειν: 285
τὴν παρρησίαν ὑμῶν: 114
τὴν ἐκβασιν: 236
τὴν ἐκβασιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς: 236
τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος: 45

Index of Latin Words and Phrases

Acquisito fine, cessant media ad finem: 208
Admonetur omnis aetas fieri posse, quod aliquando factum est: 239
Euge bone serve: 227
Id Judaei ad se trahentes rebellarunt.: 167
In maxima quaque fortuna minimum licere: 299
Memoriae martyrum: 229
O praeclarum diem, cum in illud animorum concilium caetumque proficiscar, et cum ex hac turba et colluvione discedam.: 159
Omnes itaque intelligant, quo ordine et via ipsa synodus post jactum fidei confessionis fundamentum sit progressura, &c.: 67
Oportet mendacem esse memorem: 16
Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut Judaea profecti rerum potirentur.: 167
Qua lucis miseris tam dira cupido?: 152
Quae lucis miseris tam dira cupido!: 157
Quicquid delirant reges, plectuntur achiivi: 298
Quis nisi Romanus status: 265
Quis novus hic furor est, ne moriari, mori?: 129
Quod conscientia est apud Deum, id fama est apud homines: 229
Quod si quis Deus mihi largiatur, ut ex hac aetate repuerescam, et in cunis vagiam, valde recusem.: 158
Si violandum est jus, regnandi causa violandum est: 34
Te Deum: 251
Ut Judaea profecti rerum potirentur.: 167
ad eorum orationes, opem, auxiliumque confugere: 192
bono igitur animo sumus: 261
cadere in constantem virum: 71
dicit norma iudicii: 270
et verba valent ut nummi: 14
ex vita ista discedo tanquam ex hospitio, non tanquam ex domo; commorandi enim natura diversorium nobis, non habitandi dedit: 146
fatendum est: 195
frustra fit per plura quod fieri potest per pauciora: 194
germen: 167
ignis fatuus: 282
indices expurgatorii: 100

ipsa si velit salus, servare non potest: 310
jus vita et necis: 24
luribus persuasio : 167
mero motu: 308
mortui non mordent: 228
non obstante: 61
omnino: 251
omnino beati sunt: 251
oriens: 167
pars laesa: 309
pro hac vice: 78
quoad hoc: 79
quod non fecerant Barbari, fecerunt Barberini: 291
ratio ultima: 101
scire volunt secreta domus atque inde timeri: 100
seculum futurum: 119
sed stultas divertit ad dolos: 12
sedes ubi fata quietas ostendunt: 146
testimonium rei: 42
unum necessarium: 80

Index of Pages of the Print Edition

I ii iii iv 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31
32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62
63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93
94 95 96 97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117
118 119 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140
141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163
164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186
187 188 189 190 191 192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209
210 211 212 213 214 215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232
233 234 235 236 237 238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255
256 257 258 259 260 261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278
279 280 281 282 283 284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301
302 303 304 305 306 307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324
325 336 327 328 329 330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347
348 349 350 351 352 353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370
371 372 373 374 375 376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393
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