

A SERMON Preach'd

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*The Foll, and Danger of being conceited  
of our Spiritual Knowledge.*

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A  
S E R M O N

Preach'd before the

UNIVERSITY,


In January, 17<sup>th</sup>.

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1 COR. VIII. 2.

*And if any Man think that he knoweth  
any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as  
he ought to know.*

**W**E are by no Means so to understand these Words of the *Apostle*, as if he deny'd there was any such thing as real Knowledge attainable in Matters of *Religion*: For these are certainly the most proper and noble Entertainments of our Understanding, and, if any thing can do so, deserve our utmost Enquiries, as being of such an infinite Moment and Importance to our Happiness, both here and here-


hereafter, throughout the whole Extent and SERM. XIII.  
 Continuance of our Being. Nor can we   
 suppose that the *Apostle*, whatever else he might  
 design to reprove in the Words of my Text,  
 could ever intend by them to lay so severe  
 an Injunction upon Men, that under all their  
 Attainments in true Knowledge, and when  
 they should have made such considerable Pro-  
 gress in it, that their *profiting must appear to all* 1 Tim. 4. 7 5.  
*men*, that they themselves in the mean time  
 should be the only Persons quite insensible,  
 and unapprehensive of their own Perfections.  
 To suppose the former Interpretation would  
 be quite to overthrow the Design of *God's*  
 own Revelation of himself, and the Truth to  
 the World, which was certainly to guide  
 and instruct Mankind in that Knowledge,  
 which was in it self most valuable, and most  
 pertinent and necessary for them to be in-  
 form'd in; and that must certainly suppose  
 them capable of being so, otherwise that Disco-  
 very and Revelation must have been original-  
 ly vain and to no purpose; which, as proceed-  
 ing from *God's* Wisdom and Goodness, we  
 cannot, without the greatest Impiety, sup-  
 pose to have been so. Nor can we, on  
 the other hand, admit of any such Exposition  
 of these Words, which should require a  
 perfect Ignorance and Insensibility in Men of  
 their own Progress and Acquisitions in the  
 Knowledge of *Spiritual* Matters; because  
 that contradicts the very first Principles and  
 Operations of our Minds, which, as they are  
 capable of Reflection, may be conscious of  
 their own Endowments without blame.

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But then, though the *Apostle* will not deny that there is such a thing as a true and excellent Knowledge to be acquir'd in our religious Contemplations, and in the Verse before my Text owns some Mens actual Possession of it, and that Men themselves too may be sensible of it without Sin; *For we know*, says he, *that we all have knowledge*; so that he could never be suppos'd in the Words of the Text to condemn all Self-consciousness in our intellectual Improvements; yet there is certainly one kind of Reflection on them, and an inward Demeanour towards, and an Opinion of our selves upon that score, which is a just matter of the *Apostle's* blame, and not be allow'd either by the Rules of Reason or Religion. And *that* was the proper Sense of these Words which *St. Paul* intended, and which it shall be my present Business to explain.

A fond and vain Admiration of our selves then upon the account of our greater Knowledge, and a Neglect and Contempt of our Neighbours, comparing them with our selves in Point of spiritual Understanding, is what the *Apostle* justly censures in these Words, *If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know*; that is, if a Man entertain such a vain Conceit of his Knowledge in Religion, as to pride himself upon it, and to behave himself contemptuously, and insolently towards other Men upon that account, he is quite ignorant of the true Nature and Design of all religious Knowledge, which is indeed not to make Men vain and haughty, but the more truly and deeply

deeply sensible of their Duty, and the better S E R M. XIII.  
 able and more readily inclin'd to practise it,   
 both towards God, themselves, and towards  
 all Men.

I need not consider the present and immediate Occasion upon which these Words are here brought in by the *Apostle*, in this his Discourse to the *Corinthians*, which yet 'twere easie to explain; I shall chuse rather to treat of them as a single independent Sentence, in a more unrestrain'd and general Sense; and so taken, they express to us such Doctrines, and put us in Mind of such Truths as may be of very useful Importance towards the right Government of our Minds and Behaviour, both in the Pursuit, and under the Attainment of spiritual Knowledge.

As, *First*, That whatsoever our Perfection in this sort of Knowledge may be, which yet is certainly the best in the World, yet a vain and arrogant Conceit and Admiration of our selves upon it, is both unreasonable, and sinful, upon several Accounts. If a Man *think* that he knows any thing, says the *Apostle*, implying that he ought not indeed to think so.

*Secondly*, To think so highly of our selves on the score of our greater Knowledge, is full of dangerous Consequences to our Christian Practice, which is or ought to be matter of our greater Concern and Care than any thing else. *He knows nothing yet as he ought to know*; which implies, that such an Opinion of Knowledge as *this*, may very much mislead us.

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And, *First*, I shall consider that whatever our Attainments in spiritual Knowledge may be either really in themselves, or comparatively above other Mens; yet a fond, vain and arrogant Conceit and Admiration of our selves upon them is unreasonable and sinful, and that for several Reasons.

*First*, Because our utmost reach of Knowledge in things is, and always must be, so long as we live in this World, so very imperfect.

*Secondly*, Let it be what it will, 'tis yet the mere Gift of *God's* Free Grace and Bounty, in the Revelation of himself by his Word without, and the Assistance and Inspirations of his Holy Spirit within our Minds, and therefore to presume and vaunt our selves upon it, is a great Sin; because it implies we vainly ascribe it to our selves.

*Thirdly*, 'Tis not what *God* design'd we should ever rest in, as our End and Happiness; but use it as a Means only in order to the better Regulation of our Practice: And therefore it cannot deserve our highest Esteem.

In the *First* Place then 'tis extremely vain, and to the last degree unreasonable, to admire and boast our selves upon our religious Knowledge, because the utmost reach of it, in this Life, must be always so very imperfect. We *know* but *in part*, and we *prophezie* *in part*. The utmost Force of our Mind, assisted even by those supernatural Discoveries that *God* has been pleas'd to vouchsafe us, in our present State, can enter but a very little way into those *Divine* and noble Theories, that are reserv'd

for our Happiness hereafter. Not that we ought to look upon this as any Reflection upon the Goodness of God, that he has not let us farther into the Treasures of *unsearchable Wisdom*, in this World, to a more close and intimate view of his *Heavenly Glories*; because indeed the present State of our weak Nature, and the Narrowness of our Capacity would by no means admit of it: So far as they would, and as far as was necessary to direct us to our final Happiness, so far he has indeed open'd himself to us in the merciful Revelations of his *Word*.

And yet, through the Perverseness and Blindness of our Minds, contracted by our Sin and Folly, how dim are our Perceptions even of these necessary Truths, which we might and ought to know better; and how perplex'd and intangled is very often our Discernment of those things, in which our Duty and Practice are more immediately concern'd! So that when we go off never so little from the general Rules of Duty, which, we think, lie clear enough before us, and come to examine the nature of our particular Actions, as they are invested with numerous and intricate Circumstances, where is the Man of so clear a Head, that can give himself a perfect Satisfaction in Cases without number, that yet so closely concern his Life and Conduct! How few Cases are there, even in *Divinity* it self, that are so well resolv'd by the Learning and Skill of its *Professors*, that a Man's Mind can repose it self on them without desire of farther Satisfaction! Which is a very severe Argument how much the

SERM. XIII. *Generality* of Mankind are at a loss, and puzzled to find their Duty.

And what a vain thing is it then that a Man should boast himself upon his Knowledge, when his Ignorance is ten thousand fold, and such tracts of Wisdom lie beyond his view, which he must never expect to arrive at, by his utmost Researches! To one Discovery we can make, either in the Nature and Attributes of *God*, or our own infinite Obligations to him, that which is *bidden from us cannot be number'd*; and if he should enter into scrutiny with the *Wise*st of us all, we could not answer him to one of a thousand; which ought to be enough to convince us that a perfect State of Wisdom was never design'd for our Portion here; and that we can't so much as aim at it without the greatest Ignorance both of our Nature and Abilities; than which surely there can be no greater Instance of our Folly. *Where then is Wisdom!* to be found, and *where is the place of Understanding!* *The sea says, it is not in me, and the depth says, it is not in me.* And if Man desires to know any thing of it, 'tis to *walk humbly* before his *God*, and his Neighbour, upon a thorow Sense and Conviction of his own Ignorance.


Let a Man but consider the Controversies of his own Time, and look over the perpetual Jarrs and Inconsistencies of even the *Wise*st and most Learned Men, in Matters of *religious* Doctrine it self, which yet are of the highest Concernment to be rightly stated, and he will quickly be convinc'd of the Weakness of human Reason, assisted with all the Advantages

vantages of *Revelation*. Men differ so widely from each other, and very often from themselves, in determining these Matters of highest Moment, that though a Desire of Truth may be in Charity be presum'd to have been the Ground and Motive to all their Enquiries, yet nothing seems less to be the Issue of them all, than the Discovery of Truth it self.


And therefore we may observe, that those Men themselves, who have most undergone the fatigue, and toil in the Pursuit of Knowledge, are ever apt to assume the least to themselves, and most tender and candid in Interpreting the Opinions, and passing by the Errors and Infirmities of other Men: Because they are well convinc'd, that the general and unavoidable Weakness of our Nature lays us perpetually open to Mistakes and Ignorance, and that it must be a violent strain upon Nature, to set us in any Measure above these Imperfections, or to recover us from under them. So that for a Man to triumph and insult upon the Ignorance and Inadvertence of the World about him, in a vain Confidence of his own great Accomplishments, in the Discoveries of true Knowledge, is a Practice not more offensive to common Modesty, than 'tis a plain Conviction of the Vanity of his own Pretences.

'Tis the Observation of a very \* Learned \* Lord Bacon's Person, and one perhaps that was as well experienced in human Nature as any Man in these latter Ages, That Confidence is generally the result of Ignorance, and that no Men have made such high Professions of, and put in such bold and peremptory Claims to Learning and Science,




SERM. XIII.  Science, as those that have been really most Empty, and but Smatterers! in what they would be thought most perfectly to comprehend. And there is this Reason to be given for it; because the Perception of some of the first Principles in a Science may be easie and obvious, whilst Men who care not to be at the Pains of going farther, or being vainly conceited of the Pregnancies of their own Minds, imagine they have no need to do so, immediately, and hastily conclude that all the rest is as plain and open, as what they think they know already, and so presently resolve with themselves, that they can easily account for what they never yet indeed consider'd. Whereas a wiser and more disciplin'd Understanding is aware before-hand, that there may arise Difficulties not so easily to be reconcil'd to those Principles, and therefore such Men are more reserv'd and modest both in their Proceedings, and their Professions.

I need not apply this general account of an arrogant forward Presumption on our Knowledge, to Matters of *Religion*. Every one can do it for me, from the Instances, that he is, or may be acquainted with himself. For who are those Men amongst us that raise themselves so far above the rest of their *Brethren* in their own Opinions, and dare confront the Authority of the *Church* in all Ages, and of our own *Sacred Order* at present, in their presumptuous handling the chief *Articles* of our *Faith*? Who are they? but those who by a perpetual gazing on their own Attainments, and a partial Fondness for their own Judgments, have wrought themselves  
into

into an Opinion at last of, I know not what SER. I. M. XIII. secret Illumination, as if they were as well  qualified to make new Discoveries in the *Spiritual* World, as they think they may have done in the *Natural* one. What we may lawfully think of these Men, we may learn from the Account given us of some of their Predecessors, the *Gnosticks*, that they comparing themselves amongst themselves, and judging of themselves by themselves are not Wise, but so far from it, that whilst they are soaring so high in their own vain Imaginations, they forget the first Truths and Principles of *Religion*, that lie before them, and so fall below the Reason and Christianity of plain and vulgar Men.

But, *Secondly*, were our *Spiritual Knowledge* more perfect than we have seen it is, even as consummate and absolute as some Men themselves are willing to believe it, yet we should consider that 'tis all the Gift of God's Grace, and arises from his free Discoveries and *Revelation* of himself to the World, without which, we could hardly have known any thing either of the *Divine Nature*, or our own Duty; and therefore it can be no Reason for our Pride.

There needs no other Evidence of this, than to look back upon the Darkness and Confusion in the *Old Heathen* World, where all the Light, that could be struck out, in so many Ages, by the utmost Pains of Men, of the greatest Abilities, amounted to little more than a faint Suspicion of some *religious* Truths; which because they were not able by the Force of natural Reason clearly to prove, they

SERM. XIII. they did not think themselves under any great  Obligation of believing. The Disputes about the Nature of their *Gods*, and the Immortality of Men's Souls, which are the two main Hinges of Religion, and which are the Points upon which the *Gentile Philosophy* was perpetually beating, as being apprehended of the greatest consequence to the Government of Men's Lives, yet were these never clear'd up to any tolerable advantage, or explain'd upon such Principles of Reason, as could justify a Man's firm Assent and Adherence to them. When the Controversie was as fully stated as it could be, and the Arguments drawn up and represented on every side, as far as the finest Wits of Men could possibly go; What was the Issue after all, or what great Effect was produc'd and left upon the Minds of the Auditors? Why no more than this; they were either still the worse entangled in Doubts and Difficulties, which they knew not how to solve; or, at best, were inclin'd to think one Part of the Question a little more probable than the other; but which was the right, lay beyond the utmost Skill of human Reason to determine.

If we have a Mind then to be thoroughly convinc'd of the Shallowness and Vanity of our own Reason, when left to it self to make discoveries in *Religion*, without the Assistance of *God's enlightning Grace*, the Primitive State of the World will inform us, when *Darkness thus cover'd the Earth, and gross Darknes the People*. And yet this is all we have the least Pretence to value our selves upon, because 'tis indeed all we can properly  
call

call our own. The rest is purely from the **SERM. XIII.**  
 merciful Dispensation of God to Men, and freely descends upon us *from the Father of Lights,* *from whom is deriv'd every good, and every perfect Gift.* *James. 1. 17.* But this is so far from being Matter of our Pride and Arrogance, that 'tis one of the best Reasons in the World for our Humility, and our most grateful Acknowledgments to our *Divine Benefactor.* For if we have nothing really valuable in our Knowledge of Religion, but what we have receiv'd from above, why then do we, or how can we glory, as if we had not receiv'd it? This one Consideration would effectually quell the risings of our Pride, because it would so evidently convince us of the Unreasonableness of it, and of the extremest Folly of ever giving it room, or entertainment in our Thoughts.

A *Third Reason,* to prevent our taking up too high and fond an Opinion of our spiritual Knowledge, is the Consideration that God never design'd we should rest in it, or make it our chief End and Happiness, but directs it all, in Order to the right Government of our Practice. *If ye know these things,* says our *Blessed Lord,* *happy are ye if ye do them.* He makes the Practice of our Duty, we see, the great Point he aim'd at in his teaching the World, and the Doctrine it self no farther beneficial, than as it was directed to, and made to terminate in that Practice. And there is this Reason to be assign'd for his doing so, because 'tis not Knowledge, even in the highest Perfection, and Excellency of it, that can make us Happy: It is the right Order and Government of our Wills and Affections in

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SERM. XIII. conformity to the Will of God, which is the business of our Duty, that is able to do *that*. And without this, the greater Wisdom, and more perfect Knowledge, will serve only as Instruments of Torment to us, to enhance the Pain, and to set home the Reflections on our Misery the deeper.

Much greater measures of Knowledge and Wisdom, than we can possibly apprehend, or arrive at in this World, we have good reason to think, may be found in those Natures, which we know at the same time are miserable to the last extremity. The fallen *Angels*, those accursed Spirits, do retain their *Angelic* Nature, tho' in Ruin; and for that Reason, are very probably endued with a more piercing, sharp Intelligence, than any Mortal Man can pretend to be, and understand the application of Means to Ends, much better than the wisest Philosopher. And yet they continue forever in the most dismal state of Misery; with all their inward Light and Knowledge, they are confin'd to the sad Condition, and deliver'd under the Chains, of Eternal Darkness. No fine Thoughts or sublime Speculations can sooth or alleviate their Pain, or deceive the gnawings of that Worm that never dies within their Consciences. So that a very high degree of Perfection in Knowledge may be consistent, we see, with the extremest Misery; a sure Argument that *God* never design'd Knowledge for our last and truest Happiness: Because Happiness and Misery are never reconcileable.

Shall we then set such an inordinate Value upon our Knowledge, even of the Truths  
and

and Myſteries of Religion it ſelf, as to com-  
 mit Irregularities for its ſake, and forfeit that  
 Integrity of our Wills which we are ſure is  
 the only thing that can make us happy? And  
 yet this we do, when we exalt Knowledge  
 above its proper Order, and look upon it as  
 the main Ingredient of our Blifs, and purſue  
 it with ſuch degrees of Eagernels, very often  
 to the neglect of our Practice; which is  
 much beyond what the juſt ſtate and propor-  
 tion of Reason or Religion will allow us.

'Twas the vain Affectation of Knowledge,  
 and that of Good and Evil too, it ſeems, a  
 Religious Knowledge, that threw down our  
 firſt Father from his Primitive State of Hap-  
 pineſs. Whiſt he ventur'd for its ſake to vio-  
 late the Will of his Creator, and to forfeit his  
 own Innocence, and ſo ſuſtain'd the loſs of a  
 Good that was infinitely greater for the ſake  
 of a leſs.

I don't deſign any Part of this Diſcourſe  
 as a Diſparagement to any ſort of true and real  
 Knowledge, and leaſt of all to that which is  
 Religious, which, when directed to its proper  
 End, is ſo highly instrumental to our Hap-  
 pineſs. But as good as it is, it may be miſ-  
 apply'd, and perverted, and we are ſure it is  
 ſo, when advanc'd in our Opinion above its  
 juſt Size and Value. Which may oftentimes  
 prove an Occaſion of drawing off our Minds  
 from our more immediate Duty, and from  
 thoſe more important Purpoſes of our being  
 plac'd, and living in this preſent ſtate of Trial  
 in this World, which are to rectifie our Wills,  
 and reform our depraved Nature to an Obe-  
 dience to the Laws and Will of God, upon  
 whole

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whose Disposal, according to our Behaviour, we are sure our eternal State depends. So far indeed as our *Spiritual Knowledge* serves to the better Government of our Lives; as long as the Virtue and Influence of it descends upon our Wills and Affections, and sets them right; so far 'tis preferable to every thing else in the World, but religious Obedience it self, which is the very End to which it was design'd; and therefore Knowledge must always yield to Practice, as the Means must always do to the proper and ultimate End to which they are directed. But indeed without such an Ordination and Tendency to this great End, the Conduct of our Practice, our Knowledge, how refin'd and subtile soever it may be, though in *Divinity* it self, is nothing but Emptiness and Fume, the Food and Support of Vanity. While it thus proves useless and stays only in the Head, 'tis like dry Clouds without Rain, wandring only in the upper Regions, but distills no sweet Influence to replenish the Heart, and to make it bring forth, and fructify in the Course of a religious and virtuous Conversation.


