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**The Works of Dr.
John Tillotson,
Late Archbishop of
Canterbury. Vol.
08.**

John Tillotson



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The Works of Dr. John Tillotson, Late Archbishop of Canterbury. Vol. 08.

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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. VIII.



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SERMONS

SERMON CLXXVI.

OF THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL, AS DISCOVERED BY NATURE AND BY REVELATION.

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.—2 Tim. i. 10.

HAVING in my three former discourses shewed what arguments natural reason doth furnish us with, for the immortality of our souls; I come now to the second thing I propounded, which is to shew what assurance the world had *de facto*, of this great principle of religion, the soul's immortality, before the revelation of the gospel.

Before our Saviour's coming into the world, there were but two different religions; that of the heathens, and that of the Jews. The religion of the heathens was natural religion, corrupted and degenerated into idolatry: the religion of the Jews was revealed and instituted by God; but did suppose natural religion, and was superadded to it. Therefore I shall consider the heathens and the Jews distinctly. And,

First, Shew what assurance the heathens had of this principle, of the soul's immortality.

Secondly, What the Jews had of it.

First, What assurance the heathens had of the soul's immortality.

1. It is evident that there was a general inclination in mankind, even after its greatest corruption and degeneracy, to the belief of this principle; which appeal's, in that all people and nations of the world, after they were sunk into the greatest degeneracy, and all (except only the Jews) became idolaters, did universally agree in this apprehension, that their souls did remain after their bodies, and pass into a state of happiness or misery, according as they had demeaned themselves in this life. Not that they did generally reason themselves into this apprehension, by any convincing arguments, but did herein follow the bent and tendency of their natures, which did incline them thus to think. For no other reason can be given of the universal consent, even of the most rude and barbarous nations, in this principle, besides the inclination of human nature to this opinion; that is, either men come into the world with this notion imprinted upon their minds, or else (which comes all to one) the understanding of man is naturally of such a frame and make, that, left to itself, and the free exercise of its own thoughts, it will fall into this apprehension.

2. The unlearned and common people among the heathen, seem to have had the truest and least wavering apprehensions in this matter; the reason of which seems to be plain, because their belief followed the bias and inclination of their nature, and they had not their natural notions embroiled and disordered by obscure and uncertain reasonings about it, as the philosophers had, whose under standings were perplexed with infinite niceties and objections, which never troubled the heads of the common people. By which means the vulgar had this advantage, that the natural dictates of their minds had their free course; and as they



did not argue themselves into this principle, so neither were their natural hopes and fears checked and controlled by any objections to the contrary.

But then this principle being only a kind of natural instinct in them, which did not awaken their minds by any deep consideration and reasoning about it, it had no great influence upon their lives.

For as they were not much troubled with doubts concerning it, so neither did they deeply attend to the consequences of it: but as they followed the inclination of nature in the entertaining of this notion; so, because it was not entertained upon deep consideration, it had no great effect upon them.

3. The learned among the heathen did not so generally agree in this principle, and those who did consent in it, were many of them more wavering and unsettled than the common people. Epicurus and his followers were peremptory in the denial of it: but, by their own acknowledgment, they did herein offer great violence to their natures, and had much ado to divest themselves of the contrary apprehension and fears. Therefore the poet, in the person of the Epicurean, represents it as a rare piece of happiness, and that which few attained to, to quit themselves of the notions of another state after this life:—

*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,
Atque metus omnes et inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari.*

The stoics were very inclinable to the belief of a future state; but yet they almost everywhere speak very doubtfully of it. Seneca and Antoninus often speak to this purpose—that if the soul remain after this life, there is no doubt but that good men shall be happy, and bad men miserable: but whether the soul outlive the body or not, that they could not positively determine. Aristotle hath some express passages for the soul's immortality; but it seems he was not constant to himself in this matter, or else they have done him a great deal of wrong, who have wrote so many books on both sides concerning his opinion in this point. Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, and many others of the most eminent philosophers, as Tully tells us, were full, not of assurance, but of very good hopes of the soul's immortality and a future state. Socrates, who was one of the best and wisest of all the heathens, does, in his discourses before his death, (as Plato relates them) support and bear up himself against the terrors of death, only with this consideration—that he was full of hopes, that when he left this world, he should pass into a far happier and more perfect state; that he should go to God, and live with him, and keep company with the spirits of good men: and that he is not positive and peremptory in it, is no argument that he doubted of this more than any thing else; for that was his fashion in all his discourses, to speak modestly, and with some show of doubting, even concerning those things whereof he had the greatest assurance: but this



is plain, that he was so well assured of it, as to die cheerfully, and to leave the world without any kind of disturbance, upon the hopes that he had conceived of another life; and surely they must be pretty confident hopes, that will bear up a man's spirit to such a height when he comes to die. In short, he told his friends the morning before he died, that he had as good assurance of the soul's immortality as human reason could give, and that nothing but a Divine revelation could give him greater satisfaction. And to mention no more, Tully, the chief philosopher among the Romans, expresseth himself with a good degree of confidence in this matter. He argues excellently for it in several parts of his works; but particularly in his book De Senectute, he declares his own opinion of it, where, speaking to Scipio and Lælius, he says, "I do not see why I may not adventure to declare freely to you, what my thoughts are concerning death; and perhaps I may discern better than others what it is, because I am now by reason of my age not far from it. I believe (says he) that the fathers, those eminent persons, and my particular friends, are still alive, and that they live the life which only deserves the name of life." And afterward, *Nec me solum ratio ac disputatio impulit ut ita crederem, sed nobilitas etiam summorum philosophorum et auctoritas*; "Nor has reason only and disputation brought me to this belief, but the famous judgment and authority of the chief philosophers." And having mentioned Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, he breaks out into this rapture, *Oh præclarum diem quum in illud animorum concilium cetumque proficiscar, et cum hac turba et colluvione discedam!* "Oh glorious day, when I shall go unto the great council and assembly of spirits, when I shall go out of this tumult and confusion, and quit the sink of this world, when I shall be gathered to all those brave spirits who have left this world, and meet with Cato, the greatest and best of mankind!" What could a Christian almost say with more extacy? And he concludes, *Quod si in hoc erro, quod animos hominum immortales esse credam, libenter erro, nec mihi hunc errorem quo delector, dum vivo, extorqueri volo; sin mortuus, ut quidam minuti philosophi censent, nihil sentiam, non vereor ne hunc errorem meum mortui philosophi irrideant.* "But if, after all, I am mistaken herein, I am pleased with my error, which I would not willingly part with whilst I live: and if after my death (as some little philosophers suppose) I shall be deprived of all sense, I have no fear of being exposed and laughed at by them, for this my mistake, in the other world."

Thus you see what assurance the heathens had of this principle, and that there was a general inclination and propension in them to the belief of it: and as it was not firmly and upon good grounds believed among the common people; so neither was it doubted of or called in question among them. Among the philosophers it was a matter of great uncertainty, being stiffly denied by some, doubted of by others; and those who were most inclinable to the entertainment of it, do rather express their desires and hopes of it, than their full assurance concerning it. I come therefore,

Secondly, To the other inquiry, what assurance the Jews had of the soul's immortality and a future state. And of this, I shall give you an account in these following particulars:



1. They had all the assurance which natural light, and the common reason of mankind, does ordinarily afford men concerning this matter; they had common to them with the heathens, all the advantage that nature gives men to come to the knowledge of this truth. But that which I chiefly design to inquire into, is, what singular advantage they had above the heathens, by means of those special revelations which were made to them from God. Therefore,



2. They had by Divine revelation a fuller assurance of those truths which have a nearer connexion with this principle, and which do very much tend to facilitate the belief of it; as, namely, concerning the providence of God, and his interesting himself particularly in the affairs of the world. In the history of Moses they had a satisfactory account of the original of the world; that God made it, and that he had eminently interposed in the government of it; and had given several eminent testimonies of his providence, in the general deluge which was brought upon the world, and in the dreadful particular judgment from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and the neighbouring cities; in his special providence towards Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; in that series of miracles whereby their deliverance was wrought out of Egypt, and they were carried through the wilderness to the promised land; and in those two standing miracles of the fruitfulness of every sixth year, because the land was to rest the seventh; and preserving the land from the invasion of enemies, when they came up to Jerusalem three times a year; by which God did testify a very particular and immediate providence toward them. Now, whatever gives assurance of God's providence, does very much facilitate the belief of a future state. Epicurus was well aware of the connexion of these principles, and therefore, in order to the freeing of the minds of men from the fears of a future state, he makes way for it by removing the providence of God, and denying that he either made the world, or concerned himself in the government of it.



And then, besides this, the Jews had assurance of the existence of spirits by the more immediate ministry of angels among them. And this does directly make way for the belief of an immaterial principle, and consequently of the soul's immortality. And this the Sadducees, who were a kind of Epicureans among the Jews, were sensible of; and, therefore, as they said that there was no resurrection, and no future state after this life, so they denied that there was either angel or spirit, as the apostle tells us. ([Acts xxiii. 7.](#)) From whence by the way we may take notice of the great mistake of those, who, from the opinion of the Sadducees, argue that eternal life was not at all believed under the Old Testament; because, if it had been so, it is not credible that it would have been disowned by those who acknowledged the authority of those books; whereas we see that they denied, to serve their hypothesis, other things which were most expressly revealed in the Old Testament—as, the doctrine of angels and spirits.

.3. There were some remarkable instances of the Old Testament, which did tend very much to persuade men to this truth: I mean the instances of Enoch and Elias, who did not

die like other men, but were translated, and taken up into heaven in an extraordinary manner. From which instances it was obvious to considerate men, to reason, that God did intend by these examples to encourage good men with the hopes of another state after this life. And accordingly the apostle to the Hebrews makes the belief of future rewards, a necessary consequence from this instance of Enoch's translation. ([Heb. xi. 5, 6.](#)) "By faith Enoch was translated, that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."



4. This was typified and shadowed forth to them by the legal administrations. The whole economy of their worship and temple, of their rites and ceremonies, and sabbaths, did shadow out some farther thing to them, though in a very obscure manner: the land of Canaan, and their coming to the possession of it, after so many years travail in the wilderness, did represent that heavenly inheritance which good men should be possessed of after the troubles of this life. And these were intended by God to signify those greater and better things to them, and so understood by those who were more devout and knowing among them; else the apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, had gone upon a very ill ground, when he all along takes it for granted, that the dispensation of the law, and all the ceremonies of it, were of a farther signification: ([Heb. x. 1.](#)) "The law having a shadow of good things to come."

5. This was in general, and by good consequence, though not obvious to all, yet sufficiently to prudent and discerning men, revealed in the book of the law taken precisely: I mean the five books of Moses. It is said of Abel, that God was pleased with his sacrifice, though with Cain's he was not well-pleased. ([Gen. iv.](#)) Upon this Cain was angry at his brother, and slew him. Now if the immortality of the soul and a future state, be not supposed and taken for granted in this story, this very passage is enough to cut the sinews, and pluck up the roots, of all religion. For if there were no rewards after this life, it were obvious for every man to argue from this story, that it was a dangerous thing to please God; if this were all that Abel got by it, to be knocked on the head by his brother, who offended God.



But I shall chiefly insist on the general promises which we find in these books of Moses, of God's blessing good men, and declaring that he was their God, even after their death. Now I shall shew that these promises did involve the happiness of another life, and were intended by God to signify thus much, and were so understood by good men under that dispensation. That these general promises did contain this sense under them, and were intended by God to signify thus much, is evident from our Saviour's citation of that text, to confute the Sadducees, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;" from whence he reasons thus, "Now God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him:" the force of which argument was directly and immediately levelled against

the main error of the Sadducees, which was the denial of a future state. This our Saviour immediately proves from this text, and by consequence the resurrection, which the Sadducees did not deny upon any other account, but because they did not¹ believe a future state.

6. Toward the expiration of the legal dispensation, there was yet a clearer revelation of a future state. The text in Daniel seems to be much plainer than any in the Old Testament: ([Dan. xii. 2.](#)) “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” And to this text the seven brethren, who were cruelly put to death under the persecution of Antiochus, seem to refer when they comfort themselves with the hopes of another life: ([2 Mac. vii. 9.](#)) where one of them, ready to die, says thus to Antiochus, “Thou like a fury takest us out of this present life, but the King of the world shall raise us up, who have died for his laws, unto everlasting life.” To the same purpose, another of them, ([ver. 14.](#)) when he was tormented, expresseth his confidence thus: “It is good, being put to death by men, to look for hope from God, to be raised up again by him; but as for thee (speaking of Antiochus) thou shalt have no resurrection to life.” Where he seems to allude to the twofold resurrection mentioned by Daniel. And though this history of the Maccabees be not canonical, yet the apostle hath warranted the truth of it to us, at least in this particular, for he plainly refers to this story: ([Heb. xi. 35.](#)) “Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

7. Notwithstanding this, I say, that the immortality of the soul, and a future state, was not expressly and clearly revealed in the Old Testament, at least not in Moses’s law. The special and particular promises of that dispensation, were of temporal good things; and the great blessing of eternal life, was but somewhat obscurely involved and signified in the types and general promises: for considering that the particular promises were plainly of temporal things, it was very obvious to those who were not so prudent and discerning, to interpret the general promises so as to comprehend only that kind of blessings which were expressed in the special and particular promises, and so likewise to understand the general threatenings. And upon this account, the apostle to the Hebrews principally advanceth the new covenant of the gospel above the old dispensation: because the gospel had clear, and express, and special promises of eternal life, which the law had not: ([Heb. viii. 6.](#)) “But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.” For the same reason Christ is said here in the text, “by his appearance to have abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” And so I proceed to the

¹ See Sermon XXIII. Vol. ii. p. 312.

Second thing I propounded, which is to shew, what farther evidence and assurance the gospel gives us of it, than the world had before: what clearer discoveries we have by Christ's coming, than the heathens or Jews had before.

That the gospel hath brought to us a clearer discovery of this than they had, is here expressly said; that God's gracious purpose concerning our salvation, which was before the world began decreed to be accomplished in Christ, is now made manifest by his coming into the world; ([ver. 9.](#)) "Who hath saved and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Jesus Christ before the world began, but is now made manifest/ &c. Which is emphatically spoken, now, and not till now, importing that, before the appearing of our Saviour, it was, in great measure, hid from the world, and that men had very dark and obscure apprehensions of it, till it was "brought to light by the gospel." And this is not only affirmed in this place, but very frequently all over the New Testament. I will mention some of the most express places to this purpose. ([John vi. 6, 8.](#)) When many of Christ's followers left him, he asks the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" To whom Peter answers, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." As if he had said, What master should we choose to follow rather than thee, who bringest to the world the glad tidings of eternal life? What discipline or institution is there in the world, that gives such encouragement to its followers? Others may promise great things in this world; but in the declarations and promises of another life, we cannot rely upon any one but him that comes from God, as we are fully persuaded thou dost: for it follows in the next verse, "And we believe, and are sure, that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

([Tit. ii. 11.](#) &c.) "The grace of God which brings salvation hath appeared to all men," &c. Where the revelation of the gospel is called "the grace of God which brings salvation," that is, which discovers to the world that eternal happiness, which was in a great measure hid from it before, and encourageth men by the hopes of that blessing to live a holy life. The apostle to the Hebrews doth all along in his Epistle use this as an argument to the Jews, to take them off from the Mosaical institution, and to persuade them to entertain the doctrine of the gospel, as making clearer discoveries, and giving greater assurance of eternal life and salvation, than the law did. ([Heb. ii. 2-5.](#)) "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received 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? For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak." That is, if the promises and threatenings of the law, which was delivered but by the ministry of angels, were made good, and the offenders under that dispensation were severely punished, what shall become of us, if we neglect the dispensation of the gospel,

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which reveals to us greater things, even eternal life and salvation, and which receiveth so great a confirmation, both from Christ himself, by whom it was first delivered, and also from his apostles, who published it to the world, and gave testimony to it by so many miracles? And it follows, ([ver. 5.](#)) “For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we now speak.” The meaning of which is this: the promises and threatenings of the law, which was delivered by angels, were temporal, and such as respected this world; but now God has sent his Son, he hath in him made promises of a greater salvation, he hath put into his hands the great things of another world, and hath given him power to promise eternal life, and to give it to as many as he pleases. So the danger of contemning the gospel, must needs be much greater than that of the law, because the happiness which the gospel promises is so much greater: for unto the angels Mho delivered the law, God gave no power and commission to make clear and express promises of the rewards of another world. “Unto the angels did he not put in subjection the world to come;” but so hath he done to his Son. “He hath committed all judgment to him, and hath given him power to raise up those who have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and those that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation;” as our Saviour himself speaks, ([John v. 22.](#)) And thus “he hath put the world to come in subjection unto his Son,” having empowered him to encourage and argue men to the obedience of his laws, by the rewards and punishments of another world: whereas the law delivered by angels, had only the sanction of temporal threatenings and promises. ([Heb. vii. 16.](#)) The gospel is called “the power of an eternal life,” in opposition to the law, which is called “a carnal commandment;” not only because the precepts of it respected the body, but because the promises of it were of temporal good things which belong to this life; and at the [19th verse](#), the gospel, in opposition to the Mosaical dispensation, is called “the bringing in of a better hope:” — “the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did;” ἐπεισάγωγη, the superinduction of a better hope; by which the apostle plainly signifies, that this was the imperfection of the Mosaical dispensation, that it did not give men firm hopes and assurance of eternal life; but the gospel hath superinduced this hope, and thereby supplied the great defect of the former administration. To the same purpose he tells us, ([chap. viii. 6.](#)) that Christ “hath now obtained a more excellent ministry, forasmuch as he is the mediator of a better covenant, established upon better promises.” How better promises? Why, instead of the promises of a temporal Canaan and earthly blessings, Christ hath given us promises of eternal life and happiness. Therefore, in the next chapter, he is called “a high-priest of good things to come;” and, ([ver. 15.](#)) “For this cause” he is said to be “the mediator of the new testament, that they which are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” Once more the apostle, ([chap. x. ver. 1.](#)) makes this the great imperfection of the law, in opposition to the gospel, that it “had only a shadow of good things to come, but not the very image of the things;” that is, it did but darkly typify and shadow forth the things of another life, not give us so express an image, and lively rep-

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resentation of the rewards of another world, as the gospel does. Therefore St. John makes eternal life to be the great promise of the gospel, the great blessing which Christ hath revealed to the world: (1 John ii. 25.) “This is the promise which he hath promised, even eternal life.” So that you see, that the full and clear discovery of eternal life, is every where in the New Testament attributed to Christ, and to the revelation which by him was made to the world.

It remains now, that I shew more particularly wherein the gospel hath given the world greater evidence and assurance of a future state, than they had before.

1. The rewards of another life are most clearly revealed in the gospel. That God hath made a revelation of this by Christ, is an advantage which the heathen wanted, who were destitute of Divine revelation. There are many truths which men may be well inclined to believe, and for the proof of which, the wiser and more knowing sort of men may be able to offer very fair and plausible arguments; and yet for all this they may have no confident assurance of them, or at least may be very far from a well-grounded certainty, such as will give rest and satisfaction to the mind of a considerate and inquisitive man. All men are not capable of the force of a reason; nay, there are very few who can truly judge of the weakness or strength of an argument. There are many things which admit of very plausible arguments on both sides; and the generality of men are very apt to be imposed upon by very slight arguments, to be moved any way with some little show and appearance of reason. So that, when this principle of the soul’s immortality came to be disputed in the world, and the sects of the philosophers, the learned men of those times, came to be divided in opinion about it, some disputing directly against it, others doubting very much of it, and scarce any pretending to any great assurance of it, it was no wonder, if by this means many came to be in suspense about it; but now Divine revelation, when that comes, it takes away all doubting, and gives men assurance of that, concerning which they were uncertain before. For every man that believes a God, does firmly believe this principle—that whatever is revealed by him is true: but especially if the revelation be clear and express, then it gives full satisfaction to the mind of man, and removes all jealousy and suspicions of the contrary. And this is a great advantage which the gospel gives us in this matter, above what the Jews had. They had some kind of revelation and discovery of this under the dispensation of the law; but very darkly, in types and shadows: but the gospel gives us a most express revelation of it, is full of special promises to this purpose, made in clear words, free from all ambiguity, or liableness to be interpreted to another sense. So that, if we compare the law and the gospel together, we shall see a vast difference as to this matter. Under the law, the promise of eternal life was only comprehended in some general words, from which a man, that had true notions of God and religion, might be able to infer, that God intended some reward for good men, and punishment for wicked, men beyond this life: but the promises of temporal good things were special and express, and their law was full of them. Contrariwise in the New Testament, the most special and express promise is that of eternal life, and this the books of the New

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Testament are full of; as for temporal blessings, they are but sparingly and obscurely promised, in comparison of the other.

2. The rewards of another life, as they are clearly and expressly revealed by the gospel, so that they may have the greater power and influence upon us, and we may have the greater assurance of them, they are revealed with very particular circumstances. And herein the gospel gives us a great advantage, both above the heathens and Jews. For though a man was satisfied in general of a state after this life, that men's souls should survive their bodies, and pass into another world, where it shall be well with them that have done well in this world, and ill to those that have done ill; yet no man, without a revelation, could conjecture the particular circumstances of that state. What wild descriptions do the heathen poets, who were their most ancient divines, make of heaven and hell, of the Elysian fields and the infernal regions! But now the gospel, for our greater assurance and satisfaction, hath revealed many particular circumstances of the future state to us; as, that all men at the end of the world shall be summoned to make a solemn appearance before the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God hath made judge of the world as a reward of his patience and sufferings; that the bodies of men shall, in order to that appearance, be raised up by the mighty power of God, and united to their souls, that as they have been instruments of the soul in acts of holiness and sin, so they may take part likewise in the happiness and torments of it. There are several other circumstances the gospel hath revealed to us concerning our future state, which, had they not been revealed, we could never have known, hardly have conjectured; in all which, besides the assurance that they are revealed, it is a great satisfaction to us, that there is nothing in them that is unworthy of God, or that savours of the weakness and vanity of human imagination.

3. The gospel gives us yet farther assurance of these things, by such an argument as is like to be the most convincing and satisfactory to common capacities; and that is, by a lively instance of the thing to be proved, in raising Christ from the dead, ([Acts xvii. 30, 31.](#))

It is true, indeed, under the Old Testament, there were two instances somewhat of this nature; Enoch and Elias were immediately translated, and taken up alive into heaven; but these two instances do in many respects fall short of the other. For after Christ was raised from the dead, he conversed forty days with his disciples, and satisfied them that he was risen; after which he was in their sight visibly taken up into heaven: and as an evidence that he was possessed of his glorious kingdom, he sent down, according to his promise, his Holy Spirit in miraculous gifts, to assure them by those testimonies of his royalty, that he was in heaven, and to qualify them by those miraculous powers to convince the world of the truth of their doctrine.

Now, what argument more proper to convince them of another life after this, than to see a man raised from the dead, and restored to a new life? What titter to satisfy a man concerning heaven, and the happy estate of those there, than to see one visibly taken up into

heaven? And what more fit to assure us, that the promises of the gospel are real, and shall be made good to us, than to see him who made these promises to us raise himself from the dead, and go up into heaven, and from thence to dispense miraculous gifts and powers abroad in the world, as evidences of the power and authority which he was invested withal? All the philosophical arguments that a man can bring for the soul's immortality and another life, will have no force upon vulgar apprehensions, in comparison of these sensible demonstrations, which give an experiment of the thing, and furnish us with an instance of something of the same kind, and of equal difficulty with that which is propounded to our belief,

4. And lastly, The effects which the clear discovery of this truth had upon the world, are such, as the world never saw before, and are a farther inducement to persuade us of the truth and reality of it. After the gospel was entertained in the world, to shew that those who embraced it did fully believe this principle, and were abundantly satisfied concerning the rewards and happiness of another life; they did, for the sake of their religion, despise this life and all the enjoyments of it, from a thorough persuasion of a far greater happiness than this world could afford remaining in the next life. With what cheerfulness did they suffer persecutions, with what joy and triumph did they welcome torments, and embrace death, "knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and more enduring substance!" Thus, when "life and immortality was brought to light by the gospel, death was as it were quite abolished;" those of the weakest age and sex, women and children, did familiarly encounter it with as great a bravery, and bore up against the terrors of it with as much courage, as any of the greatest spirits among the Romans ever did: and this not in few instances, but in vast numbers. No emperor in the world ever had so numerous an army of persons resolved to light for him, as this Captain of our salvation, this Prince of life and glory had of persons courageously resolved, and cheerfully contented to die for him.

Now this wonderful effect, the like of which the world never saw before, was very suitable to the nature of this doctrine. Suppose that God from heaven should have given men assurance of another life after this, in which good men should be unspeakably happy: what more reasonable to imagine, than that persons so assured should despise this life, and all the enjoyments of it, in comparison of the eternal and unconceivable happiness, which they were persuaded they should be made partakers of in another world? So that, whatever assurance an express and clear revelation from God of the soul's immortality and another life, together with the particular circumstances of that state; whatever assurance a lively instance and example of the thing, in the person of him who brings this doctrine to the world; whatever consequent miracles, and suitable effects upon the minds of men to such a principle; I say, whatever assurance and satisfaction these can give of this principle, all this the gospel hath given us, beyond whatever the heathen or Jews had before.

The inference I shall make from this discourse, shall be only this: that if there be such a state after this life, then how does it concern every man to provide for it? Every action that



we do in this life will have a good or bad influence upon our everlasting condition, and the consequences of it will extend themselves to eternity. Did men seriously consider this, that they carry about them immortal souls that shall live for ever, they would not trifle away the opportunities of this life, bend all their thoughts, and employ their designs, in the present gratification of their senses, and the satisfaction of their fleshly part, which shall shortly die and moulder into dust: but they would make provision for the state which is beyond the grave, and lay designs for eternity, which is infinitely the most considerable duration; they would not, like children, take care for the present, without any prospect to the future, and lay out all they have to please themselves for a day, without any regard to the remaining part of their lives. Nothing can be more unbecoming Christians, whose whole religion pretends to be built upon the firm belief of another world, than to be intent upon the things of this present life, to the neglect of their souls and all eternity.

Seeing then we pretend to be assured of immortal life, and to have clear discoveries of everlasting happiness and glory, as we hope to be made partakers of this portion, let us live as it becomes the candidates of heaven, those that are heirs of another world, and “the children of the resurrection,” that this grace of God, which hath brought salvation, may “teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present life, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”



SERMON CLXXVII.

OF THE CERTAINTY OF A FUTURE JUDGMENT.

For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.—2 Cor. v. 10.

THE apostle, in the beginning of this chapter, expresseth his earnest desire, if God saw it fit, to quit “this earthly tabernacle, for a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord.” But, however God should dispose of him, he tells us that he made it his constant endeavour so to behave himself, that both in this present state, whilst he continued in the body, and when he should quit it, and appear before God, he might be approved and accepted of him. And that which made him so careful was, because there was a day certainly coming, wherein every man must give an account of himself to the great Judge of the world, and receive the just recompence of his actions done in this life: (ver. 9, 10.) “Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

Which words are so plain and powerful, so easy to be understood, and of such a mighty force and influence, if thoroughly believed, that the very repeating of them is sufficient to awaken men to a serious care of their lives and actions, and a powerful consideration to persuade them to do every thing with respect to that solemn account they must one day make to God of all the actions done in this life.

But, that the truth contained in them may make the greater impression upon us, I shall distinctly consider the words, and handle, as briefly as I can, the several propositions contained in them.

The general and principal proposition contained in these words is, the certainty of a future judgment.

But, besides this principal proposition, which comprehends the general meaning and intention of these words, there are four other more particular propositions contained in them.

First, That the administration of this judgment will be committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, for which reason the tribunal before which we must appear, is called the judgment-seat of Christ. “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.”

Secondly, That all men are liable to this judgment; no person, of what condition soever, shall be exempted from it. “We must all appear.”

Thirdly, That all the actions which men have done in this life shall then come to account, and they shall be judged for them. “That every one may receive the things done in the body.”

Fourthly, That sentence will then be passed according to the quality of men's actions, whether good or bad: "every one shall receive according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil."

But I shall at present only speak to the principal proposition contained in the words concerning the certainty of a future and general judgment; viz. that at the end of the world there shall be a general and public assize, when all persons that have lived in this world (except only the Judge himself, our blessed Saviour, who is "the man ordained by God to judge the world") shall come upon their trial, and all the actions which they have done shall come under a strict examination; and according as men have demeaned themselves in this world towards God and man, they shall receive sentence, and rewards shall be distributed to them, according to the nature and quality of their actions. And though all these particulars be not expressed in the text, yet they are virtually contained in the general expressions of it, and fully and clearly delivered in other texts of Scripture.

The truth and certainty of a future and general judgment, I shall endeavour to confirm from these three heads of arguments:

- I. From the acknowledgments of natural light.
- II. From the notions which men generally have of God and his providence.
- III. From express and clear revelation of Holy Scripture.

I. From the acknowledgments of natural light. And I might shew the general consent of mankind in this matter by all sorts of human testimonies, and from all kinds of writers in all ages: but this would be almost endless, and not so proper for a plain and practical discourse upon this subject. And, there fore, passing by testimonies, I shall mainly insist upon this that the consciences of men do secretly acknowledge a difference between good and evil. Hence it is that men find great peace and quiet and satisfaction of mind in the doing of good and virtuous actions, and have secret and comfortable hopes, that this kind of actions will some time or other be considered and rewarded; and they are apt to maintain these hopes, and to support themselves with them, even when they despair to meet with any reward of their good and honest actions in this world.

And, on the other hand, men find a secret fear and horror, and are inwardly ashamed and confounded in their own minds, when they are about a wicked enterprise, and engaged in an ill design; their consciences check them and terrify them, and their own minds bode ill to them, as if mischief and vengeance would overtake them one time or other, and this when no eye sees them, and what they are a-doing does not fall under the cognizance of any human court or tribunal, nor is liable to any censure or punishment from any human authority; yet, for all that, they have many stings and lashes from their own minds, feel many checks and rebukes from their own consciences, when they do any thing which they ought not to do, though no man can charge them with it, or call them to an account for it.

Now these hopes and fears do argue, if not the firm belief and persuasion of a future judgment, yet great suspicions and misgivings of it in bad men; and in good men, secret and comfortable apprehensions concerning it. From whence else can it be, that good men, though they find that virtue is discountenanced, and goodness many times suffers, and is persecuted in this world, and that the best actions and designs are often unsuccessful; whence, I say, is it that good men, notwithstanding this, bear up and persist in their course, but because they have this inward apprehension and persuasion, that there will be a time when virtue and goodness will be considered and rewarded, though not in this world? And whence is it that bad men, though they prosper in their impiety, are yet guilty, and fearful, and timorous, but because they stand in awe of a Being, greater, and more righteous, and more powerful than themselves; but because they have some secret apprehensions of an invisible Judge, and inward presage of a future vengeance, which sooner or later will overtake them; and because they believe there will be a time when all the wickedness they have done shall be accounted for? Insomuch, that when they have done what they can, they cannot shake off these fears, nor quit themselves of these apprehensions of Divine justice, threatening and pursuing them for their evil deeds.

All which are plain acknowledgments of a natural apprehension and persuasion born with us, and riveted in our minds, concerning a future judgment.

II. This will farther appear from the natural notion which men have of a God and his providence. This is essential to the notion of a God—that he is good, and holy, and just; and, consequently, that he loves goodness and hates iniquity; and there fore it must be agreeable to his nature to countenance the one, and to discountenance the other, in such a manner as becomes the wise Sovereign and Governor of the world. Now this cannot be solemnly and openly done, but by a public distribution of rewards and punishments; and this we see is not done in this world. The dispensations of God’s providence in this world, toward good and bad men, are many times very promiscuous, and very cross, and contrary to what might be expected from the wise and just Sovereign of the world, from one whom we believe to love righteousness, and to hate iniquity. For virtuous and holy men are often ill treated in this world, grievously harassed and afflicted, and that for righteousness sake: and bad men many times flourish and are prosperous, “they are not in trouble like other men, neither are they plagued like other men.” And this is a very great objection against the providence of God, if there were no other consideration had of virtue and vice, no other kind of retribution made to good and bad men, but what we see in this world. And, there fore, the justice of the Divine Providence seems to require that there should be a day of recompence, and a solemn and public distribution of rewards and punishments to the righteous and to the wicked. For this is plainly a state of trial and probation, of patience and forbearance to sinners, and of exercise to good men; and being a state of trial, it is not so proper a season for the distribution of public justice. But since the justice of God doth not appear in this

world, it seems very reasonable to believe that there will be a time when it will be made manifest, and every eye shall see it; that God will one day fully vindicate his righteousness, and acquit the honour of his justice, and that there shall be a general assize held, when all men shall have a fair and open trial, and “God will render to every man according to his works.”

Now the justice of God’s providence is, in a great measure, hid and covered, but there will come ἡμέρα ἀποκαλύψεως, (as the apostle calls the day of judgment, [Rom. ii. 5.](#)) “A day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God;” when “he will bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day,” and “every mouth shall be stopped,” and every conscience and heart of man acknowledge “the righteous judgment of God.”

And in the mean time God contents himself to give some particular and remarkable instances of his rewarding and punishing justice in this world, which may be to us an earnest of a future and general judgment; he is pleased sometimes, in the dispensations of his providence, clearly to separate and distinguish “the precious from the vile,” remarkably to deliver good men, and to “snare the wicked in the works of their own hands.” Some times he gives good men some foretastes of heaven, some earnest of their future happiness in this life: and, on the other hand, he many times gives sinners some *præjudicia divini judicii*, some intimations of a future judgment, and shadows of that utter darkness, where they are to dwell for ever; he drops down, now and then, a little of hell into the conscience of a sinner. That fire which is kindled in some men’s consciences in this life, that unspeakable anguish, and those inexplicable horrors, which some sinners have felt in this world, may serve to give us notice of the extreme severity of the Divine justice towards impenitent sinners: that miraculous deluge that swept away the old world; those stupendous and terrible showers of fire and brimstone, which consumed Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about; that dreadful earthquake which swallowed up Corah and his company, and let them down, as it were, quick into hell, may serve for pledges and earnest to us of the dismal punishments and torments of the next world.

But, notwithstanding all these particular and remarkable instances of the Divine justice, yet, considering how unequal and promiscuous the greatest part of God’s providences are in this world, it is highly requisite, that there should be a general judgment, for a more clear and full manifestation of the justice and equity of the Divine Providence.

III. But this will most evidently appear from the clear and express revelation of the Holy Scripture. I will not cite texts out of the Old Testament to this purpose, because these things were but obscurely revealed to the Jews in comparison; “Life and immortality being brought to light by the gospel.” Yet St. Jude tells us, that there was an early revelation of this to the old world: ([ver. 14, 15.](#)) “And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon



all, and to convince all that are ungodly.” But whether this refer to the flood, or the final judgment of the world, is not so clear and certain; how ever, this is most plainly revealed by our blessed Lord and Saviour in the New Testament. The process of this great day, with several of the particular circumstances of it, are fully described by our Saviour, ([Matt. xxv.](#)) and in the vision of St. John, ([Rev. xx. 11-13.](#)) And the apostles of our Lord and Saviour do most frequently declare and inculcate it. ([Acts xvii. 30, 31.](#)) “But now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” ([Rom. ii. 5-9.](#)) Where, speaking of the day of judgment, he calls it, “The day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.” ([1 Pet. i. 17.](#)) “And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work.” ([2 Pet. iii. 10.](#)) “But the day of the Lord will come, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise,” &c.

Thus you see the truth and certainty of a future judgment confirmed, from the acknowledgments of men’s natural hopes and fears, from the natural notions which men have concerning God and his providence, and from plain revelation of Scripture.

All that I shall do farther at present, shall be to make some reflections upon what hath been delivered, concerning the certainty of a future general judgment. And,

I. If there be such a day certainly a-coming, it may justly be matter of wonder and astonishment to us, to see the general impiety and stupidity of men, how wicked they are, and how careless of their lives and actions, and how insensible of that “great and terrible day of the Lord,” which is coming upon all flesh, and, for any thing we know to the contrary, may be very near us, and even at the door. How securely do the greatest part of men pass away their time, some in worldly business, others in worldly pleasures and vanity, and a great many in wickedness and vice! Surely such men have no apprehensions of a future judgment: surely they do not believe that there will be any memorial of their actions in another world, and that they shall be called to a strict and severe account for all the actions of this life: they do not think that there is a just and powerful Being above them, who now observes every thing that they do, and will one day judge them for it; that there is a pen always writing, and making a faithful record of all the passages of their lives; and that these volumes shall one day be produced and opened, “and men shall be judged out of the things that are written in them;” and all our thoughts, words, and actions, shall pass under a most severe trial and examination!

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Or, if men do believe these things, they stifle and suppress this belief, and “detain this great truth of God in unrighteousness;” they do not attend to it, and consider it, that it may have its due awe and influence upon their lives. For it is not imaginable, that if men were possessed with a firm belief and persuasion of this “great and terrible day of the Lord,” they should be so careless and secure, as we see they are, and have so little regard to what they do; that they should pass whole days, and weeks, and years, in the gross neglect of God and religion, and of their immortal souls; that they should “spend their days in vanity, and their years in pleasure:” that they should live in a continued course of impiety and profaneness, of lewdness, and intemperance, in the cursed habits of swearing and cursing: which are now grown so common among us, that a man cannot walk in the street without having his ears grated with this hellish noise; and that they should go on in these courses, without any great regret and disturbance, as if no danger attended them, as if justice were asleep, and all their actions would be buried with them, and never rise up against them.

What can we resolve this into, but either into habitual or actual atheism and infidelity? either men do not at all believe a judgment to come; or else they do not actually consider it, and attend to the natural and proper consequences of such a belief: one of these two is necessary. It seems very hard to charge the generality of wicked men with habitual atheism and unbelief, but that the Spirit of God in Scripture so often does it. (*Psal. xiv. 1.*) “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” How doth that appear? It follows, “They are corrupt, and have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.” And, (*Psal. xxxvi. 1.*) “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, there is no fear of God before his eyes.” David speaks as if the wicked practices of men did convince him, that they had no belief and apprehension of a God.

Nay, even after those clear discoveries which the gospel hath made of a future judgment, our Saviour seems to foretel a general infidelity among men, at least as to this particular article of a future judgment: (*Luke xviii. 8.*) “Nevertheless when the Son of man shall come, shall he find faith upon the earth?” and St. Peter tells us, (*2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.*) that “there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?” that is, deriding the belief and expectation which the Christians had of a future judgment.

But, to be sure, if the generality of men be not already sunk thus low, as to disbelieve these things, yet this at least is evident from the lives of men, that they are strangely inconsiderate, and guilty of the most gross and stupid inadvertency that can befall reasonable creatures. For I dare appeal to any man of understanding and serious consideration, whether a greater folly and madness can be imagined, than for men to profess in good earnest to believe, that there is a day shortly coming, wherein they shall appear before the impartial tribunal of the great Judge of the world, and all the actions of their lives shall be ransacked and laid open, and that there is not any thing that ever they did, that shall escape

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a severe censure; yea, and farther to be persuaded, that as it shall upon that trial appear, that they have demeaned themselves in this world, they shall be sentenced to an eternal and unchangeable state of happiness or misery in the other world; and yet after all this conviction, to live at such a mad and careless rate, as no man in reason can live, but he that is undoubtedly certain of the contrary of all this, and verily persuaded in his heart, that not one syllable of what the gospel says concerning these matters is true? This is so incredible a stupidity and folly, that did not frequent and undeniable experience make us sure of the truth of it, out of mere charity and respect to human nature, it were not to be believed. “Consider this all ye that forget God, and put far from you the evil day; consider and shew yourselves men, O ye transgressors!” who profess to believe a future judgment, and yet run the hazard of it, as if ye had no fear and suspicion of any such thing.

II. Having considered, not without wonder and astonishment, what manner of persons the generality of men are, notwithstanding all the assurance we have of a future judgment, let us in the next place consider, “seeing these things shall be, what manner of persons we ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness, waiting for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God,” as the apostle argues, (2 Pet. iii. 11, 12.) How should the serious belief of this great principle of religion work upon us, that “we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil?” St. Paul tells us, that the consideration of it had a mighty awe and influence upon him, to be careful of himself, and to be concerned for others: to be careful of himself, in the verse before the text, “Wherefore we labour that whether present or absent we may be accepted of him: for we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.” And to be concerned for others, that they may prevent the terrors of that day, in the verse immediately after the text, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”—“Knowing the terror of the Lord;” it were no difficult matter to make such a dreadful representation of this “great and terrible day of the Lord,” as would affright the stoutest sinner, and make every joint of him to tremble: but it is much more desirable that men should be wrought upon by reason, and convinced and persuaded by a calm and sober consideration of things; because that is likely to have a better and more lasting effect than present terror and amazement; and therefore I shall content myself with the naked representation of the thing in the plain and powerful expressions of the Holy Scriptures. Imagine then thou sawest “the Son of man coming in great power, and great glory, and all his holy angels with him;” that thou heardest the great trumpet sound, and a mighty voice piercing the heavens and the earth, saying, “Arise ye dead, and come to judgment.” Suppose thou sawest the thrones set, and “the great Judge sitting upon the throne of his glory,” and “all nations gathered before him,” and “all the dead both small and great standing before God, the books opened, and the dead judged out of the things written in these books;” and the several sentences pronounced from the mouth of Christ himself,

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“Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world;” and, “depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Would not this be a dreadful and amazing sight! Why, the gospel plainly declares that all this shall be, and thou professest to believe it. Why then dost thou not live as if thou didst believe these things? Why should not that which will certainly be, have to all reasonable purposes the same effect upon thee, as if it were already and actually present? Why do men suffer themselves to be diverted from the attentive consideration of so important a matter, by the impertinent trifles of this world? Why do we not make wise and speedy preparation for that day, which will certainly come? But we are uncertain when it will come, “for it will come as a thief in the night, and as a snare upon all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth,” Why dost thou stifle thy conscience, and drown the loud cry of it, with the din and noise of worldly business; why dost thou? at any time check and suppress the thoughts of a future judgment, and “put far from thee the evil day?” And not rather suffer the terrors of it to haunt and pursue thee, till they have made thee weary of thy wicked life, till they have reclaimed thee to thy duty, and effectually persuaded thee to break off thy sins by repentance; and to resolve upon such a holy and virtuous course of life, that thou mayest be able not only with peace and comfort, but with joy and triumph to entertain the thoughts of that day?

Reason thus with thyself: If this day be so dreadful at a distance, that I can hardly now bear the thoughts of it, how insupportable will the thing itself be, when it comes to be present? And it will come nevertheless, nor the later, for my not thinking of it; is it not reasonable, instead of putting away the thoughts of it, to endeavour by all possible means to prevent the terrors of it?

We especially, who profess ourselves Christians, and live in the clear light of the gospel, ought to consider, that we cannot plead ignorance for our excuse, as the heathen world might. We read and hear the gospel every day, “wherein the wrath of God is clearly revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;” so that, if we continue impenitent, we have no cloak, no excuse for ourselves: woe unto us above all others! “It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for us.” “The times of ignorance, (saith St. Paul, speaking of the heathen world,) the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now he commands all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” Thus much concerning the general proposition the certainty of a future judgment.

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SERMON CLXXVIII.

OF THE PERSON BY WHOM THE WOULD SHALL BE JUDGED.

For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.—2 Cor. v. 10.

IN these words, besides the general point mainly intended, concerning the certainty of a future and general judgment, there are likewise several particular propositions.

First, That the administration of this judgment is committed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, That all men are liable to this judgment.

Thirdly, That all the actions which men have done in this life shall then come to account, and they shall be judged for them.

Fourthly, That this sentence shall be passed upon men, according to the nature and quality of their actions, whether good or evil. I have handled the general point—the certainty of a future judgment: I shall now proceed to the particular propositions contained in the text, and shall handle them in the order in which I have proposed them.

First, That the administration of this judgment is committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he is the person constituted and ordained of God, to be the judge of the world. The tribunal before which we must stand, is here in the text called “the judgment-seat of Christ.” “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.” In the prosecution of this I shall,

First, Endeavour to confirm and illustrate the truth of this proposition.

Secondly, Draw some inferences from it, by way of application.

First, For the confirmation of it, I shall do these two things:

I. Prove it from clear testimony of Scripture.

II. Endeavour to give some account of this economy and dispensation; why God had committed the administration of this great work to the Lord Jesus Christ; in all which I shall rely only upon Scripture, the thing being capable of no other proof or evidence. And, indeed, the whole mediatory undertaking of our blessed Saviour, and all the circumstances of it, are matter of pure revelation; this is the hidden and manifold wisdom of God, which none of the princes and philosophers of this world knew, and which we could not possibly have found out and discovered, had not God been pleased to reveal it to us.

I. I shall prove this from express testimony of Scripture, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the person constituted and ordained by God, to administer the judgment of the great day: (Matt. xiii. 40-43.) “So shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing



of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father.” Here our Saviour is represented as the chief minister of God’s justice, in the distribution of rewards to the righteous and the wicked; and though the effect and execution of the sentence only be expressed, yet it supposeth a judicial process preceding. So likewise, [Matt. xvi. 27.](#) “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his work.”—“Shall come in the glory of his Father;” that is, with his authority committed to him. ([Matt. xxiv. 30.](#)) Where our Saviour speaking of his coming to judge the world, it is said, “Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory;” that is, in order to the judgment of the world. But most fully and expressly, ([Matt. xxv. 31.](#)) where you have the manner of his coining particularly described, together with the solemn representation of the process of that great day. “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate the one from the other, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say to them on his right hand,” &c. You see the whole administration of this judgment, and the management of every part of it, is committed to Christ. ([John v. 22.](#)) Our Saviour there produceth his commission, and tells us from whence this authority was derived to him: The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son.” And ([ver. 27.](#)) “He hath given him authority also to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man.” ([Acts x. 42.](#)) “Anil he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he that is ordained of God, to be the judge of the quick and dead.” ([Acts xvii. 31.](#)) “He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained,” that is, by Jesus Christ; for it follows, “Whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” ([Rom. ii. 16.](#)) “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.” ([Rom. xiv. 10.](#)) “We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.” ([2 Thess. i. 7-9.](#)) The apostle there speaking of the day of judgment, describes it thus: “When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on all them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of his Son, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” ([2 Tim. iv. 1.](#)) “I charge thee, (saith St. Paul there to Timothy,) before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom.” ([Rev. xxii. 12.](#)) “Behold I come quickly, (saith our Lord,) and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be.” I proceed to the

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II. Second thing I proposed, namely, To give some account why God hath committed the administration of this work into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. And of this, I shall give an account in these two particulars:

1. God thought fit to confer this honour upon Christ, as a suitable reward of his patience and sufferings.

2. He thought fit likewise hereby to declare the righteousness and equity of his judgment, in that mankind is judged by one in their own nature, a man like themselves.

1. God hath thought fit to confer this honour upon Christ, as a suitable reward of his obedience and sufferings, of his coming into the world by his appointment, to undertake the work of our redemption, and to mediate a reconciliation between God and us, of his voluntary submission to a condition so mean and low, to that poverty and contempt, and to those extreme sufferings which he did so patiently undergo, in the prosecution of this great design.

That God hath committed all power to Christ, with a design to put an honour upon him, our Saviour himself tells us: ([John v. 22, 23.](#)) “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son; that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.” The Scripture speaks of this matter, as if, when Christ undertook the great work of our redemption, it were expressly covenanted between God the Father and him, that he should undertake this work, and submit to all those grievous things, which were necessary to be done and suffered, in order to the effecting of it; and that when he had accomplished it, God would confer this glory upon him, that in his human nature he should be “exalted to the right hand of God,” and have “power given him over all flesh, to judge the world, and to give eternal life to as many as he pleased;” and when he had received this reward, that then this mediatory office should cease, and he should “resign up the kingdom to God the Father, that God might be all in all.” This is the scope and design of the several texts of Scripture concerning this matter.

With relation to this covenant and agreement between him and his Father, he prays, ([John xvii. 1, 2.](#)) that he would not be unmindful of the glory which he had promised to invest him withal. “Fa her, the hour is come; glorify thy Son; as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” And, ([ver. 4, 5.](#)) “I have glorified thee on earth: I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do.” And then he claims the reward of it: “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self.” And the apostle to the Hebrews ([chap. xii. 2.](#)) tells us, that the hopes of this did encourage, and bear up our Lord under his sufferings, “Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” And St. Peter tells us, ([1 Pet. i. 11.](#)) that “the prophets of old testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” And St. Paul tells us what this glory is, ([Eph. i. 20, 21.](#)) viz. that “God hath set him at his own right hand in heavenly places, far above all



principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come.” But most expressly, ([Phil. ii. 7-11.](#)) the same apostle tells us, that in consideration of the great humiliation and sufferings of Christ, God hath highly exalted him. “He made himself of no reputation, (he emptied himself) and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” And that the giving of this name and authority to Christ, upon account whereof all creatures shall be subject to him, doth principally import that power of judging the world which was committed to him, is evident from the explication of these phrases, of “bowing the knee to Christ,” and of “confessing to him with the tongue,” which the same apostle tells us elsewhere do signify our being judged by him. ([Rom. xiv. 10, 11.](#)) “We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ: for it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God.”



So that you see that the glorious reward of Christ’s self-denial and suffering, doth principally consist in having the judgment of the world committed to him, which therefore is called “his kingdom,” ([Matt. xvi. 28.](#)) where our Saviour expresseth it by “the Son of man’s coming in his kingdom.” ([2 Tim. iv. 1.](#)) “I charge thee, therefore, (saith St. Paul to Timothy,) before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom.” And it is with relation to this power and authority, that the title of King was given to him, ([Matt. xxv. 34.](#)) “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand,” &c. And the Scripture almost every where, when it speaks of Christ’s coming, calls it his glorious appearance. ([Matt. xvi. 27.](#)) “They shall see the Son of man coming in the glory of his Father.” ([Matt. xxiv. 30.](#)) “They shall see the Son of man coming with power and great glory.” ([Matt. xxv. 31.](#)) “When the Son of man shall come in his glory.” And ([Tit. ii. 13.](#)) it is called, “The glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”



And this is a very suitable reward of his great submission and sufferings, that he, who lived in so mean and obscure a condition, should come in great glory; that he, who was rejected and despised of men, should be attended on by mighty angels; that he, who was arraigned and condemned by the powers of the world, should have authority given him to summon all, both small and great, the kings and great men, and judges of the earth, to appear at his bar, and to receive sentence at his month.

And this shall be the last act of his Mediatorship, to sit in judgment upon the world, to distribute rewards to his faithful servants, and to punish his obstinate and implacable enemies. And when this work is finished, then this authority shall expire, and the office and kingdom

of the Mediator shall cease; for “when he shall have subdued all things to himself, (as the apostle expressly tells us, [1 Cor. xv. 24, 25](#), &c.) “Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom of God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that hath put all things under him, that God may be all in all.”

2 God hath committed the administration of this judgment to Christ, that he might hereby declare the righteousness and equity of it, in that mankind is judged by one in their own nature, a man like themselves. And therefore we find that the Scripture, when it speaks of Christ, as judge of the world, doth almost constantly call him “man,” and “the Son of man.” In the places I have mentioned before; ([Matt. xiii. 41](#).) “The Son of man shall send forth his angels.” And, ([Matt. xvi. 27](#).) “The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father.” ([Matt. xxiv. 30](#).) “Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.” ([Matt. xxv. 31](#).) “When the Son of man shall come in his glory.” ([Acts xvii. 31](#).) “He hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world with righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained.” By the constant use of which expression, the Scripture doth give us plainly to understand, that this great honour of being judge of the world, was conferred upon the human nature of Christ. For as he is God, he is over all, and judge of the world, and could not derive this power from any, it being originally inherent in the Deity. Which likewise appears in those expressions of his being “ordained a judge,” and having “all authority and judgment committed and given to him.” ([Acts xvii. 31](#).) “He will judge the world in righteousness, by the man whom he hath ordained.” And, ([John v. 22](#).) “The Father hath committed all judgment to the Son.” And ([ver. 27](#).) “He hath given him authority to execute judgment.” Now this cannot be said of Christ as God, but in respect of his human nature. And this is clear beyond all exception, by what our Saviour adds, as a reason why this authority is committed to him; “He hath given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man:” that is, because in that respect, and no other, he is capable of having this authority derived to him; for as he is the Son of God, he hath it in himself. And, perhaps, for this reason likewise—because, in respect of his human nature, he is visible; a man being part of the visible creation of God, and the judgment of the great day being to be administered in a visible manner, and to that end the bodies of men to be raised and united to their souls, in order to their visible appearance at this judgment; it seems very congruous, that the Son of man, clothed in our nature, and in vested with a human body, should sit in judgment upon mankind.

But, principally, because nothing can more effectually declare the equity of this judgment, and that it shall be administered in righteousness, than that God hath ordained a man like ourselves to sit in judgment upon us. In human judgments, it is reckoned a great piece of



equity, for men to be tried by their peers, to be acquitted or condemned by those who are as near as may be to them, and in the same circumstances of rank and condition with themselves; because such are like to understand their cases best, and to have a fair and equitable consideration of all the circumstances belonging to it. Now Christ, as he is the Son of man, is near to us, “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, made in all things like unto us, only without sin;” which was necessary to qualify him to be our judge; he dwelt among us, and understands all our circumstances, and whatever may have influence upon our case, to extenuate or aggravate our guilt. What the apostle to the Hebrews says of Christ as a high-priest, may be applied to him as a judge: ([Heb. iv. 15.](#)) “We have not a judge, which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”



That which now remains, is to draw some inferences from what I have discoursed to you upon this argument.”

1. If the Lord Jesus Christ shall judge the world, and we must “all appear before his judgment-seat,” then it greatly concerns every one of us so to demean ourselves in this world, that we may be accepted of him in the next. If a man be to be tried for his life, how will he court the favour of the judge, that when he comes to stand at the bar, he may receive a gracious sentence from his mouth? Why, there is a day certainly coming, when every one of us must appear before the tribunal of the great Judge of the world; and therefore we should with all possible care and diligence endeavour to approve our consciences, and all the actions of our lives to him. “Wherefore we labour (saith the apostle immediately before my text) that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.” This is that which makes his acceptance and approbation so valuable and considerable, that he is to be our judge; to him we must stand or fall, by his sentence we shall be cast or cleared for ever.

We are very apt to court the favour of great men, of the princes and judges of this world, that when we come to stand in need of it, we may have the benefit and comfort of it. But this is not our great interest; for the sentence that men can pass upon us, doth but operate for a little while, the effect and consequences of it do not reach beyond this world; it is not final and conclusive as to our eternal state. To allude to that saying of Solomon’s, “many seek the Prince’s favour; but every man’s judgment is of the Lord.” We seek the favour of the great men of this world; but there is a greater man than any of these, whom we are apt to despise and neglect, “the prince of the kings of the earth, the man who is ordained of God, to be judge both of quick and dead.”



Every man’s judgment shall be from him, it is his sentence which above all other we have most reason to desire or dread. Therefore we should have regard to him, and by submitting to his sceptre, and yielding a willing obedience to the laws of his holy gospel, seek his favour, lest “he break us with a rod of iron, and dash us in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

This advice we find given to the kings and rulers of the earth. (*Psal. ii. 10-12.*) “Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings; and be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

2. This is matter of great comfort to all sincere Christians, that Christ shall judge the world; as it likewise is of great terror to all that disobey the gospel, and by their wicked lives confute their profession, and pretended belief of it. Christ is “the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him,” and to none else. He hath not only purchased this salvation for us, but, by a public, and solemn, and authoritative sentence, will confer it upon us.

Indeed it is justly matter of great terror to the wicked of the world, who live in ungodliness and worldly lusts; and, under the name and title of Christians, have “trampled under foot the Son of God,” and by their lives have openly declared, that “they would not have this man rule over them.” Sure it cannot but be matter of great horror and amazement to such persons, to think of this Judge, and to consider, that he, whom by their lewd lives and practices they have so contemned in this world, will sit as judge upon them, and condemn them in the next. And therefore our Saviour tells us, (*Luke xxi. 25, &c.*) that when the day of judgment shall surprise the world, and “they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory;” then the wicked of the earth shall be in great distress and perplexity, and “their hearts shall fail them with fear, and for looking after those things which are coming upon the earth;” but that to good men it shall be a day of great joy, and that the approach of it shall revive their spirits, and raise their heads: (*ver. 28.*) “But when these things shall begin to come to pass, then lift up your heads with joy, because your redemption draws nigh.”

And this consideration is matter of great comfort to all good men, both upon account of their sufferings and services for Christ.—In respect of their sufferings for him. In this world they are exposed to great trials and persecutions for him: but he, for whose name we suffer, is to give us our reward; he, who is of the same nature with us, and took part of flesh and blood, and suffered himself in the flesh, more grievously than any of us can suffer; he it is to whom God hath referred it, to consider our sufferings, and give what rewards to them he thinks fit. And then, in respect of our services, though the best of them be imperfect, and nothing that we do is able to abide the severity of his justice, yet, by virtue of his meritorious sacrifice and satisfaction, the imperfection of them is pardoned, and the sincerity of them is accepted. For he being our judge, who was our sacrifice, and is our advocate with the Father, we may rest assured that he will plead our cause for us, and the merit of his own sufferings, in bar of that sentence which strict justice would pass upon us.

3. And lastly, This shews what reason the ministers of Christ have to be earnest and importunate with sinners, to repent and turn to God, to believe and obey the gospel of Christ, that they may have him their friend, who will certainly be their judge. This inference



the apostle makes from this doctrine, in the words immediately after the text; “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;” we, who are employed by Christ, to warn sinners of the danger and terror of a future judgment, who are ambassadors sent from this great King and Judge of the world, to treat with sinners, and to offer peace to them, and in “Christ’s stead to beseech them to be reconciled to God,” as the apostle speaks in the latter part of this chapter. So that, if we ourselves believe what we preach to others, to be the word and law of him who shall shortly judge us, and them that hear us, can we forbear with all possible importunity to solicit their repentance, and to warn them to “flee from the wrath which is to come?” Can we let them sleep in their sins, when we see them neglect so great a happiness, and run themselves upon so intolerable a misery? If we believe that holy book out of which we preach, and the discoveries and revelation there made, we may take an easy prospect of another world, and see “the wrath of God revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” For the gospel hath made a more particular and clear discovery to us of the state of the next world, and the proceedings of the great day, than ever the world was acquainted with before. It tells us who is the person that shall sit in judgment upon us, even “Jesus Christ, whereof God hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” Now if we know this, and he assured of it, we cannot but deal plainly with sinners, and, out of tender pity and compassion to them, endeavour to make them sensible of the sad issue and event of a wicked life, and that, without repentance and amendment, they will not be able to stand in the judgment of the great day. When we see men in the highway to ruin and destruction, and the evil day making haste towards them, we cannot but warn them of that sad fate which hangs over them, and endeavour by all means to rescue them from that extreme and endless misery, which is ready to overtake them.

Consider then, sinner, whom it is thou now rejectest and despisest, and whose laws thou castest behind thy back. It is he who, for all his mean appearance in the world, is the Lord of glory, into whose hand the “Father hath committed all judgment.” And can there be a greater madness, than to provoke and make him thine enemy, who shall be thy judge? than to despise him, who can destroy thee? He appeared once as “a lamb, to take away the sins of the world;” but if through our obstinacy and impenitency we render this appearance of his ineffectual for our recovery, he will appear a second time in a more terrible manner, as “a lion to tear us in pieces.” He came once as “a light into the world;” in a still and gentle way, to convince and convert sinners: but if we resist this light, he will come “in flaming fire to take vengeance on all them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of his Son.”

And this is that which will make us speechless, and fill our faces with everlasting confusion, at the second coming of Christ that we have frustrated and made void the end of his first coming. What shall we be able to say to him, when he comes to judge us, who rejected him when he came to save us? With what reason can we hope that he will deliver us from

hell, when we would not be saved by him “from our sins, and redeemed from our vain conversation?”

I will conclude all with that merciful warning which the Judge himself hath given us, and left upon record: ([Luke xxi. 34-36.](#)) “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be over charged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man,”



SERMON CLXXIX.

OF THE PERSONS WHO ARE TO BE JUDGED.

For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.—2 Cor. v. 10.

I PROCEED to the second proposition contained in the words; viz. That all men are liable to this judgment, and that no man that ever lived in the world, except our blessed Saviour, the judge himself, shall be exempted from it. “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.”

I shall first endeavour to illustrate and confirm the truth of this proposition; and then apply it to ourselves.

First, For the confirmation of it. This I shall endeavour to do from express testimonies of Scripture: and then by arguments drawn from reason and Scripture together.

I. I shall endeavour to confirm the truth of this point from express testimonies of Scripture. And we find that the Scripture useth words of the greatest latitude and extent, to express this matter more emphatically tons. ([Gen. xviii. 25.](#)) God is called “the judge of the earth.”—“Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” ([Matth. xxv. 32.](#)) It is said, “that when Christ shall sit upon the throne of his glory, all nations shall be gathered before him,” ([Acts x. 42.](#)) He is said to be “ordained of God to be judge of quick and dead.” And so, likewise, ([1 Pet. iv. 5.](#)) “Who shall give an account to him, who is ready to judge the quick and the dead?” This expression is purposely used to take in all persons that have ever lived in the world; not only those that shall be already dead at the coming of Christ, but those that shall be found alive at his coming, who, though they shall not die, yet they shall undergo a sudden and equivalent change, as St. Paul tells us from particular revelation: ([I Cor. xv. 51, 52.](#)) “Behold, I shew you a mystery: we shall not all sleep;” that is, we shall not all die, and sleep in the grave; “but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump (for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed);” that is, they that are already dead shall be then raised, and their corruptible bodies changed into incorruptible; and they that shall be found alive, though they shall not die, yet their bodies shall undergo the same change with those that are raised. And this is the reason why Christ is often in Scripture called, “the Judge of quick and dead.”

But to proceed to other texts. ([Acts xvii. 31.](#)) “He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.” The world; that is, all men that ever lived in it. “He commands all men every where to repent, because he will judge all men.” ([Rom. xiv. 10-12.](#)) “We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ; for it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one

of us shall give an account of himself to God.” (Heb. ix. 27.) “It is appointed for all men once to die, and after this the judgment.” That is, as death shall pass upon all men, or a change equivalent to it, so after death the judgment shall pass upon the same persons: (Heb. xii. 23.) “And to God the judge of all.” (1 Pet. i. 17.) “If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth every man, according to his works.”



And to express this the more fully, the Scripture reckons up the several ranks and conditions of men, to shew that none shall be exempted: (Rev. vi. 15-17.) where you have a representation of the day of judgment, and several sorts of men in vain endeavouring to hide themselves from it, and escape it: “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?” Which words are a lively representation of the universal appearance, that all persons in the world, of all ranks and conditions, must make before God at that great day. If any be exempted, they must either be secured by their power and interest, or overlooked for their meanness and inconsiderableness; but none shall either be privileged for their greatness, or neglected for their meanness. If any can pretend to be privileged, it must be those of greatest dignity and authority, the kings and great men: or of the greatest esteem, the rich men of the earth: or of the greatest strength and power, the chief captains and the mighty men: but these have no protection against the arrest of that judgment. Nor shall any be overlooked for their meanness. If any sort of men be contemptible and inconsiderable, it must be those who are in the lowest condition of debasement, bondmen and slaves: but every bondman, as well as every freeman, shall be brought before this tribunal. And so, likewise, (Rev. xx. 12, 13.) where all persons are distributed into two ranks small and great: “I saw the dead both small and great, standing before God, and the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in those books, and the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works.” You see the whole world is ransacked and searched, sea and land, that none may escape this judgment. For which reason it seems to be called by the apostle St. Jude, (ver. 6.) “the judgment of the great day;” for that will be a great day indeed, in which all men that ever lived in the world shall appear and receive their trial.



The sum of all is this: that all persons that ever were upon the face of the earth, none excepted, of what sex or age, of what rank or quality, of what country or nation, in what times or places soever they were born or lived; high or low, rich or poor, knowing or ignorant, good or bad, young or old, the greatest princes and potentates, as well as the meanest subjects and slaves; the deepest statesmen and politicians, the learned clerks and disputers of this

world, as well as the idiots and the simple; in short all, without any distinction or exception, without any privilege or respect of persons, shall at this great day appear before this high tribunal, and give an account of themselves, and all their actions, and receive the proper doom and sentence respectively due to them. I proceed to the

II. Second thing I proposed; which was to confirm this yet farther by arguments drawn from reason and Scripture together. And this will appear, whether we consider the nature of man, or the nature of God. And,

1. If we consider the nature of man: we are all God's creatures, who have received all that we have from him, and depend wholly upon him, and are entirely subject to him, to be governed by such laws as he hath prescribed to us, and to be account able to him for our observance or violation of them; all this is essentially included in the nature of a reasonable creature, and as such we all stand equally related to him. As we are creatures, we are not our own, but wholly another's, and perfectly at the disposal of him who made us, and from whom we received all that we have: and as we are reasonable creatures, we are all equally endowed with free choice and power over our actions; by the good or bad use whereof we are capable of doing well or ill, and consequently of deserving well or ill for our doings, and of receiving rewards and punishments accordingly: we are all capable of being governed by laws, and therefore under the authority of God, as our lawgiver, and liable and accountable to him as our judge.

And all this is necessary and universal, because it is consequent upon the condition of our nature and being; and whoever pretends to be exempted from the judgment of God, he must exempt himself out of the creation of God, he must deny the God that made him, and renounce his relation to him as a creature; must disclaim his dependance upon him, and subjection to him; he must withdraw himself from the authority and jurisdiction of the universal King of the world, and declare that he hath nothing to do to rule over him, that he doth not stand obliged to him for his being, nor did receive from him those talents of life, and health, and reason, and other blessings which he enjoys, and consequently that he is not concerned to make any improvements of them, being accountable to none for the good or bad use of them.

Now, if any man can think thus, that he is none of God's creatures and subjects, he may hope to decline and escape his judgments: but every man that owns God for his creator and sovereign, must yield himself to be subject to his laws, and liable to his judgment. Upon this account the apostle St. Paul concludes all the world, the gentiles as well as the Jews, to be liable to the judgment of God; because they are all equally subject to his laws. ([Rom. iii. 19.](#)) "Now we know (says he) that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world, (that is, both Jews and gentiles,) may become guilty before God" In the Greek it is ὑπόδικος γένηται τῷ θεῷ, "that all the world may be subject (or liable) to the judgment of God." Now though this be immediately



spoken of the Jews, who were under a written law; yet he had told us before in what sense the gentiles also, as well as the Jews, are under the law of God: ([chap. ii. 14.](#)) “For when the gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law to themselves, shewing the work (or effect) of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing them witness, and their thoughts in the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another.” His meaning is, that there is no person in the world, but, though he hath not the knowledge of Divine revelation, and that law of God which is written in the Scriptures; yet he hath the light of natural conscience, he hath a law which is born within him, enacted, as I may say, in his very nature, and written upon his heart, which will acquaint him with the material parts and great lines of his duty; and by virtue of this law he is obnoxious to the judgment of God, and stands accountable to him for all his breaches and violations of it. So that, from the common nature of man, and that which is essential to all men, it is evident that we are all equally liable to the judgment of God.

2. If we consider the nature of God, who is impartially just, and no acceptor of persons, this likewise will furnish us with an argument for the proof of this truth, that none shall be exempted from the judgment of God. Justice requires that every one should have that which of due belongs to him: but of due it belongs to every reasonable creature, to give an account of himself, and of his actions, to the great Judge of the world: and to exempt any from this account would be partiality, and that which the Scripture calls *προσωποληψία*, “respect” or “acceptation of persons,” and which the Scripture doth every where remove at the greatest distance from God. ([Deut. x. 17.](#)) “The Lord your God is Lord of lords, and God of gods; a great God, mighty and terrible, he regardeth not persons.” ([2 Chron. xix. 7.](#)) “There is no iniquity with the Lord your God, nor accepting of persons.” Job, ([xxxiv. 18, 19.](#)) speaking of the impartial justice of God, says, “He accepteth not the persons of princes, nor accepteth the rich more than the poor: for they are all the work of his hands.” ([1 Pet. i. 17.](#)) “If we call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth every man.”

Now, respect of persons is, in the distribution of justice, to have respect to some qualities and circumstances of persons, which do not at all appertain to the merits of the cause, and upon that account to deal unequally with those whose cases otherwise are equal. As, when two persons are equally guilty and obnoxious to the law, to bring one upon his trial and condemn him, but to exempt the other from justice; or, if he come upon his trial, to absolve and acquit him upon some account of relation, or interest, or friendship; or, because he is rich and powerful, the other mean and poor; or upon any other account besides the pure merits of the cause. Now the impartial and inflexible justice of the Divine nature is such, that he is not to be moved and wrought upon by any consideration whatsoever, to exempt any person from appearing at his bar, and receiving his trial there, and having judgment passed upon him, according as upon trial his cause shall appear to be. “We must all appear

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before the judgment-seat of Christ.” No person whatever, of what condition soever, shall be exempted from it.

All that now remains is to apply this to ourselves, and that in these following particulars:

I. From what has been said, we learn that this doctrine of a future judgment equally concerns every one of us, and ought in reason to have the like influence upon us, because we are all of us, without difference or exception, equally liable to the judgment of God; not one of us, of what age, or quality, or condition soever, shall be exempted from it. Whoever thou art, how great, or rich, or powerful soever, though never so big and considerable among men, thou shalt not escape the judgment of God. It may be, thou art a prince, and bearest rule over others: but thou also art liable to the judgment of God, and therefore oughtest to remember, that “they that rule over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God,” and of that great account which they must one day give of that high charge committed to them. It may be now thou judgest others, and canst call them before thy bar, and make them tremble, having power and authority to absolve or condemn them: but remember, that for all this thou must come into judgment thyself, and give an account how thou hast judged others, and whether thou hast sat and proceeded in these inferior courts as one mindful of the high tribunal of God, and with a just sense of the judgment of the great day, when all the causes which thou hast tried here upon earth, will be reviewed and severely scanned in that higher court, from which there can be no appeal.

It may be thou art rich and powerful, and one of those great flies that can break through the cobwebs of human laws, and escape the judgment of them: but the judgment of God will take fast hold of thee, and, in despite of all thy interest and might, will take a severe revenge upon thee. As powerful as thou art, thou art but a man, and God is infinitely too strong for thee, thou canst not escape out of his hands. “Thinkest thou, O man! that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?” says the apostle, looking upon it as a foolish and absurd imagination, for any man to think that he can by any means avoid the judgment of God.

So that, so long as we are men, whatever else we are, we ought to stand in awe of the judgment of the great day; because, let our rank and condition be what it will, we are all equally obnoxious to that, and can upon no account whatsoever plead any privilege or exemption from it.

II. The consideration of this confounds all those differences and distinctions of men, which make such a noise in this world; and whatever they may signify in this world, makes them very inconsiderable as to the other. Why then should men be puffed up, and look so big upon account of any of these things, when there is a day not far off, and which will certainly, and, for aught we know, shortly overtake us, which will level men in all these respects, and set them upon even ground, before an impartial bar: where none of these things will be had in any consideration, and where the foolish pride and arrogance of men shall be confounded: and those who were wont to look down with so much scorn upon others, as so

infinitely below them, shall find themselves upon an equal level with the poorest and most abject part of mankind, and shall be ready to say, with the wise man in the Wisdom of Solomon, ([chap. v. 8.](#)) “What hath pride profited us, or what hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All these things are passed away as a shadow, and as a post that hasteth by.” So that we ought to use well all those advantages which we have above others in this world: if we do not, they will be of no use and benefit to us in the other. “Riches profit not in the day of wrath.”

All these petty civil differences and discriminations of high and low, rich and poor, honourable and base, they only hold in this world, and are in vogue on this side the grave: but when we come into the other world, they will all cease, and signify nothing. There the powerful oppressor can do nothing to the injury of the poorest man that ever lived in this world, and as little to his own safety and security. All that power and interest which is now so considerable, and makes its way every where, and does what it pleaseth, will be of no use and significancy in the other world. The great and the mighty, when death hath once arrested them, and bound them over to the judgment of the great day, their glory and strength departs from them, and they are then but like other men. Job elegantly describes the state of men after death: ([Job iii. 17-19.](#)) “There the wicked cease from troubling: and 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.” While we are upon the stage of this world, we sustain several persons; one is a prince and a great man, another is a captain and a mighty man; and whilst this life lasts, these differences are considerable. But when we retire and go off the stage, we shall then be undressed, we shall be stripped of all our titles, and of all our glory, and go out of the world as naked as we came into it. Death and judgment level all mankind, and when we come to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, we shall all stand upon equal terms. For God respects not the persons of the mighty in judgment, he will shew no reverence to the great ones of this world, but will deal impartially and alike with all. ([Matt. xxv. 32.](#)) You may there see how the Judge himself represents the universality and impartiality of his dealings with men in that day: “Before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.” All mankind shall then be gathered into one common flock, among which there shall no other distinction be made, but of sheep and goats; the separation which shall then be made, shall not be of the high from the low, of the rich from the poor, of the honourable from the base, of the learned from the ignorant; there shall be but one distinction then made, of the good from the bad, and the righteous from the wicked; there shall no consideration be then had, but only of the moral differences of men; all civil difference will then vanish and be of no account in that day, either to exempt any man from that judgment, or to gain any favour and respect to him in the hearing or decision of his cause. This should make all

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men very modest and humble in this world, to consider how they shall be levelled in the next.

III. How should the consideration of this dash all our sensual mirth and jollity, and put a damp upon our spirits, when they are too light and vainly transported with the pleasures and delights of this world! If a man be to prepare himself to be tried for his life after a few days, how will he look about him! With what care and seriousness will he provide for so solemn an occasion, and neglect nothing that may stand him in stead, and help to bring him off when he shall receive his trial! The thoughts of this will spoil all his mirth, and turn the lightness of his spirit into sober sadness. Much more ought the consideration of a judgment infinitely more terrible, and in the consequence of it of far greater concernment to us, to compose our minds into a serious frame. For if we believe a future and general judgment, and that none of us can by any means possibly escape it, then certainly it highly concerns every one of us to be serious, and to pass the time of this life in a perpetual awe of it. So St. Peter argues from this consideration: (1 Pet. i. 17.) “And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth every man, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear,” This thought should interpose itself in all our mirth, that “we must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.” And therefore Solomon admonisheth young men, in the midst of their sports and pleasures, to think of a future account; (Eccles. xi. 9.) “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.”

IV. And lastly, From hence we learn, that the business of religion does equally concern every man. For if we must all be judged, we are all concerned to prepare and provide for it: and a religious and virtuous life is the only preparation for it. How should we order our lives with a respect to this great and general assize, when every one of us shall be brought upon his trial, and stand at the bar of God to be judged by him! Many live as if they thought the business of religion below them, and not at all appertaining to them: but if the judgment of God will equally reach all persons, then I am sure it equally concerns all to mind religion, and a holy and virtuous life; for that alone will make us worthy, as our Saviour himself expresseth it, “to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

And this is the result of Solomon’s inquiry, and of his long discourse upon that argument—what is the great work and business, the great interest and concernment of men in this life; which we find in the conclusion of his sermon, called the book of the preacher: (Ecc. xii. 13, 14.) “Let us (says he) hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.” Religion is the great business and concernment of men in this world, because God will bring every man, and “every work into, judgment, whether it be good or evil.”



SERMON CLXXX.

OF THE ACTIONS FOR WHICH MEN WILL BE ACCOUNTABLE.

For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.—2 Cor. v. 10.

I PROCEED to the third proposition contained in these words, viz. that all the actions which men have done in this life shall then come to account, and men shall be judged for them. “That every man may receive the things done in the body;” τὰ ἴδια τοῦ σώματος, “the things proper and due to the body;” so some very good copies have it: and then the meaning will be, that every one may receive the reward due to him; the word body, by a frequent Hebraism, being put for the person: as if he had said, the reward due to himself, according to the actions he hath done in this life, good or bad. But in most copies, it is, τὰ δια τοῦ σώματος, “the things done in, or by, the body,” as our translation renders it; that every one may receive a reward of the actions which he hath done in this life; and then this phrase doth import what it is that shall be the matter of our account at the day of judgment, viz. “The things done in the body;” that is, all the actions of this life, while we are in this world, in this state of union of the soul and body.

Whether there be any peculiar emphasis in this phrase, τὰ δια τοῦ σώματος, “the things done by, or in, the body,” as if it did exclude those things which shall be done after death, in the state of separation of our souls from our bodies, from being accounted for at the resurrection in the day of judgment; I say, whether there be any such emphasis in those words, “the things done in the body,” I cannot certainly affirm; though, according to the nature and reason of the thing, it seems very probable, as the schoolmen have generally determined in this case, that *meritum est viatoris*, “merit and demerit are proper to this state of trial;” and that wicked men, when they are in *termino*, and their state is finally concluded, and the trial of their obedience is at an end, do not demerit by their sins, nor increase their punishment. For, although that hatred and enmity of God which is in the damned spirits, be a monstrous irregularity in a creature, yet it cannot well in reason be otherwise, but that a creature, which is extremely miserable, and withal desperate, and past all hopes of remedy and recovery out of that dismal state; I say, it cannot well in reason be otherwise expected, but that a creature in such a condition should rage against the Author of its torment and punishment, and do all the despite to him that he can, and wish that he were not, though it be in vain to wish so; and it seems probable that God will not bring this to a new account, because it seems so natural and necessary a consequent of a miserable and desperate state: but though all this be probable, I am far from being peremptory in it, much less am I confident that it is the meaning of this phrase here in the text; I do not love to build an opinion upon a single and doubtful phrase of Scripture. I only mention it by the by, not intending

to insist upon it, being much of his mind who said, *Non amo nimis argutam theologiam*, “I am no lover of great subtlety and nicety in divinity.”

It is sufficient to my purpose, that this phrase of “every man’s receiving the things done in the body,” does at least import thus much—that we shall be accountable, at the day of judgment, for all the actions that we have done in this life, and receive the due recompence and reward of them; which is the proposition I intend as briefly as I can to illustrate and confirm.

And, first, For the illustration of this point, I shall instance in the several heads of action, as they take their difference and variety from the principle, or matter, or object, or other circumstances of them. We must render an account to this great Judge for our inward as well as outward actions; for the acts of our minds, and every thought springing up there, especially if it be cherished and entertained by us; for all our secret designs, purposes, and intentions, as well as for the words which we speak, and the outward actions which we do; whatever we have thought and designed, spoken and declared, accomplished and done, will then be considered and examined, and we shall be judged for it. We must likewise give an account of all our civil as well as religious actions, of our behaviour toward men in all our dealing and intercourse with them, as well as of our demeanour toward God in the duties of his more immediate worship and service. The neglects and omissions of our duty in any kind will also come under consideration, as well as our commissions of evil; a strict account likewise will be exacted of all the talents which God hath entrusted us with, of all the abilities, opportunities, and advantages we ever had of doing service to God, and good to men; and whether we have made answerable improvements of them for the glory of God, and the benefit and advantage of men.

We must be accountable likewise for words and actions of less moment and consequence, as well as for those of greater weight and concernment; for those which were done in secret, and in the greatest darkness and privacy, as well as for those which were done in public, and in the open view and light of the world; for the good and evil which hath been done by ourselves, and in our own persons, and for what hath been done by others by our command and countenance, and from the influence of our counsel and persuasion, or example, or which we have been any ways accessory to hinder or promote; and lastly, for the manner and circumstances of our actions, as well as for the matter and substance of them; all these will be surveyed and strictly searched into, and weighed in an exact balance, that we may receive a reward or punishment proportionable to them.

Secondly, For the confirmation of this, I shall make it evident both from Scripture and reason.

I. From Scripture; which in general tells us, that “God will bring every work into judgment;” and that, in order thereto, God strictly observes and takes notice of what we do; that “his eyes are upon the ways of man, and that he seeth all his goings; that there is no darkness

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nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves,” (Job xxxiv. 21, 22.) That “the ways of men are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings,” (Prov. v. 21.) That “he knoweth our paths and our lying clown, and is acquainted with all our ways.” That “there is not a word in our tongue, but he knoweth it altogether,” and that “he understands even our thoughts afar off;” (Psal. cxxxix. 2-4.) That all the actions of men are recorded in books, which shall be produced and opened at the great day, “and the dead, both small and great, shall be judged from those things, which shall be written in those books;” (Rev. xx. 21.)



And more particularly the Scripture tells us, that those words and actions of men which seem most inconsiderable, and are most likely to be exempted, shall be accounted for, and severely scanned and weighed. (Matt. xii. 36, 37.) Says our Lord there, “I say unto you, that every idle word,” by which, if our Saviour do not mean every unprofitable, to be sure every wicked word, “that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment, For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” By which saying, our Saviour designedly confutes an opinion, too current among many, that men’s words signify little, and that no account will be taken of them at the day of judgment; that God will not be so severe as to make them matter of charge and accusation, and to punish us for them in the other world; and, therefore, to obviate this mistake, he purposely adds, “for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” And therefore men must not think, that all their lewd and filthy talk, all their rash oaths and imprecations, all their atheistical discourse and profane jests upon religion and the Holy Scriptures, all their calumnies and slanders of good men, all their officious lies to serve a present turn and occasion will pass for nothing at the judgment of the great day. No, the Judge himself hath expressly told us, that of all such “words men shall give an account in the day of judgment.” And St. Jude tells us, out of an ancient prophecy of Enoch, that “the Lord shall come with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly,” not only “of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed,” but likewise “of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”



Our most secret thoughts and actions also, as well as our open and public deeds, shall then be brought upon the stage. (Eccles. xii. 14.) “For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” (Rom. ii. 16.) “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” And this likewise is the meaning of that proverbial speech so often used by our Saviour, “there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known.” There is nothing so secret, which shall not be disclosed and made manifest in that great day of revelation, and be laid open in the face of the whole world; especially the cunning, dissimulation, and hypocrisy of men, with God and men. Men are apt to think themselves safe

enough, if they can but escape the eye of men, and commit their sins secretly, and in the dark. But this is either direct atheism, or downright folly; because the eye of God is continually upon us, and “the darkness hideth not from him, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to him.” And if we be always under the inspection of our Judge, if all that we think, and say, and do, be “open and naked to the eye of him,” *προς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος*, “to whom we must give an account/ what will it profit us to dissemble before men, and to conceal any of our actions from them? Nay, if we could hide them from ourselves (as we cannot our wilful and deliberate sins), yet that would be of no advantage to us, because “God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things.”

