

J. Eastland.

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SERMONS

ON

Various Subjects.

VIZ.

I Of our New Birth in
CHRIST JESUS.

II. On Religious Society.

III. On the Benefits of an
Early Piety.

IV. On Self-Denial.

V. On Intercession.

VI. The Almost-Christian.

VII. On Justification.

VIII. Of the heinous Sin
of profane Cursing and
Swearing.

IX. On the great Duty of
Family Religion.

X. Thankfulness for Mer-
cies received a neces-
sary Duty.

*[farewell
Sermon at Ford Ribblesdale
in Georgia 17th Decr 1730]*

+ *sublime
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THE
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S E R M O N I.

THE Nature and Necessity of
our New-Birth in *Christ Jesus*,
in order to Salvation.

Preach'd in the Church of *St. Mary Radcliff* in
Bristol.

² [∇]
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If any Man be in Christ, he is a new Creature.

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The Nature and Necessity of Society
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in particular.

Preach'd in the Parish Church of *St. Nicholas*
in *Bristol*; and before the Religious Socie-
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Meetings, in *Bow-Church London*, in the Year
1737.

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*Two are better than one, because they have a
good Reward for their Labour.*

For if they fall, the one will lift up his Fellow:

*But woe be to him that is alone when he fall-
eth; for he hath not another to help him up.*

*Again, if two lye together, then they have Heat;
but how can one be warm alone?*

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so he bringeth them unto the Haven where
they would be.*

*O that Men would therefore praise the Lord
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SER-

THE
NATURE and NECESSITY
OF OUR
NEW BIRTH
IN
CHRIST JESUS,
In order to SALVATION.

A SERMON preached in the Church of
St. Mary Radcliffe in Bristol.

T H E
P R E F A C E.

TH E Importunity of Friends, the Aspersions of Enemies, the great Scarcity of Sermons on this Subject among the Divines of our own Church, and not any overweening Conceit, I trust, of the Worth of the Performance, were, amongst divers others, the Reasons that induced me to permit the Publication of this very plain Discourse.

What Reception it may meet with from the Publick, it behoves me, for my own sake, to be very little concerned about. But I humbly hope, that as God was pleased to give it surprizing Success when delivered from the Pulpit, so the same Gracious Being will continue to co-operate with it from the Press: And then, if it be thereby made instrumental towards the convicting any one Sinner, or confirming any one Saint, I shall not be solicitous about the Censures that may be passed, either on the Simpli-

city of the Style, or on the Youth of the Author.

I hope it will be permitted me to add my hearty *Wishes*, that my Reverend Brethren, the *Ministers of the Church of England*, (if such an one as I may be worthy to call them Brethren) would more frequently entertain their People with *Discourses of this Nature*, than they commonly do: And that they would not, out of a servile Fear of displeasing some particular Persons, fail to declare the whole Will of God to their respective Congregations; nor suffer their People to rest satisfied with the Shell and Shadow of Religion, without acquainting them with the Nature and Necessity of that Inward Holiness, and Vital Purity of Heart, which their Profession obliges them to aspire after, and without which no Man living can comfortably see the LORD.

SERMON

S E R M O N I.

Of our New Birth in CHRIST
JESUS.

2 C O R. V. 17.

*If any Man be in CHRIST, he is a
new Creature.*

THE Doctrine of our REGENERATION, or NEW BIRTH in CHRIST JESUS, tho' one of the most fundamental Doctrines of our holy Religion; though so plainly and often pressed on us in Sacred Writ, *that he that runs may read*; nay, though it is the very Hinge on which the Salvation of each of us turns, and a Point too in which all *sincere* Christians, of whatever Denomination, agree; yet it is so seldom considered, and so little *experimentally* understood by the Generality of Professors, that

were we to judge of the Truth of it by the *Experience* of most who call themselves *Christians*, we should be apt to imagine they had not so much as heard whether there be any such thing as *Regeneration* or no. It is true, Men, for the most part, are Orthodox in the common Articles of their Creed; they believe there is but one GOD, and one Mediator between GOD and Man, even the Man CHRIST JESUS; and that there is no other Name given under Heaven, whereby they can be saved, besides His: But then tell them, They must be REGENERATE, they must be BORN AGAIN, they must be renewed in the very *Spirit*, *i. e.* in the *inmost* Faculties of their Minds, e'er they can truly call CHRIST *Lord, Lord*, or have any Share in the Merits of his precious Blood; and they are ready to cry out with *Nicodemus*, *How can these things be?* or, with the *Athenians*, on another Occasion, *What will this Babbling say? He seemeth to be a Setter-forth of strange Doctrines, because we preach unto them CHRIST, and the New Birth.*

THAT I may therefore contribute my Mite towards curing the fatal Mistake of such Persons, who would thus put asunder what GOD has inseparably joined together, and vainly expect to be justified by CHRIST, *i. e.* have their

Sins

Sins forgiven, unless they are also sanctified, *i. e.* have their Natures changed, and made holy; I shall beg Leave to inlarge on the Words of the Text in the following manner.