And thus I have endeavour'd to represent, both the Disadvantages, and the real Use of our Knowledge in matters of *Religion*; and 'tis plain, that take it which way we will, 'tis very far from being an Argument for our Self-esteem and Vanity; not upon the two former Considerations, of its being so very imperfect, and depending upon *God's free Grace* for any thing that is truly valuable in it; nor yet upon the last Account, because it is only a Means to a farther End, that great End of  
ordering

ordering a-right our Life and Practice, in the **SERM. XIII.**  
business of our Duty. 

I shall now proceed to a fuller Confirmation of this Argument, by shewing, in the *Second place*, that a high and vain Conceit of our Attainments in spiritual Knowledge is full of dangerous Consequences to our *Christian Practice*, which ought to be the matter of our greatest Care; and which, as I have shewn already, was intended by Almighty God to be the true scope and aim of all our Knowledge.

The *Apostle* could not have pass'd a greater Slight upon *Knowledge*, in comparison with Practice, than when he tells us, in the Verse immediately before my Text, that *Knowledge puffeth up, but Charity edifieth*: Not that our more perfect, and thorow Insight into the Nature and Doctrines of *Religion*, is, in its own natural tendency, apt to have this effect upon the Minds of Men; for if it were, our Knowledge would then be culpable in it self, and Ignorance justly espous'd as the truest friend to *Devotion*: But 'tis by reason of the Corruption of our Nature, 'tis from the Weakness of our Heads, and the Perverseness of our Wills, that Knowledge, which is otherwise one of the greatest Perfections of human Nature, comes by Accident to have such a fatal and mischievous Influence. 'Tis not true Knowledge it self, but the Mistakes of Men, and their wrong Opinions about it, when they set an inordinate Value upon it, and don't pursue it according to its proper Intention, that renders it a noxious Quality, and liable to this severe Censure of the *Apostle*. And that it may sometimes deserve to be



SERM. XIII.  treated so ill, when 'tis so far perverted from its proper use, will appear from these *three* following Considerations.

*First*, That a high Conceit of their Knowledge is apt to make Men look down on the Practice of Religion, as but a mean and low Attainment.

*Secondly*, 'Tis apt to incline Men to entertain too great a Dependence on their own Understanding, which is one of the main Fountains of Error, and of those Innovations and Corruptions in Religion which we find.

*Thirdly*, An over-weening Opinion of our *Spiritual* Wisdom, is directly opposite to *Humility*, that great and fundamental Virtue, in regard to ourselves, and not so well consistent with *Charity*, a Duty of the highest Concernment in our Practice towards others.

And, *First*, I shall shew that a high Conceit of their Knowledge is apt to make Men look down upon the Practice of Religion, as but a mean and low Attainment.

It has been the Complaint of former Ages, and we may find it justified by our own Experience, that Men of the profoundest Heads, and who have been suppos'd best skill'd in the sublime Mysteries and disputable Points of *Religion*, have not been always found the exactest in their Lives and Manners; and have very often, the more is the Pity, sunk below the Integrity and Innocence of a mean illiterate *Christian*. Upon which account, as their Guilt was certainly the greater, so their Condemnation, without Repentance, must have been the heavier; because their more perfect Information, as it carried in it the stricter

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Obligations to Obedience, it did likewise by consequence the higher Aggravations of Neglect. And upon this ground 'tis, that Saint *James* gives us this good Advice, *My Brethren, be not many Masters*; that is, don't insist upon your higher Improvements in the Doctrines of Religion; *knowing that we shall receive the greater Condemnation*; (i. e.) we are more liable to Judgment and Severity ourselves from the Hands of God, by how much we are more ready and forward to tax the Ignorance, and censure the Faults and Misbehaviour of other Men. And yet, as great a Fault as this is, and ought to be esteem'd, a Pretence to extraordinary Illumination, and that Vanity and Insolence of Soul that attends too great an Opinion of our Knowledge in *spiritual* Matters, certainly renders Men the more liable to this Sin, tho' it leaves them at the same time the less excusable.

So that there is indeed a sort of Temperance to be observ'd in our Desires, and Esteem of Knowledge, as well as there is in the Matter of our sensual Appetites. And he that transcends the Bounds of this, breeds a sort of Indigestion in his Mind, and many times offends to worse Consequence, and to the greater Prejudice of his Virtue, than if he should sometimes surcharge himself in pursuit of the Pleasures of Voluptuousness and Sensuality; which, next to *Spiritual Pride*, is a Sin to be most abhorr'd, upon the account of its large and wicked Influence.

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Nay, these very gross Sins themselves, that I mention'd, are not the least, that Men sublim'd into a higher Opinion, and exalted with a towering Conceit of their spiritual Knowledge and Perfections, have sometimes fallen. Who more refin'd and mysterious in their Speculations of Religion than the *Gnosticks* in their own false Opinions? and yet they fell into the grossest Sins, and wallow'd in all the Impurities of a sensual Life, upon this vain Presumption, that their more *sublim'd* Knowledge would secure them at last, and that *God* would see no Sin in the Practice of those, who were so familiar with his Secrets, as they pretended to be, so spiritualiz'd in their Contemplation of his Nature and Perfections. But I need not go so far back as to the *Gnosticks*, for an Instance to confirm my present Argument; we have Men amongst our selves, who lay claim to a higher Dispensation of *Spiritual Wisdom*, than the rest of their Brethren; I mean the illuminated Sectaries of our own Age, as they pretend themselves to be; who yet sometimes don't refuse to descend to the foulest Practices, and are often found tripping in the most substantial Points of common Honesty. It is only just necessary for me to mention these Men.

And so I pass to the *Second* Particular under this Head, which is, to shew that too high a Conceit of our Knowledge in the Affairs of *Religion* is offensive to our *Christian* Practice, upon this Account likewise; because it is apt to make Men set up for themselves, and to conceive too great a Dependence and


Presumption on their own Understandings, SERM. XIII  
 which, we know is one of the great Springs and Fountains of Error and Heresie, the main Cause of Innovations, and corrupt Opinions in Religion.

It has been sometimes made a Question of Surprize, how some Men, whose Lives in the main have been regular enough, and that could not be tax'd with any open and notorious Breach in Point of Manners, could yet fall into such desperate and dangerous Errors in Matters of *Faith* and *Doctrine* as they did. The \*great Patron of Atheistical Philosophy, that so lately spread his Poison in our own Nation, † if we may believe the Accounts given of his Life and Behaviour, was a Man of no foul and open Miscarriages in his Practice, observable above those of ordinary Men: And so the Ancient *Hereticks*, that oppos'd and corrupted Religion in the early Days of *Christianity*, were Men rather remarkable for Strictness and Severity of Life; and yet both those of our own Time, and the others, have committed such wide Breaches and Violations in the Doctrines of *Faith*, as seem at first Sight hardly to be accounted for, from Men of so unblameable a Carriage.

But if we consider more attentively we shall find, that this *Root of Bitterness*, that so defil'd the *Minds* and *Consciences* of these Men, and gave them so perverse and reprobate a Turn from the Truth and Simplicity of Religion, lay a great deal deeper; beyond

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\* Hobbes. † Dr. Kenner's Account at the End of his Fun. Sermon on the Duke of Devon.

SERM. XIII.  the common View, in the inward Bent and Temper of their Souls; and 'twas indeed their Pride of their own Judgment and Opinion; a Sin, which tho' it does not fall under the Eyes of Men so much, nor appear in such gross and foul Colours as the Sins of the Flesh, Intemperance and Sensuality; yet has as malignant an Influence, and perhaps a worse, towards the corrupting of Mens Principles, than those Sins may ordinarily have. A Pride of a Man's own Abilities of Learning and Judgement, and a partial Fondness for his own Conceits, will make a Man a Heretick, as soon as any other Principle. A Quickness of Parts to give a new Turn and Interpretation to the Doctrines of *Religion*, and a Sagacity to draw up a new fresh seemingly consistent Scheme of Opinions, and a consequent Admiration of a Man's self on this account, have very often engag'd Men of Morals and Sobriety enough, in a *Shipwrack concerning their Faith*. And when a Man has once gone on for some time in Errour of this kind, the Applause, that he is apt to give himself for it, and to receive from others, confirms him still the more by Degrees, 'till he comes to settle himself at last in a downright Persuasion of those Errors, which he only entertain'd, and propos'd at first as something probable.

This is the Account the Great \*Mr. *Hooker* gives of the Rifeness and Exuberance of *Heretical* Opinions in the *Eastern* Church, above whatever the *Western* appear'd to be trou-

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\**Eccles. Polit. Book 5.*

bled with: That the *Greeks* were ever a SERM. XIII  
 People addicted to new Opinions, and had a   
 very high Conceit of, and a wonderful Affection  
 for their own Quirks and Inventions, especially  
 in the Affairs of *Religion*: And when they once  
 hit upon a new Conceit, how strange, and *Unorthodox*  
 soever, the great Easiness and Volubility of their  
 Language serv'd them to recommend it as plausible  
 to others; which is the Reason he gives for the  
 wide, and quick spreading of *Arianism*, over  
 the whole Face of the *Greek Church*.

The way then to be secure from the most  
 dangerous and destructive Errors, is to be  
 truly and sincerely humble in our own Opinions,  
 not to think of *our selves more highly than we ought*;  
 not to be full of our selves, and our own  
 Sufficiency; not to do, as the manner of too  
 many spiritualiz'd and conceited Persons is,  
 to set up their own private Judgment in  
 Opposition to the whole *Church of God*, and  
 the Authority of so many wise and good Men  
 that have gone before us: As if every thing  
 were the more liable to Suspicion, meerly  
 for this Reason, because others had believ'd  
 it; or as if our Ancestors had all combin'd  
 to deceive us in Matters of the greatest  
 Moment.

There is Room enough for Men not to  
 make themselves liable to the Objection of  
 following with an implicit Faith, without  
 setting up themselves as the only Standards  
 of Truth, the great Oracles of *Faith* and  
*Doctrine*. He that does so, let him look to  
 the Consequences of his own Temper. There  
 is nothing so very absurd, and out of the way,

SERM. XIII, but what he may in time embrace: if it happen to be his own Production; and may come to contend with more Confidence, and Heat for the Propagation and Success of the worst of Errours, than ever the Truth it self requir'd as necessary to its Support and Maintenance. And this is the *Second* dangerous Inconvenience that attends the spiritual Pride of Understanding, the Danger of Innovations and Corruptions in the primitive Faith; which is as heinous a Piece of Guilt in Christian Practice, and ought to be as carefully avoided as any other.

*Thirdly*, and to conclude this Argument, An over-weening Opinion of our spiritual Wisdom is more immediately prejudicial to our *Christian* Practice, in that 'tis directly opposite to *Humility*, that great fundamental Duty of Religion, with regard to our selves, and is not so well consistent with *Charity*, a Duty of the highest Consequence towards others.

*Humility* engages us to think meanly of ourselves, and our Endowments, considering with how much Weakness and Imperfection they are mixt and blended; and that they don't derive their Origin from our own Industry and Care, but from the Blessing and Assistance of *Almighty God*, who supplies us with the Means, and prospers the Methods of attaining any Perfection whatsoever. But now, a Man conceited of his religious Knowledge, attributes his great Atchievements to the Strength of his own Parts, and the natural Parturiency of his Mind, which, by an innate Sagacity, strikes farther into the se-

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cret Recesses of Truth; and from which nothing of so sublime and difficult a Nature can be withheld, when he once turns the Edge and Vigour of his Thoughts upon it. So far indeed this Man is not mistaken in thinking religious Knowledge the best, and most desirable of any; but here is his Fault, he imputes the Acquisition of it to his own Industry, and does not consider how much he wants, as well as what he has, and that what he has at best is much less than what he thinks it is; and in all these Points he offends against Humility. In his high Thoughts of himself, he *sacrifices to his own Net, and burns Incense to his Drag*; that is, he attributes all his Acquisitions to his own Industry and Sagacity, without ever taking into his Consideration that first over-ruling Cause of all things, without whose Concurrence he could not move a Step; and without whose Blessing and Favour he would be *broken and disappointed in all his Purposes*. But, as the proud King of Babylon, when he walk'd in the greatness of his Strength, spoke thus to himself; *Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the Kingdom, by the might of my Power, and for the honour of my Majesty?* To the same Purpose does this proud haughty vain-glorious Man applaud himself: Is not this high Pitch of spiritual Wisdom, to which I am arriv'd, above the rest of Men, the Fruits of my own deep Study and Retirement? Who knows so much as I, and to whom am I any ways oblig'd for it, but to my self?

Dan. 4. 20.

From



SERM. XIII.



1 Cor. 13, 1,  
2, 3, 4, &c.

From whence he proceeds, in the next Place, to despise and overlook, and to carry himself insolently towards his Neighbours; which is, *Secondly*, a Violation of his *Charity*, a greater Perfection in Religion and Life than the highest Pitch of Knowledge whatsoever, though engag'd upon the noblest Subjects. For *though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, observe that, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing;* says the same great *Apostle*, that deliver'd my Text; who, when he compares these two great Qualities, Knowledge and Charity together, he represents the Danger and Inconveniencies of the former, though a worthy Accomplishment in it self, but at the same time the mighty Advantages, and most beneficial Influences of the latter; *Knowledge puffeth up, says he, but Charity edifieth*, in the Verse before my Text. We know upon what account the *Apostle* spoke these Words: His Design was to shew, that an Opinion of superior Wisdom inclin'd Men to look above their weaker Brethren, to have no Regard to their Infirmities, nor concern what Occasion of Scandal was given them by their Practice, as long as themselves follow'd the Dictates of a sounder Judgment, a more perfect Information.

We see then, what Danger there is in an Opinion of an Excess of Wisdom. (How it takes Men off from that true gentle *Christian* Con-

Condescension to the Weakness and Infirmities of our Neighbour, whilst it turns the whole Stress of Mens Thought and Admiration upon themselves; which would be much better employ'd in considering the Necessities, and relieving the Ignorance of their Brethren; which in the Judgment of an *Apostle* himself is a more *excellent way*, than even the highest Exaltations and Illuminations of our Understandings, than even a Spirit of Prophecy it self. SERM. XIII.

*Let us then covet earnestly the best Gifts, always preferring the Graces of a true Christian Life, such as Humility and Charity, to any Perfections or Endowments of our Understanding whatsoever; considering that when all the rest shall vanish and be forgotten for ever, yet these shall remain, and continue with us always, the main Grounds and chief Ingredients of our everlasting Happiness. For we are sure that Charity, which is the Bond of Perfection, the Abridgment of all Christian Graces, shall never fail: But whether there be prophecies they shall fail, whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away; For we know in part, and prophesie in part, but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part, shall be done away.* 1 Cor. 13. 3, 9, 10.

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*The Nature, Advantages, Object and Evidence of our Christian Hope.*

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A

S E R M O N

Preach'd before the

Univerfity at *St. Mary's,**Sunday, December 15, 1700.*

H E B. VI. 19.

*Which hope we have, as an anchor of the Soul, both fure and ftedfast, and which entreteth into that within the vail.*

**I**N the former Part of this Chapter, the *Apostle* endeavours to establish the *Jewish* Converts to Christianity, in the ftedfast Profession of their Faith: He urges the Necessity of their Perseverance in it, from the infinite Danger, and desperate Consequences of a Revolt from it; And he enforces the Reasonableness of it upon the ground of those high and excellent Advantages which God had

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had propos'd to their Obedience in his Holy Promises. SERM. XIV.

It was the Wisdom of that *Holy Spirit*, by whom the *Apostles* were inspir'd, thus to proceed at the first Conversion of the World, by suiting and adapting their Discourse so particularly to the Temper and *Genius* of the People they had to deal with. And accordingly we find the *Author* of this *Epistle* to the *Hebrews* addressing himself to that Nation, in a way most proper to prevail upon the Humour and Principles of that People; by turning that side of his Arguments towards them which was most likely to take hold of their own Opinions, and so strike in with those early Persuasions, they had long before embrac'd, and continu'd under.

For, to a People, that valued themselves so very highly, and that with a great deal of Reason, upon the Promises of God made unto their *Fathers*, which they took to be the distinguishing Character of their Nation from all the Kingdoms of the Earth, the peculiar Mark of God's Care and Favour towards them; could there have been any Method of Application more proper and effectual, when they had once consented to the *Christian Faith*, than to plead the Force of the same Promises to them, as an Engagement of their new Obedience, which had been before deliver'd to their *Fathers*? which were only now explain'd to a more noble and spiritual Meaning, and rested still upon the same Truth and Faithfulness of God for their Performance, that ever they did before.

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SERM. XIV.



There is not, we are sure, any one Principle in general of a more prevailing Efficacy upon the Minds of Men, than the sure Expectation of Rewards hereafter ; yet amongst a People, who were always acted by their Interest and Self-Love, and famous for it above other Nations, this way of arguing must have had some peculiar Advantage, in that they were so well inclin'd, and prepar'd to entertain it ; more than we can easily suppose others to have been, who before were *Gentiles*, and therefore utter Strangers to what the *Covenants of Promise* meant.

Ephes. 2. 12.

The great Danger as to these *Jews* was this, lest they should still have retain'd [their old Prejudices, which they had brought over with them into the Profession of *Christianity*, and those should have prov'd one time or other a *Rock of Offence* to them, and an Occasion of their Fall. For we know *that* People quite mistook the Promises of the Old *Testament*, both as to the Nature of them, and the Manner of their Accomplishment ; so far as to make the Engagements of God to *Abraham* an Objection against receiving *him*, who was the only true Seed of *Abraham*, at *whom* all the Promises made to *Abraham* and his Posterity were aim'd, and in *whom* they were to receive their true and ultimate Completion. The *Apostle* therefore makes it his Concern in the first Place, to set them right in their Notion of these Promises, and then to keep them so ; leading them on from their own Principles, to discover the Vanity and Falsity of their present Pretences ; And proving from the Faith of *Abraham* himself, the

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necessity of believing in *Christ* as the True SERM. XIV.  
Redeemer of the World. 

And when the *Apostle* had thus drawn off the Promises of *God* to the *Jews*, from their immediate Regard to an *Earthly Canaan*, and had rais'd the Minds of his *Hebrew Disciples* Heb. 11. 16. a little higher, into an expectation of a *better Country, even an Heavenly one*, which it was the true Design and Drift of those Ancient Promises to represent; from hence he concludes the great Reasonableness and Authority of our *Christian Hope*, as it leans upon those Promises, and that former Establishment, as these were reinforc'd and strengthened by the Revelations of the *New Testament* in our *Blessed Saviour*. And having thus convinc'd them of the Reasonableness of their Hope, he goes on to inform them of the exceeding great Use and Excellency of it, in the Words that follow: *Which Hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entretb into that within the veil.*

In my Discourse upon these words, I propose to consider these Three Things.

*First*, What is the nature of Hope in general, and more particularly as it stands the Duty and Privilege of a *Christian*; and where 'tis, that it either falls in with, or is distinguish'd from Faith and Charity, the other two great Principles of Obedience, with which 'tis usually reckon'd.

*Secondly*, What is the great Use and Necessity of it, in the Course and Conduct of our Religious Practice. 'Tis an *Anchor of the Soul, both sure and stedfast.*

*Thirdly,*

SERM. XIV.



*Thirdly*, Wherein lies the peculiar Eminence and Excellency of it, both, upon the account of the glorious End and Object it aims at, and pursues; and of those degrees of Evidence and Assurance, under which it does so: And what is the full Meaning of those Words, it *entretb into that within the Vail*.