And then, likewise, we must be accountable to God for all the neglects and omissions of our duty, as well as for the positive commission of sin, and that in proportion to the advantages and opportunities we have had of doing more and greater good. So our Saviour tells us, that “unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required.” (Luke xii. 48.) Many are apt to think, that if they do but abstain from notorious and scandalous vices, if they do nobody harm, though they do not serve God so fervently and constantly as others do, though they seldom think of him and pray to him, though they have no manner of activity or concernment to do good, either to the bodies or souls of men; yet that this negative virtue will serve their turn at the day of judgment. But the matter is quite otherwise, as our Saviour hath most expressly declared. “A good tree (saith he) will bring forth good fruit.” And by the parable of the foolish virgins, who for want of oil in their lamps were shut out of the kingdom of God, he declares to us the dangerous state of those who slumber away their lives in a drowsy inactivity, and are not careful either to keep alive grace in their hearts, or to shew forth the light of good works in their conversation. And in the parable of the talents, (Matt. xxv.) he passeth a most severe sentence upon that slothful servant, who hid his lord’s talent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth, without making any manner of improvement of it; (ver. 30.) “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” And in the same chapter, where our Saviour represents to us the proceedings of the great day, the charge there drawn up against them, consists of sins of omission, and gross neglects to do the good which they had the ability and opportunity to do; (ver. 42, 43, &c.) “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not.” Not that sins of commission shall then be passed by, and left out of the account; it is taken for granted, that they shall be reckoned for in the first place: but the wisdom of our Saviour chooseth to instance in those sins, which many hope they shall not be called to account for, the omission and neglect of their duty, that he might hereby root out of the minds of men effectually that false opinion, which they are so apt to entertain concerning such sins, as if they were of a very light and venial nature.

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II. This is evident likewise from reason; because all the actions of reasonable creatures, as such, are under the regulation and government of law, by which, as by a rule, every thing that we do is to be measured. And we have all the reason that can be to expect, that he who gave us this law, will look to the observance of it, and take an account of all breaches and transgressions of it, so as to reward those that keep it, and to punish the bold transgressors of it; and if this were not so, the law would want its proper sanction and enforcement, and had been given to no purpose.

And this law of God reacheth all our actions, in ward and outward, religions and civil, secret and open, positive and negative, with all the circumstances of commendation or aggravation that be long to them. And as this law is the rule of all human actions now, and by which we ought to live in this world; so it will be the rule by which we and all our actions shall be examined and judged in the next. The judgment of God will be of the same extent with his law.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, illustrated and confirmed the truth of this proposition, that all the actions which men have done in this life shall come to account in the next, and they shall be judged for them.

And if so, then certainly no consideration that can be presented to the mind of man, ought in reason to be more powerful to beget in us a strict care and conscience of all our thoughts, words, and actions, than this; that, after a little while, when a few days or years are over, all that we ever did in this world, shall be strictly examined and looked into, and be approved or condemned by the impartial judgment of God. And therefore, if we have any grain of true wisdom in us, any love to ourselves, any sense of our great and everlasting interest, that great day of account should always be before us, and present to our minds, and we should govern every action of our lives with a serious and awful regard to it. And if we be conscious to ourselves that “there is any way of wickedness in us,” that we have been grossly culpable in the violation of any known law of God, or in the neglect of any part of our duty, how can we without dread think of coming to so severe an account, and falling under so heavy a sentence, as will then be pronounced upon the workers of iniquity?

Indeed, if we could do any thing now, of which we were to give no account hereafter, and which would not be taken into consideration at the great day, we then might be secure and careless as to such actions; but when nothing we do is exempted from the judgment of God; when we are assured, beyond all doubt, that he will one day take cognizance of every thought, word, and action; how circumspect should we be, “what manner of persons we are in all holy conversation and godliness!” How nearly does it concern us, “to take heed to our ways, lest at any time we offend: to keep our hearts with all diligence,” and a to set a watch to the door of our lips!” that we may not think or speak any thing in the sight and hearing of our Judge, by which we may incur his censure and condemnation. This is the consideration which the wise man proposes to us, as of all other the most likely to awe men to the careful



obedience and observance of God's laws. "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for God will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

Can we be negligent of our lives and actions, when we consider that all the passages of our lives are upon record, and that there is a most exact register kept of them, written in indelible characters, with "a pen of iron, and the point of a diamond?" as the expression is, (Jer. xvii. 1.) "I remember all their wickedness, and their doings are before me," says God, (Hos. vii. 2.) and, (Amos viii. 7.) "The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will not forget any of their works." We sin, and forget that we have sinned; but God chargeth himself with the remembrance of all our evil doings, and they can never slip out of his mind.

Did men seriously believe these things, and were they affected with them as they ought, they could not but have a wonderful effect upon their lives, to make us more watchful over our ways, and to tread every step of our lives more warily. We could not commit iniquity with so much greediness and pleasure, and "rush into sin, as the horse rusheth into battle," without any fear or consideration, were we verily persuaded, that every evil action that we do in this life, will be matter of charge and accusation in the day of judgment.

Therefore, when we are doing any thing, we should ask ourselves, will not this also come into judgment? When we are engaged in any wicked design, or vicious course, we should consider, with what face will this act of violence and oppression, of fraud and cozenage, of filthy lewdness and brutish intemperance, appear at the great day? How will it look when "God shall arise to judgment?" When we are careless and remiss, slight and superficial in the service of God, and the duties of his worship, we should remember that God takes notice of all this, and we must give an account to him for the manner, as well as the matter of our actions.

If the actions of our lives were transient, and the consequence of them were over so soon as they are done, and no memorial of them would remain here after; if they would die with us, and never rise up in judgment against us; we needed not to take such heed to them: but we do all things for eternity, and every action of this life will have a good or bad influence upon our everlasting state.

More particularly, the consideration of this should have an influence upon us, more especially, to these purposes.

1. To make us afraid of lesser sins, as well as greater, because those also, as well as these, will come into judgment; and we should not esteem any thing little, which God shall think fit to take into consideration, and to bring upon the stage at the great day.

2. The consideration of this should likewise deter us from secret sins. We are apt to think, that if we can but sin in secret, and hide what we do from the eyes of men, we are secure and safe enough: but, alas! our great danger is not from men, but God; not now, but hereafter.



We are now very solicitous to conceal our wickedness, that we may avoid shame, and escape punishment from men: but God will one day produce all our secret sins, and bring them forth into the light, for all our studious concealment of them now. Now we are afraid of the eye of men, and therefore choose secrecy, that we may commit our sins privately and unseen. Vain man! the day is at hand, when all thy secret lewdness and fraud will be brought upon the public stage of the world, and be matter of public infamy to thee, and an everlasting reproach that can never be wiped off; and though thou now coverest thy transgression as Adam, and hidest thine iniquity in thy bosom, yet the time is coming, when all thy secret wickedness shall be exposed to the view of angels and men: and then, sinner, what wilt thou do, when thou shalt appear before this all-seeing Judge? none of thine arts of concealment will then stand thee in stead, Canst thou hide thy sins from his eye, so that he cannot search them out? or thyself from his wrath? If thou canst not, what matters it to have any secret from others, when all is known to thy Judge?



3. This should likewise dispose us to great sincerity in all our words and actions, and make us always to speak as we think, to perform what we promise and profess, and in all things to be what we would seem to be, since there is a day coming when “the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed,” and every mask of hypocrisy and dissimulation shall be plucked off, and our most close and cunning designs shall be brought into the open light. In that great day of revelation, nothing will be matter of comfort and rejoicing to us, but “the testimony of our consciences, that, in all simplicity, and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world.”

4. This should make us faithfully to improve all the talents and opportunities which God affords to us; because we are but stewards, and must give an account of them. We are apt to covet great wealth, and to aspire after great places and power; but do we consider what it is that we so eagerly desire and pursue? All this will but bring upon us the burden of a greater and heavier account, if we do not improve these talents and advantages to the end for which they were given, to relieve the wants of the poor and miserable, and to serve the great ends of religion and virtue; and if we fail herein, a dreadful account will be exacted of us, and we shall wish that we had been the poorest and meanest, the most ignorant and unlearned persons in the world.

5. This should restrain us from uncharitable censures of others. “Thou art therefore inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, that judgest another: for thinkest thou that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?” as the apostle reasons, ([Rom. ii. 1.](#))



6. This may help to support us under the unjust censures and reproaches of men. If we be innocent, God will one day “bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noon-day.” “With me, (saith Paul, [1 Cor. iv. 3.](#)) it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord.” It is desirable to approve ourselves and our actions to men: but if we cannot, it is a great satisfaction to approve

them to our own consciences, and to God, who is “greater than our hearts, and knows all things.”

Lastly, This will teach us not to measure our condition by the good opinion which others have of us; but by the law of God, which will be the standard and measure of our judgment. He will consider every thing exactly, and weigh all the circumstances of our case, and make all the allowances that equity requires. Men can but judge according to appearance: but the judgment of God will be according to truth; therefore we should above all “labour to be accepted of him in that day,”



SERMON CLXXXI.

OF THE SENTENCE TO BE PASSED AT THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.—2 Cor. v. 10.

I PROCEED to the fourth and last proposition contained in the text; viz. That at the day of judgment, sentence shall be passed upon men according to the nature and quality of their actions done in this world, whether good or evil. The reward of happiness or misery, which men shall be sentenced to at that day, shall bear a proportion to the good or evil which they have done in this life.

In the prosecution of this argument, I shall inquire into these two things:

First, What proportion the rewards of the next world shall bear to the actions of men in this life.

Secondly, The grounds and reasons of it. And then make some application of this truth to the consciences of men.

First, What proportion the rewards of the next world shall bear to the actions of men in this life. I mean, whether the rewards of the next life shall only be proportioned to the kind and quality of our actions considered in general, as good or evil; that is, that good men shall be rewarded with everlasting glory and happiness, and wicked men with eternal punishment and torment: or whether the degrees of these rewards shall likewise bear a proportion to the degrees of the good or evil of our actions, so that a more eminent degree of piety and holiness shall have a proportionable share of glory and happiness; and greater and more heinous sins shall be loaded with greater and heavier punishments.

I. It is clear, and out of all controversy, that men shall be rewarded according to the quality and kind of their actions; good shall be rewarded to the good, and evil to the evil. And this is the constant tenor of the Bible. (Psal. i. 6.) “The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous;” that is, doth approve it, and will reward it: “but the way of the ungodly shall perish;” which is of the same importance with the expression in the verse before, “the wicked shall not stand in the judgment.” (Isa. iii. 10, 11.) “Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him, for they shall eat of the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked, for it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him;” which, if it be meant of the rewards and punishments of this life, is much more constantly and universally true of the other. (Matt. xvi. 27.) “The Son of man shall come in the glory of the Father, with his angels with him, and shall reward every man according to his works.” (Rev. xxii. 12.) “Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to every man according as his work shall be;” that is, whether good or evil. (Rom. vi. 23.) “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life:” that is, “to those who have their fruit unto holiness,” as he had said im-

mediately before. Hither likewise belong those innumerable texts, in which glory, and happiness, and eternal life, are promised to those who live “soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;” and wickedness and disobedience are threatened with dreadful and eternal punishment. But I shall only take notice of two or three of the most remarkable of them. ([Matt. xiii. 41](#) 43.) “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” But this is most fully represented in that particular description, which our Lord himself makes of the process of that day, ([Matt. xxv. 34.](#)) where the sentence that shall be passed on the righteous is this: “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.” And on the wicked, ([ver. 41.](#)) “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” And, ([ver. 46.](#)) “These, (speaking of the wicked, (shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.” ([John v. 28, 29.](#)) “The hour is coming, in which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.” ([Rom. ii. 6-9.](#)) Speaking of “the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who (says the apostle) shall render to every man according to his works; to them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but to them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil.”

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II. That the rewards and recompences of the next world shall likewise bear a proportion to the degrees of good or evil which we have done in this life, though it hath been controverted, seems also to be sufficiently clear from Scripture. And to this purpose, I shall,

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1. Produce such texts as will fully prove it.
2. Answer the grounds of the contrary opinion.

1. The Scripture doth plainly assert, that the rewards of the next life will bear a proportion not only to the kind and quality of our actions, but to the degree of them; that good men shall receive a reward proportionable to the degree of their holiness and obedience, of their service and sufferings for God; and that the torments of the wicked shall be greater or less, according to the degree and aggravation of their sins.

(1.) As for good men: that the reward that shall be bestowed upon them shall bear a proportion to the degree of their service and sufferings for God. This seems to be intimated in those metaphorical expressions used by the prophet Daniel: ([chap. xii. 3.](#)) “They that be wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.” Which is much the same with what St. Paul expressly affirms, concerning the different glory of the saints at the resurrection: ([1 Cor. xv. 41.](#)) “There is one

glory of the sun, another glory 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.” (Matt. v. 10, 11.) “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you for my name’s sake: rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven.” Which words, if they do not signify a more glorious reward to those who suffer persecution for Christ, have no emphasis or encouragement in them. For what cause of exceeding joy and gladness is it, to be persecuted and suffer for Christ, if a peculiar reward did not belong to those who suffer for him? If there do not, then those who suffer for Christ are plainly in a worse condition in this world, than other good men who escape these sufferings; and yet are in no better condition than others in the next world: and why then should any man be glad to suffer? (Matt. x. 41, 42.) “He that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man, in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man’s reward.” Where you see a difference intimated between the reward of a prophet and a righteous man; namely, that a prophet shall have a greater reward than an ordinary good man. (Matt. xix. 28, 29.) Where our blessed Saviour tells us, that all that denied themselves for Christ, shall inherit everlasting life; but for his disciples, who were continually attendants upon him, and sufferers for him, that a more eminent degree of glory should be conferred on them; which is expressed by their “sitting upon twelve thrones, to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.” But most plainly in the parable of the talents, where every man’s reward is according to the improvement of his talents. “He that had gained five talents, is made ruler over five cities: and he that had gained ten talents, ruler over ten cities.” (Luke xix. 15. 1 Cor. xv. 58.) “Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” But if our reward should not hold a proportion to the degree of our service, it would be in vain to be abundant in the work of the Lord. (2 Cor. iv. 17.) “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;” that is, our affliction contributes to our glory, and adds to the degree of it. (2 Cor. ix. 6.) The apostle useth this as an argument to persuade the Corinthians to be very liberal and bountiful to their distressed brethren, because according to the degree of their charity, would be the degree of their reward. “This, I say, he that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he that soweth plentifully, shall reap plentifully:” than which I cannot imagine any thing can be spoken more plainly to this purpose. And the same argument he useth to the Philippians, to stir them up to charity: (Phil. iv. 17.) “Not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account;” clearly implying, that the more good we do in this world, the more abundant shall be our reward in the next.

(2.) It is likewise as plain from Scripture, that the punishment and torment of wicked men will be abated or increased proportionably to the degree and aggravation of their sins. Upon this account our Saviour threatens those who continue impenitent under the gospel,

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with more heavy and dreadful punish-, merits, and tells us, that in the day of judgment their condition shall be far worse than theirs of Tyre and Sidon, of Sodom and Gomorrah. ([Matt. xi. 20, 21.](#)) And ([Matt. xxiv. 51.](#)) he threatens that servant, who, because “his Lord delayed his coming,” presumed so much upon the patience of God, with a more severe punishment: “The lord of that servant shall cut him in sunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites;” intimating, that the punishment of hypocrites will be very severe, and, as it were, the standard of the highest punishment. And so, likewise, ([Luke xii. 47, 48.](#)) our Saviour tells us, that, according to the degree of light and knowledge which men sin against, shall be the degree of their torment. “The servant that knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself to do according to it, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew it not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.” And in general he tells us, that the punishment of sinners takes its aggravation from the advantages and opportunities which men have neglected. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” So likewise the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, that God will vindicate the contempt of the gospel more severely than of the law of Moses: ([Heb. ii. 2-4.](#)) “If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” And, ([chap. x. 28, 29.](#)) “He that despised Moses’s law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden underfoot the Son of God?”

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So that it seems very evident from Scripture, that the degree of happiness or misery which men shall be sentenced to in the next world, shall be correspondent to the degree of good or evil which they have done in this world; and I can hardly imagine any thing more clear. But it seems the schoolmen, and other divines, who have been at leisure to tie knots, and to make objections against the plainest truths, have called this also into question. And, therefore, I shall, in the

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Second place, briefly examine the grounds of the contrary opinion; which, though they do but immediately strike at the degrees of glory and happiness, yet, by a parity of reason and consequence, they likewise overthrow the degrees of punishment; and they are these two:

I. They say, that the merits of Christ, by which eternal life and happiness is purchased for us, are equal to all those who have any interest in them, and are of value sufficient to purchase the highest degree of glory for them; and the meritorious cause being the same, there is no reason to imagine any difference of degrees in the effect.

Answer.—The weakness of this objection, how specious soever it may appear, will be evident to any one that considers, that eternal life and happiness doth not accrue to us by way of necessary and natural result from the merit of Christ’s obedience and sufferings, but of voluntary compact and agreement, and therefore is only available so far as it pleased God

the Father and him that it should be. Now the Scripture hath declared, that “Christ is the author of eternal salvation to them that believe and obey him:” but it hath declared likewise, that, according to the degrees of our holiness and obedience, shall be the degrees of our happiness; because the happiness which Christ hath purchased for us, is not bestowed upon us but upon certain terms and conditions to be performed on our part, upon the performance whereof, and the degree of that performance, the degrees of our happiness do depend.

II. The other objection is from the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, (Matt. xx.) where it is said, that “they that came in at the last hour received as much as they that came in at the first, and had borne the heat and burden of the day, every one his penny.” For answer to this, it is a known rule among divines, that *theologia parabolica non est argumentativa*; by which they mean, that we cannot argue in divinity from every circumstance of a parable, but only from the main scope of it. Now this parable seems plainly directed against the envious Jews, who murmured because the gentiles were to partake of the blessing of the Messias, and that they who were called in the last age of the world, should share in this benefit, as well as the ancient people of God; so that, by the murmurers, the Jews are designed, who were offended that salvation should come to the gentiles. And then the scope of the parable is not that all good men shall have equal degrees of glory; but that the gentiles, which were called long after the Jews, should be saved as well as they. I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed to inquire into, viz. The grounds and reasons of this, why the rewards which shall be distributed at the day of judgment, shall bear a proportion to the good or evil which men have done in this life? And,

1. That they shall be correspondent to the nature and quality of our actions, the justice and equity of the Divine providence doth plainly require. For justice is to give to every one that which of due belongs to him: now of equity it belongs to them that do well, that it should go well with them; and to the evil, that it should be ill with them; that every one should “receive the fruit of his doings.” Not that we can strictly merit any thing at the hand of God. It is goodness to reward an innocent creature, and it is goodness to reward the good actions of those who have been sinners; but justice requires that good and bad men should not fare alike. Thus Abraham reasons from the justice of God; “that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the world do right?” And, considering the promises which the goodness of God hath made freely to good men, for their encouragement in goodness, the performance of these promises is founded in the righteousness and faithfulness of God.

2. That the rewards of the next life should bear a proportion to the degree of the good or evil done by us in this life, is clearly founded in the equity and reasonableness of the thing; it being very much for the encouragement of holiness and goodness, to be assured, that whatever we do for God now will be fully considered and rewarded hereafter; that he will take notice of the least service that we do for him, and that every degree of grace and holiness

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shall be crowned with an answerable degree of glory and happiness. And so, on the other hand, it tends very much to discountenance sin, and to keep men from running to the height of impiety; to consider that every sin will aggravate their misery, and that every degree of wickedness will add to the weight of their torment; and that though they be “children of wrath” already, yet, by adding “iniquity to transgression, they may cause the “wrath of God and his jealousy to smoke against them,” and bring more curses upon themselves, and make themselves “ten times more the children of wrath.”—

And, indeed, in the nature of the thing, it cannot be otherwise; but that the better and more holy any man is, the more capable he should be of happiness, and the more disposed for the enjoyment of God; and the more wicked any man is, the more he should exasperate his own conscience, and awaken those furies which rage in his breast. “He treasures up” more “wrath against the day of wrath,” and piles up more fuel for everlasting burnings. The torments of hell are in Scripture compared to fire; now the more fuel and greater store of combustible matter is cast into it, the more fierce and raging it must be.

I have done with the explication, and shall now apply what hath been delivered:

I. If sentence shall be passed at the great day according to the good or bad actions of men, this shews us what should be the great care of every man in this life—to attend to the nature and quality of our actions, and to observe that difference between them in our practice now, which our Judge will certainly make in the sentence which he will pass upon them at the great day. And yet, so blind and mistaken is the greatest part of the world, that they make this the least part of their care and business. Men are generally very solicitous to be rich and great, and to be in a healthful and prosperous condition, and do with all possible care seek to avoid sickness, and poverty, and meanness: but how few are concerned to be virtuous and good, and to avoid wickedness and vice! And yet these moral differences of men at the day of judgment will only be taken into consideration; other things will not “profit us in the day of wrath.” God in that day will not proceed with men according to their outward quality and condition in this life; their eternal estate shall not then be decided according to their wealth or poverty, their height and meanness in this world: it will not then be inquired what office a man bore, what titles of honour, what manors or lordships, he was owner of; but how he hath behaved himself in those circumstances, what use he hath made of his wealth and power, what good or evil he hath done, whether he hath glorified God, and served the great ends of his creation; whether he hath obeyed or disobeyed the truth; whether he hath lived in “ungodliness and worldly lusts,” or “soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world:” in a word, whether we have been righteous or wicked. This will be the great inquiry at that day; and these qualities, according as they are found with us, will determine our condition for ever.

II. The consideration of this, may comfort good men under the promiscuous dispensations of God’s providence in this world. Now all things generally happen alike, and “there

is the same event to the righteous and to the wicked:" but things will not be always thus. Have but a little patience, and the justice of God's providence, which is now under a cloud, will clear up; the day is coming, which will make a wide and vast difference between good and bad men, "between those that serve God, and those that serve him not; those that swear, and those that fear an oath;" between the lewd and the chaste, the sober and debauched, the meek of the earth and the murderers; between the proud and the humble, the just and the oppressors; between those that persecute, and those who are persecuted, for righteousness.

Now the difference is frequently on the wrong side; good men suffer and are afflicted, the wicked flourish and are prosperous: but "go into the sanctuary of God, and there thou shalt see their end." Let us but look a little before us, beyond "the things which are seen, and are but temporal, unto the things which are not seen, and are eternal," and we shall see all things straight; that the end of the wicked, who flourished in this world, is to be destroyed for ever; and that the righteous, who were so distressed and afflicted in this world, "shall enter into rest and joy: when the days of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord, these shall be comforted, and the other tormented."

III. If the reward of the next life shall bear a proportion to the degrees of good or evil, which we have done in this world, then, on the one hand, here is matter of great comfort and encouragement to us in the ways of holiness and obedience. This is a mighty argument to good men "to grow in grace," and to press forward toward perfection, "to be steadfast, and unmoveable, and abundant in the work of the Lord, because they know that their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord;" but that, according to the degree of our service and obedience, of our virtue and goodness, shall be the degree of our glory and happiness. We serve a good Master, who will consider every thing that we do for him; "who is not unrighteous, to forget our work and labour of love," and will not let the least service pass unrewarded. Let us not then content ourselves with any low degree of goodness; but be continually aspiring after the highest perfection we are capable of. Since we have such a prize in our view, "let us run with patience," and with all our might, "the race which is set before us." For by the same reason that any man desires happiness, he cannot but desire the highest degrees of it that are attainable; and will consequently endeavour to make himself capable of the greatest degree of glory: and though no degree of holiness can merit everlasting life and happiness, yet greater degrees of holiness will certainly be rewarded with a larger portion of happiness. God is not bound antecedently to his promise, to give so great a reward to any man for his works, yet he hath promised to reward every man according to them.

So that there is no reason why a good man, when he is once come to this, that, by the grace and assistance of God, he can refrain from gross sins, and resist the temptations to them, and perform the great duties of religion, why he should, with Esau, sit down and say, "I have enough," I have so much as will carry me to heaven, and I desire no more. It is a sad presage of apostasy, to stand still in religion. He that once stops, the next thing is to look

back. This is the remedy which St. Peter prescribes against apostasy: (2 Pet. iii. 18.) "Take heed, lest ye fall from your own steadfastness;" and then it follows, "but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The best remedy against apostasy, is growth in goodness. It is a rule in policy, that an ambitious man should never stay at any step of preferment, till he come at the top, because it is some security to be in motion. Our ascent to heaven is steep and narrow, and we are safest when we do not stand still: temptation cannot so well take its aim at us.

Let us therefore press after the highest degree of virtue and holiness, and labour to be as good as we can in this world, that in the next our happiness may be the greater; that when the day of recompence shall come, we may receive an ample reward, and God the righteous judge may set a bright and glorious crown upon our heads.

We ought likewise to consider, that if any man can be content only to be saved, and desire no more but just to get to heaven, that such a degree of holiness and virtue, as will save a man that can attain no more, will perhaps not save that man who lazily rests in the lowest degree, and desires no more. To be least in the kingdom of God, is next to being shut out of it. It is not to be expected that God should bestow heaven and happiness upon those who are so indifferent about it, as to desire heaven for no other reason, but because they would not go to hell. Men must not think to drive so near and hard a bargain, in so desirable and advantageous a purchase.

And then, on the other hand, it is matter of great terror to great sinners. "The wages of" every "sin is death," eternal death; and every degree of hell and damnation is dreadful: but there are sins more heinous in themselves, and some that are attended with heavier aggravations in some persons; these do inflame hell, and heat that furnace seven times hotter. There are some moderate sinners in comparison; these shall have a moderate doom, and a cooler hell; but there are others who are extravagant and enormous sinners, that "drink up iniquity, as the ox drinks up water;" that "let themselves loose to commit all wickedness with greediness;" such as sin above the common rate of men, with full consent and upon deliberation, with great design and contrivance, in despite of the clearest convictions, of the best counsels and reproofs; these make haste to ruin and take hell by violence. Now such "mighty transgressors shall be mightily tormented;" they shall not be punished at the common rate of sinners, their consciences will breed more and sharper stings, and wilder furies to torment them, and they shall sink into a deeper misery. More particularly this concerns us Christians, who continue impenitent, and live in our sins, notwithstanding the clear revelation of the gospel, and "the wrath of God revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;" notwithstanding "life and immortality" so clearly "brought to light by the gospel. How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" What condemnation will be heavy enough for those, who wilfully refuse to be saved? "This is the condemnation (says our Saviour), that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather

than light." All the sins which we now commit, are infinitely aggravated above the sins of thousands in the world, who never enjoyed that light, and those advantages and opportunities, which we have done. "The ignorance of these God winked at, but now" he expects, "he commands all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness." What stripes do we deserve, who have "known our Master's will, but have not prepared ourselves to do according to it?" All that light and knowledge which we have, all those counsels and instructions which we have read and heard out of God's word, will inflame our account, and heighten our condemnation, and the very means of our salvation will be the saddest aggravation of our ruin. What our Saviour said of the impenitent and unbelieving Jews, holds as well concerning impenitent Christians; that "it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for them. But, beloved, I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation." Let us but remember, and seriously consider, that "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive the things done in the body, according to what we have done, whether good or evil;" and this will certainly have a mighty awe and influence upon our lives, and all the actions of them. Now the God of peace, &c.



SERMON CLXXXII.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE DAY OF JUDGMENT, CONSIDERED AND IMPROVED.

But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is.—Mark xiii. 32, 33.

THESE words are spoken by our Saviour of the day of judgment; for though, in this chapter, as likewise in the 24th of St. Matthew, and the 21st of St. Luke, which are parallel to it, our Saviour discourseth very particularly and largely concerning the eminent appearance of his power and justice in the destruction of Jerusalem, which may, perhaps, sometimes in Scripture be called “his coming;” yet it is plain, likewise, that he discourseth there concerning his coming to judgment at the end of the world. For we find, in the 24th of St. Matthew, that, after our Saviour had foretold his disciples of the utter ruin of Jerusalem, they came afterwards to him, to inquire more particularly about it: (ver. 3.) “And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Where there are two several questions, to which our Saviour returns a distinct answer. The first, when those things he had been speaking of before should be? that is, the things which related to the destruction of Jerusalem, for of that only he had been speaking of before. The other question was, concerning the sign of his coming, and of the end of the world.

The reason of their joining these two questions together, seems to be this, (as is very probable from many texts of the New Testament) viz. that the apostles did think (and our Saviour permitted them for a long time to remain under this mistake) that the end of the world, and the general judgment, would be presently after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Now to this second question of theirs, concerning the end of the world, and our Saviour’s coming to judgment, he gives an answer in the latter part of that chapter: (ver. 29.) “But immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven.” Not that the general judgment of the world was immediately to follow the destruction of Jerusalem; for there were many other things to intervene, as is manifest from St. Luke: (xxi. 24.) That the Jews should be led captive into all nations, and Jerusalem should be trodden down of the gentiles until the times of the gentiles were fulfilled. And though these things be expressed in a few words, yet they comprehend a long tract of time; for the captivity of the Jews hath continued for above sixteen hundred years, and is not yet at an end. And then after the accomplishment of these things it follows, that “there shall be signs in the sun and the moon, and then they shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great



glory.” And then he tells them in conclusion, that these things should begin to come to pass, that is, some of them should happen before the end of that generation: and so they did, for the destruction of Jerusalem was about forty years after. But when the end of all should be, that is, when the day of judgment would happen, he could not tell them the precise time: (ver. 36.) “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, but the Father only;” and it is added in St. Mark, “neither the Son.”

Now by that day and hour is meant that famous and terrible time of the general judgment of the world, which St. Peter calls, by way of eminency, “the day of the Lord:” (2 Pet. iii. 10.) “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night;” that is, it will surprise men suddenly and unexpectedly, because no man can tell when it will be; it will steal upon the world, as a thief does into a house by night. “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is.”

Having thus cleared all difficulties concerning the general meaning of the text, that it is to be understood of the day of judgment, and not, as some learned men have thought, of the destruction of Jerusalem; I shall now consider the words more particularly, and they contain in them these two things:

First, The uncertainty of the day of judgment as to us, and all other creatures. “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”

Secondly, That the consideration of the uncertainty of the time, should make us very careful to be always prepared for it. “Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is.” I shall speak as briefly as I can to both these.

First, Our Saviour here declares the uncertainty of the time, as to us and all creatures, when the general judgment shall be. And to express this the more emphatically, he tells us,

1. That God only knows it. “Of that day and hour, οὐδείς οἶδεν, εἰ μὴ ὁ Πατήρ, none knows, but the Father;” For though we translate it, “no man,” yet in the Greek it is more general, “none knows but the Father, (that is) God only.” For the word Father is several times in the New Testament not used personally, in way of distinction from the Son and the Holy Ghost; but signifies the Deity, the Father being *fons et principium Deitatis*, “the fountain and principle of the Deity.”

“Of that day and hour;” the word ὥρα is not here to be taken strictly for the measure of time, commonly called a hour; this were to make our Saviour’s expression very flat, after he had denied that the day is known, to deny that they know the hour; for if they do not know the day, much less the hour. Now in these kind of speeches, the expression ought to rise, and that which is most emphatical ought to be said in the last place; so that it should rather have been, “they know not the hour, no, nor the day;” but ὥρα here does undoubtedly signify the appointed season or time; and so the four seasons of the year are by the Greeks

called ὥραι; and in this sense the word is most certainly used by the evangelist St. John: ([chap. vii. 30.](#)) “But no man laid hands upon him (speaking of Christ), because his hour was not yet come,” that is, the time appointed for his suffering; and that which in the text is called hour, is in the next verse called καιρός, which signifies a particular season, or appointed time. “Ye know not when the time is;” that is, the time which God hath particularly designed and appointed for this great work of judging the world.

2. He excludes from the knowledge of it, those who were most likely to know it, if God had not absolutely reserved it to himself. “Of that day and hour knows none, no, not the angels, neither the Son.”

(1.) “Not the angels, which are in heaven;” though they be creatures of so perfect a knowledge, though they be the ministers of God, and do continually attend upon him, and behold his face, and understand much more of the works of God, and his providence, in regard to the affairs of the world, than we that live here below in so much error and ignorance, that “dwell in houses of clay, whose foundations are in the dust:” yet the particular time, when God will judge the world, he hath reserved as a secret to himself, and not communicated it so much as to the angels, who are designed to wait upon the great Judge of the world, and to make up his train in that solemnity. So our Saviour tells us, ([Matt. xxv. 31.](#)) that “the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him.” And so likewise the apostle, ([2 Thess. i. 7.](#)) that “the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels.”

But this is not only hid from “the angels,” but which is yet more, from the Son himself. “Of that day and hour knows none, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son.” This seems strange indeed, that the Son of God, who came from the bosom of his Father, and therefore is more likely than any to know his secrets, that he, whom God had ordained to be the judge of the world, into whose hands he had committed that great trust and authority, should not be acquainted with the time of this judgment: nay, that he, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and in whom the Divinity does substantially reside, should not know this time; this seems incredible, but that he himself hath told us so. It was, indeed, a common saying among the Jews, that the time of the end of the world was revealed to none; but yet one would think, the Son was always excepted. Nay, how can it well be otherwise, if we believe him to be God? and indeed the fathers, in their disputes with the Arians, have mightily puzzled themselves about this text.

Some, and those of no small account, have understood these words, as if our Saviour only intended to put off his disciples from a more particular inquiry about this matter; not that he was ignorant of the day of judgment, but that he did not know it so as to reveal it to them: which is by no means to be admitted, not only because it looks too like the equivocation of the Jesuits, but likewise because the same may be said of the angels; since it is no otherwise denied of the angels, that they know this time, than it is of the Son. Others say, that his human

nature was not ignorant of the day of judgment, but that it did not know this of itself, but by virtue of its union with the Divine nature. But our Saviour absolutely says, that the Son did not know it. And therefore others more reasonably have distinguished between his human nature and Divine; and though as God he could not be ignorant of any thing, yet his human understanding did not know it. And it is not unreasonable to suppose that the Divine wisdom which dwelt in our Saviour, did communicate itself to his human soul according to his pleasure; and so his human nature might at some times not know some things. And if this be not admitted, how can we understand that passage concerning our Saviour, (Luke ii. 52.) that “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature;” or, as the word ἡλικία may more fitly be translated, “in age, and in favour with God and man? For if the human nature of Christ did necessarily know all things by virtue of its union with the Divinity, he could not then, as man, be said to grow in wisdom.



And this I think may be sufficient for the clearing of this difficulty, concerning the Son’s not knowing the particular time which God had appointed for judging the world: and if he did not know it, it is surely no reflection upon his disciples if they were ignorant of it, or mistaken about it. Their infallibility was only in things that were revealed to them, but cannot be imagined to extend to things not revealed.—And thus I have done with the first thing, namely, the uncertainty of the time of the general judgment, as to all but God only. “Of that day and hour knoweth none, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” I proceed now to the

Second thing, which I mainly intended, viz. That the consideration of the uncertainty of the time should make us very careful to be always prepared for it. “Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is.” In which words we have,

First, A general caution; “Take ye heed.” Look to it, that ye be not surprised and overtaken by that time. The time being so uncertain, they were always in danger.

Secondly, More particular directions how they should demean themselves in this case. And our Saviour directs to two things, vigilancy and prayer; “Watch and pray.”

Thirdly, There is a reason added to enforce this care and diligence, from the uncertainty of the time as to us: “For ye know not when the time is,”

From whence I shall observe, by the way, the great goodness of God to us, and his singular care of us. That, as he is gracious and merciful to us, in giving us the knowledge of those things which are necessary and useful for us to know; so no less in keeping us ignorant of other things, which are not only not necessary for us to know, but which it would be very much to our harm and prejudice, to have the knowledge of them communicated to us. God hath acquainted us with whatever is necessary to direct and excite us to our duty; but he hath purposely concealed from us those things, which might tend to make us slothful and careless, negligent and remiss in it. He hath not acquainted us with the secrets of his decrees and providence; but hath reserved these in his own power; because it would be really to our



disadvantage to have the knowledge of them. If we knew all events before hand, and how and when all things would happen, we should be too much concerned about some things, and too little about others; and therefore God hath, in great wisdom and goodness, afforded us the knowledge of those things which are most proper and useful for us, whereby we may be instructed in our duty, and encouraged and stirred up to it. ([Job xxviii. 28.](#)) “Unto man he saith, The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom: and to depart from evil, is understanding.” This is the knowledge which is fit for us, and which no man is destitute of, but by his own fault, and gross neglect of himself.

So that God is very good to us, both in revealing some things to us, and in hiding other things from us; particularly those things which we are speaking of, concerning the time of the end of the world, and the judgment of the great day. Which, did men certainly know to be so far off, as it really was in our Saviour’s time, and may perhaps now be, it would very much abate the force and awe of it upon the minds of men; for then men would think themselves safe, till death should remove them out of the world. But when, for any thing we know, the general judgment of the world may overtake us the next moment; this consideration gives a great deal of weight to all the rest, and is apt to strike a particular terror into men. What man would not be afraid to offend, if he did not know but that the next moment he should be brought to his trial, be fore a severe and impartial judge? So that, for this reason, God hath in great kindness to us concealed this matter from us, and, like a wise and good father, instead of gratifying our curiosity, hath consulted our real benefit and advantage.

Besides this, that it is always useful to the world to be kept in awe by the continual danger and terror of an approaching judgment, there seems to have been a more particular reason why our Saviour would have the disciples and first Christians ignorant of this thing; for which reason he discoursed so to them concerning it, as that they might rather apprehend, that the end of all things was at hand, and might probably happen in their time. And thus it seems his disciples understood his speech concerning St. John, as if he should not die till our Lord came to judgment. And the apostles, in several of their exhortations, seem to urge Christians from this very consideration, of the nearness of the general judgment. So St. Paul: ([Phil. iv. 5.](#)) “Let your moderation be known to all men; the Lord is at hand.” And the author to the Hebrews, ([chap. x. 25.](#)) encourageth Christians to constancy in their profession upon the same account; “Not forsaking the assembling yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one an other, and so much the more, because the day approacheth.” So likewise St. James: ([chap. v. 9.](#)) “Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the Judge standeth at the door.” And St. Peter tells us, that several impious men scoffed at them upon this account, as if the apostles had been deceivers in this matter, and therefore said, “Where is the promise of his coming?” as it were upbraiding them, for putting men in a vain expectation of it.



And it was no inconvenience at all, that the apostles and first Christians had this apprehension of the nearness of that time; for no consideration could be more forcible to keep them steadfast in their profession, and to fortify them against sufferings, than a persuasion of the approach of that day, where in those who suffered for Christ should be so gloriously rewarded; and those who, for fear of suffering, fell off from him, should be so terribly punished. And nothing could be more proper and powerful, to wean their affections from the love of this world, and to make them willing to part with any thing in it, than to apprehend that there would shortly be an end of it, and then all the enjoyments of it would signify nothing. So that their ignorance in this matter was, by the providence of God, admirably fitted for the animating and encouraging of Christians to a great zeal and constancy in the profession of their faith, and in the propagating of it, as thinking they had but a little while to do this great work in.



And it will be in all ages to the end of the world, a good argument to men to vigilance and constant preparation; because, if they be remiss and careless, the great Judge of the world may “come in a day that they think not of, and at an hour when they are not aware.”—But to return to the particulars I propounded to speak to from the words.

First, Here is a general caution, “Take ye heed;” look heed fully to it, that ye be not surprised and overtaken by that time: for, being uncertain when it will happen, ye are always in danger. But, because this general caution is only premised by our Saviour, to make way for the more particular directions, therefore I shall not insist upon this, but in the second place proceed to them. And they are these two, “Watch and pray.”

I. Vigilancy, which is a large duty, and comprehends under it the whole care of a Christian life; all that watchfulness and preparation which we ought to use, that we be not surprised by that terrible day; that we be not found in such a condition, as slothful and negligent servants use to be in, when their lord comes suddenly upon them, and finds all things in confusion and disorder. And to this our Saviour alludes several times in his exhortations to watchfulness: ([Luke xii. 35, 36.](#)) “Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord, when he comes, shall find watching.” And, ([ver. 40.](#)) “.Be ye therefore ready also; for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” So that this watchfulness implies a continual care of our lives and actions, that we be always in such a posture as we would be willing the great Judge of the world should take us in; doing those things which we should not be ashamed to own, if he should come suddenly upon us, and summon us before his tribunal; and avoiding those things, which would be matter of shame and confusion to us at his appearance. ([Luke xxi. 34-36.](#)) Where our Saviour giveth this caution, he instanceth in some particular sins, which are more directly contrary to this vigilance: as, intemperance, and an inordinate love and care about earthly things: “Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the



cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares: for as a snare shall it come on all that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

It would be a large work to descend to all particulars, whereby we should express our care and vigilance. I shall mention but a few, but such as will comprehend most others under them.

1. We should resolve, without delay, to put ourselves into that state and condition, in which we may not be afraid judgment should find us. It is to be feared, that a great part of mankind are in that loose and negligent posture, in the time of their health and prosperity, in which, if the great Judge of the world should surprise them, and bring them to a speedy trial, it would go ill with them; their lease would be sad and deplorable beyond all imagination, infinitely sadder than of a malefactor standing before an earthly judge, guilty of great and notorious crimes, and continually expecting the sentence of death to be passed upon him, Such is the condition of all impenitent sinners, who have lived careless and dissolute lives, without any serious consideration of their future state, or preparation for it; who have, in the general course of their lives, neglected God and religion, and a great many necessary and essential parts of their duty, and have indulged themselves, either in a continual course of impiety and wickedness, or of sensual pleasures and vanity. What shall become of those whom the Judge of the world shall find in this condition, either actually wicked, or wretchedly secure?

Nay, those who do in some measure and degree mind religion, how few of them live under “the powers of the world to come,” have “their loins girded about, and their lamps burning;” and are habitually so prepared, as if they were in a continual expectation of the coming of their Lord? So that, in the secure and negligent posture that most men live, even the better sort of men, if judgment should overtake them, how few could be saved? For this cause “God is long-suffering to men, because he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” And if he should not by his merciful providence awaken many men to consideration and care of themselves, and, by some great affliction, or long sickness, put men upon serious thoughts, and give them the space and opportunity to recollect themselves, to make up their accounts, and so make their peace with God, and to put themselves into a better posture for another world, than they usually are in the time of their health and prosperity; it is very much to be feared, that the great est part of those who are tolerably good would be destroyed in their security.

But this patience of God will not always last; but “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,” and will surprise the careless world all at once, and give them no time to trim up their lamps, and to get oil, if they be not provided already; but in an instant the door will be shut against them, and they shall never enter into the kingdom of God. This day hath



not yet happened; but it will certainly come, and, as our Saviour says, “will come as a snare upon all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth.” And “blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he comes shall find ready.”

So that our first care must be, to get out of this dangerous state of sin and security, “to break off our sins by repentance,” that we may be capable of the mercy of God, and at peace with him, before he comes to execute judgment upon the world; for, till this be done, we are every moment in danger; and if death or judgment should overtake us in this impenitent state, we are lost beyond recovery.

2. After this great work of repentance is over, we should be very careful how we contract any new guilt, by returning to our former sins, or by the gross neglect of any part of our duty. A true and sincere repentance will put us into a safe condition; but then we must take heed, that we do not repent of our repentance, and bring ourselves into danger again, by starting aside from those good resolutions, which we had so solemnly taken up. For every deliberate and presumptuous sin that we are guilty of after our repentance, does endanger our state, and shake the foundations of our peace: but if we relapse into our former evil course, or after our repentance we allow ourselves in the habitual practice of any known sin, either our repentance was insincere before, or if it were true for the time, we are fallen from it, and all that we have done signifies nothing, and we have the whole work to begin again. And if the judgment of God should over take us, before we have renewed our repentance, and reformed our lives, we should be found in the number of the ungodly, “who cannot stand in judgment.” So that, as it concerns us to make haste out of an impenitent state, so no less to order our conversation afterwards with great vigilancy and care: lest, by relapsing into our former sins, and being surprised in them by the judgment of God, we fall into condemnation.

3. Let us neglect no opportunity of doing good, but always be employing ourselves, either in acts of religion and piety towards God, or of righteousness and charity towards men, or in such acts as are subordinate to religion; I mean the works of a lawful calling, in which, if we demean ourselves with diligence and good conscience, we may be said to serve God, and to live in his fear, because we are governed by the rules of religion, all the while we are about our worldly business, and providing for the necessities of this life in an honest and industrious way.

More particularly we should strictly charge ourselves, according to our estate and opportunities, to be very much in the works of mercy and charity; remembering that our Saviour hath represented this as a special matter of inquiry at the judgment of the great day, how we have acquitted and discharged ourselves in duties of this kind, and that nothing does more immediately qualify us for the mercy of God, when we shall come to stand before his judgment-seat, than to have shewn mercy to our brethren; as, on the other hand, the Scripture hath terribly threatened, that “he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no

mercy." By these, and all other acts of a good life, we shall be in a constant readiness and preparation for the coming of our Lord. And, oh! what a happiness and comfort will it be to us, to be found by him thus employed! "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." I proceed:

4. We should often review our lives, and call ourselves to a strict account of our actions, that, judging ourselves, we may not be judged and condemned by the Lord. This frequent examination of ourselves, will give us to understand our errors and miscarriages; which, if we seriously consider, must needs prompt us to repentance, and engage us in purposes and resolutions of amendment. And the practice of this is certainly the best way to keep our accounts clear, and to prevent that horrible confusion which we shall be in, if judgment should surprise us unawares, when we have the guilt of great and manifold sins unrepented of lying upon our consciences, like a heavy weight, ready to sink us into eternal perdition. Besides that, this strict and frequent examination of our actions, will be an excellent means to make us more careful for the future to avoid those faults and miscarriages which we have observed in ourselves before. We should be ashamed to fall into those errors again, for which we have so lately and severely censured and condemned ourselves.

5. Another part of our preparation for the coming of our Lord, is, a humble trust and confidence in the virtue of his death and passion, as the only meritorious cause of the remission of our sins, and the reward of eternal life. Though we be regenerated and renewed by the Holy Ghost, and, by the assistance of God's grace, enabled to perform works of righteousness, and, as is said of Zachary and Elizabeth, "to live in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless;" that is, in the general course of our lives, to yield a sincere obedience to the laws of God: yet, because in many things we offend, and our best righteousness is very imperfect, and falls extremely short of that exact and strict duty which the law of God requires; and if it were perfect, our obedience for the future could make no reparation to the justice of God for past sins and transgressions; therefore, we cannot hope for our own righteousness to be justified and accepted with God, and upon the merit of it to have our sins pardoned, much less to be rewarded with eternal life. God, indeed, of his infinite mercy is pleased, upon our repentance, to pardon our sins past, and upon our sincere obedience to give us eternal life; and without these qualifications we shall never be made partakers of these blessings; except we repent, our sins shall not be forgiven us, and "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." But then, it is not for the merit of our repentance and righteousness, that these blessings are conferred upon us, but for the meritorious obedience and sufferings of our blessed Saviour: that most acceptable sacrifice of himself, which he offered to God in our stead, and in our behalf, hath purchased and procured these benefits for us; and "we are accepted in his beloved Son," and "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ;" and therefore, "not for any works of righteousness which we have done, but of his mercy he saves us." And here we are to fix our hopes of justification and

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salvation, viz. upon that perfect propitiation and satisfaction, which Christ, by the sacrifice of himself once offered, hath made for the sins of the whole world. For the alone merit of this sacrifice, God is graciously pleased to forgive us all our sins, upon our true repentance, and to reward our sincere, though very imperfect, obedience, with eternal life. So that through faith in the blood of Christ, not by confidence in ourselves and our own righteousness, we obtain remission of sins, and eternal life. And it is not only in itself great arrogance, but great ingratitude to our blessed Redeemer, “who gave himself for us,” to ascribe that to the merit of our own righteousness, or the merits of the saints, which nothing in heaven or earth, but the precious blood of Christ, who was “a lamb without spot or blemish,” could have purchased for us. And it is argument and encouragement enough to holiness and obedience of life, that without it we cannot see God; and by it we are qualified for that happiness which Christ hath purchased for us, and, as the apostle expresseth it, are “made meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”

6. And lastly, To awaken and maintain this vigilancy and care, we should often represent to our minds the judgment of the great day, which will certainly come, though we know not the time of it. And if any consideration in the world will make men watchful and diligent, certainly this will, that the judgment of God continually hangs over them, and may seize upon them at any time; nay, for aught we know, the judgment of God may now be standing at the door, and be ready to rush in upon us, whilst we are so negligent and secure. For this day, whenever it shall be, will come suddenly, and surprise the careless world, when they least think of it, and look for it. So our Lord himself hath foretold, that “as a snare it shall come upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth:” that is, the greatest part of mankind shall be taken unprepared, when they are unprovided for it; nay, when they are generally lulled asleep in a stupid security and infidelity; when the world is grown atheistical, and do hardly believe any such thing as a future judgment. So our Saviour seems to intimate: (Luke xviii. 8.) “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith upon the earth?” And if this be a mark and token of the general judgment, we have too much cause to apprehend that it is drawing on apace: for never was there any age since the general flood, that we know of, when iniquity did so abound, and the infidelity of mankind was so full, so great, and so general; when profaneness and atheism, the open contempt of God and religion, was so raging and violent; and when, as our Lord says, there was so little faith to be found on the earth; whether by faith we understand the belief of the principles of religion, or the fidelity of men one towards another. For was there ever any age, wherein false accusation, perjury, and subornation were more rife and impudent? wherein the reverence of an oath was so lost, and the sacred obligation of it in so little regard among men? So that, if the great Judge of the world should delay his coming, human society seems ready to disband and dissolve of itself, for want of mutual trust and confidence among men to hold it together.

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And this want of faith, in both senses, we owe in a great measure to popery; which, by its artificial ways of falsehood and perjury (which, when they have to deal with heretics, they have upon solemn occasions declared lawful), hath not only weakened, but even destroyed the credit of mankind with one another, as we find of late by sad experience. And as for infidelity in religion, they have not only given great occasion to it, by the monstrous absurdities they have brought into religion; and, by overstraining the faith of men in some parts of it, have brought them to a disbelief of the whole; as is at this day too visible in many of the most knowing persons of their communion, both in France and Italy: but besides this, they have, in their writings, to gain men to a dependance upon, and submission to, the infallibility of their church, undermined the foundations of religion, and industriously endeavoured to bring men to scepticism and infidelity; hoping that, when they have made men of no religion, they will be fit for theirs, which in too many respects is next to none; and in some, worse.

But whether the judgment of the great day be near at hand, or farther off, God alone knows; this is certain, that God hath in great mercy delayed it for a long time, because “he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” And it is no less certain, that it may come at any time, and will come when men least expect it; when the world is in great security, and very little apprehensive of the nearness and danger of it; which is reason and argument enough to continual care and vigilancy: for it may come the next hour, the next moment, for any thing we know to the contrary: and whenever it comes, if we be not prepared, it will be too late to begin that work; if our lamps be gone out, and we want oil, we cannot provide ourselves in such a hurry; we shall be full of fear and amazement, but we shall “find no place for repentance,” and a deliberate preparation for our great trial. As the great Judge of the world then finds us, so will he deal with us; such as our state and condition then is, such will be our sentence and doom to all eternity. And is not this argument enough to us to be always upon our guard, always watchful, and always ready—because the Son of man may “come at an hour when we think not?” and if we be not then prepared, it will be too late to set about it: the opportunity of doing it, and wo ourselves, are lost for ever.

This is the first direction our Saviour gives us; continual vigilancy and watchfulness over ourselves in general.

The second direction is more particular, and that is, prayer; “Take ye heed, watch and pray.” And the practice of this duty of prayer will be of great advantage to us upon these two accounts:

1. As it tends to awaken and excite our care and diligence in the business of religion.
2. As it is, if sincerely performed, effectual to engage the Divine blessing and assistance to second our care and endeavours, and to secure them from miscarriage.

1. It is very apt to awaken and excite our care and diligence in the business of religion. For whenever we heartily beg of God to assist us by his grace to any thing that is good, we



mind ourselves of our own duty; and both reason and Scripture will tell us, that we pray to God in vain for his help, if we will do nothing ourselves; that it is gross hypocrisy, and an impudent mocking of God, to implore his grace and assistance, if we be not resolved to put forth our own endeavours. Prayer, indeed, supposeth I hat we stand in need of the Divine help; but it implies, likewise, a resolution on our part to do what we can for ourselves; otherwise we ask in vain, and have no reason to hope that God will hear our prayers, and grant our requests, though never so earnestly and importunately put up to him.

2. If we use our sincere endeavours for the effecting of what we pray for, prayer is the most effectual means to engage the Divine blessing and assistance to second our endeavours, and to secure them from miscarriage. And, without the aid of God's grace, and his blessing upon our endeavours, they will all be ineffectual, and signify nothing; we shall not be able so much as to "watch one hour." If God be not with us, "the watchman waketh but in vain:" for "the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." It is necessary, therefore, that we continually implore the Divine grace, and that we do not rely upon our own, strength, and the fickleness and uncertainty of our own resolutions, according to the wise advice of Solomon; ([Prov. iii. 5, 6.](#)) "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Therefore, as ever we hope to persevere and continue in a good course, and to order our lives so, as to be in preparation for judgment, let us every day, by continual and fervent prayer, apply ourselves to the Fountain of grace and mercy, for his aid and help, to make us vigilant over ourselves, and all the actions of our lives; to enable us to a "patient continuance in well-doing, to keep us from every evil work, and to preserve us to his heavenly kingdom."

And, to this purpose, we have all the encouragement which the assurance of the Divine goodness, and the security of his never-failing promise can give us. It is but asking and receiving. So St. James tells us, speaking of this heavenly wisdom to direct us in our Christian course, so as we may be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." ([Jam. i. 5.](#)) "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." I proceed to the

Third and last part of the text, which is the reason which our Saviour here adds to enforce our care and diligence in a matter of so great concernment, viz. the uncertainty, as to us, of the particular time when this day of judgment will be: "ye know not when the time is." Therefore we should always be in expectation of it, always in a readiness and preparation for it. The certainty of the thing, and that God hath appointed and determined "a time, in which he will judge the world in righteousness," though we were sure this day were far off, ought, in all reason, to make us very watchful over ourselves, and very careful of all our actions, very strict and conscientious in the discharge and performance of every part of our duty. If there were no more but this, that we must one day be called to a strict account for

all the actions of our lives, and receive the just recompence of them, and according to the nature and quality of them be sentenced to eternal happiness, or ever lasting misery; this alone were a mighty argument. So St. Peter reasons: (2 Pet. iii. 10-12.) “But the day of the Lord will come, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. Seeing then all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God?” that is, making speedy preparation for it. The very expectation of this “terrible day of the Lord,” at how great a distance soever, should make us diligent, that when ever it shall be, “we may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.”

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But it adds a great deal of awe and force to this argument, to consider, that, for aught we know to the contrary, this judgment may surprise us at any time; that this very night we may be awakened by the sound of that mighty trumpet, which shall pierce the ears of all the world, and summon the living and the dead to judgment. And God, who is the lover of souls, and desirous to save us any ways, by hope and by fear, by his mercies and by his corrections, by our knowledge and by our ignorance, hath purposely concealed from us the time of his coming to judgment, to the end we may always be prepared, and that we might continually stand in awe of it; and for fear our Lord should come upon us unawares, might always be in a posture to receive him.

And whatever the secure part of mankind may think, who “put far from them the evil day,” how careless and confident soever they may be, it would for all that be a terrible thing to them, all on the sudden, to “see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with his mighty angels;” to hear the great trumpet sound, summoning the dead to arise and come to judgment; to see the whole world in a combustion, and the whole frame of nature ready to dissolve and fall in pieces; “the sun darkened, and the moon turned into blood, and all the powers of heaven shaken, the earth and all the works that are therein, flaming about us;” to see the dead starting out of their graves, some with great joy, others in a mighty amazement and fright, according to their several expectations of a happy or fearful doom. What a surprise would it be to drowsy and careless sinners, to be thus suddenly and unexpectedly overtaken? How will the profane infidel like to find himself so terribly confuted by his own eyes, and forced to believe that which will make him tremble? It will then be too late for men to think to make their peace with God, and to prepare for judgment. And if there were any time for it, the horror and amazement that sinners will then be in, will hinder them from doing any thing. Thus the Scripture represents the fearful case of impenitent sinners, who are thus surprised, as not knowing what to do with themselves, nor whither to fly for safety, as ready to betake themselves any whither for shelter and refuge, as “calling upon the mountains and rocks to fall upon them, and hide them from the face of Him that sits upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;” here by signifying to us, that sinners

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shall be in such a consternation, and so deep a despair of the mercy of God towards them, that instead of addressing themselves to him, they shall turn their supplications to the mountains and rocks, as being more exorable than he.

But this possibly may not be our case; this dreadful day may not come in our days; and yet it is madness to run a venture in a matter of such moment: but if it should not, I must tell you, that the case of a dying sinner is not much different, who hath neglected God and religion in his life-time, and would never think of betaking himself to him, or making any submission, till his justice be ready to cut him off. And how secure and careless soever sinners may be now, no man knows how soon he may be reduced to the very last opportunity of making his peace with God, and may be brought into those sad and miserable straits, that no man that is in his wits would be in for all the world: that he may have nothing left that can give him the least hope of being saved from eternal perdition, but a sudden and confused, and, in all probability, an ineffectual repentance; nothing but this one plank to trust to, which it is ten thousand to one whether it ever bring him to shore.

Therefore be wise, sinner, in time, and seize upon the present opportunities of life, and improve them with all thy might, with all possible care and diligence, lest judgment find thee unprepared; or in case God, in mercy to the world, should delay it yet longer, lest death seize upon thee careless and unprovided. And when that is once in view, it is but very little that can be done by way of preparation: for as “there is no counsel, nor wisdom, no work nor device in the grave,” whither we must go; so there is very little when we are come near to it; and therefore, “blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching.”



SERMON CLXXXIII.

THE CERTAINTY AND THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RESURRECTION OF TRUE CHRISTIANS.

For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.—1 Thess. iv. 14.

THE words which I have read are an argument of the blessed resurrection of good men to eternal life, grounded upon the resurrection of Christ. In the verse before the apostle comforts Christians, concerning their brethren that were already departed in the faith of Christ, that there was no reason why they should so immoderately grieve for them. “But I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others that have no hope;” that is, as the heathens do, who mourn for their dead friends in so grievous a manner, as if they were utterly extinguished by death, and they had no imagination of any life beyond this. And thus we find the apostle elsewhere describing the state of the heathen world: (Eph. ii. 12.) that “they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope.”

But Christians should not mourn for their deceased friends as the heathen were wont to do, who had no hope of a better life; because Christians profess to believe that Christ is risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven: “for if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”

There are two things to be explained in the words before we come to consider the matter of them:

First, What is meant by those that sleep in Jesus.

Secondly, What by God’s bringing them with him.

First, What is meant by those that sleep in Jesus. Sleep is a metaphor used for death by all sorts of writers, profane and sacred; and by the ancient Christians, the place of burial was called κοιμητήριον, that is, “a sleeping-place.” This metaphor is sometimes applied to the death of the wicked, but most frequently used of the death of the righteous, because to them it is truly a rest. And so the prophet, speaking of the death of the righteous, calls it: (Isa. lvii. 2.) “They shall enter into peace, they shall rest in their beds.”

And the death of the righteous is very fitly called a sleep, both as it is a rest from labour and pain: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labour;” (Rev. xiv. 13.) and, likewise, because sleep is not final, but in order to waking again. The death of the righteous is not an eternal sleep of the body, but that shall be awakened in the morning of the resurrection.

But why is the death of good men called a sleeping in Jesus? διὰ Ἰησοῦ, “for Jesus sake;” which may seem to have some particular relation to those who died martyrs for Christ; as some likewise understand that text, (Rev. xiv. 13.) “Blessed are the dead which die in the



Lord,” that is, that suffer for his cause; “for they rest from their labours,” that is, their sufferings are then at an end. But we shall best understand the meaning of this phrase by comparing it with those others which seem to be equivalent to it, as (1 Cor. xv. 18.) They also that are fallen asleep in Christ; (ver. 23.) “They that are Christ’s at his coming;” that is, they that belong to him, that died in the faith of Christ. So likewise is this, (1 Thess. iv. 10.) “The dead in Christ shall rise first;” that is, the Christians that are dead before the coming of Christ, shall first be raised, before those that are alive shall be changed. (Heb. xi. 13.) “All these died in faith;” that is, in firm belief of God’s promise of a better life. So that to sleep in Christ, to be Christ’s, to die in Christ, to die in the faith, do all seem to signify the same thing; viz. to die in the state of true Christians. For so we understand the like expressions of being in Christ: (Rom. viii. 1.) “He that is in Christ,” that is, every sincere Christian; and of abiding in Christ: (John xv. 4.) “He that abideth in me.” So to die in Christ, is to die a true Christian, in the faith and obedience of the gospel.

And it is observable, that, in the phrase and style of the New Testament, we are said to die all in and with Christ; to be in him, and to live in him, and to walk in him, by our sanctification and obedience; to die with him, by the mortification of our lusts; to rise with him, by our renovation to a new life; to ascend with him into heaven, and to have our life hid with Christ in God, by our heavenly affections and hopes; and, by death, to sleep in him.

But before I pass over this phrase of sleeping in Jesus, there is one difficulty more about the sleep of the soul, which seems to be countenanced from this text: “Those that sleep in Jesus, shall God with him; as if the apostle spake here of the souls of good men which had been asleep, and Christ should bring with him to be united to their bodies, which should be raised; as, likewise, from the whole tenor of the apostle’s discourse about the resurrection, (1 Cor. xv.) where the apostle says nothing of the living of the soul before the body be raised; as if the soul separated from the body were in a state of insensibility till the resurrection. But the true answer to this is, that neither our Saviour, in his discourse of the resurrection, nor St. Paul, in the 15th chapter to the Corinthians, nor here, in this text, do keep closely to the proving of the resurrection of the body; but of a blessed immortality after this life, against the Sadducees, who said, “there was no resurrection,” neither angel nor spirit. But sometimes they prove that there is a life after death, and sometimes that, at the resurrection, the soul shall be joined to a spiritual and heavenly body, and that the whole man shall enjoy perfect bliss and happiness.

But this opinion, or rather dream, concerning the sleep of the soul from the time of death, that is, from the time of the separation of the soul from the body till the general resurrection, may be effectually confuted these two ways:

1. By taking away the ground of it: and,
2. By producing several texts of Scripture, which are utterly inconsistent with it. And this I shall the rather do, because some men have taken a great deal of pains to establish and

prove this opinion; though I confess I do not well understand to what end, because there is as little comfort as truth in it.

1. By taking away the only ground that I know of, of this opinion; and that is, from the frequent metaphor and resemblance in Scripture of death to sleep. And, indeed, those which are dead are frequently in Scripture said to sleep, or to be fallen asleep: but then (which falls out very cross to this opinion) this metaphor of sleep is no where in Scripture applied to the soul, but to the body resting in the grave, in order to its being awakened and raised out of this sleep at the resurrection. And thus it is frequently used, with express reference to the body; ([Dan xii. 2.](#)) "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake;" and surely sleeping in the dust of the earth can only be applied to the body. And more expressly yet: ([Matt. xxvii. 52.](#)) "And the graves were opened, and many bodies of saints, which slept, arose." ([Acts xiii. 36.](#)) "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: but he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption." Now that of David which fell asleep, and was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption, was certainly his body: and that of our Saviour which was raised again, and saw no corruption, was likewise his body, according to that prediction concerning him: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell," in Hades, by which is plainly meant the state and place of souls separated from the body; a nor suffer thy Holy One to see corruption;" that is, the body of our blessed Lord to rot in the grave. ([1 Cor. xv. 20.](#)) "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept;" that is, the resurrection of his body out of the grave, is an earnest and assurance that our bodies also shall be raised. And, ([ver. 51.](#)) "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed;" where the apostle undoubtedly speaks both of the death and change of these corruptible bodies. And so, likewise, the text is to be understood of the resurrection of the bodies of the saints, which shall be raised up by the sound of the great trumpet, and reunited to their souls, that they may in person accompany Christ at his coming. So that it is the body, which is every where said in Scripture to sleep, and not the soul; and, if so, then the only foundation of this opinion is taken away.

2. I shall shew, that this opinion of the sleep of the soul is utterly inconsistent with several passages of Scripture, which plainly suppose the contrary; as ([Luke xvi. 22, 23.](#)) where, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the different states of good and bad men, immediately after their departure out of this life, are described; but they are so described, that it is evident that the souls of neither of them are asleep. It is said of Lazarus, that "he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom," and that there he was comforted; and of the rich man, that he was in hell, and there tormented in flames. This was not like to be a state of sleep and insensibility, and the rich man cries out of his torment; and that we may be sure he was awake, he is said to "lift up his eyes." And there is all the reason that can be to conclude, that Lazarus was every whit as sensible of the comfort and happiness that he was in, as the

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rich man was of his torment. [Luke xxiii. 43.](#) where our Saviour says to the penitent thief, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise:" but not surely to sleep there till the resurrection. "Though some have endeavoured to avoid the force of this text, by referring this day to what goes before, and not to what follows after; as if our Saviour had said, I say unto thee this day; and not, "this day thou shalt be with me in paradise:" which is a foolish evasion, because, I say unto thee necessarily implies the present time, and there is no need to add, "this day;" besides, that there is no such phrase any where used, as, I say unto thee this day. ([Phil. i. 23.](#)) "I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." But if to be with Christ, be to be in a state of sleep and insensibility, how is that so much better than to be in the body, serving God and his church? ([2 Cor. v. 6.](#)) "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we sojourn in the body we are absent from the Lord; we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord." But certainly, to be "present with the Lord," which the apostle here affirms that good men are, so soon as they depart out of the body, must needs signify a state of happiness; which sleep is not, but only of insensibility. Besides that, the apostle's argument would be very flat, and but a cold encouragement to Christians against the fears of death, that as soon as we are dead, we shall fall asleep and become insensible. But the apostle useth it as an argument, why we should be willing to die as soon as God pleaseth, and the sooner the better; because so soon as ever we quit these bodies, we shall be "present with the Lord," that is, shall be admitted to the blissful sight and enjoyment of him; and that, whilst we abide "in the body," we are detained from our happiness. But if our souls sleep as well as our bodies till the general resurrection, it is all one whether we continue in the body or not, as to any happiness we shall enjoy in the meantime; which is directly contrary to the main, scope of the apostle's argument.

Secondly, What is here meant by God's bringing with him those "that sleep in Jesus?" In general these words signify a blessed resurrection, as may be seen by the opposition: "If we believe that Jesus died, and rose again; even so them also that sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him." Whereto Christ's death is opposed our sleeping in Jesus; and, to his resurrection, God's bringing us with him; that is, his raising us out of the grave to accompany him at his coming. But the meaning of this expression will best appear, by considering what follows after the text: "for this we say by the word of the Lord," that is, by special revelation, "that we that are alive, and remain, at the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them that are asleep;" that is, we shall not be taken up into heaven, before the saints who are already dead shall be raised; but thus it shall be: "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, and the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." The plain meaning of all which is, that first the dead in Christ shall be raised and taken up to him in the air, to accompany him at his



coming, and thus he shall bring them with him; and then those, which are alive at his coming, shall be changed and taken up likewise, “to meet the Lord in the air.” And the same account the same apostle gives us: (1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.) “Behold, (says he) I shew you a mystery,” (which is the same he had said before in the former text, this we say unto you by the word of the Lord)—“I shew you a mystery,” (so he calls that which was not revealed to all by our Saviour, but to himself particularly) “we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed;” that is, all shall not die, but at the coming of Christ many shall be found alive and changed; but these shall have no advantage of those who were dead in Christ before: for “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, the dead shall be raised incorruptible;” that is, with spiritual bodies, which will be no more liable to corruption; “and we,” that is, those that remain then alive, “shall also be changed.” From all which it appears, that the meaning of this expression, “those that sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him,” is this: that the Lord Jesus shall come “in the clouds of heaven, in the glory of his Father,” and by the sound of the trump of God shall raise the dead in Christ. And our Saviour tells us more particularly, that this shall be done by the ministry of angels. (Matt. xxiv. 30, 31.) When the Son of man comes “with power and great glory,” that the angels shall with the great sound of the trumpet gather the “elect from the four winds;” and, when they are thus gathered, God shall bring them with him.

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And here I cannot but observe, that the title of God is given to our Saviour, who is to be judge of the world. “Them that sleep in Jesus, shall God bring with him.” And elsewhere our apostle, speaking of this glorious appearance and coming of Christ to judgment, calls him the great God: (Tit. ii. 13.) “Looking for the blessed hope, and glorious appearance, of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Which cannot be understood of the appearance of two persons, viz. God the Father, and his son Jesus Christ our Saviour; for then the article would have been added to distinguish them, and it would not have been καὶ σωτήρος ἡμῶν, but καὶ τοῦ σωτήρος ἡμῶν; as if he had said, “the appearance of the great God and of Jesus Christ our Saviour;” when as, according to the propriety of the Greek, the article being wanting, it ought to be rendered thus: “looking for the appearing of Jesus Christ the great God and our Saviour.” This is very much confirmed, in that the same apostle here in the text, speaking of Christ’s coming to judgment, calls him God, them “shall God bring with him.”

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The words, thus explained, give us this observation; that it is a firm principle of the Christian religion, that those, who die in the faith of Christ, that is, in the state of true Christianity, shall have a blessed resurrection. “If we believe, (saith the apostle) that Jesus died, and rose again; even so them also, that sleep in him, shall God bring with him.” The apostle to the Hebrews reckons the “resurrection of the dead, “among the principles of the doctrine of Christ. (Heb. vi. 2.)

In speaking to this observation, I shall do these three things:

First, I shall shew what it is to die in the faith of Christ, or in the state of a true Christian, which is here called sleeping in Jesus.

Secondly, I shall shew how the death and resurrection of Christ are an argument and proof of our resurrection from the dead. And,

Thirdly, Wherein the blessedness of the resurrection of the just doth consist.

First, What it is to die in the faith of Christ, or in the state of a true Christian, which is here called sleeping in Jesus. And this imports one of these two things; either,

1. That we die in such a belief of the doctrine of Christ, as hath been accompanied with a holy obedience of life, to the commands and precepts of the gospel; that our profession of the Christian religion hath evidenced itself in the virtues of a good life, in the constant course and tenor of a holy and unblameable conversation. This assurance the Christian religion gives us, that if we have our fruit unto holiness, our end shall be everlasting life.

Or else, 2. That we exercise such a sincere and unfeigned repentance before death for the errors and miscarriages of our lives, as produceth a firm purpose and resolution of amending our lives, if God should be pleased to prolong and continue them. For only such a belief and profession of the Christian religion, as produceth one of these effects, doth put us into a state of grace, and give us hope of a blessed resurrection to eternal life.

The first of these effects is much to be preferred, viz. the general course and tenor of a holy life; the latter being infinitely more hazardous, by reason of the deceitfulness of our hearts, and the infinite uncertainty of a death-bed repentance.

Secondly, I shall shew how the death and resurrection of Christ are an argument and proof of our resurrection from the dead. "If we believe," &c.

I shall shew, by and by, how the resurrection of Christ is an argument and proof of our resurrection. But why is his death here mentioned, as part of the argument? "If we believe that Christ died." The reason is obvious; because the truth of the miracle of his resurrection depends upon the reality of his death; for if Christ was not really dead, then he could not rise from the dead, and the pretence of his resurrection was a delusion and imposture: but if he was really dead, and rose again from the dead, then have we a firm ground for the belief of a future resurrection. Now this Christians do believe, that Christ was really dead, and rose again from the dead, and that upon very good grounds. We need not doubt but that the malice of the Jews took care to kill him; and the story makes it evident, because blood and water came out of his side, which is a certain proof that his heart was pierced; and it could not be a *deliquium*, or a fainting fit, because, after his blood was exhausted, he could not naturally return to life again. But we need not contend much about this, since the heathens who are unconcerned confess this. Tacitus, in the 15th book of his Annals, tells us, that "Jesus was put to death by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate." And Josephus, who was a Jew both by his birth and religion, and lived presently after our Saviour's time, in the 18th

book of his Jewish Antiquities, tells us, that “Christ was crucified, and that he appeared to his followers the third day, risen from the dead.”

Now this cannot, in reason, be said to be done only in appearance, and to be a mere illusion of men’s senses, as some ancient heretics pretended; because that which may be an evasion in any case, is to be admitted in none. For what greater evidence is possible of any one’s rising from the dead, than the circumstances of our Saviour’s resurrection? That there was a great earthquake, and that the stone was rolled away from the grave, and the grave-clothes found there, and his body gone; and that after this he appeared and conversed so often with so many, to whom he was well known when alive, and entertained long discourses with them, and did eat and drink with them, and permit them to handle his body, and to put their fingers into the wound of his side; and all this exactly agreeing with his own prediction. So that, if we believe the providence of God, we cannot think it to be so little vigilant, as that men, after their utmost care, must necessarily be deluded in a matter of so great consequence.

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Now I shall shew, that the death and resurrection of Christ is a very good argument of our resurrection. (1 Cor. xv. 20.) Christ is said to be “risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.” Not that he was the first that was raised from the dead; for Elijah and Elisha raised some, and so did our Saviour himself in his life-time: but the apostle here alludes to the “first-fruits” among the Jews, which were a pledge and an earnest of a future harvest. In like manner, the resurrection of Christ is called the “first-fruits of them that slept,” because it is an earnest of that general harvest, which should be at the end of the world, when “the angels, the reapers, shall come to gather the elect from the four winds.” But the resurrection of others before Christ was no earnest of this, because they “were raised/ but Christ is said to “rise from the dead by his own power.” And in this sense he is truly said by St John (Rev. i. 5.) to be “the first-begot ten from the dead.” And this secures our resurrection to eternal life; because he who hath promised to raise us up, did “raise himself from the dead.”

And that Christ intended to lay great stress upon this argument, appears in that he foretold it so often, as the great sign that he would give to the Jews to convince their infidelity. (John ii. 18, 19.) “The Jews said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us; Jesus answered, Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days; v speaking of the temple of his body. And] (Matt. xii. 39, 40.) he tells the Jews, that he would give them “no other sign but the sign of the prophet Jonah,” that “as he was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so should the Son of man be three days in the bowels of the earth.”

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Now the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and, which was consequent upon it, his ascension into heaven, does first give us satisfaction in general of another life after this, and an immortality after death; and then of his power to raise us from the dead, because “he raised himself;” as the apostle argues: (Rom. viii. 11.) “If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus

from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit which dwelleth in you.” And then, lastly, it secures us of his truth and fidelity, that he will perform what he hath promised us. He could not have promised any thing more improbable than this, that he himself would rise again the third day; and therefore, since he kept his word in this, there is no reason to distrust him in any thing else that he hath promised. By his own resurrection from the dead, he wrought such a miracle, as is the most proper to confirm us in the belief of our resurrection to eternal life: (Rev. i. 18.) “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen, Amen.” What is that? we have it explained, (Rev. iii. 14.) where he says of himself, “I am the Amen, the faithful and true witness.” This very thing, that Christ was dead, and lives again, makes him the “Amen, the true and faithful witness.” I proceed to the

Third and last thing, viz. Wherein the blessedness of the resurrection of the just shall consist; namely, in these two things:

I. In the mighty change which shall be made in these vile and mortal bodies of ours, and the glorious qualities they shall then be invested withal. And,

II. In the consequent happiness of the whole man, of the soul and body united and purified.

I. In the mighty change which shall be made in these vile and mortal bodies of ours, and the glorious qualities which they shall then be invested withal. But wherein this glory shall consist, because it is matter of pure revelation, we must wholly rely upon Scripture for the particular account and explication of it. And there are three texts of Scripture, wherein this glorious change, which shall be made in our bodies at the resurrection, is more particularly mentioned and described. The

First is, (Luke xx. 35, 36.) “But they, who shall be counted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage.” This our Saviour speaks, because that, which occasioned this discourse concerning the resurrection, was a question moved by the Sadducees concerning a woman that had seven husbands in her life-time; upon which they captiously asked our Saviour, Whose wife of the seven this woman should be at the resurrection? To which our Saviour answers, by taking away the foundation of it, telling them, that in the other world “they neither marry, nor are given in marriage.” And the reason of this is very obvious; because the reason why men marry now is, because they are mortal, and therefore to preserve and propagate the kind, which would otherwise fail, marriage was instituted: but in the other world this reason will cease; because then men shall be immortal and die no more. And, therefore, our Saviour, after he had said, that “at the resurrection of the dead, men neither marry, nor are given in marriage,” he immediately adds, as the reason of it, “neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels, that is, they shall be like them in the immortal duration of their beings; “and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.” Good men are now

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“the children of God,” because they resemble him in the holy disposition of their minds: but then they shall be like him in the participation of his happiness, so far as finite and created beings are capable; the whole man, the body as well as the soul, shall be partakers of immortality. And this is a glorious change for a frail and mortal body, liable to pains, and diseases, and death, to become immortal, and freed from all those troublesome accidents to which they are now liable. The

Second text to this purpose is, ([Phil. iii. 20.](#)) “But our conversation is in heaven,” says St. Paul, speaking of true and sincere Christians; “but our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power, whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.” And this is a great change indeed, whether we consider what our bodies now are, vile and corruptible; or the pattern according to which they shall be changed: “they shall be fashioned like to the glorious body of our blessed Saviour;” that wherein he now sits in the highest heavens, at the right hand of the throne of God. And what glory can we desire beyond that, with which God thought fit to reward his own Son, after all his obedience and sufferings? And this will be the more credible, if we consider the relation which the Scripture so often mentions between Christ and all true Christians. He is the head, and they are the members; now there must be a conformity between these. A glorious head and vile members would make a monstrous and irregular body; nay, the head could not be glorious, if the members were not so too. Or, lastly, if we consider the mighty power which will be put forth for the effecting this change. The omnipotency of the Son of God will exert itself in this work. So the apostle here tells us, that “the Lord Jesus Christ will change our vile body, according to the working of that mighty power, whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.” Omnipotency will display its whole force in bringing about this change. And what cannot that Almighty power do, which is able to conquer and subdue all things?

The third text, and that wherein this change is most fully and particularly described, is, ([1 Cor. xv. 35.](#)) “But some will say, How are the dead raised? And with what bodies do they come!” This was the common objection which the infidels made against this article of the resurrection: either men shall rise with the same bodies which they had in this life; or they shall not. If with the same bodies which they had in this life, to what purpose will that be? Since in the other world men shall not eat, or drink, or propagate their kind, and consequently have no use of such a body as ours now is: but if it be not the same body, how then are men’s bodies raised? To this question, the apostle gives a clear answer; that the bodies of men which shall be raised, shall in some respects be the same, and in other respects not the same; the matter and substance of the body may still be the same, and yet may under go a mighty change, be fashioned after another manner, and be endowed with quite other qualities than it had before. And this he illustrates by two instances.

1. By the difference between the corn which is sown, and that which grows up. And,
2. By the difference of several sorts of bodies, which are all made of the same kind of matter.

1. From the difference between the corn which is sown, and that which is grown up: (ver. 36-38.) "Thou fool, that which thou so west is not quickened except it die;" that is, unless it be first buried in the earth, and rot, and be corrupted there; "and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body which shall be, but bare grain, as of wheat, or some other kind." "But bare grain;" that is, a naked grain, without either stalk, or blade, or ear: "but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him;" that is, the Author of nature makes it spring up in a blade, which grows up into a stalk, which bears an ear which contains many grains of corn; "and to every seed his own body;" that is, a body of the same kind with the seed that was sown.

2. The other instance is from the difference of several sorts of bodies, which are all made of the same kind of matter, put into different forms, some more perfect and glorious, and others less: (ver. 39-41.) "All flesh is not the same flesh; but there is one flesh of men, another of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds;" and yet all these are fashioned out of the same kind of matter. "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another;" and the celestial bodies are of a different lustre and glory; "for there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; and one star differeth from another star in glory."

And then he applies these instances to the resurrection: (ver. 42.) "So also is" it in "the resurrection of the dead." This matter, which was vile before, when it was buried in the earth, puts on another form, and by the power of God is raised up a different thing, and far more glorious than when it was put into the earth: (ver. 42-44.) "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural (or an animal) body, it is raised a spiritual body." I shall briefly explain these several expressions, which represent to us the difference between our bodies, as they now are, and as they shall be at the resurrection.

"It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption." Our bodies, as they are now, are unequally tempered, and in a perpetual flux and change, continually tending to corruption, being made of such contrary principles and qualities, as by their perpetual confliction do conspire the ruin and dissolution of it. But when they are raised again, they shall be so tempered and refined, as to be free from all these destructive qualities, which threaten a change and dissolution; "they shall be raised incorruptible," so as not to be liable to decay and death. The body, though it continues still material and consists of matter, shall then partake of the immortality of the soul to which it is united, and be of equal duration with



it. So the apostle tells us: (ver. 52, 53.) “The dead shall be raised incorruptible; for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

“It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory.” Our bodies, when they are committed to the earth, are vile offensive carcasses, and therefore we hide and bury them out of sight: but they shall be raised beautiful and glorious, as different from what they were before, as the heavenly mansions, in which they are to dwell for ever, are from the dark cell of the grave, out of which they are raised: and they that before were only fit company for dust and worms, shall be admitted into the reviving presence of God, and the blessed society of angels.

“It is sown in weakness, it shall be raised in power.” Our bodies now fall to the ground through their own frailty, and drop into the grave through the weakness and infirmity of nature to support and bear them up any longer: but though they fall through weakness, they shall at the resurrection be endowed with such a life, and strength, and vigour, as to be able, without any change or decay, to abide and continue for ever in the same state.