First, I shall endeavour to explain what is meant by *being in CHRIST*: *If any Man be in CHRIST.*

Secondly, What we are to understand by *being a New Creature*. *If any Man be in CHRIST*, (says the Apostle) *he is a new Creature.*

Thirdly, I shall produce some Arguments to prove *Why* we must be *New Creatures* e'er we can be *in CHRIST*.

Fourthly and *lastly*, I shall draw some Inferences from what will have been delivered, and then conclude with a Word or two of Exhortation from the Whole.

I. AND *first* then, I am to endeavour to explain what is meant by this Expression in the Text, *If any Man be in CHRIST.*

Now a Person may be said to be *in CHRIST* two Ways. *First*, only by an outward Profession. And in this Sense, every one that is called a Christian, or baptized into CHRIST's Church, may be said to be *in CHRIST*. But that this is not the sole Meaning of the Apo-

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stle's Phrase now before us, is evident, because then *every one that names the Name of CHRIST*, or is baptized into his visible Church, would be a *new Creature*. Which is notoriously false; it being too plain, beyond all Contradiction, that comparatively but few of those that are *born of Water*, are *born of the Spirit* likewise; or, to use another Scriptural way of speaking, Many are baptized with Water, which were never, effectually at least, baptized with the HOLY GHOST.

To be *in CHRIST* therefore, in the full Import of the Word, must certainly mean something more than a bare outward Profession, or being called after his Name. For, as this same Apostle tells us, *All are not Israelites that are of Israel, i. e.* when applied to Christianity, all are not *real* Christians that are *nominally* such. Nay, that is so far from being the Case, that our Blessed LORD himself informs us, That many that have prophesied or preached in his Name, and in his Name cast out Devils, and done many wonderful Works, shall notwithstanding be dismissed at the last Day with a *Depart from me, I know you not, ye Workers of Iniquity*.

IT remains therefore, that this Expression, *If any Man be in CHRIST*, must be understood in a second and closer Signification, *viz.* to be

in him so as to partake of the Benefits of his Sufferings: To be *in him* not only by an outward Profession, but by an inward Change and Purity of Heart, and Cohabitation of his Holy Spirit: To be *in him* so as to be mystically united to him by a true and lively Faith, and thereby to receive spiritual Virtue from him, as the Members of the natural Body do from the Head, or the Branches from the Vine: To be *in him* in such a manner as the Apostle, speaking of himself, acquaints us he knew a Person was; *I knew a Man in CHRIST*, says he, *i. e.* a true Christian; or, as he himself desires to be *in CHRIST*, when he wishes, in his Epistle to the *Philippians*, that he might be found *in him*.

THIS is undoubtedly the full Purport of the Apostle's Expression in the Words of the Text; so that what he says in his Epistle to the *Romans* about Circumcision, may very well be applied to the present Subject, *viz.* That he is not a *real* Christian, who is only one *outwardly*; nor is that true Baptism, which is only outward in the *Flesh*: But he is a true Christian, who is one *inwardly*, whose Baptism is that of the *Heart*, in the *Spirit*, and not merely in the *Water*, whose Praise is not of Man, but of God. Or, as he speaketh in another Place, *Neither Circumcision nor Un-*
circumcision

10 *Of our* NEW BIRTH

circumcision availeth any thing of itself, but a new Creature. Which amounts to what he here declares in the Verse now under Consideration, that *if any Man* be truly and properly in CHRIST, *he is a new Creature.*

II. WHAT we are to understand by being a *New Creature*, was the next and *second* general Thing to be considered.

AND here it is evident at the first View, that this Expression is not to be so explained as tho' there was a Physical Change required to be made in us, *i. e.* as tho' we were to be reduced to our primitive *Nothings* and then created and formed again. For, supposing we were, as *Nicodemus* ignorantly imagined, to enter a *second time into our Mother's Womb, and be born*, alas! what would it contribute towards rendering us spiritually *new Creatures*? Since that which was born of Flesh would be Flesh still, *i. e.* we should be the same carnal Persons as ever, being derived from carnal Parents, and consequently receiving the Seeds of all manner of Sin and Corruption from them. No, it only means, that we must be so altered as to the Qualities and Tempers of our Minds, that we must intirely forget what manner of Persons we once were.