Though perhaps this may not seem to be the most natural and regular Method of speaking to these Points; yet because they lie in in this Order in the Text, I shall chuse rather to follow, than to invert *that*.

And *First*, I shall consider the nature of *Hope* in general, and more particularly as it stands the Duty and Privilege of a Christian; and where 'tis that it either falls in with, or is distinguished from *Faith* and *Charity*, the other two great Principles of Obedience with which 'tis usually reckon'd.

Now 'tis clear that *Hope* in general, as it is a Passion in our Nature, must be defin'd with Regard to the End and Object it pursues, and to the formal Way or Manner, under which it considers this End or Object of it self: And upon this ground, when we would determine what the *Hope* of a *Christian* is, we must explain it thus, 'Tis a Passion in our Soul arising from an apprehension of the Rewards of Heaven as future, and embracing them as desirable or attainable. And, as 'tis consider'd under *this* Notion, we may find it borrows something from the two Extremes, between which *St. Paul* has plac'd it, I mean *Faith* and *Charity*. *Faith* is the first Foundation upon which it rises, and 'tis Love that first actuates and informs it into a vital and moving

1 Cor. 13. 13.

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ing Principle. Our Hope is founded first SERM. XIV.  
 upon the Belief and Assurance of things to  
 come; otherwise it is not possible our Mind  
 should be in the least touch'd or affected by  
 them, because without the conveyance of  
 Faith, we are sure nothing that is future can  
 possibly strike or move the Soul of Man.

But now, though without the Belief of  
 things future and at a distance, in point of  
 time, there could not be conceived any the  
 least tendency to Motion or Inclination in the  
 Mind towards them; yet, *that* bare *Belief* it  
 self can never, by its own proper and imme-  
 diate Virtue, produce that Inclination. And  
 therefore *Hope* appears from hence to imply  
 something more, in its full and adequate No-  
 tion, than a pure simple *Faith* only. For *that*  
 only considers the Futurity and Certainty of  
 things to come, and the degrees of Evidence  
 for what it may expect; but *Hope* attends to  
 the Natures and Consequences of these things  
 themselves, how they may do us good, or a-  
 ny way promote our Happiness; and upon this  
 Reflection, it stirs up the Soul to desire and  
 affect them.

Nor is *this* any Prejudice or Diminution  
 to the Virtue and Excellency of *Faith*, as 'tis  
 represented in the Holy Scriptures; nor does  
 it take off from those Glorious Characters gi-  
 ven of it *there*, and those noble Perform-  
 ances ascrib'd to it, that we seem to strip it,  
 in the true naked Essence of it, thus bare of  
 all Life and Activity. For it must be con-  
 sider'd, that *Faith* is not always in *Scripture*  
 taken in its precise and abstracted sense, ac-  
 cording to the strict and rigorous Notion of it,



SERM. XIY. but as it is in conjunction there with some other Principles or Instances of Duty; suppose Fear, or Hope, or Love, or the like. Thus in one place 'tis describ'd as the *Substance of things hoped for*, and in another, 'tis express'd to *work by love*, which intimates, that *Faith* exerts its Vigour and Activity in comparison with some other Principle and Motive, without which, as the *Apostle* speaks of it *without Works*, 'tis perfectly dead and ineffectual.

It is thus necessary for us to give *Faith* its just and precise Character, when we would consider *Hope* as a Principle distinct from it; For in the general way of speaking, they are thrown together; and therefore before we can understand *either* of them aright, 'tis necessary to divide them. The difference then between *Faith* and *Hope* in short is *this*; that *Faith* asserts in the general, what *Hope* applies in the particular; And without this Application made by *Hope*, *Faith* it self, as it respects Good to come, is void, and can produce no Effect whatever. For a Man is never mov'd or affected by any future Good that he believes, unless he apprehend his own Interest or Happiness to be concern'd in it. And therefore whensoever 'tis we find *Faith* represented as exciting and putting Men upon Action, we must understand it does so, by applying to some other Principle within him, as his Fear, his Hope, his Desire, or some other; Because *Faith* alone cannot go beyond the just Extent of its office, which is not to move to *Action*, but to assent to *Truth*.

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But now, because, when we assent to things future, it is natural and necessary for us presently to consider what Regard and Relation these things stand in to our selves; which way they may either do us Good or Hurt; and while we reflect thus we are mov'd to Love or Hate, to Hope or Fear them; for this Reason it is, that we cannot so easily distinguish between a mere simple *Faith*, and those other different Acts of our Mind and Affections; and from hence, upon the account of their quick Succession to each other, we are apt to blend them together, and to consider them only as *one*, however distinct or separate in their own Nature.

Besides, that *Hope* is a Principle very different from *Faith*, if any further Proof were necessary, would sufficiently appear from hence, that we are sure the perfect and complete nature of *Faith*, taken merely as such, may be found in those Minds, where there is not the least glimmerings of Hope whatsoever. And thus it is in that deplorable case of Despairation on this side the Grave, the Torment of which is grounded upon a certain and infallible Belief of future Rewards, but an utter Denial and Exclusion of one's self from any Share or Title in them.

Again, *Hope* takes in the real Nature of *Faith* into it self, only in *one* of the *two* great Branches of it, as it considers good things to come; but there is likewise a Belief of future Punishments and Evils, and this too is as much comprehended, under the Notion of *Faith* as the former: And yet we know, *Hope*