“It is sown a natural body,” ψυχικὸν, “an animal body,” an earthly cottage or tabernacle fitted for the soul to lodge in for a little while, “but it is raised a spiritual body.” And this is the sum of all the rest. Our bodies in this world are gross flesh and blood, liable to be affected with natural and sensual pleasures, and to be afflicted with natural pains and diseases, to be pressed with natural necessities of hunger and thirst, and obnoxious to all those changes and accidents to which natural things are subject: but it shall be “raised a spiritual body,” pure and refined from the dregs of matter: it shall not hunger nor thirst, be diseased or in pain any more. These “houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust,” are continually decaying, and therefore they stand in need of perpetual reparation by food and physic: but “our house, which shall be from heaven,” shall be of such lasting and durable matter, as not only time, but even eternity itself, shall make no impression upon it, or cause the least decay in it. “They who shall be accounted worthy (says our Saviour) to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, cannot die any more; but shall be like the angels, and are the children of God;” that is, in some degree shall partake of the felicity and immortality of God himself, who is “always the same, and his years fail not.”—“It is raised a spiritual body.” We shall then be, as it were, all spirit, and our very bodies shall be then raised and refined, that they shall be no clog, no impediment to the operations of our souls. And surely we cannot but think this a glorious change, when we consider how our bodies do now crush our spirits, and what a melancholy and dead weight they are upon them, and how grievous an incumbrance, and trouble, and temptation they are, for the most part, to us in this mortal state. I proceed now to the

II. Second thing, wherein the blessedness of the just at the resurrection shall consist, viz. in the consequent happiness of the whole man, of the soul and body united and purified; the one from sin, the other from frailty and corruption; and both admitted to the blessed sight and enjoyment of the ever-blessed God. But this is an argument too big for our narrow

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apprehensions of things, whilst we are in this mortal state; a subject too unwieldy for such children as the wisest of us all are while we are in this world; and, whenever we attempt to speak of it, we do but speak like children, and understand like children, and reason like children, about it. “That which is imperfect must be done away;” our souls must be raised to a greater perfection, and our understandings filled with a stronger and steadier light, before we can be fit to handle such a subject, according to the worth and dignity of it. We must first have been in heaven, and possessed of that felicity and glory which is there to be enjoyed, before we can think or talk of it, in any measure as it deserves. In the mean time, whenever we set about it, we shall find our faculties oppressed with the weight and splendour of so vast and glorious an argument; like St. Paul, who, when he was caught up into paradise, saw and heard that, which, when he came down into this world again, he was not able to express, and which is not possible for man to utter.

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So that, in discoursing of the state of the blessed, we must content ourselves with what the Scripture hath declared in general concerning it, that it is a state of perfect freedom from all those infirmities and imperfections, those evils and miseries, those sins and temptations, to which we are liable in this world; a state of unspeakable and endless joy and happiness in the blessed sight and presence of God, and in the happy society of “an innumerable company of an gels,” and of the “spirits of just men made perfect.”

So St. John describes the felicities and glories of that state, as they were represented to him in a vision: (*Rev. xxi. 2-4.*) “And I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 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;” that is, all those evils which we saw and suffered in this world, will for ever vanish and disappear. (*And ver. 23.*) “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light there of.” And, which is the greatest privilege and felicity of all, no sin shall be there: (*ver. 27.*) “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth:” and consequently no misery and curse shall be there: (*chap. xxii. 3, 4.*) “And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God, and of the Lamb, shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face.” In which last words, our employment and our happiness are expressed; but what in particular these shall be, and wherein they shall consist, it is impossible for us now to describe: it is sufficient to know, in general, that our employment shall be our unspeakable pleasure, and every way suitable to the glory and happiness of that state, and as much above the noblest and most delightful employment of this world, as the perfection of our bodies, and the powers of our souls, shall then be above what they were in this world.

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In a word, our happiness shall be such as is worthy of the great King of the world to bestow upon his faithful servants, and infinitely beyond the just reward of their best services; it is “to see God, and to be ever with him, in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.”



SERMON CLXXXIV.

OF THE HAPPINESS OF GOOD MEN, IN THE FUTURE STATE.

It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.—1 John iii. 2.

THE great design of this Epistle is to persuade men to purity and holiness of life, without which we can lay no claim to the promises and privileges of the gospel. Christians are called “the children of God;” and this is a great privilege indeed, a mighty argument of God’s love and favour to us, to own us for his children. “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” This is the happiness of our present condition: “now we are the sons of God; and if sons, then heirs; this gives a title to a future inheritance. “And it does not yet appear what we shall be;” the circumstances of our future happiness and glory are not perfectly revealed to us, only thus much in general is discovered to us, that we shall be very happy, because we shall be admitted to the immediate sight and enjoyment of God; and we cannot see him and enjoy him, unless we be like him: and to be like God is to be happy. “We know that when he shall appear,” ἐὰν φανερωθῆ, that is, “when it shall appear.” “It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when it shall appear,” that is, when our future happiness shall be revealed to us: it is not yet particularly discovered to us, but thus much in general we know of it beforehand, that “we shall be like God, for we shall see him as he is.” In which words there are these four things worthy of our consideration:

First, The present security of our future state, as to the particular circumstances of that happiness which good men shall enjoy in another world: “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.”

Secondly, That thus much we certainly know of it in general, that it shall consist in the sight and enjoyment of God; “We know that, when it shall appear, we shall see him as he is.”

Thirdly, Wherein our likeness to God shall consist; “We shall be like him.”

Fourthly, The necessary connexion between our likeness to God, and our sight and enjoyment of him; “We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is:” that is, because “we shall see him as he is;” therefore it is certain “we shall be like him;” for unless we be like God, we are not capable of seeing and enjoying him.

First, The present obscurity of our future state, as to the particular circumstances of that happiness which good men shall enjoy in another world: “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” The Scripture tells us, that it is a glory yet to be revealed: that there shall be such a state of happiness for good men in another world, though it was in a great measure obscure to the world before, both to Jews and gentiles, yet it is now clearly revealed to us by “the appearance of Jesus Christ, who hath brought life and immortality to light by the gospel.”



But the particular circumstances of this happiness are still hid from us; and, as it is a needless, so it would be a faulty, curiosity in us to pry and inquire into them. It is enough that we certainly know there is such a state; the knowledge of this in general is enough to quicken our diligence, and excite our endeavours, for the obtaining and securing of it: it is enough to mortify all evil affections in us, and to baffle all temptations to sin, to know that it will rob us of so great a felicity as God hath promised to us; it is enough to support and comfort us under all the miseries and afflictions of this present time, to be fully assured that after a few days of sorrow and trouble are over, we shall be unspeakably and eternally happy. A firm persuasion of this, is argument enough to our obedience, and a sufficient support to our faith and patience, and we need inquire no farther. Thus much God hath revealed to us, for our comfort and encouragement, the rest he hath concealed from us; and it would be a bold intrusion into his secrets, to pry and search any farther; and, if we should, it would be to no purpose. For in things which depend upon Divine revelation, it is impossible for us to know any more, than God is pleased to reveal to us. In matters of pure revelation, we cannot go beyond the word of the Lord: "The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God, or he to whom the Spirit of God shall reveal them." If one should come from a strange country, never known and discovered before, and should only tell us, in general, that it was a most pleasant and delightful place, and the inhabitants a brave, and generous, and wealthy people, under the government of a wise and great king, ruling by excellent laws; and that the particular delights and advantages of it were not to be imagined by any thing he knew in our own country, and should say no more of it: if we gave credit to the person that brought this relation, it would create in us a great admiration of the country described to us, and a mighty concern to see it, and live in it. But it would be a vain curiosity, to reason and conjecture about the particular conveniences of it; because it would be impossible, by any discourse, to arrive at the certain knowledge of any more, than he, who only knew it, was pleased to tell us. This is the case as to our heavenly country. Our blessed Saviour, who "came down from heaven," from "the bosom of his Father," hath revealed to us a state of happiness and glory in general, that there is such "a kingdom prepared for us;" and when he was leaving the world, he told us, that he was going thither by the way of the grave; and when he was risen again from the dead, and was ascended into heaven, he promised to come again at the end of the world, and to raise us out of the grave, and to carry us into those celestial mansions, "where we shall be for ever with the Lord." And beyond this he hath made no particular discovery to us of the felicity of that place; he hath given us no punctual representation of the glory of it; he hath not declared to us, in a special manner, what our work and employment shall be, in what way God will communicate himself to us, nor what kind of conversation we shall have with the blessed angels, and with one another, and how far we shall know, or be known, to one another; or whether we shall stand affected in any peculiar manner to those who were our friends, and relations, and acquaintance in this world.



These and perhaps a thousand things more, which may concern the glories of that state, and the happiness and employment of the “spirits of just men made perfect,” our Saviour hath told us nothing of, but only in general; and it is impossible for us with any certainty to make out the rest, any more than children can make a conjecture of the designs and reasonings of a wise man; not only because it would be of no great use to us, but because the imperfection of human nature, and of our faculties in this state of mortality, is not able to bear a full and clear representation of so great a glory.

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When our Saviour was transfigured upon the mount, and a little image of heaven was shewn to men, the disciples were strangely amazed, and knew not what they said. And St. Paul tells us, that when he was “taken up into the third heaven,” the things which he saw and heard there, “were not to be uttered.” So that well might the apostle say here in the text, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” Our future state is very obscure to us while we are in this world, as to any distinct and particular knowledge of it.

There are a sort of idle men in the world, I mean the schoolmen, who have been very busy and bold in their inquiries, very peremptory in their determinations of several things relating to it: but after all our search and study, it is impossible for us to advance one step farther in the knowledge of it, than God hath been pleased in his holy word to reveal it to us. And how much God hath revealed, I shall, in discoursing of the

Second particular, consider; namely, That thus much we know of it in general, that it shall consist in the blessed vision of God: “It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but when he shall appear, we shall see him as he is.” Thus much all Christians know, because our Saviour hath plainly revealed it to them, that the blessedness of the saints should consist in the vision of God. ([Matt. v. 8.](#)) “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.” Which the apostle expresseth with a little variation; ([Heb. xii. 14.](#)) “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” Here is a great thing expressed to us in a few words, “We shall see him as he is:” for the better understanding of which, it will be convenient to inquire into these three things:

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I. What is meant here by seeing God.

II. What by seeing him as he is.

III. The fitness of this metaphor, to express to us the happiness of our future state.

I. What is meant by seeing God. The school men have spun out abundance of fine cobwebs about this, which in their language they call “the beatific vision of God,” and they generally describe and explain it so as to render it a very dry and sapless thing. They make it to consist in a perpetual gazing upon God, and contemplating the Divine essence and perfections, in which, as in a clearer mirror, they suppose men to see and know all other things. But this is a very jejune and insipid notion of happiness, but yet suitable enough to the gust and inclination of those that devised it. And, indeed, men are naturally apt to form such notions of God and heaven to themselves, as are most agreeable to their own appetites

and inclinations. So the heathen world framed to themselves gods after their own image and likeness; of like passions, and inclinations, and lusts with themselves; and such a heaven as pleased themselves, and was most suitable to their own gross imaginations of pleasure and happiness; and therefore they described it by pleasant fields, and clear rivers, and shady walks. So likewise Mahomet framed such a paradise, as is most agreeable to our sensual appetites and lusts. In like manner the schoolmen, who addicted themselves wholly to contemplation, would have the happiness of heaven to consist in that which they themselves took most delight in. But surely the Scripture understands something more by the sight of God, than a bare contemplation of him. It is a known rule given by divines for the understanding of Scripture—"The words that signify sense and knowledge, are very often in Scripture to be so understood, as to comprehend in them those affections and effects, which sense and knowledge are apt to produce in us." So our knowledge of God doth in Scripture many times import the sum of all religion, the whole duty of man: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar:" and God's knowing of us, signifies the whole happiness of man; "The Lord knoweth them that are his." So tasting and sight are in Scripture put for experience and enjoyment: ([Psal. xxxiv. 8.](#)) "Taste and see that the Lord is gracious." ([Lament. iii. 1.](#)) "I am the man that hath seen affliction;" that is, that hath suffered it. ([1 Pet. iii. 10.](#)) "He that will love life, and see good days," that is, enjoy them. And so we use the word in common speech. To see a friend, is to enjoy the pleasure of his company, and all the advantages of his conversation. So here, the sight of God doth comprehend and take in all the happiness of a future state. As to see the king includes the court, and all the glorious circumstances of his attendance; so to see God, does take in all that glory, and joy, and happiness, which flows from his presence.

I grant, indeed, that this expression primarily and immediately denotes our perfect knowledge of God in the other life, in opposition to those obscure and more imperfect discoveries and apprehensions which we have of him in these earthly bodies: for I think we need make no doubt, but that sight is here taken in a spiritual and intellectual sense. We are not to dream that we shall see God with our bodily eyes; for being a pure spirit, he cannot be the object of any corporeal sense. But we shall have such a sight of him, as a pure spirit is capable of; we shall see him with the eyes of our minds and understanding. And in this sense, we do in some degree see God in this life, by faith and knowledge; but it is but darkly, and as it were through a glass that we see him, as the apostle expresseth it. But when we come to heaven, our understanding shall be raised and cleared to such a degree of strength and perfection, that we shall know God after a more perfect manner, than we are capable of in this state of mortality. And this perfect knowledge of him, together with the happy effects of it, those affections which it shall raise in us, and that blessed enjoyment of the chief good which we are not able to express, is that which is called the sight of God.

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II. What is here meant by seeing God as he is: we shall see him as he is. Now this cloth farther and emphatically express our perfect knowledge and enjoyment of God.

1. Our perfect knowledge of him. Not that we are to imagine, that when we come to heaven, our understanding can, or shall be raised to such a pitch, as to be able perfectly to comprehend the infinite nature and perfections of God: for all created understanding being naturally finite, we cannot imagine that it can be stretched to the comprehension of what is infinite, as the Divine nature and perfections are. But our knowledge shall be advanced and raised to such degrees of perfection, as a finite and created understanding is capable of.

And we may very reasonably conceive (and in deed the Scripture leads us to it, without and be yond which it is not safe to speak of these things); I say, we may reasonably conceive the perfection of this knowledge to. consist in these three things: in a more immediate, and clear, and certain knowledge of the Divine nature and perfections, than we are capable of in this state of mortality.

(1.) We shall then have an immediate knowledge of God. In this world we see him by the means and help of his word and works; we see him as he hath manifested and revealed himself to us in the Holy Scriptures, as he hath represented himself to us in. the creatures, as the apostle tells us: ([Rom. i. 20.](#)) that “his eternal power and Godhead are clearly seen by the things that are made.” But thus we do not see God immediately and directly; but by a reflection of his perfections from the works of creation and providence. We see him by faith at a great distance, which the apostle calls, seeing him as it were “through a glass,” ([1 Cor. xiii. 12.](#)) Now faith in Scripture is most frequently opposed to sight, which is a more immediate view and nearer discovery of a thing. ([2 Cor. v. 7.](#)) “We walk by faith, and not by sight.” But in heaven we shall have an immediate and direct sight of God, that which the Scripture calls, seeing him? face to face;” not at a distance, as we do now by faith; not by reflection, as we do now see him in the creatures; but we shall have an immediate and direct view of him. Faith shall then cease, as the apostle tells us, and be perfected in sight, because of the nearness and evidence of the object.

(2.) We shall not only then have an immediate, but a far clearer knowledge of God, than we have now in this life: ([1 Cor. xiii. 12.](#)) “We now see him in a glass darkly,” ἀν ἀινίγματι, “in a riddle,” which is an obscure and involved declaration of a thing. We have now but very dark and confused apprehensions, and such as do not only represent him very imperfectly, but many times very falsely, to us. While our souls are muffled in these gross bodies, we are compassed about with clouds, which do in a great measure intercept the sight of him: but the light of glory will scatter all these clouds, “the veil shall then be taken away.” The resurrection will refine our bodies to that purity, that they shall be fit instruments for our souls. We shall have spiritual bodies, as the apostle tells us, ([1 Cor. xv.](#)) so purified from all these dregs which now incumber them, that they shall be fit to be united to a spirit, and to act with it; and then “we shall with open face behold the glory of God,” as the apostle expresseth

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it; (2 Cor. iii. 18.) or as it is here in the text, “we shall see him as he is.” We see him now many times as he is not; that is, we are liable to false and mistaken conceptions of him: but then we shall see him as he is. The clearness of our knowledge will free us from all error and mistake about him. We are now many times at a loss what conceptions to have of God; we are hard put to it to reconcile one perfection of God with another, and to make them consistent and agree together. We believe his providence; but we are puzzled many times how to make that accord with his goodness and justice: but in heaven we shall see the harmony of all these, and that it was nothing but our ignorance and darkness which made us imagine any discord and disagreement in them.

(3.) We shall then, likewise, have a certain knowledge of God, free from all doubts concerning him. There may be a certainty in faith; but not that high degree of evidence and assurance which is in sight. It is spoken by way of abating the certainty of faith, when it is called the evidence of things not seen; nay, many times the faith of good men is mixed with a great deal of fear and doubt of the contrary: but in the state of glory, we shall not be liable to any of these doublings and jealousies, which do so frequently possess the best of men in this world. Then “we shall know, as also we are known,” as the apostle expresseth it, (1 Cor. xiii. 12.) As God now knows us, so shall we then know him, as to the truth and certainty of our knowledge.

Now such an immediate, and clear, and certain knowledge of God, as hath been described, doth necessarily suppose a very great elevation of our understandings, above what this state of mortality can bear. We cannot now have a clear and immediate sight of God, because the weakness and imperfection of our present state will not admit of it. In this life, our understandings are easily overborne by the lustre and excellency of an object. Hence it was that God said to Moses, when he so earnestly desired to see his face, “Thou canst not see my face, and live,” (Exod. xxxiii. 20.) So transcendent and glorious a sight would quite overwhelm and overcome our faculties; as the light of the sun, if we look steadfastly and directly upon it, will dazzle and blind the strongest eye. The sight of so glorious a being as God is, of so much excellency, and happiness, and perfection, as centre in him, would fill us with joy and wonder, too great for frail mortality to bear: but in the state of glory, the eye of the soul, that is, our understanding faculty, shall be enlarged unto that capacity, and purified to that clearness, and elevated to that strength, as to be able to receive and bear so much of the lustre and glory of the Divine nature and perfection, as is consistent with the finiteness of a human understanding, and suitable to the perfection of a glorified soul; and our understandings shall then be raised and advanced to such a strength, that they shall be so far from being oppressed and burdened with the presence of God, and from sinking under the weight of his glory, that they shall be infinitely ravished and delighted with it.

2. To see God “as he is,” does imply our perfect enjoyment of him. We shall not only perfectly know him, but we shall take infinite pleasure in him, in beholding his glory, in

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praising and admiring his goodness, in doing his will with all imaginable readiness and cheerfulness. I do not pretend to describe to you the particularities of that state, and all the blessed comforts and enjoyments of it: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." God hath not told us, and none but he, who is the author and fountain of this happiness, can discover it to us. Let it suffice us, that God hath assured us of it, and hath prepared it for us; and it can be no mean thing, which the infinite wisdom, and goodness, and power of God hath designed for the final reward of those who love him, and of those whom he loves. If we know thus much of it, that it is certain beyond all doubt, and vast beyond all imagination, we have nothing more to wish, but that God would fit us for it, and, as soon as he pleaseth, bring us to the enjoyment of it,

III. We will consider the fitness of this metaphor, to express to us the happiness of our future state. And that the Scripture doth very much delight to set forth to us the blessedness of heaven, by this metaphor of seeing, is evident from the frequent use of it in Scripture. ([Matt. v. 8.](#)) "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." ([1 Cor. xiii. 12.](#)) "We shall see him face to face." ([Heb. xii. 14.](#)) "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." And here in the text, "we shall see him as he is." And indeed God is pleased, in Scripture, to make sensible descriptions of the happiness and misery of another world, and, by way of accommodation to our understandings, and condescension to the weakness and imperfections of this state, to set forth heaven and hell to us by such things as are sensible; and that, not only to help our understandings to a more easy conception of things, but likewise to move and rouse our affections, which, while we are in the body, and immersed in sense, are commonly most powerfully wrought upon, by sensible representations of things. And therefore hell is described to us by such things as affect the sense of feeling, because that is capable of the greatest and sharpest pain; and the enjoyments of heaven, by the sense of sight, because that is the noblest of all our senses; and the primary and proper object of it is most delightful, and of the most spiritual nature of any corporeal thing.

1. Sight is the noblest and most excellent of all our senses: and therefore the frame of the eye is the most curious of all other parts of the body, and the dearest to us, and that which we preserve with the greatest tenderness. When the apostle would set forth the mighty affection which the Galatians bore to him, he says, "they would have plucked out their very eyes for him." It is the most comprehensive sense, hath the largest sphere, takes in the most objects, and discerns them at the greatest distance. It can in a moment pass from earth to heaven, and survey innumerable objects. It is the most pure, and spiritual, and quickest in its operations, and approacheth nearest to the nature of a spiritual faculty. Of all our senses, it carries the greatest evidence and certainty along with it, and the reports of it are the most certain and unquestionable. Hence we use to say, that one eye-witness is more than ten ear-witnesses. When Job would express to us the most perfect knowledge of God, he does it by sight: ([Job xlii. 5.](#)) "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eyes see thee:"



that is, he had a more perfect and clear discovery of God and his perfections, than ever he had before. And to mention but one thing more; it is that sense which is more apt to work upon our affections:

*Segnius irritant animos demissa per aures,
Quam quæ sunt oculis commissa fidelibus;*

“The things which we hear reported, are not so apt to move our pity, or anger, or love, as the things which we see with our eyes.” So that in all these respects, of the dignity and excellency, the largeness and comprehensiveness, the spirituality and quickness, the evidence and certainty of this sense, and the power it hath to raise our affections, it is the fittest to represent to us the noblest employment and operation of our souls in the state of glory.

2. The primary and proper object of this sense, is the most delightful and of the most spiritual nature of any corporeal thing, and that is light. “The light of the eye rejoiceth the heart,” ([Prov. xv. 30.](#)) “Light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eye to behold the sun,” ([Eccles. xi. 7.](#)) It is the purest and most spiritual of all corporeal things, and therefore God chooseth to represent himself by it: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

And thus I have done with the second thing I propounded to speak to; namely, that thus much, in general, we certainly know of the happiness of our future state—that it shall consist in the sight of God. I should now proceed to the third thing, namely, wherein our likeness to God shall consist; but this I shall defer to another opportunity.

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SERMON CLXXXV.

OF THE HAPPINESS OF GOOD MEN IN THE FUTURE STATE.

It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.—1 John iii. 2.

IN these words are four things worthy of our consideration.

First, The present obscurity of our future state, as to the particular circumstances of that happiness which good men shall enjoy in another world; “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.”

Secondly, What we know of it in general; that it shall consist in the perfect knowledge and enjoyment of God; both which are comprehended in that expression: “We shall see him as he is.”

Thirdly, Wherein our likeness and conformity to God shall consist; “This we know, that, when, he shall appear, we shall be like him.”

Fourthly, The necessary connexion between our likeness and conformity to God, and our sight and enjoyment of him. The two first of these I have spoken to. I shall now proceed to the

Third; namely, Wherein our likeness and conformity to God shall consist, “We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him:” in these two, things—in the immortality of our nature, and in the purity of our souls.

I. In the immortality of our nature. In this mortal state, we are not capable of that happiness which consists in the vision of God; that is, in the perfect knowledge and perpetual enjoyment of him. The imperfection of our state, and the weakness of our faculties, cannot bear the sight of so glorious and resplendent an object, as the Divine nature and perfections are: we cannot see God and live. The frailty of our mortal condition is unequal to sustain so great a weight of glory; to be sure it is incapable of eternal felicity; nothing but an immortal nature can be happy for ever. And therefore the Scripture tells us, that, when our bodies shall be raised, the quality and condition of them shall be quite altered, and that our blessed Saviour shall, by his almighty power, make a mighty change in them, from what they were in this mortal state: (Phil. iii. 20, 21.) “Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working where by he is able even to subdue all things to himself.” And the apostle tells us, more particularly, wherein this change doth consist: (1 Cor. xv. 42.) “It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” These corruptible, and vile, and weak, and gross bodies, which we wear and carry about us for a while, and at last put off, and lay down in the grave, shall, by the power of God at the resurrection, be refined and advanced into

spiritual and vigorous, glorious and immortal bodies. Our bodies are now but a tabernacle, a temporary and moveable dwelling, that shall shortly be taken down; but, at the resurrection, they shall become a fixed and settled habitation, a house that shall never decay, nor come to ruin. So the apostle tells us: (2 Cor. v. 1.) “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.” And when this blessed change shall be made, “mortality shall be swallowed up of life; for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” And there is a necessity of this, in order to our perfect happiness. For that is not a perfect happiness, which shall expire and have an end; which it must have, if we were still liable to mortality. And therefore the apostle is peremptory, that there must be such a change, because our bodies, as they are now constituted and framed, are utterly incapable of the happiness of the next life. (Ver. 50.) “For this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Where, by “flesh and blood,” the apostle does not mean, as many have imagined, our sinful and impure nature; but our frail and mortal nature, consisting of such gross materials as flesh and blood are, for the maintenance and support of which, there is continual need of new recruits, and fresh supplies of nourishment by meat and drink. Such a nature as this, which is necessarily mortal, “cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” which is a state of perpetual and endless happiness. And that the apostle means this, by the phrase of “flesh and blood,” is evident, beyond all doubt, from the next words, which he adds by way of explication of what he had said, “This, I say, brethren, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.” That which is liable to death and corruption, is not capable of immortal glory and happiness. And therefore our nature must be made immortal; and immortality makes us like to God, and is an evident testimony and declaration that we are the sons of God. “We are now the children of God,” in respect of our title to a future inheritance; but this is hid from the world: but at the resurrection, when we shall bear the image of his immortality, this will be an evident mark of our being the sons of God. As our blessed Saviour was “mightily declared to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead;” so likewise shall his members be declared to be “the children of God,” by that glorious change that shall be made in them at the resurrection, when “this mortal shall put on immortality.” Then we are the sons of God, indeed, in an eminent manner, when “we can die no more.”

And therefore it is worth our observation, that the Scripture gives us the title of “the children of God,” more especially upon this account: (Luke xx. 35, 36.) “But they which shall be counted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, can die no more, but are equal to the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.” And (Rom. viii. 19.) the resurrection is called, “the manifestation of the sons of God.” And (ver. 21.) “Our being delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.” And (ver. 23.) it is called our “adoption or sonship; we

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ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, viz. the redemption of our bodies.” This is the first thing, wherein our likeness and resemblance to God in our future state of happiness shall consist, the immortality of our nature; without which we could not be capable of the blessed vision of God, and the everlasting enjoyment of him.

II. It shall consist in the purity of our souls. Now purity is a freedom from sin, which is the great stain and defilement of the soul. Before we can be admitted into heaven, we must be quit of all those vicious and corrupt inclinations, of all those inordinate desires and passions, which defile our souls, and render us unlike to God. In this world, every good man does “mortify his earthly and corrupt affections,” and in some measure “bring them into obedience and subjection to the law of God.” But still there are some relics of sin, some spots and imperfections in the holiness of the best men. But upon our entrance into the other world, we shall quite “put off the old man with the affections and lusts thereof;” we shall be perfectly “delivered from this body of sin and death,” and, together with this mortal nature, part with all the remainders of sin and corruption, which cleave to this mortal state. For till “our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved,” we shall never be wholly cleansed from the leprosy of sin. While we are in this world, we must be continually “cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,” and “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” But we shall never be wholly cleansed, we shall never be perfectly holy, in this life: but in the other state, all sin and imperfection shall be done away, and we shall be “presented to God, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.” And perfect holiness is the image of God, and the very nearest resemblance of the Divine nature, that creatures are capable of.

But how our souls shall be purified from those remainders of sin and dregs of corruption, which are in the best men, while they are in this world, it is not necessary that we should be able perfectly to explain. It ought to be sufficient to us/ that he who hath promised it, is able to do it one way or other; only I am confident, and have great reason to be so, that this purification will not be wrought by the fire of purgatory. For if there be any such thing, as there is not the least spark of Divine revelation for it (and how any body should come to know it otherwise, is not easy to imagine), it is granted to be a material fire; and if it be so, it is no ways fitted, either for the punishment or purgation of impure souls. Indeed, if men carried their bodies into purgatory, the fire of it might be a cruel torment and vexation to them: but how a fire should scorch a spirit, is, I believe, beyond the subtilty of a schoolman to make out; much less is it fitted to purge and take away sin. And, if the truth were known, it was never seriously intended for this purpose, to do any good to the dead, but to drain the purses of the living, by deluding them with a vain hope of getting their friends delivered out of that imaginary torment.

But we, who take our faith from the word of God, and not from the fictions of men, do believe, that the souls of good men do immediately pass out of this world into a state of happiness; and that he who does bestow this happiness upon them, does qualify them for



it, before he admits them into it. And if we consider the matter well, we shall find, that a man who hath truly repented of his sins, and through the mercy of God, in Jesus Christ, hath obtained of God the pardon and forgiveness of them, and is firmly resolved against sin, and doth truly endeavour to mortify his lusts, and to lead a holy life, and by the grace of God does “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and “lives soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world;” I say, we shall find that such a man is “not far from the kingdom of God,” but very nearly qualified and disposed for it; and that there hardly wants any thing to make such a man perfectly good, but only to remove out of his way those obstacles and impediments to virtue, and to free him from those circumstances of infirmity and temptation, which do unavoidably encompass us in this world; such as are ignorance, and the instigations of our bodily temper to irregular appetites and passions, that which the apostle calls, “the law in our members warring against the law of our minds;” the necessities of this life, the temptations of the devil and of bad company, and the like; all which do appertain to this state, and which we shall be quit of so soon as we leave this world, and put off these frail and mortal bodies: and when these are removed, we are free from the bondage of sin, and have nothing to hinder and divert that strong bent and inclination of mind, which is in every good man, to do the will of God. So that our very translation into another state does of itself assert us into this “glorious liberty of the sons of God.” And if, besides this, any thing more be necessary to cleanse us from sin, and perfect the holiness and purity of our souls, we need not be solicitous about the way and manner of it, but may rest confident, that “he who hath begun a good work in us, will perfect it in the day of Christ;” and that what is wanting in our love to God, or charity to men, in goodness, and meekness, and purity, or any grace or virtue whatsoever, shall then be added to them, that “so an entrance may be administered to us abundantly in to the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—“This we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him;” like him in the immortality of our nature, and in the purity of our souls, which are the very image of God, and the most express character of the Divine nature. The

Fourth and last thing remains, which is to shew the necessary connexion which is between our likeness and conformity to God, and our sight and enjoyment of him; “We know that we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Which implies, that, unless we be like God, we are in no capacity of the blessed sight and enjoyment of him.

I. Likeness to God in the immortality of our nature, is necessary to make us capable of the happiness of the next life; which consists in the blessed and perpetual vision and enjoyment of God. If our natures were mortal, we were incapable of seeing God. What was said of Moses, is equally true of all mankind, in this state of mortality: we cannot see the face of God and live. Nothing that is frail and dying can endure the splendour of so great a glory: nothing that stands in need of continual reparation, as flesh and blood does, can “inherit



the kingdom of God;" nothing but a fixed and immutable nature, which can never decay, is capable of everlasting happiness.

But this part of likeness and conformity to God, though it be necessary to make us capable of the felicity of another world, yet it is no part of our duty and care: if we endeavour after the other, which consists in holiness and purity, God will work this in us, and for us, without any concurrence of ours. All that he requires of us, is, that we firmly believe it, and patiently expect it, and fervently pray for it, and aspire after it. And, indeed, our likeness to God in this respect, depends upon our conformity to him in purity and holiness. For as "by sin death entered into the world, and so death passed upon all men;" so nothing but holiness can restore us to immortality.

The foundation of all our hopes of a blessed immortality, is to be laid in the price of our redemption, as the meritorious cause of it, and in our being "renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness," as the proper qualification and capacity for it on our parts. We must "have our fruit unto holiness," if we look that the end should be everlasting life. And to this purpose it is excellently said, in the Wisdom of Solomon, "the keeping of God's commandments is the assurance of immortality, and immortality makes us like to God." And therefore I shall mainly apply myself to the

II. Second thing; namely, To shew that our likeness to God in the purity of our souls, is necessary to make us capable of the blessed sight and enjoyment of him in the next life. It is necessary as a condition of the thing; and it is necessary as a qualification in the person.

1. It is necessary, as a condition of the thing to be performed on our part, before we can expect that God should make good the promise of eternal life and happiness to us. The express constitution and appointment of God hath made it necessary, who hath told us, "without holiness no man shall see him;" that "if we sow to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corruption; but if we sow to the Spirit, (that is, if we be sanctified and renewed) we shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life." And if this were a mere arbitrary condition, imposed upon us by the sovereign will of God, without any necessity from the nature of the thing; yet we ought to accept it, as a very easy condition; when he hath only said, as the prophet did to Naaman, "Wash and be clean." Certainly no man can refuse so great a benefit and blessing conferred upon such cheap and tolerable terms. God hath promised us eternal life; a mighty blessing indeed! for the obtaining of which, no condition that is possible can be thought hard and unreasonable. And what does he require of us for the obtaining of it? but that we "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God;" that is, that we do with all care and diligence abstain from sin, and endeavour to live a holy life; to conform ourselves to the will of God, and to be obedient to his laws. He does not require perfect holiness of us in this life, but a sincere endeavour after it, and he hath promised to assist our endeavour; and if we go as far as we can, he will perfect what is wanting. So that there is nothing in all this but what is very possible for every man to do,

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by the assistance of that grace which he hath promised to afford us; and if it be possible, we cannot answer our neglect of it, when all our hopes of happiness depend upon it. But this is not all, there is yet,

2. A farther necessity of it, inwardly to qualify and dispose us for the sight and enjoyment of God. We cannot possibly love God, nor take delight in him, unless we be like him in the temper and disposition of our minds. If we would know what will make us happy, we must look upon the great pattern of happiness, and that is God himself; who, as he is the most powerful, and wise, and every way perfect, so is he the happiest being in the world. So that if we would be happy, we must be like God. We cannot be so perfect as he is, and therefore we cannot be so happy; but if we would be as happy as creatures are capable of being, we must endeavour to be as like God as it is possible for creatures to be.

We must resemble him as near as we can, in those perfections wherein he is imitable by us. And these are, as I may call them, the moral perfections of his nature, which the Scripture usually comprehends under the name of holiness; his goodness, and patience, and mercy, and justice, and truth, and faithfulness; and these, as they are the great glory, so the chief felicity of the Divine nature.

Goodness is a perfection of itself, though it were without any great degree of knowledge or power. A poor man, and one that is ignorant in comparison of others, may yet be a very good man. But power and knowledge separated from goodness are not perfections, but may be applied to the worst and most mischievous purposes; as we see in the devil, who hath both these qualities in a high degree.

If we could suppose an omnipotent and all-knowing being, that were destitute of goodness, he would not only be troublesome to others, but uneasy to himself. Without goodness there can be no happiness. So that those perfections which contribute most to the happiness of the Divine nature, are the easiest to be imitated by us. We may be like God in his holiness, that is in his goodness, and patience, and mercy, and righteousness, and truth. And these perfections are the very temper and disposition of happiness; for they are the nature of God, who is therefore essentially happy, because he is a being constituted of these perfections. And so far as we imitate God in these, we are “partakers of a Divine nature; we dwell in God, and God in us.” So our apostle tells us, in the 4th chapter, verse 16. “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.” These Divine qualities make us fit company for our heavenly Father, and capable of the joys of heaven, and the delights of that glorious place.

And the contrary temper and disposition is the nature of the devil, and the very thing which makes it impossible for him to be happy. Malice, and envy, and revenge, are unquiet passions; and in what nature soever they are, they are as vexatious and tormentful to itself, as they are troublesome and mischievous to others. These are a hell within us, and are as

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natural causes of misery, as bodily diseases are of pain and restlessness; and while these furies are in us, nothing without us can make us happy.

The capacity and foundation of all felicity must be laid in the inward frame of our minds, in a god like temper and disposition. Till the image of his holiness and goodness, which hath been defaced by sin, be renewed upon our minds, we are utterly in capable of the enjoyment of the first and chief good, in which all our felicity does consist.

And thus you see what a necessary connexion there is between our likeness and conformity to God, and the blessed vision and enjoyment of him. All that now remains, is to draw some inferences from what hath been discoursed upon this argument, and so I shall conclude.

I. This shews us how impossible it is to reconcile a wicked life with the hopes of heaven. The terms of our happiness are firmly and immutably fixed, like “the foundation of the earth, which can not be moved;” nay, sooner may “heaven and earth pass away,” than a wicked man enter into the kingdom of heaven. If we continue in a sinful and impenitent state, we must necessarily “come short of the glory of God.” And therefore, all those devices which men have found out, to excuse themselves from a holy life, and yet to maintain hopes of getting to heaven at last, are but foolish arts of security, and tricks to undo ourselves quietly, and without any great disturbance. Some think to be saved by an external profession of religion, though it have no force and efficacy upon their lives; some by being of the only true church, wherein salvation is to be had: and yet, if it were true, that there were any one party or community of Christians, out of which there were no salvation, I am sure this likewise is true, that there is no church wherein a wicked man can be saved.

Others rely upon absolutions and indulgences, and hope, notwithstanding all the unrighteousness and ungodliness of their lives, to do their business at last that way. But can any man be so foolish, as to think, that any church or priest can forgive a man upon other terms, than those upon which only God hath declared he will forgive sinners?

Others hope to be saved by the righteousness of Christ, without any of their own. But what a presumption is this, to think that any thing that Christ hath done for us, will avail us while we cherish our lusts, and live in the contempt of his laws? “Let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.” The righteousness of Christ shall never be imputed to any for their justification, but those who are “sanctified by the renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

So that nothing can be vainer than a wicked man’s hopes of heaven. The whole design of the gospel is, to convince men that blessedness belongs only to the righteous, and that no man that allows himself in any wickedness and impiety of life, shall have any “inheritance in the kingdom of God and Christ.”

II. The consideration of the indispensable necessity of our likeness and conformity to God in holiness and purity, to make us capable of the happiness of the next life, calls loudly



upon us, to endeavour after it in this life. So it follows in the words immediately after the text; “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is: and every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” It is true, indeed, nothing but perfect holiness makes us capable of the enjoyment of God, and we cannot be perfectly holy in this life. But then we are to consider, that if we do not purify ourselves in some measure in this world, if we do not begin this work here, it will never be perfected hereafter; such dispositions as we carry with us out of this world, stick by us for ever. Indeed, if they be good, the degree of them shall be perfected; but if they be bad, they shall never be altered. If the “image of God be renewed upon us” in this life, “we shall be changed from glory to glory” in the other, “by the Spirit of the Lord.” But if we be utterly unlike God when we die, death will make no change in us for the better: we shall “go to our place, and inherit the portion of sinners.” We did not endeavour to be like God, and therefore we can never be admitted to the blessed sight and enjoyment of him; for there is a direct and eternal opposition between the holy nature of God, and an impure creature; and till this opposition be removed, we can have no communion with him. And it is too late to take away this opposition between God and an impure soul in the other world; because our condition is then concluded, and we shall remain for ever such as we have made ourselves, while we were in this world.

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Now is the time, “this is the day of salvation.” Now we may repent and leave our sins, and purify ourselves; and by purity make ourselves like to God, and by our likeness to him render our souls capable of being admitted to the blessed sight of him, “in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.”

So that we ought to resolve upon one of these two things; either to give over all thoughts of happiness in another world; or to qualify ourselves for it, by “purifying ourselves, as God is pure:” for till we are like God, we are not capable of enjoying him. While we live “in ungodliness and worldly lusts,” we are as unlike God as is possible; and there are but two ways imaginable, whereby to bring a conformity and likeness between God and us either by changing God or ourselves. Now the nature of God is fixed and immutable, he cannot recede from his holy nature; therefore we must leave our sins. It is certain we cannot change God; therefore we must endeavour to change ourselves. Rather think of purifying thy corrupt nature, which may be done; than of making any alteration in God, “with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.”

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Once God hath condescended so far as to take our nature upon him, to bring us to a participation of his own Divine nature, and make us capable of happiness: but if this will not do, we must not expect that God will put off his own nature to make us happy.

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SERMON CLXXXVI.

[Preached at Whitehall, 1686.]

THE WISDOM OF RELIGION JUSTIFIED, IN THE DIFFERENT ENDS OF GOOD AND BAD MEN.

The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.—Prov. xiv. 32.

SOLOMON, all along this Book of the Proverbs, doth recommend to us religion and the fear of God, by the name, and under the notion of wisdom. (Chap. i. 7.) “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” (Chap. ix. 10.); “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding.” Hereby signifying to us, that religion is the fundamental principle of wisdom, by which our whole life, and all the actions of it, ought to be conducted and governed; and that all wisdom which doth not begin here, and lay religion for a foundation, and which doth not act upon supposition of the truth of the principles of religion, viz. the belief of a God, and his providence, of the immortality of our souls, and the rewards and punishments of another life, is but wisdom falsely so called; because it is preposterous, and begins at the wrong end, and proceeds upon a false supposition, and wrong schema of things; and consequently our whole life, and all the actions and designs of it, do run upon a perpetual mistake, and false statings of our own case; and whatever we do pursuant to this mistake, is foolish in itself, and will be fatal in the issue and consequence of it.

For he that takes it for granted that there is no God, and that the world is not governed by the providence of any superior being, but by chance; that his soul dies with his body, and that there is no life after this: he that proceeds upon these principles, is free from all fetters and obligations of conscience, and hath no reason to regard any rule of right and justice, of virtue and goodness, farther than they conduce to his own ease and pleasure, his convenience and safety in this world; he hath nothing to do, but to contrive his own present happiness, and to live as long as he can; and because he knows he must die, to compose himself to undergo it as contentedly, and to bear the pain of it as cheerfully and patiently, and to act this last part as decently, as he can, being secured by his own principles against all future misery and danger, because death makes an utter end of him.

This is a very consistent theory, and hath but one fault—that it is not true at the bottom, and will fail us when we come to lay our whole weight upon it. It is just as the prophet describes “the staff of the broken reed of Egypt, whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it.” Such are the principles of infidelity, to all that trust in them; when they should stand us in most stead, and when we come to lean hard upon them, they will not only fail us, but go into our very heart, and pierce it with sharp pain and anguish. In the days of our health and prosperity, the spirit of a man may bear up itself by its own natural force and



strength; and false principles are like antics in a building, which seem to crouch under the weight of an arch, as if they bore it up, when in truth they are borne up by it. But when these men fall into any great calamity, or death makes towards them in good earnest, then is the trial of these principles, of what strength they are, and what weight they will bear; and we commonly see, that they do not only fail those who trust in them, but they vanish and disappear like dreams and mere illusions of the imagination, when a man awakes out of sleep; and the man that was borne up by them before with so much confidence, can now feel no substance and reality in them; he cannot now be an atheist if he would; but God, and the other world, begin to be as great realities to him, as if they were present to his bodily eye. And now the principles of infidelity are so far from ministering any comfort and good hopes to him, that they fill him with horror, and anguish, and despair; and are so far from quieting his mind, that there is nothing but storm and tempest there. “The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death.” “The wicked;” that is, the sinner, the hardened and impenitent sinner is driven away; which may either signify the sudden and violent end many times of bad men, they are carried away as it were by a tempest, answerable to that expression, (*Prov. x. 25.*) “As the whirlwind passeth, so the wicked is no more:” or else the word may signify, to be cast down and dejected; and then it imports that trouble and despondency of mind, that anguish and despair, which ariseth from the guilt of a wicked life. “Is driven away in his wickedness;” the word in the original is, “in his evil,” which may either refer to the evil of sin, or of affliction and calamity, and it will come much to one in which sense we take it. According to the first sense of the word evil, the meaning will be, that the sinner, when he comes to die, is in great trouble and despondency of mind, because of his wicked life; hath no comfort, no good hopes concerning his future state, according to that other saying of Solomon, (*Prov. xi. 23.*) “The expectation of the wicked is wrath.” If we take the word evil in the latter sense, for the evil of affliction and calamity, then the meaning is, that bad men, when they fall into any great evil and calamity, more especially upon the approach of death, (for that, as the last and greatest of evils, is probably intended, as appears by the opposition in the next words, “the righteous hath hope in his death;”) I say, that bad men, when they fall into any great evil or calamity, especially upon the approach of death, are full of trouble and disquiet, by reason of their guilt, and destitute of all comfort and hope in that needful time. And this is most agreeable to the opposite part of this proverb or sentence, “but the righteous hath hope in his death;” that is, the good man, when any evil and calamity overtakes him, though it be the most terrible of all, death itself, is full of peace, and comfort, and good hopes; when there is nothing but storms without, all is calm within, he hath some thing which still supports him and bears him up.

So that Solomon, in this sentence or proverb, seems to design to recommend religion and virtue to us, from the consideration of the different ends of good and bad men, so obvious to common observation, and generally speaking, and for the most part, which (as I have

often observed) is all the truth that is to be expected in moral and proverbial speeches; that, for the most part, the end of good men is full of peace and comfort, and good hopes of their future condition: but the end of bad men quite contrary, full of anguish and trouble, of horror and despair, without peace or comfort, or hope of any good to befall them afterwards. The righteous man hath great peace and serenity in his mind at that time; is not only contented, but glad to die; does not only submit and yield to it, but desires it, as much better. And so some read the words, "the righteous desires," or "hopes to die:" but the wicked man and the sinner dreads the thoughts and approaches of death, quits life with great reluctancy, clings to it, and hangs upon it as long as he can, and is not without great violence parted from it. The good man goes out of the world willingly and contentedly: but the wicked is driven away, not without great force and constraint, with much reluctancy, and in great trouble and perplexity of mind, what will become of him for ever.



You see the meaning of the words; that they contain a great truth, and very well worthy of our most attentive regard and consideration; because, if this be generally, and for the most part, true, which Solomon here asserts, then this is a mighty testimony on the behalf of piety and virtue; and plainly shews, that the principles of religion and virtue are proof against all assaults to which human nature is liable, and that the principles of infidelity and vice do shrink and give back when it comes to the trial. And this, to any wise and considerate man, is as good as a demonstration, that the religious man is in the right, and proceeds upon principles of sound and true wisdom, and hath chosen the better part: but that the infidel and the wicked man is in the wrong, and under a fatal mistake, which he seldom? discerns till it be too late to rectify it.

Now in the handling of this argument, I shall do these three things:

First, I shall shew that this observation of Solomon, concerning the different end of good and bad men, and the final issue and event of a virtuous and vitious course of life, is generally true, and that the exceptions, on either side, to the contrary, are but few, and not of force to infringe the truth of the observation.



Secondly, I shall consider whence this difference proceeds, and I shall endeavour to shew that it is founded in the true nature and reason of things. And,

Thirdly, That if this be true, it is a demonstration on the side of religion, and does fully justify the wisdom of it.

First, I shall endeavour to shew, that this observation of Solomon, concerning the different end of good and bad men, and the final issue and event of a virtuous and vitious course of life, is generally found true, and that the exceptions, on either side, to the contrary, are but few in comparison, and by no means of sufficient force to infringe the general truth of this observation; I say, that this observation of the wise man is generally, and for the most part true, which (as I mentioned before) is all the truth that is to be expected in moral and proverbial sentences. And for this I appeal to the common and daily experience of mankind,

whether we do not generally see religious and good men to have great ease and comfort, and sometimes great joy and transport in their minds, from the reflection, upon an innocent and useful, a holy and virtuous course of life. David was so confident of this, that he appeals to common observation and experience for the truth of it: ([Psal. xxxvii. 37.](#)) “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.” Or, as this text is rendered in our old translation, “Keep innocency, take heed to the thing that is right; for that shall bring a man peace at the last.” And he gives the reason of this, ([ver. 39.](#)) because God stands by them to support them in this needful time, with the comfortable hopes of his salvation; “the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord, he is their help in the time of trouble.” As they have sincerely endeavoured to serve God, so they have great hopes and confidence of his mercy and goodness to them, that he will stand by them, and support them in their greatest distress, and guide and conduct them to happiness at the last; and in this confidence they can say with David: ([Psal. xvi. 8, 9, 11.](#)) “I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.” For “thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” And ([Psal. xxxi. 5.](#)) “Into thy hand I commit my spirit, O Lord God of truth.” And ([Psal. xlviii. 14.](#)) “This God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death.” And again, ([Psal. lxxiii. 23-26.](#)) “Nevertheless, I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” Thus a good man, not only in the contemplation of death, and upon the approach of it, but even under the very pangs of it, is apt to comfort himself, in the Divine mercy and goodness, and to rejoice in the hopes of the glory of God.

But the wicked, on the contrary, when death makes its approach towards them, the guilt of their wicked lives flies in their faces, and disturbs their minds, and fills them with horror and amazement, with “a fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume them.” “The expectation of the wicked is wrath,” saith Solomon, ([Prov. xi. 23.](#)) “What is the hope of the hypocrite (that is, of the wicked man), when God shall take away his soul?” ([Job xxvii. 8.](#)) In their life-time they neglected God and religion, and perhaps denied him, or said unto him with those in the [21st chapter, ver. 14.](#) “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;” and when they come to die, they find that God is departed from them. They have not the confidence to look up to him, or to expect any mercy or favour from him, being conscious to themselves that they have denied the God which is above, or at least neglected and despised him; and now “the terrors of the Almighty take hold of them, and his arrows stick fast in them,” and wound their consciences, and they cannot pluck them out, or get rid of them; their spirits are ready to sink with in them, and the principles

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of infidelity which they once relied upon now fail them; and, instead of ministering any comfort and confidence to them, they pierce them to the heart, and are the greatest ground of their trouble and despair.

So that here is a very visible and remarkable difference between good and bad men when they come to die. Good men have commonly a great calm and serenity in their minds, are full of good hopes of the mercy and favour of God to them, and of the sense of "his loving-kindness, which is better than life itself;" and are willing to leave this world, in the comfortable expectation and assurance of a better condition after death; and not only willing, but many times heartily glad, that they are going out of this vale of tears, out of this sink of sin and sorrows; that they are quitting these drooping mansions, and exchanging these earthly tabernacles, for "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens:" whereas the wicked is full of trouble and anguish, and his mind in greater pain and disorder than his body; all storm and tempest, "like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest:" "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." And how can there be peace, when his whoredoms and adulteries, his repeated acts of drunkenness and in temperance, his profane oaths and blasphemies, have been so many? When he is conscious to himself what a life he hath led, and is thoroughly awakened to a just sense of the evil of his doings? And when death makes up to him, how does he dread the sight and thoughts of it, and how does he hanker after life, as if all his happiness depended upon it and ended with it? And at last, like the young man in the gospel, he goes away sorrowful; because, perhaps, he had great possessions in this world, and hath no hopes at all in the other. "This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed to him by God."

There are, I confess, some exceptions to the contrary on both sides; but they are but few in comparison, and by no means sufficient to infringe the general truth of this observation.

On the one hand, some good men are very melancholy and dispirited, when they come to die, and leave the world full of fears and jealousies concerning their future condition; and this may proceed from several causes. Perhaps they are naturally of a dark and melancholy temper, which is usually heightened and increased by bodily weakness and distemper; and in this case it is no wonder, if the considerations of religion be not sufficient to scatter these clouds, and to overrule and correct the irregularities of our bodily temper; because the principles and considerations of religion do not work naturally and by way of physic, but morally and by way of conviction and counsel. Sometimes this fear and dejection of mind in good men, proceeds from mere lowness and faintness of spirit, naturally caused by the load and continuance of the distemper which they labour under, and by which the mind is likewise, in some degree, weakened and broken; and when this happens, it is usually very visible, and consequently the account of it easy and obvious; and sometimes, perhaps, we are charitably mistaken in our good man, and either he is not a sincerely good man, or not so good as we took him to be; perhaps his life hath been very unequal, and full of great fail-

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ings: and, in either case, it is no wonder if the man have not that peace and comfort, which is answerable to our good opinion of him; if the man be not sincerely good, there is no real foundation of peace and comfort; for “the hope of the hypocrite shall perish: whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be as a spider’s web. He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure,” as one of Job’s friends speaks: (Job viii. 14, 15.) And (ver. 20.) “Behold, God will not cast away a perfect (or sincere) man; neither will he help (or support) the evil doers.” Or, though he have been in the main a good man, yet perhaps with a great mixture of imperfection, and many great failings and neglects; and then it is no wonder, if his mind be not so calm, and clear of doubts and jealousies concerning his condition: for proportionably to the breaches and inequalities of our obedience, and our more and greater failings, will our peace and comfort, living and dying, be naturally abated and interrupted. But these cases are not many; it is sufficient that it is generally other wise with good men, and that their end is peace. And this is so remarkable, that Balaam, when he was reckoning up the blessings and privileges of the people of Israel, the type of good men in all ages, he takes particular notice of their happy end, as a most signal and invaluable blessing; which made him break out into that wish, (Numb. xxiii. 10.) “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.”

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And, on the other hand, it cannot be denied, but that some very bad men (as bad as we can well imagine) have passed out of this world, not only quiet and undisturbed, but with a great deal of courage and resolution. And this I believe in fact and experience, at least according to my best observation, is the more rare case of the two; for a notorious bad man to die in perfect peace, than for a good man to die in great trouble and perplexity of mind. But this, when it happens, may probably enough be ascribed to one or more of these causes—either to the mistake of the by-standers, who take silence for peace; and because the man is of a strong resolution, and hath a good command of himself, and does not think fit to trouble others, in a mutter in which he thinks they can give him no comfort and relief, they interpret this to be tranquillity of mind; because he holds his peace and says nothing, they think he hath peace, and that all is quiet within. But I remember the observation of a very wise historian, Phil. Comines, who says, that he knew in his time several great persons, who, in ordinary conversation, and to a superficial view, seemed to be very happy and contented; but yet to them who knew them more intimately, and in their private freedoms and recesses, were the most miserable and discontented persons in the world. This I confess is very rare, for men to conceal a very great trouble, and more yet for a man to dissemble when dying; and yet there is reason to believe it sometimes happen.

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Sometimes, the quiet death of a very bad man proceeds from stupidity, and want of a just sense of the danger of his condition, and this from want of discipline and instruction in the nature and principles of religion: this temper looks like courage, because it is fearless of danger; but this fearlessness is founded in great ignorance and want of apprehension;

whereas a true courage discerns the danger, and yet thinks it fit and reasonable to venture upon it. Now this stupidity of dying men, who have lived very ill, is commonly the case of such as have been brought up in great ignorance, and have lived in great sensuality, by which means their spirits are immersed, and even stifled in carnality and sense; and no wonder, if they who live like beasts, die after the same manner. And thus our Saviour represents the rich glutton in the parable, as never coming to himself, and a sense of his condition, till he was awakened by the flames of hell; ([Luke xvi. 22, 23.](#)) "The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment." As if he had never been awakened till then, his voluptuous and sensual course of life rendering him insensible of another world.

Or else this false peace may be ascribed to the delusion of false principles, by virtue whereof it is often seen, that men die in a very bad cause, not only without any regret and trouble, but with cheerfulness and satisfaction: and this is not to be wondered at, because every man's conscience is a kind of god to him; and whether a man be in the right or wrong, so long as he thinks he does well, "and his heart condemns him not/ he is apt "to have confidence towards God;" but for all that it greatly concerns every man to take great care to inform his conscience. For if men will not be impartial in their inquiry after truth, and be not ready "to receive it in the love of it," St. Paul tells us, "that for this very cause, God may send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie, and that they might be damned, because they believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness;" ([2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.](#)) that is, in falsehood and imposture: for so the word ἀδικία, which is here rendered "unrighteousness," is sometimes used in the New Testament.

And this is the last cause I shall mention, to which the false peace of wicked men when they come to die, is to be ascribed, viz. to the just judgment of God, who permits great sinners to be so hardened in an evil course, as neither living nor dying to be awakened to a sense of their condition; such as the apostle speaks of, ([1 Tim. iv. 2.](#)) who said to have "their consciences seared, as it were, with a hot iron." This, it is to be hoped, is but the case of a few, that are thus utterly forsaken of God, and left to perish in their own hardness and obstinacy. This is like a gangrene in the body, which mortifies the part, and leaves it without sense, and thereby incapable of recovery. I proceed, in the

Second place, to shew whence this difference between good and bad men, when they come to die, does proceed. And here I shall endeavour to shew, that this difference is founded in the true nature and reason of the things themselves; in the nature of religion and virtue, and of impiety and vice, in the different ways and courses of good and bad men, which do naturally tend to these different ends.

And to make out this more clearly and distinctly, I shall endeavour to manifest these two things:

I. That a religious and virtuous life is a real ground of peace and serenity of mind, of comfort and joy, under all the evils and calamities of life, and especially at the hour of death.



II. That impiety and wickedness is a real foundation of guilt and fear, of horror and despair, in the day of adversity and affliction, and more especially in the approaches of death.

I. That a religious and virtuous life is a real ground of peace and serenity of mind, of comfort and joy, under all the evils and calamities of life, and especially at the hour of death.

Under the evils and calamities of life, innocency is a great stay and support to our minds under sufferings, and will bear up our spirits when nothing else can; especially if a man suffer for a good conscience, “and for righteousness sake;” because then, beside the comfort of innocency, we are entitled in a special manner to the favour of God, and the comforts of his Holy Spirit, and the hopes of a glorious reward from that God, for whose sake and in whose cause we suffer. All trouble is tolerable to him who hath no burden of guilt upon his mind, to him who is at peace with his own conscience, and at peace with God, and is assured of his favour and friendship, of his providence and care, of his approbation and reward; this is a firm ground, not only of patience, but of joy to a good man, in the saddest and most dismal condition he can fall into. “Unto the upright (saith the Psalmist) there ariseth light in darkness,” (Psal. cxii. 4.) And no wonder, because he that fears God, and serves him faith fully, and suffers for him patiently, hath laid a sure foundation of comfort to himself, hath sown the seeds of contentment and peace, of joy and gladness in his own mind, which will spring up and flourish most, when we are in the most destitute and afflicted condition: “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart,” says David, (Psal. xcvi. 11.) “The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever,” saith the prophet, (Isa. xxxii. 17.)

And more especially at the hour of death, then the comfort of a good man overflows, and “he lifts up his head with joy, because his redemption draweth nigh:” then the reflection upon a well-spent and unspotted life fills his soul with abundant consolation, with “joy unspeakable and full of glory:” for God, and the things of another world, appear more real and substantial to him, as he draws near to them, and his faith begins to be turned into sight and fruition; he now stands upon the confines of both worlds, and discerns more clearly the vanity and emptiness of that which he is going from, and the substantial and durable happiness of that which he is entering into. Here is the trial of our faith, and the proof of religion, by the real fruits and effects of it, in the peace and comfort which it gives to a good man, when he is leaving this world; so that, “when he walks through the valley of death, he fears no ill,” and his hopes are then most lively and vigorous, when he is ready to give up the ghost; the voice of nature, and of every man’s reason and conscience, as well as Scripture, says to the righteous, “it shall be well with him, for he shall eat the fruit of his doings; but woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.” Which brings me to the

II. Second thing; namely, That impiety and wickedness is a real foundation of guilt and fear, of honor and despair, in the day of adversity and affliction, and especially in the approaches of death.

And how can it be otherwise, when all inward support and comfort fail him, and all sorts of evil and calamity, inward and outward, assault him, and break in upon him at once? When the principles of infidelity fail him, and what he hath made out so speciously to himself, vanisheth into nothing, “as a dream when one awakens, and as a vision in the night?” For when any great calamity befalls this man, God, who was not before in all his thoughts, then begins to appear terrible to him, and he cannot banish, the thoughts and fear of him out of his mind. But how uncomfortable is this—to be convinced there is a God, when a man hath most need of him, and can least hope for his favour and pity?

But especially at the approach of death, what a sad preparation for that is an impious and wicked life! how does his conscience then fly in his face, and how bitter is the remembrance of those sins which he committed with so much pleasure and greediness? What a terror is the Almighty to him, and the apprehension of that vengeance that threatens him, and that eternal misery which is ready to swallow him up? And in the midst of all this anguish and horror, which naturally spring from an evil conscience, and the guilt of a wicked life, he is destitute of all comfort and hope; he hath denied the God that is above, and now he dares not look up to him: his whole life hath been a continued affront to the Divine Majesty and an insolent defiance of his justice; and what hopes can he now reasonably have of his mercy? “Of the God that formed him, he hath been unmindful,” and hath used him with all the despite he could; and, there fore, he hath all the reason in the world to conclude that “he that made him will not save him, and he that formed him will have no mercy on him.” And this is the natural consequence of impiety and wickedness, it fills the soul of a dying sinner with trouble and anguish, with guilt and despair, when he is leaving the world, and puts him into the most dismal condition that can be imagined on this side hell, and very like to it, without comfort and without hope. I proceed to the

Third and last thing I proposed; viz. That if this be true, it is a demonstration on the side of religion, and doth fully justify and acquit the wisdom of it; and that upon these three accounts:

I. Because the principles of religion, and the practice of them in a virtuous life, when they come to the last and utmost trial, do hold out, and are a firm and unshaken foundation of peace and comfort to us.

II. That they minister comfort to us in the most needful and desirable time.

III. That when men are commonly more serious, and sober, and impartial, and when their declarations and words are thought to be of greatest weight and credit, they give this testimony to religion and virtue, and against impiety and vice.

I. That the principles of religion, and the practice of them in a virtuous life, when they come to the last and utmost trial, do hold out, and are a firm and unshaken foundation of peace and comfort to good men, at that time. The belief of a God, and of his providence and care of good men, and that “he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him;” the persuasion of our own immortality, and of the eternal recompence of another world; that “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,” and to purchase eternal life and happiness for those who, “by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality:” I say, the belief of these things is commonly most strong and vigorous in the minds of good men when they come to die; and they have then a more clear apprehension, and firm persuasion of the truth and reality of these things, than ever they had in any time of their lives, and find more comfort from them, more peace and joy in the belief of them. And this is the great time of trial, when death presents itself to us, and the terrors of it compass us about, whether upon occasion of persecution or sickness. These are the rains, and storms, and winds, which will try upon what foundation our peace and comfort is built; and nothing but the principles of religion, sincerely believed and practised, will make us firm and impregnable against these assaults. So our Saviour assures us: (*Matt. vii. 24, 25.*) “Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them,” that is, believes and practiseth my doctrine, “I will liken him to a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.”



And, on the contrary, the principles of infidelity and vice are most apt to shrink and give back at such a time: nay, for the most part, they vanish and disappear, and, upon the apprehension of death, a new light, as it were, springs up in their minds, and things appear quite contrary to that scheme which they had formed, and which they had taken so much pains to maintain and make probable to themselves; and that hypothesis which they had been so long a-building, appears now to have no foundation, and falls at once, and all their hopes together with it. And now the infidel believes and trembles, is sensible of his wicked life, and of the vengeance that hangs over him, and was never in his life half so well satisfied of the principles of infidelity, as he is now convinced of the contrary, to his infinite trouble and confusion that there is a God, and another life after this, and a terrible punishment to the workers of iniquity.

And daily experience confirms to us the certainty and truth of this matter, and that there is this difference, for the most part, very visible in the temper and carriage of good and bad men when they come to die.

II. The principles of religion and virtue do minister comfort to us in the most needful and desirable times; and, on the contrary, the principles of infidelity and vice do not only fail us in the day of distress, but give great trouble to us at the most unseasonable time.



And this makes a mighty difference between the condition of these two sorts of persons: for when would a man desire to be at peace and quiet in his mind, but when his body is restless and in pain? When would a man wish for “strong consolation and hope,” that “anchor of the soul sure and steadfast,” as the apostle to the Hebrews calls it, but in that last and terrible conflict of nature, with the last of enemies, which is death? And when would a man dread trouble and anguish of mind, but at such a time, when he is hardly able to sustain his bodily pains and infirmities? If it be true of every day of our lives, “sufficient for the day is the evil thereof,” much more of the day of death: it is enough surely to have that one enemy to encounter, at which nature startles, and our best reason can hardly furnish us with force enough for the conflict, even when the sting of death is taken away—I mean the guilt of an evil conscience: but when all evils assail a man at once, pains without, and terrors within, a weak body, and a wounded spirit, an incurable disease, and intolerable despair, death ready to assault us, and hell following it; how unseasonable is the conjuncture of so many and so great evils! Wise men are wont to provide with great care against such a time, that they may not be oppressed with too many troubles at once; and, therefore, in the time of their health, they settle their worldly concerns, and make their wills, that when sickness or death comes, they may have no care upon them, nothing to do but to die. This is a time, when all the force of our reason, and all the comfort and hope that religion can give, will be little enough to give us a quiet and undisturbed passage out of this world into the other: and we shall be very miserable, if the terrors and stings of a guilty conscience, and the pangs of death, do seize upon us at once. And therefore a wise man would make it the business of his whole life, to prevent this unhappy concurrence of evils, so insupportable to human nature; and to render death, which is grievous and terrible enough of itself, as comfortable and easy as it is possible. For if there were nothing beyond this life, yet it were worth the while to provide for a quiet death; and if men were sure to be possessed of these passions of hope and fear, of comfort and despair, which usually attend good and bad men when they come to die, there is no man, that calculates things wisely, would, for all the pleasures of sin, forfeit the peace and comfort of a righteous soul, going out of the world full of the hopes of a blessed immortality, and endure the anguish and torment of a guilty conscience, and the amazing terrors of a despairing and dying sinner. This is a condition so sad and fearful, that a wise man would avoid it upon any terms.

III. When men are commonly more serious, and sober, and impartial, and their declarations and words are thought to be of greatest weight and credit, they give this testimony to religion and virtue, and against impiety and vice.

It is generally seen, when men come to die, that the manner of their death is answerable to the course of their life; that the reflection upon a holy and virtuous life, is a great ease



and comfort to men's minds: and, on the contrary, the guilt of a wicked life is apt to fly in their faces, and to disturb their minds, and fill them with horror. And this is a critical time, when the consciences of men are usually awake, and apt to pass an impartial judgment and censure upon themselves. And for this, the infidel may believe one of his own great authors, I mean Lucretius, who observes, that when men are in distress, and the apprehensions of death are upon them, religion does then shew its force:

Acrius advertunt animos ad religionem,

“The thoughts of it are then more pungent and powerful upon their minds.”

Nam veræ voces turn demum pectore ab imo

Eliciuntur, et eripitur persona, manet res:

“Men's words then come from the bottom of their hearts, the mask is taken off, and things then appear to them as indeed they are.”

Now, that when men are so impartial and in good earnest, when they stand upon the confines of both worlds, and can view them at once, when they are leaving this world, and are now no longer in danger of being blinded or flattered, or tempted by it, and are just ready to pass into the other world, and so much the more likely to discern the reality of it, as they approach nearer to it: I say, that, in these circumstances, men generally declare on the side of piety and virtue, and declaim most vehemently against their sins and vices; that, generally speaking, and according to what is commonly seen in experience, the man who hath led a religious and virtuous life, is, when he comes to die, quiet and easy to himself, hath no regret at what he hath done, no severe and angry reflections upon the strict course of a virtuous life, his conscience doth not accuse, or upbraid, or terrify him, for having lived “soberly, and righteously, and godly in this world;” nay, so far from this, that if he have any trouble, it is not because he hath lived piously and virtuously, but because he hath not lived more so, because he hath come short of his duty, and hath been so imperfectly and inconstantly good: that generally dying men repent of their evil actions, and are troubled for them; but no man ever repented himself of serving God, and doing good. This surely is a great testimony on the side of religion and virtue, because it is the testimony, not only of the friends to religion, but of those who have been the greatest enemies to it, and at a time when they are most likely to declare the inward sense of their minds, and to speak most impartially, without design or disguise. When the ungodly man and the sinner comes to lie upon a death-bed, he hath then other apprehensions of things than he had, or would own to have, in the days of his health and prosperity, and his soul is full of sadness and trouble, of perplexity and anguish, of fear and despair, because of the wicked and lewd life which he hath led. But why art thou so dismayed, man? why so troubled and cast down, so restless and unquiet, so wretched and miserable in thine own thoughts?

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If thou hast not done well in renouncing the principles of religion, and breaking loose from all obligations of duty and conscience, in gratifying thine inclinations and lusts, why art thou now troubled at it? If thou wert in the right all the while, why dost thou not now stand to it, and justify thy actings, and bear up like a man? If the principles thou wentest upon were sound and firm, why dost thou not still take comfort and support from them? why does thy heart faint, and thy spirit sink within thee? how comes thy imagination to be so disturbed with such frightful appearances, and to haunt thee continually with such vain and groundless terrors? whence is it that those who have taken a contrary course, and lived a quite different life, have so much the advantage of thee, in the comfort, and peace, and tranquillity of their minds when they come to die?

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But if thou hast been in the wrong, and dost now discern real cause for so much trouble and fear, why didst thou not consider in time? why wast thou not troubled sooner, when trouble would have done thee good, and a great part of the anguish which thou now feelest, and all the misery thou art so afraid of, might effectually have been prevented?

I think it is said, by those who are concerned to take off the force of this terrible objection against infidelity and a wicked life, that when men are in a dying condition their spirits are low, and their understandings weak and disturbed, and their minds thrown off the hinges; and therefore it is no wonder if they want that firmness and resolution of spirit, that consideration and courage, which they had in the time of their health.

This is speciously said, and with some show and appearance of reason: but it does by no means answer and take off the objection. For if this were a true reason at the bottom, why is it not true on both sides? why are not both sorts of men, when they are sick and near to die, those who have lived piously and virtuously, as well as the loose and wicked livers, equally troubled? why are they not disturbed and afraid alike? hath not sickness the same natural effect upon them, and does it not equally weaken and disorder their minds? but we see generally in experience a plain and remarkable difference between these two sorts of men, when they come to die; so plain, that it is not to be denied; and so remarkable, that there must be some considerable cause of it; and so general and constant, that it cannot without great folly and perverseness be imputed to chance. Now what can we imagine should be the reason of this palpable difference between good and bad men, when they are under the apprehensions of death, but this: that a pious and virtuous life is a real ground of peace and joy, of comfort and confidence at that time; and that impiety and wickedness are a real foundation of guilt and fear, of horror and despair, in a dying hour: in a word, that the different ways and courses of good and bad men, do naturally lead to these different ends, and produce these different effects?

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Either this must be granted, and then the whole cause of infidelity and vice is yielded and given up at once; or else men must fly to that which seems the most unreasonable and extravagant paradox in the world, and does effectually give up the cause another way; viz.

That a false opinion of things, and a mere delusion, is more apt to support the fainting spirits of a dying man, and to give him more comfort and hope in the day of distress, than aright and well-grounded persuasion.

But this (as I said before) does effectually give up the cause another way: for if this be true, then certainly they are rightest that are in the wrong; and religion, though it were a mistake, ought to be embraced and entertained by a wise man, because of this great benefit and comfort of it. If this be truly the case, then every wise man must say, Let me be so deceived; let it be my lot and portion, to live and die in so pleasant, and comfortable, and happy an error, as that of religion is.

So that, whether religion be true or false, it must, according to this reasoning, be necessarily granted to be the only wise principle, and safe hypothesis for a man to live and die by. And this very thing, that it is so, is a strong evidence of the truth of religion, and even a demonstration of the real excellency of virtue; because no other supposition but that of religion, does so clearly solve all appearances, and so fully and exactly answer the natural desires, and hopes, and fears of mankind. If the being of God, and the obligations of religion and virtue, be admitted, this gives an easy account of the whole matter, and shews us, that sin and vice are the foundation of guilt and trouble; and that religion and virtue do naturally produce peace and comfort: for that is to be esteemed and reckoned the natural effect of any thing, which doth generally belong to the whole kind. If those who live religiously and virtuously, have generally peace and comfort when they come to die, and those who live wickedly are commonly full of guilt and remorse, of fear and perplexity, at that time; this is reason enough to believe, that these are the natural effects of those causes: and that men when they come to die, are, according as they have lived, afraid of the Divine justice, and of the vengeance of another world, or confident of God's goodness, and the rewards of another life, is a strong argument of a superior Being that governs the world, and will reward men according to their works; because no supposition but this doth answer the natural hopes and fears of men. And this likewise is an argument of the immortality of our souls, and of the rewards and punishments of another life; and as good a demonstration of the reality and excellency of religion and virtue, from these happy effects of it, as the nature of the thing is capable of.

And now to make some reflections upon what has been said upon this argument.

First, The consideration of the different ends of good and bad men, is a mighty encouragement to piety and a good life. Nothing in this world shews us so remarkable a difference between the righteous and the wicked, as a death-bed. Then a good man most sensibly enjoys the comfort of a good life, and "the peaceable fruits of righteousness;" and the sinner then begins to reap the bitter fruits of sin. What a difference is there then between the comfort and trouble, the composure and disturbance, the hopes and fears, of these two persons? And, next to the actual possession of blessedness, the comfortable hopes and expectation



of it are the greatest happiness; and the next to being plunged into it, the fearful apprehensions of eternal misery are the greatest torment. “The wicked is driven away in his wickedness;” is violently hurried out of the world full of guilt and trouble. What storms and tempests are then raised in his mind, from the fear of God’s justice, and the despair of his mercy? But “the righteous hath hope in his death.” The reflection upon a holy and virtuous life, and the conscience of a man’s uprightness and sincerity, are a spring of joy and peace to him, which refresheth his mind with unspeakable comfort and pleasure, under the very pangs of death. With what triumph and exultation of spirit cloth the blessed apostle St. Paul, upon the review of his labours and sufferings for God and his truth, speak of his dissolution? (2 Tim. iv. 6-8.) “For I am now ready 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 the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.” He speaks with such a lively sense of it, as if he had his crown in his view, and were just ready to take hold of it. And what would not a man give, what would he not be contented to do and suffer to be thus affected, when he comes to leave the world, and to be able to bear the thoughts of his death and dissolution with so composed and cheerful a mind? And yet this is the natural and genuine effect of a holy and useful life. And that which the same apostle tells us was the ground of his rejoicing under sufferings, is likewise the comfort and support of good men at the time of their death: (2 Cor. i. 12.) “Our rejoicing (saith he) is this: the testimony of our conscience, that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world.” All the holy and virtuous actions of our lives, are so many seeds of peace and comfort to us at the hour of our death, which we shall more sensibly enjoy when we come to depart this life. For then the consciences of men are apt to deal most freely and impartially with them: and “if our hearts do not then condemn us, we may have comfort and confidence towards God.”

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I believe there are some very pious and good souls, who have lived very disconsolate and full of doubtings, and been under a cloud the greatest part of their lives, who yet, upon the approach of death, and just as they were leaving the world, have broken forth, as the sun sometimes doth just before his setting. I know it is not always thus; there are, I doubt not, some good men who go out of this world with little or no comfort; and yet, so soon as they step into another world, are encompassed with “joy unspeakable rind full of glory:” and though the comfort of such persons be not so early and forward, yet it cannot choose but be extremely welcome: and it must needs put a doubting and trembling soul into a strange kind of ecstasy and ravishment, to be thus unexpectedly surprised with happiness.

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Secondly, Since this is so great and evident a testimony of the truth and goodness of religion, is it not a strange thing, and to be wondered at, that true religion and virtue should be so little practised, and impiety and vice should so generally prevail in the world, against so many bars and obstacles, and against such invincible objections to the contrary? Not only

against our inward judgment and conscience, but against the general sense and experience of men in all ages, the constant declarations and testimonies of dying men, both good and bad, when they are most serious, and their words are thought to be of greatest credit and weight; against the best and soberest reason of mankind, and their true interest and happiness; against the health of men's bodies, and, which is the most dear and valuable thing in the world, the peace and quiet of their minds; and that, not only in the time of life and health, but in the hour of death, when men stand most in need of comfort and support: in a word, against the grain of human nature, and in despite of men's natural fears of Divine vengeance, and to the defeating of all our hopes of a blessed immortality in another world, and against the inflexible nature and reason of things, by no art or endeavour of man, by no colours of wit, or subtilty of discourse, by no practice or custom to the contrary, by no conspiracy and combination of men, ever to be changed or altered? So that we may say with David, "Have all the workers of wickedness no knowledge," no consideration of themselves, no tenderness and regard to their present and future interest? Nay, if there were no life after this, setting aside the case of extreme suffering and persecution, religion and virtue are certainly to be chosen, not only for our contentment in life, but for our comfort in death: and if there be a state of happiness or misery remaining for men after death, as most assuredly there is, much more in order to the attaining of that endless happiness, and the avoiding of that eternal and in tolerable misery. "Oh that men were wise, that they understood this, and would consider their latter end!"



SERMON CLXXXVII.

THE USEFULNESS OF CONSIDERING OUR LATTER END

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.—Psalm xc.
12.

THE title of this Psalm tells us who was the author of it. It is called, “A prayer of Moses, the man of God;” or, as the Chaldee paraphrase more expressly, “The prayer which Moses, the prophet of the Lord, prayed, when the people of the house of Israel sinned in the wilderness.” Upon which provocation of theirs, God in great displeasure threatened, and was immutably resolved, that they should all perish in the wilderness, and that none of the men that came out of Egypt, Caleb and Joshua only excepted, should enter into the promised land, but should all die in the space of forty years.

Upon this occasion, Moses made this psalm or prayer to God, being a devout meditation upon the shortness and frailty of human life, which was now brought into a much narrower compass than in former ages. But the case of that people was different from that of the rest of mankind, being limited and confined to forty years. They might die sooner than that time; but that was the utmost bound of their lives, which none were to exceed; which seems to be the ground and reason of the petition, which Moses puts up to God in the text, “So teach us,” &c.

For I do not think that Moses does here beg of God to reveal to every one of them the precise end and term of his life; that might seem to savour of too much presumption or curiosity: but since they knew that, according to the ordinary course of nature, the life of man was then reduced to threescore and ten, or fourscore years; and since God, by a peremptory sentence, had pronounced, that, two persons only excepted, all that vast number which came out of Egypt, and even Moses himself, should die within the compass of forty years; it was a very pious and proper request, which Moses here puts up for himself and the rest of that people, that God would give them wisdom to make a right use of the notice which they had of their end, since it might happen at any time, but could not reach beyond forty years, reckoning from the time of their coming out of Egypt.

To know the determinate time of our life, or to know certainly that our life shall not exceed such a term (which was the case of the Israelites in the wilderness), is a very awakening thing, and does commonly rouse men more than the general consideration of our own frailty and mortality. And yet, to a wise and considerate man, it ought in reason to be the same; for that which will certainly be, ought to be reckoned upon and provided for; and if it be un certain when it will be, whether at some distance, or the next moment, we ought presently to take care about it, and to be always in a readiness for it, lest we should be surprised and overtaken.

And then this prayer is as proper for us, as it was for Moses and the Israelites, though we are not just under the same circumstances that they were. They were under a peremptory sentence of death within forty years, and none of them knew how much sooner they might be taken away: and this is not much different from our case; for we are liable to death at any time, every day, every moment; and how few of us in this congregation can reasonably either hope or expect to have our lives prolonged beyond the term of forty years? Nay, it is very probable, that not one of us in a hundred will hold out so long. And then this prayer may be as fit for us, as it was for Moses and the Israelites, that God would “teach us so to number our days,” that is, to make such an account of the shortness and uncertainty of our lives, and so to consider and lay to heart our latter end, “that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;” that is, that we may manage and conduct this frail, and short, and uncertain life, in the best manner, and to the wisest purposes.

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And this consideration of our latter end was always esteemed by the wisest men, a principal part and main point of wisdom. Socrates, who was, by the general consent of wise men (a more infallible oracle than that of Apollo), esteemed the wisest of all the philosophers, gives us this definition of philosophy, that “it is the meditation or study of death;” to intimate to us, that this is true wisdom, to be much in the thoughts of our latter end, and in a constant readiness and preparation for it. And this a greater than Socrates had long before him observed to be a chief point of wisdom, I mean Moses, “the man of God,” that Divine person and prince of the ancient prophets, not only in this Psalm, but also in his last Divine song, a little before his death; in which he makes this the sum of all his wishes for the people of Israel, that God would endow them with this high point of wisdom: (*Deut. xxxii. 29.*) “Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!” This is true wisdom and philosophy, to consider our latter end.

And this, by God’s assistance, shall be the argument which I intend to handle from these words; namely, to shew what influence and effect the serious consideration of our latter end, and of the shortness and uncertainty of this present life, ought in reason to have upon us. And of this I shall give you an account in these following particulars:

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I. The meditation of our latter end should make us to take into consideration our whole lives, and our whole duration, that we may resolve and act accordingly. And this is a main point of wisdom, to understand ourselves, and the nature of our beings, of what we consist, and for what duration we are designed; whether we consist only of matter a little better fashioned and moulded, and made up in a more curious and complicated engine, consisting of many secret and hidden springs and wheels, and fitted for greater variety of motions, and for more fine and subtle operations, than the bodies of those other creatures which we esteem below us: or whether we be endowed with a spiritual principle, wholly distinct from matter, and capable not only of sense, but of acts of reason, and of the impressions of religion, from the apprehension of a Deity and a superior Being that is of itself, and made us and all other

things. In a word, whether we shall “die like beasts;” or whether there be an immortal spirit within us, which hath no dependance upon matter and the bodily and visible part of ourselves, but is a much “better and enduring substance,” which hath no principle of corruption in itself, but shall survive these perishing bodies; and when they are mouldered into dust, shall subsist in a happy or miserable condition, according as we have behaved ourselves in this world.

For these are two very different hypotheses and schemes of things, and ought to affect us very differently, and to inspire us with different resolutions, and to put us upon a quite contrary method and conduct of our lives.

For, on the one hand, if we be well assured, that we shall be utterly extinguished by death, “like the beasts that perish,” then we have nothing to take care of but our bodies, because we are nothing else; then we need not extend our thoughts, our hopes, or fears, beyond this world, and this present life; because we have nothing to do, but to please ourselves with present enjoyments, and to live so with other men, as may make most for our temporal quiet, and satisfaction, and security.

But then we are to consider very well, whether these things be certainly so, and whether we may rely upon it, and whether it will bear all that weight which we lay upon it: whether these principles will not fail us when we come most to stand in need of the comfort and support of them, and, when death is in view, and making up towards us, quite vanish and disappear: because it is of infinite consequence to us to be well assured of this, since our happiness or misery to all eternity depends upon it. And therefore nothing less than a demonstration of the impossibility of the thing, of our having immortal spirits that shall survive our bodies, and subsist apart from them, and be extremely miserable or happy in another world: I say, nothing but a demonstration of the impossibility of this, ought to be satisfaction to us in a case of so great danger, and upon which so much does depend.