As

As it may be said of a Piece of Gold that was in the Ore, after it has been cleansed, purified and polished, that it is a new Piece of Gold: As it may be said of a bright Glass that has been covered over with Filth, when it is wiped, and so become transparent and clear, that it is a new Glass: Or, as it might be said of *Naaman*, when he recovered of his Leprosy, and his Flesh returned unto him like the Flesh of a young Child, that he was a new Man: So our Souls, tho' still the same as to Essence, yet are so purged, purified and cleansed from their natural Dross, Filth and Leprosy, by the blessed Influences of the Holy Spirit, that they may properly be said to be *made anew*.

How this glorious Change is wrought in the Soul, cannot easily be explained: For no One knows the Ways of the Spirit, save the Spirit of God Himself. Not that this ought to be any Argument against this Doctrine; for, as our Blessed LORD observed to *Nicodemus*, when he was discoursing on this very Subject, *The Wind*, says he, *bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the Sound thereof; but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth;* and if we are told of natural Things, and we understand them not, how much less ought we to wonder, if we cannot immediately account for the invisible Workings of the HOLY SPIRIT?

SPIRIT? The Truth of the Matter is this: The Doctrine of our *Regeneration*, or *New Birth* in CHRIST JESUS, is *dark and hard to be understood* by the natural Man. But that there is really such a Thing, and that each of us must be spiritually born again before we can enter into the Kingdom of GOD; or, to keep to the Terms made use of in the Text, must be *new Creatures* before we can be *in CHRIST*, I shall endeavour to shew under my

III. *Third* general Head, in which I was to produce some Arguments to prove, *Why* we must be *New Creatures*, in order to qualify us for being savingly *in CHRIST*.

AND here one would think it sufficient to affirm, that GOD himself, in his holy Word, hath told us so. For, not to mention many Texts, that might be produced out of the *Old Testament* to prove this Point, (and indeed, by the way, one would wonder how *Nicodemus*, who was a *Teacher* in *Israel*, and who was therefore to instruct the People in the spiritual Meaning of the Law, should be so ignorant of this grand Article, as we find he really was, by his asking our blessed LORD, when he was pressing on him this Topic,

How

How can these things be? Surely, he could not forget how often the Psalmist had begg'd of GOD to make him a new Heart, and renew a right Spirit within him; as likewise, how frequently the Prophets had warned the People to make them new Hearts, and new Minds, and so turn unto the LORD their God. But not to mention these and such-like Texts out of the Old Testament) this Doctrine is so plainly and often repeated in the New, that, as I observed before, He that runs may read. For what says the great Prophet and Instructor of the World himself? Except a Man (i. e. every one that is naturally ingendered of the Offspring of Adam) be born again of Water, and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of GOD. And lest we should be apt to slight this Assertion, and, Nicodemus-like, reject the Doctrine, because we cannot immediately explain, How this thing can be; our Blessed Master therefore affirms it, as it were, by an Oath, Verily, verily, I say unto you, or, as it may be read, I the Amen, I who am Truth itself, say unto you, that it is the unalterable Appointment of my heavenly Father, that unless a Man be born again, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of GOD.

AGREEABLE to this are those many Passages we meet with in the *Epistles*, where we are
commanded

cominanded to be *renewed in the Spirit*, i. e. as was before explained, in the inmost Faculties of our Minds; to put off the *Old Man*, which is corrupt; and to put on the *New Man*, which is created after God, in Righteousness and true Holiness; That *Old Things* must pass away, and that all Things must become *New*; That we are to be saved by the *Washing of Regeneration*, and the *Renewing of the HOLY GHOST*. Or, methinks, was there no other Passage to be produced besides the Words of the Text, it would be full enough, since the Apostle therein positively affirms, that *if any Man be in CHRIST, he is a new Creature*.

Now what can be understood by all these different Terms of being *born again*, of *putting off the Old Man*, and *putting on the New*, of being *renewed in the Spirit* of our Minds, and becoming *new Creatures*; but that Christianity requires a *thorough, real, inward Change of Heart*? Do we think these, and such like Forms of speaking, are mere Metaphors, Words of a bare Sound, without any real solid Signification? Indeed it is to be feared, some Men would have them interpreted so; but, alas! unhappy Men! they are not to be envied their Metaphorical Interpretation:

It will be well, if they do not interpret themselves out of their Salvation.