SERM. XIV. has nothing to do here, for that regards  
 ~~~~~ Good only, and not Evil.

I have thus far consider'd how far *Faith* contributes to the Origination of *Hope*; I shall now, *Secondly*, explain how far *Love* or *Charity* likewise has its Share in the Constitution of this so excellent a *Grace*.

Rom. 8. 34.

It is certain then, from what has been said, that *Hope* must always respect something that is future. For, as the *Apostle* argues, *what a Man sees, why does he yet hope for?* that is, how can he in Reason be said to do so? But we know, every thing that may be future cannot be the Object of our Hopes; for then *Evil* might be so, but that is impossible. Wherein then lies the Reason of this Difference? In this, that we can never *hope* for any thing, but what may be an Object of our *Love*, and therein 'tis, we see, *Charity* bears its Proportion in the Composition of a Christian's *Hope*. When we apprehend things to come agreeable to our Nature, or our Interest, when we reflect upon them as the Instruments of our Pleasure, or the Means of our Perfection, 'tis then we contract a Liking to them, and our Souls begin to move towards them.


But this is not all yet; 'Tis not enough to produce *Hope* within us, that we believe things to come, and conceive a Love and Affection for them in our Minds, unless we likewise apprehend our own Interest concern'd in them, and that 'tis within the reach of our Power and Abilities to attain them. For how great soever our Love and Desire of things that are future, and that are agree-  
 able

able to us may be, yet we don't go on to hope for them presently upon that Account, unless we conceive of them as some way or other possible to be attain'd by our Endeavours. \*'Tis possible a Man may love and desire a Happiness, which he thinks it utterly impossible for him ever to partake of, but he can never be said to hope for it in any Sense. That he may do the former is certain, because otherwise there would be no Torment in Despair, for that is founded upon, and supposes the Love and Desire of that thing which we cannot have; but for a Man to be without that thing which he does not desire, can never be in the least degree uneasy to him.

*Hope* then differs in *something* both from *Faith* and *Love*, as I have shewn at large, tho' it does indeed partake of *both*; and we may in general conclude there is *such* a Difference, because it makes up the Character of a third *Christian* Principle distinct from *both*. And the Distinction, as I said before, lies in this, that *Hope* superadds to our general Belief of the Futurity of things, and to our ge-

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\*Aristotle tells us, that a Man can't make anything the matter of his Election and Choice which he apprehends as impossible, because that would import he could apply himself to the Means of obtaining it, which we are sure he cannot. But still he may will it, and retain a Desire and Inclination towards it; and this the great Philosopher owns, in Contradistinction to the former, in express Words. Πεγαίρεσις μὲν γὰρ ἔκ ἐστι τῶν ἀδυνάτων. Καὶ εἴ τις φαίη πεγαίρεσιν δοκῆσαι ἐν ἡλίθιοις εἶναι. Βέλησις δ' ὅτι τῶν ἀδυνάτων οἷον ἀθανασίας. Aristot. Eth. ad Nicom. Lib. 3. Cap. 4.

SERM. XIV.  neral Love and Desire of them, the Probability likewise of our Attainment of them in particular: Otherwise, how firm soever our Faith of things to come may be, and how strong and importunate soever our Desire of them, yet *Hope* will never carry us on so far as to endeavour after them: Because we must presently conclude our Endeavours that way to be altogether vain and useless.

Thus, a Man may really believe a State of Happiness to come in another World, and most heartily desire his Share and Interest in the Glories of it; as there is no Question but every Man who thinks at all of these things must do one time or other of his Life; but if *God* himself had not been pleas'd to reach out his Hand to us from Heaven, and open the way to our Happiness in the *Blood of his only Son*, our Souls must have for ever sunk in Despair, and have eternally languish'd in vain and ineffectual Cries after that Happiness, which we must always have desir'd, and yet never could have so much as hop'd to enjoy.


*Numb. 23. 10.* *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his,* was a Reflection that cut deep upon the Soul of him that made it, when *God* was pleas'd to discover to him the Glories and Happiness of his Saints, but his own most miserable Fate in his Exclusion from them. And indeed the greater any Happiness is in it self, and the more deeply the Desire of it is rooted in our Nature, so much the more must the Reflections on it, sting and torment our Minds, if we could not flye for a Refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before

*Heb. 6. 18.*

us. Even an *eternal weight of glory* it self SER. M. XIV.  
 would be an unsupportable Thought to the   
 Minds of Men, if they had not some Reason 2 Cor. 4. 17.  
 to believe that they should be one Day ad-  
 mitted to those Joys, which they now reach  
 and aspire after, with the utmost Longings  
 of their Souls.

And as it is *this*, that inflames the Desires,  
 and enlivens the Hopes of *good* Men, that  
 they are sure they shall not fail of Success in  
 their Inquiries and Endeavours after *glory and* Rom. 3. 7.  
*honour and immortality*; So, on the other  
 side, 'tis, because *ill* Men do not entirely give  
 up the Hopes of attaining these things, that  
 they can take any Peace and Comfort in li-  
 ving. But could one of these wicked Men  
 now see his Name struck out of the *Book of*  
*Life*, and read his eternal Banishment from  
 the joyous Presence of *God*, who is *Life* it  
 self; how sanguine a Sinner soever he  
 might be, it would tumble him down from  
 the Pride of his Glory, make him roll him-  
 self in the Dust, and groan and howl under  
 the Agonies and Anguish of his Spirit. But  
 'tis *this* that keeps up the Spirits of *ill* Men,  
*this* that supports the Courage of the bravest  
 Sinner, howsoever he may pretend to go on up-  
 on Principles of *Atheism* and Infidelity, that all  
 shall be well at last, and that he will one  
 time or other return, and be reconcil'd to  
 that God, by his Repentance, whom he now  
 pretends to despise.

And if these Sinners can raise so great a  
 Comfort to themselves, barely upon entertain-  
 ing a Prospect of Repentance, as it is ne-  
 cessary to put Men under a Capacity, and

SERM. XIV.  within the Hopes of future Happiness; How much more Reason then have good and pious Men to rejoice and triumph in Confidence of their actual Interest in God's Favour, and that their Title to it is firm and stedfast as the Foundation upon which it stands, the Mercy and Truth of God himself! If Hope be always full of Joy and Glory in proportion to the Greatness of its Object, and the Clearness of apprehending its own Right and Interest in it, what Thought then is able to fill the Minds of Men, like that of Heaven, of an infinite and eternal Happiness, or what Claim can be more infallible than that which relies upon the Word of *Everlasting Truth* it self!

And yet *this* is the Foundation upon which the Mind of every good Man may rest it self secure. *Therefore thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed in thee; because he trusteth, or hopeth, in thee. Therefore we rejoice in hope of the glory of God; we abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost; and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. And God has made it our Duty to do so, and has been pleas'd to put the Hopes of Heaven amongst the very Conditions of obtaining it; because he knew this was so very necessary to carry us through the Difficulties and Temptations of the World.*


Isa. 26. 3.

Rom. 5. 2.

1 Pet. 1. 8.

Which brings me to the *Second* thing propos'd, namely, to consider, what the great Use and Necessity of our *Christian Hope* is, in the Course and Conduct of our religious Practice; 'tis an *Anchor of the Soul, both sure and stedfast.*

'Tis

'Tis call'd an Anchor of the Soul under a Fi- SERM. XIV.  
 gure indeed, but with the greatest Reason. 

*First*, In that it fixes and regulates our Desires, holding them close to their true and real Interest, and taking off our Minds from their extravagant Pursuits of worldly Vanities, which would either hinder or abate our Happiness. And this indeed a true *Christian Hope* does for us, by enabling our Minds to despise and overlook these things as fruitless and insignificant to our truest and last End.

*Secondly*, *Hope* is an *Anchor of our Soul*, in that it is a great Security to us against the Troubles and Afflictions of this World; because *Hope* looks beyond all these things, into a future State, and there discovers the proper Haven of our Rest and Peace and Happiness.

*Thirdly*, as the Consequence and Result from *both* the former, *Hope* keeps our Obedience firm and steady, by encouraging and enabling us to overcome those Temptations to Sin, that threaten and assault our Virtue.

These are the three great Advantages of a *Christian Hope*, in its Influence on our Religion; and these are the *Properties* of it, to which the Metaphor, under which *Hope* is here styl'd the *Anchor of our Soul*, seems to confine me.

And, *First*, *Hope* may be styl'd an *Anchor of the Soul*, in that it fixes and confines our Desires, holding them close to their true and real Happiness; and therein it lays the firmest Ground and Foundation for the Peace and Satisfaction of our Minds: Because it hereby prevents those many vexatious Defeats and  
 Disap-



SERM. XIV. Disappointments, which attend our Mistakes, in Matters of Good or Happiness, and which are the Issues of as misguided Choice.

Our Desires, unless directed aright, and moving upon the true Ground, which God intended should only be able to support them, become to us the real Instruments of Misery, and prove the busiest Tormentors that we have: Because they will ever be putting us forward upon fresh Attempts and Enterprizes in our Inquiry after Happiness; in which if we fail of succeeding, they will be sure to lash and sting our Minds for it. And indeed, 'tis impossible they should ever do otherwise, as long as we fluctuate amidst the Uncertainties and Vanities of this World, and look for our Happiness there, where 'tis impossible it should ever be found. So long as we do so, we must be always wavering and unsteady in the Purposes of our Mind, always chusing, and always refusing, and never full.

And hence 'tis, that Men, that live at random in their Desires, and that they have not the certain Compass of a future State by which they are to steer their Intention, are under a necessity of often shifting the Objects of their Happiness; if it be possible, by this Means, to elude the Force of that Desire within their Souls, which they find they cannot satisfy. Men turn from one Point to another, from Business to Diversion, and round again; and their whole Lives are nothing but a Scene of new Designs, and new Disappointments. But when Mens Desires once come to be determin'd towards God, and their real Happiness, *This is the rest where-*  
*with*

*with ye may cause the weary to rest, says God, by the Holy Prophet; Here all our Hopes and Expectations come to be center'd; and we find so full and entire a Satisfaction from these things, as will render our Enquiries useless any farther, and keep our stragling Thoughts and Affections at home within our own Breasts. And then all the other Pleasures and Enjoyments of our present State, will fall in, only as the Accessions to our main Happiness; but we shall in no wise look upon them as the proper Grounds and Supports of it. If we then find any Comfort from the World, we shall consider it as some part of that Portion which God has here given the Sons of Men, and we may rejoyce in it as the Effects and Issue of his Goodness and his Kindness towards us; but then we take care never to promise our selves much from hence, and we find we need not do so.*

For indeed the hopes of enjoying God and a future Glory are Thoughts so pregnant, and big with Comfort to the Minds of Men, that they in a manner drown and silence all other inferior Desires in our Nature. And howsoever other Temporal Affairs may go with us, *though the labour of the Olive should fail, and there should be no Fruit in the Vine, tho' the Voice of Temporal Joy and Gladness should be cut off within our Dwellings, yet our Minds can never droop and languish, whilst we have this Refuge and Security, that the Comforts of God are ready within us to support and to refresh our Souls.* And for a Man indeed, to have such a Reserve of Happiness and Peace amidst all the Toils and Tumults

SERM. XIV.




mults and Travels of human Affairs, in which the deeper we are engaged, the more of the *other* we shall certainly find, is an unspeakable Advantage to the Mind of Man; 'tis that only, which will make us undergo these things with Cheerfulness, and whatever the Success may prove, carry us out of them with Triumph and Satisfaction: For while our *Du-ty*, which is our main Design, goes on well and prosperously; and our Hopes of our exceeding great Reward, arising from the Conscience of our Obedience, are ever dwelling upon our Thoughts, all other things will appear little and inconsiderable to us; we shall neither court the Favour, nor fear the Terrors of the World: Which is another great Advantage of our Christian *Hope*, that it will,

*Secondly*, Be a firm Security to us against the Storms of Life, the Troubles and Afflictions of this World; because *Hope* looks beyond all these things into a *future* State, and there discovers the proper Haven of its Rest and Peace and Happiness. To be able to see through the Cloud, and to discern the *Angel* of Salvation standing behind it, will make us enter into it with Courage and Resolution: And those bright and joyous Reflections, that will attend our Passage through it, will take off from the gloominess and the uneasiness of the Way. He, that has his Eye in Heaven, fix'd upon the Blessed *Jesus*, the *bright* and *morning Star* of his Desires, may sing even while he passes through the *vale and shadow* of *Death*, and dare even to defie the *Powers* of *Darkness* to molest him, within their own Dominions. For,

Rev. 22. 16.

For, 'tis not the natural Weight and Pressure of Affliction it self, if we consider aright, that sits so heavy upon the Minds of Men, and sinks them so far below themselves; but they are our own Thoughts, our own sharp and cutting Reflections, that give our Miseries such advantage over us, as to make us sometimes think our Wound incurable, and our Grief without remedy. We seem to hug and embrace our own Sufferings, and add to their weight the strength of our own Arms, in pulling it closer upon us. But could we suspend our Attention, for a while, and call off our Thoughts from the pursuit of their own Misery, (And this cannot be done but by turning them to a brighter side, and by representing to them the mighty Prospect of our future Glory) we should then quickly find, that the very slighting our Troubles would break the Force of them; and they could not be so very importunate, when they were so much neglected. If we would take care to keep our Minds full with the hopes of Heaven, and, upon our Contemplation of *Jerusalem* above, resolve to set our Faces hard towards it, it would not then be possible for any cloud of Trouble to settle upon our Souls, and the Arrows of Affliction would glance off without wounding them.

'Tis certainly one of the most deplorable Cases, that our Nature in its present State can be reduc'd to, for a Man to be under great and actual Troubles in this World, and at the same time the Dread and Terror of worse to come. And tho' a Man does not fall

SERM. XIV.  fall under the Terrors of a future State, yet to be merely without comfortable Reflections on his Condition hereafter, at a time when Darkness and Sorrow are round about him, and he can see no end of them, is what must needs confound the Thoughts of the wisest Man amongst us, and reduce him to such Perplexity and Anguish, against which no Reason or *Philosophy* can relieve him.

For the Arguments, which both these offer him, are such only, as determine on this side the Grave; but when a Man thinks he has reason to loath and hate Life it self, as he may under the former Case, to what purpose is it to go about to use such Arguments to him, as proceed only upon the Supposition of his Desire and Love of Life. It must be the light of *God's* Countenance only, that can support a Man in such a Case as this. And those bright and surprizing Views of the Joys and Happiness above; and that real Conviction of an Interest in another World, which the *Good Spirit* of *God* will then open to the Minds of good Men, are such, as will not only give them Patience and Support under their present *Sufferings*, but enable them even to rejoice and triumph in the midst of them; in as much as they know that their

2 Cor, 4. 17. *light Affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory.*

We all are, or may be, convinc'd of the utter Vanity and Insufficiency of the World, and all the Comforts of it, to support a Man when he comes to stand in real need of them. Indeed, while the Mind is sound and vigorous,  
and,


and, by the firmness of its natural Complexion and Courage, is well enough able to support it self without these outward things, they may then seem to claim a greater Share in the Frame and Constitution of our Happiness, than ever they can really deserve; because we seldom take the pains at such times to consider how far exactly they go to make it up. But under a sad and disconsolate Spirit, then is the time for these things to do their Parts by us, if they can do any thing: And do they so indeed? Can they give ease to a *wounded Spirit*, or make up the Breaches of our Peace within? No, they cannot; All our Learning, our Reputation, our Wisdom, our Riches, our Honour, our Friends fail and sink under us, and we are left to look out for Comfort wheresoever else we can find it. And if then our Minds can give us any reasonable Assurance of God's Favour, and of the Glory laid up in Heaven for us, how must this revive and strengthen our Souls, convey a secret Vigour through our feeble Knees, distill an healing Balm upon our Spirits, and make our Faces shine in the midst of Despair! Without this, how advantageous soever the other Circumstances of our Condition may appear outwardly, though we seem to have all the Instruments of Happiness about us, yet will our Souls refuse to be comforted in these things; and in the midst of all this Plenty, *we shall be in want*. For when we thus *sink in the deep mire, and the waters come into our Soul*, then is the Season for God alone to interpose for our Assistance and Consolation; then the hopes of Heaven, and the delightful Prospect

SERM. XIV. *speck of that fulness of Joy at God's right hand*  
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 become an *anchor* to secure our Peace, amidst all the dashing Billows, and against the Violence of outward Afflictions. As our Hope will likewise, in the

*Third* place, Be the best Means to keep our Obedience firm and steady, by encouraging and enabling us to overcome those Temptations to *Sin*, that threaten and assault our *Virtue*.

And *this*, as I intimated, is a *Result* and Consequence from *both* the *former* Considerations: For if by an over-powering Sense of the Happiness of another World, and under lively Expectations of it, we have once gone so far, as to disarm the Pleasures and Glories of this World of their Charms, and the Evils and Afflictions of it of their Sting, what is there then that can prevail with us to leave our *Duty*, and to sin against God?

When we commit *Sin*, we do it with the proposal of some Temporal Interest, or to avoid some outward Suffering; But now, upon this Ground and Supposition, that we have laid up all our Interest in Heaven, and directed our Hearts and Expectations thither, these temporary Goods and Evils appear to us inconsiderable and empty; less than Nothing and Vanity. And our Minds will come to be so vigorously drawn in time by the attractive Powers of a future State, that there will be hardly room for any other Desire, in any considerable degree, within our Hearts. And we shall have so learnt to live upon the Reversion of future *Glories*, as to make a due respect to *these*, the Rule and Measure of our Actions; so as almost quite to overlook what

is present, any farther, than is necessary for SERM. XIV.  
our more convenient Support, and needful   
Comfort, in our Passage to the other World.


Besides, by sinning against *God*, we are sensible that we interrupt the gracious Intercourse between Heaven and our Souls, and break off the Chain of Communication, in which Life and Joy descend upon our Minds from thence, and in which our Hopes ascend thither; and this will be an ungrateful, harsh Reflection to us, and therefore a most powerful Restraint upon us from Evil; and a firm Guard and Security to our Perseverance.

I have thus shewn in what sense *Hope* is here styl'd by the *Apostle* the *Anchor of our Souls*; and how justly it answers the Metaphor, in three general Instances of it.

I come now to consider, *Thirdly*, wherein lies the peculiar Eminence and Excellency of our Christian *Hope*, both upon the account of the glorious End and Object it aims at and pursues, and of those degrees of Evidence under which it thus pursues it: Which was the *last* thing to be spoken to, and which I take to be imply'd in these words of the *Apostle*; and which entreteth into that within the *vail*.

Which Expressions intimate to us not only the mighty Privilege of our *Christian Hope*, in that it points out to us the most glorious Object, infinitely transcending what any other Religion could propose; But these words likewise plainly imply the particular Way and Manner in which our Minds are employ'd about this glorious Object; That, as the Rewards themselves laid up in Heaven for us



SERM. XIV.  are really the greatest and noblest that human Nature is capable of; so our *Hopes* of them, even while we are in this World, *enter in within the veil*; take a Survey and View of them, make them present and actual to our Thoughts; and by a strong and peremptory Presumption of their Futurity, even antedate our Happiness hereafter, in the Joy and Rapture of those devout Contemplations, under which we behold it at the present.

I shall speak to these *things* distinctly, because they are indeed different Considerations; and shall shew, in the *First* place, the Nobleness and Excellency of our *Christian Hope*, from that transcendent difference there is between those things, which the Hope of a Christian proposes, as the Motives to his Obedience, and what any other Religion in the World could ever pretend to. To prove this Point, the *Apostle* instances particularly in the Religion of the *Jews*, which was, before *Christianity*, the most excellent of any other, and establish'd upon *Divine* Authority. And yet the great Imperfection of it appears in *this*, that it left that People under such confus'd and obscure Apprehensions of a future State, and of the Nature of it: By which means they were left without that *veil*, which we now enter, and by doing so are admitted to understand those Mysteries, which they must not have look'd upon.

There is no Question, but there were admirable Truths imply'd and couch'd under the *Levitical* Symbols, and this of Life *Eternal* more especially. But as long as these things lay thus retir'd from the way of common Appre-

pre-

prehension, 'twas impossible they should in any considerable Measure influence the Hopes and Practices of Men. For whatever Light might sit upon the Face of *Moses*, yet we know there *was a veil over it*; and we are sure, *the Children of Israel could not look to the end of that which is now abolish'd*. For the way, within the veil, to the Holy of Holies, was not yet made manifest, while the first Tabernacle was yet standing; the Holy Ghost this signifying, that the Veil was not to be rent asunder, nor the Mysteries within display'd and laid open, but only at the Death, and by vertue of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

But now, through a new and living way which he has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say his Flesh, and having an High Priest over the House of God, we draw near with a true heart in full assurance of Hope, and have the boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus.

What an infinite Privilege is this? Without which *Moses* was under a necessity of leaving his Followers, and who, as he must not bring them into an Earthly *Canaan*, so neither could he give them any great and evident Security of a better Country. To pass within a Veil, implies a Happiness too big for our present Apprehension. 'Tis to be admitted to such Degrees of Joy and Bliss, as, in this feeble Condition of our Nature, we cannot understand; and which, till we are even exalted above our selves, we shall not be able to bear! To dwell in the Temple of God for ever, and to approach the Tabernacle which the Lord has pitch'd, and not Man! To follow the