For if there be a possibility, on the other side, of our having immortal souls, which shall live for ever in another world, nothing can acquit us from the greatest imprudence, if we should neglect to take care of that better and more lasting part of ourselves, and to provide for that duration which shall never have an end.

And, therefore, if the supposition of the soul’s immortality be infinitely more probable, as better agreeing with all the notions which men have of God and his providence, and with the natural desires, and hopes, and fears of mankind, and as most suitable to all our capacities and expectations, and to the general opinion and consent of wise men in all ages; then it is infinitely more safe, and consequently more wise, to proceed upon this supposition, and to provide and act accordingly.

Thus “to number our days,” that is, to make such an account of the shortness and uncertainty of this life, as to employ it mainly in the care and preparation for a better life, will engage us effectually in the business of religion. And this, perhaps, is the meaning of this

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phrase in the text, of “applying our hearts to wisdom,” according to that of Job: ([Job xxviii.28.](#)) “But unto man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;” as if he had said, This is the true wisdom, the great excellency and perfection of human nature is religion, the lively sense and firm belief of a Deity, and a carnage and demeanour suitable to that belief; and that man is well taught, and rightly instructed in the great business and concernment of this life, and makes a wise reckoning and account of the shortness and un certainty of it, who applies himself to the business of religion: for this is the fundamental principle of wisdom, by which our whole life, and all the actions of it, ought to be governed and conducted.

So that, if we have immortal spirits, which shall live and continue for ever, we cannot in reason but take our whole life, and our whole duration into consideration. And if we do so, we can never justify it to ourselves, to employ all our care and time about the worst and more ignoble part of ourselves, and to make provision only for the few days of our pilgrim age here in this world, without any regard to that eternal duration which we shall have in another world.

The serious consideration of this cannot fail to make us careful of our souls, and concerned for eternity; and in order to the securing the happiness of that state, to mind us to “work out our salvation” with great care and diligence, that, if it be possible, we may avoid the misery, and obtain the happiness of another world; because there is no comparison between the goods and evils of this life, and those of the other, neither in respect of the degree, nor of the duration of them. And therefore it must needs be great wisdom, to forego the good things of this life, to obtain those of the other; and to bear the evils and afflictions of this life, to escape those of the other. For what man in his wits, for a temporal convenience and satisfaction, would forfeit an eternal benefit and advantage; and to escape a present evil, which cannot last long, would run himself upon one infinitely greater, and which will last for ever?

“Consider, then, and shew yourselves men.” Can there be a greater oversight and miscarriage in the conduct of our affairs, than to mind that least which concerns us most? Is it possible for men to run into a greater mistake, than to think that their great business in this world, is to mind the things of this world? And yet the greatest part of mankind not only run into this mistake at their first setting out, but persist in it all their days; as if their great, and indeed their only concernment were to please themselves for the present, and to provide for this world, as if they were to live always in it: forgetting all this while that they have immortal souls, which shall sur vive their bodies, and after a time be re-united to them, to live for ever, deprived of that happiness which they would take no care to secure, and under going that misery and punishment which they would be at no pains to prevent whilst they were in this world, and the opportunity of securing the one, and avoiding the other, was in their hands.

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II. The thoughts of our latter end should make us very serious and composed in our spirits. For if we have immortal souls as well as dying bodies, if we shall live for ever, and if the happiness of all eternity depends upon the improvement of this short time of our lives, and our carriage and demeanour while we are here in this world; then it is no trifling business, it is not a matter of small concernment to us how we live here, and manage ourselves during our abode in this world.

Whom do not the lively thoughts of death, and the near approach of it, make grave and serious? and many men much wiser and more considerate than ever they were in any other time of their lives, and much truer judges of things? They can then tell how they ought to have lived, what use they should have made of their time, and what use they would make of it, if God would be pleased to prolong it to them.

The near view of another world is an amazing thing, and apt to inspire men with better thoughts and resolutions than ever they had before. And why should not the clear prospect of it at a distance, and the assured belief of it, have the same effect upon us, to make us serious and to mind in good earnest, “in this our day, the things which belong to our peace, and to wait all the days of our appointed time, till our change shall come?”

And, therefore, to engage us to a continual seriousness and watchfulness, the great Judge of the world hath hid from us both the time of the general judgment, and of our particular summons out of this world, that we might never be unprovided for the main chance, for that which may happen at any time, and which will concern us for ever.

III. The meditation of our latter end should put us upon minding the great business of our lives with all our might, and make us very vigorous and industrious in it; I mean the business of religion, and the salvation of our souls. And if we set up this, as in reason we ought, for the great end and design of our lives, and the main scope of all our actions, it will make our lives of a piece, and every part thereof agreeable to itself; because our mind will stand continually bent one way, and all our thoughts, and cares, and endeavours, will be united in one great end and design.

And it will oblige us to great diligence and industry, and make us work hard, to think how great a work we have to do, and how little time to do it in; perhaps much less than most of us do imagine. It is not an easy work for a man to become good, and fit for heaven; it requires time and care, and great watchfulness over ourselves, great strugglings, and many a conflict with the evil inclinations of our minds, which, after we have conquered them, will often rally and make head again; a stout resistance of temptations, a stiff and obstinate resolution not to yield to them, and a “patient continuance in well doing.” The consideration whereof should make us very careful and diligent to get oil into our lamps; that is, all those graces and virtues, all those good dispositions which may fit us for another world, and prepare us for eternity; it should make us very vigorous and industrious to do all the good we can, while the opportunity of doing it is in our hands, and to make ourselves as good as we can,

because this is the time and season of laying the foundation of our future happiness, and increasing the degrees of it; for “as we sow, so shall we reap; he that sows sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he that sows plentifully, shall reap plentifully.” Every degree of virtue and goodness that we attain to in this world, will meet with a suitable reward, and a more resplendent degree of glory and happiness in the next life.

And we shall have this advantage, by a great industry and diligence in “working out our own salvation,” that, if we have made religion the great care and business of our lives, we shall have nothing to do when we come to die, but to renew our repentance for the errors and miscarriages of our lives, and to beg God’s pardon and forgiveness of them, for the sake of the meritorious obedience and sufferings of our blessed Saviour; to comfort ourselves in the goodness and promises of God, and in the glorious hopes of the happiness which we are ready to enter upon; and in the mean time to exercise faith and patience for a very little while, till death put an end to the sorrows and miseries of life.

IV. The meditation of our latter end should make us much in the exercise of repentance, and to renew it frequently; because we continually offend God, and provoke him every day, if not by sins of commission, yet of omission and neglect in one kind or other, and by the imperfection of our best actions and services; if not by presumptuous sins and against knowledge, yet by manifold sins of ignorance and infirmity; so that the best of us may say with David every day, “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret sins. If thou shouldest be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who can stand?”

Thus, by exercising a daily, or at least a very frequent repentance, we may keep our accounts in a good measure even, and not be in a hurry and confusion when we come to die, neither knowing where to begin our repentance, nor how to go through with so great a work in so short a time, and in circumstances of so much weakness and destruction. There are hardly any of us, especially of us who are ministers, and have frequent occasion to attend upon sick-beds, but have seen several in these wretched circumstances, not knowing what to do, desirous to repent, but, what through weakness of body, and horror and confusion of mind, not knowing how to go about it, lamenting their neglect of it in the time of their health, and despairing of doing it now with any success and acceptance. These are sad spectacles indeed, and ought to be loud warnings to us who are in health, and have the opportunity of repentance before us, to make use of it, and to set about this necessary work out of hand, “to-day, whilst it is called to-day, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,” and be at last brought into those miserable straits which I have been describing, and which no man that understands himself would be in for all the world.

V. The meditation of the shortness and uncertainty of life should make us great husbands of our time, as that which, next to our immortal souls, and for the sake of them, is the most precious and valuable thing in the world.



For as, on the one hand, nothing will comfort us more when we come to die and leave this world, than the remembrance of a well-spent life, carefully employed in the service of God, and for the benefit and advantage of men; so, on the other hand, there is nothing for which our consciences will more bitterly reproach us at that time, and fly in our faces with greater fury and rage, than for an useless and unprofitable, especially if it have been likewise (as is too commonly seen) a wicked and vitious life.

Our life is uncertain, and therefore we should seize the present time, and improve it to the best advantage, though it be but short in itself, and very short in respect of the great and long work which we have to do in it. To prevent or cure the manifold distempers of our minds, and to preserve our souls in a good state of health, and to keep them free from the disorders of our appetites and passions, requires a wise conduct, and a very careful management of ourselves. Evil and inveterate habits are not mastered and mortified in an instant: nor the contrary virtues attained in any measure of perfection, but by long practice and slow degrees. There must be time, and patience, and perseverance, for the doing of these things, and we must “give all diligence to add to our faith knowledge, and to our knowledge virtue,” and one virtue to another, and one degree of virtue to another; and nothing without this can minister true comfort to us in the hour of death, and make us “to lift up our heads with joy in the day of judgment.”

The consideration of this should make us careful not to neglect any occasion of doing good, or of making ourselves better; and restrain us from allowing too much of our time to those great wasters and devourers of it, diversions and visits; because they do not only hinder us from better work and employment, but are apt insensibly to work us off from that serious temper of mind, which becomes those who do in good earnest design for another world.

VI. The meditation of our latter end should make us always to prefer the doing of our duty, and the keeping of a good conscience, to all temporal considerations whatsoever, whether of fame and the good opinion of men, or of wealth and riches, of honour and dignity, of authority and power. “choosing rather (with Moses) to suffer afflictions with the people of God, than to have the temporary enjoyments of sin.”

And as for pleasure, there is little in this world that is true and sincere, besides the pleasure of doing our duty, and of doing good; I am sure none that is comparable to it. A good conscience is “a continual feast;” and he certainly pleaseth himself best, and is most easy in his own mind, who is conscious to himself, that he endeavours as well as he can to do what he ought.

VII. The meditation of our mortality should teach us the true price and value of all temporal enjoyments, and make us duly affected towards them, and to sit as loose to them



in our affections as we can: for nothing surely can be more apt to beget in us a coldness and indifferency towards the enjoyments of this world, than the consideration of the uncertainty of all these things, and of the shortness and uncertainty of our own lives.

Or if we suppose, that they and we both should continue for some number of years, yet there will be an end of them or us; and nothing is to be reckoned a lasting happiness, that will have an end, though it should be long first: for where there can be either sorrow or an end of our joy, there can be no true felicity.

Besides, that the nature of the things of this world is such, that they afford but little happiness to us whilst we have them; we cannot do well without them, and yet we can hardly do well with them. Most of the enjoyments of this world, as desirable as they are to us, are very dangerous, and are always attended with some inconvenience or other; and even when we have all that we can wish for in this world, we are apt to be still uneasy, either something troubles us, or nothing pleases us; we are pained with fulness, and cloyed with the long enjoyment of the best things this world can give us. Why then should we set such a high and unreasonable value upon these temporary enjoyments, and be so much concerned for those things of which we have so slippery a hold, and so slender an assurance, and which afford us so very little contentment and satisfaction when we have them, and yet give us so much grief and trouble when we lose them? Considering how soon we must, and how suddenly we may leave this world, and all the enjoyments of it, we ought in reason to set no great price upon them.

VIII. The consideration of the shortness and un certainty of our lives, should make us contented with our present condition, and patient under all the evils and afflictions which may befall us in this world. A little may content us for a little while, for the short time of our abode here; and since we do not expect our rest and happiness in this world, we cannot think ourselves disappointed if we do not meet with it. If our condition be tolerable it is well, and we have reason to be contented with it, since it is as much as this world usually affords. If it be very mean and strait, it cannot last long; and even that consideration should silence our murmurings, and should restrain and check our discontent.

And it should make us patient likewise under the greatest evils and afflictions of this present life, to consider that they will shortly have an end; either they will give off of themselves, or they will carry us off and make an end of us, and all the patience we have exercised will be rewarded far beyond the proportion of our sufferings.

At the worst, the afflictions and sufferings of this present time are not like the troubles and miseries of the other world, they will not last always. The most grievous things that can befall us here are not like the torments of hell, neither for the degree, nor the duration of them, without intermission and without end.

IX. The meditation of death, and of the consequences of it, should make us upright and sincere in all our words and actions. Hypocrisy and dissimulation, as much as they are

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practised, are no part of true wisdom, no, not as to this world; they recoil terribly upon men, and turn to their reproach and disadvantage so soon as they are discerned, and they cannot be long practised without being discovered. But if we regard the other world, all disguises and arts of deceit are perfect folly; because then “God will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil,” as Solomon assures us, ([Eccles. xii. 14.](#)) And our blessed Saviour cautions us against hypocrisy, upon this consideration—that there is a day coming, when all the false pretences of men shall be exposed and laid open, and all those masks and vizors which men wear in this world will fall off, and the actions of men shall appear in their true colours: ([Luke xii. 1, 2.](#)) “Beware (says our Saviour there first of all) of the leaven of the pharisees, which is hypocrisy; for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; nor hid, that shall not be known.”

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Lastly, The meditation of our latter end should put us upon a careful, and continual, and particular preparation for the time of our death and dissolution. And this is very well worth our while, and the sooner we set about it the better; because, when this work is in any good measure done, we have rescued ourselves from that bondage to which most men are all their life long subject, because of the continual fear of death. Nothing abates the terror of death like a due preparation for it. When this is once made, we cannot be much concerned when it comes; for, to a well-prepared mind, sooner or later makes no great difference; but if we have delayed this necessary work, the longer we have delayed it the more unfit we shall be for it, and the more un willing to set about it; and if necessity drives us to it at last, we shall find that old age and sickness are but bad times to make preparation for death in, to begin our repentance and the change of a bad life. He that prepares not for death before he draws near to it, and comes to lie upon a sick-bed, is like him that begins to study the art of navigation when he hath present occasion and use for the skill which he hath not yet learned, when his vessel is driven among rocks, and is every moment in danger of being dashed in pieces.

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Let this then be established for a firm principle and rule—that the best and surest preparation for a happy and comfortable death, is a holy and good life. For nothing will disarm death of its terrors like the conscience of our own innocency, and of a sincere desire and endeavour to please God in the general course and tenor of our lives, and of a sincere repentance for all the errors and miscarriages of our lives. And though our life be short and un certain, yet it is a great deal that we may do by way of preparation for another world, if we begin and set out betimes, and be good husbands of the present opportunities. It is a great way that we may go in a short time, if we be always moving and pressing forwards.

But the mischief is, many men pass fifty or sixty years in the world, and, when they are just going out of it, they bethink themselves, and step back, as it were, to do something which they had all this while forgot; viz. the main business for which they came into the world, to repent of their sins and reform their lives, and make their peace with God, and in

time to prepare for eternity. This, which is forgotten and deferred to the last, ought to have been first thought of, and to have been made the great business of their whole lives.

But I proceed to give some more particular directions concerning our preparation for death; namely,

1. By frequent meditation of it, which will render it more familiar to us, and help us to tame this monster, and to take off the dread of it; and therefore we should accustom ourselves to the thoughts of it, that we may in some measure be reconciled to it.

2. We should endeavour to mitigate the evil and terror of death by thinking of something worse; I mean the evils and miseries of life. For when we once come to look upon death as a remedy of all the evils of life, we shall then begin to be reconciled to it; and if we be wise, shall be glad to be out of the noise, and danger, and suffering of so many evils as we are continually liable to in this world; and shall thank God heartily for dismissing us and giving us leave to die, and by death to put an end to this miserable life, and to begin a better and happier life, which shall never have an end.

And we should likewise meditate much on the glory and happiness of another world. For if we be once possessed with a firm belief and persuasion of it, we shall think the time long that we are detained from it, and wish for that which we so much feared—I mean death; that it may bring us to the enjoyment of that which we have much more reason to desire.

And, indeed, considering (as I said before) the many evils and miseries which we are liable to, and always in danger of, while we are in this world, we have cause to thank God that we were born to die, and that we are not condemned to live for ever in this world. So that, whenever God shall think fit to release us, we ought to esteem it a favour: but if he will have us to stay a little longer, we must with patience wait for another opportunity of making our escape out of an evil and troublesome world. But, methinks, we should not much desire to ride it out in the storm any longer, when the port is open, and we may safely enter in. And then,

3. By way of farther preparation for death, we should endeavour to maintain always a lively sense of it in our minds, that we may be, to all good effects and purposes, as much under the power of it as if it were just approaching, as if the physician or the judge had passed the sentence of death upon us. We should always reckon upon that which may happen the next moment; and if we do so, we can never be extremely surprised; but whenever our Lord comes, shall be found watching. And,

Lastly, We should make it our constant prayer to God, that he would fit us for our dissolution, and stand by us and comfort us in that needful time, without whose gracious support and assistance, both physicians, and even the ministers of God themselves, are but miserable comforters. It should be our daily petition to God, that he would enable us to perform this last act of our life with decency and constancy of mind, that neither our disease nor our weakness may break the firmness of our spirits, or leave us to be amazed with fear,

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or betrayed with peevishness, so as to render us uneasy to ourselves, or to make our friends willing to be rid of us.

But, more especially, when God thinks fit, either by the nature or present danger of our distemper, to give us a nearer summons and clearer warning of our mortality, we should take the opportunity to impress upon our minds a deep and more lively sense of another world, that we may quicken our pace, and “work the work of Him that sent us into the world, while it is day; because the night is coming when no man can work.”

Nature I know is fond of life, and apt to be still longing after a longer continuance here, and to find many delays and excuses to tarry yet a while longer in this world: and yet a very long life, with the usual burdens and infirmities of it, is seldom in reason desirable; for it is the same thing over again, or worse; so many more days and nights, summers and winters, a repetition of the same pleasures, but still with less pleasure and relish; a return of the same or greater pains and troubles, but still with less patience and strength to bear them.

Let us then be of good courage in the approaches of death, since we see land, and the storm which we are in will quickly be over; and then it will be as if it had never been, or rather the remembrance of it will be a great pleasure to us:

*Suave mari magno, turbantibus æquora ventis,
E terra alterius magnum spectare periculum.
Non quia vexari quendam est jucunda voluptas;
Sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est.*

“It is a pleasant thing to stand upon the shore when we see others in a great storm at sea. Not that it is delightful to see others in danger; but when others are in great difficulties and dangers, it is a pleasure to find ourselves safe and out of danger.”

And if it should please God to exercise us with great pains and tedious sickness, we should make use of all the considerations which reason and religion do furnish us withal, to help to mitigate and deceive our troubles, and to make that short way a little more smooth and easy. For the best of us have no privilege and exemption from the common accidents of humanity, no piety can certainly secure to any of us an easy and comfortable death; and, therefore, it is a groundless confidence for any man to reckon upon it; we must in this, as in all other things, resign up ourselves to God’s good pleasure, and submit to him the time and manner, and all other circumstances of our departure out of this world; whether our sun shall set in a cloud, or shine brightest and look biggest when it is going down. But however it sets, it is the sun still, and the fountain of light, and will rise gloriously. There are always the seeds of joy and comfort in the conscience of a good man; and though they be hid and buried for a while, they will spring forth one time or other. “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart,” as David assures us, (Psal. xcvi. 11.)

I will conclude all with the words of the author of this psalm: ([Deut. xxxii. 29.](#)) “Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!”



SERMON CLXXXVIII.

THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST CONSIDERED, AS OUR EXAMPLE.

Leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.—1 Pet. ii. 21.

THE apostle here propounds to Christians the example of our Saviour as an argument to persuade them to one particular grace and virtue; namely, patience under sufferings unjustly laid upon us: (ver. 19-21.) “For this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently; this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”

But though the example of our Saviour be here propounded to us upon a particular occasion, and with a more especial regard to the particular virtue of patience under unjust sufferings, which did so eminently appear in our blessed Saviour, the most meek and patient endurer that ever was, of the greatest and most wrongful sufferings; yet the apostle does not limit this great pattern of all righteousness to the single virtue of patience, but propounds it to us, as an example of universal holiness and goodness; for so he extends it in the next words, “leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.”

In this latitude and extent I shall discourse of it at this time, and that under these following heads:

- I. That his life is a most absolute and perfect pattern.
- II. That it is a very easy and familiar example.
- III. Very encouraging to the imitation of it.
- IV. An universal pattern fitted for the imitation of all sorts of persons, of what rank or condition soever.
- V. In the nature of it, very powerful to engage and oblige men to the imitation of it.

I. The life of our blessed Saviour is a most absolute and perfect pattern of holiness and goodness, complete and entire in all its parts, and perfect to the utmost degree, in the following whereof there is no danger of being misguided, no fear of miscarriage: whereas all other examples of mortal men are fallible and uncertain guides, which if we follow too closely, will some time or other mislead us. In the lives of the best men recorded in Scripture, we may discern some spot and blemish, some error and oversight, some fall or slip; so that the lives of the holiest men are no sure rule, no perfect measure of our duty, and are therefore to be imitated with great wisdom and wariness, lest, if we follow all their actions indifferently and implicitly, in confidence they are good, because they are theirs, we may fall into great errors and failings; and therefore, in following the lives and examples of the best men, we



must have an eye to the rule, and by that judge of the example which we propose to imitate; otherwise we may easily be seduced by the authority of a great example.

But the example of our Lord is a living law and rule, his precepts and his pattern are of equal perfection, and the imitation of his life and actions is the very same thing with obedience to his laws. For the life of our blessed Saviour here on earth, is the life of God in the nature and likeness of man; he was God as well as man, and the Divine nature is certainly the pattern of all perfection. As he was the Son of God, he was “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image and character of his person;” and as he was the Son of man, though he had natural frailties and infirmities, and was subject to hunger and thirst, weariness and pain, like other men; yet he had all the moral perfections belonging to human nature, without any of the evil inclinations, and sinful frailties, to which it is incident; and his human nature was assisted in an extraordinary manner by the Spirit of God, which “was not communicated to him by measure, but he was anointed with that holy unction above his fellows,” above all the sons of men, above all the prophets and messengers of God that ever were sent to mankind; “he had no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” And indeed it was requisite, that he that “was manifested to take away our sins,” and to make expiation for them, should himself be “without sin,” as the apostle to the Hebrews reasons: (Heb. vii. 26.) “Such a high-priest became us, who was holy, harmless, and undefined, separate from sinners:” and had he not been so, he could neither have been an example nor an expiation.

And this is no small advantage to mankind, to have so excellent a pattern of the same nature with ourselves to imitate, so perfect a copy to write after. For whoever would excel in any kind, must (as Quintilian says) *optima quæque exempla ad imitandum proponere*, “propose to himself the highest and most perfect examples of that kind for his imitation;” and the example of our blessed Saviour is unquestionably such a perfect pattern of all goodness and virtue, to the perfection whereof though we can never attain, yet it is a great advantage to have it always before us, and in our eye, that we may correct the errors and deformities of our lives, by the unspotted purity and perfect innocency of his life, and that we may be always aspiring after farther degrees of goodness; for surely we can no way better learn how God would have men to live in this world, than by seeing how God himself lived, when he was pleased to become man, to assume our nature, and dwell among us.

II. As the life of our blessed Saviour is a most perfect, so likewise it is a familiar and easy example. The Divine nature is the great pattern of perfection; but that is too remote from us, and above our sight; “no man hath seen God at any time, nor can see him;” and though his perfections are represented to our minds in some degree, yet they are so glorious and dazzling an object, that we cannot bear to be hold them with that steadfastness, with which we ought to eye our pattern; and therefore God hath been pleased to condescend so far to our weakness, as to give us a visible example of those virtues he requires of us in “his own Son, appearing in the likeness of sinful flesh:” and the Son of God is an example of equal

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perfection with God himself, but much more easy and familiar, and level to us, in which we may see the several virtues of a good life practised in such instances, and upon such occasions, as do frequently happen in human life.

Nothing was ever more simple and open, more obvious and easy to common imitation, than the life of our blessed Saviour, in which there was nothing dark and mysterious, abstruse and intricate; it was all perfect innocency and goodness, and he carried on one plain, and intelligible, and uniform design, which was to do all the good he possibly could to all men: this he pursued with all his might, with the greatest vigour and industry, with an undaunted courage and resolution, with an unwearied diligence, with a constant cheerfulness and serenity of mind; this was “his meat and drink,” his great business and delight, his life and his happiness; he was not superciliously morose, had no affected singularities, no peculiar austerities in habit or diet, different from the common usage of men; his conversation was kind and innocent, free and familiar, open and indifferent to all sorts of persons; for he was a physician, and every body had need of him, all mankind were his patients. He did not place religion (as some have done since) in retirement from the world, and shunning the conversation of men, and taking great care to do nobody good: not in profound mysteries and fine speculations, but in the plain and honest practice of the solid and substantial virtues of a good life; in meekness and humility, in kindness and charity, in contentedness in a low and mean condition, and a calm composed mind under all accidents and events, in patience under the greatest reproaches and sufferings, and a perfect submission to the will of God in all his dispensations, how harsh and unpleasant soever.

Now there is nothing in all this, but what lies open to every man’s understanding, and is easy to our practice and imitation, requiring nothing but an honest mind, and due care and diligence to do what we may easily know, to follow our guide in a plain way, and in all the actions of our lives, to tread in those steps in which the Son of God, and the best man that ever was, hath gone before us.

III. The life of our blessed Saviour is likewise an encouraging example. It cannot but give great life to all good resolutions and endeavours, to see all that which God requires of us performed by one in our nature, by a man like ourselves. Our Saviour, indeed, had many advantages above us, being God as well as man; and his humanity, being supported by the Divine nature to which it was united, being clear from all the ill effects of original sin, and from all kind of vicious and inordinate inclinations; but then it is a great encouragement to us, to consider that God doth not require at our hands a perfect and unsinning obedience, as the condition of our salvation and happiness; but only such an obedience to his laws as is sincere, and continually aspiring after greater perfection, which is very possible to us by the grace of Christ, even in this imperfect state; that God considers our weakness, and how much we stand in need of his grace and assistance, and hath assured us that it shall not be wanting to us, if we heartily and earnestly beg it of him; and that strength which we may



have for asking, is as good as if it were our own. If Christ were the Son of God, so are we, in a lower degree, by grace and adoption; and “if we be the sons of God, the Spirit of God dwells in us,” to quicken and raise us to newness of life. And he that hath left us such an example, on purpose that we might follow it, will not surely leave us destitute of power to enable us to do so. It is a good argument to us, that he will enable us to do that in some degree in our own persons, which he himself did for example in our nature.



An example more suitable to our weakness, might seem to have had more of encouragement in it: but we are to consider, that the Son of God assumed our nature, as compassed with infirmities, and liable to be “tempted in all things as we are, only without sin;” so that his example could not possibly have come nearer to us than it does, without great disadvantage to us, without wanting that perfection which is necessary to a complete and absolute pattern. In short, the Spirit of Christ dwells in us; and the same Spirit which kept and preserved him from all sin, is equally able to mortify sin in us, and to enable us to do the will of God in such manner as he will accept to our justification.

IV. It is an universal pattern. As the doctrine of our Saviour, so his example was of an universal nature and design, calculated for all times and places; and, as much as was possible, abstracted from the circumstances of a particular condition, that it might be the more equally suited to all callings, and conditions, and capacities of men, and fitted for general direction and imitation in all sorts of goodness and virtue, either in the general principle, or in the particular instances of them. And for this reason he would not engage himself in any particular calling, or way of life, that his pattern might more equally and indifferently regard all mankind.

He was really a great person, the greatest that ever was in birth and dignity, being the only Son of God, the maker and heir of all things: and yet he submitted to the lowest condition, to all the degrees of poverty and meanness, of contempt and sufferings, to teach men of high degree to be humble and serviceable to the good of others: and men of low degree to be contented and cheerful in the meanest condition, and the hardest circumstances that the providence of God shall see good to place them in.



He had the deepest and most comprehensive knowledge; in him, as the apostle expresseth it, “were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge:” and yet he made no vain show and ostentation of it; he did not puzzle his hearers with abstruse speculations and sublime mysteries, but, in a way of plain and familiar instruction, declared to his hearers those things which were most useful and necessary for them to know. He confuted the doctors, and confounded the wisdom of the wise, those who were conceited of their own knowledge and skill in Divine things; but was always ready to condescend to the weakness and ignorance of the meanest capacity; giving herein an example to the wise and learned, not to make a show of their knowledge, but to make the best use of it; not to lift up themselves above others, but to condescend and stoop to them for their good.

He sometimes retired from conversation and company, that he might be alone, and at leisure to attend upon God, and meditate on Divine and heavenly things, without interruption and distraction; but most frequently he conversed with others, and mingled himself with all sorts of persons, that he might give all the advantage, and do all the good he could to all men. Nay, he did not decline the conversation of the worst of men, and it was really true which was objected to him, that “he was a friend of publicans and sinners,” being sincerely desirous to do them the greatest kindness in the world, to reform their manners, and reclaim them to a better course; so that he was a pattern both of the contemplative and active life, and shews us how to mix these to the greatest advantage; and by his own example teacheth us, that we cannot serve God better than by doing good to men; and that he is as well pleased, when we lay out ourselves for the benefit of others, spiritual and temporal, as if we employed all our thoughts and meditations wholly upon himself and Divine things; that a perpetual retirement from the world, and shunning the conversation of men, is not the most religious life, but living among men, and doing good to them.

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More particularly, the life of our blessed Saviour is a pattern to us,

1. Of the greatest and most substantial virtues.
2. Of the most rare and unusual.
3. Of the most useful and beneficial.
4. Of the most hard and difficult: and,
5. Of such virtues as are most needful; and for the practice of which, there is the greatest and most frequent occasion in human life.

1. It is a pattern of the greatest and most substantial virtues.

Of a fervent piety and devotion toward God. We read, that he often retired to pray, and sometimes spent whole nights in it: his mind was continually upon God, as appears by his frequent ejaculations upon all occasions, by his communication and discourse, which was always either instructive of men in Divine truths, or persuasive to a holy practice; from worldly objects and occurrences, he would take occasion to raise some spiritual meditation, and to speak of heavenly things.

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And then his ready and cheerful obedience to the will of God in all things: “In the volume of the book it is written of me, I come to do thy will, O my God.” He speaks of it with pleasure; and he delighted to do it: he declined the will of God in no instance, how difficult and displeasing soever to flesh and blood.

The perfect purity and innocency of his life; he was “a lamb without spot and blemish,” (1 Pet. i. 19.) “He did no sin,” (chap. ii. 21.) “Leaving us herein an example, (that though we cannot keep equal pace with him, yet) we should follow his steps.” He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,” (Heb. vii. 26.)

And then his universal charity, taking all opportunities to do all the good, temporal and spiritual, that he could to all men, of which his whole life is one great and continued instance: these are all great and substantial virtues.

I have indeed said nothing of justice, both because there was little occasion for it, he having no thing to do in those matters wherein justice is concerned: he had no estate of his own, and he meddled not with those of other men: and, likewise, because his life was all goodness, which is a virtue of a higher pitch than justice: he that was so good to all, we need not doubt of his justice, if there had been occasion for it.

2. He was a pattern of the most rare and unusual virtues.

Such was his sincerity, “guile was not found in his mouth,” (1 Pet. ii. 22.) His conversation was free and open, without disguise and concealment; and therefore, when the high-priest asked him of his disciples, and of his doctrine, (John xviii. 19.) he wondered at the question: “Why askest thou me? Ask them that heard me. I spake openly to the world, I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort, and in secret have I said nothing.” And this is no common virtue, and therefore our Saviour gave it as a singular commendation to Nathanael: (John i. 47.) “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.” Perfect sincerity is a great foundation of goodness; it is soundness at the heart, and, like perfect health, seldom to be seen; there is hardly any thing wherein men, otherwise good and virtuous, do oftener trip and falter.

Another virtue, which is not very usual, was eminent in our Saviour—I mean true humility, without affectation and secret pride lurking under it. This appeared very remarkable, and very natural, in his whole life, which was all of it the greatest instance of humility that ever was; and, therefore, with great assurance he propounds himself to our imitation in this: (Matt. xi. 29.) “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in spirit.” And St. Paul sets this virtue before us, as being the constant temper of our Lord, and visible in his whole undertaking, and in every part of it from first to last, from his coming into the world to his going out of it: (Phil. ii. 5-8.) “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation (he emptied himself of all his majesty and glory), and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Here was humility indeed, from so great a height to stoop so low, from the top of glory and majesty, to the lowest pitch of meanness and misery! Here is a pattern for us; and how should it shame and confound the pride of the sons of men, to see the Son of God so humble? There is no virtue I am sure which we have so much reason, and yet none which we have so little inclination, to imitate. “Pride was not made for men,” says the son of Sirach; it does not become us, and yet it is the fashion; we know that we have no cause to be proud, and yet we know not how to be humble. Let the example of our Lord’s humility bring down the

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haughtiness of men, and when we consider how he abased himself, let us be “vile in our own eyes, and abhor ourselves in dust and ashes.”

And then his contempt of the world, and the enjoyments and pleasures of it, to that degree, that he would have no part and share in the possessions of it, not so much as one of the first and almost lowest conveniences of life, a settled abode and habitation; so that, as he himself tells us, he was in a more destitute condition than the brute creatures: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” Not that he designed to oblige us to a strict imitation of him in this particular; for he might, and we may lawfully possess and enjoy these things: but to teach us not to overprize them, not to seek them too earnestly, nor love them inordinately. That he despised them, should keep us from admiring them, and doating upon them; that he would not have them in his possession, should keep them out of our hearts, and make us very loose and indifferent in our affections to them; that he valued doing good above all the enjoyments of this world, should make us value them only in order to that end.

And then his excessive kindness and benignity to us, such as men very rarely shew to their best friends, and the best men; but such as no man ever shewed to his enemies: “Peradventure, for a good man one would even dare to die, (says St. Paul, [Rom. v. 7.](#)) But herein God commended his love to us, in that whilst we were sinners, Christ died for us.” And this pattern of love our Saviour propounds to our imitation: ([John xv. 12, 13.](#)) “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friend.” The highest pitch of human friendship that ever was, was to die for a friend: but our Lord died not for his friends, but for his enemies, that he might make them his friends, by gaining them to the obedience of his laws: “Ye are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you.” The same pattern the apostles of our Lord propound to us: ([Ephes. v. 2.](#)) “Walk in love as Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us.” ([1 John iii. 16.](#)) “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” Here is a pattern of the highest and most unusual kind of love proposed to our imitation; not that every man, by virtue of this example, is to lay down his life for another, because that is not practicable; for then, by the same reason that I am obliged to lay down my life for another, he would be as much obliged to lay down his life for me; and so, by my dying for him, I should hinder him of doing a duty to which he was equally obliged, and take it out of his hands: but the meaning of this precept is, that, as Christ died for a common good, so we ought to bear that common affection to mankind, and especially to our brethren, who are endeared to us by a nearer relation, as, in imitation of the example he hath given us, to be ready by our single life, if there be occasion, to redeem the lives of many of our brethren, and to expose ourselves to save them. This I conceive is all that can reasonably be collected from our obligation to imitate our Lord’s example.

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3. The life of our blessed Saviour is likewise a pattern of such virtues, as are most useful and beneficial to others.

In his readiness to do good to all persons and all kinds; by instructing their ignorance, and supplying their wants, spiritual and temporal; by resolving their doubts, and comforting them in their sorrows; by healing their diseases and infirmities, which he, indeed, did in extraordinary and miraculous ways, because he was destitute of ordinary means; and we are to do it by ordinary means, and such as are in our power, which when they are, there is no need of miracles. And then in his seeking occasions and opportunities for it, not content with those that offered themselves, but inquiring after them; and in his unwearied diligence in this work; for “he went about doing good,” spent whole days from morning to night, for the service and benefit of others; neglected himself, and the ordinary refreshments of nature, out of his great zeal to “work the work of him that sent him,” to bring glory to God, and good to men.

And in the delight he took in this employment; it was “his meat and drink” to be doing of it; he esteemed it his happiness, yea, a greater felicity to confer benefits upon others, than any man finds in receiving the greatest benefit from others: for that, it seems, was a noted saying of his, a kind of motto with him, as St. Paul testifies: ([Acts xx. 35.](#)) “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” And in all this, he persisted in despite of the greatest discouragements from the ingratitude and malice of men, who maligned him for his kindness, and put an ill construction upon his most charitable actions, and were ready “to stone him for his good works:” but this did not discourage him, and take him off; so he might do good, he was contented to hear and suffer ill.

And then in his condescension to others, and consideration of their weakness, and complying with them in lawful and indifferent things, for their edification, and to gain them in greater matters; this St. Paul tells us, was our Lord’s temper, and he urgeth Christians with the example of it: ([Rom. xv. 1-3.](#)) “We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification: for even Christ pleased not himself.” Where we have liberty and can yield, we ought to abate of our own humour, for the good and edification of others; and not peevishly and stiffly to insist upon lesser things, to the hinderance of a greater good; “for even Christ pleased not himself.” He who had all authority to command, and right to be obeyed, and who could not err in any thing; yet he condescended to the weakness and infirmities of others, and in all indifferent things, did not consult his own inclination, but their interest and edification.

And, which greatly conduceth to the comfort and benefit of all societies, both civil and ecclesiastical, he gave us the example of an obedient and peace able temper, conforming himself and his actions not only to Divine, but human laws, “giving to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s, and to God the things which are God’s;” insomuch, that when tribute



was demanded of him, though he was really free from any such obligation, and so poor, that he was not able to pay it, in which case even Cæsar must lose his right; nevertheless, to avoid offence, he submitted to it, and chose rather to work a miracle, than to appear refractory and disobedient.

And in religious rites and ceremonies, and the observance of days and times, he did not only conform to all Divine institutions, but to human appointment and usage in all things that were of an innocent and indifferent nature; and this without any anxious scrupulosity, and perverse disputing every inch of his liberty; with great peaceableness observing those religious festivals, which had no other appointment but of the civil authority, and were of mere human institution; and with great prudence steering a middle course, between endless superstition and scrupulous and petulant faction; giving all Christians herein a pattern, how to demean themselves in like cases with great peaceableness and obedience, and not to do or avoid the doing of any thing, out of peevishness and singularity of humour, and a spirit of contradiction, and not to indulge needless and endless scruples, especially on the wrong side, as it is too visible many men's scruples lie almost wholly about obedience to authority, and compliance with indifferent customs, but very seldom about the danger of disobedience and unpeaceableness, and rendering in pieces the church of Christ, by needless separations, and endless divisions.



And our Lord did not only give us the example of a peaceable and uniting spirit, but a little before his departure out of the world, he bequeathes it to his disciples, as his last legacy. (*John xiv. 27.*) "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." And, to confirm it to them, he makes it his most earnest and particular prayer to God for them, that God would preserve this spirit of peace and unity among Christians to the end of the world, foreseeing, in his infinite wisdom, what mischiefs and dishonour the contrary temper would bring to his holy religion. (*John xvii. 20-23.*) "Neither pray I for these alone," meaning his disciples, "but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;" that is, for all Christians to the end of the world; "that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me." Intimating, that nothing is more apt to bring in question the divinity of the Christian doctrine, than contentions and divisions among Christians; "that the world may know that thou hast sent me."

Let us often think of this pattern, and this prayer of our Saviour, and let the consideration of it quell those unchristian heats which are among us, lest, by our animosities and divisions about lesser things, which, whatever opinion men may have of them, do no ways touch upon the life and essence of religion, we first dishonour, and finally destroy from among us the best religion in the world. "And God grant that we may all know and do in this our day,



the things which belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes, for his mercy's sake in Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for ever.”



SERMON CLXXXIX.

THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST CONSIDERED AS OUR EXAMPLE.

Leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.—1 Pet. ii. 21.

I HAVE considered our Saviour's example as an universal pattern, calculated for all persons, times and places; and this I illustrated in these particulars:

1. That it was a pattern to us of the greatest and most substantial virtues.
2. Of such as are most rare and unusual.
3. Of such as are most useful and beneficial to others: I proceed to the particulars, which remain to be spoken to.
4. Our Saviour is likewise a pattern to us of such virtues as are most hard and difficult to be practised, such as are most against the grain of our corrupt nature, and most contrary to flesh and blood.

Every virtue is then hard and difficult, when it either contradicts the strong inclinations of nature, or meets with powerful temptations to the contrary.

The virtues which thwart the inclinations of human nature, are comprehended under the general name of self-denial; the denial of ourselves in those things which are commonly dearest to men; such are our own life, our pleasure or ease, our reputation: in all these, our blessed Lord hath given us the greatest example of self-denial that ever was; he denied his own life, and gave up himself wholly to the will of God, to do and suffer whatever he thought fit to impose upon him. So he himself tells us: ([John v. 30.](#)) "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which sent me:" and, ([John vi. 38.](#)) "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." And when he was in that great agony, on the apprehension of his approaching sufferings, at which nature did start, and when that bitter cup, that cup of astonishment was put into his hand, though he would have been glad to have declined it, if God had thought fit; yet, upon the whole matter, he submitted to it, and renounced his own will, the strongest inclination of nature that could be, in obedience to the will of God. ([Matt. xxvi. 39.](#)) "He fell on his face and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt:" and, ([ver. 42.](#)) "He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." Here was a great conflict; nature declined those dreadful sufferings which were coming upon him, and would have shrunk back: but he considered his duty, and made his inclination yield to it.

And he did not only deny his own will in obedience to the will of God, for which there is so great and invincible reason; but he denied it likewise in compliance and condescension to the prejudices, and humours, and infirmities of men, for their edification and good. So St. Paul tells us, and propounds our Lord herein to us for a pattern. ([Rom. xv. 2, 3.](#))

He denied himself in the lawful pleasures and satisfactions, in the ease and accommodations of life: he lived meanly, and fared hardly; he possessed and enjoyed none of the good things of this world, and endured all the evils of it; he despised riches, and the pomp and pride of life, and contented himself with a poor and destitute condition, “having not where to lay his head,” nor wherewithal to support nature, and to defray the common tribute, without a miracle. And he did not submit to this poor and mean condition upon necessity, for “he was Lord of all;” he made the world, and it was all his own, upon the highest right and title: but he voluntarily embraced it, “being rich, for our sake he became poor,” that he might wean us from the love of these things, and be an effectual example to us of the contempt of worldly wealth and greatness.

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And he denied himself likewise in one of the dearest and tenderest things in the world, to the wisest and greatest minds, I mean in point of reputation: “he made himself of no reputation,” says St. Paul, (*Phil. ii. 7.*) ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσε, “he emptied himself.” To submit to contempt, is to empty one’s self indeed: reputation being one of the last things a generous mind would be content to forego, and that which some have held in equal dearness and esteem with life itself; yet in this our Lord denied himself, and, that he might do good to mankind, was contented to be esteemed one of the worst of men; and without any kind of cause and desert, to undergo all manner of obloquy and reproach, to be accounted a magician and impostor, “a friend and companion of publicans and sinners;” a seducer of the people, a seditious person, and more worthy of the most cruel and shameful death than the greatest malefactor. Thus was the Son of God contented to be set below the worst of men, to be abased and vilified, that he might be a perfect pattern to us of this difficult virtue of self-denial, even in those things which are held in greatest esteem among the best of men.

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And surely in no case is example more necessary than in this, to animate and encourage us in the discharge of so difficult a duty, so contrary to the bent and inclination of our nature. A bare precept of self-denial in these things, and a peremptory command to sacrifice our own wills, our ease, our pleasure and reputation, yea, and life itself, to the glory of God, and the good of men, would have sounded very harsh and severe, had not the practice of all this been exemplified in a pattern of so much advantage: one who, in all these respects denied himself much more than is possible for us to do, who might have insisted upon a greater right, who abased himself, and stooped from a greater height and dignity, who did not submit to a condition of poverty and meanness when it was unavoidable, but chose it; who submitted to suffering, though he never deserved it, and who met with all the contempt and reproach imaginable, whilst he truly deserved the greatest esteem and reputation. Here is an example that hath all the argument, and all the encouragement that can be to the imitation of it. Was he, who had so regular a will and inclination, contented to have it crucified and thwarted? did he, who had an unquestionable right to all the riches and enjoyments of the world, renounce them all, and embrace poverty? did he, to whose deep wisdom and judgment

all mankind ought to submit, condescend to the weakness of others, and not please himself? did he, who never did the least thing in his whole life that might justly stain or blemish his reputation, patiently bear all sorts of contumely and reproach? And shall we think much to deny ourselves in any of these? Such an example is of greater force and authority than any precept or law. Well might our Lord, thus going before us, command us to follow him, saying: "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." If he thus denied himself, well may we, who have much less to deny, and much more reason and cause to do it; for, as he argues, "the disciple is not greater than his master, nor the servant than his lord." He did it voluntarily and of choice; it is our duty: he did it for our sakes; we do it for our own: we did not deserve it of him; but he hath merited it of us.

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Our Lord did not, like the pharisees, give strict precepts to others, which they themselves did not follow. "They said, and did not; laid heavy burdens upon others, and grievous to be borne, when they themselves would not touch them with one of their fingers:" nor like the philosophers, who spake fine and glorious things of goodness and virtue, but did much like other men; gave strict rules to others, but lived loosely themselves; and therefore it is no wonder that their discourses had so little effect upon the lives and manners of men, and were so unavailable to the reformation of the world. Precepts of great strictness and severity, are like to be obeyed very slowly and faintly, unless they be sweetened and made easy by the familiar practice of those that give them. In a way that is rugged and difficult, full of trouble and danger, it is not enough to bid men go on; but he that bids them, must go before them, and take them by the hand, and give them an example to follow his steps; without this, rules and precepts are very dry things, and give but faint and cold encouragement. Cæsar's example prevailed much more upon his soldiers than his word of command. No man ever discoursed better of magnanimity and greatness of mind, in great dangers and calamities, than Tully does; and yet when it come to the trial, no man ever behaved himself more faintly, and shewed greater dejection of mind, than he did; so that it is hard to say, whether his discourses are more apt to raise, or his example to damp, a man's spirit. Seneca writes with wonderful wit and smartness, with great fineness and force of argument, about the contempt of the world and wealth; but then, to consider how he flowed in wealth himself, and how intent he was to heap up riches beyond measure, would make a man more apt to despise him than the world. So necessary is it that precepts, especially of great difficulty, should be backed and enforced by example, and that severe rules should be mollified, and made easy by the practice of those who prescribe them. And this our Lord took particular care to do in those precepts of his, which seem to offer the greatest violence to the common bent and inclination of human nature.

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And so he did likewise in those virtues which are so difficult upon the account of temptation from without, as well as of inclination from within. Not to insist upon his firm

resistance of all the temptations to ambition, which made not the least impression upon him; the offer of the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, had no influence upon him. He was sometimes in great favour with the people, and mightily applauded by them, for speaking as never man spake, and doing such things as no man ever did: but he was as little moved by their applause, as he was dejected by their reproaches. When the people would have made him king, to qualify him the better, as they thought, to be the Messias, he would not take so much notice of the offer as to refuse it, but silently withdrew himself, that they knew not where to find him.

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But that which I shall particularly take notice of, under this head, is his great meekness; which is a very difficult virtue, if we consider the peevishness and infirmity of the human nature, and the frequent temptations to passion and anger, which occur in human life, and these very sudden and surprising; so that there is nothing wherein wise men do oftener betray their own weakness, than in the matter of sudden anger. Moses, the greatest of all the prophets that had been, and who it seems was naturally of a meek temper, having this testimony given him by the Spirit of God, that he was the meekest man upon earth; yet he miscarried in this matter, and not being able to bear the continual perverseness of that people, lost his temper, and fell into an irregular passion. But our blessed Lord, whose temper was perpetually assaulted with the highest provocations in all kinds, still maintained the evenness and meekness of his spirit.

The dulness and slowness of his disciples, to understand and believe what he had so plainly taught, and so often inculcated upon them, was a great trial of patience; which yet provoked him no farther, than to a just rebuke of their fault. The hardest words he ever gave them, were: "O unwise and slow of heart to believe! how long shall I suffer you?" And when he was in the height of his sorrow and trouble, and his disciples were so unconcerned for him, as to fall asleep, in the same breath that he reproves their drowsiness, he makes an excuse for it: "Can ye not watch with me one hour? The spirit indeed is willing; but the flesh is weak." This carriage from his friends and followers, when he stood in most need of their comfort and assistance, and "his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even to the death," was a great temptation to anger, especially falling upon a sore and afflicted mind; and yet it was so far from provoking his anger, that it rather moved his pity toward them.

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His sharp reproofs of the scribes and pharisees, were but a necessary severity, and a just expression of his indignation at the fulsome hypocrisy of such great pretenders to piety and devotion; for he knew their hearts. His whipping of the buyers and sellers out of the temple, the only action of his life in which there appears any transport of anger, was no other than a becoming zeal for the honour of God's house, which he saw so notoriously profaned; which zeal was warranted, after the example of Phineas, by the extraordinary occasion of it. In all his other actions, he was perfectly meek and lowly in spirit, void of pride, one of the chief causes of inordinate anger. We cannot say he was never angry; but whenever he

was so, which was very seldom, he sinned not; it was upon great and just occasion, and never to any undue degree.

And this is the more remarkable, because he was very apt to receive the impressions of other passions; of love and pity, which easily moved him to kindness and compassion. He could not forbear to weep, when he saw Lazarus's friends lamenting over his grave, though he knew the cause of their sorrow would soon be removed and turned into joy, by his resurrection to life. Nay, he had not only this tenderness towards his friends, but even to his greatest enemies. When he looked upon Jerusalem, and foresaw the terrible revenge that God would take upon his enemies and murderers, and beheld at a great distance the dreadful calamities that were coming upon them, he could not refrain from tears. He allowed himself in these innocent and human passions; but where there was danger of transgressing, as there is in no passion more than that of anger, he was continually upon his guard, and governed himself with great care, and never gave way to it, but upon evident and just occasion; and was never transported to any undue degree.

And yet he lived and died almost under continual provocations to it; not only from his friends and followers, but from all sorts of persons, provocations of the highest nature: if the most spiteful reproaches and injurious usage, and the most cruel persecutions and sufferings from the hands of those whom he had by all ways endeavoured to oblige; if the contradiction of sinners, whom he came to save; in a word, if the greatest malice, accompanied with the highest ingratitude; if any, if all of these be provocations of a high nature, he was almost continually, living and dying, exercised with these. And how did he demean himself in the midst of all these provocations? with the greatest meekness and mildness imaginable, answering their bitterest reproaches and cruellest usage either with calm reasonings or with meek silence; that, by the reasonableness and meekness of his answers and carriage, he might either convince or mollify them. When his enemies charged him with the profanation of the sabbath, he only reasons the matter fairly with them, asking them, whether it was "lawful to do good or to do evil on the sabbath-day?" telling them, that "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath?" bidding them go and learn what that means, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." When they accused him for being a magician, and "casting out devils by the prince of the devils," he convinceth them, by reason, that this was a malicious and groundless charge, telling them, that "a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand;" and that if he by Satan cast out Satan, his kingdom was divided against itself, and must fall. When they upbraided him for companying with publicans and sinners, he justifies the thing, by telling them, that "the whole have no need of the physician, but the sick;" that "he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." When they charged him with blasphemy, for saying to the man sick of the palsy, "thy sins be forgiven thee;" he only asks them this question, "Which is easier to say, thy sins be forgiven thee; or, take up thy bed and walk?" When they called him by the odious name of impostor, and se-



ducer of the people, he makes no sharp answer, but appeals to his miracles, and the works which he had done among them, as an unquestionable testimony that he came from God. When they took up stones to throw at him, he opposeth to this hard usage only soft, gentle words, if by that means he might stay their rage: ([John x. 32.](#)) “Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of these works do you stone me?” Thus, upon all occasions, he answers their malice and rage, not with boisterous passion, but by calm reason and argument; and, notwithstanding it had little effect, he continues this way to the last, and as the malice of his enemies was invincible, so was his meekness. In his last sufferings, when he was so rudely and injuriously treated at his trial, and one of the high priest’s officers struck him in the open face of the court, he only says to him, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?” What could be said more meekly? What more reasonably? And when, in the extremity of his sufferings, the high priests, and the soldiers, and the people, all joined together to revile him, and insult over his misery in the most barbarous and cruel manner; instead of breaking out into passion in this anguish of his soul, he pours out his prayers to God on their behalf, and makes the most charitable excuse and apology for them that their crime was possibly capable of: “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.” While he felt the bitter effects of their malice, he imputes it to their ignorance. Here is an example of meekness fit for the Son of God to give, and much more fit for the sons of men to follow; for, as the wise son of Syrach says excellently, “Pride was not made for men, nor furious anger for him that was born of a woman.”

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And having such an example left us of this great virtue, let us do likewise, since, as St. Peter tells us, he suffered, with all this meekness and patience, “to leave us an example that ye might follow his steps; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” When we consider this example, can we resent so highly every petty injury and provocation; and upon every slighting word proceed to a challenge and a quarrel, and entertain fierce and implacable thoughts of revenge? When the Son of God with so much meekness endured the continual contradictions of sinners, and put up with such outrageous affronts and indignities from his creatures, those ungrateful wretches, whom he had made, and whom he came to save, and for whom he offered to give that very blood, which they so cruelly and maliciously shed, for the expiation of their guilt.

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To all which I shall add, his readiness to forgive injuries, considering the temptations he had to wrath and revenge, from the spiteful reproaches, and injurious calumnies, and continual persecution of his bitter and implacable enemies without a cause; who pursued him with incessant rage and malice, and never gave over until they had wrought his ruin, and by false accusations, and a most violent persecution, and seditious tumults and clamours, they had forced the Roman governor, contrary to his inclination and the convictions of his own mind and conscience, and against all reason and justice, to pass sentence upon him,

when he declared he saw nothing in him worthy of death, and to condemn him to a most painful and ignominious death. Nor did their malice end here; but they aggravated his sufferings with scurrilous taunts and reproaches, and all the rudeness and indignities imaginable: and yet all this injurious and cruel usage did not provoke him to one revengeful thought; could not extort from him so much as one peevish, or misbecoming, or threatening word. “When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not.” But, notwithstanding all this provocation, he was more ready to forgive the injuries and indignities they put upon him than they could be to offer them, and implored the mercy and forgiveness of God for them as heartily and as earnestly as they had solicited his death and destruction.

It is easy to give precepts of forgiveness, to bid men “love their enemies, bless them that curse them, do good to them that hate them, and pray for them that despitefully use them, and persecute them; and to forgive our brother that offends us, not only to seven times, but to seventy times seven,” without stint and limit: but the practice of this is exceeding difficult; for how hard do we find it to pass by a little provocation, and upon a very small affront and indignity offered to us to suppress the thought and desire of revenge, and to command our passion from breaking out in word or deed? But much more difficult is it perfectly to forgive, to love our enemies, to pray for them, and to be ready to do them good. Such a difficult virtue as this had need of all sorts of inducements to engage us to the practice of it. And therefore our blessed Lord did not think it enough strictly to enjoin it, and to enforce it upon us by the most powerful considerations, teaching us in our daily prayers to beg mercy and forgiveness of God upon this condition—that we forgive others, and not to hope for it upon other terms; telling us, that as we demean ourselves toward one another in this case of injuries and provocations, so God will deal with us; “if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses.” Nothing can be urged upon us with greater force than this duty is, because upon our practice and performance of it all our hopes of mercy and forgiveness from God are suspended. But yet it is difficult after all this; and, therefore, to allure us more powerfully to the practice of it, our Lord hath given us the example of it in the whole course of his life; in which, being continually assaulted with injuries and provocations, he had perpetual occasion for the practice of forgiveness; and that in greater instances, and upon occasion of greater injuries, than any of us are capable of receiving. He who could never stand in need of forgiveness from men, who needed none from God, who had it always in his power to have revenged with ease, and to the utmost, all the provocations and affronts that were offered to him; he who had none of those powerful inducements to forgiveness which we have, was thus ready to forgive; and did it perpetually, upon the greatest, upon innumerable occasions; he forgave his enemies, all their ill-will toward him, and all their vile and malicious usage of him throughout his whole life: but most remarkably at his death, when the provocations were greatest and most violent, when they

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fell thick and in storms upon him, and when they were most grievous and piercing, in the very agony and anguish of his sufferings; in these hard and pressing circumstances, he was so far from breathing out threatening and revenge against the authors of his cruel sufferings, that with his last breath he did most effectually declare his free forgiveness of them, and perfect charity toward them, by his fervent prayer to God for them; "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

5. And lastly, Our Saviour is likewise a pattern to us of the most needful virtues, and for the practice whereof there is the greatest and most frequent occasion in human life.

Several of these I have already mentioned under the former heads: as sincerity, which hath an universal influence upon all our actions; and is a principal ingredient into all the duties and services which we are to perform to God and men; humility and meekness, for the exercise whereof there is almost continual occasion in all our conversation with others. These have been spoken to, I shall therefore instance in some others, which are likewise of great and frequent use in human life.

(1.) The great humanity of his carriage and deportment, of which he gave manifold instances, in his free and familiar conversation with all sorts of people. He did not despise the meanest. How familiarly did he talk with the woman of Samaria? insomuch that his disciples were offended at it, and "marvelled that he talked with her." He did not decline the conversation of the worst of men, where he had any hope of making them better by it; and though his companying "with publicans and sinners" was often objected as matter of scandal to him, yet he would not for that reason neglect any opportunity of doing good. He was affable to his inferiors, to the meanest person that had occasion to speak with him; yea, he rebuked his disciples, for forbidding the little children to come to him. They would have kept them from him, because they could not imagine to what purpose they should be permitted to come to him: but though they were not capable of his instructions, yet they were of his kindness and blessing. "He took them up in his arms, and laid his hands upon them, and blessed them;" and he proposed them to his disciples as emblems of that innocency and simplicity, without which no man shall enter into the kingdom of God.

His humanity likewise appeared in the tenderness and compassion of his nature, towards all that were in want or misery of any kind. "He healed all manner of sicknesses and diseases among the people, and went about doing good." And when his followers, by their long attendance upon him in desert and solitary places to hear his doctrine, were pinched with hunger, he could not find in his heart to dismiss them without some refreshment; and, having no other means, did it by a miracle. He was very apt to sympathize with the condition of others, to weep with them that wept, as he did with the friends of Lazarus over his grave: nay, he had a tenderness for his enemies; when he beheld Jerusalem, and the sad fate which hung over it for their obstinate impenitency, he could not refrain from tears at the thoughts of it.

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Another instance of his humanity was his easiness to be entreated, and readiness to yield to the request of those who desired his company, or implored his help and assistance. And as he was most ready to do good to all, so he did not disdain to receive kindness from any; complying cheerfully with the desires of those who invited him to their houses, and accepting kindly any well-intended respect. How did he resent the extraordinary kindness of the devout woman, who poured the box of rich ointment upon his head! taking care that the memory of it should be transmitted to all generations, and proclaimed over the whole world, ([Matt. xxvi. 13.](#))

(2.) Another very needful virtue, and for which our Lord was very eminent, was his neglect and disregard of the opinion of men, in comparison of his duty. As he was not affected, much less puffed up, with their applause (which is an argument of a vain and light mind), so was he as little moved with their censures and reproaches, by which he was neither disordered in his passions, nor discouraged from well-doing. He took heed to his duty, and made sure to do the things which pleased God, and was not very solicitous what men said or thought of him. He observed in the pharisees, how great a temptation and hinderance to the receiving of his doctrine an undue regard to the praise and censure of men was: “they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God,” as he tells us; ([John xii. 43.](#)) and, ([chap. v. 44.](#)) “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not, the honour which cometh from God only?” Not that we are to slight and neglect the opinion of others concerning our actions, that is pride and self-conceit; and our Lord himself was not so regardless of his reputation, as not to take great care to give no just occasion of censure, no needless handle to slander and calumny; he vindicated himself upon all occasions, and was ready to give a fair and reasonable account of his actions, to those who found fault with them, nay, even maliciously carped at them; he prudently avoided occasions of offence, and, by wise and cautious answers, many times avoided the snares that were laid to bring him under obloquy and reproach: but in competition with his plain duty, he neither regarded the applause nor censures of men; he complied with them in nothing that was bad, to gain their good opinion and esteem; nor was he hindered and discouraged from any thing that was good, for fear of being ill-spoken of, or of having a bad interpretation put upon his good actions.

And this is a virtue very necessary to a good man, especially in bad times, and requires a good degree of fortitude and firmness of resolution to make a man master of it. And it is not more necessary than it is reasonable: for it is not in our power, whether men shall speak well or ill of us; but it is in our power, whether we will do well or ill. It is many times impossible to please men, they are so divided in their opinions about good and evil; but we may make sure to please God, and to gain his praise and approbation, “whose judgment is always according to truth.” It is a vain and endless thing to live up to the humours and opinions of men, which are variable and uncertain; but if we keep steady to our duty, we



live to the consciences of men, which first or last will come to themselves, and come over to us, and approve of that which is good. This is, as St. Paul speaks, “to commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”

(3.) Another virtue for which there is great occasion in human life, and for which our Lord was very remarkable, was his contentedness in a mean and poor condition; and such was his condition to the very lowest degree. He was destitute of the ordinary conveniences and necessary supports of life; he lived generally upon the kindness and charity of others, and when that failed, and he wanted ordinary supports, as he often did, he was maintained by miracle: and yet, in this mean and necessitous condition, he had a constant evenness and serenity of mind; he had no anxious care and solicitude upon him, “what he should eat, and what he should drink, or wherewithal he should be clothed;” he never murmured at the unequal providence of God, never uttered one discontented or envious word at the plenty and prosperity of others; he rather pitied the misfortune of rich and great men, who were exposed to so many temptations, that it was very hard for them, in his opinion, to be saved; but he enjoyed himself, and served God, and went about doing good, and depended upon the providence of God for his daily food; and if at any time that was wanting, he tells his disciples, that he had meat to eat which they knew not of; for it was his meat and drink to do the will of his Father. By all that appears in the history of his life (and we are sure that it is true), no man was ever poorer, and yet no man ever more contented than he was; which is not only an example of contentedness to those, whom the providence of God hath placed in the extremity of meanness and want, but a much stronger and more forcible argument of contentment in every condition. For discontent is not only the portion of the poor, but of those who have a competency, because they have not plenty; and many times of those who have plenty and abundance, because they are wanton and foolish, and know not what they would have; so that our Saviour, by giving an example of contentment to those of the poorest and meanest condition, hath given it much more to those who are in better circumstances. A narrow fortune is riches in comparison of none; a competency is plenty, compared with poverty, and the want of the ordinary accommodations of life. If the Son of God submitted to the lowest and poorest condition, and bore it with so much evenness and tranquillity of mind; well may we-, if God call us to it. If he that was “heir of all things,” was destitute of all things, and well contented to be so; shall we murmur and repine, if we be in the same circumstances? If this example be of any force (as it is certainly of the greatest), should the providence of God see fit to reduce us to the lowest condition of want, we have no reason for discontent; but if he affords us a competency, we have no colour and pretence for it, unless we think ourselves better than the Son of God, and can claim a greater right to the possessions and enjoyments of this world, than he that made it.

Before this example, we might have thought that poverty and meanness had been a sign of God’s hatred and displeasure, or at least an argument of less love and regard: but now



that we see him, whom God loved infinitely better than any man in the world, to have been one of the poorest men that ever lived; this is a demonstration, that a man may be entirely beloved of God, though he be in the poorest and most destitute condition; for in such a condition he thought fit to place his beloved Son, "in whom he was well-pleased." And if poverty be consistent with the highest degree of God's love and favour, we may bear it contentedly; and if there be reason for contentment even in poverty, to be discontented in any condition that is above it, is shameful and intolerable. Of such force is this example of our Lord, to banish discontent from any condition we are liable to in this world. The

(4.) Fourth and last virtue I shall instance in, and for the exercise whereof there is very great and frequent occasion in human life, is patience under sufferings, and such a perfect resignation of ourselves to the will of God, that whatever pleaseth him should please us, how distasteful and grievous soever it be. And of this virtue our blessed Saviour was the greatest example that ever was; his whole life, from his birth to his death, was made up of persecution and patience, and was a continual exercise of his virtue. There had been great examples in all ages of the sufferings and patience of good men, which we might propound to ourselves with great advantage; and so St. James exhorts the Christians to do: ([James v. 10.](#)) "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience." Job, especially, was a most eminent example in this kind: "Ye have heard (says he) of the patience of Job." And all these examples are of great use, and considerable arguments to this virtue; but the pattern of our Lord's sufferings and patience is a greater example, and a more powerful argument than all these. His sufferings were far greater than any man's ever were; "Never was any sorrow like to his sorrow, wherewith the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger:" and his patience was greater than any man's ever was, not only because he suffered more than any one of the sons of men ever did, but because he suffered without cause, being perfectly innocent, and free from the least personal fault and guilt. Well may we "bear the indignation of the Lord patiently," because "we have sinned against him." Whatever we suffer, our consciences tell us we have deserved it all, and much more from the hand of God, and that our punishment is always less than our iniquities have deserved. Sin is at the bottom of all our sufferings, and if we be buffeted for our faults, we ought to take it patiently. Upon this consideration, St. Peter recommends to us the example of our Lord's sufferings and patience, as a powerful argument to work the same temper and disposition in us: ([1 Pet. ii. 20-22.](#)) "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if when you do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps, who did no sin." Where the apostle insinuates a two fold difference between our Lord's suffering for us and ours. He suffered for us: but we upon our own account, and for our own faults. He was perfectly innocent, "He had no sin," and yet he suffered with so much

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patience; much more ought we: for by how much the more guilt, so much the greater reason for patience; and the more innocent the person is that suffers, so much the more perfect and commendable is his patience.

So that the greatness of our Lord's sufferings, considered together with his perfect innocency, gives his example a peculiar force and advantage above all other examples whatsoever. And therefore the apostle to the Hebrews, after a great number of examples of the persecution and patience of the saints in all ages, not content with these, he adds that of our Lord, as the most perfect and powerful example of all others: (*Heb. xii. 1-3.*) "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race that 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, despising the shame. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds." "Such contradiction of sinners;" such as no man ever endured; and yet he bore all this, not with a stoical and stupid insensibility, but with a true patience. For no man had greater apprehensions of suffering, and a more quick and tender sense of it, than he had. He had not only the more manly virtues of wisdom, and resolution, and constancy; but was clothed also with the softer passions of human nature, meekness, and compassion, and grief, and a tender sense of pain and suffering. "He took our infirmities, (says the prophet) and bore our griefs." And this he expressed both in his agony in the garden, and in his behaviour upon the cross; he did not despise pain, but dreaded it, and yet submitted to it; he did not outbrave his sufferings, but bore them decently; he had a human sense of them, but under went them with a Divine patience, resigning himself absolutely to the will of God, when he saw them coming; and when they were upon him, expressing a great sense of pain, without the least sign of impatience. And hereby he was a pattern accommodated to the weakest and tenderest of mankind: he did not give us an extravagant example of bravery, and a sturdy resolution; but, which was much fitter for us, of a patient submission to the will of God, under a great sense of suffering.

Before I come to the fifth and last advantage of our Lord's example, it will be requisite to clear what hath been said from three or four obvious objections. But this I shall reserve for another discourse.



SERMON CXC.

[Preached March 25, 1686.]

THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST CONSIDERED, AS OUR EXAMPLE.

Leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.—1 Pet. ii. 21.

THE example of Christ is an argument never unseasonable; and though it be somewhat foreign to the occasion of this day, yet it will afford us some thing not improper to be considered by us, concerning the blessed mother of our Lord. I have handled this argument of our Lord's example very largely, and, among other things, have shewn the manifold advantages of it, in these following respects:

I. That the example of our Lord is a most absolute and perfect pattern, being the life of God, in the nature and likeness of man.

II. A most familiar and easy example, in which we see the several virtues of a good life practised in such instances, and upon such occasions, as do frequently happen in human life.

III. It is an encouraging example; nothing being more apt to give life to good resolutions and endeavours, than to see all that which God requires of us, performed by one in our own nature, and a man as like ourselves, as it is possible for a perfect pattern to be.

IV. It is likewise an universal example, calculated as equally as it is possible for all conditions and capacities of men, and fitted for general direction and imitation of all sorts of virtue and goodness; such virtues as are the greatest and most substantial, the most rare and unusual, the most useful and beneficial to others, the most hard and difficult to be practised, and for the exercise whereof there is the greatest and most frequent occasion in human life. There remains now only to be spoken to, the

V. Fifth and last advantage, which I mentioned of our Lord's example; that it is, in the nature of it, very powerful to engage and oblige all men to the imitation of it. But before I enter upon this, I proposed to clear what hath been already said concerning our Lord's example from three or four obvious objections.

The first objection is, that a great part of our Saviour's life consisted of miraculous actions, wherein we cannot imitate him.

This is very true; and for that very reason, because we cannot imitate him herein, we are not obliged to do it: but we may imitate the compassion and charity which he shewed in his miracles, by such ways, and in such effects, as are within the compass of our power. We are not anointed, as he was, "with the Holy Ghost, and with power to heal all manner of sickness and disease:" but we may "go about doing good," as he did, so far as we have ability and opportunity; we may comfort those in their sickness and distress, whom we are not able in a miraculous manner to recover and relieve; and in diseases that are curable, we

may help the poorer at the expense of our charity, and do that by slower and ordinary means, which our Saviour did by a word in an instant.

Secondly, Against the universality of our Saviour's example, it is objected, that he hath given us no pattern of some conditions and relations of life, for which there seems to have been as great need and reason as for any other.

To this I answer, that though his single state of life did hinder him from being formally an example as to some of the most common relations, as of a father and a husband; yet he was virtually so in the principle and practice of universal charity, which principle, if it be truly rooted in us, will sufficiently guide and direct us in the duties of particular relations.

And whereas it is further objected, that he hath left us no example of that, which by many is esteemed the only religious state of life; viz. perfect retirement from the world, for the more devout serving of God, and freeing us from the temptations of the world, such as is that of monks and hermits; this, perhaps, may seem to some a great oversight and omission: but our Lord in great wisdom thought fit to give a pattern of a quite different sort of life, which was, not to fly the conversation of men, and to live in a monastery or a wilderness; but to do good among men, to live in the world with great freedom, and with great innocency. He did, indeed, sometimes retire himself, for the more free and private exercise of devotion, as we ought to do; but he passed his life chiefly in the conversation of men, that they might have all the benefit that was possible of his instruction and example. We read, that "he was carried into the wilderness to be tempted;" but not that he lived there, to avoid temptation. He hath given us an example of denying the world, without leaving it; and of renouncing, not only the pomp and vanity, but even the lawful enjoyments and conveniences of life, when it may serve to any good end, either of glory to God, or of advantage to men; teaching us hereby, that charity is a duty no less necessary than devotion; that we cannot serve God better, than by endeavouring the good and happiness of men. So that if our Saviour's example be of authority with us, that will soon decide which is the most perfect state of life, to go out of the world, or to live innocently and usefully in it. And since neither our Saviour nor his apostles have recommended it to us by their example, nor by one word of precept or counsel tending that way, it seems very plain that they did not esteem monkery the most perfect, much less the only religious, state of life. There could not have been so deep a silence throughout the New Testament concerning so important a piece of religion, as the church of Rome would bear us in hand this is: for to be professed of some monastical order, they call entering into religion; and they speak of it as the most direct and ready way to heaven; and not only so, but they give fair encouragement to believe, that to die, or be buried in a monk's habit, will go a great way (they are loath to tell us how far), in the carrying of a bad man towards heaven, or at least to the abatement of his pain in purgatory.

Thirdly, It is objected, that some particulars of our Saviour's carriage towards rulers and magistrates seem liable to exception, and not proper for our imitation: as, his bold re-

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proofs of the scribes and pharisees, many of whom were chief rulers, and of greatest authority among them; and his message to Herod, “Go and tell that fox.” This opprobrious and reproachful treatment of magistrates seems directly contrary to an express law of God: ([Exod. xxii. 28.](#)) “Thou shalt not revile the gods, (or judges,) nor speak evil of the ruler of thy people.”

But to this the answer is plain: that our Lord used this freedom by the virtue and privilege of his prophetic office, and of his immediate commission from God; it being the office of prophets, and a part of their commission, to reprove kings and rulers with all freedom and plainness, because they were really superior to them in the execution of that office. In all positive laws of respect to superiors, there is an exception of the Divine commission; because, in that case, the prophet speaks in the name, and by the authority of one infinitely greater than the greatest upon earth; as, in the Lord’s name, and by his commission, any man may check inferior magistrates, and that in such a manner, as would be rudeness and insolence for any other, not so warranted, to do it. And of this there are manifold examples in the prophets of the Old Testament; and what the tenor of their commission was, we may see in that given to the prophet Jeremiah: ([chap. i. ver. 10.](#)) “Behold, I have set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull up, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant,” (that, is, to denounce judgments and calamities, or peace and prosperity to them;) and, ([ver. 17, 18.](#)) “Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee; be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls .against the whole land; against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land.” This commission set him above them all in the discharge of his office: and therefore, what our Lord did in this kind, by virtue of an extraordinary commission, and the privilege of a prophet immediately sent by God, is not to be drawn into example in ordinary cases: for we may do that by special commission from God, which the ordinary rules of duty, and respect to princes and governors, will by no means allow to be done.

The fourth and last objection is, that our blessed Saviour does not seem to bear himself with that duty and respect towards his mother, which that relation seems to require. And to speak according to the first appearance of things, this seems to be, of all other, the most exceptionable part of his life, and to require some particular and extraordinary reason, not so obvious at first sight, for the vindication of it

There are, to my best remembrance and observation, but five passages in the history of our Saviour’s life, concerning his carriage towards his mother, and his discourse with her, and of her; in all which he seems rather to treat her with some appearance of neglect, than with any great show of reverence and respect. Not that we are to imagine, but that he did pay her an entire duty; for we know that he “fulfilled all righteousness:” but, for reasons best

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known to his infinite wisdom, he thought fit very much to conceal it in his public behaviour, and to have as little notice taken of it in the history of his life.

And the first passage is, [Luke ii. 48.](#) when his parents having lost him, at last found him in the temple disputing among the doctors; and his mother reproved him, “Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing:” he gives them this short and obscure answer, which they knew not what to make of; “How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” This happened when he was but twelve years old. And that we may not think, that, during his minority, he did ordinarily assume this behaviour towards his parents, but only upon this first essay of his public appearance, the evangelist purposely adds, ([ver. 51.](#)) that “he went down with his parents to Nazareth, and was subject to them.”

The second passage is, [John ii. 4.](#) when his mother desiring him to work a miracle, at his first appearance and entrance upon his public ministry, he takes occasion to declare to her, that he was discharged from her conduct and government, and this in terms to all appearance of no great respect: “Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.” Greg. Nyssen reads both sentences with an interrogation: “What have I to do with thee? is not mine hour now come?” As if he had said, “Why dost thou interpose in these matters? is not the time come, that I am to enter upon my office; and in the discharge of it, to be directed by God, and none else?”

The third passage is, [Matt. xii. 47.](#) when he was told, that his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him: “Who is my mother (says he), and who are my brethren?” And pointing to his disciples, “Behold my mother, and my brethren; for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Here is but little appearance of regard; for we do not find that he left the business he was about, to speak with her when she desired it. Nor, it seems, did she understand her power so well as the church of Rome hath done since, when (as is to be seen in some of their mass-books) they address to her in these terms, *Jure matris impera redemptori*; “By the authority of a mother, command the Redeemer.”

The fourth passage is not much different from the former; ([Luke xi. 27, 28.](#)) when “a certain woman said to him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked: he said, Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.” He does not deny what was said in honour of her, but turns his discourse another way; and, foreseeing the danger of a superstitious veneration of her, he seems to bring her down to the same level with all sincere Christians; teaching us, that no external privilege or relation, how glorious so ever, no, not that of being the mother of the Son of God, was so valuable as doing the will of God: “Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”

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The last passage is at the time of his death: ([John xix. 25-27.](#)) “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother: when Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son: then saith he to the disciple. Behold thy mother. And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” Here, indeed, he shewed his great kindness and concernment for her, in committing her to the care of his best-beloved friend; but yet without any extraordinary demonstration of respect in the manner of it.

These are all the passages I know in the gospel, which concern our Lord’s carriage towards his mother; which, upon the whole matter, is so strange, that we cannot imagine but there must be some special and extraordinary reason for it: and we who have lived to see and know what hath happened in the Christian world, are now able to give a better account of this great caution and reservedness in his behaviour towards her; namely, that, out of his infinite wisdom and foresight, he so demeaned himself towards her, that he might lay no temptation before men, nor give the least occasion to the idolizing of her. He always called her “woman:” and by the privilege of his Divinity and high office, hardly seems to pay her the respect due to a mother, that he might restrain all Christians from worshipping her as a Deity: or if they did, that they might have no colour or excuse for it, from any thing he said or did. This is so probable an account of that which might otherwise seem so unaccountable, that I persuade myself, that all unprejudiced persons will readily assent to it. And, which is farther remarkable in this matter, the apostles of our Lord, in all their writings, use the same reservedness, and, no doubt, by the direction of the same Spirit, concerning the blessed mother of our Lord. For, throughout the history of the Acts, and all the Epistles of the apostles, there is but one mention made of her, and that only by the by; ([Acts i. 14.](#)) where it is said, that the “disciples all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus.” So far are they from proposing her for an object of our worship, that they only once make mention of her, and that joining with others in prayer and supplication to God, without any special remark concerning her; much less do they speak of any devotion paid to her.

And surely, if this “blessed among women,” the mother of our Lord (for I keep to the titles which the Scripture gives her), have any sense of what we do here below, she cannot but look down with the greatest disdain upon that sacrilegious and idolatrous worship which is paid to her, to the high dishonour of the great God and our Saviour, and the infinite scandal of his religion. How can she, with out indignation, behold how they play the fool in the church of Rome about her? What an idol they make of her image? and with what sottishness they give Divine honour to it! How they place her in their idolatrous pictures in equal rank with the blessed Trinity, and turn the salutation of the angel, *Ave Maria*, “Hail Mary, full of grace,” into a kind of prayer; and in their bead-roll of devotion repeat it ten times, for once that they say the Lord’s Prayer, as of greater virtue and efficacy! And, indeed,

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they almost jostle out the devotion due to Almighty God, and our blessed Saviour, by their endless idolatry to her.

So that the greater part of their religion, both public and private, is made up of that which was no part at all of the religion of the apostles and primitive Christians; nay, which plainly contradicts it: for that expressly teaches us that there is but one object of our prayers, and one Mediator, by whom we are to make our addresses to God. "There is one God; and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," says St. Paul, when he gives a standing rule concerning prayer in the Christian church. And yet, notwithstanding all the care that our blessed Saviour and his apostles could take to prevent the gross idolatry of the blessed mother of our Lord, how blindly and wilfully have the church of Rome run into it: and, in despite of the clearest evidence and conviction, do obstinately and impudently persist in it, and justify themselves in so abominable a practice. I come now to the

V. Fifth and last advantage of our Lord's example, that it is in the nature of it very powerful, to engage and oblige all men to the imitation of it.

It is almost equally calculated for persons of all capacities and conditions, for the wise and the weak, for those of high and low degree; for all men are alike concerned to be happy. And the imitation of this example is the most ready and direct way to it, the most effectual means we can use to compass this great and universal end; nay, it is not only the means, but the end, the best and most essential part of it. To be like our Lord, is to be as good as it is possible for men to be; and goodness is the highest perfection that any being is capable of; and the perfection of every being is its happiness.

There is a kind of contagion in all examples; men are very apt to do what they see others do, though it be very bad: every day's experience furnisheth us with many and sad instances of the influence of bad examples; but there are peculiar charms in that which is good and excellent. A perfect pattern of goodness does strongly allure and invite to the imitation of it, and a great example of virtue to a well-disposed mind is a mighty temptation, and apt to inspirit us with good resolutions, to endeavour after that in ourselves, which we so much esteem and admire in others. And such is the example of our Lord, perfect as is possible, and yet obvious to common imitation, and as much fitted for the general direction of mankind in all sorts of virtue and goodness, as any one single example can be imagined to be.

The virtues of his life are pure, without any mixture of infirmity and imperfection. He had humility without meanness of spirit; innocency without weakness; wisdom without cunning; and constancy and resolution in that which was good, without stiffness of conceit, and peremptoriness of humour: in a word, his virtues were shining without vanity, heroical without any thing of transport, and very extra ordinary without being in the least extravagant.

His life was even and of one tenor, quiet, and without noise and tumult, always employed about the same work, in doing the things which pleased God, and were of greatest benefit



and advantage to men. Who would not write after such a copy; so perfect, and yet so familiar, and fit for our imitation? Who would not be ambitious to live the life which God lived, when he was pleased to become man, and dwell among us?

We are ambitious to imitate those whom we esteem, and are apt to have their example in great dearness and regard, from whom we have received great kindness and mighty benefits. This pattern, which our religion proposeth to us, is the example of one whom we ought to reverence, and whom we have reason to love 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; it is an example that carries authority with it, and commands our imitation. “You call me Lord and Master,” says he himself, recommending to us the example of his own humility. (John xiii. 13, 14.) “You call me Lord and Master, and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another’s feet;” that is, stoop to the lowest and meanest office to serve one another; “for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”

Yet farther, 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 own blood; and, while we were bitter enemies to him, did and suffered more for us, than any man ever did for his dearest friend. How powerfully must such a pattern recommend goodness, and kindness, and compassion to us, who have had so much comfort and advantage from them? Had not the Son of God commiserated our case, and pitied and relieved us in our low and wretched condition, we had been extremely, and for ever miserable, beyond all imagination, and past all remedy. All the kindness and compassion, all the mercy and forgiveness he would have us practise towards one another, he himself first exercised upon us; and surely we have a much greater obligation upon us to the practice of these virtues than he had: for he did all this for our sakes, we do it for our own. We have a natural obligation, both in point of duty and interest; his was voluntary, and what he took upon himself, that he might at once be a Saviour and an example to us. He that commands us to do good to others, was our great benefactor; he that requires us to forgive our enemies, shed his own blood for the forgiveness of our sins; while we were enemies to him, laid down his life for us, making himself the example of that goodness, which he commands us to shew to others.

Are any of us reduced to poverty and want? let us think of him, who, being Lord of all, “had not where to lay his head; who being rich, for our sakes became a beggar, that we through his poverty might be made rich: Are we persecuted for righteousness sake, and exercised with sufferings and reproaches? “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, despising the shame.”