MULTITUDES of other Texts might be produced to confirm this same Truth: But those already quoted are so plain and convincing, that one would imagine no one should deny it; were we not told, *There are some, who having Eyes, see not, and Ears, hear not, and that will not understand with their Hearts, or hear with their Ears, lest they should be converted, and CHRIST should heal them.*

BUT I proceed to a second Argument to prove, *Why we must be new Creatures*, in order to be rightly in CHRIST: And that shall be taken from the Purity of GOD, and the present corrupt and polluted State of Man.

Now GOD is described in Holy Scripture (and I speak to those who profess to know the Scripture) as a *Spirit*; as a Being of such infinite Sanctity, as to be of *purser Eyes* than to *behold Iniquity*; as to be so transcendently *holy*, that it is said the *very Heavens are not clean in his Sight*; and the *Angels themselves* he chargeth with *Folly*. On the other hand, *Man* is described (and every *regenerate* Person will find it true by his own Experience) as a Creature altogether *conceived and born in Sin*; as having no good *Thing* dwelling in him; as

being

being *carnal, sold under Sin*; nay, as having a Mind which is *Enmity with God*, and such-like. And since then there is such an infinite Disparity, can any one conceive, how such a filthy, corrupted, polluted Wretch can dwell with an infinitely pure and holy God, before he is changed, and rendered, in some measure, like him? Can He, that is of purer Eyes than to *behold Iniquity, dwell with it*? Can He, in whose Sight the *Heavens* are not clean, delight to dwell with *Uncleanneſs* itself? No; we might as well suppose *Light* to have Communion with *Darkneſs*, or CHRIST to have Concord with *Belial*. But I paſs on to a

THIRD Argument to make good the Apoſtle's Aſſertion in the Text, which ſhall be founded on the Conſideration of the Nature of that Happineſs God has prepared for thoſe that unfeignedly love him.

To enter indeed on a minute and particular Deſcription of Heaven, would be vain and preſumptuous, ſince we are told, that *Eye hath not ſeen, nor Ear heard, neither hath it entered into the Heart of Man to conceive,* the Things that are prepared for the *ſincere Followers* of the Holy JESUS even in this Life, much leſs in that which is to come. However, this we may venture to affirm in the general, that as God is a *Spirit*, ſo the Happineſs

piness he has laid up for his People, is *spiritual* likewise; and consequently, unless our *carnal* Minds are *changed*, and become *spiritualized*, we can never be made meet to partake of that Inheritance with the Saints in Light.

It is true, we may flatter ourselves, that, supposing we continue in our natural corrupt Estate, and carry all our Lusts along with us, we should, notwithstanding, relish Heaven, was GOD to admit us therein. And so we might, was it a *Mahometan Paradise*, wherein we were to take our full Swing in sensual Delights. But since its Joys are only *spiritual*, and no unclean Thing can possibly enter those blessed Mansions, there is an absolute Necessity of our being *changed*, and undergoing a total *Renovation* of our depraved Natures, before we can have any Taste or Relish of those heavenly Pleasures.

It is, doubtless, for this Reason, that the Apostle declares it to be the irrevocable Decree of the Almighty, that *without Holiness*, i. e. without being made pure by *Regeneration*, and having the Image of GOD thereby reinstamped upon the Soul, *no Man living shall see the Lord*. And it is very observable, that our Divine Master, in the famous Passage before referred to, concerning the absolute Ne-

cessity of *Regeneration*, does not say, Unless a Man be born again, he SHALL NOT, but *Unless a Man be born again, he CANNOT enter into the Kingdom of GOD*. For it is founded in the very Nature of Things, that unless we have Dispositions wrought in us suitable and answerable to the Objects that are to entertain us, we can take no manner of Complacency or Satisfaction in them. For Instance ; What Delight can the most harmonious *Musick* afford a *deaf*, or what Pleasure the most excellent *Picture* give a *blind* Man ? Can a tasteless Palate relish the richest Dainties, or a filthy Swine be pleased with the finest Garden of Flowers ? No : And what Reason can be assigned for it ? An Answer is ready ; Because they have neither of them any Tempers of Mind correspondent or agreeable to what they are to be diverted with. And thus it is with the Soul hereafter : For Death makes no more Alteration in the Soul, than as it enlarges its Faculties, and makes it capable of receiving deeper Impressions either of Pleasure or Pain. If it delighted to converse with God here, it will be transported with the Sight of his glorious Majesty hereafter : If it was pleased with the Communion of Saints on Earth, it will be infinitely more so with the Communion and Society of holy Angels, and
the

the Spirits of just Men made perfect in Heaven. But if the Opposite of all this be true, we may assure ourselves, it could not be happy, was God himself to admit it (which he never will do) into the Regions of the Blessed. But it is Time for me to hasten to the

FOURTH and last Argument I shall offer to prove, that we must be *new Creatures* ere we can be *in CHRIST*, *viz.* because CHRIST'S Redemption will not be compleat without it.