SERM. XIV. *Lamb whithersoever he goeth, to be with him, and to behold his Glory, and to partake of it! To come to mount Zion, the city of the living God, the new Jerusalem, to the assembly of the First-born, to an innumerable company of Angels, and to the Spirits of just men made perfect! Where all the Beauties of God's Nature shall be unvail'd, and the dark and mysterious Paths of his Providence shall be resolv'd! Where perfect Knowledge and perfect Love shall combine to make us happy for ever, beyond all our Conceptions, and beyond all our Desires! And where Joy and Peace shall rule in every Capacity of our Nature!*

Heb. 12. 22,  
23.

If any thing surely can allure our Hopes, or affect our Desires, these things must do it; And God design'd they should do so, and therefore propos'd them as the strongest Engagements of our *Hope*, and the most powerful Incitements of our *Duty*.

And indeed without these things, what is the Life of Man? or what worthy End can it propose to it self? Without these things, what should make us desire the Continuance of our Being any longer, or engage us to be thankful that ever we had it? Without these things, the Springs of our Nature would fail and slacken; because there would be nothing to engage them, and the Vigour and Activity of our Minds would sink away, for want of something to bear up the Weight and Stress of our Desires.

And yet as great and glorious as these Instances of our Happiness are, which I have mention'd, they were once perfectly unknown, and not so much as suspected by the *Nations*  
of

of the World; And if the Kindness of God SREM XIV  
*our Saviour had not appeared, and brought Life*   
*and Immortality to light by the Gospel, neither* Tit. 3. 4.  
 they, nor we, had ever heard of them. Till  
 that time Ignorance over-spread the whole  
 Earth, like Darkness upon the Face of the  
 primitive Deep, and Mankind was left with-  
 out *Hope*, and *without a God in the World*;  
 Deliver'd over to the blind and uncertain  
 Guesses of deprav'd natural Reason, and with-  
 out any sure and infallible Direction to the  
 main and ultimate End of their Life and Be-  
 ing. But let us learn to measure and value  
 the Greatness of our own Happiness, so much  
 the more, by their wants of it; and endea-  
 vour to enliven our *Hopes*, and quicken our  
 Desires of so great a Bliss, in proportion to  
 these larger Discoveries God has given us of  
 another State.

And this leads me to the *Last Particular*  
 under this Head, which is the only thing, that  
 yet remains to be consider'd. And 'tis *this*,  
 the peculiar Excellency of our *Christian Hope*,  
 from the greater degrees of Evidence and Af-  
 surance, under which it pursues this glorious  
 Object; of which degrees the *Apostle* im-  
 plies 'tis capable, when he tells us, that it  
*enters in within the vail.*

And this Evidence of our *Christian Hope* a-  
 rises, not only from the general Ground and  
 Foundation, on which 'tis built, the Truth  
 and Promises of God in *Holy Scripture*; but  
 more particularly from the Testimony of our  
 own private Conscience pronouncing upon  
 the Sincerity of our Faith and Obedience:  
 Which Testimony within us is wrought by

SERM. XIV. the secret Operation of God's *Holy Spirit*, which beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the Children of God.  
*Rom. 6. 8.*

For our Hopes of future Glory, when they are regular and well grounded, arise always in proportion to the Evidence of our Sincerity; and when our Zeal abates, and our Care and Watch upon our Duty grow remis and slack, our Hopes themselves must likewise fail and sink together.

But when a Man, by a frequent Victory over his Temptations, and a constant and regular course of Piety and Devotion, comes to have such a Conviction of his own Sincerity, that it leaves no room upon his Spirit for his Doubt and Suspicion of it, so that he can even venture to appeal to *God* himself for the Truth and Uprightness of his Heart, and in an humble Confidence say with *Holy David*, *Search me, O God, and try me*; 'Tis then his hopes of Life and Glory grow up forcibly within him; and break in upon his Mind with such an irresistible Light and Conviction of his Share and Interest in *God's* Love and Favour towards him, that he seems almost to enter upon the present Possession of Happiness. He now looks upon Discourses of another World, and the Glories of the Blessed, no longer as things at a Distance, in which he is unconcern'd, but, by a Resolution and Peremptory Act of lively *Hope*, he enters even now within the vail, and is curious to survey the least Particular of that Felicity, which shall shortly be his Portion.

I would

I would not here be understood to say, that no Man can be within the Terms of *Grace*, and a Capacity of Salvation, but he that is arriv'd at such a firm Assurance of it: For it is certain there are different degrees of *Hope* as well as *Faith*; and God only knows, what little Portions of either he may accept, as the indispensable Condition of Life, and the exact Boundary on this side Death; who will not, as he tells us himself, *break the bruised Reed*, nor *quench the smoking Flax*. Matt. 12. 20. But so far we may be certain, that if we ourselves would receive any great Comfort from our Religion, if we would make *our Calling* 2 Pet. 1. 10. *and Election sure*, we must aim at greater things, and endeavour after Perfection in our Piety; and then our Hopes and Expectations of the Rewards of it will be lively and effectual.

This indeed is our *Duty*, and 'tis no more than what has been the *Practice* of some brave and generous Souls, over whom the Flatteries and Terrors of *this World* have had no Power, in that they were so entirely overborn by the prevailing Sense and Conviction of the *glory to be reveal'd*. 1 Pet. 5. 4.

And *this* might be the Perfection of every one of us, if we would act up to the Measures of our Christian Religion, and according to the full Direction of our most Holy *Faith*. But we are not to think 'tis a Work to be done at once, for a Man to arrive at such a firm Evidence of his Interest in God's Favour: No, it is a Business of Time and Industry; It requires greater Resolution and Fervour in our Duty, greater Frequency in our Prayers,

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more perfect Purity in our Hearts, more Sincerity of Intention, and Abstraction of Soul from the Lusts and Pollutions of the World, than what the generality of Men, if we may guess by their Manners, seem to be aware of.

But, *may the God of Hope and Consolation make us all to abound in Hope, through the Power of the Holy Ghost, that having this hope we may purifie our selves as he is pure; and may at last obtain the end of our Hopes, the salvation of our immortal Souls.*

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*The Nature of Christian Forgiveness of Injuries, and by what Rules we may try our Practice of it.*

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A

## S E R M O N

Preach'd before the

University on St. Andrew's Day,

*Thursday, November 30, 1794.*


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 L U K E. VI. 37.
*Forgive*—————

**T**HAT our *Blessed Saviour* should lay so very great a Weight and Stress upon the Duty of *Christian Forgiveness*, and that he should enforce it upon no less than the highest Sanctions, as he plainly appears to do throughout the *Gospel*, we cannot think it strange, when we consider what Opposition was like to be made to it from the Lusts and Prejudices of the *World*. For which Reason, it was no more than necessary, that he should allure  
Mens



SERM. XV.



Mens Obedience to it by the greatest *Mercies*, and guard against the Breach and Violation of it, by the severest *Terrors* of the *Gospel*; that he should enjoin it upon Reasons of absolute Necessity, and with an Authority strong enough to prevail against all Objections, and to over-balance all the contrary Tendency of corrupt Nature, of Opinion, and Custom.

How far human Reason and Philosophy could, or did prevail, in this particular Instance of Duty, either to discover the Nature of it, or to infer the Necessity of its Obligation, we may be very well convinc'd from the Accounts which the wisest of the ancient *Philosophers* have given us concerning it. Some amongst them we find there are that fairly and openly declare against it, as either a Vice in *Morals*, or an Imperfection in Nature; and that not to revenge an Injury, when within a Man's Power to do so, argued a tame and degenerate Spirit, a Mind sunk and fallen from its native Height and Resolution, and unfit to engage in great and generous Designs.

And though we can't say this was the Opinion of every one of them, or indeed the standing and regular Declaration of the very same Person, upon all, and different Occasions, at one time speaking to the popular Judgments of Men, and at another disputing more closely to Reason and Nature in Retirement; yet even those wise Men amongst them, that had gone farthest in their Inquiries and Resolutions of this Nature, even so far, as to conclude *forgiveness of injuries a*  
*kind*

*kind* of Duty, and fit for some Reasons to be observ'd, even *these* very Men themselves give in such lame and imperfect Descriptions of its Nature, and go about to establish its Observance upon such weak and slippery Foundations, with so little Zeal and Concern, whether Men practis'd it or not, as sufficiently shews us they were not themselves satisfy'd with the Result of their own Reasonings; and therefore distrusted the Force of their Arguments upon the Minds of other Men. SERM. XV.

And if we look into the *Mosaick* Law, which was indeed an Elevation of Nature, as it then stood corrupted, to a Pitch above its own; yet we shall not find the Case much better; *this* too so far consulted the Weakness of Nature, as not too strain too high above it, and made very great Condescensions to the Corruptions and Infirmities of Men: Which, as it appears, were not able at that time to comport with *Duties* of so very high and spiritual a Perfection, as *this* was. For indeed, the State of Men in those Days would not admit of it, because of the *hardness of their hearts*; that is, upon the account of that Indisposition to obey, which they lay under from their own Corruptions.

And therefore we see the Obligation of the present Duty rather insinuated in the Books of *Moses*, than clearly and openly asserted; we find it deliver'd with so much Obscurity, propos'd under so great Uncertainty, and so extreamly weaken'd by large Concessions from the Strictness and Letter of it, as we are sure left room for so very wrong and fatal a Construction, as did indeed entirely

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SERM. XV.




Mat. 5. 43.

ly undermine, and overthrow the very Nature of the *Duty*. Thou shalt love thy Neighbour, and hate thy Enemy, was, it seems, a Principle amongst that People, that could plead the Authority of ancient Days, and the Prescription of Ages: Which so very gross Corruption yet could never have prevail'd so far, under so thorow an Acquaintance with the Law, as we must suppose amongst that People, from the frequent Repetition of it in their Ears, if there had not been some Countenance, at least some Occasion, given for it, from Liberties in this Point allow'd, and even authoriz'd in the; Body of the *Law* it self.

So very necessary was it that our *Blessed Saviour* should build and settle this *Duty*, upon other Foundations besides those of Nature; that he should fill up the Measures of *Moses's* his Law, where it was defective in this Case; that he should enlighten it where it proved obscure, and strengthen it where it stood in need of a Support; and this *latter* he very plainly does in my Text, and the Words that immediate follow it, where he commands us to *forgive*, and inforces his Injunction with this strong Reason; because our own Forgiveness with God his Father depends upon our right Performance of it. *Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*

I propose to insist no farther at present than upon the Command it self, as being a Subject large enough for the Compass of a single Discourse; and in treating on it, I shall endeavour these *three* things.

*First,*

*First*, I shall enquire whether Revenge or a Return of Injuries, the opposite Quality and Practice to *Forgiveness*, has any true Foundation in natural Reason. SERM. XV. 

*Secondly*, I shall proceed to explain at large the Nature of *Forgiveness*, as it stands a Duty of the *Christian* Religion; and take some Care to prevent, or remove, the most common and dangerous Mistakes of Men about it.

And, *Thirdly*, I shall lay down some Rules for our better Direction, that we may not impose upon our selves in the Practice of this Duty, by vainly imagining we perform it, when indeed we do not.

And, *First*, I am to enquire, in a few Words, whether Revenge, or a Return of Injuries, the opposite Quality and Practice to *Forgiveness*, has any true Foundation in natural Reason. 'Tis certain that by the Doctrine of the *Gospel* no Return of Injuries whatsoever can be lawful, as I shall prove hereafter. When Men therefore plead, in any Sense, for the Lawfulness of Revenge, as we know they will sometimes very *warmly* do, they must proceed upon this Ground and Supposition, that Revenge was ever, and is still a *Right of Nature*; tho' it be indeed bound up and restrain'd by the Laws of *Christianity*. And that therefore we are properly said to *forgive*, because we recede from some natural Right of our own, which we might otherwise take, out of Obedience to the Precepts of the *Gospel*. But this I shall shew is a vain Allegation; and however it may and has been often urg'd, that there cannot be any real Pretence, or true ground of Reason to suppose it. To

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To prove this, I shall not run back Nature, and *strip* it into such a *wild and imaginary State*, as some in their *idle Hypothesis* have fram'd of it. For we may make better and truer Discoveries of what Rights are really natural, by considering Nature as it always *was*, and ever *will* be (and not what we may fancy it) invested with those Properties, and endued with those Inclinations, which were given it by the great *Creator*, for Ends and Purposes, which it ever did, and ever will propose to it self. If then it appear, that private *Revenge*, in the necessary Consequence of it, contradicts a true natural Original Inclination, I hope, it may be allow'd not to be natural it self; because true Nature contains no contrary Principles in it, and is never at Odds and Variance with it self.

But now, if an Inclination to *Society* be truly a natural one, rooted in us from the very Frame of our Being, as it has been always own'd to be, then 'tis certain that private *Revenge* cannot be a Right of Original Nature, because it is fundamentally inconsistent with *Society*. For no *Society* can subsist without Government, in which there must be, of necessity, a Subordination of Inferiors to a superior Power; and there can be no such Subordination as this, where every one has an equal Right in that which is the chief *Subject Matter* of Government; as the Reparation of Injuries, and Distribution of Punishments, in Proportion to the Offences of Men against each other, must be acknowledg'd to be. But now, private *Revenge* violently assumes this Power to it self, out of the

the Hands of Government, and by it, every Man takes upon himself to be a Judge of his own Injuries, without any Deference or Respect to a Superior; so that Government is here plainly superseded by it, in the chief Business of its Institution and Employment, and disappointed of the main End for which it was design'd; and consequently must dissolve, there being no farther Use of it, or Business for it. From whence it clearly follows, that if a Desire of Society be a natural Inclination, that then private Revenge can have no true Foundation in Nature, any more than it has in *Christianity*.

'Twas necessary for me thus to consider this Point a little, in order to remove an ill-natur'd Prejudice, that would certainly lye at the Bottom of Mens Hearts against this Duty, if private *Revenge* should be thought to have any true Spring and Original in *Nature*: For as long as we believe true Nature, as such, to be under so violent a Bent and Inclination as *Revenge* imports, we must necessarily look upon that Duty of *Religion*, which lays such a firm Restraint upon it, as a Cramp and Encroachment upon our natural Liberty, such as comes to ravish Nature from its Original Course and Tendency, and goes about to subvert the very fundamental Principles of our Being.

'Tis true indeed, by the Corruption of Times and Opinions, Men for a long time lay under almost a total Neglect, and Violation of this great *Duty of Religion*; and the *times of this ignorance God was pleased to wink at*, and to suffer the *Nations* of the World

*Acts 17. 30.*

to

**SERM. XV.** to go on in their own Ways, how wrong soever. But though *God* thought fit to pass by the frequent Transgressions of a natural and necessary *Duty*, in Mercy to the Infirmities of Men, this I hope does not prove it to be no *Duty* at all, or indeed to be ever the less so: And yet *none* in those Ages it must necessarily have been, if Revenge had been naturally lawful. For it could have been no Man's *Duty* to forgive, if every Man had a natural Right to punish.

*Christianity* therefore turns us out of no Right or Privilege in this Case, which we ever had before; and when it commands us with so great Authority, and upon such high Penalties to *forgive*, this is no more, than what Men ought always to have done, howsoever they might erroneously conceive themselves to be left under a greater Liberty. *Forgiveness* is therefore indeed an old *Commandment*, a Law of natural Religion, establish'd upon necessary and immutable Reasons, upon Reasons of *God's* Government of the World, and Man's *Duty* of Subjection and Obedience to him. But then, 'tis again a *new Commandment*, in that our *Blessed Lord*, by the clearer Revelations of the *Gospel*, has more fully brought to light the Nature, and Extent, and Obligation of it, has explain'd it to far greater Advantage, and has enjoin'd it upon Reasons and Motives peculiar to *himself*, and his Religion.

I shall therefore now, in the *Second* place, proceed to explain this *Duty* at large, as it stands a *Duty* of *Christianity*; and take some Care to prevent or remove the most common  
and

and dangerous Mistakes about it. And the Nature of it may very well be comprehended under *three* Particulars, in regard to the several Offices it performs upon us. SERM. XV.

*First*, As it commands us to overcome our inward Passion and Resentments, and to quench and suppress all Inclinations and Desires of *Revenge* within our own Hearts.

*Secondly*, As it restrains our outward Actions, and forbids any Manner of injurious Return whatever in our Practice.

*Thirdly*, As it infers the Recovery of a perfect Good-will, and Kindness to the injurious Person, and implies a Readiness to do him all Offices of Humanity and *Christian Charity*.

And *First* we may consider this *Duty of Christian Forgiveness*, as it commands us to overcome our inward Passions and Resentments, and to quench and suppress all Inclinations and Desires of *Revenge* within us. And *herein* it comes to differ from the Grace and Virtue of *Meekness*, that whereas 'tis the peculiar Office of that *Grace*, to regulate our Anger in its Rise and Motion, either entirely suppressing it, or prescribing Laws to its Progress, and confining it within the Bounds of Reason and *Religion*; so when it *has* once moved and acted within due Compass, which surely it *may* do without any Offence, or Breach of Duty, then comes in the part of *Christian Forgiveness*, to take down the Passion, to cool the Resentment, and to restore the Mind to its natural and easie Posture. If *Meekness* therefore do not first set the Measures to our *Anger*, it must prove irregular as to its Origin or Degree; and if *Forgiveness*

E e does



SERM. XV. does not in due time flake and remove it, it becomes inordinate and sinful in its Duration. The Virtue of *Meekness* therefore must over-rule it in its *Rise* and *Progress*, and that of *Forgiveness* must fix the Bounds to its *Continuance*.

Now this *First* Part of the *Duty* is transacted intirely within a Man's self, and the Influence of it, is immediately confin'd to his Will and Affections, and respects not the outward Behaviour, any further, than as *that* derives from those inward Springs and Principles of Action.

And indeed, here 'tis that the *Laws* of *Christianity* begin, and have their chiefest Aim, to rule and regulate the inward Motions of the *Heart*, to restore and set *that* right in the first Place; for if *that* be rotten and vicious, a Man's Life is poison'd in the very Fountain of it, and all the Streams and Issues that flow from thence, must carry the same Taint and Corruption along with them.

But more especially as to the present Case; if any angry and revengeful Temper prevail within us, it hurries off the Soul from its religious Obedience, and carries all the Powers of it into a preternatural and violent Course; utterly indisposing a Man for those Acts of *Devotion* and *Charity*, in which the very Life of a *Christian* does consist: And therefore it is impossible to reconcile it with any tolerable Obedience here, or Hopes of Happiness hereafter.

Upon which Account it is that when our *Blessed Saviour* points out the great Lines of a *Christian Temper* for our Imitation, he proposes

poses a meek and humble Habit of Mind, as the chiefest Instance in which we must resolve to follow him, if we intend ever to be like him either in Holiness or Happiness. *Learn of me, says he, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your Souls.* But now a rancorous and revengeful Constitution of Mind is the most directly opposite to *this* that can be; and involves such a Complication of ill Qualities in it, such a Mixture of Pride and irregular Self-love, and a thousand other black Consequences, into which those two pregnant *Sins* diffuse themselves, that 'tis one of the severest and most dangerous Enemies, we have to contest with in our whole *Christian Warfare*. And 'tis certain, if this Temper be not broken, 'twill be impossible we should ever bow our Necks to the Yoke of Christ. *Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted that are far from righteousness,* says God, by the *Prophet*; implying the wide Distance this Sin will always make between him and us; and so for ever block up all Approaches to our Happiness.

But here, perhaps some Men will object; What? are we not allow'd then to be angry for the Affronts and Injuries we receive from Men? Has God put such a strong Passion into our Nature, only to rack and torture us in a violent Restraint and Confinement of it? No, he has not; and 'tis sure we may be lawfully angry, within the Limits that he himself has set us. And it must be consider'd, that it is not against *Anger* it self, in its own Nature, that I am now pleading; but against the *Inordinacy* and *Irregularity*

SERM. XV.



Ephes. 4. 26.

of it, in point of time; when it passes the due Period he has determin'd for it, and from a Transport of Passion grows into the settled State and Habit of the Soul: When it once comes to this, 'tis exorbitant and sinful; and howsoever we may complain of the Violence of the Passion, that will be no Excuse for its Extravagance. *Be angry*, says the *Apostle*, and *sin not*, *let not the Sun go down upon your wrath*; from whence 'tis plain, that all *Anger* is not a *Sin* in its Nature, but if it hold us too long, it becomes *so* by its Duration.

But are not the Tempers and Complexions of Men, you will say, very different, and consequently the Passions and Resentments that arise from thence? Can every Man command his *Anger down* with the *Sun*, and overcome the Turbulency and Hurry of his Passion, within the same Compass of a few Hours, that *one* perhaps may? If not, how then can the *Apostle's* Precept in *these* Words be a Rule to *all* Men, any more than the same Proportion of Habit will fit *all* Statures?

To this it may be answer'd, That we must indeed allow the Frame and Complexions of Men to be very different from each other, and to give a quite different turn, and ply to their Passions; and therefore what the *Apostle* intended in general by this Rule, was *this*, that it is our Duty not to cherish at *least*, or indulge our *Anger* beyond that Period, that we should overcome and subdue it sooner than that if possible; but however, in such a Proportion of time, we should be actually striving against it, in contention with it, and in some fair Tendency to a Victory over it:

That

That we should not, for a longer Space, let SREM XV. harsh and angry Reflections pass up and down with our Soul regardlessly; but choke and stifle them, as fast as we apprehend them, and begin to gather in the *Reins* of our Passion in due time, and not let it run loose and without controul, 'till it hurry us into unlawful Practices. And *this* surely, is equally in every Man's Power to do, be his Complexion what it will, to set himself thus early to oppose, and struggle against his own Resentments, tho' it may *not* be entirely to subdue them. If we cannot quite overcome, and stop the irregular Motions of our *Anger* presently, yet we may chuse whether we will give them our Allowance; we may disapprove and condemn them in our Thoughts, tho' we cannot presently get the perfect Mastery and Dominion over them. And if we will only do so much as *this*, we are in a fair way at *least* to be heal'd of our distemper'd Passion; and if we do not remit our Care, but still pursue our Contest with it, by the Grace of God and his Blessing on our Endeavours, we shall in a little while become more *than Conquerors over it*,

'Tis true indeed, there will be some Difference, in Point of Time, as to this Effect of subduing our Passion, arising, as I said before, from Mens different Humours and Constitutions. Some Mens Passions, for Instance, are pliable and easie, quickly turn'd, and set right again, and so the Resentment goes off with little, or no Reluctance. In others the Passions are more stiff and inflexible, and

SERM. V. *this* too from natural Causes and Complexion: And *here*, because there is more Resistance made, there will be the greater Difficulty to overcome. The *former* sort are in Reason and Conscience bound to a more immediate and speedy Reconciliation, because they are better capable of it: But in the *latter*, Reason and Time must work together, 'till the Passion comes to yield by degrees, and then breaks away it self. And because this State of Mind will not admit to have Arguments *thrust* upon it, they must therefore be gently and leisurely *insinuated*. The Sum of what I have said on this Point is *this*, that *all* Men are indispensably bound, by the Laws of *Christ*, to compose their Passions, and to forgive the Offences of others, within a very little time after they have suffered by them; and every particular Person must do it as soon as he can, as fast as his *Temper* and *Circumstances* will admit of.

But is there then no Distinction to be made here in point of Time, in regard to the Size and Quality of the Injuries that are done us? Are we not allow'd to maintain and keep up our Resentments for a greater Injury, longer than we may for a less? To which I answer, that we are allow'd indeed to be *more* angry for a greater Injury, but not *longer* so. As for the Degree and Measure of our Anger, when all other Circumstances will suffer it, we may proportion it to the Quality and Greatness of the Offence; but there is no Difference to be taken from thence as to the Duration of it. The *Apostle's* Rule is general, and without Reserve, *Let not the Sun*

go down upon your wrath; no Exception made in the Rule, whether the Injury be less or greater, and therefore we must not make any in our *Life and Practice*. SERM. XV.

And indeed to what purpose in Reason, and why, so much to our Disquiet, should we desire or be allow'd to keep up our Passion and Resentments longer, than till we can well remove them? For after all, let us cherish our Anger never so long, 'tis certain we are deny'd to execute it in any *revengeful* act at last; that by the Rules of *Christianity* being entirely forbidden us. And if we are not permitted to act our *Revenge* at all, why should we be fond of keeping up an impetuous, hungry, violent Desire within us, of that which is *totally* forbidden us under the severest Penalties. Now the \* *Great Philosopher* assures us, that all *Anger*, even in the very Nature of it, is attended with a present Desire of some *Revenge*. As long therefore, as we retain our *Anger*, and yet must not commit *Revenge*, we keep alive a *Vulture* within our Breasts, which we must *never* satisfy, and which will *therefore* only prey upon our own *Vitals*.

I have thus far consider'd this *Duty of Forgiveness*, as it respects only the *Inward State and Disposition* of our Mind.

I shall now go on to speak of it under the *Second Notion*, as it lays a Restraint upon our *Outward Actions*, and forbids us any manner of *Injurious Return whatever* in our Practice. For so far 'tis certain we are bound, by the

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\* *Aristot, Rhetor. lib. 2. cap. de ira.*

general Tenour of the Gospel, and the particular Nature of this *Duty*, to do nothing out of a Principle of *Revenge*, that is, out of a Design of Hurt or Prejudice to our *Neighbour*, by way of Retaliation for any Evil or Inconvenience we may our selves have suffer'd at his Hands; In whatsoever Interest it be that we have suffer'd, though under the extremest Provocations, and the highest degree of Malice and Contempt.

This, perhaps, Men will say is a very severe *Commandment*, if it be so, and grates too harshly upon Flesh and Blood; 'Tis a hard saying, who can bear it? It may be so, but for all that 'tis true, and our *Duty*; 'tis the Doctrine of our *Lord and Saviour*, and what he practis'd himself; and dare we be offended at it? Men may possibly object against it indeed, and their Practice may give us too much Reason to think, they believe their own Objections; but this must be no Prejudice against an express Law of *Christ*, a clear *Duty* of the *Gospel*. And that *what* I am speaking of is *such*, and under this Explication of it, which I have given, we have as full and express Authority of *Christ* and his *Apostles* for it, as we have for any thing. *Resist not evil*, says our *Blessed Lord*; *Bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you. Render not evil for evil, nor railing for railing, but contrariwise, Blessing*, says the *Apostle*; besides many other Passages to the same effect, which I need not here repeat; *all* which very plainly and openly prohibit a Man any manner of revengeful Return whatever, tho' under the forest Provocations.

Matth. 5. 32,  
44.

1 Pet. 3. 9.

cations. And the reason why they do so, is as S E R M. XV clear; because *Vengeance* is a Right that God  *Almighty* has reserv'd only to himself; and therefore if we dare assume it, we invade his Propriety. *Dearly beloved, avenge not your selves, but rather give place unto Wrath, for Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.* Rom. 12. 19.

In many cases indeed we are allow'd to *repair* and *redress* an Injury, but in no case must we return any; that is, we are permitted often to seek our own Good, but not to design the Evil of our Neighbour at any time; and we may very well and easily do the *former* of these, without the *latter*. For the formal Reason of an Injury lies in *this*, in the ill Design a Man conceives to hurt his Brother by any *outward* Action; but he that intends merely to right or defend himself, if the Cause be weighty enough, may do *so* very lawfully, and without being really Injurious to any one.

'Tis true indeed, another Man's great Inconvenience, and perhaps his Ruin, may follow upon my Reparation of the Damage I suffer by him; but upon a Supposition, that the Loss and Mischief, I must otherwise lie under, if I do not maintain and recover my Right, be very considerable, though the Ruin of my Adversary follow, 'tis not my Fault, because 'twas not in my Design, and I would have chosen to have secur'd myself, if possible, without the Trouble of my Neighbour. So that tho' the Evils my Adversary suffers be indeed the Consequence of my Action, yet they do not come under the Nature and Notion





tion of an Injury from me, because they were not so intended.

If the Damage indeed and Inconvenience, my Neighbour receives by my Action, done in pursuance of my Right, do very much overbalance the Advantage I can probably receive by the Reparation, *Christian Charity* would in this case, that if it be a Matter properly within a Man's own Power, I should bear with the Injury, rather than seek to right my self, so much to another's Prejudice.

But then, as I said, it must be in a Matter properly within a Man's own Power. For sometimes, whatsoever another Person may suffer by it, it may not be Lawful for a Man to recede from the least Right under his Protection, to prevent that Other's greatest Damage; and that which it is not lawful for a Man to do, in the Eye of the *Civil Law*, is not properly within his Power.

And *thus* 'tis in the case, where a Man is entrusted with the Rights of another under his Care; though the matter of Right it self, which lies in Debate, should prove very little, in comparison with what the Adversary, against whom 'tis maintain'd, or from whom the Satisfaction is demanded, may suffer by that Maintenance or Demand; yet let it be what it will, he must look to the Consequence. I must not falsify my Trust, that my unjust Adversary may not suffer. And thus, in this Case, it becomes Justice in me to Vindicate, what otherwise, if 'twere within my own Disposal, would be Mercy and Charity in me to *Forgive*. And thus, you see, how well, to all reasonable Purposes, an Injury

jury may very safely and innocently be re-<sup>SERM. XV,</sup> pair'd, and none ought ever to be in the least return'd.

And if this Point were well consider'd, we should find room enough to right ourselves, without being really Injurious to our Neighbour. And *where* Reason or Religion would allow a Man at any time to seek his Remedy, *there* he might have it without a Violation of his *Charity*; and in *other* Cases, if he will act like a good *Christian*, he must be content to forgive without one.

If *this* were rightly observ'd in our *Law-suits*, and our Appeals about our Right to a determining Power, we should have a great deal more of Religion, and much less Quarrelling in the World. For in all these Cases we are not allow'd by the Laws of our *Religion* to do any thing out of an Intendment of Trouble and Vexation to our Neighbour, we are to act only for our own Defence and Vindication. And if it were not so, that we could refer our Differences to the Law without an Infringement of our *Christian Charity*, 'tis certain the *Law* would be *good* for nothing; because a *Man* could never *use it* lawfully. But *this* is not yet a perfect Notion of a *Christian's* Forgiveness, merely to do no Injury to his Neighbour: For,

*Thirdly*, A True *Christian* Forgiveness infers a perfect Good-will and Kindness to the Injurious Person, and a Readiness to do him all the Offices of Humanity and *Christian Charity*.

Not that, I think, the bare and strict Notion of *Forgiveness* in general, implies so much



as *this*, but a *Christian* Forgiveness necessarily supposes it, as a true and genuine Consequence of it self, if it be sincere and real. For, because *Forgiveness* in general imports a Restoration of a Man to the same State and Disposition of Mind towards his Enemy, that he was in before the Injury, therefore a true *Christian* Forgiveness comes by Accident to have so close and inseparable a Connexion with Good-will and Charity; Because *this* is, or ought to be, the constant and standing Temper of our Minds towards every *Christian* whatsoever. Unless therefore a Man by his *Forgiveness* be restor'd to this Temper towards his Enemy, his *Forgiveness* cannot be real; because it does not return him to what, by the Laws of his Duty, he was suppos'd to have been before, that is, under a perfect Disposition of *Christian* Charity. So that, tho' the Notion of Kindness and Good-will, do not enter into the very Nature and Constitution of *Forgiveness*, they must however always attend it, in order to prove its Sincerity; and where we can say the *former* are not, we are sure the *latter* can't be.

And from hence I come to the *Third* and *Last* thing propos'd, which was to lay down some Rules for our better Direction, that we may not impose upon our selves in the Practice of this *Duty*, by vainly imagining we perform it, when indeed we do not.

Now the Rules that I shall mention upon this Occasion are *Negative*, and they are these *Two* that follow.

*First* then, It is certain we do not forgive our Enemy as we ought, from our Hearts and  
 inmost

inmost Affections, howsoever we make a shift SERM. XV. to smother and conceal our *Anger* for the present; if, when Time and Opportunity shall serve us upon him, our Resentment then return, and we any way express it to his Hurt or Dis-interest. For 'tis our *Duty* to kill, and not only to defer our *Revenge*, not to exchange the time for it, but entirely to root it up. 'Tis possible enough there may be an *outward appearing* Reconciliation between us and our Enemy, and we may not easily distrust it our selves at first, till by the Fruits we find the Insincerity and Rottenness of it; but if, under this State, when every thing shall seem fair and open between us and our Enemy, we shall yet close in with an Opportunity that is offer'd us of *smiting him secretly*, of taking away his good Name, or hurting him in any other of his Interests, tho' it may be, less dear to him than that; if we shall do this, and be pleas'd at the return of such Opportunities; Notwithstanding that we carry a fair Face towards him, does not *this* plainly betray a secret Disaffection to him still remaining in us? Does it not shew that the Wound was never perfectly heal'd, but only skinn'd over? and that the fiery *Coals* of our Resentment were still alive, and glowing under the deceitful Ashes of an outward false Behaviour? Surely it does; and *God* will never accept of *this*, for such a *Forgiveness*, as he himself has commanded in his Word, or *such*, as shall exempt us from his Displeasure. So *likewise shall my Heavenly Father*, Matth. 18. 35. says our Lord, *do also unto you*, that is, deliver us over to Condemnation, *if ye from your hearts*

SERM. XV. *hearts, forgive not every one his Brother their*  
 Trespasses.

The surest way then of judging of our Sincerity in the Performance of *this Duty*, and indeed of the constant Temper and Affections of our Soul in *any*, is, by observing *how* we behave our selves upon emergent Occasions. If, when we have it in our Power to do an Injury to our Enemy, and that perhaps so *secretly*, that he shall never know we did it; we yet restrain our selves and do it not, in vertue of this great and wise Reflection, *how shall I do this Wickedness, and sin against God!* This is such an Evidence to our selves that we are Sincere, as will strike us with a *secret Comfort*, that none but *God* and our own *Souls* are conscious of. But if we bear *any*, though but an *inferior* degree of *Malice* towards our Neighbour, though it be but a *little one*, a close, a secret Reserve of Ill-will; it will be sure in time to discover it self, and the secret Lees of Corruption, that lurks within our Hearts, will be restlessly working, and ever now and then throwing up a Bitterness and Indisposition upon our Spirit towards him.

And this not seldom happens, for this reason; because we did not begin to work with our Resentments at first upon a true and sufficient Foundation; but it may be, set our selves to still and quiet our present Passion, upon reasons of our Fear, our Temporal Interest, our Reputation, or the like incompetent Principles; from which as soon as ever we break loose, our Passion revives again, and then the *Vengeance* shews it self, which  
 had

had been all the while sculking at the bottom of our Hearts. SERM. XV.

For such Arguments, as those I mention'd, don't go deep enough upon the Heart to cleanse it thoroughly, and to make a perfect and thorow change of it, and to reach all the secret Corners, and Retirements of Corruption in it. Nothing can do that but the *word of God, that Word which is perfect and converteth the Soul, which is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edg'd Sword, and pierceth to the dividing asunder the Soul and Spirit, the joynts and marrow, and is a discerner of the Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart.*

*Psal. 19. 7.*

*Heb. 4. 12.*

So that if we would effectually cure our Resentments, and not only silence and lay them for the present, if we would prevent the ill Fruits and Sproutings of them afterwards in our Conversation, let us be sure to strike at them in their first Foundation and Principle; let us lay the *axe to the root* and bottom of the Tree, proceed against them by Arguments that will entirely overturn them Root and Branch, and leave no *Principle* of Corruption behind, to give them a new Spring and Recovery for ever hereafter.

Again, *Secondly*, We may certainly know we do not forgive our Enemy as we should, and from the bottom of our Hearts, though we take care to restrain our Passion from any outward Injurious Act towards him, if yet we take a silent Pleasure in his Misfortunes, and rejoice at the Calamities that befall him otherwise; if, though we spare him our selves, we are yet glad to find him suffer from the Injuries of others, if we love to see him run down  
in

SERM. XV. in his Estate, Interest, or Reputation, and to fall and sink into the Dust before us; If, I say, we can take delight in such a View as this, then as *surely* as *Christianity* is true, and *Forgiveness* is our *Duty*, we do not forgive our Enemy, but take out our *Revenge* upon him, by the Hands of others, and by those Instruments without us that afflict him.

For next to that of doing Mischief *our selves*, there is no more certain Token of a base, invenom'd and canker'd Spirit, towards another Man, than to rejoice in the Success of Evil upon him from *Abroad*. The Law of *Forgiveness* indeed is so very express and peremptory, and charg'd so home upon the Consciences of Men, that a Man can hardly find in his Heart to make an *evil* Return equal to a strong and high Resentment, but he must fly in the Face of his own Convictions, and secretly and severely reproach and censure himself for it: Because that is so very open a Violation of a great and known *Law*, that it leaves no Refuge for a Man to screen himself behind it, from the Rebukes and Lashes of his own *Mind*. And therefore this may oftentimes bind up a Man's own Hands, and restrain him from doing that Evil himself, which yet he would be glad to see.

But if my Enemy comes to suffer without my Fault, if the Hand of Providence shall strike him, or the Consequences of his own Folly overtake him, perhaps to his Ruin, may not I then be allow'd to take out my Satisfaction upon him, when 'tis thus without my Guilt? For surely, what harm can there be for me to strike in with the Issues of Pro-  
vidence,

vidence, and to rejoice to find Sin and Folly receive a just Discountenance from Heaven, in the ill Effects that follow them? This indeed is a very *specious* Plea, and 'tis possible many a Man may impose upon himself and others by it; but 'tis a very false, ill natur'd one for all that, and proceeds from a Base, Uncharitable, *Unchristian* Temper of Soul at the Bottom; and God sees it does so, and if we act according to it, he will be sure to place it to the account of our Sins. In the meantime, very likely we may applaud our selves in it, and look upon our selves as good *Husbands* in our *Revenge*; as if, by this Method of proceeding, we could gratifie our malicious Resentment at none of our own Charge. But if we will only consider with our selves a little, don't we know that 'tis at the Expence of our *Christian* Charity, that we are thus solacing our selves in our Brother's Sufferings? And if we can think a little ill-natur'd Pleasure a good Purchase, at so dear a rate as that, we may do so; but 'tis our great Sin if we do, and will be our great Unhappiness.

God Almighty therefore commands us, and the nature of a true *Christian Forgiveness* expects from us, a Frame and Temper of Mind towards our Enemy quite different from this; That we should indeed ease his Pains, and lighten his Burden as much as we can, but not make his Afflictions our Sport and Pleasure, and Triumph and Insult upon him while he is labouring under them. This is contrary to the very Charity of a *Jew*; and how then can we think it consistent with the Mercy and



SERM. XV. *Forgiveness of a Christian. Rejoice not when  
 thyne Enemy falleth, says Solomon, nor let thine  
 Heart be glad when he stumbleth, lest the Lord  
 see it, and it displease him, and he turn away  
 his Wrath from him.* 'Tis a Sin, it seems, of a  
 very provoking Nature to do thus, and such  
 as will turn the Anger of God from our Ene-  
 my, against our selves.

'Tis no more than an Instance of common  
 Charity, not to rejoice in the Evils and Suf-  
 ferings of Men; and can we think the *For-  
 giveness* of a Christian real, that shall allow  
 of this? Upon what Grounds and Principles,  
 or according to what *Divinity*, can we pre-  
 tend to think so? The *Forgiveness* and Love  
 of our *Enemies* were ever yet look'd upon as  
 the very Height and Perfection of *Christian  
 Charity*; and can *these*, think we, be Sincere,  
 and yet defective in one of the *lowest* Instan-  
 ces of Charity, such as the not rejoicing in  
 the Calamities and Misfortunes of other Men?  
 And therefore, if we will pretend we Love and  
 Forgive our Enemies, and at the same time  
 can take Delight to see them miserable, 'tis  
 certain, that we have found out such a Scheme  
 of *Morality* to our selves, that the World was  
 never yet acquainted with, and are in a very  
 fair way towards reconciling Contradictions.

And *thus* I have gone through every Part  
 of my Proposal, by removing and preventing,  
 under the *first Head*, the strongest Objection  
 that I was sensible would lie against this *Duty  
 of Forgiveness*; by explaining the Nature of  
 it under the *Second*; and under the *Last*, by  
 prescribing some Rules for the Trial of our  
*Practice*.

And

And now, after all that can be said, How SERM. XV. little is this *great* Commandment of our Blessed Lord and Saviour regarded in the World! And how infinitely short does it fall of its due Force and Influence upon the Lives of Men! Men, that acknowledge the Purity and Holiness, the Weight and Authority of the Precept; nay, and own the Necessity of conforming to it in general, have yet one way or other found out an unhappy shift of turning off the force of it from themselves: Whether it be, that they don't consider it enough, or understand it aright, or, which is more probable, vainly presume upon God's Mercy to themselves, however they fail in a due Subjection and Obedience to it.

*Others* there are, surely Men of too high Spirits to be Christians! who dare confront this Sovereign Law of their *God* and *Saviour*, to the Face; spurn at the Duty it self, as a base and low-spirited Quality, unworthy of a *Gentleman*, and set up other standing Rules and Measures of acting to themselves, a false and foolish Honour, and I know not what vain Principles, to oppose it.

But that we may not be too much surpris'd at this, we may consider, that though the Laws of *Christ* contain within themselves the most powerful Arguments and Motives to Obedience that are possible; though the *Gospel* of our *Saviour* be really in it self, what the Great *Apostle* stiles it, the *Power of God unto Salvation*, yet if Men will not consider and attend to their *Duty*, and the Consequences of their own Actions, there is no Remedy.

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God lays no Force or Violence upon any Man's Will; but let these Men look to it, he will be sure to meet them all hereafter, and reckon severely with them in *another* World, for all their Affronts to himself, Contempt of his Laws, and rejecting the *Authority* of his Son's Commandments in *this*.

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*Plain*

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*Plain Dealing, Zeal and Integrity; the indispensable Duty of the Christian Ministry, in times of Danger and Corruption; and the best Means to secure the Honour and Reputation of their Sacred Order.*

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A

## S E R M O N

Preach'd before the

University on *Act-Sunday,*


July 8, 1711.

2 Cor. IV. 1, 2.

*Therefore seeing we have this Ministry, as we have receiv'd mercy we faint not; But have renounc'd the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the Truth, commending our selves to every Man's conscience in the sight of God.*

**T**HESE Words are a very close and useful Consequence drawn from the *Apostle's* Argument in the former Chapter, where he had been settling the great Perfection and Advantages of the *Gospel* Ministration, in point of *Spiritual* Privileges,

F f 3