When we are ready to be discouraged in well doing, by the opposition we meet withal from the ingratitude of men, and the malicious interpretation of our good actions, perverting the best things, done with the best mind and to the best ends, to some ill purpose and design, “consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest you be weary and faint in your minds.”

Can we be proud, when the Son of God “hum bled himself, and became of no reputation;” emptied himself of all his glory, and was contented to be “despised and rejected of men?” Shall we be covetous, and thirst after the things of this world, when we consider how the Son of God despised them, and trampled upon them? Shall we condemn and despise the poor; nay, can we choose but esteem them for his sake, whom they resemble, and whose low and indigent condition in the world hath made poverty not only tolerable, but glorious? Can we be peevish and fro ward, and apt to fly out into passion upon every little occasion, when we consider the meekness of the Son of God, and with what serenity and evenness of mind he demeaned himself, under great and continual provocations? Shall we be discontented in any condition, when we consider how contented the Son of God was in the meanest and most destitute condition; how he welcomed all events, and was so perfectly resigned to the will of his heavenly Father, that whatsoever pleased God, pleased him? Shall we be so ready to separate from the communion of the church of God, upon pretence of something that we think amiss, or less pure and perfect (which will always be in this world); when the Son of God lived and died in the communion of a church guilty of great corruptions both in doctrine and practice, such as can with no colour be objected to ours?

Shall we resent injuries, slanders, and calumnies so heinously, as to be out of all patience, when we consider with what meekness of temper, and how little disturbance of mind, the Son of God bore all these; how “he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and with held not his face from shame and spitting?” How “he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as the sheep before the shearer is dumb, so he opened not his mouth; being reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously?” Such vile and barbarous usage the Son of God met withal; and yet, under all this, he possessed his soul in patience: and do we expect to be better treated than he was? Was goodness itself contented to be traduced, and evil spoken of, perfect innocence to be slandered and persecuted; and shall we, who are sinners, great sinners, think ourselves worthy to escape these things, and too good to have that done to us, which was done to one infinitely better than we are? It is our Lord’s own argument, and there is great weight and reason in it; “if the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. 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; it is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord: if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of the household?”

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Can we entertain thoughts of revenge, when we have such a pattern of forgiving before us, who poured out his blood for the expiation of the guilt of them that shed it, and spent his last breath in fervent and charitable prayers for his betrayers and murderers? Lord endow us with the like temper; but do not try us with the like sufferings.

Thus by setting the example of our Lord before us, and keeping this pattern always in our eye, we may continually correct all our own errors and defects, all the distempers of our minds, and the faults and irregularities of our lives; we may argue ourselves into all kind of virtue and goodness, and from such an example be strongly excited and sweetly led to the practice of it.

Let us not be discouraged by the consideration of our own weakness; for he who hath given us such an example of virtue, is ready likewise to give us his Holy Spirit, to assist and enable us to conform ourselves to this pattern of our Lord and Master, and to follow the blessed steps of his holy life.

“Now the God of peace,” &c.



SERMON CXCI.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST CONSIDERED, AS A PROPER MEANS OF OUR SALVATION.

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.—1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

THE sufferings of the Son of God for the sins of men, as they are a subject never improper to be insisted on; so they are more especially seasonable at this time,² which the Christian church hath for so many ages set apart for the solemn commemoration of them, in order to our more due preparation for the receiving the sacrament at Easter; which next after the Lord's day (which was set apart by the apostles for a weekly commemoration of our Saviour's resurrection) is the first and most solemn festival that is taken notice of in ecclesiastical antiquity, to be generally observed by Christians; at which time all Christians that were admitted to those sacred mysteries, did receive the holy sacrament; and, for this reason, I have pitched upon this subject at this time.

Among all the prejudices that were raised against the Christian religion, when it first appeared in the world, this was the greatest of all other, that the first author of this doctrine should come to so miserable and shameful an end, as to die upon the cross; that the Son of God should be "delivered into the hands of men," to be so cruelly and ignominiously handled. This both Jews and Greeks laid hold on, as the most popular objection against Christianity, and matter of just reproach to that religion, which pretended to be brought from heaven by the Son of God: for though he called himself the Son of God, yet he died like a man; and, not only so, but suffered as a malefactor.

But, notwithstanding the odium of this objection, the apostles of our Lord and Saviour, who were sent by him to publish his doctrine to the world, did not, in the least, endeavour to hide and dissemble the matter; but did openly, and without disguise, declare to the world, that he in whom they believed, and endeavoured to persuade others to believe, was for speaking the truth, which he had heard from God, arraigned at Jerusalem, and there "by wicked hands crucified and slain." And though they knew that this seemed very foolish and absurd, both to Jews and Gentiles, whom they designed to convert to Christianity, and did extremely prejudice them against it; yet nevertheless they persisted in the course they had begun, leaving God to do his own work, in his own way; and they found the success of it. For, though it was a very plain story which they told the world, and appeared even ridiculous to those who thought themselves the wisest and ablest judges of these matters; yet being the truth of God, it had a mighty efficacy upon the minds of men, notwithstanding all the pre-

² Preached on Good Friday.

judice that was raised against it. “It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe;” by this doctrine which seemed so absurd to human reason, to gain many to the belief and entertainment of it.

Indeed, it was not suited to the genius either of the Jews or gentiles; for they, according to their different ways of institution, expected quite another thing: ([ver. 22.](#)) “The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.”—“The Jews require a sign:” they expected the apostles should have given some extraordinary testimony from heaven, such as was Elias’s calling for fire down from heaven, to consume those that opposed and resisted them. Such things as these they read of the prophets in their law, and they expected the Messiah would do the same, and greater things. And though in truth he did so, wrought more and greater miracles than Moses and all the prophets had done before him, yet their curiosity was not satisfied; and, notwithstanding the great works which he did among them, they were continually importuning him for a sign: ([Matt. xii. 38.](#)) “Then certain of the scribes and pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.” This seems a strange and unreasonable demand, considering the many and great works he had done among them, which were so generally known. So that, in all probability, it was some particular and peculiar kind of miracle which they desired, as appears from [Matt xvi. 1.](#) “The pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting, desired him, that he would shew them a sign from heaven.” He had wrought many miracles on earth, in healing the sick, and opening the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf, in cleansing the lepers, and making the lame to walk; but these they looked upon as an inferior sort of miracles, here was all this while no extraordinary thing immediately from heaven; if they could once see that, they would be satisfied. But when no such thing was done, and at last God permitted him to die upon the cross, as an impostor and seditious person; and it appeared plainly that he, who pretended to free others from diseases, could not save himself from death: this confirmed them in their unbelief, and upon good reason as they thought. And that this was a sign which they particularly expected, and thought they had cause so to do, appears by their upbraiding of him with the want of it in the time of his suffering: ([Matt. xxvii. 39.](#)) “And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it up in three days, save thyself: if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” And it was not only the malice and ignorance of the common people that objected this to him, but even the priests, and scribes, and elders, insisted upon the same thing ([ver. 41-43.](#)) “Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save: if he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” By this passage you see what it was the Jews expected; that if our Saviour had been the Son of God, he should have saved himself; when they went about to crucify him, that God should have rescued him out of their hands, and given some extraordin-



ary testimony from heaven to his innocence; and, for this reason, the preaching of Christ crucified was very offensive to them: "The Jews require a sign; but we preach Christ crucified."

Such was the temper and disposition of the Jews: but now the gentiles, according to their way of institution, expected that the apostles should have discoursed to them upon philosophical principles, and have demonstrated things to them in their way. "The Greeks seek after wisdom;" they were great searchers after wisdom and knowledge, and they valued nothing but what had the appearance of it, and what was delivered with great sharpness of wit and reasoning, and set off with art and eloquence. Had the apostles pretended to some new theory of natural or moral philosophy, and discoursed to them about the first principles of all things, about the chief good, or about the nature of the soul, they would have heard them with great patience and delight. Nothing but deep and subtle speculations, about these kind of arguments, did relish with them, and please their palates. But the history of our Saviour, his life, and death, and resurrection, and the plain precepts of his doctrine, were dry and insipid things to them, and were so far from having a shew of wisdom and philosophy, that they appeared foolish and ridiculous to them.

But the design of God in the Christian religion, being not to please the humour and gratify the curiosity of men; but really to do them good, and to reform the manners of mankind, he used quite another method; which, how offensive soever it might be to those who thought themselves wise, yet it was really the wisest and most powerful means to that end: so the apostle tells us here in the text: "But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness: but unto them that are called, (that is, to those whose minds are duly prepared to consider things impartially, and to receive the truth) the power of God, and the wisdom of God;" a most wise and powerful means to reform the world, an eminent instance of the Divine power and wisdom.

In these words we have these two things considerable:

First, The exception which the world took at the doctrine of the gospel, upon account of our Saviour's sufferings: Christ crucified was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness."

Secondly, That notwithstanding the seeming unreasonableness and absurdity of it, it was a most wise and effectual contrivance for the end to which it was designed and appointed: "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." I shall speak something to each of these, as briefly and plainly as I can. I begin with the

First, The exception which the world took at the doctrine of the gospel, upon account of our Saviour's sufferings. The world were generally offended at it, but not all upon the same account; the Jews took one kind of exception against it, and the heathen another: "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." They were both offended at the same thing, the low and suffering condition of our Saviour;

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but not upon the same reason. The Jews thought, that this mean appearance and condition of our Saviour, was unsuitable to the power of God; and the heathen, that it was not agreeable to the wisdom of men.

The Jews, from the tradition of their fathers, to which (just as the church of Rome does now-a-days) they paid a greater reverence than to the written word of God, were possessed with a strong persuasion, that the Messiah whom they expected, and was foretold by the prophets, was to be a great temporal prince, to appear in great splendour and glory, to be a mighty conqueror, and not only to free them from the Roman yoke, which they were then under; but to subdue all nations to them, and so bring them under their dominion and government. And this did so generally prevail among them, that even the disciples of our Saviour were as strongly possessed with this conceit as any of the rest; insomuch that the mother of James and John made it her solemn request to our Saviour, that “her two sons might sit, one on his right-hand, and the other on his left, in his kingdom.” And though he had told his disciples just before, that he “must go up to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the scribes and pharisees, and be betrayed and put to death;” yet the other conceit of his temporal dominion and greatness did so possess their minds, that “they could not understand this saying, and it was hid from them that they perceived it not,” as St. Luke tells us. ([Luke ix. 45.](#)) Nay, even after his death and resurrection, when he appeared to them, this still stuck in their minds, as appears by that question which they asked him immediately before his ascension: ([Acts i. 6.](#)) “When they were come together, they asked of him, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” They took it for granted, the Messiah would do it one time or other, and they inquire of him, whether that were the time.

So that the Jews being so firmly fixed in this conceit of the temporal reign of the Messiah, nothing could be a greater stumbling-block to them, than the mean and suffering condition in which our Saviour appeared. The meanness of his birth and life was a great objection against him; but when they saw him put to death so ignominiously, and that he did not then shew his glory and power, to save himself from that cruel and shameful death, they could rather believe any thing than that this was the Messiah foretold, and whom they had so long expected. They made full account that the Messiah, whenever he came, would live in great splendour and glory, and do great things for the advantage and honour of their nation; the least they expected from him, was their deliverance from the Roman yoke, and the establishing of the throne of David for ever; or if his beginning had been obscure, that he would at last break forth in great lustre and majesty; or if they could have supposed that the Messiah should be persecuted, and condemned, and nailed to the cross, yet they doubted not but then God would have given testimony to him by some sign from heaven, and have rescued him from the cross in a miraculous manner: but seeing nothing of all this, nothing but poverty and meanness, reproach and suffering attending him, they concluded, whatever miracles he pretended to, this could not be the Son of God, the true Messiah.



On the other side, the heathen philosophers, who were not possessed with these conceits about the Messiah, they were offended at the unreasonableness and folly, as they thought, of the apostles doctrine, who went about to persuade the world, that a man, who had lately suffered and was crucified at Jerusalem, was a great prophet come into the world; nay, the Son of God, in whom all men ought to believe, and by whom they ought to hope for life and salvation: as if it were reasonable to think, that God would have exposed the most innocent and virtuous person that ever was, to so great reproach and sufferings, that the Son of God should die, and that life and immortality were to be hoped for from him, who was crucified and put to death. This they looked upon as a story so ill-framed, that to all wise and sagacious men, it destroyed its own credit and belief. For though they said he was risen again from the dead, yet before that could be entertained by men of philosophical minds, there were many deep points to be determined, as concerning the nature of the soul, and whether it can subsist separately from the body, and whether a body once dead can be restored to life again, and re-united to the soul.



And as for his doctrine, which the apostles pretended to deliver, it was a plain and rude thing, without art or eloquence, nothing of deep speculation, or strict demonstration in it: in short, so far from being worthy of “a teacher come from God,” that it was below the pitch of an ordinary philosopher. These and such-like things were, in all probability, the exceptions which the heathen philosophers took as the apostles preaching, concerning our Saviour’s death and his doctrine; and they had some colour in them.

But, upon impartial examination, it will appear, that, notwithstanding these exceptions, the sufferings of our Saviour, considered with all the circumstances that belong to them, were a very wise and effectual method made use of by Almighty God, for the reforming and saving the world. Which brings me to the

Second thing propounded to speak to from these words; namely, To vindicate the wisdom of this design and contrivance of Almighty God, for the salvation of mankind by the sufferings of his Son, from the seeming absurdity and unreasonableness of it. “But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” And,



First, The Jews had no sufficient ground to be so much offended at the sufferings of the Messiah. For,

I. They had no reason to expect that the Messiah should be a great temporal prince, if they had attended to the predictions of their prophets concerning him, which ought to have been their rule: for they affirm no such thing of him. All that they say of him, plainly refers to a spiritual kingdom, that he should “rule in righteousness,” that he should “preach the gospel to the poor, and open the eyes of the blind, and unstop the ears of the deaf, and make the lame walk;” that he should “finish transgression, and make an end of sin, and make intercession for iniquity, and bring in ever lasting righteousness.” So that, if they had not entertained a very groundless and carnal conceit concerning him, they could not so widely

have mistaken the ancient prophecies of him, which ought to have guided them in these matters, and which they might have seen all plainly fulfilled in the person of our Saviour.

II. The predictions concerning him do most expressly foretel his death and sufferings, and that with very particular circumstances: David in the 22d Psalm: Isaiah quite throughout his 53d chapter: and Daniel does particularly point out the time when he should be cut off. So that they had all the reason in the world to expect that the Messiah, when he came, should be “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief;” that he should be scourged and buffeted, oppressed and afflicted, and at last “cut off out of the land of the living.” Nay, if it had been other wise, they had had no reason to have owned him for the true Messiah.

III. As for signs to evidence him to be the Son of God; though God did not gratify their curiosity as to the nature and manner of them, yet he gave the greatest testimonies that ever were given to any prophet, and abundantly enough to satisfy any reasonable man, that he was “a teacher come from God.” Indeed, his miracles were not generally so prodigious and amazing: but they were many and public, they were useful and beneficial to mankind; and for that reason, more likely to come from God. He did not call for fire from heaven to destroy his enemies; but he gave sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, and health to those that were sick of the most dangerous and inveterate diseases, and (which was always reckoned among the greatest and most undoubted kind of miracles) life to the dead. And when he himself was put to death by the malice of the Jews, though he did not “come down from the cross,” and was not rescued from his sufferings by an immediate hand from heaven, to triumph over the malice and cruelty which they were exercising upon him (which was the miracle they required to be shewn), yet God was not wanting to give testimony to him in a most remarkable manner, by prodigies which immediately followed his death; in the strange darkness which came upon the land; in the terrible earthquake which rent the veil of the temple, and tore the rocks asunder; in the opening of the graves, and the rising of the dead; and, lastly, in his own miraculous resurrection, the third day after he was crucified: so that here was no sign wanting in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, to convince their obstinacy and unbelief, unless it were that very sign which they demanded. God did enough to satisfy every man’s reason; and he is not wont to gratify the humour and curiosity of men. If men be so unreasonable as to expect this from him, God lets such men continue in their wilful blindness and infidelity.

Secondly, Neither had the heathen philosophers reason, upon account of the story of our Saviour’s sufferings, to look upon the gospel as so absurd and unreasonable a thing; as will, I hope, evidently appear, if you will be pleased to consider with me these following particulars:

I. That there is nothing more inculcated in the writings of the wisest and most famous of the heathen philosophers than this, that worldly greatness and prosperity is not to be



admired, but despised by a truly wise man. Aristotle, in his Ethics, makes it the property of a magnanimous and great spirit, not to admire greatness and power, and victory, and riches. So that, according to their own principles, our Saviour was not to be despised upon account of his meanness and sufferings. He might be a great prophet and come from God, though he enjoyed nothing of worldly greatness and prosperity.

II. They tell us, likewise, that men may be very virtuous and good, and dearly beloved of God, and yet be liable to great miseries and sufferings. And to this purpose I could bring you almost innumerable testimonies out of the books of the philosophers. Max. Tyrius, the Platonist, speaking of Ulysses, says, that “the gods forced him to wander, and beg, and wear rags; and suffered him to be reproached and reviled, for the love and friendship that they bare to him.” Epictetus, a poor slave, but inferior to none of all the philosophers for true virtue and wisdom, thanks the gods for his mean condition, and says, “He did not believe himself to be one jot the less beloved by them for that reason; and that he was not cast into a state of poverty and contempt, because the gods hated him, but that he might be fit to be a witness to others.”

III. They tell us, likewise, that a state of affliction and suffering is so far from rendering a man unfit to reform the world, and to be an example of virtue, that none so fit as those that are in such circumstances. Arrian, in his dissertations of Epictetus, describing a man fit to reform the world, whom he calls “the apostle and messenger, the minister and preacher of God to mankind,” gives this character of him: “He must (says he) be without house and harbour, and destitute of all worldly accommodations; (just as it is said of our Saviour, that the “Son of man had not where to lay his head;”) he must be armed with such a patience by the greatest sufferings, as if he were a stone and devoid of sense; he must be a spectacle of misery and contempt to the world.” And, to mention no more, Plato, in the second book of his Commonwealth, when he would represent a righteous man giving the most unquestionable testimony to the world of his virtue, “Let him (says he) be stripped of all things in this world, except his righteousness; let him be poor and diseased, and accounted a wicked and unjust man: let him be whipped, and tormented, and crucified as a malefactor; and yet all this while retain his integrity;” which does so exactly agree with our Saviour’s condition, that had he not wrote before his time, one would have thought he had alluded to it.

IV. As it seems very convenient, (I am not so bold as to say it was necessary, and that God had no other way to bring about the salvation of men; for what are we, that we should prescribe to God, and set bounds to infinite wisdom?) I say, as it seems very reasonable, that, in order to our salvation, the Son of God, who was the author of it, should become man, both that he might be an example of holiness, and an expiation for sin; and that he should be born after the manner of other men, to satisfy us, that he was really of the same nature with us, that so he might converse more familiarly with us, and might be a more



easy, and encouraging, and imitable example of all holiness and virtue; so likewise was it convenient, that he should be subject to the miseries and sufferings of our nature, that, by passing through the several states and conditions of humanity, he might have an experimental knowledge of the sufferings that human nature is liable to; and from his own sense of our infirmities, might be a more merciful and compassionate high-priest. And this the apostle expressly takes notice of, ([Heb. v.](#)) that it was convenient that “our High-priest should be taken from among men,” that he might learn to be compassionate, by knowing experimentally what it was to be tempted and afflicted; the knowledge of experience being the strongest motive and incitement to piety; and consequently to give us the greater assurance of his tender affection to us.

It was of great use that he should live in so mean and afflicted a condition, to confound the pride, and vanity, and fantasy of the world, and to convince men of these two great truths, that God may love those whom he afflicts, and that men may be innocent, and virtuous, and contented, in the midst of poverty, and reproach, and suffering. Had our blessed Saviour been a great worldly prince, his influence and example might possibly have made more hypocrites and servile converts, but it would not have tended one whit to make men more inwardly good and virtuous. The great arguments that must do this, must be fetched, not from the pomp and prosperity of this world, but from the happiness and misery of the other. Besides, had our Saviour appeared in any great power and splendour, the Christian religion could not have so clearly been acquitted from the suspicion of a worldly interest and design.

And then the Scripture assigns very plain and excellent reasons of his suffering of death; that he might make expiation for the sins of the whole world, that he might take away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and put an end to that troublesome and unreasonable way of worship by sacrifice, which was in use both among Jews and heathens, and that, by conquering death, and him that had the power of it, he might “deliver those, who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage,” as the apostle speaks, ([Heb. ii. 14.](#)) For though the death of Christ, barely considered in itself, be far from an encouragement to us to hope for immortality; yet the death of Christ, considered together with his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, is the clearest, and most sensible, and most popular demonstration that ever was in the world, of another life after this, and a blessed immortality. So that, considering our Saviour rose from the dead, it is far from being ridiculous, to rely upon one that died, for our hopes of immortality.

V. As for the plainness of our Saviour’s doctrine and of the instruments whereby it was propagated, this is so far from being an objection against it, that it is the great commendation of it. It contains a plain narrative of our Saviour’s life, and miracles, and death, and resurrection, and ascension into heaven, and a few plain precepts of life; but the most excellent and reasonable, and the freest from all vanity and folly, that are to be met with in any book in



the world. And can any thing be more worthy of God, or more likely to proceed from him, than so plain and useful a doctrine as this? Lawgivers do not use to deliver their laws in eloquent language, to set them off with flourish of speech, and to persuade men to a liking of them by subtle and artificial insinuations; but plainly, and in few words, to declare their will and pleasure.

And for the instruments God was pleased to make use of for the publishing of this doctrine, we grant they were generally rude and unlearned men, and our religion hath no reason to be ashamed of it; for this was very agreeable to the simplicity of the whole design, that all things should be managed in the plainest manner; that Christianity might be introduced in such a way, as there might be no possible suspicion of a, human contrivance, or worldly design in it.

The religion itself was simple and plain, there were no worldly inducements to the embracing of it, but all imaginable discouragements upon that account; the instruments of propagating it were simple and plain men, unassisted by learning or art, by secular power and authority; which is so far from being a disparagement to our religion, that it is a great reputation to it, and a plain evidence of its Divine original, that it was from God, and was countenanced and carried on by him, “not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord.”

And in truth, considering the nature of this doctrine, which consisted either of plain matter of fact, or of easy and familiar precepts, and rules for a good life, the apostles were as fit for the propagating of it, as any sort of persons in the world: for it did not require depth of understanding, or sharpness of wit to comprehend it, and declare it to others; but honesty and integrity of mind, zeal and industry to promote it; in which qualities the apostles excelled the philosophers and best learned persons in the world: and provided an instrument be sufficient and competent for its end, it matters not how plain and unpolished it be; for instruments are not intended for ornaments, but for use. Now the apostles of our Saviour, though they were illiterate and unbred, were as competent witnesses of matter of fact, as any other persons: for there is no wit and learning required, to relate what a man hath seen and heard. Nay, the more simple and plain, the less eloquent and artificial any relation is, the more likely it is to be true, and to gain belief.

Thus you see, that, notwithstanding the seeming unreasonableness and absurdity of the doctrine of the gospel, it is a most wise and effectual contrivance for the reforming and saving of mankind. “But unto them that are called, both Jews and gentiles, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”

The proper inference from all this is, to stir us up to a thankful acknowledgment and admiration of the wisdom and goodness of God, in the salvation of men by Jesus Christ. We are most apt to admire that wisdom which finds out such means to an end, as human wisdom would have been least apt to devise and hit upon; and yet the more we consider

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them, the more we must approve their fitness. Such is the design of the recovery and redemption of mankind, by the death and sufferings of the Son of God. However it may appear to rash and inconsiderate men, who judge superficially, and according to the uppermost appearances of things, to be a very unlikely and improbable design; yet, upon a thorough and impartial examination of things, we shall find that God's way is the wisest, and that, in the management of this design, he hath outdone the utmost prudence and wisdom of men, and hath ordered things to infinitely more advantage, than they would have been, in any of those methods which the short and imperfect wisdom of carnal men would have been most apt to pitch upon. Ignorant, and conceited, and prejudiced men, may censure it for folly; but the angels, more intelligent and discerning creatures than we are, and of a deeper reach, do look upon it with wonder and astonishment. So the apostle tells us: (1 Pet. i. 12.) where, speaking of the gospel, he calls it a thing "which the angels desire to look into." An allusion to the cherubims, who looked earnestly upon the mercy-seat which was over the ark, as if they would pry into it.

And then let us acknowledge the infinite goodness of God, in saving us by the death and sufferings of his Son, us vile and miserable sinners. Had we been the most innocent and righteous, and the dearest friends to him in the world, what could he have done more? How could he possibly have testified greater love to us, than to give his Son to die for us? Here is goodness without bounds, love without parallel and example; for "greater love than this hath no man, that a man should lay down his life for his friend." This is the highest pitch that human affection ever attained to, to die for one's friend: but herein hath God commended his love to us, that, while we were enemies, he gave his Son to die for us.

This is that which we are to commemorate at this season, and by the commemoration thereof, to prepare ourselves for the receiving of the blessed sacrament of his body and blood, which was broken and shed for us. The consideration whereof, as it should excite in us a hearty sorrow and repentance for sin, so should it also inflame us with love to Christ, who, by suffering such things for us, hath laid upon us an eternal obligation of love and obedience to him. The remembrance of whose death should not only put us into a present fit and passion of grief and love, but should be the ground of lasting affections and resolutions; the thoughts of what he hath done and suffered for us, should make us ambitious to do or suffer any thing for him. What should not we be willing to part with for him, who did not think his own life and his glory dear to him for our sakes? Did he die for us? and shall we think much to live to him? Did he become miserable for our sakes? and shall we think much to become holy and happy for his sake and for our own?

Such affections and holy resolutions the consideration of our Saviour's death and sufferings should be apt to excite in us. What grief, what love, what thankfulness, should the remembrance of his dying love work in us! when we consider seriously the many and the mighty blessings and benefits which flow to us out of his wounds, and are taking the cup of



salvation into our hands, how should “our souls, and all that is within us, bless his holy name, who pardoneth all our iniquities, and healeth all our diseases; who redeemed our life from destruction, and crowneth us with loving-kindness and tender mercy.” To him, therefore, our gracious and good God, let us give all thanks, adoration, and praise. Amen.



SERMON CXCII.

THE EVIDENCE OF OUR SAVIOUR'S RESURRECTION.

To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.—Acts i. 3.

THESE words comprehend in short the whole evidence of our Saviour's resurrection, which maybe referred to these four heads:

First, His appearance to them after his death and passion: "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion." "To whom;" that is, to the apostles whom St. Luke had mentioned just before: "After he had given commandment to the apostles, whom he had chosen; to whom also," &c.

Secondly, The proof of the reality of his appearance: "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs;" ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηριοῖς, "*idque compluribus argumentis*," saith Erasmus, "and that by many certain and undoubted proofs, or arguments."

Thirdly, The duration and continuance of his appearance to them: "Being seen of them forty days."

Fourthly, The subject matter of his discourse with them: "And speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Each of these affords us a considerable evidence of Christ's resurrection.

First, His appearance to them after his death and passion: "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion." In which words there are three things very considerable, and which give great evidence to our Saviour's resurrection.

I. His appearance to his apostles.

II. That he was really alive, and his body vitally united to his soul.

III. And this after he was really dead—"after his passion;" that is, after he was crucified, dead, and buried, he was raised to life again. I shall speak briefly of these.

I. His appearance to his apostles: "To whom also he shewed himself alive." The apostles are here only mentioned, because this is here spoken of, in order to their designation and appointment to be the witnesses of Christ's resurrection to the world, as the great confirmation of that doctrine which they were to publish: but because I am considering his appearance after his resurrection, as an evidence of the truth of it, I shall therefore take in his appearance to others also of his disciples and followers; and consider, likewise, why he only appeared to his own followers, and not also to the unbelieving Jews, who had put him to death, for the full conviction of his enemies and murderers, and the conversion of that whole nation, to whom he was primarily sent.

In considering his several appearances, not only to his apostles, but to his other disciples and followers, that I may give the shortest and fullest view of them, I shall take them as they

are briefly summed up by St. Paul; (1 Cor. xv. 4, &c.) where, giving an account of the sum of his doctrine among the Corinthians, he tells us, that the foundation of all his preaching was the death and resurrection of Christ. "I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." And then follows the particular evidence of his resurrection: (ver. 5.) "And that he was seen of Cephas." St. Paul here takes no notice of his first appearance to the devout women, who brought spices and ointments to his sepulchre; "Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women," as we find, Luke xxiv. 10. The reason of which seems to be this: because his first appearance was in consideration of their piety and affection to him, and of the weakness of their sex, their faith being liable to be first staggered; and they were only to relate it to the apostles, and to be honoured with carrying the first news of it, not to be witnesses of it to the world; so that this appearance was only for the private confirmation of their faith, and therefore not particularly taken notice of by St. Paul among the public evidences of Christ's resurrection.

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"He was seen of Cephas." This is mentioned Luke xxiv. 34. "The Lord is risen, indeed, and hath appeared to Simon."

St. Paul goes on; "And then of the twelve." The college of the apostles, because their number was twelve by our Saviour's institution, are most frequently called "The Twelve," though at some meetings some one of them might perhaps be absent: it is true there was a short interruption by the miscarriage of Judas, from the time of our Saviour's apprehension to his ascension, and then they are called "The Eleven," as before and after they are called "The Twelve:" yea, at this first appearance of our Saviour to them, when they were but ten, Thomas being absent, they are called "The Eleven." (Mark xvi. 14.) "He appeared to the eleven as they sat at meat;" because they were then but eleven in all. And, indeed, in this text of St. Paul, both the Vulgar translation, which certainly follows a very ancient copy, and St. Ambrose there, instead of twelve, render it eleven; so that St. Paul probably means our Saviour's first appearance to them, mentioned by St. Mark, where they are also called "The Eleven," though Thomas was absent; which is the reason why St. Paul says afterwards at the 7th verse, that he was seen of all the apostles, that is, Thomas also being present, as I shall shew by and by.

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"After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once." This was the most solemn appearance of all, mentioned Matt. xxviii. 10. and John xxi. 1. where our Saviour appointed a general meeting of all his disciples and followers. "Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there they shall see me." (Ver. 16.) "They went into Galilee into a mountain, where Jesus had appointed them." This mountain, according to the ancient tradition, was Mount Thabor.

There is one considerable difficulty concerning the greatness of this number of five hundred; namely, that after our Saviour's ascension we find, ([Acts i. 15.](#)) that after their return from Mount Olivet (from whence our Saviour ascended) to Jerusalem, the whole number of their meeting was but a hundred and twenty, for so it is expressly said—"the number of names together, were about a hundred and twenty;" that is, of the persons there met. Now we cannot reasonably suppose that any of those five hundred, who had seen him after his resurrection, were fallen off from them.

For the clear solution of this, it is to be considered, that the great meeting of five hundred was in Galilee, where our Saviour's residence chiefly had been, and where he had preached most constantly, and by consequence he had probably there the greatest number of followers, which was the reason why he chose to appear there, and appointed that place for the general meeting. After which, the apostles who went thither by our Lord's appointment, together with others who accompanied them from Jerusalem, returned back: but his followers who lived in Galilee remained there; so that there might very well be five hundred at the meeting in Galilee, and but a hundred and twenty at Jerusalem.

St. Paul goes on; ([ver. 7.](#)) "After that he was seen of James." This particular appearance of our Lord to St. James, the brother of our Lord, is no where mentioned in the evangelists. St. Paul, probably, had it from the common tradition mentioned by St. Jerome, out of the Hebrew gospel of the Nazarenes, in which are several passages omitted by St. Matthew, and this for one; "That our Lord immediately after he had risen, went and appeared to James: for James had vowed that hour that he drank of the cup of the Lord, (*viz.* in the sacrament) he would not eat bread, till he saw him risen from the dead. The Lord, when he appeared to him, said, Bring hither bread and a table; and he took the bread, and blessed and brake it, and gave it to James the Just, and said to him, My brother eat thy bread; for the Son of man is risen from among them that sleep." To this tradition St. Paul probably alludes; but then ἐπεῖτα, which we translate afterwards or then, ought to be rendered, as it elsewhere is, *præterea, besides*, "moreover he appeared to James," without denoting the order of the time; for, according to the tradition, it was presently after his resurrection, before he had appeared to the other apostles.

It follows, "Then he was seen of all the apostles;" that is, by Thomas, as well as the rest. And this was his second appearance to the apostles together; of which St. Luke gives us an account, ([Luke xxiv. 5.](#)) and St. John, ([chap. xx. 19.](#))

"And last of all, he was (says St. Paul) seen of me also, as an abortive," or one born out of due time. This he speaks of the appearance of our Lord to him in his way to Damascus, whereby he was in a very powerful and extraordinary manner, on a sudden, converted to Christianity.

Thus I have given you an account of the several appearances of our Saviour, not only to the apostles, but to others, and have endeavoured to explain the chief difficulties relating

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to them; so that here is a very plentiful testimony of our Saviour's appearance after his resurrection. I proceed to the

II. Second thing here observable, That our Lord was really alive when he thus appeared, and his body vitally united to his soul: "to whom also he shewed himself alive." To which purpose, there is a remarkable passage in Ignatius, in his epistle to the church of Smyrna, out of the same Hebrew Nazarene Gospel; "That Christ said to Peter, after his resurrection, Behold, touch me, and see that I am not a spirit that have assumed a body." For that was one great objection—that his body was not a real body united to his soul, but a thin airy body, such as are assumed by spectres and apparitions. But the farther evidence of this I refer to the second general head, concerning the proofs of the reality of his appearance. I proceed to the

III. Third thing I observed; viz. That he appeared alive after he had been really dead; "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion," says the text; that is, after he was crucified, and dead, and buried, he was raised and restored to life again. And this likewise is necessary, to evidence the truth and reality of his resurrection, that he was really dead. That this was so, we cannot doubt, whether we consider the malice of the Jews, who would take care he should be dead before he was taken from the cross; or the manner of his death, his heart being pierced by the spear, which was evident from the water and blood which came out of his side, which shewed that his heart was mortally wounded; or the time of his being in the grave, which was part of three days.

And now, if he was really dead, his restitution to life, which we call his resurrection, must be miraculous; it being beyond any natural power, that we know of, to effect it.

As for that malicious tradition of the Jews, that he was stolen out of his grave by his disciples, while the watch was asleep, and given out to be risen from the dead; besides the undeniable proofs of his resurrection, which I shall produce by and by, the evidence which these suborned witnesses gave of his disciples stealing away his body destroys itself; for they said, "his disciples came by night, and stole him away, while we slept;" which amounts to no more, but that, when they awaked, his body was some way or other conveyed or gone out of the grave; which is consistent with his resurrection. But surely none will think fit to give credit to what they testify was done while they were asleep. They are very willing to believe a thing, who will admit of such a deposition.

Thus much concerning our Saviour's appearance to his disciples and followers after his resurrection. I shall briefly consider, in the

Second place, Why he only appeared to his own followers, and not also to the unbelieving Jews, who had put him to death, for the full conviction of his enemies and murderers, and the conversion of that whole nation to whom he was primarily sent.

Of this matter, so far as is fit for us to inquire into the reason of the Divine dispensations, this probable account may be given:

1. It was only of absolute necessity, that those who were to be the first publishers of the gospel, and the witnesses of his resurrection to the world, should have the utmost evidence and satisfaction concerning the reality of it: others might very soon credit it upon the testimony of so many witnesses, who also gave evidence to the truth of their testimony, by the miracles which they wrought; and of their own sincerity, by dying for this testimony. And thus St. Peter takes notice of the reason why our Lord, after his resurrection, did not appear to all the people, but only to select witnesses: because his appearance was necessary only to those, who were designed and appointed to be the witnesses of it. If more had been necessary, he must, by the same reason, have appeared to all the world, as well as to the Jews: ([Acts x. 40, 41.](#)) “Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead; and he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify,” &c.

2. The unbelieving Jews, especially the chief priests and rulers, upon whose authority the people depended, were very unworthy, to whom God should afford so extraordinary a way of conviction, who had already despised and rejected so great evidence as was offered to them: and not only so, but maliciously imputed the plainest miracles that ever were wrought amongst them, to the power and operation of the devil. Now if any thing can render men incapable of the favour of farther means of conviction, such a malicious resistance of the evidence which our Saviour's miracles daily wrought among them, carried along with them, would probably do it: especially if we consider, that the greatest of all the miracles which he wrought in his life-time (I mean the raising of Lazarus from the dead, after he had been dead four days), was so far from convincing them, though they could not deny the thing, that from thence their malice took occasion to resolve to put him to death; ([John xi. 47.](#)) “Then gathered the chief priests and pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles: if we let him alone, all men will believe on him.” And, ([ver. 53.](#)) “Therefore from that day they took counsel together to put him to death.” Now was it reasonable that he should appear to them for their conviction, after he was risen from the dead, who maliciously conspired to compass his death, for this very cause, because they knew that he had raised one from the dead?

3. This would have been inconsistent with that just punishment, which God had determined to bring upon the Jewish nation for their obstinate in fidelity, and malicious rejection, and cruel usage of the Son of God. After fitting means used for the conviction of men, it is just with God to let men remain in their own obstinate infidelity, and to punish them for it. And it is not to be expected, that God should use violent and irresistible means, to bring such persons to repentance, and to prevent their ruin. He pities the weakness and infirmities of honest minds, and condescends to give them such evidence as it is reasonable to demand; as he did to his disciples: but he hath not thought fit to provide so extraordinary a remedy for wilful and obstinate infidelity; which was the case of the scribes and pharisees.

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Secondly, We will consider the proofs of the reality of our Saviour's appearance after his resurrection: "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs;" ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηριοῖς, a by many certain and undoubted proofs or arguments;" for so the words properly signify, as Quintilian from Aristotle tells us: τεκμήρια, says he, are *indubitata et necessaria signa*, "undoubted and necessary signs of a thing;" as the actions of speaking, walking, eating, and drinking, are the τεκμήρια, undoubted signs, of life.

And these τεκμήρια, or undoubted proofs of our Saviour's resurrection, may be referred to these two heads—the natural, and the supernatural and miraculous evidences of the thing.

1. The natural evidence of the thing to their senses; to their eyes, the quickest and surest of senses, men being least apt to be deceived in those things, *quæ sunt oculis commissa fidelibus*, "which are committed to such faithful witnesses as our own eyes." He was seen of all his disciples, not once, but several times; not by a transient view and glance, but in a way of the most familiar conversation; he discoursed with them, and did eat and drink with them, and with the same circumstances that he used in his life-time, he gave thanks, and brake bread with them: he suffered his body to be touched by them, that they might be convinced that it was a real body, consisting of flesh and bones: (Luke xxiv. 39.) "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as you see me have."

And to convince them, beyond all doubt and scruple, that the very same body was raised in which he had suffered, he gives them leave to handle the wounds of his hands and feet; (Luke xxiv. 39.) "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is myself." (John xx. 20.) "He shewed them his hands and his side." And to Thomas, who was more unbelieving than the rest, he says, in the presence of them all, (ver. 27.) "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands: and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." But, besides this natural sensible evidence, he gave them likewise,

2. A supernatural and miraculous evidence. St. John mentions two or three instances: his coining on the sudden upon them, and standing in the midst of them when the doors were shut. Not that he passed through the door with his body, which is not a miracle, but a plain impossibility, and therefore just as fit to countenance transubstantiation as one impossibility is to prove another; but that he did miraculously open the door, and come in upon them so quickly, as was undiscernible to them; which very man will grant not only to be possible, but easy to the Divine power. But this way of our Saviour's conveying himself into the midst of his disciples, though it be also miraculous, yet the church of Rome will by no means allow it; it is too plain, and easy to be reconciled with the nature and possibility of things; they love at their hearts a lying wonder, a foppish miracle.

And this miracle was repeated twice; first when Thomas was absent, (John xx. 19.) and when he was present the same was done again, (ver. 26.)

And then the miraculous draught of fishes, by which also he had made himself known to them in his life-time.

And then Peter's casting himself into the sea, when he knew it was he, in confidence of that Divine power, which, in the like kind, he had experience of before.

These miracles St. John mentions; but he tells us, ([chap. xx. 30.](#)) that "many other miracles Jesus did in the presence of his disciples, which are not set down in that book." The

Third thing in the text is, The duration and continuance of his appearing to them, "being seen of them forty days." And this is of great moment to confirm the reality of the thing: a man may for once be imposed upon by an illusion of fancy, in a thing which he vehemently desires and expects, and which runs strongly in his mind: but where there is time to examine things, and compare all circumstances together, and to look narrowly into them, and to try them by several senses, and at several times, for so long a space, it is morally, nay, almost naturally impossible, that any one man in his senses, much more so many hundreds of persons, should, in such circumstances, be grossly deluded in a plain sensible matter of fact.

Fourthly, and lastly, Here is the subject-matter of our Saviour's discourse with his disciples, concerning things which "pertain to the kingdom of God; or, as it is in the verse before, "after he had by the Holy Ghost (which was not given him by measure, as the evangelist tells us elsewhere) given commandment to his apostles, whom he had chosen:" that is, after he had given the full orders and instructions concerning the doctrine which they were to publish, and all other things pertaining to that spiritual kingdom which he was setting up in the world: by the agreement of all which, with what he had said to them in his life-time, they were more and more confirmed that it was the very same person whom they had conversed with before for above three years together. And yet in this discourse concerning his kingdom, he reserved some things to be afterward revealed to them by the Holy Ghost, according as he had promised, "that when the Spirit of truth was come, he should teach them all things;" particularly concerning the spiritual nature of his kingdom, which they did not yet fully understand, as appears by that question which they put to him, ([ver. 6.](#)) "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom unto Israel?" They still dreamed of a temporal kingdom, in which our Saviour would appear in great pomp and splendour to subdue the world to them.

From all this discourse which I have made, you see what evidence the apostles, who were to be the first publishers of the gospel, and witnesses of Christ's resurrection, had of the truth and reality of it; so plentiful, and clear, and convincing, as nothing more could either be desired or expected. And we have a credible relation of these things brought down to us, abundantly sufficient to satisfy those who are free from the bias of passion or interest, or the prejudice and prepossession of a contrary religion in which they have been educated and brought up, and sufficient to gain some few ingenuous and teachable persons here and there, who do more impartially consider things; and though they have been educated in a contrary religion, yet have preserved in themselves a greater freedom of judgment than education does usually leave in the minds of men.



But yet this credible relation of actions and miracles done long ago, how true soever in itself, does not carry so present, and sensible, and strong a conviction with it, as to be able to bear down in the common people the violent prejudice of education in a contrary religion, and consequently is not likely to do any great matter of itself toward the conversion of infidel nations.

And therefore the Divine wisdom, which does no thing that is superfluous and unnecessary, thought fit, not only to send the apostles armed with this evidence, which had abundantly convinced them, to testify the resurrection of Christ to the world, but also to give an immediate testimony to them, by enabling them to work present miracles upon the spot, for the confirmation of their testimony. And this Divine power which went along with them, was a sensible testimony and conviction both to the knowing and ignorant part of mankind, that they were teachers and witnesses sent by God; and therefore our Lord commands them, “not to depart from Jerusalem, till they had received power from on high,” to qualify them to be witnesses of Christ’s resurrection, not only in Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, but to the utmost parts of the earth.

And this I still believe to be the case of those many nations of the world, that are yet under the violent, and almost invincible, prejudice of education in another religion. That which may reasonably satisfy us who are brought up in the Christian religion, is not likely to be effectual enough to convince them; and, therefore, I think it still very credible, that if persons of sincere minds did go to preach the pure Christian religion, free from those errors and superstitions which have crept into it, to infidel nations, that God would still enable such persons to work miracles; without which there would be little or no probability of success. For as the wisdom of God is not wont to do that which is superfluous, so neither to be wanting in that which is necessary; and though the morality of the Christian religion be admirable, and very apt to recommend itself to the reason of mankind, yet the doctrine of the death of the Son of God would be such a stumbling-block, as would be hard for them to get over; and the relation of ancient miracles would not easily be admitted, by those who are utterly strangers to our histories of former times; and, consequently, not so fit to judge of what credit and value they are.

It is not good to be confident where we are not certain; but this I piously believe, that God would extraordinarily countenance such an attempt by all fitting assistance, as he did the first publication of the gospel; because the reason and necessity is plainly the same in this case as it was at first. For if God did not think the apostles naked testimony, unless it were armed with miracles, sufficient for the conviction of the world, concerning the resurrection of Christ, of which themselves had been eye-witnesses, much less can we expect to gain credit, who only carry the relation of these ancient matters of fact, attested by histories to which they are wholly strangers.

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And I do strongly hope, that there still remains a great harvest among the gentiles, yet to be gained to Christianity before the end of the world; and that the providence of God will, in his own appointed time, make a further step in the conversion of the infidel nations; and that more of the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ; and that yet before the end of all things, the light of the gospel shall be displayed in a glorious manner, not only in those vast empires of Tartary, and China, and Japan, and Hindostan, and other great kingdoms of the east, but in the large and dark regions of the new-discovered world; for that solemn promise which God made to his Son, ([Psal. ii. 8.](#)) “Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession,” seems to be very far from being yet fully accomplished; and since this is like to be the work of some ages, the time, perhaps, is not far off, when it shall begin: and though I see no sufficient grounds from Scripture to believe the personal reign of Christ upon earth for a thousand years; yet it seems to be not improbable, that some time before the end of the world, the glorious kingdom of Christ, I mean the prevalency of the pure Christian religion, should be of as long continuance, as the reigns of Mahomet and Antichrist have been, both which have now lasted about a thousand years.

For it is clear, that the “fulness of the gentiles” is not yet come in, because the Jews still continue dispersed over the world, which is the mark our Saviour hath given of the call and restitution of the Jews: ([Luke xxi. 24.](#)) “They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the gentiles, until the time of the gentiles be fulfilled.” And thus St. Paul explains to us this prediction of our Saviour: ([Rom. xi. 25.](#)) “I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, that blindness, in part, is happened unto Israel, until the fulness of the gentiles be come in.”

So that this we have reason to expect, and this let us pray for, “That the knowledge of the Lord may fill the earth, as the waters cover the sea; that his ways may be known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations;” and with St. Paul, “Let our hearty desire and prayer for Israel be, that they may be saved; that there may come out of Sion a deliverer, and he may turn away unrighteousness from Jacob;” especially, since St. Paul hath given us reason to hope, that this would be of so great benefit and advantage to the gentile world: ([Rom. xi. 12.](#)) “If the fall of the Jews be the riches of the world, and the diminution of them the riches of the gentiles; how much more their fulness?” and, ([ver. 15.](#)) “For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world; what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” Intimating, that as the rejection of the Jews was the occasion of publishing the gospel, that “doctrine of reconciliation,” to the world, as the same apostle doth elsewhere call it; so the receiving them to favour again, should be “life from the dead;” that is, a kind of resurrection to the remainder of the gentile world, who had so long “lain in darkness and the shadow of death.” Which “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,”

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grant in his due time may be accomplished; that those “other sheep which are not yet of this fold, may hear his voice, and be brought in, that there may be one fold, and one Shepherd; and all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God.”



SERMON CXCI.

[Preached at Whitehall, 1682.]

THE POSSIBILITY OF THE RESURRECTION ASSERTED AND PROVED.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?—Acts xxvi. 8.

THE resurrection of the dead is one of the great articles of the Christian faith; and yet so it hath happened, that this great article of our religion hath been made one of the chief objections against it. There is nothing that Christianity hath been more upbraided withal, both by the heathens of old, and by the infidels of later times, than the impossibility of this article. So that it is a matter of great consideration and consequence, to vindicate our religion in this particular. For if the thing be evidently impossible, then it is highly unreasonable to propose it to the belief of mankind.

I know that some, more devout than wise, and who, it is to be hoped, mean better than they understand, make nothing of impossibilities in matters of faith, and would fain persuade us, that the more impossible any thing is, for that very reason is the fitter to be believed; and that it is an argument of a poor and low faith, to believe only things that are possible; but a generous and heroic faith will swallow contradictions, with as much ease as reason assents to the plainest and most evident propositions. Tertullian, in the heat of his zeal and eloquence, upon this point, of the death and resurrection of Christ, lets fall a very odd passage, and which must have many grains of allowance to make it tolerable: *Prorsus credibile est* (saith he) *quia ineptum est; certam est quia impossibile*: “It is, therefore, very credible, because it is foolish; and certain, because it is impossible.” “And this (says he) is *necessarium dedecus fidei*,” that is, “it is necessary the Christian faith should be thus disgraced, by the belief of impossibilities and contradictions.” I suppose he means, that this article of the resurrection was not in itself the less credible, because the heathen philosophers cavilled at it, as a thing impossible and contradictory, and endeavoured to disgrace the Christian religion upon that account. For had he meant otherwise, that the thing was therefore credible, because it was really and in itself foolish and impossible: this had been to recommend the Christian religion from the absurdity of the things to be believed; which would be a strange commendation of any religion to the sober and reasonable part of mankind.

I know not what some men may find in themselves; but I must freely acknowledge, that I could never yet attain to that bold and hardy degree of faith, as to believe any thing for this reason—because it was impossible; for this would be to believe a thing to be, because I am sure it cannot be. So that I am very far from being of his mind, that wanted not only more difficulties, but even impossibilities, in the Christian religion, to exercise his faith upon.



It is true, indeed, Abraham, when he was offering up his son Isaac, is said “against hope to have believed in hope:” but he did not believe against a plain impossibility; for the apostle to the Hebrews expressly tells us, that “he reasoned that God was able to raise him from the dead.” But had he believed this impossible, he could not have reconciled the command of God with his promise; the command to sacrifice Isaac, with the promise which he had made before, that “in his seed (which was Isaac) all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” So that though God was pleased to try his faith with a great difficulty, yet with no impossibility.

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I premise all this, to satisfy men how necessary it is to vindicate the Christian religion from this objection—of the impossibility of any of its articles. And whatever Tertullian might say in a rhetorical rant, it is very plain, that the ancient fathers did not think the resurrection to be a thing impossible; for then they would never have attempted, as they very frequently do, to have answered the objections of the heathens against it, from the pretended impossibility of it.

To be sure, St. Paul did not think the resurrection of the dead a thing impossible, for then he would never have asked that question, “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” Nothing being so likely to be thought incredible, and upon so good reason, as that which is impossible.

Leaving therefore, to the church of Rome, that fool-hardiness of faith, to believe things to be true, which at the same time their reason plainly tells them are impossible, I shall at this time endeavour to assert and vindicate this article of the resurrection, from the pretended impossibility of it. And I hope, by God’s assistance, to make the possibility of the thing so plain, as to leave no considerable scruple about it, in any free and unprejudiced mind. And this I shall do from these words of St. Paul, which are part of the defence which he made for himself before Festus and Agrippa; the substance whereof is this: that he had lived a blameless and inoffensive life among the Jews, in whose religion he had been bred up; that he was of the strictest sect of that religion, a pharisee, which, in opposition to the Sadducees, maintained the resurrection of the dead, and a future state of rewards and punishments in another life; and that for the hope of this he was called in question, and accused by the Jews: (ver. 6, 7.) “And now I stand here, and am judged for the hope of the promise made unto the fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come; for which hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.” That is, he was accused for preaching that Jesus was risen from the dead, which is a particular instance of the general doctrine of the resurrection, which was entertained by the greatest part of the Jews, and which, to the natural reason of mankind (however the heathen, in opposition to the Christian religion, were prejudiced against it), hath nothing in it that is incredible. And for this he appeals to his judges, Festus and Agrippa; “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”

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Which words, being a question without an answer, imply in them these two propositions:

First, That it was thought by some a thing incredible, that the dead should be raised. This is supposed in the question, as the foundation of it: for he who asks why a thing is so, supposeth it to be so.

Secondly, That this apprehension, that it is a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead, is very unreasonable: for the question being left un answered, implies its own answer, and is to be resolved into this affirmative that there is no reason why they, or any man else, should think it a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead.

I shall speak to these two propositions as briefly as I can, and then shew, what influence this doctrine of the resurrection ought to have upon our lives.

First, That it was thought by some a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead. This St. Paul had reason to suppose, having from his own experience found men so averse from the entertaining of this doctrine. When he preached to the philosophers at Athens, and declared to them the resurrection of one Jesus from the dead, they were amazed at this new doctrine, and knew not what he meant by it: ([Acts xvii. 18.](#)) “They said, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection.” He had discoursed to them of the resurrection of one Jesus from the dead; but this business of the resurrection, was a thing so remote from their apprehensions, that they had no manner of conception of it; but understood him quite in another sense, as if he had declared to them two new deities, Jesus and Anastasis; as if he had brought a new god and a new goddess among them, Jesus and the Resurrection. And when he discoursed to them again more fully of this matter, it is said, ([ver. 32.](#)) that “when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, they mocked.” And at the [24th verse of this chapter](#), when he spake of the resurrection, Festus told him, he would hear him no farther, and that he looked upon him as a man “beside himself, whom much learning had made mad.” Festus looked upon this business of the resurrection, as the wild speculation of a crazy head. And indeed the heathens generally, even those who believed the immortality of the soul, and another state after this life, looked upon the resurrection of the body as a thing impossible. Pliny, I remember, reckons it among those things which are impossible, and which God himself cannot do; *revocare defunctos*, “to call back the dead to life.” And in the primitive times, the heathen philosophers very much derided the Christians upon account of this strange doctrine of the resurrection, looking always upon this article of their faith as a ridiculous and impossible assertion.

So easy is it for prejudice to blind the minds of men, and to represent every thing to them, which hath a great appearance of difficulty in it, as impossible.

But I shall endeavour to shew, that if the matter be thoroughly examined, there is no ground for any such apprehension. I proceed therefore to the

Second proposition; namely, That this apprehension, that it is an incredible thing that God should raise the dead, is very unreasonable: “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” That is, there is no sufficient reason, why any



man should look upon the resurrection of the dead as a thing impossible to the power of God; the only reason why they thought it incredible, being because they judged it impossible: so that nothing can be vainer, than for men to pretend to believe the resurrection, and yet at the same time to grant it to be a thing in reason impossible, because no man can believe that which he thinks to be incredible; and the impossibility of a thing is the best reason any man can have to think a thing incredible. So that the meaning of St. Paul's question is, "Why should it be thought a thing" impossible, "that God should raise the dead?"

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To come then to the business: I shall endeavour to shew, that there is no sufficient reason why men should look upon the resurrection of the dead as a thing impossible to God: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible (that is, impossible) with you, that God should raise the dead? Which question implies in it these three things:

- I. That it is above the power of nature to raise the dead.
- II. But it is not above the power of God to raise the dead. And,
- III. That God should be able to do this, is by no means incredible to natural reason.

I. This question implies, that it is above the power of nature to raise the dead; and therefore the apostle puts the question very cautiously, "Why should it be thought incredible, that God should raise the dead?" By which he seems to grant, that it is impossible to any natural power to raise the dead; which is granted on all hands.

II. But this question does plainly imply, that it is not above the power of God to do this. Though the raising of the dead to life be a thing above the power of nature, yet why should it be thought incredible, that God, who is the author of nature, should be able to do this? And, indeed, the apostle's putting the question in this manner, takes away the main ground of this objection against the resurrection, from the impossibility of the thing. For the main reason, why it was looked upon as impossible, was, because it was contrary to the course of nature, that there should be any return from a perfect privation to a habit, and that a body perfectly dead should be restored to life again: but for all this, no man that believes a God, who made the world, and this natural frame of things, but must think it very reasonable to believe, that he can do things far above the power of any thing that he hath made.

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III. This question implies, that it is not a thing incredible to natural reason, that God should be able to raise the dead. I do not say, that by natural light we can discover that God will raise the dead; for that, depending merely upon the will of God, can no otherwise be certainly known than by Divine revelation: but that God can do this, is not at all incredible to natural reason. And this is sufficiently implied in the question which St. Paul asks, in which he appeals to Festus and Agrippa, neither of them Christians; "Why should it be thought a thing in credible with you, that God should raise the dead?" And why should he appeal to them concerning the credibility of this matter, if it be a thing incredible to natural reason?

That it is not, I shall first endeavour to prove, and then to answer the chief objections against the possibility of it.

And I prove it thus: it is not incredible to natural reason, that God made the world, and all the creatures in it; that mankind is his offspring; and that “he gives us life, and breath, and all things.” This was acknowledged and firmly believed by many of the heathens. And, indeed, whoever believes that the being of God may be known by natural light, must grant, that it may be known by the natural light of reason, that God made the world; because one of the chief arguments for the being of a God, is taken from those visible effects of wisdom, and power, and goodness, which we see in the frame of the world. Now he that can do the greater, can undoubtedly do the less; he that made all things of nothing, can much more raise a body out of the dust; he who at first gave life to so many inanimate beings, can easily restore that which is dead to life again. It is an excellent saying of one of the Jewish rabbies “That he who made that which was not, to be, can certainly make that which once was, to be again.” This hath the force of a demonstration; for no man that believes that God hath done the one, can make any doubt but that he can if he please do the other.

This seems to be so very clear, that they must be strong objections indeed, that can render it incredible.

There are but two that I know of, that are of any consideration, and I shall not be afraid to represent them to you with their utmost advantage; and they are these:

First, Against the resurrection in general: it is pretended impossible, after the bodies of men are resolved into dust, to recollect all the dispersed parts, and bring them together, to be united into one body.

The second is levelled against the resurrection in some particular instances, and pretends it to be impossible in some cases only; viz. when that which was the matter of one man’s body, does afterwards become the matter of another man’s body; in which case, say they, it is impossible that both these should, at the resurrection, each have their own body.

The difficulty of both these objections is perfectly avoided by those who hold, that it is not necessary that our bodies at the resurrection should consist of the very same parts of matter that they did before; there being no such great difference between one parcel of dust and another; neither in respect of the power of God, which can as easily command this parcel of dust as that, to become a living body, and being united to the soul, to rise up and walk: so that the miracle of the resurrection will be all one in the main, whether our bodies be made of the very same matter they were before, or not. Nor will there be any difference as to us; for whatever matter our bodies be made of, when they are once re-united to our souls, they will be then as much our own, as if they had been made of the very same matter of which they consisted before. Besides that, the change which the resurrection will make in our bodies will be so great, that we could not know them to be the same though they were so.

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Now upon this supposition, which seems philosophical enough, the force of both these objections is wholly declined. But there is no need to fly to this refuge; and therefore I will take this article of the resurrection in the strictest sense, for the raising of a body to life, consisting of the same individual matter that it did before; and in this sense, I think it hath generally been received by Christians, not without ground, from Scripture. I will only mention one text, which seems very strongly to imply it: (*Rev. xx. 13.*) “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and the grave delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to his works.” Now why should the sea and the grave be said to deliver up their dead, if there were not a resurrection of the same body; but any dust formed into a living body, and united to the soul, would serve the turn? We will therefore take it for granted, that the very same body shall be raised. And I doubt not even in this sense, to vindicate the possibility of the resurrection from both these objections.

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First, Against the resurrection, in general, of the same body; it is pretended impossible, after the bodies of men are mouldered into dust, and by infinite accidents have been scattered up and down the world, and have undergone a thousand changes, to recollect and rally together the very same parts of which they consisted before. This the heathens used to object to the primitive Christians; for which reason they also used to burn the bodies of the martyrs, and to scatter their ashes in the air, to be blown about by the wind, in derision of their hopes of a resurrection.

I know not how strong malice might make this objection to appear, but surely in reason it is very weak: for it wholly depends upon a gross mistake of the nature of God and his providence, as if it did not extend to the smallest things; as if God did not know all things that he hath made, and had them not always in his view, and perfectly under his command; and as if it were a trouble and burden to infinite knowledge and power, to understand and order the least things: whereas infinite knowledge and power can know and manage all things, with as much ease, as we can understand and order any one thing.

So that this objection is grounded upon a low and false apprehension of the Divine nature, and is only fit for Epicurus’s herd, who fancied to themselves a sort of slothful and unthinking deities, whose happiness consisted in their laziness, and a privilege to do nothing. I proceed therefore to the

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Second objection, which is more close and pressing; and this is levelled against the resurrection in some particular instances. I will mention but two, by which all the rest may be measured and answered.

One is, of those who are drowned in the sea, and their bodies eaten up by fishes, and turned into their nourishment; and those fishes, perhaps, eaten after wards by men, and converted into the substance of their bodies.

The other is of the cannibals; some of whom, as credible relations tell us, have lived wholly, or chiefly, of the flesh of men; and consequently the whole, or the greatest part, of the substance of their bodies is made of the bodies of other men. In these and the like cases, wherein one man's body is supposed to be turned into the substance of another man's body, how should both these at the resurrection each recover his own body? So that this objection is like that of the Sadducees to our Saviour, concerning a woman that had seven husbands; they ask, "Whose wife of the seven shall she be at the resurrection?" So here, when several have had the same body, Whose shall it be at the resurrection? And how shall they be supplied that have it not?

This is the objection; and, in order to the answering of it, I shall premise these two things:

I. That the body of man is not a constant and permanent thing, always continuing in the same state, and consisting of the same matter; but a successive thing, which is continually spending, and continually renewing itself; every day losing some thing of the matter which it had before, and gaining new: so that most men have new bodies oftener than they have new clothes, only with this difference, that we change our clothes commonly at once, but our bodies by degrees.

And this is undeniably certain from experience. For so much as our bodies grow, so much new matter is added to them, over and besides the repairing of what is continually spent; and after a man be come to his full growth, so much of his food as every day turns into nourishment, so much of his yester day's body is usually wasted, and carried off by insensible perspiration; that is, breathed out at the pores of his body; which, according to the static experiment of Sanctorius, a learned physician, who, for several years together, weighed himself exactly every day, is (as I remember) according to the proportion of five to eight, of all that a man eats and drinks. Now, according to this proportion, every man must change his body several times in a year.

It is true, indeed, the more solid parts of the body, as the bones, do not change so often as the fluid and fleshy; but that they also do change is certain, because they grow, and whatever grows is nourished and spends, because otherwise it would not need to be repaired.

II. The body which a man hath at any time of his life, is as much his own body, as that which he hath at his death; so that, if the very matter of his body, which a man had any time of his life, be raised, it is as much his own and the same body, as that which he had at his death, and commonly much more perfect; because they who die of lingering sickness, or old age, are usually mere skeletons when they die; so that there is no reason to suppose, that the very matter of which our bodies consist at the time of our death, shall be that which shall be raised; that being commonly the worst, and most imperfect body of all the rest.

These two things being premised, the answer to this objection cannot be difficult. For as to the more solid and firm parts of the body, as the skull and bones, it is not pretended

that the cannibals ate them; and if they did, so much of the matter, even of these solid parts, wastes away in a few years, as, being collected together, would supply them many times over. As for the fleshy and fluid parts, these are so very often changed and renewed, that we can allow the cannibals to eat them all up, and to turn them all into nourishment, and yet no man need contend for want of a body of his own at the resurrection; viz. any of those bodies which he had ten or twenty years before, which are every whit as good, and as much his own, as that which was eaten.

You will pardon me, I hope, that I have dwelt so long upon so contentious an argument, when you consider how necessary what I have said is to the vindicating of so great an article of our religion; and especially in this evil age of unbelief, when greater matters than this are called in question.

Having thus shewn that the resurrection is not a thing incredible to natural reason, I should now proceed to shew the certainty of it from Divine revelation. For, as reason tells us, it is not impossible; so the word of God hath assured us, that it is certain. The texts of Scripture are so many and clear to this purpose, and so well known to all Christians, that I will produce none. I shall only tell you, that as it is expressly revealed in the gospel, so our blessed Saviour, for the confirmation of our faith, and the comfort and encouragement of our hope, hath given us the experiment of it in his own resurrection, which is “the earnest and first-fruits” of ours. So St. Paul tells us, that “Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.” And that Christ did really rise from the dead, we have as good evidence, as for any ancient matter of fact, which we do most firmly believe; and more and greater evidence than this the thing is not capable of; and because it is not, no reasonable man ought to require it.

Now what remains, but to conclude this discourse with those practical inferences which our apostle makes from this doctrine of the resurrection? and I shall mention these two:

The first, for our support and comfort under the infirmities and miseries of this mortal life.

The second, for the encouragement of obedience and a good life.

I. For our comfort and support under the infirmities and miseries of this mortal state. The consideration of the glorious change of our bodies at the resurrection of the just, cannot but be a great comfort to us, under all bodily pain and sufferings.

One of the greatest burdens of human nature, is the frailty and infirmity of our bodies, the necessities they are frequently pressed withal, the manifold diseases they are liable to, and the dangers and terrors of death, to which they are continually subject and enslaved. But the time is coming, if we be careful to prepare ourselves for it, when we shall be clothed with other kind of bodies, free from all these miseries and inconveniencies which flesh and blood is subject to. “For these vile bodies shall be changed and fashioned like to the glorious body of the Son of God.” When our bodies shall be raised to a new life, they shall become

incorruptible; “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality; and then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” When this last enemy is conquered, there shall be no fleshly lusts, nor brutish passions, “to fight against the soul; no law in our members, to war against the law of our minds;” no disease to torment us, no danger of death to amaze and terrify us. Then all the passions and appetites of our outward man shall be subject to the reason of our minds, and our bodies shall partake of the immortality of our souls. It is but a very little while that our spirits shall be crushed and clogged with these heavy and sluggish bodies: at the resurrection they shall be refined from all dregs of corruption, and become spiritual, and incorruptible, and glorious, and every way suited to the activity and perfection of a glorified soul, and “the spirits of just men made perfect.”

II. For the encouragement of obedience and a good life. Let the belief of this great article of our faith have the same influence upon us, which St. Paul tells us it had upon him: ([Acts xxiv. 15, 16.](#)) “I have hope towards God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust; and herein do I exercise myself, always to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.” The firm belief of a resurrection to another life, should make every one of us very careful how we demean ourselves in this life, and afraid to do any thing, or to neglect any thing, that may defeat our hopes of a blessed immortality, and expose us to the extreme and endless misery of body and soul in another life.

Particularly, it should be an argument to us, “to glorify God in our bodies, and in our spirits;” and to use the members of the one, and the faculties of the other, as instruments of righteousness, unto holiness. We should reverence ourselves, and take heed, not only how we defile our souls by sinful passions, but how we dishonour our bodies by sensual and brutish lusts; since God hath designed so great an honour and happiness for both at the resurrection.

So often as we think of a blessed resurrection to eternal life, and the happy consequences of it; the thoughts of so glorious a reward should make us diligent and unwearied in the service of so good a Master, and so great a Prince, who can and will prefer us to infinitely greater honours, than any that are to be had in this world. This inference the apostle makes from the doctrine of the resurrection: ([1 Cor. xv. 58.](#)) “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know, that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”

Nay, we may begin this blessed state while we are upon earth, by settling our “hearts and affections upon the things that are above,” and “having our conversations in heaven, from whence also we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.”

“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 us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us always that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”



SERMON CXCIV.

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR SAVIOUR CONSIDERED, AS AN ARGUMENT FOR SEEKING THINGS ABOVE.

If ye then be risen with Christy seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.—Col. iii. 1, 2.

THE apostle in this Epistle (as his manner is in all the rest), having laid the doctrine of the gospel for a foundation, and endeavoured to rectify some errors, both in doctrine and practice, which the Christians at Colosse were seduced into, by the guile and arts of false teachers and apostles; as particularly the worship of angels, and, out of a pretence of humility, addressing themselves to God by their mediation, which is the particular scope and design of this Epistle: the apostle, I say, having in the former part of it endeavoured to set them right in this matter, and to establish their minds in the faith and doctrine of Christ, in the latter part of it exhorts them to a conversation answerable to the doctrine of Christ, to a holy and heavenly life, at the beginning of this third chapter: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.”

This inference is drawn from what he had said at a good distance before; namely, at the [12th verse](#) of the former chapter; “Being buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” “Being buried with him in baptism:” for the full understanding of this expression, we must have recourse to that parallel text, ([Rom. vi. 3-5.](#)) which will explain to us the meaning of this phrase: “Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” Where we see, that “to be baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ,” is to be baptized into the similitude and likeness of them; and the resemblance is this;—that as Christ being dead was buried in the grave, and after some stay in it, that is, for three days, he was raised again out of it by the glorious power of God, to a new and heavenly life, being not long after taken up into heaven to live at the right hand of God; so Christians, when they were baptized, were immersed into the water three times, their bodies being covered all over with it; which is therefore called, our being “buried with him by baptism into death;” and after some short stay under water, were raised, or taken up again out of it, as if they had been recovered to a new life; by all which was spiritually signified, our dying to sin, and being raised to a Divine and heavenly life, “through the faith of the operation of God;” that is, by that Divine and supernatural power, which raised up



Christ from the dead. So that Christians from thenceforth were to “reckon themselves dead unto sin; but alive unto God through Jesus Christ,” as the apostle speaks, (Rom. vi. 11.)

Now upon this ground, that we are “buried with Christ in baptism,” and “risen with him to a new and heavenly life,” the apostle founds the exhortation in the text, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above; not on things on the earth.” So that the words are an earnest exhortation to a Divine life, and a spiritual and heavenly conversation. In which there are two things to be considered:

First, The duty we are exhorted to, which is heavenly-mindedness. “Seek the things which are above;” and “Set your affections on things above.”

Secondly, The arguments by which the apostle urgeth and presseth this exhortation. “If ye be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above;” and “Seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.” So that my work will be,

First, To shew the nature of the duty to which we are exhorted. And,

Secondly, The force of the arguments which are used to persuade us to it.

First, For the nature of the duty to which we are exhorted; and it is expressed both affirmatively and negatively.

1. Affirmatively; and the apostle useth two several expressions. “Seek the things which are above;” and, “Set your affections on things above.”

2. Negatively; “And not on things on the earth.” And this seems to be added, not only to explain and ascertain the object, and to add vehemence and earnestness to the exhortation; but likewise to set off the excellency of the object, by way of opposition and comparison. On the things that are above, and not upon those pitiful and inferior things which are upon the earth. And likewise to shew the inconsistency of these, and the impossibility of seeking and setting our affections upon both in an intense degree. For that would be to have two chief ends, to love God and mammon; to serve two masters, which our Saviour hath told us is impossible. But this I shall use afterwards, as an argument to enforce the exhortation.

To explain the nature of this duty, I shall consider the act and the object.

I. For the act, here are two words used to express it, ζητεῖτε and φρονεῖτε, *seek*, and *set your affections*; and in these two words, these four things seem to be comprehended—an act of our understandings about these things; the ardency of our affections; and the activity of our endeavours in the pursuit of them; and a clear preference of the things which are above, to the things of the earth, when they come in competition. For these two words do comprehend, not only the power of our understandings, and wills, and affections, and an earnest attention and application of mind to these things; but the activity of our endeavours about them.

1. Here is implied an act of our understandings, that we should mind and think upon these things, that we should often consider them, and meditate upon them; that heaven

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should be much in our thoughts, and the glory and excellency of that state which we hope to attain to, and by what ways and means we may come to be made partakers of that blessed inheritance.

2; It implies, likewise, an act of our affections; that we heartily love and desire the things that are above, with that ardency and vehemency of affection, which is proportionable to the worth and excellency of them. And both these are included in the word φρονεῖτε, which is sometimes translated *to mind*, sometimes to *set our affections* upon a thing.

3. Activity and industry in the prosecution of these things, if by any means we may attain them. And this is implied in the word ζητεῖτε, “seek the things which are above.” When we know there are such treasures in heaven, so great a reward laid up for good men, joys so unspeakable and full of glory, and when our understandings have dwelt so long upon these things as to work upon our affections, these, like so many springs of motion, will set our endeavours on work, for the obtaining of what we so much love and desire, and will make us inquisitive, with the young man in the gospel, “What good thing we shall do, that we may inherit eternal life;” by what means we may best secure our title to heaven and happiness; and very industrious to acquire those qualities and dispositions, which will fit us for heaven, and the blessed sight and enjoyment of God; nay, by which we may begin this happy state here, by our conversation in heaven, whilst we are sojourning here below, as “pilgrims and strangers in the earth.”

4. It implies a clear preference of the things above to the things of the earth, when they come in competition. And in this sense the word φρονεῖν is observed to be used in good authors, for taking part with, and adhering to, one side, when two parties or interests come in competition. And, indeed, this phrase and form of speech, when the thing is expressed affirmatively and negatively, is very often used by way of comparison, when two things come in competition. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to eternal life.” So here, “Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.” When heaven and earth come in competition, the happiness of the next life, and the enjoyments of this, the interest of your souls, and of your bodies, “the things which are not seen, and are eternal, and the things which are seen, and are but temporal;” a holy, and heavenly, and virtuous life, and a sensual and sinful course, “choose the better part,” stick to that which is the true and lasting interest; prefer heaven before earth, and the care of your souls to that of your bodies, things eternal to things temporal, and a holy and virtuous life, which leads to heaven, to those sinful and vicious practices which will sink men into perdition. For that this also the apostle means by “things on the earth,” sinful lusts and practices, seems very probable from what follows: (ver. 5.) “Mortify, therefore, your members, which are upon the earth.”

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II. Let us consider the object of this act, what it is that we are to seek and set our affections upon; and that is “the things which are above.”

1. The glorious God and Father of all, and his blessed and eternal Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit of God; these are the great objects of our contemplation and adoration. And then the holy angels, and “the spirits of just men made perfect,” who are examples to us, of doing the will of God here on earth, as it is done by them in heaven.

2. The blessed state and condition which we aspire after in the next life, with all the joys and glories of it, “such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.”

3. The dispositions to be acquired, and the actions and duties to be performed by us, as necessary qualifications and means for the obtaining of this happiness, and bringing us to the possession of it; all these are comprehended in the latitude of the object, “the things which are above.”

And to seek, and mind, and set our affections upon these, is to do those things, which the consideration of each of these respectively calls for; so to meditate on God and mind him, as to fear, and love, and serve him; to seek his glory as our last end, and the enjoyment of him as our chief good; to seek his favour above all things, and to sue to him as the fountain of all grace, and “the giver of every good and perfect gift,” and of all blessings temporal, spiritual, and eternal, by the powerful intercession of his Son, the great and only Mediator between God and man, to be obtained for us, and to be wrought in us, by the powerful virtue and operation of the Holy Spirit. So to mind the angels and blessed saints above, as to aspire after their society, by imitating their virtues, and “being followers of those, who through faith and patience have inherited the promises.” So to meditate on our future blessedness, as to raise our hearts and affections above this world, and effectually to engage us to fit ourselves for that blessed state and condition, that we may be “meet to be made partakers of that glorious inheritance.” And, lastly, so to mind all the duties and means necessary and conducing to our salvation, as effectually to perform them; to order our lives, and all the actions of them, with a regard to eternity; in a word, to omit and neglect nothing that may further and promote the great design of our eternal salvation, and to do nothing that may contradict or hinder it. This is to seek and “set our affections upon the things that are above.” And thus I have done with the first thing I propounded, the nature of the duty which we are exhorted to. I proceed to the

Second thing I propounded, which was, to consider the force of the arguments which are used to persuade us to it. Here are three arguments in the text to this purpose; two of them are express, and the third of them implied.

L “If ye be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above.”

II. “Seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.”



III. The transcendent and incomparable excellency of the things above, in comparison of earthly things. This is intimated in the opposition, “set your affections on the things which are above; and not on things on the earth.” I shall briefly shew the force of each of these arguments.

I. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above.” That is, if ye believe his resurrection, if ye will be conformed to him in it, if ye be made partakers of the power and virtue of it.

1. If ye believe the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, was the great seal of his ministry, and confirmation of his doctrine: and one great branch of his doctrine was heavenly-mindedness, that we should “lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, because where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also;” that we should “first seek the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof.”

2. If we will bear a conformity and resemblance to him in his resurrection. He is our great pattern and example which the gospel propounds to us; and that we may have the nearer conformity to him, the apostle doth not only propose the virtues of his life to our imitation, but where we cannot literally imitate him, the apostle urgeth spiritual conformity, that those things which he did and suffered in his body, we should do and suffer spiritually; as Christ “died for sin,” so we should “die to sin;” as he literally “rose again from the dead, so, in conformity to him, we should be spiritually “raised to newness of life.” “As he ascended into heaven,” so we should “ascend thither also in our hearts and affections.” (Col. ii. 12.) “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” (Rom. vi. 4, 5.) “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” To be raised from the dead, is in order to a new life. So the apostle tells us: (ver. 9-11.) “Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead, indeed, unto sin; but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” As the resurrection of Christ was in order to a better and happier life, to his ascension into heaven, and his living with God: so, in conformity to Christ, our spiritual resurrection should be in order to a heavenly and Divine life. And what is the meaning of all this? but that men are apt to imitate those whom they love, and do affect to resemble them as much as they can. And therefore, to endear our duty to us, the mortification of our lusts, and a holy life, the apostle tells us, that hereby we bear a conformity to Christ, the great object of our love and imitation.

3. If ye be made partakers of the power and virtue of his resurrection. The resurrection of Christ is not only a pattern, but hath a power and efficacy in it, to raise us to a spiritual

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and heavenly life. When Christ rose, he did not rise alone, but many of the bodies of the saints who were dead rose with him, to signify to us the power of his resurrection. It communicated a virtue to those who had an interest in the merits of his death and sufferings, whereby they are enabled to live a new and heavenly life. (John xi. 25.) “I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” (Eph. i. 19.) “And 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.” (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 may attain the resurrection from the dead.” (Col. ii. 1, 3.) “And you being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him.” Now this power is derived to us by “believing on him who raised up Jesus from the dead, that he is also able to raise us, who are dead in trespasses and sins, to a Divine and heavenly life.” The

Second argument is contained in these words—“Seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.” Which words do declare to us the exaltation of Christ’s human nature, and his being advanced to be the king and governor of his church, having all power and judgment committed to him. (Luke xxiv. 26.) Christ’s ascension, and his sitting at the right hand of God, is called, his entering into his glory: “Ought he not to have suffered these things, and then to enter into his glory?” That is, to be invested with all power and authority for the good of the church. But most particularly the apostle describes this: (Eph. i. 20-22.) “And set him at his own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principalities, and powers, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and given him to be head over all things to the church.”

And now the force of this argument is from the relation that is between the head and the members, between Christ and Christians. The members have an affection for the head, which makes them aspire heavenwards; and the head hath an influence upon the members. “If I be lifted up from the earth (says our Lord), I will draw all men unto me.” This is spoken of his crucifixion, signifying what death he should die, as the text tells us, (John xii. 32, 33.) But it is proportionably true of his ascension, and sitting at the right hand of God; for there is a power and virtue in the resurrection of Christ, and in his ascension into heaven, as well as in his death, to draw all men to him. The gift of God’s Holy Spirit is the fruit of his ascension and exaltation “at the right hand of the Majesty on high:” and it is by the powerful operation of the Spirit of God upon our hearts, that we are raised to newness of life, and our affections fixed upon heavenly things. We are naturally bowed down to the earth, and inclined to the things of this world, *Curvæ in terris animæ, et cælestium inanes*: but our glorified Saviour, sitting at the right hand of God, by the power of his Spirit, draws our affections to him. The

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Third and last argument, which is but implied in the text, is the transcendent and incomparable excellency of heavenly things, above things on the earth, which the apostle intimates by the opposition; “Set your affections on things above; not on things on the earth.” Earthly things are perishing and transitory, gross and unsatisfactory, and cannot be the felicity of an immortal soul, being neither suited to the spiritual nature, nor to the immortal duration of our souls: they can neither satisfy us while we live, nor preserve us from death, nor comfort us in it, nor accompany us into the other world, nor contribute any thing to our happiness there; and if they can do nothing towards our happiness, why should we set our hearts upon them? They that seek for happiness in earthly things, are like the women sitting over our Saviour’s sepulchre, with their faces bowed down to the earth—they seek the living among the dead: our happiness is not here, it is risen, it is above. Let our hearts ascend thither, where our happiness and our treasure is. Why should we bestow our affections upon these low and mean things, when there are incomparably better objects to fix them upon?

The inference from all this shall be to engage and persuade us by all these arguments and considerations, “to seek and mind the things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God;” and “to have our conversation there, where our Saviour is, and from whence also we look for him again, to change these vile bodies, that they may be made like unto his glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.” Let all our actions have relation to another world, and our conversation declare, that we are “mindful of another country, that is a heavenly.” Is Christ our head risen and ascended into heaven? Let us in our hearts and affections follow him thither, and patiently wait until he receive our souls, and raise our bodies, and take us wholly to himself, that we may be “for ever with the Lord.”

The resurrection of Christ is a demonstration of a future state after this life, and a pledge of a blessed immortality in another world. For our Lord by his resurrection from the dead, hath conquered death, and abolished it, “and brought life and immortality to light.” He is “the first-fruits of them that slept,” and his resurrection is an earnest and assurance of ours; and from thence the apostle makes this inference, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know, that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.” The belief of a future state after this life, should put us upon the most earnest and vigorous endeavours to secure this happy condition to ourselves: “If by any means (as the apostle expressed! it,) we may attain the resurrection of the dead.” It should raise us above the world and the lusts of it, above all the terrors and temptations of it.

As, on the one hand, the serious thoughts of our mortality should check our eager pursuit of this world; so, on the other hand, the belief of a life to come should quicken our endeavours for the obtaining it: seeing we hope for so happy a state, we should prepare ourselves for it by purity, and holiness of heart and life, by perseverance, and “a patient continuance in

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well-doing. What manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness," who have such hopes and expectations? "Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Now that "life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel," what greater, what other design can any man propose to himself, than to be happy for ever? For such a prize, who would not strive, and run, and take any pains? Who would not deny himself "the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season;" resist temptations, and conflict with difficulties, and glory in tribulations and sufferings, and be constant and "faithful to the death, in hope of that eternal life, which God that cannot lie hath promised?"

In our pursuit of the things of this world, we usually prevent enjoyment by expectation: we anticipate our own happiness, and eat out the heart and sweetness of worldly pleasures, by delightful forethoughts of them; so that when we come to possess them, they do not answer the expectation, nor satisfy the desires which were raised about them, and they vanish into nothing: but the things which are above, are so great, so solid, so durable, so glorious, that we cannot raise our thoughts to an equal height with them; we cannot enlarge our desires beyond a possibility of satisfaction. Our hearts are greater than the world; but God is greater than our hearts; and the happiness which he hath laid up for us, is like himself incomprehensibly great and glorious. Let the thoughts of this raise us above this world, and inspire us with greater thoughts and designs, than the care and concernments of this present life.