SERM. XVI.  vileges, above those of *Moses's Law*. Amongst the other noble Characters of Excellence, which he gives the *Gospel* above the *Legal Dispensation*, that which comes more immediately home to my *Text*, is *this*, that the Truths and Doctrines of *Christianity* are reveal'd with the greatest Plainness and Simplicity, with which the *Law* was not: That the great things it teaches are express'd in the most clear and open manner, not wrapt up in the Obscurity, nor clogg'd with the Incumbrance of *Ritual* and *Ceremonial* Observances, but plain and easie to the first Apprehensions of Men, and need no *other* Light to approve their Use and Excellence to the general Reason of Mankind, than *what* they carry with them. Whereas in the *other* case the *veil*, that was put on *Moses's* Face, was a mystical Representation of that covering of Darkness that lay upon the true *spiritual* Intention of the *Law*, and upon the Hearts of those that liv'd under the *Mosaical* Oeconomy.

2 Cor. 3. 13.

2 Cor. 3. 18.

*But now*, says the *Apostle*, by way of contradiction to the *Law*, *we all*, that is, all Christians, with *open Face* beholding, *as in a glass*, the glory of the *Lord*, are chang'd in the same image; *from glory to glory*, even as by the *spirit of the Lord*; That is, we have now so clear Representations of *God's* Nature and Will made to us in the *Gospel* of our *Saviour*; we have our Duty set before us in so full a light, and our Sins press'd by such powerful Convictions on our Consciences, that by the Assistance of *God's* Grace and *Holy Spirit*, we cannot fail of being Reform'd by this means, if we faithfully apply our own Endeavours.

From

From whence the *Apostle* concludes, that there SERM. XVI  
 could be no way to recommend the *Gospel*   
 of *Christ* so effectually, as to preach it as it  
 was, in its own true, natural, unaffected State;  
 and that whosoever should go about to put  
 any false Colours or Disguises on it, would  
 only throw a slur and diminution upon its  
*native Lustre*.

This Conclusion of his he expresses before  
 my *Text*, in the 12th verse of the former  
*Chapter*, in these words, *seeing then that we* 2 Cor. 3. 12.  
*have such hope*, that is, such a full Satis-  
 faction of the excellent Nature and Advan-  
 tages of the *Gospel* Ministration, *we use great*  
*plainness of speech*; he means, in the Proposal  
 and Promulgation of it; And then he comes  
 and tells us in the words of my *Text*, that  
 this was not only his present Resolution, to  
 deal thus plainly in the execution of his *Mi-*  
*nistry*, but that, when he look'd back upon  
 his former Practice, he could not remember  
 that he had ever done otherwise. *Therefore*  
*seeing we have this Ministry, as we have re-*  
*ceiv'd Mercy we faint not, but have renounc'd*  
*the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in*  
*craftiness, nor handling the word of God de-*  
*ceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, com-*  
*mending our selves to every mans conscience in*  
*the sight of God.*

The words may be very easily resolv'd into  
 this plain Paraphrase, which follows;

*Since we have receiv'd an Office of Ministry,*  
*of so great Excellence and Dignity in its Na-*  
*ture, in the performance of which we are to de-*  
*liver to the World Truths of the highest Moment*  
*and Importance; such Truths, which the more*


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plainly they are reported, shine with the greater Conviction, and are like to have the more powerful influence upon the Hearts of Men: Though the impartial execution of this our Office, by reason of Mens Vices and Corruptions, may sometimes prove dangerous to our present Safety, and destructive of our Worldly Interests; yet, through the support of God's Grace and Mercy, we are not binder'd by any Discouragements of this nature; But, as we are not sensible, we do at present, or have ever acted upon any sinister oblique temporary Respects, for our own Advancement or Promotion, so neither have we stood in need, of any of those shuffling Artifices, or base Compliances, which some other Men make use of, to conceal or promote our own Designs, or to varnish and colour over our Pretences; But we dare openly appeal, for the Soundness of our Doctrine, and for our Integrity in delivering it, to the Consciences of Men, as those who speak in the presence of the God of Truth, whose gracious Designs for the good of Mens Souls, 'tis the great Business of our Sacred Calling, and what we have solemnly undertaken to promote.

This, St. Paul, you see, declares to have been his Practice; I shall endeavour in the following Discourse to prove it to be no less our Duty; and shall shew in the

First Place, That an open, fearless, unreserv'd Representation of the Truths and Doctrines of our Religion, whatever Dangers or Inconveniencies may attend it, is nevertheless the Duty of the Christian Ministry, most agreeable to the design and nature of the Gospel, which they Teach, and the main Point, in which consists the right, and impartial

Execu-

Execution of their Office: Which, I think, SER M. XVI is a *Proposition* very clearly drawn out of the words of my *Text* taken all together. 

*Secondly*, I shall enquire what peculiar Temptations and Difficulties there are, that lie in the way of our *Sacred Office*, that so many have fail'd in the right Performance of this *Duty*; so that even the *great Apostle* himself look'd upon it as no less than the Mercy of God, that he himself had not swerv'd in that particular; *Therefore seeing we have this Ministry, as we have receiv'd mercy, we faint not.*

*Thirdly*, I shall try to lay before you somewhat a more particular Account, of the Nature and Description of those irregular and sinful Motives and Methods of declining from the Duties of our *Sacred Profession*, which the *Apostle* here taxes under the infamous Character of *bidden things of dishonesty*, such base, unworthy Principles and Proposals, as cannot bear the just Reproach of being in the *Light*; and therefore very conveniently shelter and hide themselves under the vain Protection of Disguise, and false Pretences: By which Men are yet tempted to prevaricate with their *Duty*, and are fain to make use of Artifice, and Craft, and Violence upon the *word* of God it self, to screen themselves, and escape from the Shame and Apprehensions of the World: All which, both Principles and Practices, the *Apostle* assures us, 'twas his great Concern and Conscience to avoid; *But have renounc'd the bidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.*

*Fourthly,*




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*Fourthly, and Lastly, By way of Conclusion, I shall observe from my Text, That a steady, resolv'd, uniform Maintenance of the Rules and Principles of Christianity, by the Ministry of it, is the only true way, at last, to consult their own Honour and Reputation, and that of the Religion they profess.---- By manifestation of the truth, commending our selves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

A Discourse upon this Subject, and to this Purpose, may not perhaps be altogether unnecessary to vindicate the Practice and Behaviour of a small Number of Men amongst us, whose just Zeal, in the late times of *Danger*, has been censured by those who would be thought *wiser* Men, and we are sure took care to be more safe, as rash and singular, and out of *Season*. In direct Contradiction to the Resolutions and Practice of these Men, I shall endeavour from the Words of my *Text* to prove in the


*First Place*, that an open, fearless, unreserv'd Representation of the *Truths* and *Doctrines* of our Religion, whatever Dangers or Inconveniencies may attend it, is nevertheless the *Duty* of the *Christian Ministry*, most agreeable to the Design and Nature of the *Gospel*, which they teach, and the main *Point* in which consists the right and impartial Execution of their *Office*. For, is it not the very end of the *Christian Revelation* to ripp up the Sores, and to lay open the Corruptions of Men to the Bottom, to search all Designs, to unmask all Disguises, and to sift all Pretences, and to make every Man truly sensible what he is, and what he ought to be?

I am sure the *Apostle* thought so, when he SERM. XVI. tells us in his *Epistle* to the *Hebrews*, *The*  *word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper* Heb. 4. 12. *than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts, and intents of the heart.* When the Duties of Religion are press'd upon the Minds of Men with the same Freedom and Severity, they stand reveal'd in the *Holy Scriptures*, they are so lively and convictive, and strike with so powerful and awful a *Light* upon the Conscience, that the Sinner has no *Covering of Darkness*, where to hide himself, nor any *Refuge*, where to escape from the *Rebukes and Censures* of his own Mind.

And *herein 'tis*, the *Gospel* proves to be, what the *Apostle* styles it, *the power of God unto salvation*; for this very Reason, which he gives us himself, because *therein the wrath* Rom. 1. 18 *of God is so plainly revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.* Which was the great Argument why *St. Paul* assures us, he was not *ashamed of the* Rom. 1. 16. *Gospel of Christ*; because he knew it was so admirably well qualify'd to fulfil its own Design.

But now, if, when the Sins and Corruptions of Men call out aloud upon us to speak freely in behalf of Religion and the Truth, we are then silent, and afraid to assert our own Doctrine, upon the Account of those Difficulties, and Disadvantages we must expect to meet with, from a *World*, which we are sure to *provoke and engage*, while we endeavour to *reform* it; if the Impudence and

Out-

SERM. XVI.  Outrageousness of Mens Sins shall strike a mortal Chill and Damp, upon the Forwardness of our *Zeal*, at the very time, when 'tis the most proper Season for it to bestir it self, to be most vigorous and active, we then disappoint the noble Remedies, which the *Gospel* has provided for the Distempers of Mankind, of their design'd Effect; we conceal and stifle the greatest publick *Blessing*, that ever was discover'd; and may well be said to be asham'd of that *Gospel* our selves, whose Honour and Reputation, in the Recovery it would make upon Mankind, we thus oppress in *secret*. And then *Our Blessed Lord* will tell us, what just and heavy Doom attends our Sloth and Prevarication for such a Practice. *Whosoever shall be asham'd of me, and of my Words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be asham'd, when he shall come in the glory of his Father and of the holy Angels.*

Mark 8. 38.

*Our Lord*, we see, supposes the Age, in which the Proposals of his Doctrine were to be made, might be as *corrupt* and *loose* as could well be imagin'd; for which Reason he stiles it an *adulterous generation*, that is, a Race of Men quite gone off, and estrang'd from their vow'd *Duty* and Obligations to *Almighty God*, prostitute to Vice, and perfectly lost and profligate as to all Principles of Goodness and Religion? And yet as *bad* as it might be, and we are assur'd it was, in the time of his own Life, and after; do we find, that he gives the *Apostles* and *Ministers* of his Doctrine any Dispensation to be safe and silent in such an Age as this? Does he  
allow

allow them to secure their *worldly* Interests, SERM. XVI.  
 at the Neglect of their *religious* Duty; and  
 to reserve themselves for better Times, in  
 connivance at the Corruptions of the pre-  
 sent? that is, in short, Does he give them  
 leave to *lay aside the Commandments of God*, in  
 compliment to the *Sins* of Man? No: But  
 though he knew they must draw the Hatred  
 and Opposition of the World against them,  
 if they would be faithful in the Discharge of  
 their sacred *Office*; tho' he was sensible, that  
 Mens Resentments would rise, and their In-  
 dignation storm against those that should re-  
 buke them for their Vices, and by that means  
 lay them under the Reproach and Censure  
 of former Folly; yet, for all this, he does  
 not make the least Abatement of their *Duty*,  
 for any Danger they might run in the Exe-  
 cution of it; but referring them for their Se-  
 curity to his own Providence and Protecti-  
 on, in the way he bids them go, he com-  
 mands them to exert their utmost *Zeal* and  
 Activity in the Cause of his Truth and Ho-  
 nour, with a Promise *hereafter to reward* them  
 for it.

This was the true State of primitive *Zeal*  
 and Fervour of Spirit, in the Prosecution of  
 their *Office*, which our *Blessed Lord* requir'd,  
 and his first *Followers* practis'd.

But now, if we will admit of the more  
*soft and favourable* Doctrines, and *dispensing*  
 Interpretations of our *Duty*, as to the Point  
 of venturing for our *Religion*, in these *modern*  
 Ages; especially, if we'll form our Judgment  
 by the Principles and Practice of our *own*;  
 " Why then, the *Apostles* and primitive  
 " *Chri-*

SERM. XVI



“ *Christians* were extreamly out, in running  
 “ those Hazards of Suffering for their Do-  
 “ ctrine, which they might have as well a-  
 “ voided: For why would they go to ex-  
 “ pose themselves so unnecessarily? And what  
 “ Good could they hope to do by it, when  
 “ the Interest and Prejudices of Men were  
 “ so violently set against them, and would  
 “ be sure to barr up all the ways of Instructi-  
 “ on, and render the Reformation of the  
 “ World, in the highest Degree improbable?  
 “ 'Tis true, in some time, when the Heat  
 “ of Opposition might be a little slack'd and  
 “ abated, Men might possibly *then* be in-  
 “ clin'd to attend, with some Patience, and  
 “ Calmness to the Proposals of a *Doctrine*, which  
 “ they would only *now* reject with Resent-  
 “ ment and Reproach; and therefore 'twas  
 “ only prostituting the Truth, and them-  
 “ selves, to the Wildness and Fury of an en-  
 “ rag'd Multitude, to endeavour thus un-  
 “ seasonably to *thrust* their Doctrine upon the  
 “ Minds of Men, when, 'twas plain, the ge-  
 “ neral Consent and Practice was against it!  
 “ Or if some Body must needs appear, to  
 “ give a Check to the Tide of general Cor-  
 “ ruption, yet why Men of such mean Ca-  
 “ pacities, and slender Endowments, as *the*  
 “ *first Preachers* were? Some of whom might  
 “ prejudice the Cause for want of *Dis-*  
 “ *cretion*; *others*, for want of *Resolution*, might  
 “ betray it. So that the most *prudent* way  
 “ were to be quiet, to let things go on as  
 “ they did, and since we had no Hand in  
 “ the Corruptions of the World, we might  
 “ even be content not to meddle to *reform*  
 “ them. These,

These; and a great many more such *vain* SERM. XVI. Excuses that I *could* mention, and which we have, not so long since, seen exemplified in *Practice*, are the fond *Apologies* of a *Luke-warm* undisciplin'd Soul, to palliate and hide a timorous and cowardly Temper; contriv'd on Purpose, in times of *general Apostacy*, to exempt a Man from appearing *singular*, and to reconcile a present Interest and a quiet Conscience, when *Sufferings* become his Duty.

If *these* had been the Resolutions of Men in the first Ages of *Christianity*, very probably we had never heard of it, it would have sunk in its *Infancy*, and gone out of the World as *quietly*, as bad Men desir'd it should have done, to the unspeakable Loss, and Unhappiness of Mankind.

And (to come a little nearer to our *own* Case at home) if *these* Sentiments had universally prevail'd amongst our selves; If there had been no true *Sons* of our own excellent *Mother the Church of England*, amongst all the Children *that she had brought up*, who, in *Isa. 51. 18.* the late time of a pestilent and prevailing *Faction*, the Days not only of her *Danger*, but almost her *Destruction*, that had been prompted by a noble generous and courageous *Zeal*, to take her by the Hand, to assert her Honour in the midst of her *enemies in the gate*, *Psal. 127. 5.* and to vindicate their own Relation to her, through all the Infamy, that was thrown upon *her*, and upon *them* for *her* sake; by this time, very probably some Men would have begun to apprehend, too late, that their Blame of other Mens true Concern for their *Church and Religion* was as much with-  
out

SERM. XVI. out Reason; as their own want of it in themselves was, and is still without Excuse.

Ephes. 6. 11. 'Tis very strange that *any*, especially the *Ministers of Religion*, who take upon themselves the *whole armour of God*, and are justly suppos'd to be the best skill'd, as well as most engag'd in the *spiritual Warfare*, should then think it a time to lay by their *Weapons*, when their *Enemies* were most vigorous and active, and just at the *Gates* of their *Holy City*, which *themselves* were the Persons to defend. *That*, which the Men of *this* Temper bring as an Argument to excuse their want of Activity at such a time as this, may be turn'd against them, as the best Reason in the World for it: Because there was so strong a Confederacy and Assembly of the *Enemies of God*, and *Religion* against the *Church*; for that very Reason, surely, 'twas the proper Time and Occasion to awake, and stand up in its Defence, thro' all Objections of Danger and Difficulty that could be offer'd: Which, upon this Supposition only, that Men ought to have a more tender Regard to the Prosperity of *Religion*, and the Care of their *Duty*, than to their own secular Ease and Interests, immediately vanish and come to nothing: Which yet, surely, is a Principle, that, I suppose, no Man will deny in *Theory*, howsoever he may contradict it in his *Practice*. How then, can those Men who are set for the *Guard of Religion* be excus'd, if by their Inattendence and Negligence, they suffer the Adversaries of *Truth* to break in and rifle her, while in the mean time they are only providing for their own Security

Security, and every Man is looking for his Gain SERM. XVI.  
 from his Quarter? 

Besides, what an Encouragement is *this* to wicked and villainous Designs, when, in a loose and degenerate Age, the Men of corrupt Minds shall be so busily employ'd in beating down the Principles of *Holiness* and *Piety*; and those who are most concern'd shall be so very cautious how they appear against them, because 'tis dangerous, and they may happen to *provoke*; *provoke* whom? why the Enemies of God, and of his *Truth*; those whom we ought to hate as *Holy David* did, with a Psal. 139. 22. perfect hatred, and to defie their utmost Malice and Vengeance to hurt us, whilst we stand upon the Defence, and Maintenance of our *Duty*.

But 'tis possible, that we may come to suffer by this Means; and should not a Man of *Prudence* be careful to avoid *that*? Ay, there lies the *Objection*: They may persecute, and afflict us, and bring us before their *Judgment Seats*; and does not our *Blessed Saviour* himself advise us to *beware of Men*, in such a Mat. 10. 17. Case? Yes he does; but 'tis, I hope, when we have *first* done our *Duty*, which his Commands will never justify us in declining, otherwise than upon that Reason. And in the very same Place he encourages us to be Mat. 10. 19. unconcern'd at the worst of Usage that may happen to us, in the Pursuit of our *Office*; and when we have done all we can, and have been brought before councils, for his name's Mat. 10. 17, 18. sake, and for a *Testimony* against them, and the *Gentiles*; then comes in the proper Opportunity for taking his Advice, with as much



SERM. XVI. Innocence as we can to elude the Malice, and disappoint the revengeful Designs of wicked Men: And if we must suffer *at last*, 'tis given us as an Honour, and the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon us, to support, and to reward us: And where are we then the Losers!

1 Pet. 4. 14.

But for Men, when the Cause of Religion is under Tryal, and ready to sink for want of a Support, then to wrap themselves in their own Sloth and Security, and to have their Heads and Hearts employ'd only in forecasting a Refuge for themselves, and how to keep out of Harm's way; if this be not cursed Hypocrisie, or base Cowardice, or timorous Infidelity, then, I will venture to say, 'tis impossible to define what is so.


And what great Advantage do these wise Men make of it after all, who are so very reserv'd; and wonderfully cautious of offending a Combination of powerful Sinners? Why, they come off with no Honour at all, and not with greater Safety at last, than a resolute, bold, and honest Man; so true is that of our Blessed Saviour, *whosoever will save his Life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospels, the same shall save it*; not only with respect to a future Exchange, in another World, which, we are sure, will be infinitely advantageous, but even with regard to a Man's present Interest in this; for *there is no Man, says Christ, that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, (we may observe that) houses, and brethren,*

Mark 8. 35.

Mark. 10. 29,  
30:

*brethren, and sisters, and mother and children, and lands with persecutions, and in the world to come Life everlasting;* that is, he shall gain a greater Interest and find more Friends, even in this World, for standing up for God's Honour, and that of Religion, than he can lose by it; tho', at the same time, he may be hated, envy'd, and malign'd for it by Men of an opposite Interest.

So that an *honest, upright, undefining* Man may happen to come off as well, it seems, even as to *this* World, which yet one would hardly think, as the most projecting self-defining, crafty *Hypocrite*. And when *this* comes to be the Case indeed, that a good Man's Integrity has been *tried* to the utmost, and found *superior* to all the Methods and Malice of his Enemies, *then*, to be sure, none so ready to run in, and compliment, and congratulate, and triumph, as these *safe cautious* Men themselves; who, while his Cause was in Danger, lurk'd behind, and suspected every thing he did, and could see Reasons of *Impeachment* in every Line he wrote, and find out Reflections upon *Great Men*, where, *perhaps*, they were never intended. In short, we have seen the Day, when Men of our own Order have been ashamed of an upright, forward, zealous *Brother*, while his Principles were under a publick Discountenance; and many a one ready to say of him as *Levi* is represented by *Moses* to have done of his own Kindred, tho' in a very *different* Sense, *I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his Brethren;* and could almost thank God they were under no Obligation to express  
 G g 2 their

SERM. XVI.  their Consent to the Words and Actions of an honest Man.

I am sure, this way of *shifting* for our selves, when God's Truth and holy Religion are suffering, can find nothing either of Practice, or Precept, throughout the whole *Book of God*, to countenance it. If some good and *Holy Men*, in the Days of old, ever stept out of the way, from the Malice of their *Persecutors*, 'twas then, when they had answer'd *first* their *utmost* Duty, and had protested against the *Evil* of their Times, and so had blown up the Rage and Malice of *Tyrants*, and *Enemies to Truth*, by severe Rebukes and Remonstrances against their Practice; which was all certainly, that any Man can think they were bound to do, in pursuance of God's Commission to them. And thus we are inform'd, *Moses* did, and so did *Elijah*,  
 Gen. 2. 15. and some others that we meet with in *Holy Writ*; who yet we find were never tax'd for it; and why? because they acted by the Rules of a just, and truly religious *Prudence*.

1 Kings 19. 3.

And as we have no warrantable *Example* of such Reserve, and shuffling in *the Word of God*, so I can think but of one *Text* in the whole *Bible*, that seems any way, to look with the least favourable Aspect upon that Practice: 'Tis in the 5th *Chapter* of the *Prophet Amos* at the 13th *Verse*, where, speaking of the Sinfulness and Danger of the Times, the *Prophet* infers thus; *Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time, for it is an evil time*; the only *Text* some Men seem to have been commenting upon, for some Years past; but 'tis capable, I hope, of a better Interpretation,

tation, than they have given it in their Practice: *Which* indeed is this, (as it very plainly appears from the *Context*) that in a time of such *Oppression*, and publick *Injustice*, as *that was*, when Men lay upon the *catch* to vex and harass one another, a *wise* Man would keep out of the way, as much as he could with *Innocence*, and give no Man a *Personal* Provocation to molest and grieve him; since Men were so ready to take all Opportunities of doing so, without *any*: For thus the *Verse* before informs us; *they afflict the just,* Amos 5. 13. *they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right;* and then immediately follow the Words I mention'd: But that the *Prophet* should ever mean by *these* Words, that when the publick and private State of *Religion* and *Truth* should be thus far overturn'd, it should be a *wise* and a *good* Man's Part and *Duty* to stand by, and say nothing, is, I think, such an Interpretation, as no Man would easily make or allow, but he that has *Honesty* little enough to put it in Practice. We are sure *this* was not the *Prophet's* own way of acting; and therefore 'tis very unlikely it should be his Advice. We know how he protested against the Vices of a *prophane, Idolatrous* Court, with Vehemence, and was *accus'd* for it, I don't say *impeach'd*, by that *Apostate infamous Priest* of Bethel, *Amaziah*, in these Words, *O thou seer, go, flee* Amos 7. 12. 13 *thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesie there, but prophesie not again any more at Bethel, for 'tis the King's chappel, and it is the King's court:* In Answer to which the *Fervent Prophet* asserts his Di-