We all profess most firmly to believe, that after a few days we shall leave this world, and all the enjoyments of it, and go to the place from whence we shall not return; that we shall enter upon an unchangeable state of happiness or misery, according as we have demeaned ourselves in this present life; that great care and diligence is necessary to "work out our own salvation;" that there must be a great preparation of ourselves, by unspotted purity of heart and life, to make ourselves "meet for an inheritance with them that are sanctified;" that we must labour, and strive, and run, and fight, "and give all diligence, to make our calling and election sure;" that we had need to "watch and pray always, that we may be accounted worthy to escape the judgment of the great day, and to stand before the Son of man." Such thoughts as these should continually possess our souls, and heaven should be always in our eye, as if, with St. Stephen, "We saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God," to see how we behave ourselves here below; and when "we have fought a good fight, and finished our course, and kept the faith, to receive us to himself, that where he is, there we may be also."

"To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for evermore. Amen."

SERMON CXC.V.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND BENEFITS OF OUR SAVIOUR'S ASCENSION.

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.—Acts i. 9-11.

THERE are two occasions of this day³ accidentally meeting together, which bear some resemblance to one another; the ascension of our blessed Saviour into heaven, and his exaltation in his kingdom, being “crowned with glory and honour, and set on the right hand of the Majesty on high:” and the restoration of our sovereign to his just rights, and royal state and dignity here upon earth, by a miraculous providence of God, and, as it were, by a kind of resurrection from the dead.

The first of these being of a more spiritual and excellent nature, shall be the subject of my present discourse, not forgetting the other in the application of it.

The great foundation of our religion is the history of our Saviour, of his incarnation, and miracles, and life, of his resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven, and intercession for us at the right hand of God; and the doctrines and articles concerning these, make up the main body of the Christian faith: and, therefore, nothing can be more useful than the explication of these, and a serious consideration and meditation upon them.

In these words you have an account of our Saviour's ascension into heaven; concerning which, we will consider these three things:

First, The circumstances foregoing his ascension.

Secondly, The circumstances of his ascension.

Thirdly, The consequent benefits and advantages of it.

First, The circumstances foregoing his ascension: “And when he had spoken these things, he was taken up.” This refers to the discourse which our Saviour had with his apostles, immediately before he was taken up from them into heaven, of which we have an account in the verses before the text, ([ver. 4.](#)) Being assembled with them, and just ready to take his leave of them, he commands them “that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which they had heard of him:” that is, they should not disperse themselves, till the Holy Ghost, which he had promised to send from his Father, was come upon them, in those miraculous gifts and powers, where by they should be qualified for the preaching of the gospel to the world.

3 Preached May 29, being Ascension-day.

And when our Saviour had given them this charge, they put a question to him, concerning a thing which, notwithstanding he had so plainly declared to them that “his kingdom was not of this world,” did still run in their minds, about the temporal reign of the Messiah, and a glorious kingdom by him to be set up among the Jews; ([ver. 6.](#)) “They asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” To this our Saviour gives them no direct answer, neither that he would nor that he would not do what they expected, but gently reprehends their curiosity; ([ver. 7.](#)) “It is not for you to know the times and seasons, which the Father hath put into his own power.” And instead of satisfying them in things that did not concern them, he discourseth to them about those things which did concern them; namely, how they should be qualified and sent forth to preach the gospel to the world: ([ver. 8.](#)) “But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and unto the utmost parts of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, he was taken up.” These are the circumstances preceding his ascension.

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Secondly, We will consider the circumstances of his ascension; and they are these four:

I. That our Saviour was taken up, while he was blessing his disciples; ([Luke xxiv. 51.](#)) “And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.”

II. That he was taken up in the view of his disciples, and while their eyes were attentively fixed upon him: “while they beheld, he was taken up,” ([ver. 9.](#)) And ([ver. 10.](#)) it is said, “they looked steadfastly towards heaven, as he went up.”

III. That he was taken up in a cloud: “and a cloud received him out of their sight.”

IV. The place whither he went: ([ver. 11.](#)) “The same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven;” which is elsewhere more particularly expressed, by declaring the dignity to which he was exalted in heaven, “being set down on the right hand of God,” and “having all power in heaven and in earth committed to him.” These are the chief circumstances of his ascension, which I shall speak briefly to.

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I. That our blessed Saviour was taken up while he was blessing his disciples. This St. Luke does not mention here in the history of the Acts, having mentioned it before in his gospel, to which he refers us; ([Luke xxiv. 50, 51.](#)) speaking of our Saviour and his apostles; “And he led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.” Lifting up of the hands was a ceremony used among the Jews, in blessing the people. [Lev. ix. 22.](#) it is said there, that “Aaron lifted up his hands towards the people, and blessed them.” So our Saviour here, in imitation of the usual ceremonies among the Jews: “And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.” The first tidings of our Saviour's birth were attended with praises to God, and blessings to men; “Glory to God on high, peace on earth, and good-will towards men.” And when he died, he breathed out his soul in blessings to his enemies; in the height of his sufferings he was full

of hearty prayers, and good wishes, for those who were the cause of them: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And after his resurrection from the dead, just as he left the world, he was taken out of it, and translated into heaven, with a blessing in his mouth: "while he blessed them he was parted from them and carried up into heaven." And, indeed, his whole life, all that he did, and all that he suffered, his coming into the world, and his going out of it, was all a blessing to mankind; "God sent him to bless us, in turning us away every one from his iniquity." He was always wishing well to us, and doing well for us; "he went about doing good."



A blessed pattern to us, "leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps:" a lovely and desirable example; in imitation whereof, we should endeavour that our whole life may be a blessing and benefit to mankind; and that when we leave the world, we may be found so doing as our Lord did, doing the work of heaven while we are going thither.

II. He was taken up in the view of his disciples, and while their eyes were attentively fixed upon him: "while they beheld, he was taken up," ([ver. 9.](#)) And ([ver. 10.](#)) it is said, "they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up." After the apostles were fully convinced, by several appearances of our Saviour to them, and familiar conversation with them, that he was indeed risen from the dead; that they might be fully satisfied that he came from God, and went to him, he was in their sight, while he was speaking to them, taken up into heaven. And this is no small confirmation of the truth of our religion, that our Saviour did not only work the greatest miracles while he was alive, and after death rose again, and conversed among men; but was visibly taken up into heaven. So that if all things be duly considered, never did any man give so many evidences of his being sent from God, as our blessed Saviour did. He delivered the truth of God with a Divine authority; and did the works of God with all imaginable evidence of a Divine power; and with a Divine patience submitted to the will of God, enduring the greatest sufferings; and by the mighty power of God was raised from the dead; and in a visible manner, by the same Divine power, taken up into heaven.



III. He was taken up in a cloud: "He was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight." Which circumstance, though it do not seem very material; yet does it fitly represent to us the difference between the two dispensations, of the law, and of the gospel. Elias was carried up by a whirl wind into heaven, in a fiery chariot, with horses of fire: but our Saviour in a cloud; to signify to us, the coolness and calmness of the gospel-dispensation, in comparison of that of the law; which difference our Saviour had before observed to his disciples, upon a remarkable occasion, ([Luke ix. 54, 55.](#)) When they would have called for fire from heaven, to have consumed the Samaritans for refusing to entertain our Saviour, as Elias had done in a like case, our Saviour severely reproveth that fierce spirit of theirs, as by no means suitable to the gospel: "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." And just answer able to the difference between the spirit of Elias and our Saviour, was the different manner of their translation

into heaven; the one gently received up in a cloud; the other violently taken up by a whirlwind, carried in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire.

And there is likewise another difference not altogether unworthy of our observation. The blessing which Elijah left to Elisha at his parting from him, and the promise of his spirit to be imparted to him, is conceived in very doubtful words: ([2 Kings ii. 9.](#)) "Elijah said to Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if thou see me not, it shall not be so." This was very doubtful, suitable to the obscurity of the law: but our Saviour, when he parted from his disciples, makes a plain and absolute promise of the Holy Ghost to them, answerable to the clearness and grace of the gospel: "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." So wisely did God order all circumstances concerning our Saviour, that every thing belonging to him, every action that he did, and every circumstance of it, might have some important signification.

IV. The last circumstance of our Saviour's ascension, is the place whither he went; ([ver. 11.](#)) "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven." And this is elsewhere more particularly expressed, by declaring the dignity to which he was exalted in heaven; "being set down on the right hand of God," and "having all power in heaven and earth committed to him." ([Mark xvi. 19.](#)) "He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God:" which phrase signifies our Saviour's being advanced in his human nature, to an honour and dignity next to that of the Divine Majesty; the right hand being esteemed the place of greatest honour. This exaltation of Christ, the apostle tells us, was conferred upon him as a reward of his great humiliation and sufferings; ([Heb. xii. 2.](#)) "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." And by virtue of this exaltation, the apostle proves him to be exalted in his human nature above the angels. ([Heb. i. 3, 4.](#)) "When he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they;" that is, being advanced to a higher dignity; for name among the Hebrews signifies dignity and honour. So the apostle useth the word name: ([Phil. ii. 9-11.](#)) "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." So, likewise, ([Eph. i. 20, 21.](#)) "Whom he raised from the dead, and set at his own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principalities, and powers, and might, and do minion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in that which is to come." And now, wherein this dignity doth consist, the same apostle tells us in the next words; that he "hath put all things tinder his feet, and given him to be head over all things to the church;" which

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is the same with what our Saviour told his apostles before his ascension—"all power is given me in heaven and in earth;" that is, God hath committed the government of the world into his hands, for the benefit and advantage of his church here in this world, and for the dispensing of rewards and punishments to good and bad men in the next life.

And though the apostles did only see him taken up, and received in a cloud out of their sight, and were not witnesses of his advancement and exaltation at the right hand of God; yet they had, and we have, sufficient assurance of it, both by what our Saviour declared before his ascension, and by the effects which followed after. Before he ascended, he told them whither he was going, and what power and dignity would be conferred upon him, that all power in heaven and earth was committed to him; and that, as an evidence of this exaltation at the right hand of God, and the power there conferred upon him, he would in a few days send down the Holy Ghost upon them in a sensible manner, and in great and sensible effects, enabling them to speak with tongues and to work all sorts of miracles. After this he was in their sight taken up from them, and carried towards heaven; and ten days after, the Holy Ghost, according to his promise, came down upon them in miraculous powers and gifts. So that here was abundant evidence to them of his exaltation in heaven, they having seen him taken up, and carried thitherwards, and after this finding the wonderful effects of his being there, and of the power which was conferred upon him.

The third and last thing to be spoken to, is the consequent benefits of our Saviour's ascension and exaltation; and they are chiefly these three:—The sending of the Holy Ghost; his powerful intercession for us at the right hand of God; and the confirmation of our faith, as to the truth of his doctrine in general, and particularly as to his coming to judgment.

I, The sending of the Holy Ghost in miraculous powers and gifts upon the apostles, to qualify them for the speedy and effectual propagation of the gospel, and to give credit to them in the preaching of it. By the gift of tongues they were enabled to preach the gospel to all nations; and by the other miraculous powers, God bare witness to the testimony which they gave of our Saviour's doctrine and resurrection. And this was a great benefit; for to this we owe the great blessing of the gospel, and the spreading of the Christian religion through the world; and this was properly the fruit of our Saviour's ascension into heaven, and his exaltation at the right hand of God, and of that royal power and majesty which he was invested withal. God, in his wise dispensation of things, having so ordered, that this dignity and power should be the reward of our Saviour's obedience and sufferings; which may serve to explain to us that passage: ([John vii. 39.](#)) "This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." The giving of these gifts of the Holy Ghost, was purposely reserved by God, to be an instance of that power and glory wherewith our Saviour was to be invested upon his ascension into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God; and therefore our Saviour tells his disciples, that they ought not to be troubled at his departure, because, until he had

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left them, the Holy Ghost would not come; ([John xvi. 7.](#)) "I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you."

II. Another mighty benefit of our Saviour's ascension and exaltation is, his powerful intercession for us at the right hand of God. And this is a mighty advantage and comfort, to have a perpetual patron and advocate at the right hand of God, to plead our cause, to solicit our concerns, and represent our wants, and to offer up our prayers and requests to God, in the virtue of his meritorious sacrifice; to have so good a friend in the court of heaven, in such power and favour with the great King of the world. This under the law was shadowed by the high-priest's going into the holy of holies, once every year alone, carrying blood with him, to offer for the sins of the people; answerably to which, our Saviour is once for all entered into the heavens, to intercede with God for us, by the representation of that sacrifice which he offered for our sins, and of that blood which was shed for us. So the apostle tells us, ([Heb. ix. 24.](#)) that "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God for us." And this is a mighty comfort to us under the guilt of our sins, that "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is a propitiation for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world." This is a great comfort under all trials and temptations, that "we have not a high-priest that cannot be touched with a sense of our infirmities; but was, in all points, tempted like as we are." He that is our mediator and intercessor, knows by experience the infirmities of our nature, and hath learned by his own sufferings to compassionate ours.

And this is a mighty encouragement to our prayers, and gives us confidence and hopes of good success in our addresses to God, that they are offered by so powerful and prevalent a hand. So the apostle reasons: ([Heb. iv. 14, 16.](#)) "Seeing then we have a great high-priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God; let us come boldly to the throng of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

In a word, this may animate us against all the enemies of our salvation, because he that hath all power in heaven and earth is concerned for us, and is continually soliciting our cause with God: ([Heb. vii. 25.](#)) "Wherefore he is able to save them to the utmost, who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us."

III. The ascension of our Saviour into heaven, is a mighty confirmation of our faith, both as to the truth of his doctrine in general, and particularly as to his coming again at the end of the world, to judge the quick and the dead, to reward the righteous, and to punish the sinners and ungodly.

1. As to the truth of his doctrine in general. If after all the miracles of his life, and his resurrection from the dead, any man can doubt whether he came from God, and was sent by him to teach the world; yet this, methinks, is evidence beyond all exception, that God took him to himself, that he was visibly taken up into heaven; and though the witnesses of his ascension did not see him in heaven, yet the sending of the Holy Ghost, according to



his promise, was an abundant evidence that he was received up into glory. Upon this account it is that our Saviour says, that the coining of the Holy Ghost should convince the world of sin, for not believing in him; because the sending of the Holy Ghost was an evidence that he was in glory; and his being taken up into glory, was a demonstration that he was a true prophet, and sent from God, and consequently that they were guilty of a great sin, who did not believe in him. And,

2. This likewise is a great confirmation of our faith, as to our Saviour's coming again at the end of the world, to judge the quick and the dead. St. Peter tells us, ([Acts x. 42.](#)) that our Saviour, after his resurrection, did particularly give in charge to his apostles, "to testify to the people, that it was he that was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead." And what argument more proper to persuade them of this, than to see him visibly taken up into heaven; and, at the very time of his ascension, to be admonished by angels, that this same person, whom they saw carried up into heaven, should, in the same visible manner, come down from heaven again at the end of the world? So the text tells us, that "while the apostles looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, (that is, two angels in the appearance of men) which said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven;" that is, in a visible manner, and in a cloud. For as "he was received up in a cloud out of their sight;" so at his return to judge the world, men shall "see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven," ([Matt. xxiv. 30.](#)) And this is a great confirmation of our faith of a future judgment; that our Saviour, immediately after his resurrection, declared himself to be "appointed by God judge of quick and dead;" and when he was ascended, the angels declared that "he should come again in like manner as they had seen him taken up." So that they who believe his ascension, cannot doubt of his return to judgment; nothing being more credible, than the saying of one whom God raised from the dead, and visibly took to himself.

And now to make some reflection upon what hath been delivered. The consideration of our Saviour's ascension into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God, is very comfortable to all true Christians, in these two respects:

I. In respect of our condition in this world.

II. In respect of the happiness of the next world.

I. In respect of our condition in this world. The church of Christ, and every particular member of it, every true Christian, is exposed to a great many troubles and dangers in this world: but it is matter of great comfort to us, in the consideration of all the evils we are liable to, that we are under his patron age and protection, who hath "all power given him in heaven and earth." He who is the head and defender of the church, "is set down on the right hand of the majesty of God, exalted far above principalities, and powers, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, in this world, and that which is to come;" so that

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the true church of Christ need not fear either the powers of this world, or the malice of devils, because we have a sure friend, who is greater than all these, whom God hath made his vicegerent, and hath “put all things under his feet,” and hath given the government of the world, and of all creatures, into his hands, for the good and benefit of his church; who is able to protect his church, and every true member of it, against all the injuries of earth, and the malice of hell; and if he permit us at any time to fall into sufferings, he is able to support us under them, and reward us for them: and “if he be for us, who can be against us?” He that “died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, and maketh intercession for us.” ([Rom. xiv.9.](#)) “For this end, Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living;” and now that he is in heaven, and clothed with majesty and glory, he is not less concerned for us, than when he conversed with us upon earth, and suffered and died for us: for he is there in our nature, that nature in which he suffered more than any of us can do; and therefore we may with confidence make our application to him in all our distresses and difficulties, because he is nearly allied to us, “Bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh,” and was once tempted like ourselves, and from the experience of his own trials and sufferings, still retains a quick sense of the frailties and infirmities of mortality. This consideration the apostle to the Hebrews makes use of, to support Christians under all their persecutions for the profession of Christianity. ([Heb. iv. 14, 15.](#)) “Seeing then we have a great high-priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God; let us hold fast our profession. For we have not a high-priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

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II. The consideration of Christ's ascension and exaltation, is likewise matter of comfort to us, in respect of the happiness which we hope for in the next world. No religion that ever was in the world hath given men so sensible a demonstration of a future life, and a blessed immortality in another world, as the Christian religion hath done, by the resurrection of our blessed Saviour from the dead, and his visible ascension into heaven. This is a sensible argument, and levelled to the capacities of all mankind. The reasonings of the philosophers concerning the immortality of men's souls, and a future state after this life, besides the uncertainty of them, have also this disadvantage—that they are only calculated for the more refined and speculative part of mankind: but every man is capable of the force of this argument, that he who declared to the world another life after this, and the happy condition of good men in another world, was himself raised from the dead, and visibly taken up into heaven. And now it is no difficult matter for us to believe that God will raise us, and advance us to glory and happiness, when we consider what an earnest he hath given us of this, by “the working of that mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, in heavenly places.”

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If then we believe that “Christ is ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God,” let this raise our minds above the vain delights and perishing enjoyments of this world, to the consideration of those better and more glorious things that are above; Jet us often ascend thither in our thoughts, whither “our Saviour is gone before us, to prepare a place for us;” and from whence he hath promised to come again, at the end of the world, “to receive us to himself, that where he is, there we may be also.”

But then we must endeavour to live as he did, if we hope to go to him when we die. “Every man that hath this hope in him, purifies himself, even as he is pure.” Let us then “have our conversation in heaven, from whence also we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working of that mighty power, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.”

To conclude: Let us heartily thank God for the whole dispensation of our salvation, by the incarnation and doctrine, by the holy life and meritorious death of our blessed Saviour, and by that demonstration of God’s mighty power and goodness, “which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in 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; having put all things under his feet, and given him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body.”

The consideration whereof is (as you have heard) a mighty consolation unto us under all the troubles and dangers to which the church of Christ is exposed in this world. He who hath “all power committed to him” by God, and is made “head over all things for” the benefit and advantage of “the church,” we may be sure, will have a particular care of it, and tender it as his “own body: v and as he is able, he is ready upon all occasions to protect and defend his own religion, and the true professors of it, against all the fury and malice of men and devils, so that the “gates of hell,” the strongest combinations and deepest conspiracies of all the powers of darkness, “shall not” finally “prevail against it.” Here is the foundation of our hopes and confidence, that our Redeemer is strong, and that God hath given him a kingdom and power that is paramount and superior to all earthly kingdoms and powers; and though they should conspire together, and be of one mind, unite all their force, and “give their power and strength unto the beast, to make war with the Lamb and his company,” that is, the true church and faithful servants of Christ; yet “the Lamb shall overcome them,” because “he is Lord of lords, and King of kings.”

And let us likewise bless God for the wonderful restoration of his Majesty to the government of these kingdoms, who, under Christ, is the great defender of our faith and religion; and let us pay that duty and obedience, which becomes us, to a prince whom God hath so miraculously preserved and restored; and pour out our most fervent prayers to God, that he would long preserve him, and protect his person from all dangers, who is the great security

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of our religion,⁴ and the life of all our hopes, and as truly as any prince ever was to any people, the light of our eyes, and the breath of our nostrils; and that God would make him “wise as an angel of God, to go in and out before this great people;” and grant to him, and all the people of this land, “to know in this our day the things that be long to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.”



4 Preached towards the conclusion of the reign of King Charles the Second.

SERMON CXCVI.

OF THE GIFT OF TONGUES CONFERRED ON THE APOSTLES.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.—Acts ii. 1-4.

ONE of the chief designs of the dispensation of God towards the Jews, and of the giving of the law to them by Moses, was, to be a type of the Christian church, and of the dispensation of the gospel by the Son of God; and therefore no wonder, if there be a great correspondence between them, and that the Divine Providence should so order the event of things, that the seasons of dispensing the great evangelical blessings should happen at the same times, when the great blessings of the law, which were the types of them, were dispensed and commemorated. Thus our Saviour, who was the Lamb of God, was slain and offered up at the same time that the passover was kept, and the paschal lamb was slain and offered up among the Jews; and the redemption of the world from the slavery of sin and Satan, is celebrated by Christians at the very same season of the year, when the deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptian slavery was commemorated by them: and as at the time of Pentecost (which was fifty days after) the Jews were appointed to rejoice before the Lord, and to offer their first-fruits by way of grateful acknowledgment to God for the fruits of the earth, then newly gathered in; so did God likewise at the same time impart the first-fruits of the Holy Spirit to the apostles, who were to be the first and chief labourers in that spiritual harvest, to which they were appointed by the Lord of the harvest: and, which is yet more remarkable, at the same season that the law was delivered to the Jews from Mount Sinai, and the first covenant established, namely, at the time of Pentecost, as is commonly supposed by the Jewish doctors, and as may probably be collected from the text; ([Exod. xix. 1.](#)) I say, at that very time the gospel, which contains the terms of the new covenant, began to be published from Mount Sion, in as wonderful, though not so terrible a manner, as the law was given from Mount Sinai. And thus it was fore told by the ancient prophets, ([Isa. ii. 3.](#) and [Micah iv. 2.](#)) that “out of Sion should go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

I shall briefly explain the words, and as I pass along make some short observations upon them, and then fix upon that which is mainly intended in them; viz. This first and most miraculous gift of the Holy Ghost, which was conferred upon the apostles when they were assembled together at Jerusalem upon the day of Pentecost.⁵

5 Preached on Whit-Sunday.

“When the day of Pentecost was fully come,” that is, when the fifty days after Easter were fulfilled, upon the fiftieth day, which was called the day of Pentecost, “they were all with one accord in one place.” “They were all;” that is, all the twelve apostles; for upon them it was that the gift of tongues was bestowed; because they were appointed to be the chief publishers of the gospel, having been eye-witnesses of our Saviour’s miracles, and particularly of his resurrection from the dead. There is no mention of any other in this chapter, but only of the twelve apostles: (ver. 14.) we find Peter and the eleven spoken of; and (ver. 37.) it is said, that “the multitude,” who were astonished at this miracle, “spake to Peter and the rest of the apostles.”

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“They were all with one accord in one place.” Unity is an excellent qualification and disposition for the Holy Spirit of God and his gifts; for which reason, the peace and good agreement of Christians is called by St. Paul, “the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.” When the apostles were “of one heart, and one mind,” then the Holy Spirit of God came down upon them in this wonderful manner.

(Ver. 2.) “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind.” As they were together “waiting for the promise of the Father,” all on the sudden there came a sound as of a strong gust of wind. This was a fit emblem of the Divine Spirit; for to this our Saviour had compared it, in his discourse to Nicodemus: (John iii. 8.) “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou nearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

“As of a rushing mighty wind.” To signify to us, that the publication of the gospel was attended with the same Divine presence and power, that the giving of the law was; but not with the same circumstances of terror, which the apostle to the Hebrews describes, when he sets forth to us the difference between Mount Sinai and Mount Sion, that is, between the two dispensations of the law and the gospel. (Heb. xii. 18, 19.) Speaking of Mount Sinai, from which the law was given, “Ye are not come (says he) unto the mount, that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words;” that is, that terrible voice of God, wherein the ten words of the law were delivered; which voice then shook the earth, as the apostle tells us: (ver. 26.) “A voice so terrible, that they who heard it, earnestly begged that they might hear it no more.” These were all circumstances of great horror: but at the coming down of the Holy Ghost, here was no trumpet nor terrifying voice; no thunder, nor darkness, nor tempest; only the sound, as it were, of a strong gust of wind, as a sensible signification of a Divine presence and power.

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“And it filled all the house where they were sitting.” The whole house, to represent the world, which was to be filled with the sound of the gospel; according to that of the Psalmist, cited by St. Paul, (Rom. x. 18.) where, speaking of the general publication of the gospel, “their sound (says he) went out into all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world.”

“It filled all the house.” This is that which (ver. 5. of the former chapter,) our Saviour calls baptizing the apostles with the Holy Ghost, so that they who sat in the house were, as it were, immersed in the Holy Ghost, as they who were baptized with water were overwhelmed and covered all over with water, which is the proper notion of baptism.

(Ver. 3.) “And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, as it were of fire, and sat upon each of them.” “Cloven tongues,” to signify the diversity and distribution of them; this gift being imparted to every one of the apostles: for it is said, that these tongues “sat upon each of them.”

“Cloven tongues, as it were of fire,” to signify the penetrating virtue and efficacy of their preaching. And this is that which John the Baptist calls “baptizing with the Holy Ghost, and with fire,” meaning the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles, in the form of fiery tongues; “divided,” to signify the diversity of them. At first, men were all of one language; and the confusion and division of tongues, was a curse and punishment upon them, and the cause of their dispersion through the world; but now, God by the gift of several tongues designed to gather mankind together, and to unite them in one religion.

“And it sat upon each of them.” These cloven fiery tongues sat upon each of the apostles, that is, remained visibly upon them for some time; to signify the permanency of this gift of tongues. It was not like several of the other miraculous gifts, which did not constantly reside upon them; for they had them not at all times, nor when they pleased, but as God was pleased to dispense and communicate them: but this gift of tongues was constant, because they had continual use of it; and it was common to all the apostles, because they were to be the publishers of the gospel, and the witnesses of our Lord’s resurrection, which was the greatest miracle whereby the gospel was to be confirmed.

(Ver. 4.) “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” “And began to speak with other tongues:” the Vulgar translation renders it, *variis linguis*, with divers tongues; that is, they spake several languages besides their own mother tongue; or, as it is expressed in our Saviour’s promise to the apostles, (Mark xvi. 17.) “with new tongues.” “These signs,” says our Lord before his ascension, “shall follow them that believe; they shall speak with new tongues;” that is, they should all on the sudden speak languages which they had never learned, nor had any knowledge of before.

I know not who was the first author of that conceit, that the miracle was not in the speakers, but in the hearers; that is, the apostles spake in their own mother tongue (the Syriac), and the hearers of several nations heard them every one in their own language; which indeed must be acknowledged to be as great a miracle, or greater, than if the apostles had spoken so many different languages: but this seems to be a very groundless and unreasonable conceit, and very contrary to this relation of this miraculous gift, and to all the circumstances of it. For the text expressly says, that they spake “with other tongues;” that is,

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in languages different from their mother tongue, in which they spake before, otherwise they could not be called other, or new tongues. And (1 Cor. xii. 28.) the apostle, among the several gifts which God hath bestowed upon the church, mentions diversity of tongues; which had not been true, if the apostles had all spoken in one language. And (ver. 30.) he makes a difference between the gift of speaking several languages, and interpreting things spoken in divers tongues. “Do all (says he) speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” But if what the apostles had spoken in one language, had been heard of those of several nations in their own language, there had been no need of interpretation. And, (chap. xiv. 2.) “He that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for n man heareth him;” that is, no man understandeth what he saith, God only knows it; whereas if they heard every one in their own language, they all understood what was said. And, (ver. 13.) “Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue, pray that he may interpret.” But what need of that, if every one heard what was spoken in his own tongue? and (ver. 16.) the apostle says, that “he that was unlearned, could not say Amen at giving of thanks in an unknown tongue;” because a he understood not what was said.” And, (ver. 27.) “If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at most by three, and that by course, and let one interpret.” All which plainly contradicts that foolish conceit, that the miracle of the gift of tongues was not in the speakers, but the hearers.

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That which seems to have given occasion to this error, was, that they could not understand how any man should at the same time speak divers languages: but there is no ground at all to suppose so; because it is not said, that any of the apostles did at the same time speak several languages, (which is impossible) but that the apostles spake several languages, so that the several nations then present heard some or other of the apostles speaking in their own language. So that, to trouble ourselves no farther about this idle conceit, the miracle was not, that every one of the apostles did speak several languages at the same time; but they all spake, on a sudden, languages which they had never learned before; so that the people of several nations, that were then present, did then hear some or other of the apostles speaking to them in their own language.

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Having thus explained the several expressions and passages in the text,

I come now to speak to the main argument contained in them; viz. This miraculous gift which was conferred on the apostles, of speaking, all on the sudden, the languages of all nations, with whom they had occasion to converse, though they had never learned them before.

And in the handling of this argument, these following particulars will be fit to be considered, and inquired into by us:

First, The strangeness of this gift or miracle.

Secondly, The clear evidence of this miracle, that it was real, and that there was no manner of imposture or deceit in it, nor could there be any suspicion of it.

Thirdly, The wonderful effect of it immediately, and upon the spot, upon the very day, and in the place where it was first wrought.

Fourthly, The great necessity and usefulness of it.

Fifthly, The reason why it was the first of all the miraculous gifts, and so visibly conferred upon the apostles, before any of the rest.

Sixthly, and lastly, I shall inquire, whether there be any necessity now, and consequently any possibility, of the renewing this miracle, in order to the conversion of the infidel world, and those many and great nations in the remoter parts of the world, which do still continue strangers and enemies to the Christian religion.

First, The strangeness of this gift or miracle. It was of that nature, that the like was never known in the world, neither before nor since the first ages of Christianity, upon any occasion whatsoever; nor can we well imagine any other sort of miracle that could probably affect men more, and strike them with greater wonder and admiration, and have been a more sensible demonstration of a Divine power and presence accompanying the apostles, than to see and hear them all on the sudden perfectly to speak so many languages, which they had never learned before.

Especially, if all the circumstances of the thing be duly weighed and considered; that they who pretended to be endowed with this gift, were not strangers newly arrived and come to Jerusalem, who before they came thither might possibly, by great study and pains, have attained to the knowledge and skill of several languages (each of them, suppose, two languages apiece), and have craftily combined together to impose upon the world, by the pretence and ostentation of such a miracle: but these persons were known to all that dwelt in Jerusalem, and had for a long time been taken notice of, as the disciples and followers of Jesus, who was lately crucified among them; their education was known, and the meanness of their condition, that they were simple and illiterate persons, who never had the advantage or opportunity of attaining to this skill in an ordinary way; and, therefore, it must be concluded to have been an extraordinary and supernatural gift.

Besides that, this miracle was very publicly wrought, and the noise of it in a few hours drew together the strangers of several nations, who, being become proselytes of the Jewish religion, dwelt at Jerusalem; these all coming together, upon the noise and fame of this miracle, found it to be true; and, as appears from the history, were so well satisfied of the reality of it, that a very great number, upon the occasion of it, and upon that very day, became proselytes to the Christian religion, and joined themselves to the apostles and their followers (who were then but few in number), and were presently admitted into the Christian church by baptism, the usual ceremony of admitting proselytes among the Jews. This was a present and great effect, and is a great evidence and confirmation of the truth and reality of the thing: but this I shall have occasion to speak more fully to, when I come to the fifth particular which I proposed.

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I add farther, that our Saviour seems to have reckoned this as one of the greatest of miracles, and therefore to have reserved it, for an instance and demonstration of the glorious power which he was invested withal, after his ascension into heaven, as may very probably be collected from that declaration and promise which he made to his apostles, a little before his departure from them: ([John xiv. 12.](#)) “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father;” that is, in order to the sending of the Holy Ghost, “to endow them with power from on high,” to qualify them for the publishing of the gospel, which they were forbidden to enter upon till this promise was made good to them. But what were these greater works, which he here promiseth to enable them to do, after he was gone to his Father? For he expressly promiseth, that they shall not only do the works which he had done, but greater works than those: and what could these be? Our Saviour had wrought many and great miracles almost in all kinds imaginable; he had cast out devils, and healed all sorts of infirmities and diseases; he had changed nature, by turning water into wine, and had stopped the course of it, by stilling the winds and the sea by his word; and he had raised the dead: and now what work could that be which was greater than any of these? Even that which I am speaking of, the miraculous power of speaking all languages, without learning them; a thing never heard of in the world before. And this was the first sensible effect of the coming of the Holy Ghost upon them, the first miraculous power with which he endowed his apostles, after he was ascended into heaven, and gone to his Father; an evident testimony of the glory and power which he was invested withal, after he was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God, to signify both the honour and power which was conferred upon him, in that he enabled his apostles, when he was absent from them, to do that which, whilst he was present with them, he had never enabled them to do, nor ever did himself; all which tends to advance this miracle, and to shew the greatness and strangeness of it above any other. And unless we fix it upon this miracle, it will be hard, if not impossible, to give a good account of the accomplishing of that solemn promise of our Saviour to his disciples, after he should be gone to his Father; that is, after his ascension into heaven; “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father.” Now what miraculous work can be instanced in, that was done by the apostles, and was greater than any our Saviour did, when he was upon earth; but this only of speaking all languages on the sudden, without ever having learned them? Which consideration alone does confirm me past all doubt, that our Saviour in this promise meant the miraculous gift of tongues, which was the first gift that was conferred upon them, after he was ascended into heaven, and gone to his Father. I proceed,

Secondly, To consider the clear evidence of this miracle, that it was real, and that there could be no suspicion of any manner of imposture and deceit in it.

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It was publicly wrought before many witnesses, and those the most competent of all other, because they were highly prejudiced against the apostles, and great enemies to them, as being the disciples of him whom they had so lately crucified as an impostor. They gave clear proof of this miraculous power in the presence of great multitudes of several nations, who heard them every one speaking to them in their own language: and besides the present demonstration of this miraculous gift, to those of several nations that dwelt at Jerusalem, they gave evidence of it in all places and nations whither they went preaching the gospel; so that this miracle accompanied and continued with them, till the gospel was made known to a great part of the then known world, and lasted for a whole age, and till there was no farther need and use of it.

But it may be said, that though this was sufficiently evident to them that dwelt at Jerusalem, who knew the apostles, and the circumstances of their education; yet it was not so credible to others, who lived remote from Jerusalem, and neither knew the apostles, nor the manner of their education, nor were witnesses of the miraculous rise and beginning of this gift of tongues. These could only hear them speak in their language; but whether their knowledge of this language had been acquired by study, or was supernatural and infused, for this they had only common fame, and the apostles own word, which may seem to have been but a slender evidence for a thing so strange. And so it must be acknowledged to be, if the apostles affirmation, that this gift was supernaturally conferred upon them, had not been otherwise countenanced and supported; as it was in a very extraordinary and remarkable manner, by their being endowed with a power to work other miracles of all kinds, which they did every where, and very frequently, upon all occasions. And this was sufficient to give credit to what they affirmed, concerning the supernatural gift of tongues: for when they saw them work other miracles of all sorts, they had no reason to doubt of the truth and reality of this miraculous gift of tongues, which was abundantly confirmed by the other miraculous powers with which they were endowed. So that the gospel, wherever it came, carried its own evidence along with it, and was confirmed by the very manner of its conveyance and delivery; and well might men entertain it as a Divine doctrine, when the very manner and means, whereby it was conveyed to the world, was so strange and astonishing a miracle, as was never wrought in the world before, upon any occasion whatsoever. And this will yet be farther evident, if we consider, in the

Third place, The wonderful effect which this miracle immediately had upon the spot, and on the very day when it first appeared.

It had so glaring an evidence, and carried such conviction in it, that the doctrine which they who were endowed with miraculous gifts did preach, was immediately received and entertained by a very great number of the hearers; who, upon the conviction of this great miracle, became proselytes to this new religion, and were solemnly admitted to the profession of it by baptism; as we read, [ver. 41.](#) of this chapter; where, after St. Peter had made an end



of his sermon to the people upon this occasion, it is said, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Here was a mighty effect, three thousand converted at one sermon, being convinced by the evidence of this miracle. And it is a very immediate effect; for it is said, that "the same day three thousand were added to the church." Here was an effect proportionable to the greatness and strangeness of its cause; a mighty victory gained over the prejudices of men, and the powers of darkness, by the light and conviction of this miracle, which our Saviour seems to have kept in reserve for this great occasion, when his gospel and religion was to be first published, and to make its solemn entrance into the world. Here was a large portion of first-fruits, and a great earnest of that spiritual harvest, which the apostles had began to reap; of which the first-fruits among the Jews were a type: for their harvest also was at this very season of the year; as I noted before.

Fourthly, We will consider the great usefulness of this miraculous gift, for the more easy and speedy conveyance of the doctrine of Christianity, and the diffusing and spreading the knowledge of it in the world; and this, if we consider it, not as a miracle, but only as a means so very convenient to this purpose, that, by the advantage of it, the gospel made a greater progress in the space of a few years, than in human probability could have been made without it in many ages: and it was spread farther in thirty years, than could in reason have been expected in fifteen hundred, by natural and ordinary means: "So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed;" being carried on in so powerful and supernatural a manner.

Fifthly, We will consider, why this was the first miraculous gift conferred upon the apostles more visibly, and before any of the rest. The other miraculous powers were only visible in their effects; but this was visible, not only in the effects of it, but likewise in the cause and the manner of its being conferred: "for the Holy Spirit rested upon them, in the form of fiery cloven tongues;" to signify, not only the diversity of languages which they should be enabled to speak, but the quick and piercing efficacy of their speech. The reason of all which seems to be, because this was the greatest of all miracles, and therefore fit to be first: for, as I shewed before, this, in the judgment of our Saviour, (who best understood the different degrees of miracles) was greater than any of those which he himself in his life-time had wrought; and, likewise, because this miracle was of greater use than any of the rest, and more necessary to the effectual discharge of their apostolical office, and to the easy success and more speedy effect of it. For by this miraculous gift more especially, the apostles were, as it were, consecrated to their office, and made capable to discharge it with ease and effect; their office being to publish the doctrine of the gospel to the world, and to be witnesses of our Saviour's resurrection from the dead, which was to be the great confirmation of his doctrine; neither of which they could, with any probability of effect and success, have done without this miraculous gift: for what slow progress must they have made, and how little could they have advanced in this work, had they either done all by interpreters, or been put

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to have learned the languages of the several nations, to which they had been to preach, before they could have published this doctrine among them?

The Jews, who were very zealous of their religion, (which was likewise from God, and was attested by miracles) upon occasion of several calamities which befel them, and carried them into captivity, were dispersed in several nations; and yet how slowly, for want of this gift, did they gain proselytes to their religion? and how few did they convert to it in the space of four or five hundred years? by which we may judge how little Christianity would have gained upon the world, had it not been countenanced and assisted from heaven in this miraculous manner. I come now to the

Sixth and last thing which I proposed to inquire into; namely, Whether there be any necessity now, and, consequently, probability, of the renewing of this miracle, in order to the conversion of infidels, and the gaining over of those many and great nations in the remoter parts of the world, who are still strangers and enemies to the Christian religion.

That which would induce a man to hope well in this case, is, that without some such miraculous gift there is little or no probability of the conversion of infidel nations: unless God should be pleased, by some unexpected means, to bring over to Christianity some powerful prince of great reputation for his wisdom and virtue; who, by the influence of his example, and by his favour and countenance, might give advantages to the planting of it among his subjects. And yet, considering the inveterate and violent prejudices of men against a new religion, such an attempt would, in all human probability, be more likely to end in the ruin of the prince, and the overturning of his government, than in the establishing of a new religion. Of which kind there have been several instances very remarkable in Japan and Æthiopia, and perhaps in places and times nearer to us, and within our own memory.

But if any such thing should be attempted by private persons, the undertaking would meet with such insuperable obstacles, not only from the prejudices and interests of men, but from the great difficulty of gaining languages so different from our own, that it must in all likelihood have a very slow progress, and at last fall to the ground, for want of proper and effectual means to carry it on. For though the morality of the Christian religion be admirable, and very apt to recommend itself to the unbiassed and impartial reason of mankind (if any such thing were any where to be found), yet,⁶ the death of the Son of God is such a stumbling-block, as is very hard for human reason to get over. Of which the Jesuits in China were so sensible, that, according to their usual sincerity, they thought best to conceal that most essential part of the Christian doctrine which relates to the death and sufferings of our Saviour. So I am sure St. Paul took it to be, when he tells the Corinthians, that “he determined to know nothing among them, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” This, it seems, he looked upon as the most material and valuable part of the Christian religion, and of greatest

⁶ See Sermon cxcii. p. 308. of this volume.

consequence to be known by us. But the Jesuits, it seems, thought otherwise, and therefore concealed it from their converts: for which most shameful and unchristian practice, several of them were very lately under prosecution at Rome.

Besides all this,⁷ the matters of fact upon which the truth of Christianity does necessarily depend, as the birth, and life, and miracles, and death, and resurrection of our blessed Saviour, and his visible ascension into heaven: I say, these matters of fact, though we have a most credible history and relation of them brought down to us, do not carry so strong and sensible a conviction in them, to those who never heard of them before, as to be able to conquer and bear down a violent prejudice: nor is it in reason to be expected, that these things should easily be admitted by those, who are utter strangers to our history of former times, and consequently not fit to judge of what value they are.

I speak not this to discourage any from using their best endeavours to propagate our religion among infidels, where the providence of God opens a door, and gives any opportunity for it. Among the many bad things that have been clone in the church of Rome, there is one thing very much to their honour—that they have been at very great charge and pains in their missions for the conversion of the infidel nations, especially in the eastern parts of the world, to that which they account the true Christian religion. And if the matter had been as honestly managed, as I hope it was piously intended, and their charity and zeal had been equally warm for the conversion of the northern infidels, where there is nothing to be met with but frost and cold, as it hath been for the conversion of those parts of the world where gold and spices abound, it had deserved great praise, notwithstanding their mistakes in religion, and the great mixture of errors and corruptions in it.

And it is no small reproach to the protestant religion, that there hath not appeared an equal zeal among us for this purpose: and that to our un wearied endeavours to promote the interest of trade in foreign parts, there hath not been joined a like zeal and industry for the propagating of the Christian religion; which might surely be attempted, with more than ordinary advantage, in those places where we have so free a commerce.

It is not good for men to be confident, where they are not certain; but⁸ it seems to me not impossible, if the conversion of infidels to Christianity were sincerely and vigorously attempted by men of honest minds, who would make it their business to instruct those who are strangers to our religion in the pure doctrine of Christianity, free from all human mixtures and corruptions: it seems to me, in this case, not at all improbable, that God would extraordinarily countenance such an attempt, by all fitting assistance, as he did the first publication of the gospel: for as the wisdom of God is not wont to do that which is superfluous, so neither

7 See the beforementioned Discourse.

8 See the forecited Discourse.

is it wanting in that which is necessary. And from what hath been said upon this argument, the necessity seems to be much the same that it was at first.

I would not be mistaken in what I have said about this matter; I do not deliver it as positive, but only as probable, divinity; no-wise contrary to Scripture, and very agreeable to reason.

Thus much may suffice to have spoken concerning this miraculous gift of tongues, conferred upon the apostles at the time of Pentecost.



SERMON CXCVII.

OF THE COMING OF THE HOLY GHOST, AS AN ADVOCATE FOR CHRIST.

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.—John xvi. 7, 8.

THESE words are part of our Saviour's last sermon, -which he made to his disciples a little before he left the world: and this sermon is only recorded by this evangelist, who hath set it down at large in the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters of his Gospel. The main scope of it is first, to persuade them to the obedience and practice of that holy doctrine, which he had delivered to them while he was with them; and then, because their hearts were full of sorrow at the thoughts of his departure from them, knowing that for his sake they should be ill-treated by the world, he arms them against these discouragements; he promiseth, not long after his departure from them, to send down his Holy Spirit upon them in miraculous powers and gifts, as a testimony to the world of the truth of his doctrine, and a clear conviction that he came from God; ([ver. 26.](#) of the 15th chapter.) "But when the Comforter (or rather the advocate) is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceeds from the Father, he shall testify of me. And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." The testimony which the Holy Spirit should give to them, should give credit and strength to their testimony.

And this consideration he makes use of to comfort them under the sad thoughts of his departure, because his absence would be abundantly recompensed to them, by the coming of the Holy Ghost, which could not be until he had left the world; because this Comforter, or advocate, was to be sent in his name, to come upon his account, and in his stead, to supply his absence. So that though they were greatly troubled at the thoughts of his departure, there was no cause for it, when all things were considered; for, in truth, it was for their advantage, that he should depart from them: ([ver. 6-8.](#) of this chapter:) "But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you, that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."

From which words, I shall consider these two things:

First, The necessity of Christ's leaving the world, in order to the coming of the Holy Ghost; "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."



Secondly, The happy consequence and effect of the coming of the Holy Ghost: “And when he is come, he shall reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” I shall as briefly as I can explain both these.

First, The necessity of Christ’s leaving the world, in order to the coming of the Holy Ghost: “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” That it is the Holy Ghost which is here spoken of, and that as a person, and not as a quality, or power, or virtue, is plain from our Saviour’s discourse all along this sermon, in which he is spoken of under the notion of a person, and that in as plain and express terms as Christ himself is. As the Father sent Christ, so is he said to send the Holy Ghost; as Christ is said to depart, so the Holy Ghost is said to come; as Christ is called an advocate, so the Holy Ghost is said to be another advocate; Christ our advocate to plead our cause with God, he Christ’s advocate to plead his cause with the world: ([chap. xiv. 16, 17.](#)) “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.” And who is that? “Even the Spirit of truth.” And ([chap. xv. 26.](#)) “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth.” And in the verse immediately after the text, “Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come.” But expressly, ([chap. xiv. 26.](#)) he is called the Holy Ghost: But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things.”

All the difficulty is concerning the word παράκλητος, which our translation renders “the Comforter.” It is true, indeed, that the verb παρακαλεῖν is of a very large and unlimited signification; it sometimes signifies to comfort, very frequently to preach, teach, and exhort, and sometimes to plead as an advocate the cause of another. And this seems to be the proper notion of the word παράκλητος in this place, “the advocate or patron of a cause,” one that pleads for the party accused. And in this sense, and no other, Christ is called our παράκλητος, or “advocate with the Father:” ([1 John ii. 1.](#)) “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” And as Christ is our advocate with the Father in heaven; so the Spirit is Christ’s advocate here on earth, and pleads his cause with the world. And it is very observable, that this very word *paraclete*, though it be not a Hebrew, but a Greek word, is frequently used both by the Chaldee paraphrast, and other Jewish writers, in this sense of an advocate. And that this notion of the word agrees best with this place, I shall clearly shew, when I come to the second head of my discourse; namely, To shew the happy consequence and effect of the coming of the Holy Ghost, viz. the convincing of the world how injuriously they had dealt with Christ, and the clear vindication of his innocency, which is the proper office and work of an advocate.

Having thus fixed the notion of the word παράκλητος in this place, we will now inquire what necessity or expediency there was, that Christ should leave the world, in order to the

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coming of the Holy Ghost: “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the advocate will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”

And of this I shall give an account in these two particulars:

I. From the method of the Divine dispensation, in the redemption and .salvation of man by Jesus Christ.

II. From the rational suitableness and congruity of this dispensation.

I. From the method of the Divine dispensation in the redemption and salvation of man by Jesus Christ. Thus the Scripture tells us, that God in his infinite wisdom had designed and ordered things that the Son of God should come into the world, and live in a mean and abject condition; that he should be despised and rejected of men, persecuted and put to death; and that, as a reward of all this submission and suffering, he should be raised again from the dead, taken up into heaven, and placed “on the right hand of the Majesty on high;” and that in the triumph of his ascension, he should lead captive death and hell, and all the powers of darkness; and being entered into the highest heavens, and set on the right hand of God, as an act of power and royalty, he should send down his Holy Spirit in miraculous gifts upon men, for the conviction of the world, that the doctrine which he commanded his apostles to publish to all nations was from God. And therefore the apostle St. Paul tells us expressly, that the communication of these gifts of the Spirit was the proper effect and consequent of our Lord’s exaltation, and one of the first acts of royalty which he exercised, after he was possessed of his glorious kingdom; ([Ephes. iv. 7, 8.](#)) where, speaking of the various gifts of the Spirit, “Unto every one of us (saith he) is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” For which he cites the prediction of David; ([Psal. lxxviii. 18.](#)) “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” And, “he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” So that we plainly see, that this was the dispensation of God, and the method which his wisdom hath pitched upon, that our Lord should first leave the world, and be taken up into glory, and then send down the Holy Ghost, in the plentiful effusion of miraculous gifts. So this evangelist expressly tells us in another place, which gives great light to the text; ([John vii. 39.](#)) “But (says he) spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Implying that, according to the Divine disposal, it was ordered, first, that Christ should be glorified, and being invested in his kingdom and glory, that then he should do acts of grace, and, like a king at his coronation, scatter and dispense his gifts among men, by sending down his Holy Spirit among them. And accordingly we find St. Peter, ([Acts ii.](#)) after that the Holy Ghost came down upon them, giving this account of it; ([ver. 32, 33.](#)) “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses: therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth that which ye now see and hear;” meaning the gift of tongues; so that he

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resolves it into the dispensation of God, who had thus designed and ordered things. And therefore, in the

Second place, I shall shew, that this dispensation is very congruous and suitable to the Divine wisdom. For as it was convenient, that the Son of God should assume our nature, and come into the world, and dwell among us, that he might reform mankind, by the purity of his doctrine, and the pattern of his holy life; and likewise that he should suffer death, for the expiation of sin: in such a manner as might not only advance the mercy, but assert and vindicate the holiness of God, and testify his great hatred and displeasure against sin: so likewise, after he had thus abased himself to the lowest degree of meanness and suffering, it was very suitable to the Divine goodness, to reward such great sufferings with great glory, by raising him from the dead, and taking him up into heaven; but it was not fit, when he had left the world, that the great work for which he came into it should be given over, and come to nothing, for want of effectual prosecution, without any fruit and effect of so much sweat and blood. And, therefore, though it had "pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief," as the prophet expresseth it, yet the Divine wisdom hath so ordered things, that, after "he had made his soul an offering for sin, he should see his seed, and prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands;" that he should see some fruit of "the travail of his soul, and be satisfied," as the prophet foretels, (*Isa. liii. 10.*) So that, as it was expedient, that he should die and depart this life; so it was also requisite afterwards, that he who had begun this great and good work of the redemption and salvation of man, should take care to have it still prosecuted and carried on: and accordingly, when he was ascended into heaven, he still promotes the same design, *per vicariam vim spiritus sancti*, as Tertullian calls it, by sending the Holy Ghost, as his deputy, for the managing of this work, and the propagating and establishing of that religion which he had planted in the world.

God foresaw that the greatest part of the Jewish nation would reject Christ and his doctrine, and that they would put him to death, as a deceiver and impostor; and because it was expedient, that there should be such an expiatory sacrifice for sin, and that "one man should die for all men," God was willing to permit his Son to be thus dishonourably and unjustly treated, "and by wicked hands to be crucified and slain;" because he knew very well, how to make the malice of men subservient to his own gracious purpose and design; but yet he was not willing, that so much innocency and goodness should always lie under this reproach; from which, if he had not been vindicated, the design of the gospel had fallen to the ground, and presently come to nothing: and therefore, as a reward of his obedience and submission to the will of God, in these dreadful sufferings, in this cruel and dishonourable usage, God furnished him with this means of vindicating himself and his doctrine; he gave him power to send his Holy Spirit into the world, who should distribute miraculous gifts among his apostles and followers, that so both he and his doctrine might be effectually

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vindicated to the world, and a way made for the more speedy spreading and propagating of it.

So that we plainly see, that the wisdom of God had so ordered this whole dispensation, that every part of it, the birth, the life, and death, and resurrection, and ascension of our Lord, and the sending of the Holy Ghost, are all subservient to one another, and to the whole design; viz. the reformation and salvation of mankind.

I have done with the first thing I propounded, the necessity of Christ's leaving the world, in order to the coming of the Holy Ghost. I shall now proceed to the

Second thing I proposed, the happy consequence and effects of the coming of the Holy Ghost. "When he is come he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." There is a great difficulty in these words, and therefore I shall endeavour, as well as I can, to explain them and then draw some useful inferences from the main doctrine contained in them.

For the explication of them. "And when he," that is, the Holy Ghost, the advocate mentioned before, "shall come," that is, when the promise of the Father concerning the coming of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles shall be accomplished, "he shall reprove the world;" the word is ἐλέγξει, which I think may much more properly be rendered *convince*—he shall convince the world. And so it is used by this evangelist: (John viii. 46.) "Which of you (says our Saviour) convinceth me of sin?" The very phrase used in the text, "He shall convince the world of sin." And the same word is also used in the same sense by St. Paul, (Tit. i. 9.) ἐλέγχειν ἀντιλέγοντας, "to convince gainsayers." And this certainly is much more agreeable to the scope of this place. For though to "reprove the world of sin" be a current expression, yet to "reprove the world of righteousness, and of judgment," are very hard phrases, and I doubt not intelligible; but to convince an adversary, or to satisfy a court, of the falsehood of the accusation and charge brought against the party accused, that is to vindicate and justify him in his cause, this is the proper act of an advocate.

So that the great end of the coming of the Holy Ghost, who is here called the advocate, is to convince the world. "He shall convince the world;" that is, both Jews and gentiles, who joined in their enmity against Christ, and agreed to put him to death: in these three points concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment. The expression is short, and somewhat obscure, and seems (as Grotius and other learned men have not improbably thought) to allude to the three sorts of causes and actions among the Jews.

In the first, to public actions concerning criminal matters, among which was the case of believing or rejecting prophets. "He shall convince the world of sin, because they believed not in me;" that is, he shall convince the world that I was a true prophet sent from God, and no impostor; and consequently, that they were guilty of a great contempt of God, and a horrible murder, in putting me to death.

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In the second, there seems to be an allusion to that sort of private actions, which referred to the vindicating of innocency from false testimony and accusation, which are called by the name of righteousness. “He shall convince the world of righteousness.”

In the third, to that sort of actions, which referred to the vindication and punishment of injuries, by way of retaliation upon him that did the injury, and which are called κρίσεις, or judgments. “He shall convince the world of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”

But to explain these things more particularly.

1. He shall convince the world of sin, because they believe not on me;” that is, of the great sin that they were guilty of, in rejecting this great prophet, and condemning him as a seducer and impostor. And of this they would remarkably be convinced, when they should see the predictions of Christ fulfilled, particularly that of sending the Holy Ghost, and of that terrible vengeance which should afterwards be executed on the Jewish nation, for rejecting the Son of God. The first of these we find eminently fulfilled upon the coming of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost, ([Acts ii.](#)) For when the apostles by a sudden inspiration spake with other tongues, the Jews and proselytes, who saw and heard them, were very much amazed at it, ([ver. 7.](#)) And from this miraculous power of the Holy Ghost so visible upon them, St. Peter takes occasion to convince the Jews, of their great sin in rejecting the Messiah, and putting him to death: ([ver. 32, 33.](#)) “This Jesus (saith he) hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses: wherefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.” From whence he concludes, ([ver. 36.](#)) “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” That is, by this you may be convinced, that he whom you crucified, as a false prophet, was the true Messiah. Upon this we find, ([ver. 37.](#)) that “when the Jews heard this, they were pricked at their hearts; and said unto Peter, and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?” Thus you see the first effect which our Saviour foretold of the coming of the Holy Ghost, fulfilled in a most eminent manner; for upon this sermon, three thousand of the Jews being “convinced of their great sin, in not believing on him, were baptized in his name.”

II. “He shall convince the world of righteousness;” that is, of the innocency of that holy and just person, whom they had condemned as a malefactor. “Of righteousness, because I go to the Father;” that is, this shall be an evidence to the world of my innocency of those crimes, with which I was charged; that I am taken up into heaven, and seated at the right hand of God, where I shall remain for ever, out of the reach of their malice and injury. “Because, I go to the Father, and ye see me no more;” that is, I shall be there, where their malice cannot reach me. For so he tells the pharisees when they came to apprehend him:

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(John vii. 33, 34.) “Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me: ye shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, thither ye can not come.”

And this vindication of his innocence, was begun by the miracles which immediately followed his death, upon which “the centurion glorified God,” saying, “Certainly, this was the Son of God,” as St. Matthew hath it; or, as St. Luke, “this was a righteous man,” (Luke xxiii. 47.) And not only the centurion, but all the people: (ver. 48.) “And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.” But the great, vindication of his innocence was his resurrection, which delivered him from that unjust sentence of death which was passed upon him, by raising him up to life again. And this is particularly ascribed to the Holy Ghost: (Rom. i. 4.) “And was mightily demonstrated to be the Son of God, by the Spirit of holiness, in his resurrection from the dead.” Especially if we consider, that he was afterwards taken up visibly into heaven, and there invested with royal power and dignity, of which he gave plentiful evidence, in the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, poured forth upon the apostles: which was a standing demonstration to the world of his innocence and righteousness, since God had taken him up to himself, and “set him on his own right hand,” and “committed all power to him in heaven and earth.”

III. “He shall convince the world of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” He that usurped the authority of God in the world, and by his instruments had procured Christ to be condemned as a counterfeit king, is himself dethroned and condemned; “the prince of this world is judged.” He that thought to have destroyed the Son of God, by putting him to death, is by this very means destroyed himself. So the apostle tells us, (Heb. ii. 14.) that “Christ through his death,” that is, upon occasion of his death, and his resurrection from the dead consequent upon it, “hath destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”

But most remarkably was the prince of this world judged and cast out, when, after he had so long usurped the name and worship of God in the world, he was, by that mighty power of the Spirit of God, which accompanied the preaching of the gospel, thrown out of his kingdom; and wherever the doctrine of Christ came, the idolatry of the world was not able to stand before it, but fell down, like Dagon before the ark. And that this is the meaning of judgment here, is plain from the same evangelist; (chap. xii. 31, 32.) “Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.” Where our Saviour explains the judgment of this world, by the casting out Satan out of that power and authority which he had usurped in the heathen world by his idolatrous worship. And, therefore, our Saviour foretels, that when he was “lifted up from the earth/ that is, after he was crucified, and raised from the dead, and taken up into heaven, he “would draw all men to him;” that is, his religion should prevail wonderfully in the world, and be entertained in all nations. And this was most remarkably accom-

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plished, by the wonderful progress of the gospel, and speedy downfall of idolatry in the world, “not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord.” The acknowledgment of Porphyry, that bitter enemy of Christianity, as it is reported to us by Eusebius, is very remarkable: “That since one Jesus began to be worshipped, they found no public benefit from their gods; their miracles and their oracles ceased.” This our Saviour foresaw, and foretold, when he appointed and sent forth the seventy disciples to preach the gospel: (Luke x. 18.) “I beheld Satan like lightning to fall from heaven;” to express to us the sudden demolishing of his kingdom, and the quick and speedy overthrow of idolatry in the world. And thus I have explained, as briefly as I could, this difficult passage, concerning the Holy Ghost’s “convincing the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.”

I shall only draw two or three inferences from what hath been delivered, and so conclude.

I. We have great reason to adore the wisdom and goodness of God, in the dispensation of the gospel; that, by the sending down of his Holy Spirit, to endow the first publishers of his heavenly doctrine, with such miraculous powers and gifts, he hath given such abundant testimony to the truth of our religion, and such firm grounds for our faith to rely upon. Had God left the Christian religion to have been propagated only by its own rational force upon the minds of men, what a slow progress would it in all probability have made? How little belief would the apostles naked testimony of our Lord’s resurrection from the dead, without any other demonstration or proof, have gained while they were alive, much less after their death? how unable would their doctrine, destitute of Divine testimony, as well as of all human advantages, have been to have contested with the lusts and interests of men, the wit of the philosophers, and the powers of the princes of this world, which all set themselves against it? How could it, with any hope of success, have encountered the malice of men and devils, which was so active and busy, by all possible violence and by all imaginable arts, to root it out of the world? Had the apostles of our Lord only gone forth, in the strength of their own interest and eloquence (which in poor and unlearned men must needs be very small), how little could they have contributed to the carrying on so great and difficult a work? Nay, had they not been supported, and borne up in their spirits by a mighty strength above their own, had not their commission been sealed by the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost, which upon all occasions shewed forth itself in them, to the wonder and astonishment of men, and was a testimony from heaven to them, that they were the ambassadors of God to men, specially empowered and commissioned by him for that work, they could not but have been discouraged by the opposition and difficulties they met withal; and they might with Moses have declined the service, and desired God to send his message by others, that were fitter and better qualified to deliver it; and after some vain and unsuccessful attempts, to propagate the belief of their doctrine, they would have given it over, and been ashamed of their rash undertaking. So St. Paul intimates, that had not the mighty power of God accom-

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panied their preaching, and made it effectual to the conversion and salvation of men, they would have been tempted to have been ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

But then we must remember, that it is the doctrine of Christ which is thus confirmed, and not the doctrines and traditions of men. For had the concealment of the doctrine of Christ, and the serving of God in an unknown tongue, been any part of the apostles doctrine, the gift of tongues had not been a confirmation of this doctrine, but a contra diction to it; had they preached transubstantiation, and the renouncing of our senses in order to the belief of it, miracles could have given no credit to it: for that which depends upon the certainty of sense (as miracles do) cannot be a competent argument to prove that which is contrary to sense; for that which makes me sure of the miracle which should prove this doctrine, does at the same time make me equally sure that this doctrine is not true. If there were no other evidence, that transubstantiation is no part of the Christian doctrine, this to a wise man would be sufficient, that what proves the one, overthrows the other; and that miracles, which are certainly the best and highest external proof of Christianity, are the worst proof in the world of transubstantiation, unless a man can renounce his senses, at the same time that he relies upon them; for a man cannot believe a miracle, without relying upon his senses; nor transubstantiation, without renouncing them: and never were any two things so ill coupled together, as the doctrine of Christianity and that of transubstantiation, because they draw several ways, and are ready to strangle one another. The main evidence and confirmation of the Christian doctrine, which is miracles, is resolved into the certainty and testimony of our senses; but this evidence is clear and point blank against transubstantiation.

II. The consideration of what hath been said, convinceth men of the great sin of infidelity, and the unreasonableness of it, after so clear conviction and demonstration as God hath given to the world of the truth of Christianity. That the gospel was planted and propagated in the world in so wonderful a manner, and prevailed, notwithstanding all the opposition that was made against it: the remarkable and terrible destruction of Jerusalem, according to our Saviour's prediction: the several attempts of rebuilding the temple, particularly by Julian the apostate, in despite to Christianity, and to confute our Saviour's prediction, so remarkably frustrated, and resisted from heaven, by tire flaming out of the foundation, and consuming the workmen, so that they were forced to desist; and this recorded by a heathen historian, Ammianus Marcellinus: the dispersion of the Jewish nation, and their continuing for so many ages separate and distinct from all other people, for a standing accomplishment of our Saviour's prophecy, and a testimony to all ages of the truth of Christianity:—these, with many more arguments I might mention, are a clear evidence to any one that does not obstinately wink and shut his eyes against the light, that the doctrine of Christianity came from God.

III. They who believe the gospel are inexcusable if they do not obey it, and live according to it. This is the great end of all the miracles which God hath wrought for the confirmation

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of Christianity; that, by the belief of the gospel, men might be brought “to the obedience of faith,” and live conformably to the precepts of that holy religion, which the Son of God, by so many miracles, hath planted and preserved in the world. The infidelity of men will be a heavy charge upon them, at the judgment of the great day, and God will condemn them for it: but we that profess to believe the gospel, and live contrary to it, shall not only be condemned by the judgment of God, but by the sentence of our own consciences. Our profession to believe the gospel, will be an aggravation of our disobedience to it, and every article of our creed will be a sore charge against us; and that faith, which was ordained to justify us, will be our great condemnation at the great day.

Therefore, as the apostle to the Hebrews argues, “We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we fall away,” either by infidelity or impiety of life; “for if the word spoken by angels was steadfast,” that is, if disobedience to the law of Moses was so severely punished, “and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward: how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which was at first spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed afterwards 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.” For, “if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses died without mercy, under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment shall we be thought worthy, if we tread under foot the Son of God; and count the blood of the covenant, whereby we are sanctified, an unholy thing, and offer despite to the Spirit of grace! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! But, beloved, I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak, and that you are not of the number of those who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of your souls.”

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SERMON CXCVIII.

OF THE COMING OF THE HOLY GHOST, AS A GUIDE TO THE APOSTLES.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but you can not Lear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.—[John xvi. 12, 13.](#)

OUR Saviour having before declared to his disciples the great expediency of his leaving the world, in order to the coming of the Holy Ghost, ([ver. 7.](#)) he tells them, in the next place, what the office of the Holy Ghost should be. In reference to Christ, he should be an advocate: and in reference to them, he should be a guide or teacher.

1. In reference to Christ, he should be an advocate to plead the cause of Christ and of his doctrine, and to vindicate them to the world: ([ver. 8-11.](#)) “And when he is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believed not in me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” All which I have formerly handled and explained at large.

2. In regard to the apostles; the Holy Ghost is promised to be a guide and teacher, to reveal to them, and instruct them in some truths which our Saviour, whilst he was with them, had not so fully acquainted them withal, because of their present incapacity and unfitness at that time to receive them. “I have many things to say unto you, but you can not bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.”

In the handling of these words, I shall do these two things:

First, I shall endeavour to explain the meaning of them.

Secondly I shall draw some inferences from them.

First, I shall begin with the explication of them; in order whereunto, it will be requisite to inquire into these two things:

I. What those things probably were, which our Saviour did not reveal and declare to his disciples, because they could not then bear them.

II. What is the meaning of this promise, that “the Spirit of truth shall guide them into all truth.”

I. What those things probably were, which our Saviour did not reveal and declare to his disciples, because they could not then bear them. Our Saviour does not express particularly what those things were, nor can it be expected he should have done so: for then he had declared them to them, which he tells us he would not do: but the text gives us two marks to direct our inquiry concerning them.

1. That they were such things as the disciples at that time were incapable of. “I have many things yet to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” So that it seems they were such truths, as the disciples were prejudiced against upon some account or other; most



probably by reason of their education in the Jewish religion, and some principles which they had imbibed from the teachers and interpreters of their law.

2. They were such truths as, after the Holy Ghost did descend upon them, they should be instructed in. So that if we can find out what those truths were which the disciples were fully instructed in after the coming of the Holy Ghost, which either were not at all, or not so clearly revealed to them before, because of their prejudice against them; we may then certainly conclude, that these were the things which our Saviour here speaks of, when he says, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

And upon inquiry into this matter by these two marks, it will appear that they were principally these three:

1. That our Saviour did not design the setting up of any temporal kingdom in this world; but that his kingdom and government was to be spiritual, not managed by any external force or compulsion, or by laws, the violation whereof he would vindicate by the temporal sword; but by laws, the sanction and penalty whereof should take hold of the minds and spirits of men, and relate unto another world.

And this was a truth which the disciples were incapable of, whilst our Saviour was here upon earth; against which they were so prejudiced by the general tradition which the Jews had entertained, that the Messiah was to be a great temporal prince, and to subdue all nations to them, that they were in a continual expectation, when he would lay aside his mean condition, and appear in that glory and majesty which they expected; when like the sun he would break through all those clouds wherewith he was muffled and obscured, and shine forth in his full strength and glory. For it appears very plain, that they had a hankering expectation after some such thing, and that after he had so plainly declared to them his death and sufferings. For the text tells us, that "they could not understand these things, but they were hid from them;" that is, they were so possessed with the conceit of his temporal kingdom, that they could not imagine that any such thing could befall him. And to shew how deeply this conceit was rooted in them, immediately after Christ had told them so plainly of his sufferings, James and John put up a petition to him, that one of them might sit on his right hand, and the other on his left, in his kingdom. This opinion of his temporal kingdom did so run in their minds, that they could not understand any thing that seemed to contradict it.

And though our Saviour had so expressly declared, but a little before his death, that his "kingdom was not of this world," and therefore he should make no resistance to the violence that was offered to him, yea, though the disciples saw him put to death; yet they did not lay aside this opinion, but still expected that he would rise again, and then begin his kingdom in this world. For so we find the two disciples discoursing together, as they were going to Emmaus: ([Luke xxiv. 21.](#)) "We trusted," say they one to another, "that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." And, after his resurrection, this was that which lay uppermost

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in their minds, and which their thoughts were still upon; as appears by that question which they put to him just before his ascension, as St. Luke tells us: (*Acts i. 6.*) “When therefore they were come together, they asked of him, saying, Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

No wonder then, if, being possessed with so strong a prejudice about this matter, our Saviour did not strive to convince them of it, whilst he was upon earth; because they could not then have borne it: but we find that, after the coming of the Holy Ghost, they were fully instructed in it, and quitted the conceit which they had formerly entertained, and were satisfied that he was ascended into heaven, and “set at the right hand of the majesty of God;” and that from thence he had sent his Spirit to instruct and govern his church, and that this was the kingdom of the Messias.

They were so possessed before with another apprehension, that they would almost have rejected him, had they understood that the Messias was to have no other kingdom than this; but after that glorious confirmation was given to him, by his resurrection from the dead, and visible ascension into heaven, and the descent of the Holy Ghost in such wonderful and miraculous gifts, then at last they were capable of understanding and receiving this truth, which could not sink into their hearts before.

2. Another truth which our Saviour here probably intended, was the abrogating the Jewish dispensation. And this likewise they must needs be extremely prejudiced against; because their law was given by God, and looked upon by them, not as a temporary, but a perpetual institution. And this truth we find that the apostles were afterwards instructed in, when the Holy Ghost was come upon them. And, therefore, in the council at Jerusalem, the apostles released the gentiles from the observance of Moses’s law, as a thing which they were perfectly instructed in by the Holy Ghost. (*Acts xv. 28.*) “It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us,” &c.

3. Another truth which our Saviour probably here intended, was, that the salvation of the Messias belonged to the gentiles as well as to the Jews. The Jews had a strong conceit of their own privileges, and looked upon all the world, besides themselves, as a company of reprobates, that had no share or interest in the promise of God, or in those great blessings which their Messias was to bring to the world. And we find that the disciples had so deeply imbibed this prejudice in their education, that they wondered at our Saviour, when they found him talking with the Samaritan woman. And though before his ascension he had given them an express command to “go and teach all nations,” yet it seems it was a good while before they understood this command in the latitude in which our Saviour intended it. For it is plain, from the history of the Acts, that until Peter was sent to Cornelius, and better instructed in this matter by a vision from heaven, they had not at all preached the gospel to the gentiles, being persuaded that it was unlawful to do it: but, by the command of our Saviour to “go and teach all nations,” they understood that they were to preach to



the Jews dispersed in all nations. But after this vision to Peter, and when they saw that the Holy Ghost fell upon the gentiles, in the same manner that it had done upon them, then, and not before, they were instructed in this truth.

That these are all or some of the principal of those truths which our Saviour here means, when he says, that he had yet many things to say unto his disciples, which they could not then bear, does, I hope, sufficiently appear; because they were such truths as the disciples were most vehemently prejudiced against, and which afterwards they were fully instructed in by the descent of the Holy Ghost, and not before.

II. I shall inquire what is the meaning of this promise in the text, that “the Spirit of truth will guide them into all truth.”

That these words are not to be understood in the greatest latitude which they are capable of, I think any one will grant. For certainly no man ever supposed, that our Saviour here promised that his Spirit should lead his disciples into the knowledge of all natural truths, and instruct them in all the depths of philosophy, and in the mysteries of all arts and sciences. Plain it is then, that some limitation must be put upon this general and universal promise of “leading them into all truth.” All the difficulty is, how far it is to be limited, and what bounds are to be set to this general promise.

Now in all reason it ought to be limited by the context; and if we go that way, which is the only reasonable way of limiting general words, then the plain meaning of this promise will be this: that because our Saviour had forborne to reveal several truths to his disciples, which they were not then capable of, he would supply this difficulty afterwards by his Holy Spirit, who, after that he was risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven, should descend upon them, and instruct them fully in those truths, which he, in condescension to their prejudice and incapacity, had in his life-time forborne to do; that is, he would take a fitter season to instruct them fully by his Spirit, in all those truths which, whilst he was upon earth, they were not so capable of receiving. “I have yet many things to say unto you:” that is, besides what I have already declared to you, there are several other things, which ye are not now so capable of receiving, which the Holy Ghost, whom I will send in my name, shall take a more convenient time to instruct you in. And our Saviour speaks much to the same purpose: ([John xv. 25, 26.](#)) “These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you; but the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things;” that is, he shall make up and supply what is wanting, and instruct you in those things which ye are not now so capable of receiving.

I shall now, in the second place, make some inferences from the words thus explained. As,

First, That it is not necessary at all times to preach all truths, which are of importance to be⁹ known. For these were great truths which our Saviour forbore for some time to reveal

9 *Utile ste ut taceatur aliquod verum, propter incapaces.* Aug. Persev. 1. ii. c. 16.

to his disciples, and were of great importance to the planting and propagating of the gospel: and yet he thought it better at present to forbear the pressing of them, than by an unseasonable declaration of them to do no good, but only stir up prejudice against himself, and those other necessary truths which he had instructed them in.

Secondly, That there ought to be a due regard had to what people can bear; and where men are possessed with a violent prejudice against some truths, we ought, in imitation of our Saviour's example, patiently to expect and endeavour the removal of that prejudice; and, first, to apply all fitting means for the conquering and subduing it, before we expose truth to be rejected by those who have taken up a violent prejudice against it. And this rule holds universally, where we have to deal with persons who are tractable and willing to learn, but do at present lie under some prejudice of education, or some false principles which they entertained unawares, which, by time and patience, and gradual progress of truth, may be removed, but are not to be conquered and borne down at once. There are some prejudices which cannot be plucked out of the minds of men at once, but yet may be so loosened by degrees, that they will fall off of themselves; as there are many knots untied with patience and leisure, which by a violent pulling are fixed so much the faster.

And this course we find the apostles took, in imitation of our Saviour; (1 Cor. iii. 2.) "I have fed you (saith St. Paul there) with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it." He was contented to instil truth into them by degrees, and as they were capable of it. The minds of most men are strait and narrow, and cannot receive that at once which may be instilled by degrees; like narrow-mouthed vessels, into which liquor may be poured by degrees; but if we strive to put it in faster than they can receive it, it runs by, and is lost.

But where men are not of a teachable disposition, but the prejudice against truth is wilful and affected, there we are bound to propose great and important truths to men, notwithstanding their prejudice against them, and to urge upon them those things which are necessary and fit for them to know, "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." And if in that case they will resist truth, fairly and with full evidence proposed to them, they do it at their peril. God is not obliged to do more, than to offer men sufficient means of conviction; and if they will be obstinate and pertinacious, God is not bound in that case to provide any farther remedy.

III. Another inference, and which I principally intended from this text, is this: that from the explication which I have given of this promise of our Saviour's, of sending his Spirit to lead his disciples into all truth, it very plainly appears, that there is no ground or colour of ground from this text, for the pretended infallibility of the Romish church: and yet this is one of those texts, which their great masters of controversy do urge us withal, for the proof of their infallibility; a sign that they are much at a loss for good arguments to prove it by, otherwise they would never summon a text so very remote from their purpose. And how

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far this text is from proving their church to be infallible, will very clearly appear, if we consider these five things:

1. That the plain and obvious sense of this promise (as I have already shewn) is this; that because there was some truths fit for the apostles to know, which they were not at that time capable of receiving, whilst our Saviour was upon earth, there fore, after his ascension, he would send his Holy Spirit to instruct them in those things, and to guide them into all those truths, which it was not then, seasonable to acquaint them withal. Now by what art can any man infer from hence, that our Saviour would give the infallible assistance of his Holy Spirit to the church of Rome, to the end of the world?

2. Let it also be considered, that this promise was made personally to the apostles, and therefore ought not to be extended beyond them, unless it evidently appear, that it ought to be so extended; unless it evidently appear, either from the tenor of the promise, or from some other reason, that it was the intention of the promiser that this should equally extend to others as well as to them. It is true, that this promise was made to the apostles, not merely for their own sakes, but for the benefit of the church; for God thereby promiseth, that his Spirit should reveal those truths to them, that they might declare them to the church: but it does not from hence follow, that any other persons, in succeeding ages of the church, should have the same immediate assistance of the Holy Ghost which the apostles had; because, being once revealed to the church, there was no need of a new revelation of those truths in every age.

3. There is nothing in the tenor of this promise, nor any other reason, from whence it may appear, that this promise ought to be extended any farther than to the persons to whom it was made; because this promise was made with a peculiar respect to the apostles, and their employment, and for reasons proper to the first state of the church; and not common to all ages; therefore it cannot with reason be extended to all after-ages of the church.

Let it be granted, then, that this promise, taken together with other promises of our Saviour made to the apostles, does signify an infallible assistance to them, so as to secure them from error, in the delivery of the doctrine of Christ; yet why should any church afterwards, much less the church of Rome, apart from all others, pretend to be heir general to the apostles in this infallible assistance? the apostles gave sufficient evidence of their infallibility, by the miracles which they wrought: and let the pope and general councils give this testimony of their infallibility, and we are ready to acknowledge it. There was reason why this assistance should be afforded to the apostles in the first preaching of the gospel; but after it was planted, and the doctrine of Christianity consigned to writing, there was no need of such an infallible assistance afterwards.

But they of the church of Rome tell us, that this infallible assistance was necessary afterwards for the perpetuity of the church, and for the government of it, and for the decision of controversies amongst Christians. To this I answer two things:



First, If this infallible assistance be necessary to these ends, then it is also necessary, that it should have been declared, what that church or society is, which was to be so infallible; else how should men know, whither to have recourse for the government of the church, and the decision of controversies in matters of difficulty? As good the Christian church be without infallibility, as that no man should know where it is.

And will any man have the confidence to say, that God hath any where in Scripture declared, that the church of Rome hath this infallibility annexed to her? Hath the Scripture any where told us, that the church of Rome is the catholic church; that is, that a particular church is the church universal; if we should suppose the universal church to be infallible in matters of faith and practice, is it any where said in the Bible, that the pope, or a general council, or both together are infallible? Are we any where there directed to have recourse to Rome, and the bishop of that city, either with or without a general council, for the determination of controversies in religion? And yet if infallibility be necessary for the ends mentioned, then certainly it is as necessary, that we should have been plainly directed where to find it, that we may make use of it upon occasion. What man living can persuade himself, that the belief of the infallibility of the Romish church; that is, of the pope, or of the pope and council, should be so fundamental an article of faith as they would make it; and yet that neither Christ nor his apostles should say one word about it? How comes it to pass, that when there were so many schisms and dissensions in the primitive church, St. Paul should never so much as once mention this effectual remedy of all those evils, to send them to St. Peter, who was the only infallible judge of controversies? If Christ had appointed this way, then certainly St. Paul could not have been ignorant of it. Besides that, it would have been an excellent direction to the church in after ages, what to have done in the like cases; if our Saviour, or any of his apostles, would have given us the least signification, that the heir of infallibility had been fixed at Rome, and that thither we were to have recourse for the deciding of all differences in religion.

Especially it must needs seem very wonderful, that St. Paul in his Epistle to the Roman church, should not acquaint them what a singular privilege that church had above all other churches, that it was the seat of infallibility, and that the bishop of that church was the great judge of controversies, and that there could no difference arise among them, about any matter of faith, but they might speedily have it decided from that chair. Nay, on the contrary, there are shrewd intimations given, that the church of Rome herself should apostatize from the faith, and that her haughtiness would be her ruin. ([Rom. xi. 20, 21.](#)) Where, speaking of the Jews, that were broken off by their unbelief, he gives this caution to the church of Rome; “Well: because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches; take heed lest he also spare not thee.” “Be not high-minded, but fear.” What needed they to fear, who had the privilege of infallibility? Their faith must needs be unshaken. But St. Paul seems to think that church

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to be in as much danger of falling from the faith, as any other. From whence we may certainly conclude, that he knew nothing of its infallibility. Nay, he seems to have foreseen their arrogant pretence to it, and that that very thing would be the occasion of their falling, when he gives them that caution, "Be not high-minded, but fear." For what greater instance could there possibly be of a proud and high mind, than to assume to themselves to be infallible? But,

Secondly, The ends mentioned may be sufficiently attained without infallibility. As for the perpetuity of the church, that may continue to the end of the world, by virtue of the infallibility of Christ's promise, though there be no infallibility either in the church of Rome, or any where else. For setting aside Christ's promise, the church may fail; and his promise signifies only that it shall not fail, not that it cannot. All that can be inferred from the promise of Christ, concerning the perpetuity of the church, is only the certainty of the event, but not the infallibility of the cause; not that the church shall be infallible, but only that it shall not fail.

In like manner for the government of the church, and decision of controversies, there is no need of infallibility; because the church may be governed well enough, as other societies are, without an infallibility: and all controversies that are necessary to be decided, may be decided by the infallible rule of faith, the Holy Scriptures, which are plain in all things necessary; and there is no necessity, that controversies about matters not necessary should be decided.

To conclude this point; if the pope and a general council be the seat of infallibility, (which is the most general opinion in the church of Home) then how was the Christian church governed, and controversies decided, before the council of Nice, which was the first general council; that is, for three hundred years? And if the church did well enough for three hundred years without an infallible judge, this is a demonstration that there is no absolute need of it.

4. This promise here in the text signifies a revelation of some new truths to the apostles, which they were not instructed in before, and therefore cannot belong to any church in after-ages. For the church of Rome herself does not pretend to any revelation of objects of faith not known before, and therefore can challenge nothing by virtue of this promise.

5. Suppose infallible assistance were here promised to the church in all ages, and that the church of Rome were the catholic church, and that the pope and a council were the Roman church, and consequently the catholic: I say, suppose all this granted; yet the church of Rome, according to her principles, can never be certain that this is the meaning of this promise. For they profess to receive both the Scripture and the interpretation of it from the church, and consequently to believe this text to be scripture, and this to be the meaning of this text, because their church which is infallible tells them so: and if so, then they do not believe their church to be infallible, because this text says so; but they believe this to be the



meaning of this text, because their church is infallible and tells them so. So that of necessity they must first believe their church to be infallible, before they can prove it from this or any other text; and consequently, they must either prove things in a circle, or else take the meaning of this text of the infallibility of their church for granted, without any proof. And thus much may suffice to have spoken to this text.



SERMON CXCIX.

OF THE ORDINARY INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY GHOST, ON THE MINDS OF CHRISTIANS.

But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.—John vii. 39.

OUR blessed Saviour (who used from all sorts of objects and occurrences to discourse of heavenly and spiritual things) being present at the feast of tabernacles, in which it was the custom of the Jews, from the fountain Siloam, to fetch water with great pomp and ceremony, and to bring it into the temple with sound of trumpet, and to offer it, singing those words of the prophet Isaiah, “They shall draw waters with joy out of the wells of salvation:” I say, our Saviour being present at this feast, takes occasion from these waters, which they brought into the temple with so much joy, to proclaim those spiritual benefits which Christians should be made partakers of by the Holy Ghost, and which are in Scripture represented by waters flowing from a living fountain. “In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture saith,” that is, according to the tenor of several passages in the prophets, “out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water;” and then the evangelist adds, by way of farther explication of our Saviour’s meaning, “but this he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” In which words we have these three things considerable:

First, The gift itself; which is here called the Spirit, or the Holy Ghost.

Secondly, The persons upon whom this gift was to be conferred; and those are believers, such as should believe and embrace the gospel. “This he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive.”

Thirdly, The particular time and season of the first conferring of this gift: and this was not to be till after our Saviour’s ascension into heaven, and being received up into glory, implied in those words, “the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” I shall as briefly as I can explain these three things.

First, The gift itself, which is here called the Spirit, or the Holy Ghost. By which we are to understand a special power and presence of the Holy Ghost with believers, the immediate operation and assistance of the Divine Spirit communicated and imparted to them; and this comprehends in it these two things:

1. Those extraordinary and miraculous gifts which were bestowed upon the apostles and primitive Christians, in order to the planting and propagating of the Christian religion in the world, and for the use and benefit of the church, while it was under persecution, and destitute of all secular countenance and assistance; and of those ordinary human advantages



which are sufficient to preserve and maintain a religion, after it is once firmly settled, and generally entertained. And these gifts were in a very remarkable manner, and such as no religion that ever was in the world can pretend to the like, conferred upon the first preachers of the Christian doctrine, and planters of it in the world; and they were in a high degree necessary to give credit and countenance to this religion at its first appearance, and to awaken the drowsy world to an attentive consideration of it; to conquer the prejudices of men against a new religion; and to support and bear up the teachers and publishers of this doctrine, against that violent opposition and persecution which would certainly be raised against it; and likewise to supply the want of secular power and authority to give countenance and assistance to it.

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For these, and such-like ends and reasons, God was pleased, at that time, not only to endue the apostles and first preachers of Christianity with all sorts of miraculous powers, but even the generality of Christians with several extraordinary gifts; and also to accompany the outward preaching of the gospel with a very extraordinary influence of God's Spirit upon the minds of men; to make way for the entertainment of it, by opening their understandings, and enlightening their minds to discern spiritual things, by subduing their prejudices, and conquering their lusts, and the vicious and perverse inclinations of their wills, to the obedience of faith, by raising their minds above the world, above all the allurements and enjoyments of it, and above all the threatenings and (errors of it, and giving men courage and resolution to embrace this profession, and with constancy to adhere to it, notwithstanding all the dangers and sufferings which attended it.

I shall not now treat of these miraculous gifts particularly, having had frequent occasion heretofore¹⁰ to discourse at large of the nature, and several kinds, and particular use and ends of them. I shall only observe to you, that this power of miracles, and this extraordinary influence of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, was not intended always to continue in the church, but only so long as there should be need and occasion for it; that is, till the Christian religion was fully propagated and planted, and the fury of persecution abated, and till Christianity had the favour and countenance of the civil authority, and the prejudice of education on its side. For when by this means it came to stand upon equal terms of advantage with other religions, God then withdrew his extraordinary assistance, and left it to be maintained and supported by more human and ordinary ways, and, in a great measure, by its own rational force and power upon the minds of men.

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2. The gift of the Holy Ghost doth likewise signify and comprehend in it a more than ordinary and gentle influence of God's Spirit upon the minds of men, to all holy and good purposes: by which I mean, an immediate operation and assistance of the Holy Ghost afforded to men, to relieve the weakness and impotence of human nature, to help and strengthen us

¹⁰ See Sermon XX. vol. ii. p. 235. and Sermon CXCVI. p. 377. of the present volume.

to the performance of what the gospel requires of us. And this I shall have occasion to explain more particularly, when I have gone over the other parts of the text.

Secondly, You have here the qualification of the persons who were to be made partakers of this gift; and that is, believing and embracing the gospel: “This he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive.”

The extraordinary and miraculous gifts of the Spirit were not conferred on any but those who embraced the faith of Christ, and made profession of the Christian religion. Not that all Christians were endowed with those extraordinary gifts, much less all in an equal degree. But they were distributed (as St. Paul tells us) in such manner and measure as the wisdom of God thought fit, and as was most for the use and edification of the church. But all were partakers of the Holy Ghost, in respect of his more ordinary influence and assistance, and this gift all Christians received upon their embracing and owning the Christian religion. Thus ([Acts v. 32.](#)) the Holy Ghost is said to be “given by God to them that obey him.” And ([Gal. iii. 14.](#)) we are said “to receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” And ([Ephes. i. 13.](#)) “In whom, also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.”

And because this profession of faith was made in baptism, whereby men are solemnly initiated into the Christian religion, hence it is, that this gift of the Holy Ghost is in Scripture promised, and said to be conferred in baptism: ([Acts ii. 31.](#)) “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” And ([Heb. vi. 4.](#)) the apostle, speaking of those who had solemnly taken upon them the profession of Christianity, thus describes them; “Those who were once enlightened, (that is, baptized, for so baptism is frequently by the ancients called illumination) those who were once baptized, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost;” implying, that this heavenly gift of God’s Holy Spirit was conferred upon Christians in their baptism; and hence it is, that “baptizing with water and the Holy Ghost” were frequently put together, water being the outward symbol, and the Holy Ghost the inward grace, conferred in baptism. So likewise the apostle joins together, “the laver of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” ([Tit. iii. 5.](#))

All which considered, I cannot imagine why so great a scruple should be made of those expressions which our church useth in the office of baptism of children; “being regenerated and born again by baptism,” and “being thereby made the children of God, and heirs of eternal life.” That is, by entering into this covenant, they are put into a state and capacity of all the blessings of the gospel, if they do not neglect the condition which that covenant requires on their part. For all this is in truth no other but what the Scripture says of baptism, and ascribes to it, when it calls it, “the laver of regeneration,” when it declares the Spirit to be conferred in baptism, and when it says, that “as many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God, and that the sons of God are heirs of eternal life.” So that I cannot see that

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our church, in her highest expressions concerning the benefits and effects of baptism, says any thing but what is very agreeable, both to the expressions and sense of Scripture. And thus, not only the ancient fathers spake of this matter, but so likewise do all the liturgies of the reformed churches, in the offices and forms appointed by them for the administration of baptism; so that it seems a very affected singularity to take exceptions at such expressions as have constantly been, and still are, generally used in all Christian churches. The

Third thing considerable in the text is, the particular time and season of the conferring of this gift of the Holy Ghost; and that was after our Saviour's ascension into heaven, and being received up into glory, implied in those words, "the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified;" signifying to us, that this effusion of the Spirit was not to be till after our Saviour's ascension into heaven.

But was not the Holy Ghost given to the prophets of old? and were not good men in former ages of the world under the ordinary influence and assistance of the Divine grace and Spirit? why is it then said, that the "Holy Ghost was not yet given?"

The answer to this is easy: that our Saviour here speaks of that general and plentiful effusion of the Holy Ghost, which was promised to the latter days, that is, to the gospel age; the like to which, both for the universal communication of this gift, and for the extraordinary degree and measure of its participation, had never been in the world before; and of this it is that the evangelist speaks, when he dates the time of it from after our Saviour's ascension into heaven. Now why the dispensation of this gift of the Holy Ghost was particularly limited to this time, though it is not necessary we should know the reasons of it, yet there are three obvious ones, which may give us full satisfaction in this matter.

1. Because it was not so necessary before, in our Saviour's life-time: for during his continuance in the world, and conversation with his disciples, his presence supplied all other defects; but when he left them, they were, as he calls them, orphans, destitute of help, comfort, and protection; and therefore it was requisite, that, upon his departure from them, this Comforter and advocate should come to "abide and continue with them for ever." But this does not seem to reach fully the reason assigned in the text, why "the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." Therefore,

2. It seems very convenient, not only that our Saviour should be visibly taken up into heaven, but that after he was ascended thither, he should give some remarkable testimony to the world, of the power and dignity to which he was there advanced; and that as a king he should give some evidence of his authority and majesty, at his solemn inauguration into his kingdom, by dispensing plentifully spiritual gifts, as the princes of this world are wont at such a time to scatter temporal favours and benefits. And this the Scripture takes notice of, as an evidence and testimony of his royal dignity, and glorious exaltation at the right hand of God, ([Acts v. 31, 32.](#)) "Him hath God exalted (speaking of our blessed Lord) with his own right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and forgive-

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ness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so also is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” Where you see that the gift of the Holy Ghost is mentioned as a testimony of our Saviour’s being “exalted as a Prince at the right hand of God.” But more expressly St. Paul, ([Eph. iv. 8.](#)) applied to our Saviour these words of the Psalmist, Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.”

3. After our Saviours ascension, there was the greatest occasion that ever was for the bestowing of this gift of the Holy Ghost, considering what kind of persons they were that were appointed to publish the gospel to the world: and that this great work being to be carried on by instruments in all appearance so weak, and mean, and contemptible, there was an absolute necessity of an extraordinary testimony to be given from heaven to the Divinity of this new doctrine, and of a Divine power and presence going along with it, to encourage and support those weak instruments in carrying on of this work, against the mighty opposition and persecution it was likely to meet withal, and against such difficulties and obstacles as were plainly insuperable by any human power and means. For as there never was a work of greater consequence and difficulty than this undertaking; so could this Divine power and assistance never have appeared and manifested itself, upon a litter and more worthy occasion. Since our Saviour, according to the wise counsel of God, intended, that after his ascension into heaven, his gospel should be published to the world, it was highly requisite that the minds of men should be prepared for it, and way made for the more ready entertainment and easy passage of it, by some signal testimony of the Divine presence attending the first publishers of it, and by circumstances, though not so full of terror and amazement as those which did accompany the giving of the law, yet really of greater force and efficacy, and more apt to convince the world of the truth of this doctrine, and to insinuate it more effectually into the hearts and consciences of men.

And now that I have given you a brief account of the three particulars, which from this text offer themselves to our consideration, I shall return back to that which I intended more especially to insist upon; and that is, the more ordinary influence of the Holy Spirit of God upon the minds of those who believe and embrace the Christian doctrine; and this I shall endeavour to explain to you under these four heads:

First, I shall open to you the nature of it.

Secondly, The necessity of it, to enable us to perform the condition of the gospel covenant.

Thirdly, The blessed effects of it.

Fourthly, The extent of it as to persons and times.

First, I shall endeavour to open to you the nature of this gift of the Holy Ghost, understanding by it the ordinary influence of the Holy Spirit of God upon the hearts and minds of believers. And I doubt not but that the Scripture means by it an immediate influence and

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operation of the Holy Spirit of God upon the minds of men, an inward power, strength, and assistance, communicated to Christians, to all the purposes of holiness and obedience, enabling them to be such “manner of persons, in all holy conversation and godliness,” as the gospel requires: and not only that this strength and assistance is offered and afforded to us, “to work in us, both to will and to do” all that is necessary to salvation, if we put no obstacle thereto, and do not resist the Spirit of God, and the blessed motions of it; but, likewise, that this power does continually dwell and reside in all true Christians, if we do not grieve the Spirit of God, and provoke him to withdraw himself from us.

And this is sufficiently declared in several places of the New Testament, where we are said to be “assisted by a Divine power, and strengthened with all might by the Spirit in the inner man; to walk in the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit, and by the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the flesh;” and likewise in those texts, wherein the Spirit of God is said “to work mightily in them that believe, to dwell in them, to sanctify and renew them,” with many such-like expressions, frequently to be met with in the writings of the apostles. By all which, unless we offer notorious violence to the plain and obvious sense of them, we must necessarily understand something more than the confirmation which was given to the Christian doctrine, by the miracles that were wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost; which doctrine being thus confirmed, does by way of rational conviction work upon the minds of men, and change their wills, without any internal operation and immediate assistance of the Holy Ghost. Such a remote influence of the Spirit of God upon men as this is, does by no means seem to answer the fulness of those phrases and expressions, which the Scripture so frequently useth concerning it; and if any man do but seriously weigh and consider them, nothing less than an immediate influence of the Spirit of God upon our hearts, and a real strength and power thereby communicated to us, can be imagined to satisfy the proper sense and meaning of the several expressions which I have mentioned.

And that the Scripture, by the promise of the Spirit, and the various expressions concerning it, does mean this ordinary assistance common to all Christians in all times, and not only the extraordinary and miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, which were peculiar to the first ages of Christianity, seems to me to be very plain; because the Scripture makes the gift of the Spirit to be common to all believers, and to be given to all that are baptized, and this in all ages of the church; as appears from those words of St. Peter: ([Acts ii. 38, 39.](#)) “Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” This promise is “the promise of the Holy Ghost,” which, he says, is made to them and their posterity, that in all succeeding ages should be gained to the faith of Christ. So that this “promise of the Holy Ghost,” which St. Peter speaks of, and declares to be conferred in baptism, does not respect only the first ages of Christianity, but all succeeding

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generations; and therefore cannot be understood of the power of miracles, because that is long since ceased in the Christian church.

And this appears yet more evidently, in that the Scripture makes the want of the Spirit a sign that a man is no true and sincere Christian: “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;” and, on the contrary, makes our having the Spirit of God, a mark of a child of God; “As many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God:” but our Saviour hath assured us, that men may have the miraculous gifts of the Spirit of God, may “prophecy in Christ’s name, and cast out devils in his name, and in his name do many wondrous works,” and yet be “workers of iniquity, and shut out of the kingdom of God.” And, on the other hand, men may not have these miraculous gifts, and yet be the children of God. But this will yet more fully appear, if we consider, in the

Second place, The great necessity of such an immediate influence and assistance of the Spirit of God, to enable Christians to perform the condition of the covenant of the gospel. The great corruption and degeneracy of human nature, and the impotency and weakness consequent thereupon, is not only matter of Divine revelation, but hath always been the general apprehension, and acknowledgment, and the sad complaint, of the wisest part of mankind: and, indeed, every man may feel it in himself, and observe it in others. Now for our relief and recovery out of this miserable and degenerate state, God was pleased, in great pity and commiseration to mankind, to send his Son into the world, to reveal his will and our duty anew to us, for our direction in the way to life and happiness; and by the sacrifice of himself to make a perfect expiation of sin; and to proclaim forgiveness of sins to us, for the encouragement of our repentance, and return to our duty; and, in a word, to offer new terms of life and happiness to us, upon the conditions of faith, and repentance, and new obedience.

But after all this is done for us, we are still with out strength, our nature being depraved, and sunk into that impotency and weakness, that, without the powerful assistance of Divine grace, we are utterly unable to perform those most equal and reasonable conditions which the gospel requires of us, being, as the Scripture expresseth it, “dead in trespasses and sins, and estranged from the life of God, through the darkness that is in us, and the blindness of our hearts;” being enslaved to vitious habits, and having a carnal mind, which is enmity to God, and renders us incapable to receive or relish Divine and spiritual things. So that, notwithstanding all that our blessed Saviour hath done and suffered for us, and all the merciful overtures of pardon and happiness, which the gospel makes to us, all this will signify nothing to our benefit and advantage, unless our impotency be relieved, and new life and strength be conveyed to us, to awaken and excite us to that which is good, to enable us to mortify and subdue our evil and corrupt inclinations, to break off our vitious habits, and to walk in the ways of God’s commandments. For “we are not sufficient of ourselves, as of ourselves,” for any of these things; “but our sufficiency is of God. Without Christ we can do nothing;”

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and it is only through him strengthening of us, that we are able to do all those things which are necessary to be done by us, in order to the obtaining of that happiness and salvation which the gospel hath promised, and our Saviour hath purchased for us. And therefore our merciful Redeemer, that he might not leave his work imperfect, hath sent his blessed Spirit into our hearts, to enlighten the eyes of our minds, and to open and dispose our understandings for the receiving of Divine and spiritual truths; to conquer, likewise, the perverseness and stubbornness of our wills, and to set us at liberty from the slavery of our lusts; (for “where the Spirit of God is,” as St. Paul tells us, “there is liberty;”) “to renew our natures, and to purify our hearts, to mortify our corrupt affections, and to assist us to every good word and work;” to strengthen us against temptations, to support us under sufferings and persecutions, and, in a word, to keep us by this mighty power of God, and gracious assistance of his Holy Spirit, “through faith unto salvation.” So that whosoever shall but duly weigh and consider his own darkness and ignorance, the strange and unreasonable prejudices of a corrupt mind against Divine truth, and against the practice of holiness and virtue, the strong bias of men’s natural inclinations to that which is evil, the mighty force and power of evil and inveterate habits within us, and the strength and violence of manifold temptations without us, together with the great difficulties and discouragements of piety and virtue, especially when they are attended with grievous sufferings and fiery trials, for righteousness sake; I say, he that considers all this, will easily discern, and readily acknowledge, how great a necessity there is of the grace and assistance of God’s Holy Spirit, to all the purposes of a firm faith, and a sincere repentance, and a constant and universal obedience to the holy laws and precepts of the gospel, to rescue us from the power and dominion of sin, to raise us to a new life, to engage us in a holy course, and to fortify our resolutions against sin, and to enable us to persevere, and patiently continue in doing and suffering the will of God.

It is this gracious influence, and continual assistance of God’s Holy Spirit residing and dwelling in us, which secures all the other blessings and benefits of the gospel to us, and conducts us safely through all the temptations of this world, and the difficulties of a Christian course, to the end of our faith, the eternal salvation of our souls. For which reason, the Spirit of God dwelling in good men, and evidencing itself by its genuine fruits and effects, the graces and virtues of a good life, is said to be the pledge and earnest of our future inheritance, and of a blessed resurrection to eternal life, and “to seal us up to the day of redemption:” (Rom. viii. 11.) “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you; he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” For the same reason the apostle makes the Spirit of God, by which Christians are governed and led, to be the mark of their adoption, and being “the children of God, and heirs of eternal life;” (ver. 14.) “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God!” And, (ver. 16, 17.) “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-

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heirs with Christ.” And elsewhere the apostle useth it for an argument, why we should be careful not to resist, or quench the motions of God’s blessed Spirit; because by this mark we are sealed to eternal life. “And quench not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” I should now have proceeded, in the

Third place, To shew the blessed effects of the influence of the Holy Spirit dwelling and residing in us: but that, together with the extent of this gift of the Holy Ghost, as to persons and times, I shall refer to another opportunity.



SERMON CC.

OF THE ORDINARY INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY GHOST, ON THE MINDS OF CHRISTIANS.

But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.—John vii. 39.

IN my former discourse from these words, I observed, that the gift of the Spirit, or the Holy Ghost, comprehends under it two things.

First, Those extraordinary and miraculous gifts, which were bestowed upon the apostles and primitive Christians, in order to the planting and propagating of the Christian religion in the world; together with that extraordinary influence of God's Spirit upon the minds of believers, which accompanied the first preaching of the gospel.

Secondly, The more ordinary and gentle influence of the Spirit of God, upon the minds of all those who believe and embrace the gospel.

The latter of these I proposed to speak to more particularly and fully, and that under these four heads:

First, To open the nature of this influence.

Secondly, To shew the necessity of it, to enable us to perform the condition of the gospel-covenant.

Thirdly, To consider the blessed effects of it.

Fourthly, To consider the extent of it, as to persons and times.

The two first of these I have spoken to, and now proceed to what remains; viz.

Thirdly, To consider the blessed effects of this gift of the Holy Ghost. And they are many and great.

I shall enumerate them as briefly as I can, not in tending to insist long upon them. And in general, all the good that is in us, and proceeds from us, all good thoughts and inclinations, all good purposes and resolutions, all good works and actions, are in Scripture every where ascribed to the dictates and motions, to the influence and assistance, of the Holy Spirit of God. It is he that works in us, both to will and to do of his own mere goodness. All our strength and sufficiency is from him. To his blessed inspirations and aids we owe all good inclinations, our beginning, and our progress, and our perseverance, in virtue and goodness. And though the Spirit be said to be given to them that do already believe, that is, so as to dwell and reside, to take up his constant habitation and abode only in those who have already sincerely embraced the Christian faith; yet this doth not exclude a preventing influence and operation of God's Holy Spirit upon the minds of those to whom the gospel is offered disposing them to embrace and entertain it, and by this means working faith in them. And in this sense it is, that faith in Scripture is said to be the gift of God, because it is first wrought

in them by the influence and operation of that blessed Spirit, which is promised to dwell and reside in them after they have believed, and sincerely embraced, the Christian religion.

More particularly these blessed fruits and effects are constantly in Scripture attributed to the Holy Spirit of God:—

1. Our sanctification. We are said to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and by the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the flesh. That great change which is wrought in man, which in Scripture is called by the several names of regeneration and a new birth, of the new creature, and the new man, is constantly ascribed to the Spirit of God, as the author of it.

2. The conduct of our whole Christian course, and all the actions of it, and our constancy and perseverance in it, are likewise ascribed to the same blessed cause. We are said to be “led by the Spirit, and to walk in the Spirit;” that is, to be guided and assisted in all that we do by this blessed principle, which does, as it were, act and animate all good men; and we are said to be “kept by the mighty power of God,” that is, by the powerful operation of God’s Holy Spirit, “through faith unto salvation.”

3. All particular graces and virtues are likewise said to be the fruit of the Spirit. ([Gal. v. 22.](#)) “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith (or rather fidelity), meekness, temperance.” And, ([Ephes. v. 9.](#)) “The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.” And charity, which is the sum almost of all other graces and virtues, is said to be planted and wrought in us by the Spirit: ([1 Pet. i. 22.](#)) “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto charity, or unfeigned love of the brethren.”

4. By the same Spirit we are said to be made partakers of that great and glorious privilege of adoption, and are advanced to that high honour and dignity of being called the sons of God; ([Rom. viii. 14.](#)) “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God,” and consequently heirs of a blessed resurrection to eternal life. For so the apostle reasons: ([ver. 16, 17.](#)) “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit,” that is, is a testimony within us, “that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” So that the Holy Spirit of God, which is conferred upon all sincere Christians, and does reside in them, is a mark or seal of their being the children of God, and a pledge or earnest of the blessed inheritance of eternal life, as the Scripture very plainly and frequently declares: ([2 Cor. i. 21, 22.](#)) “Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us,” or set his signature and mark upon us; and what this is, he explains in the next words; “and he hath given us the earnest or pledge of the Spirit in our hearts.” ([Eph. i. 13, 14.](#)) “In whom, also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise; which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession.” And ([chap. iv. 30.](#)) “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”

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5. By this Spirit we have free access to God in prayer, in confidence that we shall have our petitions granted: ([Ephes. ii. 18.](#)) “For through him,” that is, through Jesus Christ, “we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father.” By the same Spirit, likewise, we are assisted in our prayers to God, and directed what to ask of him. So St. Paul tells us, ([Rom. viii. 26.](#)) that “we do not know what to pray for as we ought; but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, and intercedeth for us;” that is, suggests to us such petitions and requests as are fit for us to put up to God.

6. By the same Spirit, joy and peace in believing, and from the testimony of a good conscience, great consolation and good hope through grace, are frequently instilled into us, and shed abroad in our hearts. Hence are those expressions so frequent in Scripture, of “the consolations of the Spirit,” of “peace and joy in the Holy Ghost,” which, as it is the natural fruit of righteousness, so it is likewise produced and increased in us, by the secret operation and influence of God’s Holy Spirit.

7. And lastly, By the same Spirit, Christians are supported and borne up, cheered and comforted in all their troubles and afflictions, and that in a very extraordinary and supernatural manner, when they fall under great tribulations and sufferings for righteousness’ sake. And this influence and assistance of the Divine Spirit, was very visible and remarkable among the primitive Christians, who were so terribly exposed to the most fierce and cruel persecutions: and may proportionably be expected in all cases of extraordinary suffering for the testimony of God’s truth.

And though this influence and assistance, this conduct and guidance of the Divine Spirit, be commonly very gentle and secret, and do usually work upon us in so imperceptible a manner, that it is very hard, if not impossible, particularly to distinguish between the motions of God’s Spirit and those of our own minds, between the immediate suggestions of the Holy Ghost and the dictates of our own reason; yet we are in general sufficiently assured of it, partly from the effects themselves, but principally from the express promise and declarations of Scripture, that Christians are acted by a supernatural principle, and secretly assisted by the influence of a Spirit above our own: and, therefore, we have reason, as the Scripture constantly does, to ascribe all the good that is in us, or that is done by us, to this gracious assistance and powerful influence of the Holy Spirit of God upon our minds, and thankfully to acknowledge, that in us, that is, in our flesh, in our carnal minds considered as destitute of the Spirit of God, “there dwells nothing that is good;” and that “by the grace of God we are what we are,” and are enabled to do all the good we do, “through Christ strengthening of us by his Spirit in the inner man.” I proceed to the

Fourth and last thing I proposed to consider; viz. The extent of this gift of the Holy Spirit of God, as to persons and times. And, in short, this gift is bestowed upon every particular Christian, every sincere believer; for we receive the promise of the Spirit by faith: and, “if any man,” says the apostle, ([Rom. viii. 9.](#)) “have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of

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his;" that is, he does not belong to him, he is no true Christian. And, (1 Cor. iii. 16.) "Know ye not," says the same apostle, speaking of all Christians in general, "know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

And that this gift extends to all persons, in all times and ages of the church, to all that sincerely embrace the Christian profession, and are admitted into it by baptism, is plain from that discourse of St. Peter, which I had occasion to mention before: (Acts ii. 38.) "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." And that this was not a favour and privilege peculiar to the first ages of Christianity but common to all succeeding times, is evident from what follows; (ver. 39.) "But the promise," that is, the great promise of the Holy Ghost, "is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." That is, this promise of the Spirit extends to all those who shall hereafter embrace the Christian profession.

And in this sense, our Saviour makes good that promise which he made to the apostles, to be with them always in the work of making disciples, and baptizing them, to the end of the world; that is, he would accompany the labours of the pastors and teachers of his church in all ages, with such a presence and influence of his Spirit upon those that were taught and baptized, as should be suitable to the occasions and necessities of the church, both the pastors and the members of it, unto the end of the world. In a word, this gift of God's Holy Spirit is bestowed upon all those who by baptism are admitted into Christ's religion; and if it be cherished and complied with, and the blessed motions of it be not resisted and quenched by us, it will abide and continue with us, and produce those blessed fruits and effects which I have before mentioned.

Having thus explained the several particulars contained in the text, all that now remains is, to make some useful inferences from the whole; and they shall be these following, and I shall be very brief in them.

I. What an encouragement is here to our duty, that we have such a mighty aid and assistance promised and afforded to us in the gospel! So that the apostle doth with great reason exhort, (2 Cor. vii. 1.) "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." And we are utterly inexcusable, if we do not make use of that grace which is promised, and ready to be afforded to us to this end; it is our own fault if sin still have dominion over us, and reign in our mortal bodies, that we should obey it in the lusts of it.

II. What great cause have we thankfully to acknowledge the wonderful goodness of God to us, in bestowing such an invaluable gift upon us, as this of the Holy Spirit, by whose grace and assistance alone we are made partakers of all the other blessings and benefits of the gospel! Had we been still left without strength, that great salvation which Christ hath purchased for us, and which the gospel offers, would have signified nothing to us, for want of

power to have performed the conditions, which the gospel requires of all that hope for eternal life and salvation.

III. Let us always be ready to comply with the motions and suggestions of the blessed Spirit, and sincerely make use of those aids and assistances which he is always ready to afford to us; and let us take great heed, that we do not by any disobedience of ours to his blessed motions, or by any wilful presumptuous sins, resist, and quench, and grieve this Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption.

If the Spirit of God vouchsafe to dwell in us, and to make his abode in our sinful souls and bodies; let us do nothing that is unworthy of so Divine and heavenly a guest; let his presence with us fill our hearts with a continual awe and reverence of him, and engage us effectually “to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit;” let nothing be acted by us, or proceed from us, which may defile this temple of the Holy Ghost. “Ye are the temple of the living God,” says St. Paul, (2 Cor. vi. 16.) And in the 1st of the Corinthians, (chap. iii. 16, 17.) “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” More particularly the apostle useth it as an argument to flee from fornication, because our bodies also are “the temples of the Holy Ghost:” (1 Cor. vi. 18, 19.) “Flee fornication; for every sin that a man doeth,” that is, other sins which men commit, “are without the body; but he that committeth fornication, sinneth against his own body;” that is, pollutes and defiles it. And then it follows: “What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

IV. Let us earnestly beg of God’s Holy Spirit, and continually depend upon him for his grace and assistance, in a humble sense of our own impotency and weakness, of the frailty and treachery of our own spirits, of the fickleness and inconstancy of our best purposes and resolutions, always remembering that saying of our Saviour’s, (John xv. 5.) “With out me ye can do nothing.” And that of St. Paul, (Ephes, ii. 8.) “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” And that of St. Peter, (1 Pet. i. 5.) speaking in general of all true Christians, “Who (says he) are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” This power of God is the Spirit, which they that believe receive, and by the blessed guidance and influence whereof they are kept unto salvation.

V. This shews us what an advantage we have by the Christian religion, which makes us partakers of the Holy Ghost, whereby is afforded to us all necessary direction, and assistance, and comfort in our Christian course. Our Saviour tells his disciples, that the presence and influence of this Comforter and Advocate, whom “he would send to abide with them for ever,” would be more to them, than even his own personal presence among them, which surely we should look upon as an unspeakable privilege and happiness; and yet the inward



presence of the Divine Spirit is more for our security and comfort, than the best teacher and example; because it is inward, and conveys a real strength to us; and it is universal, diffusing itself at once into the hearts and minds of all good men, and is always present to them, which Christ's personal and visible presence was not, nor could be; so that, to all purposes of direction and assistance, of security and comfort, we are in a better condition under the continual influence and conduct of God's Holy Spirit, than they who had the advantage and happiness of conversing personally with our Saviour here upon earth. And therefore he tells his disciples, that it was really for their benefit and advantage, that he should leave the world, to make way for the coming of this Comforter and advocate; ([John xvi. 7.](#)) "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away. For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart, I will send him unto you." So that they were gainers by their loss, and his departure from them upon these terms was really to their advantage.

VI. This shews the great fault of the contempt and neglect of the sacrament of baptism, which was instituted by our Saviour as the solemn rite and ceremony of admitting persons into the Christian religion, and the means of making us partakers of this gift of the Spirit, and of all the blessed fruits and effects of it; so that this sacrament cannot be neglected or slighted, without great affront to the Christian religion, and contempt of one of the greatest blessings promised in the gospel. They that were admitted to the solemn profession of Christianity by baptism, were "made partakers of the Holy Ghost;" and this not only in the apostles times, but in all after ages; for this "promise of the Holy Ghost was to them and their children, and to all that were afar off, even to as many as the Lord their God should call;" that is, to all that should embrace the Christian religion, and make a solemn profession of it in baptism, in all succeeding ages to the end of the world.

VII. What hath been discoursed upon this argument, discovers the vanity of many men's pretensions to the Spirit. Some pretend to infallibility, all pretence whereto is vain, without miracles to justify and make good this pretence; and yet upon this presumption of infallibility, without any proof of it, but only that it is convenient for them to have it, which will as well prove all others to be infallible, because it is every whit as convenient for them: I say, upon this presumption and pretence, they assume to themselves to dictate to all the world, what they shall believe, and to censure and condemn all those who will not submit to their dictates, as miserably mistaken, and out of the way of salvation; whereas the infallibility of the apostles was a supernatural gift, not evident of itself, but evidenced to the world by the miracles which were wrought, to confirm the truth of their testimony and doctrine; and without this evidence of infallibility, no man's, no church's pretences to it ought to be regarded, but ought to be looked upon as fanatical enthusiasm: be sides, the prodigious uncharitableness of this spirit, is as directly contrary as can be to the first and chief fruit of the Spirit mentioned by the apostle, which is love or charity.



Others pretend to be guided by the Spirit in all their actions, and to be governed in an extraordinary manner by particular impulses and impressions from the Spirit of God; which they likewise pretend they can certainly discern from the motions of their own minds and imaginations. But as they can give no reason for this, so we have seen many times in experience, that men have been led into unlawful and wicked practices, and have done weak, and unreasonable, and ridiculous things, and then have blasphemously charged them upon the Spirit of God; a presumption of a high nature, and which hath some resemblance to the sin against the Holy Ghost, and seems to be of near affinity with it. For as the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost consisted in resisting the evidence of our Saviour's miracles, and perversely and maliciously imputing the operations of the Spirit of God to the power and efficacy of the devil; so, on the other hand, to pretend to the Spirit of God, and his motions for the works of the devil, and any thing that is wicked; and to ascribe these things, which are most likely to proceed from the instigation of that evil spirit, to the impulse of the Holy Spirit of God, is a high blasphemy of the Holy Ghost.

Others pretend, that the Spirit doth immediately dictate to them their prayers, which many times are very confused and unbecoming, and too plainly the issue of a heated imagination; whereas "God is not the God of confusion, but of order." And what is merely the effect of an acquired habit, or natural fluency and facility of expression and warm affections, they confidently ascribe to the Spirit of God; whereas the Spirit of God is more frequently and certainly in the still voice, than in the high wind and fire, the boisterous passions, and fiery zeal of men. And certainly, he that takes care to put up wise and decent petitions to God, and considers carefully what to beg of him, and asks it in a becoming manner, with faith and true fervency of affection, though in a form, hath much more reason to conclude that he prays in and by the Spirit of God, than he that hath the greatest freedom of extempore effusions.

And, after all, there is a much better and clearer demonstration, that a man hath the Spirit of God, than any of these pretences; and that is, from the undoubted fruits of the Spirit, in the graces and virtues of a good life, which are visible and manifest in the temper and conversation of a good man; and without these, all pretences to the Spirit of God are but fancy and vain delusions; such men "deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them."

VIII. And lastly, From hence it appears, how happy it is for us, that we are not left in our own hands, and to our own weakness and impotency, and "to work out our own salvation," but that we are under the continual conduct, and powerful protection of such a guardian, and that the Holy Spirit is always ready to be afforded to us, to all the purposes of guidance and assistance, of comfort and support, of sanctification and obedience, of patient continuance and perseverance in well-doing. "Let us, therefore, (as the apostle exhorts,) work out our salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do." We are not left to ourselves to carry on this great work, for then it would



certainly miscarry; but “God works in us,” both the will .and inclination to that which is good, and gives us the power to do it: he does not force our wills, but incline them by the gentle suggestions and motions of his blessed Spirit; with which, if we comply, we are happy; if we resist them, and rebel against them, “we receive the grace of God in vain,” and “our ruin and destruction is of ourselves.”

But can we then do nothing? No, not without the preventing and assisting grace of God; but that being afforded to us, we may comply with the motions of God’s blessed Spirit; we may co-operate and concur with his assistance. God assists, but we do; he sanctifies and renews us by the Holy Ghost, and yet we purify and cleanse ourselves.

But is not this injurious to the grace of God, if we do any thing at all, and the grace of God do not all in us and for us? I answer,

1. It is a great grace of God, to help our weakness, and to relieve our impotency, and to strengthen and enable us to do what we cannot do of ourselves. We owe our salvation to the grace of God, to the influence and assistance of his Holy Spirit, if so be that without it we should still remain “dead in trespasses and sins,” and should never be able to emerge and recover out of that corrupt and miserable state.

2. Grace does not destroy nature, nor Divine assistance take away our liberty, but frees us from our bondage; and, as David expresseth it, “enlargeth our hearts to run the ways of God’s commandments;” for if God do all, and we nothing, all exhortations and persuasions would be in vain.

But then it seems that we may “receive the grace of God in vain,” and “resist the Holy Ghost,” and our complying with it, or not resisting of it, is our own act; which is to make men their own saviour, and to give the casting and determining vote to human liberty. I answer,

1. The Scripture expressly says, that men may “receive the grace of God in vain, and reject the counsel of God against themselves;” and that if we rebel against, and disobey the motions of God’s Spirit, he will depart from us, and we forfeit his assistance.

2. All this is, ἀργός λόγος, *mere cavil*; as will appear to any one by this plain instance: A rebel is convicted, and liable to the sentence and condemnation of the law; he sues for a pardon, and obtains and accepts it: will any man now say, that because he asks and accepts it from the king, and the king does not take his hand and open it, and violently thrust his pardon into it, that this man saves himself, and takes away the glory of the king’s grace and mercy, and that he owes his life to himself, and not to the king’s bounty and goodness? A man would be thought very senseless, that should so ascribe this man’s deliverance from death to any act of his own, as not to think it wholly owing to the king’s grace and favour. I think the case is the very same, concerning men’s complying with that grace which God affords them for their “repentance unto life.” I would fain know of these subtle objectors, whether Moses, when he says, ([Deut. xxx. 19.](#)) “I have set before you life and death, blessing

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and cursing, therefore choose life;” does not, in so saying, plainly suppose, that men may choose life or refuse it? And if so, whether he intended to make men their own saviour?

But this objection is pressed yet a little farther; that if this be so, then Judas had as much cause to thank God as Peter had. And who ever denied, or can deny, that a rebel who refuseth a pardon offered to him by his prince, hath the same real obligation of gratitude to his prince, with him that accepts it? The prince offers the same favour to both, and the obligation is equal; and though he that accepts it doth not save himself, yet he that refuseth it destroys himself. And at the judgment of the great day, all impenitent sinners under the gospel, shall be forced to acknowledge the grace of God to them, in affording the opportunity of salvation, and shall only blame and condemn themselves for neglecting that happy opportunity. But if an irresistible degree of grace be necessary to every man’s salvation, it is plain, that impenitent sinners never had the opportunity of salvation, and consequently cannot condemn themselves for the neglect of it.

I have been the longer upon this, that I might root out of the minds of men an inveterate false persuasion, concerning the manner of the operation of God’s grace in the conversion of sinners. And thus much may suffice to have been spoken concerning the operation of God’s Spirit upon men, in order to their conversion and making of them good: but after men are converted, and do sincerely “repent and believe the gospel, they have the Spirit of God in another manner; he “dwells and resides in believers,” as a constant and settled principle of holiness and obedience, as I have already shewn.



SERMON CCI.

THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT, THE SAME WITH MORAL VIRTUES.

For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.—Ephes. v. 9.

I HAVE formerly, upon occasion of this festival solemnity,¹¹ discoursed on divers sorts of arguments relating to the Holy Spirit of God: as, concerning the¹² miraculous powers and gifts of the Holy Ghost, conferred upon the apostles in a visible manner, when they were assembled together upon this day of Pentecost, to qualify and enable them for the more speedy and effectual planting and propagating of the Christian religion in the world; which is the argument more peculiarly proper to this day.

I have likewise¹³ discoursed to you concerning the sanctifying power and virtue of the Holy Spirit of God, which is common to all Christians, and to all ages of the Christian church; as also concerning the blessed fruit and effect of God's Holy Spirit, conferred upon Christians in baptism, and which does continually dwell and reside in all those who do sincerely perform, and make good their baptismal vow, to assist and enable them to all the purposes of holiness and obedience, and to work and increase in us all those graces and virtues which are here in the text, said to be the fruit of the Holy Spirit of God: "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth." The connexion of which words with the apostle's foregoing discourse, is briefly this. At the [17th verse](#) of the former chapter, the apostle gives a solemn charge to the Christians, at Ephesus, who were newly converted from heathenism to Christianity, to be careful that their conversation be answerable to that holy religion which they now made profession of, and that as they had quitted the religion and rites of paganism, so likewise that they would abandon the vices and evil practices of it; that the world might see that they had made as great a change in their minds and manners, as in their religion. "This, I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye hence forth walk not as other gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who, having lost the sense of good and evil, have given themselves over to all filthiness and brutish lusts." And then, at the [20th verse](#) he tells them, that the Christian religion requires another sort of conversation: "But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind: and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness;" or, the holiness of truth.



11 Preached on Whit-Sunday, 1690.

12 See Sermon CXCVI. p. 377. of the present volume.

13 See Sermon CXCIX. and CC. p. 432, and 448. of the present vol.

And then he cautions them against several sorts of vices which they had formerly lived in, and recommends the contrary virtues to their practice; and as an argument thereto, he puts them again in mind of the change which they had made at the 8th verse of this chapter; “For ye were some times darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.” The condition they were in, whilst they were heathens, he calls darkness; by which metaphor he represents that dismal state of ignorance and wickedness in which they formerly were; “but now are ye light in the Lord.” Being admitted into the Christian religion by baptism, they were enlightened by the Spirit of God. For so the apostle to the Hebrews describes baptism by illumination, and being made partakers of the Holy Ghost. (Heb. vi. 4.) “They that were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift;” which he explains in the next words, by being “made partakers of the Holy Ghost,” because that is conferred in baptism.

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“But now are ye light in the Lord, walk there fore as children of the light;” that is, do nothing unbecoming that state, into which, by the solemn profession of Christianity in baptism, ye are entered; or, as it follows a little after the text, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; walk as children of the light, as becomes those who are enlightened and sanctified by the Holy Spirit of God, whereof ye were made partakers in baptism; for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.”

“For the fruit of the Spirit.” Some copies have it, ὁ γὰρ καρπὸς τοῦ φωτός, “for the fruit of light,” that is, of the illumination of the Holy Ghost, which Christians are made partakers of in baptism, “is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth,” which will make no difference in the sense.

I shall briefly explain the importance of these three words, “goodness, and righteousness, and truth;” and then proceed to make some observations from the text.

I. Goodness. And what that is, the apostle takes it for granted that every body knows; he does not go about to define or explain it, but appeals to every man’s mind and conscience, to tell him what it is. It is not any thing that is disputed and controverted among men, which some call good, and others evil; but that which mankind is agreed in, and which is universally approved by the light of nature, by heathens, as well as Christians; it is that which is substantially good, and that which is unquestionably so. It is not a zeal for indifferent things, about the ritual and ceremonial part of religion, the external circumstances of it, much nicety and scrupulousness about things of no moment and consideration, such as was the pharisees tithing of mint, anise, and cummin; disputes about meats and drinks, and the observation of days, and the like: but a pursuit of the weightier things of the law, a care of the great duties of religion, and those things wherein the kingdom of God consists; the practice of the great virtues of conversation, which are apt to recommend us to the general approbation of men, to gain their good-will, and to take off exasperations, and to calm and sweeten the spirits and tempers of men towards us; and they must likewise be things unquestionably good, and

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against which there is no exception, such as will justify and bear themselves out in the general opinion of mankind.

I know very well that goodness, in the strict notion of it, does signify a ready inclination of mind to benefit and help others all that we can, as we have opportunity. And this is the particular virtue of alms-giving, or, as we commonly call it, charity; which is so often recommended to us under the notion of doing good. ([Gal. vi. 10.](#)) “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men.” And, ([1 Tim. vi. 17, 18.](#)) “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.”



But there is a larger notion of goodness more frequently used in the New Testament, which comprehends and takes in all those virtues of conversation, which are universally, and by the light of nature, owned to be such, and the practice whereof is apt to recommend us to the love and esteem of all men; as, on the contrary, the neglect of them is apt to bring religion under a great scandal and censure: such are obedience to our superiors and governors, and a conscientious care to discharge all those duties which the several relations wherein we stand to others do call for from us.

Obedience to governors is recommended to us under the notion of goodness, or well-doing. ([1 Pet. ii. 13-15.](#)) “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him, for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” So, likewise, praying for those that are in authority: ([1 Tim. ii. 1-3.](#)) “I exhort, therefore, that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, 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. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.”

In like manner, a conscientious discharge of the duties which other relations require is recommended to us under the notion of goodness, and that which is a special grace and ornament to religion: ([1 Tim. v. 4.](#)) “Let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents, for that is good and acceptable before God.” And ([Tit. ii. 9, 10.](#)) the apostle exhorts servants to be obedient to their masters; that, by this instance of goodness, as well as others, they may bring credit and reputation to religion; “Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again, not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”



More particularly, the several virtues of conversation are frequently instanced in, as branches of goodness, as unity, peaceableness, courtesy, compassion, and good-will towards all men. The practice of these things the apostle calls the following of that which is good:

(Rom. xii. 9, 10, &c.) “Let love be without dissimulation; abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one towards another. Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one towards another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” So, likewise, the apostle (1 Thess. v. 15.) instanceth in abstaining from revenge, as an eminent piece of goodness: “See that none render evil for evil unto any man: but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men.” And, St. Peter also gives much the same instances of goodness, that St. Paul hath done: (1 Pet. iii. 8, 9, &c.) “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren: be pitiful, be courteous; not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” that is, if ye practise goodness in the instances I have mentioned.

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You see, then, what goodness is, by the instances which the Scripture gives of it; obedience to our superiors and governors, and a conscientious care of the duties of our several relations; sincere love and charity, compassion, humility, peace and unity, ab staining from wrath and revenge, and rendering good for evil; these are unquestionable instances of goodness, and pass for current among all mankind, are on all hands agreed to be good, and have an universal approbation among all parties and professions, how wide soever their differences may be in other matters.

These are the things which are in Scripture more peculiarly called good, because they are so in themselves, and in their own nature, and not merely because they are commanded, as the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish religion were, which are there fore called by God himself, in the prophet, “statutes that were not good;” (Ezek. xx. 25.) “Wherefore I gave them statutes that were not good;” that is, I gave them laws concerning several things, which had no intrinsical goodness in them. But moral duties, because of the essential and eternal goodness of them, are eminently called good; as in that known passage of the prophet, (Micah 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?”

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The other two fruits of the Spirit which are added in the text, “righteousness and truth,” which respect likewise our conversation with men, more especially in the way of commerce, are rather parts or branches of goodness, than really distinct from it; but they are two considerable virtues, and there fore the apostle thought fit to instance particularly in them, after

he had mentioned goodness; which is, indeed, the general name, that comprehends all virtues in it.

“The fruit of the Spirit is righteousness;” which signifies justice in our dealings and actions with others; and truth, which is justice in our words; for he that speaks as he thinks, and performs and makes good what he promiseth, is said to be just to his word. And all these, “goodness, and righteousness, and truth,” and whatever particular virtues are comprehended under them, though they be truly and properly moral virtues, yet are said to be “fruits of the Spirit.”

From the words thus explained, I shall make these four observations, which I shall speak as briefly as I can:

First, That “the fruits of the Spirit” are plain and sensible effects, appearing in the disposition and lives of men.

Secondly, That these “fruits of the Spirit,” here mentioned, are of an eternal and immutable nature, and of perpetual and indispensable obligation.

Thirdly, That moral virtues are the graces and “fruits of the Spirit.”

Fourthly, That, therefore, they are by no means to be slighted as low and mean attainments in religion, but are to be looked upon and esteemed as a main and substantial part of Christianity.

First, That the “fruits of the Spirit” are real and sensible effects, appearing in the dispositions and lives of men. The apostle here speaks of what is visible in the lives and conversations of men; for he exhorts Christians to “walk as children of the light:” now walking is a metaphor which signifies the outward conversation and actions of men. “Walk as children of the light. For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth;” that is, if a man be endued with the Spirit, it will discover itself by these visible fruits and effects. What the apostle says of the “works of the flesh,” (*Gal. v. 19.*) “The works of the flesh are manifest,” plainly to be seen in the lives and conversations of men, is equally true of the “fruits of the Spirit,” that they also are visible and manifest; so that by these men make a judgment of their condition, whether they be true Christians, and the Spirit of God dwell in them, or not; viz. by the temper and disposition of our minds, manifestly appearing in our lives and actions, by the practice of those real virtues which are the proper and genuine fruits of the Holy Spirit of God. For religion is not an invisible thing, consisting in mere belief, in height of speculation, and niceties of opinion, or in abstruseness of mystery. The Scripture does not place it in things remote from the sight and observation of men, but in real and visible effects; such as may be plainly discerned, and even felt, in the conversation of men; not in abstracted notions, but in substantial virtues, and in a sensible power and efficacy upon the lives of men, in all the instances of piety and virtue, of holy and excellent actions. This our Saviour requires of his disciples; that the virtue and holiness of their lives should be so visible and conspicuous, that all men may behold it, and give testimony to it,

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and glorify God upon that account: ([Matt. v. 16.](#)) “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Not that men should make any ostentation of religion, as the pharisees did of their devotion and alms, which our Saviour censures very severely; but there is a great difference between an affected and vain glorious show of piety and virtue, and the real and substantial effects of them in a good life, which as they cannot, so they ought not to be hid; nay, on the contrary, men ought, as St. James exhorts, ([James iii. 13.](#)) to “shew out of a good conversation their works with meekness of wisdom;” that is, in a wise manner, not with pride and ostentation, but with meekness and humility, the great ornament of all Christian graces and virtues. I proceed to the

Second observation; namely, that these “fruits of the Spirit,” here mentioned, “goodness, and righteousness, and truth,” are of an eternal and immutable nature, and of perpetual and indispensable obligation. The notions of good and evil, of just and unjust, of truth and fidelity, and of falsehood and perfidiousness, in our words and actions; I say, these notions are born with us, and imprinted in our natures; are so fixed and determined in the very frame of our minds and understandings, that as they need not be explained, so they can never be changed and altered. The difference of good and evil is naturally known, and the notions of righteousness, and goodness, and truth, are fixed antecedently to any Divine revelation, which supposeth the nature of them to be known, and therefore, doth not go about to define and explain them to us; and supposeth, likewise, the obligation of them, being branches of the law of nature, and essential parts of that religion which is born with us, and “written upon our hearts,” and makes us “a law to ourselves.” And, therefore, the Christian religion doth only declare these duties more plainly, and press them more earnestly upon us, and enforce the obligation of them by more powerful arguments and considerations, grounded upon clearer discoveries of the grace and mercy of God to mankind, and of the rewards and punishments of another world: but these duties are in their nature still the same; and the Christian religion is so far from releasing us from the obligation of them, that it hath very much heightened it, and bound them the faster upon us. I pass on to the

Third observation from these words; namely, That moral virtues are the graces and “fruits of the Spirit.” For the three particulars here mentioned by the apostle are no other but the chief heads and instances of moral duties, “goodness, and righteousness, and truth.” What are these but moral virtues? and yet it is certain, that they are also Christian graces, because they are here expressly said to be “the fruits of the Spirit.”

And they are called moral virtues, because they are such duties as are not enjoined by any positive law, (which is not obligatory from the nature and reason of the thing commanded, but merely from the command;) but are of natural and eternal obligation, and such as we had been bound to the observance of them, from the immutable goodness and reason of them, though God had never made any external revelation of his will concerning



them. Though it cannot be denied, but that, by the means of external revelation, we have a more clear and certain knowledge of them, and more powerful motives to the practice of them. So that grace and virtue are but two names that signify the same thing. Virtue signifies the absolute nature and goodness of these things; grace denotes the cause and principle by which these virtues are wrought and produced, and are preserved and increased in us; namely, by the free gift of God's Holy Spirit to us; for which reason, these graces and virtues of goodness, and righteousness, and truth, which are here mentioned in the text, are said to be "the fruits of the Spirit." I come now to the

Fourth and last observation from the text; namely, That since these very things which are called moral virtues, are in their nature the very same with the graces and "fruits of the Spirit," therefore they are by no means to be slighted as low and mean attainments in religion, but to be looked upon and esteemed as a main and substantial part of Christianity. They are called "the fruits of the Spirit;" that is, the natural and genuine effect of that Divine power and influence upon the hearts and lives of men, which accompanies the Christian religion; or the happy effects of the Christian religion wrought in men, by the immediate operation and assistance of the Holy Spirit of God, which is conferred upon all Christians in their baptism, and does continually dwell and reside in them, if by wilful sins they do not grieve him, and drive him away, and provoke him to withdraw himself from them.

I do not say, that these virtues are all religion, and all that is necessary to make a man a complete Christian, and good man. For there must be knowledge to direct us in our duty; there must be faith, or a hearty assent to the revelation of the gospel (especially concerning the forgiveness of our sins, and of our justification and acceptance with God, for the sake of the meritorious sufferings of our blessed Saviour), to be the root and principle of all religious actions; there must be piety and devotion towards God, and the constant practice and exercise of religious duties in public and private; such as prayer, hearing and reading the word of God, frequent and reverent receiving of the holy sacrament, which are the best and most effectual means in the world to make men good, because they are appointed by God, and attended with his blessing to that end: I say, there must be all these, because they are the principles and means of religion, which are always supposed as necessary to that which is the end. Now the great end of religion, that which Christianity mainly designs to work and perfect in us, are those graces and virtues which are called "the fruits of the Spirit;" such as those mentioned in the text, "goodness, and righteousness, and truth."

And this will be evident to any one that will attentively consider what the Scripture says of them; and more especially, how our Saviour and his apostles do every where recommend them to our consideration and practice; (*Micah 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?" It is to these qualities and dispositions of goodness, and righteousness, and the like virtues, that our Saviour promises blessedness. These St. Peter



calls a Divine or God-like nature; (2 Pet. i. 4, 5.) speaking of the knowledge of the gospel, “Whereby (says he) are given to us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine nature;” and thereupon he exhorts that Christians should “give all diligence to make their calling and election sure,” by adding to the faith of the gospel, the several graces and virtues of a good life; these being that Divine nature which the gospel designs to make us partakers of.

To speak a little more particularly of the three virtues here mentioned, goodness, righteousness, and truth. These are every where frequently commended and enjoined in the New Testament. Goodness, whether we consider it as it imports charity in general, and our love of one another, our Saviour makes it the great badge and mark of a Christian. “Hereby (says he) shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.” St. Paul calls it “the fulfilling of the law, and the end of the commandment, τέλος τῆς παραγγελίας, the great end and design of the gospel, is charity.” St. John riseth yet higher, and speaks of it as the very nature and essence of God himself, and that by which we are, as it were, united to him. “God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him,” Or whether we consider goodness, under the notion of compassion and beneficence, a readiness to pity and relieve, and benefit others according to our ability and opportunities. This the Scripture celebrates as a thing highly acceptable to God. ([Heb. xiii. 16.](#)) “But to do good, and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased.” And St. James instanceth in it as one of the most signal testimonies of true piety: ([James i. 27.](#)) “Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” And ([chap. iii. 17.](#)) he makes it a mark and character of the Divine and heavenly wisdom; “The wisdom which is from above, is full of mercy and good works.”

And then for righteousness, of which truth and fidelity in our intercourse with men is a considerable part, St. Paul instanceth in it, in the first place, as a principal thing, wherein “the kingdom of God doth consist:” ([Rom. xiv. 17.](#)) “The kingdom of God doth not consist in meats and drinks;” that is, the power and efficacy of the Christian religion, or the gospel (which is frequently, in the New Testament, called the kingdom of God), doth not consist in zeal about indifferent things: but in the substantial virtues of a good life, “in righteousness and peace.”

You see by all this, at what a rate the Scripture magnifies these virtues, as the great things of religion, the end of the gospel, and that wherein our Christianity does mainly consist. The consideration whereof would make a man stand amazed, to think how these virtues should ever fall into so much contempt among those who call themselves Christians, and do every day read the Bible; and come to be accounted but low and pitiful things, in comparison of I know not what fancies and conceits, wherein some are pleased to place religion. For what can the best religion that ever was in the world (which Christianity certainly is) be better placed in, than in these and the like virtues? all which are so excellent in their



nature and use, and have so direct a tendency both to the happiness of particular persons singly considered, and of human society; and several of them, especially those instanced in in the text, goodness, and righteousness, and truth, are the very nature and perfection of God himself.

And what more worthy to be “the fruits of the Holy Spirit of God,” and the effects of a Divine power and influence working upon the minds of men, than such qualities and dispositions as render us so like to God, and do so nearly resemble the highest excellencies and perfections of the Divine nature? And therefore our Saviour useth this as an argument to persuade us to be good, and merciful, and patient; because these qualities are so near a resemblance and imitation of the Divine perfection, the nearest that creatures are capable of. (Matt. v. 48.) “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

And thus I have dispatched the four observations from the text; that “the fruits of the Spirit” are plain and sensible effects, appearing in the dispositions and lives of men; that they are of an eternal and immutable nature, and of perpetual and in dispensable obligation; and though they be moral virtues, yet they are likewise “the fruits of the Spirit;” and are by no means to be slighted and undervalued, as low and mean attainments in religion.

All that now remains is, to make some inferences from what has been discoursed on this text.

And if this discourse be true, then the want of these virtues mentioned in the text, and the reigning of the contrary vices in us, is a clear and undeniable evidence, notwithstanding all our fair professions and pretences, that we are not true Christians. For if we do not bring forth “the fruits of the Spirit,” we have not the Spirit of Christ; and then St. Paul hath determined our case, that “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” If these Christian graces and virtues mentioned in the text, goodness, and righteousness, and truth, do not shine forth in our lives and conversations, it is plain, according to the apostle’s reasoning in this and other texts, that we are not “children of the light,” because we do not “walk as children of the light,” as those that are enlightened by the Spirit of God: for “the fruit of the Spirit,” or “the fruit of light,” as some copies have it, “is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.” And if these fruits be not found in us, it is a plain evidence that we do not “walk in the Spirit,” that we are not led and “guided by the Spirit of God;” for “the fruits of the Spirit,” as well as “the works of the flesh,” are manifest, sufficiently plain and visible, in the conversations of men; and according as we fulfil the lusts of the one, or bring forth the fruits of the other, we may certainly judge whether we have the Spirit of Christ or not; that is, whether we be true Christians, or do only usurp a name, and take a title to ourselves, which does not of right belong to us. We need not to trouble and puzzle ourselves with a great many doubtful and obscure marks, to find out by them what our state and condition is, and whether we be the children of God or not; if we have a mind to know it, we may soon bring the matter to an issue, by looking into our own hearts and lives,

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whether “the fruits of the Spirit” be there, “in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth,” and in all those virtues which are elsewhere mentioned as “fruits of the Spirit.” These are plain and sensible things, and if these virtues be in us, they cannot be hid from ourselves or others, but will shine forth in our lives and conversations, in all our words and actions. Goodness is soon seen, it hath a native beauty and brightness in it, which draws the eyes of men towards it: and it discovers itself by its effects, which are perceived and felt in those upon whom it is exercised. Righteousness, and truth, are likewise very sensible to ourselves and others; and so are the contrary dispositions and practices. No man does an unjust thing, but his conscience tells him he does so; no man speaks contrary to truth, or breaks his word and promise, but he is guilty to himself of so doing. And thus I might instance in all other virtues and vices. If we will but look into ourselves, and observe our own actions, we may easily discern, whether we be malicious and envious, cruel and hard-hearted, censorious and uncharitable; or good, and kind, and merciful, and ready to forgive; whether we make conscience of our word or not; or whether we do to others, as we would have them do to us. Nothing is more easy to be known than it is, which of these qualities does possess and rule our hearts, and govern and bear sway in our lives. And if we can know this, we know whether we have the “fruits of the Spirit” or not; “for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.” And by these fruits of the Spirit, or the want of them (which are both very discernible), we may know what our state and condition is, whether we have the Spirit of God, and be true and sincere Christians. A great many men tire themselves in an endless inquiry, concerning the good estate of their souls towards God; whether they be the children of God, and whether they have the Spirit of God or not, and are trying themselves all their lives, by obscure and uncertain marks, which will never bring the matter to any clear issue, but leave them still in the dark and in doubt, concerning their own sincerity, and the integrity of their hearts towards God; and how can it be otherwise, since they have been so often told by unskilful men, that they cannot know their own hearts, and consequently can never be assured of their own integrity and sincerity? This, I must confess, is but an ill sign of sincerity, when we find it so hard a matter to discern it in ourselves. Job found it clearly in himself, and was very confidently assured of it: ([Job xxvii. 5, 6.](#)) “Till I die, (says he) I will not remove my integrity from me: my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go.” But if a man can not know his own heart, and whether he have integrity or not; how shall he know either when he parts with it, or when he holds it fast? the apostle, in the text, gives us a sure mark whereby we may know when we have the Spirit of God—by the sensible fruits and effects of it.

I will conclude all with the apostle’s exhortation: ([Phil. iv. 8.](#)) “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” Think of them and regard

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them as principal parts of your duty, and particular instances of that universal goodness which Christianity teacheth and requires, as the proper and genuine effects of that “grace of God which hath appeared to all men, and brings salvation;” that is, of the gospel. And if the doctrine of the gospel do not produce these blessed fruits and effects in the hearts and lives of those who profess the Christian religion; then, as the apostle to the Hebrews reasons, “how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which was at first spoken by the Lord, and after wards confirmed by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with wonders, and signs, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?”



SERMON CCII.

THE NECESSITY OF SUPERNATURAL GRACE, IN ORDER TO A CHRISTIAN LIFE.

For without me ye can do nothing.—[John xv. 5.](#)

IN the beginning of this chapter our Saviour compares his mystical body, that is, his church, to a vine, which his Father, whom he compares to a husbandman, hath planted. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.” To represent to us the union that is betwixt Christ and all true Christians, and the influence of grace and spiritual life, which all that are united to him do derive and receive from him, he sets it forth to us by the resemblance of a vine and branches. As there is a natural vital union between the vine and the branches, so there is a spiritual vital union between Christ and true Christians; and this union is the cause of our fruitfulness in the works of obedience and a good life. There are some, indeed, that seem to be grafted into Christ by an outward profession of Christianity, who yet derive no influence from him, so as to bring forth fruit, because they are not vitally united to him; these the husbandman will lop off, and take away, as unprofitable and dead branches; ([ver. 2.](#)) “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away;” that is, they who only make an outward profession of faith in Christ, but do not bring forth the fruits of obedience and a good life, shall finally be separated from him; “and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” And because all our fruitfulness depends upon our union with Christ, as the fruitfulness of the branches depends upon their union with the vine, therefore he bids us be careful, that this union be preserved and continued; ([ver. 4.](#)) “Abide in me, and I in you.” We are planted into Christ by faith, and the belief of his doctrine; and we abide in him by a firm purpose and resolution of obedience. So they are said to abide and continue in Christ’s word, who obey and practise his doctrine: ([John viii. 31.](#)) “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.” So St. James explains it: ([James i. 25.](#)) “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty,” that is, the Christian doctrine, “and continueth therein;” how is that? “he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” And ([1 John iii. 6.](#)) “Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not.”

“Abide in me, and I in you.” Christ is said to abide in us, by the continual aids and influences of his grace and Holy Spirit; and if we k abide in him,” by the resolution of obedience, his grace and assistance will be continually derived to us, to bring this good resolution to effect, and to enable us to bring forth fruit. “For as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit. For without me, ye can do nothing,” *χωρὶς ἐμοῦ*, “out of me,” being separated from me, “ye can do nothing.”

There are two things to be explained in the words, and then I shall come to the assertion or proposition contained in them .

First, What is here meant by being without Christ, or out of him.

Secondly, In what sense and with what limitations we are to understand that expression, we “can do nothing.”

First, What is here meant by being without Christ, or out of him. “Out of me ye can do no thing;” that is, unless we be united to him, and by virtue of that union derive from him the supernatural aids and influences of his grace, we can do no thing. It is true, indeed, that without God we can do nothing; we cannot think, or speak, or do any natural action, without the common assistance and concurrence of his providence; “for in him we live, and move, and have our being.” But this assistance is natural and ordinary, and commonly afforded to every man in the world: but the grace and assistance of Christ, signifies something extraordinary and supernatural, that which divines mean by supernatural grace, in opposition to the ordinary concurrence of Divine providence to all the actions of men.

Secondly, In what sense, and with what limitations we are to understand that expression, we can do nothing: “Without me ye can do nothing.” And this is necessary to be limited to such effects as our Saviour was speaking of; viz. the proper acts of a Christian life, obedience to the laws and precepts of the gospel, which our Saviour here, in pursuance of the allegory, calls “bearing fruit, and bringing forth much fruit.” For if it be not thus limited, but extended to all kind of actions, natural or civil, it is not true that we cannot do these without supernatural assistance, and the grace of Christ. For these we may do by the common and natural assistance and concurrence of God, equally afforded to men: nay, more than this, we may by this common assistance do those actions which tend to make us spiritually good, and are the means appointed by God for that purpose. We may go to church, we may read and hear God’s word, and upon the hearing of it may reflect upon the actions of our lives, and may be convinced of our sin and danger, and, upon this conviction, may beg God’s mercy and grace to reform and grow better. But then we cannot effect this without supernatural grace and assistance. So that this assertion here in the text, is to be limited to the purposes of regeneration, and sanctification, and perseverance in holiness; that a man cannot make himself good, he cannot convert and change himself, nor by his own strength continue and hold out in a good course; we can do nothing of this, without the grace and assistance of Christ.

So that the plain design of this proposition here in the text is, to assert the necessity of supernatural grace, to make men good, and to make them persevere in a course of holiness and obedience. In speaking to this argument, I shall,

First, Shew what it is we mean by the supernatural grace and assistance of Christ.

Secondly, That to this the Scripture doth constantly attribute our regeneration, and sanctification, and perseverance in holiness.

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Thirdly, That there is great reason to assert the necessity of God's supernatural grace and assistance to these purposes.

Fourthly, That this supernatural grace and assistance does not exclude, but suppose, the concurrence of our own endeavours.

Fifthly, That this grace and assistance is derived to us from our union with Christ.

First, What we mean by the supernatural grace and assistance of Christ. Whatever natural power we have to do any thing, is from God, an effect of his goodness; but God, considering the lapsed and decayed condition of mankind, sent his Son into the world, to recover us out of that sinful and miserable condition into which we were fallen, to reveal eternal life to us, and the way to it, and to purchase happiness for us, and to offer it to us upon certain terms and conditions to be performed by us: but we being weak and without strength, slaves to sin, and under the power of evil habits, and unable to free ourselves from this bondage by any natural power left in us, our blessed Saviour, in great pity and tenderness to mankind, hath in his gospel offered, and is ready to afford us, an extraordinary assistance of his grace and Holy Spirit, to supply the defects of our natural power and strength. And this supernatural grace of Christ is that alone which can enable us to perform what he requires of us. And this, according to the several uses and occasions of it, is by divines called by several names. As it puts good motions into us, and excites and stirs us up to that which is good, it is called preventing grace; because it prevents any motion or desire on our parts: as it assists and strengthens us in the doing of any thing that is good, it is called assisting grace: as it keeps us constant in a good course, it is called persevering grace; and may have several other denominations, in several other respects: for it is suited to all our occasions and necessities.

Secondly, To this grace and assistance of God, the Scripture doth constantly attribute our regeneration, and sanctification, and perseverance in holiness. We are said to be "born again of the Spirit," to be "sanctified by the renewing of the Holy Ghost," to be "led by the Spirit of God," and, "through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the flesh—to do all things through Christ strengthening us," and "to be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." All which, and many more texts that I might instance in, do plainly express to us the supernatural assistance of Christ, whereby we become good, and are enabled to do any thing that is good, and preserved and continued in a good course. As the Scripture doth every where attribute sin to our own corrupt hearts, and to the temptation and instigation of the devil; so does it constantly ascribe all the good that we do to the grace of Christ, or, which is all one, to the blessed motions and assistances of God's Holy Spirit. For "the Spirit of God" is called "the Spirit of Christ," yea, Christ: (*Rom. viii. 9, 10.*) "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin." By which it is evident, that "the Spirit of God," and "the Spirit of Christ," and "Christ," do in this text signify one and the same thing.



Thirdly, There is great reason to assert the necessity of this grace and assistance to these purposes, whether we consider the corruption and impotency of human nature, the strange power of evil habits and customs, the fickleness and inconstancy of human resolution, or the malice and activity of the devil to seduce and tempt us to sin.

1. If we consider the corruption and impotency of human nature. This the light of nature cannot but acknowledge. The philosophers and wise men among the heathens, were sensible of a great depravation in our souls, and degeneracy from the Divine life; and therefore they prescribed several ways and methods for the purifying of our souls, and the raising of them to that purity and perfection to which they supposed they were designed: but they were wholly ignorant from whence this depravation came; and therefore many of them supposed a preexistence of souls; that is, that our souls, which now inhabit these bodies, had lived in a former state, and for some faults they had committed in that state, were, by the justice of God, sentenced to be imprisoned in these bodies, as a punishment for their former sins. They could not imagine that our souls came impure out of God's hands; and, to avoid that inconvenience, they imagined a former state wherein they had sinned. And this was the best account they could give of the general depravation of mankind.

But the Scripture hath given us a more certain account of this; that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." This is the true source and original of the universal degeneracy of mankind, and of the weakness and impotency of human nature. The fall of our first parents hath derived corruption and weakness upon the whole race and posterity of Adam; for "whatsoever is born of the flesh is flesh."

So that, considering our natural impotency, there is great need of a supernatural and extraordinary power and assistance, to recover us from this degeneracy, and "to renew us after the image of him who created us in righteousness and true holiness." And therefore when the Scripture speaks of the redemption of Christ, it represents our condition not only as miserable, but helpless: (Rom. v. 6.) "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." When mankind was under an utter impotency of recovering itself out of that state of sin and misery into which it was plunged, "in the fulness of time," that is, when God thought it most convenient, "he sent his Son into the world, to die for sinners;" and, "by that Spirit which raised him from the dead," to enable us to mortify our lusts, and "to rise to newness of life."

2. The necessity of this grace and assistance will farther appear, if we consider the strange power of evil habits and customs. The other is a natural, and this is a contracted impotency, whereby men make themselves much weaker than they were by nature. The habits of sin being added to our natural impotency, are like so many diseases superinduced upon a constitution naturally weak, which do all help to increase the man's infirmity. Evil habits in Scripture are compared to bonds and fetters, which do as effectually hinder a man from motion, and putting forth himself to action, as if he were quite lame, hand and foot. Habit

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and custom is a kind of second nature; and so far as any thing is natural, so far it is necessary, and we cannot do otherwise. By passing from one degree of sin to another, men become fixed and hardened in their wickedness, and do insensibly bring themselves into that state, out of which they are utterly unable to recover themselves. When men have been long accustomed to evil, and are once grown old in vice, it is as hard to reform and rectify them, as to recover a body, bowed down with age, to its first straightness. When men have continued long in a sinful course, they are almost under a fatal necessity of being wicked, and under all imaginable disadvantages of contributing any thing to their own recovery. The Scripture represents the condition of such persons to us, by such things as are naturally impossible. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” Now this consideration added to the former, to the impotency of nature, the strength of evil habits is still a farther evidence of the necessity of supernatural grace and assistance for our recovery. For the greater our impotency is, so much more need is there of an extraordinary power and assistance to enable us to do our duty.

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3. This will yet farther appear, if we consider the inconstancy and fickleness of human resolution. Suppose that, upon hearing the terrible threatenings of God’s word against sin, or upon the natural checks and convictions of conscience for having done wickedly, a sinner should of himself (as there is reason enough for it) entertain a purpose and resolution of breaking off his sinful course; yet how unable would this resolution be to withstand the powerful assaults of temptation, and the violent returns of his own inclinations to his former lusts? This almost every man finds by his own frequent and sad experience, how inconstant his mind is to his own purposes, and how unfaithful and treacherous to his most solemn and severe resolutions; how false we are to ourselves, and to the vows and promises we have made to God, and our own souls, when the occasions and temptations of sin present themselves to us. So that our need of God’s grace is in no case more plain and evident, than to keep us steadfast to our resolution of forsaking our sins, and amending our lives; and without this, we find how uncertain and ineffectual all our good purposes are, “like the morning cloud, and as the early dew which passeth away.” So that we must say with the prophet Jeremiah, ([chap. x. 23.](#)) “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”

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4. Besides all these disadvantages from ourselves, from the impotency of our natures, and the strength of our lusts, and the inconstancy of our resolutions, we have likewise a powerful enemy with out, the devil, who is very malicious and active to promote our ruin, by keeping us in this slavery. He is the great enemy of our souls, and his malice will not suffer him to neglect any opportunity of doing us mischief. He observes and watcheth our tempers and dispositions, and accordingly plants his temptations, and plays them upon us where we are weakest, and they may do the greatest execution. So that we are not only weak within, but strongly assaulted without: “We wrestle not only with flesh and blood; but with

principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickednesses.” All the powers of darkness are combined against us, to work our destruction; and therefore we have need of an extraordinary strength and assistance, to enable us to contend with such powerful adversaries, upon so many disadvantages. And our comfort is, that God offers his grace to us, and that is sufficient for us. “Greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world.” The Spirit that dwells in good men, and is ready to assist them to all good purposes, is stronger than that evil spirit which is in the world, and “goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

Fourthly, This supernatural grace and assistance does not exclude, but suppose, the concurrence of our endeavours. The grace of God does not do all, without any concurrence on our part. It strengthens and assists us; but does not produce the whole effect, without any activity or endeavour of ours. When our Saviour says, “without me ye can do nothing,” he does imply, that by the assistance of grace we may perform all the duties of the Christian life; we may bear fruit, and bring forth much fruit. And to keep to the metaphor in the text, the branches of a vine are not merely passive, but contribute their part to the production of fruit, though they derive continual supplies of sap and virtue from the vine. When the apostle says, “I can do all things through Christ strengthening me,” he does not think it a disparagement to the grace of Christ, to say, he could do all things by the assistance of it. He acknowledged! his own impotency and weakness, and glories in the strength and assistance of Christ. But an acknowledgment of impotency does not exclude endeavour; for impotency does not signify an utter want of power, but the weakness and insufficiency of it, that it is disproportioned to the work and duty required. So that though we are not sufficient of ourselves for any thing that is good; yet, being assisted by God, we may co-operate with him to the killing of sin, to the cleansing of ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to the perfecting of holiness in the fear of God. As the apostles were workers together with God in the salvation of others; ([2 Cor. vi. 1.](#)) “We then, as workers together with God, beseech you, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain; I say, as they were workers together with God in the salvation of others, so may we be said to be, in working out our own salvation, nay, we are commanded to be so; ([Phil. ii. 12, 13.](#)) “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.” So that God’s preventing and assisting grace, his working in us both to will and to do, is so far from excluding our endeavours, that it is used by the apostle as a strong reason and argument to the contrary; “Work out your own salvation: for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.” And if this were not so, all the exhortations of Scripture were to no purpose, our preaching were vain, and your hearing vain: for nothing can be vainer, than to persuade men to do their duty, if this be true, that God does all, and we do nothing.

Fifthly and lastly, This grace and assistance is derived to us from our union with Christ. So soon as we believe in him, and heartily embrace his doctrine, we are united to him; and if we continue in this faith, “we abide in him, and he in us;” and by virtue of this union, the



influences of his grace, the aids and assistances of his Spirit are derived to us, to all the purposes of holiness and obedience, to enable us to do the will of God, and patiently continue in well-doing, and to preserve us to his heavenly kingdom.

There is no other mystery in this union, than that which I have plainly told you, that it is effected by your becoming the disciples of Christ, and sincerely embracing his doctrine; that it is continued by our bringing forth the fruits of holiness and obedience. By this we become branches of that true vine; and being so, derive sap and virtue from him, the vital influences of his grace and Holy Spirit, to assist us in our duty, and to make us to be “fruitful in every good work, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and the glory of God.”

But when I say this grace and assistance is derived to us from our union, I do not intend to exclude the necessity of God’s grace and Holy Spirit to the conversion of a sinner, and his first planting into Christ: but when we say that Christians derive the influences of grace and assistance from their union with Christ, this supposeth them to be Christians already, and planted into Christ, and that this likewise is the work of God’s grace. For if we can not bring forth fruit, without the aid and assistance of his grace, much less without that could we be planted into him, and united with him.

I shall conclude my discourse upon this subject, with three or four inferences from what hath been delivered.

I. If the grace of God be so necessary to all the ends of holiness and obedience, and to our perseverance in a good course, then there is great reason why we should continually depend upon God, and every day earnestly pray to him for the aids and assistances of his grace, and the influence of his Holy Spirit, to guide, and direct, and strengthen us in all goodness, and “to keep us up by his mighty power through faith unto salvation.” For though God hath promised his assistance to us, and is al ways ready to afford it; yet we are to remember, that it is a free dispensation of his grace and goodness, “he works in us both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.” And the promise of this grace is not so absolute, but that he expects we should earnestly sue and beg to him for it. He hath not promised his Holy Spirit but to them that ask him, and that with great earnestness and importunity; we must ask, and seek, and knock. Even where he promiseth “to give us a new heart and a new spirit;” yet, he says, that “for all these things he will be sought to by the house of Israel.” And though sometimes he be found of them that seek him not, and do frequently prevent us with his grace, and the motions of his blessed Spirit; yet we have no reason to expect it without our seeking of it.

II. We should thankfully acknowledge and ascribe all the good that is in us, and all that we do, to the grace and assistance of God exciting and strengthening us to every good work, without which we can do nothing, and say, with David, “Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but to thy name be the praise.” And with St. Paul, “yet not I, but the grace of God which

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was with me.” As the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt, and conducted to the possession of the good land (which is a type of heaven) by the presence and power of God going along with them, “not by their own sword and bow, but by a mighty hand, and an out stretched arm:” so, if ever we be rescued from the bondage of sin, and quickened to newness of life, if ever we be saved, and come to heaven, we must be assisted, and conducted, and kept by the mighty power of God: for “by grace we are saved, and that not of ourselves,” for it is the gift of God.

III. Let us take heed that we resist not the Spirit of God, and receive not this grace of God in vain. And this we do, whenever we resist the motions of God’s blessed Spirit, and do not make use of that grace and assistance which God offers to us, by being workers together with God, and co-operating with his grace by our own sincere endeavours. God’s Spirit doth frequently put good motions into us, and is ready to further them, if we comply with them, and to enable us to bring them to effect: but men may, and many times do, resist the Holy Ghost, and quench the motions of that blessed Spirit of grace; and then God justly leaves us, and withdraws his assistance, and takes away his Holy Spirit from us. But if we comply with them, his grace and help is ready to carry us still farther, and to assist us more and more, that we may go from strength to strength, until we come to appear before him in Sion.

IV. The consideration of our own impotency is no excuse to our sloth and negligence, if so be the grace of God be ready to assist us. For if that be offered to us, and always at hand to help us, where men have not provoked God to withdraw it; then it is our own fault if we do not do our duty, and if we fall short of eternal happiness. For we are really able to do all that which God’s grace and assistance is ready to enable us to do. St. Paul reckons upon the strength of Christ as in some sense his power. “I am able to do all things through Christ strengthening me.”

V. And lastly, The consideration of our own impotency is no just ground of discouragement to our endeavours, considering the promise of Divine grace and assistance. Now that God has entered into a new covenant of grace with us, and offers us eternal life upon the conditions of faith, and repentance, and sincere obedience, the greater our weakness is, the more reason we have to expect his grace and assistance; because we know that he deals sincerely with us, and intends to bring us to that happiness which he offers to us; and therefore we are assured, that he does not command us impossibilities, and seeing we are weak and insufficient of ourselves to do what he requires of us, that he is ready to afford us his grace to enable us to do it.

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SERMON CCIII.

OF THE FORM AND THE POWER OF GODLINESS.

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.— 2 Tim. iii. 5.

THE apostle in these words distinguishes two things in religion, which do not, but ought, always to go together; viz. the show and pretence of religion, and the life and power of it. He condemns neither, but blames the separating of them. The latter, in deed, cannot be without the first; for wherever religion really is, there will be some appearance of it: but the former may be, and often is, without the latter. Men may make a great show of religion, and yet be very destitute of the power of it. And such were those persons the apostle describes here in the text; they were guilty of the greatest faults and vices in their lives, but thought to cloak ail these by an outward show and appearance of godliness. “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.”

The word *μόρφωσις*, which is here translated *form*, signifies the show or image of a thing, which is dead and ineffectual: in opposition to the reality and life, which is quick and powerful. And, I think, this word is but once more used in the New Testament, and much in the same sense; viz. for an empty and ineffectual knowledge of religion with out the practice of it. (Rom. ii. 17-20, 21.) The apostle there speaks of some pharisaical Jews, who gloried in their knowledge of the law, but violated it in their practice. “Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and hast the form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law. Thou, therefore, that teaches! another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest, a man should not steal, dost thou steal?” So that a form of godliness, signifies an empty show and profession of religion, without the real effects of it.

And they who are destitute of these, are said to deny the power of religion. It is usual in several languages to draw metaphors from words to actions; and men are said to contradict or deny any thing, when they do contrary to what they pretend; and so this phrase is elsewhere used, (Tit. i. 16.) “They profess to know God, but in their works they deny him.” (1 Tim. v. 8.) “If any man provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith.” The apostle does not mean that such an one denies the faith by an express declaration in words, but by actions so contradictory to the. Christian faith, as an infidel would hardly do. “He hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

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

First, Shew wherein a form of godliness consists.

Secondly, Wherein the power of it lies.

Thirdly, Give some marks and characters where by we may know when these are separated, when the form of godliness is destitute of the power.

Fourthly, Shew that a mere form of godliness, without the power of it, is insignificant to all the great ends and purposes of religion.