SERM. XVI. vine Authority and Resolution to do as he  
 had done: *The Lord took me, says he, as I*  
*follow'd the Flock, and the Lord said unto me,*  
*Amos 7. 15.* *go prophesie unto my People Israel.* And so must  
 we do in like manner, we must assert our sa-  
 cred Ministry, whatever Checks we meet  
 with for it, we must persist in a resolv'd, o-  
 pen way of declaring the *whole Truth of God,*  
 without Reserve, Disguise, or Concealment,  
 whenever Religion comes to be under a Dis-  
 countenance, or in Danger from the Vices,  
 or bad Principles of *wicked Men;* and *that,*  
 whatever we may be threatned with, or suf-  
 fer for it, if we desire to be found *true* to our  
*great Master's* Commission, or will answer the  
 most important Trust he has repos'd in us,  
 for the Benefit, and Salvation of Men's Souls.

*I come now to enquire in the Second place,*  
 what peculiar Temptations and Difficulties  
 there are, that lie in the way of our *Sacred*  
*Office,* that so many have fail'd in the Per-  
 formance of this *Duty;* that even the *great*  
*Apostle St. Paul* look'd upon it, as no less than  
 the *Mercy of God,* that *himself* had not swerv'd  
 in that particular; *Therefore seeing we have*  
*this Ministry, as we have received Mercy we faint*  
*not.*

Now the Temptations that are peculiar to  
 us of the *Clergy,* above other Men, are *these,*  
 That we are many times oblig'd to renounce,  
 and not value the Favour and Displeasure of  
 Men, of whatsoever Order or Character they  
 may be, in the faithful Discharge of our *Of-*  
*fice,* and yet lie more expos'd to be influenc'd  
 by the Effects of their Kindness or Frowns,  
 than *others* do.

If there be any thing of publick Mischief SERM. XVI.  
 going on against *Religion* and the Truth, to  
 be sure, the *Ministers of Religion*, who pre-  
 side over its Interests and Safety, and must  
 give an Account, as far as it falls within their  
 Direction, of the Declension or Advance-  
 ment of it, stand the Mark and Aim of the  
 Spight and Malice of the Men of no *Religi-  
 on*; and if possible, are either to be remov'd  
 out of the way, or render'd as insignificant  
 as may be, that they may put in no *Bar*, nor  
 give any Disturbance to the Dispatch of these  
 Men's *unrighteous* Designs. Or if a Man of  
 our *Order* should happen to prove a little  
 more troublesome to such Mens Interests and  
 Projects, by a bold undaunted *protesting* a-  
 gainst their Transgressions himself, and alarm-  
 ing the Apprehensions of others to mark  
 their *oblique* Proceedings; why then, nothing  
 less than Fury and Ruin denounc'd upon him  
 in a Moment. The *Grand Cabal of Politici-  
 ans* is summon'd, in Order to advise, *what* *Esther 6. 6.*  
*shall be done to the Man* that seems to pay  
*God more Honour*, than to themselves; *whom*  
 for that very Reason they delight to ruin;  
 and after mature debate, from this *pious* As-  
 sembly, out comes a Resolution at last, with  
 a *Curse*, to crush him!


And, as a true faithful *Embassador of Christ*  
 is sure to meet with Wrath and Persecution  
 enough from his *Enemies*, the old *Serpent*,  
 and his *Adherents*; so when he has done his  
*Duty*, and ventur'd his utmost in Pursuance of  
 his Conscience, and in Defence of the Principles  
 of his Religion and the Government, 'tis a

SERM. XVI. Hazard if he be not laid *by*, at last, and neglected by his *Friends*.

*Eccles. 9. 15,*  
16.

And there is not in every one of our *Order* that Strength of Judgment, and Firmness of Will to despise these Discouragements, and to rest himself satisfy'd in the Applauses of his own Mind and Conscience. And therefore 'tis, that, under these uncomfortable Reflections on both sides, in regard to Friends, as well as Enemies, we have seen so many Persons of our own *Order* (the greater is the Shame) in these late Years, throw up their Arms, and settle themselves in more easie Resolutions, than to maintain such a stated War, and perpetual Contentions against the Enemies of *Religion* and *Truth*, without any Encouragement, when they saw others make their own Advantage by a shorter *Method*.

And when Men have *once* yielded to this Temper, *then* they have given these outward Temptations a firm Hold, and Possession of their Heart; and *then* the *Terrors* and *Favours* of the *World*, that *threaten* them on the *hardest* side, and *court* them on the *softest*, come to have the perfect *Sway* of their Actions; and may be said to be the two great *Engines*, especially when represented by the Hands of Men in *Power*, whereby the *Devil* makes an Interest in the *Church*, against it self; and by taking hold of the *Ambition*, or the *Fears* of Clergymen, as he knows very well how to adapt his Arguments to different Tempers, he comes to unsettle the Foundations, and disparage the Profession of *God's Holy Truth*, by the *Hands*, or with the *Consent* of those very Men, that wear the *Badges* of *Religion*,  
and

and are *most* concern'd, in common Prudence, SERM. XVI  
as well as Duty, to support it. 

And is not *this* the noblest Triumph of Vice and Impiety? In which our crafty *Politicians* think they have reason to pride themselves much, and exalt their own Wisdom, and despise Religion to the *Ground*, when they can thus allure, and draw over the chief Ministers and Votaries of Religion to their Interest, at so cheap a rate; by those very temporal Advantages that *were once*, and *ought* to be *still* the Rewards of a more bright and eminent *Piety*: When the holding out a *rich Promotion* shall make the *Priest* turn *Apostate*, and *revolt* from his former Integrity, and come basely to sneak and creep to the *unrighteous* Hand, that is able to advance him, to the great Prejudice, we are sure, of Religion and the Church; *this* is a Sight so abominable before *God* and the *Blessed Angels* and *good Men*, and so highly grateful to the grand *Enemy* of *Truth* and *Holiness*, that *Hell* with all its *Eyes* would open to behold it, and *bles*s the *Day*, wherein it should see its own main Interest thrive so, and prosper on the Earth, and its chiefest Work done, and the Expences paid for it out of the *Treasures* and *Revenues* of the *Church* it self, so unhappily betray'd! But I am willing to *make haste* from so *ungrateful* a Reflection, and to *hope*, that not *one* of those, that hear me *this* *Day*, will ever consent to such an Instance of *execrable* Baseness, and thereby derive so *foul* a *Stain* and blot upon *God's* Honour, and their own Order and Innocence for ever!

That



SERM. XVI



Heb. 6. 5.

2. Cor. 4. 18.

That we may all be the more secure from the very Borders of such impious and dishonourable Compliances, we should carry a strict and jealous Eye upon our own Tempers and Inclinations, we should be careful to observe and regulate the main *Springs* and *Principles* of Action within us, our *Fears* and our *Desires*, the very *Hinges* upon which all our *Motions turn*. *These* we should endeavour to preserve under the Government and Awe of *religious Principles*, and within the reach and Influence of the *Powers of the world to come*: And then we shall come to move and act above the Sphere of any base earthly Attraction, and steer our *Motions* by a Compass more steady than any *this World* can supply us with; with a fix'd Eye and Regard to those infinitely brighter Views of Honour and Happiness *hereafter*; which will make us look down upon, and despise these earthly things, as too mean for our Ambition, and not worthy our Pursuit. *For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen (unless with the Eye of Faith alone) are eternal.*

'Tis to *this Perfection* that every one of our *sacred Function* is bound, and professes himself continually to aspire; and which 'till he has in some competent Measure attain'd, he will never be so secure, as he ought to be, from the *Prevalence* of those Temptations that are so peculiar to his *Order*, and so powerful to disturb or pervert the *faithful Execution* of his *Office*: Which brings me,

*Thirdly*, To lay before you somewhat a more particular Account and Description of those

those irregular Motives, and Methods of declining from the *Duties* of our *Profession*, which the *Apostle* here taxes under the infamous Character of *bidden things of dishonesty*; such base Principles and Proposals, as cannot bear a just Reproach of being in the *Light*, and therefore very conveniently shelter and hide themselves under the vain Protection of Disguise and false Pretences; by which Men are tempted to Prevaricate in their Sacred Office, and are fain to make use of Artifice, and Craft, and Violence upon the Word of *God* it self, to screen themselves, and escape from the Shame and Apprehensions of the World. All which, both Principles and Practices, the *Holy Apostle* assures us, 'twas his great Concern, and Conscience to avoid: *But have renounc'd the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.*

The *Apostle* does very justly, and with a great deal of Elegance, censure these Ill Principles, under the reproachful Character of *bidden things of Dishonesty*: *Dishonest* they are in their very Form and Constitution, and since they are so, 'tis very fit they should be *bidden*. For so far common Sense directs us in the things of *Nature*, that what is indecent or offensive, be conceal'd; And 'tis the very same in *Morality* and *Conscience*, which, at least, appears desirous to gloss over, and disguise, what 'tis affectionately willing to retain, when it knows it not to be so exactly agreeable to the Rules of *Reason* and *Religion*.


For there is so much *Deformity* in irregular Designs, and sinful Purposes, that a Man would be out of *Countenance* with himself, as well

SERM. XVI. well as in *Disgrace* with the World, if he should always vouch and assert his real Intentions under the true Drift and Aim, by *which* they are carried; And therefore, in *such* a case, the Man seeks about for the *thin covering* of some lawful Pretence or other, whereby to impose a little upon his own Thoughts, that he may be the more *ease* to himself, and at the same time lie *conceal'd*, and out of the way from the View and Reflections of other Men.

*Thus*, we have known *Pride*, and *Singularity*, and *Fondness* for new Opinions of a Man's own, in matters of *Religion*, pass it self upon the World, and perhaps upon the Man himself at last; for *that* is possible, under the popular disguise of a generous Concern for the promoting of *Truth*, and delivering Mankind from under the Danger and Slavery of Old Prejudices in points of *Faith*. And this we find at present made a Pretence by *one* of our own Order, so full only of *himself*, for disturbing the long since establish'd Doctrines of *Religion*, and the Peace of the *Christian Church*, by returning us back into the Tumults and Confusion of ancient *Heresy*; which has, so many hundred Years since, receiv'd its Condemnation by the clear Light and Convictions of *Holy Scripture*, as the Modern *Revisers* of it ought to do by the severe Censures of the *Church* and *Law*. So strong a Byass is the *Conceit* of a Man's own Understanding upon him, to pervert the Word of *God*, in favour of his own *fond* Opinions!

But *this* is not the *only* Principle of Perverseness, the Gratification of a Man's *Pride* of his

OWN

own Knowledge and Conceits, that thus SERM. XVI gives a violent Wrest; and Turn to his Mind,  from the Truths of *Religion*. But when a Man comes to set his Heart too much upon Temporal Interest, and resolves to have his Share in the Happiness of this Life, when the favour of the Times comes to run in Countenance of False Principles, whether in *Religion*, or *Politicks*; 'tis this Man's *Wisdom* then to sink his Doctrine to a just Level with the Theam of *popular* Opinion, and to the Pleasure of those, whose Favour he seeks, and upon whose Interest he's willing to depend. A famous Instance of Spiritual Craft, in perverting the *Word of God* for this Reason, as we may in Charity believe, we find in the *Author* of a late piece of *Politick Sophistry*; where to serve a *violent Turn* of *Government*, *St. Paul* and his Doctrine are forc'd Rom. 13. 1, 2, 3, 4. from their *natural sense*, and brought in to Teach and Patronize *Rebellion*: And such a *Scheme* of Government erected, where *God Almighty* and his *Providence* are entirely left out; and Men put under a very *safe* Condition without his Assistance of defending themselves when there shall be Occasion, by resisting their *Supreme Governours*, as the *Apostles* and we say, his own immediate *Ordinance*; but *these Men* deny it!

How expedient such a Corruption of *God's Word* may be to the End, for which it was intended by this *Author*, I will not here meddle to determine; But this is certain, that no *Revolution* in State can make it necessary to change the *word of God*; and let it be as *glorious* as it will, is very much to be suspected, when

SERM. XVI. when it shall be thought to stand in need of  
 such *violent* Methods to defend it.

But thus it happens, when Men have a strong set *Resolution* to excuse, or justify former *Declensions* from the *Rules of Religion* and *Right*, in publick Management, for base, unworthy *Ends* of their own private Interest; 'tis but then coining a sufficient number of *reserv'd* and *excepted Cases*, and *Distinctions* that would be found out in time, and such like diminishing *Artifices*, and they will presently bring down, and sink away a full, absolute, peremptory *Command* and *Law* of *Christ*, into a mere, thin, hungry, prudential *Admonition*, that Men shall be oblig'd to obey in *some* Cases only, and under *some* certain Circumstances; that is, when they have a *mind* to it, and have no longer *Temptation* nor *Interest* to the contrary.

Again, When a *Great* and *Powerful* Sinner has a mind to lie secure and lull'd in the *Enjoyment* of his *Lusts*, and yet would seem to be *Religious*, 'tis but applying to one of these *Reconcilers of Breaches*, these *Healers of Consciences*; and he, by concealing, or reserving some *Parts* of the *Truth*, and by perverting others, shall immediately furnish out a *Religion*, exactly to the *Interest* and *Pleasure* of his *great Patron*; and as agreeable to the *word* of *God*, in the mean time, as the *Teacher's* own *Faith* and *Practice* are.

The late *Modesty* of some *worthy Patriots*, who would pretend to determine the *Clergy* of the *Church* of *England* what *Subjects* they were to *Preach* upon, (I suppose none of those that should touch upon their own *Vices*) could  
 not

not have done the *Business of Religion* more SER.M. XVI.  
effectually, than these Men do it for them-  
selves; who, by false Applications to the Con-  
sciences of Men, and by *speaking peace to them*  
upon Grounds of Security, which the *word of*  
*God* knows nothing of, quite pervert the De-  
sign of *Christianity*, and disappoint the blessed  
End and Effect which it ought to have,  
and which *Almighty God* himself so heartily  
desires it should have, the *Reformation* and  
*Salvation* of sinful Men.

I shall give but *one deplorable* Instance of  
this, equivalent to a *thousand*. I mean that  
*Wicked Insinuation*, that after a Life of the  
greatest Prophaneness, Injustice and Debau-  
chery, “ yet a Man of fine Parts, and a well-  
“ *turn'd* Understanding, upon his Death-bed  
“ cannot so easily miscarry ; he will come one  
“ time or other, it seems, before he Dies,  
“ to understand the true Worth and Value  
“ of his Soul : If this be not to *walk in craf-*  
*tiness* and to *handle the word of God deceitfully*,  
then, what is so? If to change the *Terms* of  
*Salvation*, which *Christ* himself deliver'd, is to  
pervert the *word of God*, then *this is such*. If  
*this* be not to betray the Interest of Men's  
Souls for *Gain*, and to compliment the *Dy-*  
*ing* Sinner into his *Eternal* Ruin, in order to  
procure the Temporal Favour and Preferments  
of the *Living*, then surely there is no such  
Practice in the World.

In the mean time, what a Whisper and *ill*  
Report will go through the Region of *de-*  
*parted Spirits*, when, after all, they shall find  
themselves in the midst of Torments, against  
the *Man* and his *Doctrine*, that to give them a  
little

**SERM. XVI.** little present, false, wretched, ease of Conscience, shall have thus deluded them for ever!

I am sure, it highly concerns the *Author* of this fatal and dangerous Suggestion, to repent him severely of the *wickedness of his thought*, and to take timely Care to prevent the *horrid Influence* of it, lest what was spoken by the *Holy Prophet Isaiab* upon another Occasion, be verified of him at last: *Hell from beneath is mov'd for thee, to meet thee at thy coming; it stirreth up the Dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth: all they shall speak, and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak, and Miserable, as we are? art thou become like unto us?* "After all thy boasted Parts and Learning, art thou thus venerably descended, with all thy Wisdom and Gravity, to share with us in this Place, this House of Woe and Pain: Which we thought, instructed by thy Doctrine, to have been the Portion only of *Ignorant and Foolish Souls!* And how this *Man* will then be able to answer this *Dismal* Expostulation, he were best look to it himself, whilst there is time and room for his Repentance!

It is now time for me to draw towards a Conclusion of this *long* Discourse, and to proceed to shew in the


*Fourth and last* Place, that a *steady, resolv'd, uniform Maintenance* of the Rules and Principles of *Christianity* by the Ministers of it, is the *only true Way*, at last, to consult their own Honour and Reputation, and that of the *Religion* they profess. *By manifestation*  
of

of the Truth, commending our selves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. SERM. XVI.

Not that the *Apostle* could ever suppose, that we should always actually procure the Favour, or receive the outward Approbation of Men, for justly executing our *Ministry*, which sometimes might prove an Argument for their Displeasure or Dislike against us; when we should by this very means oppose their ill Designs, controll their Practice, and contradict their Principles; which haughty and powerful Sinners, we know, can never bear. But thus far we are bound to do, and may commend our selves to the Consciences of the worst, and greatest Men, upon all Occasions, we may and ought to speak the great Truths of Religion so impartially before them, whether they will bear, or whether they will forbear, Ezek. 2. 5. for they are sometimes most rebellious: We may deal so frankly and openly with them, in rebuking their Sins, and laying down the Duties of Religion so plainly before their Eyes, that we may dare appeal to their Consciences, if they will but think at all, and force them, in their own Convictions, to give their Opinion on the side of our Integrity; Tho' perhaps they may, at the same time, by a wicked Violence conceal their real Sentiments, and turn an outward Face of Frowns and Displeasure against our Persons and Interest.

So that what was here primarily intended by the *Apostle*, by commending our selves to the Consciences of Men, is only this, that we give Men all the just Reason in the World, by our open, undissembled Dealing, in the Work of our *Ministry*, to approve us; whether



SERM. XVI.  ther they *will*, or *not*, is not in our Power, and therefore can be no part of our *Duty*, nor ought to be any Reason of our Concern, but only in *Charity* for their sake.

Much less are we to understand by this *commending our selves to mens consciences*, in this fair, unreserv'd Procedure in our *Ministerial* Office; that we shall always recommend our selves to their *Favour* and *Preferments*. A *faithful*, resolute Discharge of our *Duty* is not always the *readiest* way to the Procurement of these things. With *some* Men 'tis a Disservice to a Man's Character, that he has been *too Honest*.

But none of *these* things ought to move us, nor ought any of *these* Considerations to be regarded by us, in competition with doing our *Duty*, and fulfilling *the ministry which we have receiv'd of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God*. For as these Temporal Interests *ought* not to have been in our first Proposals, so if we go without them at last, it should be none of our Disappointment. This we may be sure of, that if *God* has any thing for Men to do in the Service of his *Church*, he is able to raise them in his own good time, and by his own Methods; And if he has not, there is no Reason we should desire our Advancement, it may prove a *Snare* to us, an In-  
 Acts 20. 24. cumbrance either of our *Honesty*, or our *Happiness*.

However these outward things may go with us, if, in the mean time, by our Steadiness and Constancy in maintaining the Principles of *Religion*, we have been so Happy as to have secur'd the Honour and Reputation of it in the World; If we have given all the Con-  
 victions

victions possible of our own Sincerity in the SERM. XVI. Belief of it, and that we our selves, who may be justly presum'd best skill'd in the *Mysteries*, are most heartily affected to the *beauty* of *Holiness*; Why, then we may rest our selves contented and satisfied with the blessed Applause, and Approbations of a *good Mind* and *Conscience*, without depending on the Frowns or Favour of Men.

But, *Blessed be God*, this is not all that he has given us for our Comfort at this time! We now live to see those *Sacred Truths*, that were, not so long since, the *Sport* and *Ridicule* of *Impious*, *Insolent* Men, maintain a far better Reputation in the *World* than *themselves* with all their *Management*! *Truths*, that had once the united Interest of Hypocrisie, Atheism, Prophaneness, and Faction combin'd against them, now *Triumphing* in the good Opinions of Men, above all the Power of the Enemy, above all the dark Policy, and malicious Contrivance of the *Kingdom of Darknes* to suppress them! *Is not this the Lord's doing?* *Psal. 118. 23.* and should it not be *wonderful in our Eyes*! From *hence* we may learn the strange Power of oppress'd *Truth*, when assisted by *God's Blessing* and *Heavenly Influence*! How, from under all the Violence and Reproach thrown upon it, 'tis able by a *Native Spring* within it to return, and recover it self, and bear down all *Opposition* that shall tend to overthrow it!

And as *God* has thus made *bare his Arm*, and done Honour to his Holy Cause; so, on the other side, has he not as *visibly pour'd contempt* upon the Head of all those mean *Spirits*, especially of his Ministry, that either deserted

SERM. XVI. or betray'd his *Truth* in times of *Danger*? Be-  
 cause they *rejected the word of the Lord*, there-  
 fore he has *rejected them*, and has made them  
 contemptible and base before all the People, ac-  
 cording as they have not kept his ways, but have  
 been partial in the Law; which latter Words  
 were a severe Threat denounc'd by the Prophet  
*Malachi* against the Corruption of the Priest-  
 hood in his Days; and we are heartily trou-  
 bled we have had Reason to see them so tho-  
 roughly verify'd in ours.

But let us not again renew our Breaches,  
 but endeavour to heal them: To this End,  
 in the Language of the *Holy Prophet*, let them  
 return to us, for we must not go to them: Let  
 them see and be convinc'd, that the venturing  
 and exposing our utmost Safety, for the Cause  
 of *God* and his Honour, whenever the State of  
 things requires it, is not only the noblest Sa-  
 crifice we can offer to *God*, the bravest Instance  
 of our *Duty*, but the most direct Means to se-  
 cure the Interests of *Religion* it self, and our  
 own lasting *Honour* together with it: Which  
*God*, in his great Mercy to his Church and  
 People, grant that we may always continue  
 to *deserve*, tho' we may not always *meet* with  
 it, at the Hands of Men. But that we may  
 the better do so, *Let thy Priests be cloathed*  
*with Righteousness*, O *God*, so shall thy Saints  
 sing with *Joyfulness*.

To which ever-blessed *God*, *Father*, *Son* and  
*Holy Ghost*, be ascribed all *Praise*, *Honour*,  
*Glory*, and *Power*, throughout all the Churches  
 of the Saints, now, and World without end, Amen.



I N I S.



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