First, To shew wherein a form of godliness doth consist. In general it consists in an external show and profession of religion, or of any eminent part of it, or of that which is reputed to be so; and a form of religion is more or less complete, according to the extent of it. Some pitch upon one part of religion, and set themselves chiefly to make a show of that; others take in more parts of it, and endeavour to express and counterfeit them; so that the forms of religion are various and different, and not to be reduced to any fixed and constant standard; but they commonly appear in some one or more of these shapes:

- I. An external devotion.
- II. An orthodox profession of the Christian faith.
- III. Enthusiasm and pretence to inspiration.
- IV. A great external show of mortification.
- V. An imperfect repentance and partial reformation.
- VI. The appearance and ostentation of some particular grace and virtue.
- VII. A great zeal for some party, or opinions, or circumstances of religion.
- VIII. Silliness and freakishness, and either a pretended or real ignorance in the common affairs and concernments of human life.
- IX. Much noise and talk about religion.

These are the several forms of religion which men are wont to assume. Not that these do al ways go singly; but sometimes men put on one, sometimes more of them, as may best serve their several turns and interests. Nor would I be understood to condemn all these; for several of these particulars which I have mentioned are good in themselves, and necessary parts of religion; but being destitute of other things wherein the life of religion doth consist, they are but a form of godliness.

I. External devotion. This is the most common form of religion, and easiest to be assumed, and therefore it is that so many take it up. And this is good in itself, and a necessary part of religion: but if there be no more than this, it is a mere image and picture of religion, abominable to God, and fulsome and odious to discerning men.

Now this external devotion shews itself more especially these two ways:

1. In a frequent and diligent use of the means and instruments of religion.
2. In a curious and nice regard to the modes and circumstances of performing these.
 1. In a frequent and diligent use of the means and instruments of religion; such as prayer, reading, and hearing the word of God, and receiving of the blessed sacrament. These are not the life of religion, the great end and design of it, but the means and instruments which God hath appointed for the begetting and increasing of holiness and virtue in us. Many exercise themselves in these with great constancy and devotion, pray to God, and read the Bible frequently, go to church duly, and hear God's word attentively, and receive the sacrament reverently, and behave themselves devoutly in all parts of public worship; and yet all this may be but a mere form, and certainly is no more, where the great end of all

this is neglected, and men do not sincerely endeavour to do what God's word directs them to, and what they daily pray to God to enable them to do.

For all these means are in order to some farther effect and design. We read and hear the word of God, that we may know his will, and that we may do it; that by the precepts and counsels of the Holy Scriptures, we may learn and understand our duty; and by the motives and arguments which are there offered to us, we may effectually be persuaded to the practice of it. We pray to God not only for the forgiveness of our sins, but for his grace and assistance, to enable us to mortify and subdue them, and to proceed in all virtue and godliness of living. We receive the sacrament, to inflame our love to God and our blessed Saviour, to excite in us a greater hatred of sin, and to confirm us in the purpose and resolution of well-doing. These are the great ends for which God hath appointed all these helps and means; and if these ends be not obtained, in vain do we worship God; all our religion is but mere show and pageantry. We are but like the people God himself describes: (*Isa. xxix. 13.*) "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do they honour me, but have removed their heart far from me." And like those (*Ezek. xxxiii. 30-32.*) who "spake one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after covetousness. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words, but they do them not." This is not to worship God, but impudently to affront him; and if we take this for religion, we put the grossest cheat imaginable upon ourselves. Hear how God challenges the people of Israel upon this account: (*Jer. vii. 2-4, &c.*) "Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place." This is the great end of all religious worship and devotion, the reformation of our lives and actions; and if it have not this effect, it is a cheat. "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways, and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for ever and ever. Behold, ye trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods, whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?" What greater impudence can there be, than to worship God devoutly, and to live wickedly?

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This is to declare that we mock God under a pretence of serving him; or else that we believe that God whom we worship allows these abominations, and is pleased with them.

2. Others make this form of external devotion yet more complete by a curious and nice regard to the modes and circumstances of performing the duties of religion. They are very punctual and exact in all their carriage and gestures, as if they minded nothing else but the outward part of religion.

Not but that great humility and reverence does very well become men in their addresses to God; but then we must be sure that this external reverence be a signification of the inward and real devotion of our minds. For if it be separated from this, it is not devotion, but superstition; it is not to “worship God in spirit and in truth,” but in bodily show and appearance only; not to honour the Divine Majesty, but to fawn upon him and flatter him. And where men are very intent upon these things, and endeavour to outstrip other people in voluntary expressions of outward devotion, it too often happens that such persons are destitute of the substance and reality of religion. They are like the formal complimenting sort of people in civil conversation, who commonly have very little in them, and notwithstanding all their smooth outside and appearance, they have neither that solidity nor sincerity which is in many a plain ordinary man.

II. An orthodox profession of the Christian faith. This is another form of religion, which the more knowing and inquisitive sort of men are apt to take up and rest in. And this is that which in the Jewish religion the apostle calls “a form of knowledge, and of the truth in the Lord.”

And this is good as far as it goes. But then it must not rest only in the brain, but descend from thence upon the heart and life: otherwise a man may have this form of godliness, and yet be a denier of the power of it. St. Paul puts this very case, that a man may have the theory and knowledge of religion, and yet, if it do not produce the fruits of a good life, it is nothing worth: (1 Cor. xii. 2.) “Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing.” And the reason is plain, because the knowledge of religion is only in order to the practice of it; and an article or proposition of faith is an idle thing, if it do not produce such actions as the belief of such a proposition doth require.

There are many persons in the world very solicitous about an orthodox belief, and mightily concerned to know what the Scriptures, but especially what the councils and fathers, have declared in such a matter; and they are nice and scrupulous in these things, even to the utmost punctilios, and will with a most unchristian passion contend for the Christian faith: and yet, perhaps, all this while they can allow themselves in plain sins, and in the practice of such things as are in Scripture as clearly forbidden to be done, as any thing is there commanded to be believed. Whereas religion does not consist so much in nicety and subtilty of belief, as in integrity and innocency of life; and the truest and most orthodox

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persuasion in matters of religion, is but a mere form and image, if it be not accompanied with an answerable practice; yea, like the image represented to Nebuchadnezzar in his dream, “whose head was of fine gold, but the legs and feet were iron and clay.”

Not but that a right belief is of great concernment in religion; but then this belief must be prosecuted into the proper and genuine consequences of it upon our lives: if it be not, it is unhappy for men that they believe so well, when they live so ill. The devils have a right faith, St. James tells us; “they believe and tremble.” And, indeed, none have so much reason to tremble, as those who believe the principles of religion, and yet are conscious to themselves that they live contrary to them; because of all persons in the world they are the most inexcusable.

III. Another form of religion which many take upon them, is enthusiasm and pretence to inspiration. And this is a very glorious form, which is apt to dazzle and amuse the ignorant, because they know not what to make of it. It seems to be some thing strange and extraordinary, and yet it is no thing but what every man that has confidence enough may pretend to.

There is no Christian doubts but that the Spirit of God hath heretofore inspired men in an extraordinary manner, and that he may do so again when he pleases: but since the great and standing revelation of the gospel, we have reason not to be rash in giving heed to such pretences. If those who pretend to inspiration declare nothing but what is revealed in the gospel already, their inspiration is needless; if they declare any thing contrary thereto, we are sufficiently cautioned against them; if any thing be sides the revelation of the gospel, but not contrary to it, then we are to expect what evidence they bring for their inspiration. For God does not inspire men for their own sakes, but for the sake of others; and another man’s inspiration is nothing to me, unless he can satisfy me that he is inspired. For either I must believe every one that pretends to inspiration, or those only that can make good their pretence. Not every one, for then I yield up myself to the mercy of every confident man, to lead me into what delusions he pleases. If I believe only those who are able to make good this pretence, then am I in no great danger: for nothing less than a miracle can give me reasonable assurance of another man’s inspiration; and I think few or none of our modern enthusiasts have so much as pretended to miracles. So that this form of religion is calculated only to impose upon the ignorant, but signifies little among the steady and considerate sort of people.

Nay, if this pretence were real, yet it may be no more than a form of religion. For the apostle sup poses that men may “have the gift of prophecy, and yet want charity, without which they are no thing.” And our Saviour tells us, that many shall plead at the day of judgment, “Have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?” And yet these very persons for all this may be workers of iniquity, and such as our Lord will bid to depart from him.

IV. A great external show of mortification.

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This the pharisees of old did much applaud themselves in, they fasted twice a week. And this is still a great part of the religion of many in the Romish church; they impose strict penalties and corporal severities upon themselves; abstain from several sorts of meats and drinks, watch and afflict their bodies with several sorts of rigours: whereas one severe resolution of a good life well prosecuted, is a thousand times better than all this.

For experience shews us, that men may be very severe to their bodies, and yet favourable to their lusts. The pharisees, indeed, fasted often, but they were very ravenous in another kind—they devoured widows houses. It is possible that men may kill themselves by corporal austerities, and yet never mortify one lust; they may submit to a thousand penances, and yet never truly repent one sin; they may turn pilgrims and go as far as Jerusalem to visit our Saviour's sepulchre, and yet never know the power of his death.

Fasting may be a good instrument of religion, if it be discreetly used; and as it may be used, there may be no religion in it. But as for those other kinds of severities, they are absurd and superstitious, and taken up upon a great mistake of the nature of God; as if he were never well-pleased, but when we do something very displeasing to ourselves; as if he were extremely delighted in the misery and torment of his creatures; and to be cruel and unmerciful to ourselves, were the only way to move his compassion towards us.

These are barbarous and heathenish conceits of God; and the absurd practices grounded upon them are no where recommended to us in Scripture, nor have any example there, but only in Baal's priests, who lanced and cut themselves, believing that to be a good way to incline their gods to hear them. These are voluntary superstitions, which God hath required at no man's hands. And no wise man can doubt, but that he that really mortifies his lusts, and subdues his passions, may be a good man, though he never whip himself in all his life; and that he that lives soberly, and righteously, and godly, may justly be accounted religious, without turning vagrant, and rambling idly up and down the world. These are such forms of religion as can have no esteem and reputation, but in a very superstitious church and age.

V. An imperfect repentance and partial reformation.

By an imperfect repentance, I mean a trouble and sorrow for sin, without the forsaking of it, and the amendment of our lives; or when, if men do reform in some things, they continue in the love and practice of other sins. This is not true repentance; for he that hath truly repented is heartily troubled for all his offences against God, and resolved not to commit the like again; but he that retains any lust, and allows himself in the practice of it, is not troubled that he hath offended God, but hath left his sins for some other reason. For whatever arguments and considerations respecting God will move a man to quit any one lust, ought upon the same account to prevail with him to abandon all. So that whatever trouble and sorrow a man may pretend for his sins, there is no surer sign of an insincere repentance, than if, after this, he continue in the habitual practice of any known sin.

VI. The appearance and ostentation of some particular grace and virtue.

A man may be moved by the inclination of his nature, or upon some interest and design, to the practice of some particular virtue. Some are tender and compassionate in their nature, and that excites them to charity; others of quiet and easy dispositions, and that makes them patient, and meek, and peaceable; others assume one or more virtuous qualities out of vain-glory, or to serve some other interest. The pharisees were much for giving alms, because this is a piece of religion universally applauded and well-spoken of; and therefore, though they omitted many other necessary parts of religion, yet they were so cunning that they would not be defective in this; not out of regard to God, but themselves and their own reputation. For, as our Saviour observes, they did their alms with such circumstances of vain-glory, as quite blasted the glory of them. "They caused a trumpet to be sounded before them in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they might be seen of men," and have glory of them.

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Now though the exercise of every grace and virtue be materially a substantial part of religion, yet the practice of one virtue with the neglect of others, is a shrewd ground of suspicion that it is not virtue but design, that it is not religion but interest, which prompts men to it. For if it were religion, and done with regard to God, the very same reason would oblige them to all other parts of their duty as well as that.

VII. A great zeal for some particular party, or opinions, or circumstances of religion.

This form is frequently assumed, because men find the greatest shelter and protection under it. He that declares zealously for a party or opinion, and is fierce and eager against those that oppose it, seldom fails to gain the reputation of a religious and godly man; because he hath the vote of the whole party, and a great number to cry him up. And if he be guilty of any miscarriage, unless it be very gross and visible, he shall never want those that will apologize for him, and be ready to vindicate him at all turns. Either they will not believe what is reported of him but impute it to malice, or they will extenuate it, and ascribe it to human infirmity; but still they cannot think but that he is a religious man, because he is so zealous for that which they esteem to be so considerable a part of religion. Nay, such is the horrible partiality and injustice of parties, that a very bad man that appears zealous for their way, shall easily gain the esteem of a holy and religious man, though he have many visible and notorious faults; though he be passionate and ill-natured, censorious and uncharitable, cruel and oppressive, sordid and covetous; when another who quietly, and without any noise and bustle, minds the substantial parts of religion, and is truly devout towards God; just, and peaceable, and charitable towards men; meek, and humble, and patient, kind and friendly even to those that differ from him, shall hardly escape being censured for a lukewarm, formal, moral man, destitute of the grace of God and of the "power of godliness."

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So, likewise, zeal for or against indifferent circumstances of religion, is another "form of godliness," which many appear in. And commonly such persons, the more destitute they are of true piety and virtue, the greater stir they keep about these things, that they may seem

to be something in religion; just like those, who, being conscious to themselves that they are defective in true and useful learning, that they may not seem to be so, are always troublesome with the shreds and ends of it.

Now the indifferent circumstances of religion are things which no man ought to have the face to trouble himself about, that neglects the weighty and substantial duties of it. No man that hath "a beam in his own eye," ought to be concerned for "the mote that is in his brother's eye." Indeed, he that is careful of the main parts of religion, may and ought to be concerned for the other in their due place, so far as the order and decency of God's worship, and obedience to authority, and the peace of Christians, is concerned in them. But to place all religion in a zeal for or against these things, is one of the thinnest and slightest forms of religion.

VIII. Silliness and freakishness, and either a pretended or real ignorance in the common affairs and concernments of human life.

This may seem, at first hearing, to be a very odd form of religion, and indeed so it is; yet, in several religions, men have appeared in it with great applause and acceptance. Among the Turks, idiots and madmen are mightily revered, it being always taken for granted that they are inspired. And among the papists, the most eminent of their saints, if their legends do not belie them, especially St. Francis and St. Dominic, are magnified scarcely for any other reason, but for saying and doing the most silly and ridiculous things. What can be imagined more foolish and fanatical than St. Francis's stripping himself of his clothes and running about naked? than his frequent preaching to the birds, and beasts, and fishes? Was ever any thing more nauseously ridiculous, than his picking up the lice which were beaten off his clothes, and putting them in his bosom? which is magnified in him as a profound piece of humility; as if nastiness were a Christian grace. These, and many more such freaks, which are related in his life as instances of his great sanctity, serve to no other purpose, but to render religion ridiculous to any man of common sense. As if to be a spiritual man and a mere natural were all one; and as if this were a good consequence, that a man cannot choose but be very knowing in religion, because he is very silly in all other things, and must needs have abundance of grace because he hath no wit. It is pity it should be so, but I am afraid it is too true, that the greatest mischiefs that have been done to the world, have been done by silly well-meaning men.

Lastly, Great noise and talk about religion.

This is as empty a form as any of the rest, and yet this does strangely please and satisfy a great many. If a man do but mix something of religion with all his discourses, and be often speaking of God and heavenly things, this passeth for a more than ordinary character of a religious man. And many deceive themselves with it; they have talked of religion so long, till they believe they have it.

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Not but that this is a good thing, provided it be ordered with discretion and humility, and be not forced and affected, impertinent and troublesome. But then we must have a great care that other things be answerable. Our lives must justify our godly talk, and our actions must give weight to our words; for nothing is more odious than a religious and good discourse from the mouth of a bad man. This made our Saviour so full of indignation against the scribes and pharisees—they were not what they appeared to be in their discourse and outward garb. They said and did not, therefore he compares them to “whited walls and painted sepulchres, that were beautiful indeed without, but within were full of all uncleanness and rottenness.”

It is true, indeed, that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh:” if religion be with in, it will appear in men’s words as well as actions; this is a fire that will break out: but the best men are very modest, and make little noise, do nothing out of ostentation and to be taken notice of, and had rather refrain from good words, than to make an unseasonable show of religion.

Speech is intended to signify the inward sense of men’s minds, but it does not always do so; men may be full of religious talk, when there is nothing of religion in their hearts, nothing answerable in their lives; men may speak like angels and yet do like devils.

Therefore let no man deceive himself, or think to deceive others with this appearance of religion: for let men talk never so piously, every considerate man knows that there is more of true religion in one good action, than in a thousand good words.

And thus I have done with the first thing: viz. wherein a form of religion doth consist.

Secondly, Wherein the power of godliness doth consist. And, because it is very material to be rightly informed in this, I will reduce the several particulars to these four general heads:

I. A due sense of God, and suitable affections towards him.

II. A sincere and diligent use of the means and instruments of religion.

III. A firm and steady resolution of well-doing.

IV. As the proper and genuine effect of all these, the practice of a good life, in the several parts and instances of it.

I. A due sense of God, and suitable affections towards him. This is the principle and fountain of all religion, from whence all actions of piety and goodness do spring.

Under this I comprehend a lively sense of God’s being; which the apostle tells us, is fundamentally necessary to all religion: “He that cometh to God must believe that he is.” This is the great spring of all religious motions, and of our dependance upon him, the lively sense whereof will make us humble and thankful, and teach us “to acknowledge him in all our ways,” and to refer all our concernments to him; and of our subjection to him, which will make us obedient to his laws, and submissive to his pleasure; nothing being more reasonable than that he that gave us our lives should have the entire government and disposal of them; than that he that made us what we are, should command us what we should do.

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In short, this comprehends faith in God, or a readiness to assent to what he reveals, with the fear and the love of God, which are the great principles of religion.

II. A sincere and diligent use of the means and instruments of religion, such as prayer, reading, and hearing the word of God, and receiving the sacraments. These are the means which God hath appointed for the improving of us in holiness and goodness; and we sincerely use these means, when we really aim at this end; when we pray, and read, and hear, and meditate on God's word, and receive the sacraments, that we may truly become better, more holy and virtuous in all manner of conversation; and do not rest in the use of these means, as if a man were a religious and good man, because he prays often, and every day reads the Bible, and goes to all the sermons he can hear of, and takes all occasions to receive the sacrament. The life of religion does not consist in the bare use of these, but in the real efficacy of them upon our lives. It is a very good caution which St. John gives us: "Be not deceived, he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous," (1 John iii. 7.) Men are apt to impose upon themselves, as if they could be righteous, and approve themselves to God, upon some other terms, whereas only "they that fear God, and work righteousness, are accepted with him."

I do not speak this to undervalue the exercises of religion, but to inform men of the true nature and design of them. Be as diligent as thou wilt in the exercises of piety and devotion, but be sincere in the use of those means; do not satisfy thyself in the performance of those duties, unless thou find the effect of them upon thy heart and life, always remembering that "not the hearers of the word, but the doers of it are blessed," that the prayer and all "the sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord."

III. A firm and steady resolution of well-doing. This is the result of a true and sincere repentance, and the great principle of a new life; and if it be firm and steadfast, it will derive its influence into all our actions; but if it be wavering and inconsistent, it is only the occasion of a religious mood and fit, but not the principle of a religious state. Therefore it concerns us to strengthen this principle, and to be true to it, when we have once taken it up; for whenever we quit it, we break loose from God and religion at once, and cast ourselves back into a much more dangerous state than we were in before.

There is no doubt, but that the devil and our own corrupt hearts will make many assaults upon such a resolution, and raise all their batteries against it, because it is our main fort, and the great security of our souls, and so long as we maintain that we are safe; and therefore it had need be a mighty resolution that is able to stand out against such opposition.

But what are we that we should take up such a resolution, and what is our strength? We are weak and "unsteadfast as water, reeds shaken with the wind; we are not sufficient of ourselves, as of ourselves, for any thing that is good; the way of man is not in himself, nor is it in man that walks to direct his steps:" but we have a greater strength than our own to rely upon, and greater than that of any adverse power that can set itself against us; we have

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God on our side, and the assistance of his grace to back and fortify these holy resolutions; so that we have no reason to despair of success and victory, if we be not wanting to ourselves; for “God’s grace is sufficient for us; greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world.”

IV. And lastly, Which is the proper and genuine effect of all these, the practice of a holy and virtuous life in all the parts and instances of it. And unless this effect be produced, we want the surest evidence of the former: for it is not credible, that that man hath a due sense of God, and pious affections towards him, or does sincerely exercise himself in the duties of religion, or is firmly resolved in well-doing, who does not shew forth the effects of all this in a good conversation. Thus St. James reasons: ([chap. iii. 13.](#)) “Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge amongst you?” that is, instructed in the Christian knowledge, in the heavenly wisdom; “let him shew forth out of a good conversation his works.”

So that herein the power of godliness doth visibly appear, in the course of a good life; and it is the very design of the apostle in this chapter to declare this to us, as will appear to any one that considers the description here given of those persons, who, under a show of religion, denied the power of it; they were such as notwithstanding all their pretences to godliness, allowed themselves in several vices, and lusts, and passions, and were destitute of the virtues of a good life; they were selfish, and covetous, and vain-glorious, and proud, evil speakers, disobedient to parents, unthankful to their benefactors, filthy and impure, treacherous, heady, conceited, sensual, and voluptuous; so that, whatever appearance of godliness they made, they were almost as bad as could be imagined; there is hardly a fuller catalogue of sins to be met with in the Bible: besides, that all these vices are such as are plain and evident in the lives of men,

So that, upon the whole matter, it is very clear wherein the apostle mainly places the power of godliness; namely, in the real effects of religion, such as are the mortifying our lusts, and subduing of our passions, the government of our tongues, and the several virtues of a good life.

1. In the mortifying of our lusts, the lusts of in temperance and uncleanness, covetousness, and ambition. He that is a slave to any of these, his religion is but a form, how glorious a show soever it may make. “Fleshly lusts war against the soul,” and will finally ruin it. Covetousness and pride are enmity to God. “God resists the proud afar off,” and “the covetous man the Lord abhors.”

2. In the subduing of our passions, wrath, hatred, malice, envy, and revenge. They are the very nature and properties of the devil, and dispositions as contrary to God, as light is to darkness; there fore, whoever allows himself in these, whatever pretences he makes to religion, is really a bad man. This St. John tells us is a plain case: ([1 John iii. 10.](#)) “Whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.” ([Jam. iii. 14, 15.](#)) “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the

truth (that is, do not pretend to be religious); this wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.”

3. In the government of our tongues. This is a great effect of religion, to “keep our tongues from speaking evil,” from backbiting, and slandering, and censuring, and reviling, from profane swearing and cursing, lewd and filthy talking. When men’s tongues run out into these disorders, it is a sign that they are not under the government of religion, and that the fear of God hath not seized upon their hearts; for “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” So St. James tells us, ([chap. i. 26.](#)) “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.” And, on the contrary, it is a good sign that religion hath some power over men, when it restrains them in this kind. So the same apostle tells us, ([chap. iii. 2.](#)) “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.”

4. In the several virtues of a good life, in opposition to these and all other vices; such as are truth and justice, humility and meekness, patience and contentedness with our condition, peaceableness and charity to those that are in want and necessity, a readiness to forgive our enemies, and an universal love and kindness to all men. I have not time to recommend these particularly to you, the Scripture does it frequently and fully, telling us that these are “the will of God,” and the “Divine nature—the new creature—pure religion and undefiled—the wisdom that is from above—the fruits of the Spirit,” the proper and genuine effects of true piety, the sensible and substantial evidences of our love to God, the things wherein “the kingdom of God consists,” and that “he that in these things serveth Christ, is accepted of God, and approved of men;” but he that neglects these, whatever form of godliness he puts on, is a denier of the power of it. “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil, he that doth not righteousness is not of God.”

Thus I have done with the second thing I propounded to speak to; namely, wherein the power of godliness consists. There are two other particulars remaining, which I shall reserve to a farther opportunity.

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SERMON CCIV.

OF THE FORM, AND THE POWER OF GODLINESS.

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.—2 Tim. iii. 5.

THE third thing propounded was, to give some marks, whereby we may know when these are separated, when there is a form of religion without the power of it.

I need not insist long upon this, because this will in a good measure appear by the account I have given of these two severally, of the form of religion, and of the power of it; for he that considers where in each of these consists, will easily judge when they are separated. But yet, that we may be sure not to mistake in a matter of so great concernment, I will instance in two or three gross and palpable characters of this, and they are so comprehensive as to contain most of the rest.

I. He hath only “a form of godliness,” who minds merely the external part of religion, without any inward sense of it.

II. He that useth only the means of religion, without regard to the end and effect of it.

III. He that is grossly and knowingly defective in the practice of any part of it.

I. He hath only “a form of godliness,” who minds merely the external part of religion, without any inward sense of it. He that worships and serves God outwardly, but hath no inward reverence and esteem for him, who cares not, so the work be done and the duty performed, with what heart and affection he does it. This is a mere carcass of religion, which is so far from being pleasing to God, that it is intolerably offensive to him; for though it be outwardly an honour done to God, yet really and in truth it is a contempt of him.

And yet it is to be feared, that this is a religion which many in the world choose and content themselves with. They can serve God an hour together, and mention his name a hundred times, without ever thinking of him, or being affected with the business they are about: nay, which is worse, this is a religion which a great part of the world use and cannot help it; I mean all those who serve God in an unknown tongue. For how is it possible their minds and hearts can be concerned in a service they do not understand? They may possibly have a devout mind in general; but they cannot exercise any acts of devotion in the particular service they are engaged in. The best of men are apt enough to let their thoughts swerve, and go astray from God when they are worshipping of him, though they understand the service they are about; but when they do not understand, it is impossible their minds and thoughts should go along with it and be concerned in what is done. This is properly, and in the strict sense of the word *μόρφωσις εὐσεβείας*, “an image of religion and devotion, without any life or sense.” And if to have our bodies put in a devout posture, to move our hands, and lips, and eyes, without understanding the service we offer to God, may be accounted worshipping of him, this is a service that may be performed by poppets as well as men. “God is a spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.” “In



spirit and in truth,” in opposition to a mere bodily service, and external show of devotion. God, who is a spirit, must be worshipped with our spirits. He expects from reasonable creatures a reasonable service; and that service only is reasonable, which is dictated by our understandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections: and to worship him otherwise, is to offer a sacrifice without a heart; it is to “offer the lame and the blind in sacrifice,” which would be an affront to our governor, much more to “the great King of the world.” Whatever we do in the service of God, we must “do it heartily as to the Lord,” because he is “the searcher of hearts, and all things are open and naked to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

II. He hath only “a form of godliness,” that useth only the means of religion, without regard to the end and effect of them. A man may exercise his understanding in the service of God, and his heart may be touched, and his affections moved in prayer, and at the hearing of God’s word, and the receiving of the sacrament; and yet this may be but a form of religion, if it go no farther. If we do not forsake those sins we confess to God, and daily beg the pardon of; if we do not truly and heartily endeavour that we may live godly, and righteous, and sober lives, as well as pray that we may do so; if the counsels and directions of God’s word have not an influence upon our lives; if we be not awed by the threatenings of it to leave our sins, and encouraged by the promises of it to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God;” we use the means of religion to no purpose, and we discredit the institutions of God, because we make no proficiency under them. We are just like the disciples of those formal professors of religion, whom the apostle describes after the text, who are “ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” It seems they used the means of instruction, and continued to use them, they were “ever learning;” but all this while they were under the dominion of sin, and the power of their lusts; “they were laden with sin, and led away with divers lusts,” and so they never attained to that which the apostle calls “the knowledge of the truth;” that is, such a knowledge of the doctrine of Christ, as is accompanied with a suitable practice, according to that of our Saviour: ([John viii. 31.](#)) “If ye continue in my word,” that is, if ye practise my doctrine, “then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Then men come to the “knowledge of the truth,” when it frees them from the slavery of sin. If our knowledge have not this effect it signifies nothing, and does not deserve the name of knowledge, because we know nothing in religion as we ought to know. ([1 John ii. 2, 3.](#)) Speaking of the knowledge of Christ, “Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith he knows him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

III. He hath only a form of religion, who is grossly and knowingly defective in the practice of any part of it. And this sort of persons are those, whom the apostle particularly intended here in the text; for such were they whom he describes by this character, that they

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had “a form of godliness, but denied the power of it.” Under the garb of religion which they had put on, they were grossly faulty in their lives and practice, and mainly defective in many of the essential duties of Christianity; they were selfish and covetous, vain-glorious, and despisers of others, calumniators and slanderers, undutiful to their superiors, and unthankful to those that had obliged them, fierce and ill-natured, treacherous and false to their word, persecutors of those that were good, filthy and sensual; not that every one of them had all these vices, they are so many and gross, that no cloak of religion could have covered them; but the apostle means, that among those that made an empty profession of religion, these vices were visible, some of them in one, and some in another. And the living in any one of these, or any other of the like nature, is inconsistent with Christianity. The power of religion appears chiefly in the subduing of these lusts, and in the exercise and practice of those graces and virtues which are contrary to these. Here the very heart and life of religion lies, and these are the veins in which it runs; and if there be a failure in any of these main virtues of a Christian life, it is a plain case, that we are destitute of the power of religion, and do only make “a vain and empty show of it.” St. James instanceth, as one would think, in none of the gross est and most considerable of these, the government of our tongue; and yet he preemtorily determines, that the want of this virtue is enough to destroy all a man’s other pretences to religion: ([chap. i. 26.](#)) “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”



So that, by the practice or neglect of these main virtues of a good life, every man may examine and judge himself. This is the rule which our Saviour gives to try the religion of men by: ([Matt. vii. 16, 17.](#)) “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them.” The force of which reasoning is this: that every tree bringeth forth fruit according to its nature, and by the kind and quality of the fruit, you may certainly know what the tree is. So by the good or bad action of men’s lives, you may know by what principle they are governed, whether the fear of God or the love of sin bear sway in them: the course of their lives will discover the bent and inclination of their minds, whatever show and profession they make to the contrary. “By their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, (there is some profession of religion) shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven;” (there is the power of it.)



I would, by no means, encourage men to be over-censorious toward others, there is too much of that spirit already in the world; but it is not amiss that men should be strict and severe toward themselves. And would to God men would bring themselves to this test, and examine the truth and sincerity of their religion, not by the leaves of an outward profession, but by the fruits it produceth in their lives. Every man that will but take the pains to look

into himself, and to observe his own actions, may, by comparing the temper of his mind, and the general course of his life and practice, with the rules and precepts of religion, easily discern what power and efficacy religion hath on him. A man may as certainly know himself, and make as sure a judgment of his state and condition toward God in this way, “as a tree is known by its fruit.” Therefore let us not flatter ourselves; for if we indulge any lust, or irregular passion in our souls, and do not endeavour to mortify and subdue it; if we allow ourselves in any vicious practice in our lives, we do but deceive ourselves with an opinion of our godliness, and whatever show and appearance we may make of religion, we are certainly destitute of the power of it. True religion and godliness is an uniform principle, which inclines a man to all holiness and goodness, and does bias him against all known sin and wickedness. All the motives and arguments of religion, and all considerations of piety, are levelled against all sin, and tend to engage men to universal holiness of life. *Bonum constat ex iutegris causis, sed malum ex quolibet defectu*: The practice of any one vice is enough to render a man a bad man; but there must be the concurrence of all the parts of religion and virtue to make a man good.

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I proceed to the fourth thing I propounded, which was to shew, that a form of godliness, without the power of it, is insignificant to all the great ends and purposes of religion. The great ends that men can reasonably propound to themselves in being religious, are these three:

I. The pleasing of God.

II. The peace and tranquillity of our own minds.

III. The saving of our souls. Now a form of godliness, without the power of it, is unavailable to all these purposes:

I. To the pleasing of God. External devotion, and exercising ourselves in the means and instruments of religion, and the profession of a right belief, or any other form of religion whatsoever, do not recommend any man to the Divine favour and acceptance, without the real effects of religion in a good life: nay, so far is it from this, that all forms of religion, destitute of the life and power of it, are extremely odious and offensive to him. Devotion in prayer, without a holy life, is but a rude and troublesome noise in the ears of the Almighty. “The prayer of the wicked” is so far from being accepted, that it is an “abomination to him.” He does not love to be invoked by unhallowed mouths, and to be praised by the workers of iniquity. Flattery is hateful to a wise man, much more to the infinitely wise God. He cannot endure that men should lift up eyes to him “that are full of adultery, and hands filled with violence and oppression, and tread his courts with feet ready to shed blood.” It is an affront to God to be worshipped by evil-doers, and to see men diligent in reading his word, and attending to his law, who break it every day. “Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth, seeing thou hatest to be reformed, and castest my words behind thy back?” What God says of the

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sacrifices of the Jews, offered to him by “a sinful people laden with iniquity,” may be applied to the worship of Christians, who live wicked and abominable lives: ([Isa. i. 11, 12, &c.](#)) “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord? I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations. Incense is an abomination unto me: the new-moons and sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meetings. Your new-moons, and your appointed feasts my soul hateth, they are a trouble unto me. I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hand, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear. Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well.” This is that which God expects from us, the amendment and reformation of our lives, and without this all our religious addresses to him are nauseous and abominable. God does hardly any where in Scripture express so great a detestation of the greatest sins, as he does of the devotion of wicked men. I will but bring one text more to this purpose: ([Isa. lxvi. 3.](#)) “He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man: he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck: he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine’s blood: he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol.” What is the reason of all these severe expressions? because they were “the sacrifices of the wicked,” of those “who had chosen their own ways,” and “whose soul delighted in their abominations;” they worshipped God according to his will, but lived according to their own; and, therefore, they were to him no better than an assembly of murderers, and a church of idolatrous worshippers; for this is false worship, to offer sacrifices to God, and to devote ourselves to the service of our lusts.

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II. Another end of religion is, the peace and tranquillity of our own minds. And this is not to be attained upon true and lasting grounds, by any form of religion without the power of it. Men may delude themselves with some false peace, and make a hard shift to stop the loud and vehement clamours of their conscience; but the guilt of any vicious course of life will frequently recoil upon them, to disturb and interrupt their peace, and to put out their false joy; their consciences will ever and anon give them many secret girds and lashes. For no man can knowingly live in the practice of any sin, but he must be guilty to himself; and whoever is guilty, hath received a secret sting into his heart, which is never to be taken out but by repentance, and a thorough reformation. God hath said it, and I doubt not but every sinner finds it true, “There is no peace to the wicked.” Especially when such a man is seized upon by sickness, and approaches in his thoughts near to eternity, then his drowsy conscience awakes like a lion out of sleep, full of rage and fierceness, and all his false peace and comfort vanisheth. “For what is the hope of the hypocrite when God comes to take away his soul?” It is, as Job elegantly expresses it, “like the spider’s web,” artificially wrought, but miserably weak, it can endure no stress, upon the least touch it breaks and vanisheth.

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And this is no small disadvantage which a man that hath only the form of religion lies under, that in effect he loseth all the pleasure and satisfaction of religion; or if he fancy any hope or comfort to himself, it is built upon a false foundation, which, when it is tried, will endure no shock. This is the comparison our Saviour useth in this very case: ([Matt. vii. 26, 27.](#)) “Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not (here is a form of godliness without the power of it) shall be likened to a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” But real and substantial religion is like “a house built upon a rock.” which no tempest can overthrow. “Righteousness,” saith Solomon, ([Prov. x. 25.](#)) “is an everlasting foundation;” it is a continual spring of joy and peace. There is a certain unspeakable contentment and delight arising from a good conscience, and from the sincere discharge of our duty, which a hypocrite is a stranger to, and is never admitted to the taste of. Now what an uncomfortable thing is this, for a man to take the pains to seem to be religious, and yet to lose the real pleasure of religion!

III. The great end of all, of being religious, is the saving of our souls. And this end a mere form of religion will certainly miss of. No external garb of religion will gain a man admission into heaven; there is no getting in there in masquerade, no prayers will then avail, though never so fervent and importunate. “Many shall say in that day, Lord, Lord, open unto us;” and yet he will bid them depart from him. Though we had heard Christ himself preach, and had received the blessed sacrament with him, yet this will not avail. So our Saviour tells us: ([Luke xiii. 20.](#)) “Then shall they begin to say, We have eaten and drunken in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets;” and yet he will “say unto them, I know not whence you are.” It is not a pretence to inspiration, no, though it were justified by miraculous gifts, that will then stand us in stead. “Many shall say in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name have done many wondrous works?” And yet these shall be rejected. Why, what should be the reason of all this severity? Our Saviour gives us a plain account of it; because they were workers of iniquity. Under all these several masks of religion, they were wicked in their lives.

It is not an orthodox faith, and the belief of all the articles of Christianity, that will save a man, without the works of a good life: ([Jam. ii. 14.](#)) “What doth it profit a man, my brethren, though a man say that he hath faith, and hath not works? can faith save him? Thou believest there is one God; thou doest well;” the devils believe this too, but they are not so vain as to hope to be saved by this faith; no, they know the contrary, and that makes them fear and tremble. “Know then, O vain man, that faith without works is dead.” Thou believest “in one Lord Jesus Christ, that came down from heaven to save us, that was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, and became man that he might bring us to God; that suffered and died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, and is ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, and from thence he shall come again

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at the end of the world, to judge the quick and the dead;” thou doest well to believe this: but if thou do not live accordingly, what will become of thee, when the Son of God shall come to judge the world? then the great inquiry will be, how we have lived? what good we have done? our Saviour represents the proceedings of that great day. “I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not:” therefore, “depart ye cursed into everlasting fire.” So that it seems herethe business will stick, upon the good and bad actions of men’s lives, and accordingly sentence shall be pronounced upon them. For “God will render to every man according to his works; to them that by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but to those that obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the gentile: but glory, and honour, and peace to every man that worketh good; to the Jew first, and also to the gentile:” for “not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” Still you see that it is to “the patient continuance in well-doing,” to “the obeying of the truth,” to “the working of righteousness,” that eternal life is promised: and “the wrath of God” is threatened to “them that obey unrighteousness,” to “every soul of man that doeth evil.—To the Jew first.” Why so? Because he had great advantage of coming to the knowledge of the truth, which is so much the greater aggravation of his wicked life, and makes his sentence so much the heavier.

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Indeed, it shall be to men at the day of judgment likewise according to their faith, in a certain sense, that is, according to the doctrine of the gospel which they profess to believe, according to what our Saviour and his apostles have taught, that “the workers of iniquity shall depart from him, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; and if we live after the flesh we shall die;” that “no whoremonger, nor adulterer, nor covetous, nor unrighteous person, shall have any inheritance in the kingdom of God, and of Christ.” This we profess to believe, and according to these declarations God will proceed with men at the great day. And he that believes this, and yet goes on in an impiety and wickedness of life, though his faith will not justify him, yet God will justify his faith, and make it good, when “he shall judge the world in righteousness.”

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Thus you see plainly, that “a form of godliness” without the power, is insignificant to all the great ends and purposes of religion: nay, he that takes up in a form, does not only lose the advantages of religion, but he hath two great disadvantages by it.

- I. He hath the trouble of making a show of religion, without the real benefit of it.
- II. He incurs a heavier sentence upon this very account.

But these with the application I shall refer to the next opportunity.

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SERMON CCV.

OF THE FORM, AND THE POWER OF GODLINESS.

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.—2 Tim. iii. 5.

I COME now to shew, that he that takes upon him a form of religion, without the power of it, doth not only lose all the considerable advantages of religion, but he hath two great disadvantages by it.

I. He hath the trouble of making a show and appearance of religion, without the real benefit of it.

II. He incurs a heavier sentence upon this account, that he hath a form of religion, and yet is destitute of the power of it.

I. He hath the trouble of making a show and appearance of religion, without the real benefits of it. And it is no small trouble to personate and act apart well; it requires great art and attention, great guard and caution. That which men are prompted to by an inward principle, is natural and easy, it is done with pleasure and delight; but whatever is artificial and counterfeit, is stiff and forced. *Nemo fictam personam diu sustinere potest*, “No man can dissemble always;” one time or other he will be surprised and forget himself, and let his mask fall. A form of religion is a dry unpleasant thing, and a continual burden to him that assumes it, and the more outwardly strict and holy he is, he is the more inwardly guilty; his conscience never stings and galls him more, than when he is playing the hypocrite with God and men: whereas a truly good man, when he employs himself in acts of religion, or justice, or charity, he doth it naturally, and hath a mighty satisfaction of mind in the doing of it, and if he were permitted to make his own choice, he would not do otherwise; but a hypocrite puts a force upon himself all the while, and acts against his nature and inclinations, every thing he does in religion goes against the grain, and because it is un natural must be uneasy; his outward conversation and demeanour is set, and in a frame; he does not move as he would, but as he must, and the secret propensions of his nature are under a continual restraint.

He hath indeed one advantage by his artificial garb, that he can more securely overreach and defraud others by a show of godliness, while men are not aware of his dissimulation. But this commonly does not last long, and only serves a man for a few turns: and when it is discovered, the man is lost, and nobody will trust him. But suppose he could serve himself of religion this way for some consider able time, where is the advantage? It amounts to no more than this that the man hath the opportunity of being a greater sinner, of making himself more miserable, and “treasuring up to himself” more “wrath against the day of wrath.” So that he pays dear for all this in the end and issue, as well as in the way. He spends many a tedious hour in the service of God, and the exercise of religion; more it may be than many do, who save their souls and get to heaven. For as to the external part of religion, a

hypocrite must do all that which a truly religious man does; he must frequent the church, and make as much show of devotion as the best; nay, it may be he pays more, and fasts oftener, and is more busy, and keeps a greater stir in the outward part of religion, than the sincere Christian; for being conscious to himself of his own hollowness and insincerity in religion, he thinks himself obliged outwardly to over-act it in unseasonable and superstitious observances, and in all other arts of affected devotion; and when he goes abroad into the world, he is forced to lay great restraints upon himself, and to be continually gathering his cloak about him, as being afraid lest any body should spy what is under it. So much more troublesome it is for any man to seem to be religious, than to be so indeed.

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II. A mere form of religion does upon some accounts bring a man under a heavier sentence, than if he were utterly profane and irreligious. He that makes a show of religion flatters God, but all the while acts and designs against him: whereas the profane man deals plainly, and though he be a monstrous and unnatural rebel, yet he is a fair and open enemy; and the kisses of a false friend are more hateful than the wounds of an open enemy. Upon this account it is that our Saviour denounceth so many severe woes against the scribes and pharisees, because they were wicked under a show of religion. “Woe unto you scribes and pharisees, hypocrites:” and when he would set forth the severity of the lord against the evil servant, ([Matt. xxiv. 51.](#)) he expresseth it thus: “He shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” As if the punishment of hypocrites were the rule and standard of the severest punishment. “He shall appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.”

I will not deny but that a profane man is a worse example to the world, and may do more mischief upon that account: but the hypocrite is more mischievous to himself, and of the two more odious to God, and sometimes does more prejudice to religion by undermining it, than the other does by all his open assaults and batteries. God cannot endure to be affronted: but he hates to be mocked. So that, upon this account, it is like to go harder with the formal professors of religion, than with the open contemners of it.

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And thus I have done with the four things I propounded to speak to from these words—wherein a form of godliness does consist; wherein the power of it lies; by what marks and characters we may know when these are separated; and that a form of religion without the power of it, is insignificant to all the great ends and purposes of religion; and not only so, but it is greatly to men’s disadvantage to assume a form of godliness, if they be destitute of the power of it.

All that now remains is, to draw some inferences from this discourse by way of application; and they shall be these three:

First, To take heed of mistaking the form of religion for the power of it.

Secondly, To take heed of being captivated and seduced by those who have only a form of godliness.

Thirdly, To persuade men to mind the life, and power, and substance of religion.

First, To take heed of mistaking the form of religion for the power of it. The papists have almost confined their words religion and religious to cloisters and monks; and they make a religious life to consist in masses, and Ave-Maries, and Pater-nosters, in the observation of canonical hours, and the distinction of meats and habits, in coarse clothes, and a dissembled poverty, and several bodily rigours and severities. As if, to make a man a religious and good man, it were necessary that he should be dressed fantastically, and in a great many indifferent things be different from other men. Nay, so far doth this superstition prevail, that a great many think that they should hardly get to heaven with out it, or that it will be very much for their advantage, if they be buried in the habit of a religious man: as if to be put in a monk's cowl, would give a man the start of other people at the resurrection. But what reason is there that the name and title of religion should be appropriated to these usages? Does the Scripture any where constitute religion in these things, or confine it to them? Are not these voluntary things which God ties no man to? Whence then come they to swallow up the name of religion, and to engross it to themselves, as if they were the very life and soul of Christianity; when the great author of our religion Jesus Christ, and his blessed apostles, never spake one word of them? What an abuse of language is this, to confine the name of religion to that which is not so much as any part of it!

But the church of Rome is not alone guilty of this; among ourselves it is very ordinary to mistake the form of godliness for the power, though the mistake is not so gross, as in those particulars I have mentioned. How many are there, who talk as if the power of godliness consisted in nothing else but a daily task of devotion, in frequent hearing of sermons, and a strict observation of the Lord's-day? These are very good things; but they are but a form of godliness, and may be, and often are, with out the power of it; they are but the means and instruments of religion, but not the great end and design of it, that consists in the renewing of our natures, and the reformation of our lives; in "righteousness and true holiness;" in "mortifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts of it," such as are "adultery, fornication, hatred, variance, wrath, sedition, envying, murder, drunkenness; for they which do such things, cannot inherit the kingdom of God;" and in "the fruits of the Spirit," such as are "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance," as the apostle reckons them up, (*Gal. v. 22.*) These are real and sensible effects of religion; and the means of religion, if they be sincerely used, do all tend to the begetting and increasing of these in us: so that it is a gross mistake to talk of the power of religion, without these. Whoever is destitute of these, whatever attainments in religion he may pretend to, is got no farther than a form of godliness, he is not yet under the power of it. This is the first.

Secondly, Let us be cautioned against being captivated and seduced by those, who have only a form of godliness. This is the apostle's exhortation here in the text, "From such turn away: for of this sort are they which creep into houses and lead captive silly women." To

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the same purpose is our Saviour's caution: (Matt. vii. 15, 16.) "Be ware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." And that we may know how to avoid them, our Saviour bids us to observe their lives, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." He does not bid us examine their opinions, and try their pretences to inspiration; that is a thing many times above the capacity of the ordinary sort of men; but their lives and actions are open to every man's view; and though it is possible men may counterfeit even in this, yet they seldom do it so exactly, as not to be tray themselves some time or other: however, this of all other is the easiest and surest rule: "By their fruit ye shall know them."

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Therefore, if any man pretend to any new discoveries in religion, beyond what is plainly revealed in Scripture, though he appear in ever so sanctimonious a garb, be not moved with this: for the power of religion does not consist in any thing now to be discovered; but in those things which are clearly contained in the word of God, in the precepts and directions, and in the motives and arguments to a good life; and whoever lives according to these, is in the best way to heaven that any man can put himself into; and he need not trouble himself about those new lights and opinions, which in every age appears like comets, and glare a while, and draw people to gaze upon them, and then vanish. And none are so much to be suspected of a form of religion, as those who make frequent changes in it, and wander from one party and opinion to another. An outward form and shape is easily changed; it is that which a man shifts and puts off at pleasure.

Thirdly, To persuade men to mind the power, and life, and substance of religion. It was the commendation of Socrates, the best of philosophers, that he did *philosophiam de caelo deducere*, "bring down philosophy from heaven to earth;" that is, from contemplation to practice, and from being an art of talking and disputing to be an art of living. This I desire may be the aim of all my discourses, to instruct men in religion in order to the practice of it, to teach men to know God, in St. John's sense: (1 John ii. 3.) "Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." This is the great end and scope, to which all discourses of religion ought to be levelled. It was a good saying of Pacuvius, *Ego odi homines ignava opera et philosophos sententia*: "I hate men that are inactive in their lives, and philosophers in their opinions." Christianity is the best philosophy, and the most perfect institution of life that ever the world was acquainted withal; and therefore it is much more odious to see men Christians in their profession, and faulty and vicious in their lives; because the very design of the Christian religion, is to give men a perfect and plain law and rule of life, and to enforce this law by the most powerful and prevailing arguments. So that as Tully says, concerning the philosopher who lived but a bad life, that he was utterly inexcusable, *Quod in eo cujus magister esse vult labiter, artem vitae professus, delinquit in vita*: "Because he failed in that wherein he pretended to be a master, and while he professed to have an art of living better than other men, he offended and miscarried in his life.; All defects in the practice,

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and in the virtues of a good life, may with much more reason and justice be upbraided to Christians, to those “who have learned Christ, who have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus;” to those who are blessed with the clearest and most perfect revelation which ever God made to the world, the holiest and most reasonable religion, which furnisheth us with the best counsels and directions, the most prevalent motives and arguments, and the greatest helps and advantages to a good life; a religion plain and simple, that hath less of outward form and pomp, and more of substance and reality, than any religion that ever was known in the world.

What a sad thing is it, that a religion so wholly fitted and calculated to the design and purpose of a good life, armed with such powerful considerations to engage men thereto, should yet have so little force and power upon the lives of men, as we see it generally to have! As if “the grace of God had never appeared to men, to teach them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

There was hardly ever any age, wherein the form of religion did more abound; and it is to be feared, that there was never less of the power and efficacy of it.

I will instance in two great defects in the lives and practice of Christians, which are visible to every one, but are sad indications how little the power of religion prevails among men; I mean the want of common honesty and integrity among men, and the want of peace and love; the first of which is, the great virtue of civil conversation; and the other, the great bond both of civil and ecclesiastical societies. These are two great duties of religion frequently mentioned, and strictly charged upon the consciences of men in Scripture: and yet how rare is the practice of them in the lives of Christians? These are two main defects in religion, and a plain demonstration of a form of religion, without the power of it.

I. The want of common honesty and integrity among men. So, indeed, it used to be called common honesty; but it grows so rare now that it is like to lose that name. “Righteousness, truth, and faithfulness, are almost failed from among; the children of men;” all ranks of men have corrupted themselves in this kind; this is grown almost an universal depravation, there is hardly any trade or profession which hath not something of knavery and falsehood woven into the very mystery of it, and is become almost a necessary part of it. Where is the generous honesty and uprightness which did heretofore possess the spirits of men, and which is an inseparable companion of true courage? But we are now passing apace into foreign manners and vices, and any form of religion will serve, when justice and integrity are gone.

II. The want of peace and love. How full of factions and divisions are we? And these managed with all imaginable heat and animosity one to ward another; as if the badge of Christianity were changed, and our Saviour had said, “Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye hate one another.”

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All the differences among Christians, of what denomination soever, are sadly to be lamented; but I almost despair as to the difference between us and the church of Rome, because the reconciliation is impossible, unless they renounce their principles. They cannot come over to us, because they think they are infallible; and we cannot pass over to them, because we know they are deceived; so that there is “a great gulf between us and them.” We must not only renounce the Scriptures, but our reason and our senses, to be of their mind. We cannot communicate with them in the sacrament, because they have taken away one half of it, which is as plainly instituted and commanded as the other part which is left. We cannot worship the Virgin Mary, and the saints, much less their images, because it is written, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.” In short, several of their articles of faith are such, as no credulity can swallow; and several parts of their worship are such, as no piety can join with.

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But this we bewail, that those who agree in the same essentials of faith and worship, should be so forward to divide and separate from one another, merely upon forms of government, and circumstances of worship. What can justify the breach of communion and peace upon such terms? Either church government is of Divine right, or it is not. If it be, why do not men submit to the form which is established by authority? If it be not, what kind of government can contend for that right, with any equality of advantage, against that which cannot be denied to have almost universally obtained in most ages and parts of the Christian world?

As for the circumstances of worship, there is scarce any man hath the face to contend, that any of those used in our church are clearly condemned by the word of God; and what else can make them unlawful? One of the chief causes of separation, is a form of prayer; the lawfulness of which our Saviour hath abundantly justified, and I do not think was ever questioned by any writer in the Christian church, for near upon sixteen hundred years; and is it worth while to break the peace of the church, and violate one of the greatest precepts of Christianity, upon little and slight pretences of unlawfulness and doubtful reasons of convenience and expedience; and about such things as are no more reasonable grounds of quarrels among Christians, than the differences of men’s stature and faces would be a just ground for mankind to make war upon one another?

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Where is the power of religion, when the peace and unity of Christians is violated upon these terms? It is a sign that the life and substance of religion is little regarded by us, when men can afford to employ so much zeal about these things.

And that men may be effectually persuaded to mind the substance of religion more, let me desire them to imprint these three considerations upon their minds:

I. That the parts of religion are subordinate to one another, and are to be minded each in their due place. The means of religion are less worth than the end, and therefore deserves our regard chiefly in order to that. The circumstances of religion are less considerable than the means and instruments of it, and therefore are to be subordinated to them. Faith is in order to the practice of a good life, and signifies nothing, unless it produces that. So that the issue and upshot of all is a holy and virtuous life: “To deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world; to love God and our neighbour;” to deal justly, and to be kind, and peaceable, and charitable towards all men.

II. Consider that religion consists in an entire and universal obedience to the will of God, in a respect to all his commandments, and hating every evil way. Here the power of godliness consists in being “holy in all manner of conversation.”

III. Consider that religion chiefly respects God and another world. A form of religion, if it were artificially contrived, might possibly serve to cheat men, and be useful enough to all the interests and advantages of this world: but we are to do all things in reference to God, who cannot be imposed upon with shows and pretences; and with regard to another world, where no form of religion will be current, without the power of it. Yea, and in reference to this world, if there be any advantage in seeming religious, certainly the best way to seem to be so, is to be so indeed.



SERMON CCVI.

OF THE NECESSITY OF GOOD WORKS.

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. These things are good and profitable unto men.—Tit. iii. 8.

THIS Epistle of St. Paul to Titus, whom he had made bishop of Crete, contains directions how he ought to demean himself in that great charge.

1, By appointing in every city bishops or elders, to teach and govern those that were already, or should afterwards by their means be converted to the faith of Christ; and to be very careful to make choice of worthy and fit persons into this high office; men of sound doctrine, and unblameable lives, ([chap. i. from ver. 5. to the end.](#))

2. By his own doctrine and conversation among them. And this is the subject of the two following chapters, in which he gives him a strict charge, to be very careful both of his doctrine and his life. Of his doctrine, that it be according to the soundness and purity of the gospel; not such corrupt and adulterate stuff, as the false apostles and teachers were wont to vend among them: ([chap. ii. 1.](#)) “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine;” which he elsewhere calls “the doctrine of truth which is according to godliness,” such a doctrine as tends to reform the lives of men, to make them better, and more like to God. And then he should be careful, likewise, that his life and conversation be exemplary in all virtue and goodness; without which the best words will be of little weight, and the wisest doctrines and counsels of small efficacy and force to persuade others to the practice of them, ([ver 7.](#)) “In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works.” When sound doctrine is seconded by the good life of the teacher, it must have great authority and force of persuasion, ([ver. 15.](#)) “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority; let no man despise thee.” If the minister of God do but so preach and so live, this will give him authority, and set him above contempt; let men despise such an one if they can.

More particularly, as he would have him instruct men, in general, in all the virtues of a good life; so more especially, the several ages and conditions of men in the duties and virtues respectively belonging to them; to young and old, men and women.

And because great scandal had been brought upon the Christian religion, by the unedifying carriage of servants and subjects towards their masters and magistrates, upon a false notion of Christian liberty, advanced and propagated by the false apostles and Gnostic libertines, he gives Titus, in particular, charge, to put Christians in mind of their duty in this particular, and to inculcate it earnestly upon them, that the Christian religion might not be slandered upon this account: ([chap. ii. 9, 10.](#)) “Exhort servants to be obedient to their masters, &c. that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.” ([Chap. iii. 1.](#)) “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, and to be ready to every good work;”



that is, in short, to endeavour to be good in all relations, and in all sorts and kinds of goodness.

And then ([ver. 8.](#)) he lays great stress and weight upon this matter, that Christians should constantly and upon all occasions be taught the great necessity of the virtues of a good life. “This is a faithful saying,” &c. By which solemn and vehement kind of expression, the apostle seems to insinuate, that the false apostles did exalt the virtue of faith, to the prejudice and neglect of a good life; as if, by a mere speculative belief and profession of the Christian religion, men were discharged and released from the practice of all virtue and goodness. And this is very probable, because we find these kinds of licentious doctrines very frequently reflected on, and reprov'd by the apostles in their epistles, and especially by St. Paul. The false apostles made the Christian religion a matter of mere speculation and dispute, but laid no weight upon the virtues of a good life. And therefore St. Paul, after he had charged Titus to inculcate upon Christians the necessity of good works, immediately adds, “But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law: for they are unprofitable and vain;” intimating that the false apostles, instead of pressing the necessity of a good life, did amuse people with these idle notions and disputes.

But to return to my text, “This is a faithful saying.” This kind of preface the apostle useth several times, but always when he is speaking of something that is of great weight and concernment to us, and which deserves our serious attention and regard; as in [1 Tim. i. 15.](#) “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” ([1 Tim. iv. 8.](#)) “Godliness is profitable unto all things; having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying.” And ([2 Tim. ii. 11, 12.](#)) “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; if we deny him, he also will deny us.” And so likewise here in the text, “This is a faithful saying, that they which have believed in God, should be careful to maintain good works.” By which you see, that it is not a form which the apostle useth of course, and applies to any thing, but only to things of more than ordinary consideration and regard, such as are of the essence of Christianity, and fundamental to the belief and practice of it.

“This is a faithful saying,” πιστός λόγος, “a credible saying,” that which every man that truly understands the nature and design of religion will readily assent to.

“And this I will that thou affirm constantly.” He chargeth him to preach this upon all occasions, lest the doctrine of justification, by faith and by grace, without any works of righteousness proceeding, should be turned into licentiousness, as it had been by some, and men should falsely conclude, that because works of righteousness were not necessary before justification, and to bring men into that state, they were not necessary neither afterwards to our continuance in that state.

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The apostle, indeed, did teach that “God did justify the ungodly,” by the grace of the gospel, and faith in Christ; that is, that those who did sincerely believe and embrace the gospel, though they had been never so great sinners before, were justified upon that faith; that is, all their former sins were forgiven, and they were received into the favour of God. But though works of righteousness were not necessary before their justification, yet they are necessary afterwards, because the faith of the gospel, and the embracing of Christianity, doth imply a stipulation and engagement on our part, to live according to the laws and rules of the gospel, which do strictly enjoin all kinds of virtue and goodness. The covenant of baptism, by which we are entered into Christianity, doth contain on our part not only a profession of faith in Christ, but a solemn promise “to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world.” So that it is the greatest mistake in the world to think, that because we are justified by faith and the profession of Christianity without works of righteousness, therefore we are under no obligation to a good life: for faith in Christ, and the sincere profession of the Christian religion doth imply a good life, and an engagement to the practice of all virtue and goodness, which, if we do not perform and make good, we fail in our part of the covenant, and thereby forfeit all the blessings and benefits promised therein on God’s part.

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Therefore it is observable, that the apostle, after he had spoken of our justification by grace without works of righteousness, gives this charge to Titus, to press the necessity of good works upon those who did believe and embrace the profession of the gospel, as it were on purpose to prevent all mistake and abuse of the doctrine of justification by faith, and the free grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ: (*ver. 5-7.*) “Not by works of righteousness which we have done; but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that is, by our solemn profession of Christianity at our baptism; “that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs, according to the hope of eternal life.” And then he adds, (*ver. 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;” that is, that they who are thus justified by the faith of the gospel, should be so far from thinking themselves hereby excused from good works, that they should, upon this account, be more careful to maintain and practice them, because, by the very profession of the Christian faith and religion, they have solemnly engaged themselves so to do.

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That they which believe in God; that is, who have taken upon them the profession of Christianity in their baptism. For it is not improbable, that the apostle, having spoken of baptism just before, may, by this phrase of believing “in God,” refer to that profession of faith made in baptism, which began with these words: “I believe in God;” and then “they which have believed in God,” are those who in baptism have made a solemn profession of Christianity: as if he had said, “these things I will that thou affirm constantly,” that all that

profess themselves Christians “be careful to maintain good works.” Or if by the phrase of believing “in God,” we will understand an assent to all Divine revelations, more especially that of the gospel and the Christian religion, the most perfect that ever God made of his will to mankind, the matter will come much to the same issue.

“Be careful to maintain good works.” This phrase seems, in the latter end of this Epistle, to be used in a very restrained sense; for labouring in a honest calling: (ver. 14.) “Let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.” In the margin of your Bibles you will find it rendered, “to profess honest trades.” “Let ours also learn to profess honest trades for necessary uses;” that is, for the supply of their necessities: but in the text it seems more agreeable to the scope of the apostle’s discourse, to render the phrase of maintaining good works, for the practice of all Christian virtues, especially those which are most useful and beneficial to human society; among which, diligence and industry in a honest calling is none of the least considerable, because it follows, “these things are good and profit able unto men.” And, indeed, these are properly works of goodness, which redound to the public benefit and advantage.

But good works may well be taken in a larger sense for all sorts of virtuous actions. And so it is certainly used several times in this Epistle: (chap. i. 16.) “Unto every good work reprobate,” speaking of all profligate persons who were lost to all virtue and goodness. (Chap. ii. 7.) “In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works;” that is, an example of all kind of virtue. And (chap. iii. 1.) “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, and to be ready to every good work;” that is, to the practice of all goodness, of whatsoever is honest and virtuous in itself, amiable and commendable in the sight of others, useful and beneficial to any.

Having thus explained the words, I come now to consider the two points contained in them.

First, The certain truth and credibility of this saying or proposition, that they which have believed in God, ought to be careful to maintain good works. “This is a faithful saying;” that is, a most evident and credible truth. And,

Secondly, The great fitness and necessity of inculcating this upon all Christians, that the Christian religion doth indispensably require the virtues of a good life. “These things I will that thou affirm constantly,” &c. I begin with the

First of these points, viz. The certain truth and evident credibility of this saying or proposition, that “they which have believed in God, should be careful to maintain good works.” “This is a faithful saying, πιστός λόγος, a saying worthy of credit, a most certain and credible truth/ And it will appear to be so, whether we consider the great end and design of religion in general, or of the Christian religion in particular.

I. If we consider the great end and design of religion in general, which is to make us happy, by possessing our minds with the belief of a God, and those other principles which



have a necessary connexion with that belief; and by obliging us to the obedience and practice of his laws.

1. By possessing our minds with the belief of God, and of those other principles which have a necessary connexion with it. Such are the belief of the Divine perfections, of the infinite goodness, and wisdom, and power, and truth, and justice, and purity of the Divine nature; a firm persuasion of his providence, that he governs and administers the affairs of the world, and takes notice of the actions of men, and will call them to an account for them; of the immortality of our souls, and their endless duration after death, and consequently of the eternal rewards and punishments of another life. These are the great principles of natural religion, which mankind are in some measure possessed with, and persuaded of, without any external revelation from God; and these are necessary and fundamental to religion, as the apostle to the Hebrews declares: ([Heb. xi. 6.](#)) “Without faith it is impossible to please God;” that is, there can be no such thing as the practice of religion, without the belief of the principles of it; and what these are he tells us in the next words: “He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

But then we must not rest here, in the belief of a God and the principles of religion; for this faith is not required of us for itself, but in order to some farther end, which if it be not attained by us, the mere belief of the principles of religion is to no purpose, neither acceptable to God, nor useful and beneficial to ourselves. God would not have imprinted the notion of himself upon our nature, he would not have discovered himself to us, nor have required of us the belief of his being and providence, merely that we might know there is such a being as God in the world, who made us and governs us; but that this belief might have its proper influence upon us, to oblige us to the obedience of his laws, which are the proper causes and means of our happiness. It will not avail us at all, nor is it in the least acceptable to God, for men “to profess that they know him,” when “in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate,” as the apostle describes some, ([chap. i. 16.](#)) And therefore,

2. The great end and design of religion is, that our minds being possessed and prepared by the principles of religion, the belief of these should have its proper influence upon us, which is effectually to oblige us to the obedience and practice of God’s laws. Now the laws which God hath given us to live by, as they are the rule and measure of our duty, by the performance whereof only we can hope to gain the favour of God, so they are the proper directions and means in order to our happiness; they teach us both the conditions of our happiness, and the proper qualification and disposition for it.

Obedience to the laws of God is the condition of our happiness, both temporal and eternal, both in this world and the other. The promises which God hath made of temporal felicity and blessings, are upon condition of our obedience to his laws; it is godliness only that hath the promise of this life as well as the other. ([1 Tim. iv. 8.](#)) A truth so certain and

evident, that the apostle thought fit to add that solemn seal to it which he prefaceth to the saying in the text, "This is a faithful saying." And though God be pleased, out of his excessive goodness, to bestow many temporal blessings and favours upon very bad men, that by this goodness of his he might lead them to repentance; yet God never made any promise of temporal blessings to wicked men; but, on the contrary, hath threatened them with great temporal evils and calamities; but all the promises, even of temporal good things, are made to the obeying of God's laws; "to them that keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them."

And this is not only the condition upon which the promises of temporal blessings are suspended, but generally, and for the most part, the natural cause and means of those blessings; for there is no moral duty enjoined by God, no virtue, the practice whereof he requires from us, which does not naturally tend to our temporal felicity in this world; as temperance and chastity to that invaluable blessing of health, and to the preservation of our estate, which is wasted by lewd and riotous living; humility and meekness to our quiet and safety; justice and integrity to our reputation and honour, one of the chief instruments of temporal prosperity and success. Kindness and charity, and a readiness to do good to all men as we have opportunity, are in their nature apt to recommend us exceedingly to the love and esteem of all men, and to their favour able regard and assistance, when we stand in need of it. And so, I might instance in all other virtues, the sincere practice whereof, though it be not in all cases certain and infallible, yet it is the best and wisest course that any man can take, to attain the greatest happiness which this world can afford, and to avoid the greatest miseries and calamities of it: as, on the contrary, there is no vice, no wicked practice, but is naturally productive of some great temporal mischief and inconvenience.

And then the practice of virtue and goodness, as it is the absolute and indispensable condition of our future happiness in another world, so is it the necessary and only proper qualification for it, and the certain and infallible means of attaining it.

It is an absolute and indispensable condition of attaining it; and, without this, it is in vain to hope for it. As God will certainly punish the transgressors of his laws, so nothing but obedience to them can pretend to his rewards. This God hath most expressly declared, that without purity and holiness, no man shall see him; that Christ is the author of eternal salvation only to them that obey him. And if God had not declared this in his word, the consideration of God's essential holiness and justice would sufficiently assure us of it.

But, besides this, in the very nature and reason of the thing, holiness and goodness is the necessary and only proper qualification for happiness. With out the blessed sight and enjoyment of God we cannot be happy, and holiness and goodness can only qualify us for this: for happiness is a state which results from a temper and disposition of mind suited to it; and where this is wanting, the man is no more capable of happiness, than he that is sick is of ease. Virtue and goodness are so essential to happiness, that where these are not there

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is no capacity of it. These make us like to God, who is the fountain and pattern of all happiness; and if we be not like to God, we can have no enjoyment of him; and a wicked man, if he could steal into heaven, into the sight and presence of God, would, from the temper and disposition of his own mind, so unsuitable to that holy place and company, be extremely miserable, even in the mansions of the blessed. Such a temper of mind, such a polluted and guilty conscience, as a sinner carries with him out of this world, will accompany him, and remain with him in the other; and guilt is always restless and full of torment; and though God should not punish it with any positive infliction of pain, would of its own nature make a man for ever miserable. So that it is a vain dream and imagination, that any man, without the practice of holiness and virtue in this life, can be happy in the other. A sincere and thorough repentance of all our sins will, indeed, clear our consciences of guilt, and by the mercy of God, make us capable of happiness: but it does this by changing our minds, and, reconciling them to holiness and goodness, in firm purpose and resolution of a new life; and by changing our lives and actions too, if there be opportunity for it; but till this change be wrought, either in firm purpose, or in real effect, it is impossible we should be happy; and though I will not deny but this may be done by a deep repentance, and such as God sees would prove sincere, in the last act of our lives: yet it is extreme madness to run such a hazard, because we may be cut off from the opportunity of it; or, if God should afford us time and grace to that purpose, it is the hardest thing in the world to have any comfortable and well-grounded assurance of the sincerity of it: so that very little hopes of heaven and happiness can be given upon any other terms, than the general and constant course of a holy and virtuous life; and least of all to those who have, all their life long, resolved to venture their everlasting happiness upon the infinite uncertainties of a death-bed repentance at the last. But,

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II. The truth of this proposition, that “they which have believed in God, should be careful to maintain good works,” or that faith and the virtues of a good life ought to go together: I say, the truth of this will yet be more evident, if we consider the great end and design of the Christian religion in particular, which was to reform the world, to purify the hearts and lives of men from corrupt affections and wicked practices, to teach men to excel in all kinds of virtue and goodness.

And this is every where in the New Testament most expressly declared. The great promise of blessedness is made to the virtues of meekness, and patience, and peaceableness, and purity, and righteousness, as our Saviour expressly teacheth in that excellent sermon of his upon the mount, which is the summary of the Christian religion. ([Eph. iv. 17, 18, &c.](#)) “This, I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth,” that is, now that ye have embraced Christianity, “walk not as other gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given

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themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. “But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind: and that ye put on that new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour; for we are members of one another. Be ye angry and sin not, let not the sun go down upon your wrath; neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers; and grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another,” &c. So that you see, that unless there be an universal reformation of heart, and life, we have “not so learned Christ as the truth is in Jesus:” we do not rightly understand the gospel, and the tendency of the Christian religion: ([Gal. v. 22-24.](#)) “But the fruits of the Spirit,” of that spirit which the Christian religion endows men withal, “is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance;” and “they that are Christ’s, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts;” that is, they that profess themselves Christians are obliged to endeavour after all these virtues, and to put off the contrary lusts and vices: ([Phil. iv. 8.](#)) “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” St. James likewise declares, to the same purpose, the genuine effect of Christianity, which he calls the knowledge and “wisdom which is from above:” ([James iii. 13-17.](#)) “Who is a wise man, and endowed with knowledge amongst you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness and wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish; and the wisdom that 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.” To which I will add but one text more, which is the sum and comprehension of all the rest, and it is (chap. ii. of this Epistle to Titus, [ver. 11.](#)) “The grace of God (so he calls the doctrine of the gospel) the grace of God which brings salvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world.”

I might proceed particularly to shew, that the whole dispensation and doctrine of the gospel, and all the parts of them, are calculated to raise and exalt human nature to the highest



pitch and perfection of virtue and goodness, and effectually to reform the spirits and lives of men.

The dispensation of the gospel, or the Christian religion, consists in God's merciful condescension to send his own and only Son in our nature, to live among us, and to die for us. The doctrine of the gospel consists in the things to be believed; the duties to be practised by us; and the arguments and encouragements to the practice of those duties. Now I shall briefly shew, that the design of every part, both of the dispensation and doctrine of the gospel, is to reform the minds and manners of men, and to engage them to the practice of all virtue and goodness. And,

I. For the dispensation of the gospel: by which I mean the gracious method which the wisdom of God hath pitched upon for the salvation and recovery of mankind, by sending his only-begotten Son into the world in our nature, to live among us, and to die for us. So that the principal parts of this dispensation are these three:

1. His incarnation, or appearing in our nature.
2. His life.
3. His death and sufferings for us. And I will shew, that the great design of all this was to reform mankind and make them better.

1. For his incarnation. The great design of his coming into the world, and appearing in our nature, was this; and this was the reason of the name Jesus, given him at his birth, as the angel tells us: ([Matt. i. 21.](#)) "His name shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." ([Matt. ix. 13.](#)) He himself tells us, that he came to call "sinners to repentance;" that is, to reclaim them to a better and more virtuous course of life; and ([chap. xviii. 11.](#)) "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost;" that is, to recover mankind from a state of sin and misery, to a state of holiness and happiness. And St. Peter, exhorting the Jews to repentance, useth this argument, that for this very end God sent him among them: ([Acts iii. 26.](#)) "Unto you first God sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquity." ([Heb. ix. 20.](#)) "But now once in the end of the world he hath, appeared to abolish sin;" that is, to destroy both the guilt and power of sin. ([1 John iii. 5.](#)) "Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins." And ([ver. 8.](#)) "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, to destroy the works of the devil."

2. This likewise was the great design of his life, of his dwelling and conversing with us so long, to teach us by his doctrine in all holiness and virtue, and to give us the perfect pattern and example of it in his life. For his doctrine, I have spoken of that by itself: but, besides that, one principal end of his living amongst us, was, that in the course of his life, and all the actions of it, he might give us a perfect and familiar example of all holiness and virtue, and therefore we are commanded to take him for our great pattern. "Learn of me, (saith he) for I am meek and lowly in spirit." ([Matt. xi. 29.](#) [John xiii. 15.](#)) After that great instance of



his humility, in washing his disciples feet, he adds, “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.”

3. This also was the great design of his death and sufferings. So the apostles every where teach: ([Gal. i. 4.](#)) speaking of Christ, “who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world;” that is, that he might rescue us from the vicious customs and practices of the world. ([1 Pet. i. 18.](#)) “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” The death and sufferings of Christ did not only make expiation for our sins, but are proposed to us as a pattern of mortification to sin, and resurrection to a new life, and a most powerful argument thereto. ([Rom. vi. 1-3, &c.](#) and [2 Cor. v. 14, 15.](#)) Speaking of the love of Christ in laying down his life for us; “For the love of Christ (saith he) constraineth us, because we thus judge; that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live, should not hence forth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them;” from whence he infers, ([ver. 17.](#)) “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” And, ([ver. 21.](#)) “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;” that is, he hath made him, who was without sin, a sacrifice for our sins; which should be a strong motive and argument to us, to endeavour after the righteousness of God.

II. As the whole dispensation of the gospel tends to this end, so more particularly does the doctrine of the gospel, and every part of it. Now the whole doctrine of the gospel may be referred to these three heads:

1. The things to be believed by us.
2. The duties to be practised. And,
3. The arguments and encouragements to the practice of these duties. And all these have a most direct and proper tendency to reform mankind, and effectually to engage us to the practice of holiness and virtue.

1. The matters of faith proposed in the gospel have a direct tendency to a good life, and immediate influence upon it. All the articles of our creed, and whatever the Christian religion proposeth to our belief concerning God the Father, the Creator and Governor of all things; and concerning Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour; and concerning the Holy Spirit of grace; the catholic church; the communion of saints; the resurrection of the dead, and everlasting life after death: all and each of these are so many arguments and reasons, motives and encouragements, to a good life. In general, our hearts are said to be “purified by faith,” ([Acts xv. 9.](#) [1 Tim. i. 5.](#)) Faith is there reckoned among the principal sources and fountains of a good life: “The end of the commandment (the word is *πραγγελίας*, the end of the gospel declaration) is charity, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”



So that a sincere faith is the great principle of charity, which is the fulfilling of the law, and comprehends in it the duties of both tables. And here I might particularly shew, what influence the several articles of the Christian faith have upon the practice of holiness and virtue in our lives: but this would be too large a field of discourse; and the thing is very plain and obvious to every man's consideration; and therefore I shall content myself with what I have said in general concerning the influence of faith upon a good life.

2. The duties enjoined by the Christian religion do likewise tend more immediately to the same end and design; I mean the laws and precepts of the gospel, which are nothing else but so many rules of good life, and in the main substance of them are the laws of nature cleared and perfected. For Christ came not to destroy the law, which was in force before; but to explain and clear it, where, through the corruption and degeneracy of mankind, it was grown obscure and doubtful, and to perfect it, by superadding some rules and precepts of greater goodness and perfection, than seem to have been enjoined by it: as, to abstain from all kind of revenge, to love our enemies, and not only to be ready to forgive them the greatest injuries they have done us, but to do them the greatest good, and even to be perfectly reconciled to them after the highest provocations, whenever they are in a meet capacity and disposition for it. So that the precepts of the Christian religion are a plain and perfect rule of all virtue and goodness, and the best and most absolute system of moral philosophy that ever was in the world, containing all the rules of virtue and a good life, which are scattered and dispersed in the writings of the philosophers, and the wise men of all ages, and delivering them to us with greater clearness and certainty, in a more simple and un affected manner, with greater authority, force, and efficacy upon our minds, than any philosopher and lawgiver ever did; teaching us how to worship God in the best manner, and most suitable to his nature and perfections; how to demean ourselves towards others with all meekness and humility, justice and integrity, kindness and charity; and how to govern ourselves and our own unruly appetites and passions, and bring them within the bounds of reason, much better than any law or institution that ever was in the world; and all these duties and virtues strictly commanded and enjoined in the name and authority of God, by one evidently empowered and commissioned by him, and sent from heaven on purpose to instruct us in the nature and practice of them. So that the doctrine of the gospel, in respect of the laws and precepts of it, is a plain and perfect rule of a good life. And then,

3. The Christian religion contains the most powerful arguments and encouragements to this purpose; and these are the threatenings and promises of the gospel.

(1.) The terrible threatenings of eternal misery and punishments to all the workers of iniquity, and wilful and impenitent transgressors of these laws. And this is an argument which taketh the safest and surest hold upon human nature, and will many times move and affect, when no other considerations will work upon us. Many men that could not be wrought upon by the love of God and goodness, nor by the hopes of everlasting happiness, have been



affrighted and reclaimed from an evil course by the fear of hell and damnation, and the awe of a judgment to come. To think of lying under the terrible wrath and displeasure of Almighty God to eternal ages, of being extremely and for ever miserable, without intermission, and without end, must needs be a very dismal consideration to any man that can think and consider: “For who knows the power of God’s anger? who can dwell with everlasting burnings?” and yet to this horrible danger, to this intolerable misery, do all the workers of iniquity, every one that lives in the wilful contempt and disobedience of the laws of the gospel, expose themselves, and this is as expressly revealed and declared to us, as it is possible for words to declare any thing: (Matt. xiii. 40-42.) “So shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. xxv. 41.) There you have the very sentence recorded, which shall be pronounced upon sinners at the great day: “Then shall the King say to them on his left hand, (that is, to the wicked) Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” And, (ver. 46.) “These shall go into everlasting punishment.” And this is that which St. Paul tells us, renders the doctrine of the gospel so powerful for the conversion and salvation of sinners: (Rom. i. 16.) “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because it is the power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth.” And, (ver. 18.) “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” And, (chap. ii. 8, 9.) “To them that obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.” (Ephes. v. 6.) “Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things (viz. the sins he had mentioned before) cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” (2 Thess. i. 7-9.) “When the Lord Jesus (speaking of the judgment of the great day), shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” So that the gospel gives all imaginable discouragement to the transgression and disobedience of God’s laws, by denunciation of the greatest dread and terror that can be presented to human nature, enough to make any sensible and considerate man willing to do or forbear any thing, to escape so horrible a danger, to cut off a foot or hand, or to pluck out an eye, not only to restrain nature in any thing, but even to offer violence to it, rather than to be cast into hell fire, “where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched/ as our Saviour expresseth it, (Mark ix. 48.) This is the first argument from the threatenings. The

(2.) Second, is from the promises of the gospel, which are full encouragement to obedience; and there are three great promises made in the gospel to repentance, and the obedience of God’s laws.

1. The promise of pardon and forgiveness.



2. Of grace and assistance.

3. Of eternal life and happiness. And these certainly contain all the encouragement we can desire; that God will pardon what is past, assist us in well doing for the future, and reward our perseverance in it to the end with eternal life: and all this is expressly promised to us in the gospel.

1. The pardon and forgiveness of sins past. (*Acts xiii. 38, 39.*) “Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” And this is a great encouragement to amendment, to be fully indemnified from all past sins and transgressions; and this promise is made to believing, which includes in it repentance and a better course.

2. The promise of grace and assistance to enable us to all the purposes of holiness and obedience. And this our Saviour has most expressly and emphatically promised to all that are sincerely resolved to make use of it; and that upon the easiest condition that can be, if we do but earnestly pray to God for it, telling us that we may, with the same confidence and assurance of success, (nay, with much greater) ask this of God, as we can any thing that is good of the kindest father upon earth, (*Luke xi. 9.*) And surely, here is a mighty encouragement to well-doing, to be assured that God is most ready to afford his grace and assistance to us to this purpose, if we heartily beg it of him. So that neither the consideration of our own weakness, nor of the power of our spiritual enemies, can be any discouragement or just excuse to us from doing our duty, since God offers us so freely all the strength that we need, and to endow us with an inward principle of well-doing, more powerful and effectual to all the purposes of holiness and virtue, than any opposition that can be raised against it. So St. John assures us, that we have God on our side, and the powerful assistance of his Holy Spirit, and therefore are sure of victory in this conflict: (*1 John iv. 4.*) “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. If the Spirit of God be more powerful than the devil, we are of the stronger side; and we have no just cause to complain of our inability and weakness to do the will of God, since that strength and assistance, which we may have for asking, is to all effects and purposes in our own power. And therefore St. Paul made no scruple to call it so, and to say, he was able to do all things: “I am able to do all things through Christ, which strengthened me.”

3. The promise of eternal life: and this is the great promise of the gospel, and the crown of all the rest: (*1 John ii. 25.*) “This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.” And this is a reward so great and glorious, and so infinitely beyond the proportion of our service and obedience, that nothing can be more encouraging. What should not men do “in hopes of eternal life, which God that cannot lie hath promised to us?” The expectation of such a reward, so well assured to us, is sufficient to encourage us to do our utmost, and to strain all our powers for the securing and attaining of it, which we cannot do without

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holiness and obedience of life; for “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” So that all the promises of the gospel are to encourage and strengthen us in well-doing, “to make us partakers of the Divine nature, that we should cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.”

Thus you see that the whole dispensation of the gospel, and the doctrine of it, and every part of them, are all calculated to reform the minds and manners of men. This is the great design of the Christian religion, and all the parts and powers of it, to clear, and confirm, and perfect the natural law, to reinforce the obligation of moral duties by severer threatenings and greater promises, and to offer men more powerful grace and assistance to the practice of all goodness and virtue; and they do not understand the Christian religion, who imagine any other end and design of it. There is nothing that our Saviour and his apostles do every where more vehemently declare, than that hearing and believing the doctrine of Christ signifies nothing, with out the real virtues of a good life. “Know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead,” saith St. James. For men to think that the mere belief of the gospel, without the fruits and effects of a good life, will save them, is a very fond and vain imagination. And thus much may suffice to have been spoken concerning the first point.



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