IF we reflect indeed on the first and chief End of our Blessed LORD'S Coming, we shall find it was to save us from our Sins, to be a Propitiation for our Sins, to give his Life a Ransom for many. But then, if the Benefits of our dear Redeemer's Death were to extend no further than barely to procure Forgiveness of our Sins, we should have as little Reason to rejoice in it, as a poor condemned Criminal, that is ready to perish by some fatal Disease, would have in receiving a Pardon from his Judge. For *Christians* would do well to consider, that there is not only a legal Hindrance to our Happiness, as we are Breakers of GOD'S Law, but also a moral Impurity in our Natures, which renders us incapable of enjoying Heaven, (as hath been already prov'd) till some mighty Change hath been wrought in us. It is necessary therefore, in order to make

CHRIST'S Redemption compleat, that we should have a Grant of GOD'S Holy Spirit to change our Natures, and so prepare us for the Enjoyment of that Happiness our Saviour has purchased by his precious Blood.

ACCORDINGLY the Holy Scriptures inform us, that whom CHRIST *justifies*, *i. e.* (as we said before) whose Sins he *forgives*, those he also *sanctifies*, *i. e.* purifies and cleanses, and totally changeth their corrupted Natures. Nay, in one Place of Scripture, *Sanctification* is put before *Justification*, on purpose, as it were, to convince us that there is no Salvation to be had without it: *But ye are washed*, says the Apostle, *but ye are sanctified*; and *then* follows, *but ye are justified*. As the Scripture also speaketh in another Place, CHRIST *is to us Justification, Sanctification, and then Redemption*. Let this therefore be admitted as another indisputable Argument why we *must* be new Creatures, ere we can be *in* CHRIST, because without it CHRIST is dead in vain.

PROCEED we now to the next general Thing proposed, *viz.* To draw some Inferences from what has been delivered.

I. AND First then, If he that is *in* CHRIST must be a *new Creature*, this may serve as a
 Reproof

Reproof for some, who rest in a bare Performance of *outward* Duties, without perceiving any real *inward* Change of Heart.

WE may observe a great many Persons to be very punctual in the regular Returns of publick and private Prayer, as likewise of receiving the Holy Communion, and perhaps, now and then too, in keeping a Fast. And so far we grant they do well. But then here is the Misfortune, they rest barely in the Use of the Means, and think all is over, when they have just complied with these sacred Institutions: Whereas, were they rightly informed, they would consider, that all the instituted Means of Grace; as Prayer, Fasting, Hearing and Reading the Word of God, Receiving the Blessed Sacrament, and such-like, are no further serviceable to us, than as they are found to make us *inwardly* better, and to carry on the spiritual Life in the Soul.

It is true, they are *Means*, and *Essential* ones too; but then they are *only* Means; they are *Part*, but not the *Whole* of Religion: For if so, Who more religious than the *Pharisee*? who fasted twice in the Week, and gave Tythes of all that he possessed, and yet was not justified, as our Saviour himself informs us, in the Sight of God.

You perhaps, like the *Pharisee*, may fast often, and make long Prayers; you may, with

Herod, hear good Sermons gladly ; or, as *Judas* himself, according to the Opinion of our Church, did *, receive the Blessed Sacrament. But yet, if you continue vain and trifling, immoral or worldly-minded in your Conversations, and differ from the rest of your Neighbours barely in going to Church, or in complying with some outward Performances, are you better than they ? No, in no wise : You are by far much worse, because those that wholly neglect the Means, are answerable only for omitting the Use of God's Ordinances ; whereas if you use them, and at the same time abuse them, by not letting them produce their intended Effect, you thereby encourage others to think there is nothing in them, and therefore must expect to *receive the greater Damnation*.

2. BUT, Secondly, If he that is *in CHRIST* must be a *new Creature*, then this may check the groundless Presumption of another Class of Professors, who rest in the Attainment of some Moral Virtues, and falsely imagine they are *good Christians* ; if they are just in their Dealings, or temperate in their Diet, and do Hurt or Violence to no Man.

BUT if this was all that is requisite to make us *Christians*, Why might not the Heathens of

* See the first Exhortation to be read the Week before the Communion.

old; be good *Christians*, who were remarkable for these Virtues? Or *St. Paul*, before his Conversion, who tells us, That then he lived in all good Conscience, and was, touching the Law, blameless? And yet, after his Conversion, we find he renounces all Dependance on Works of this Nature, and only desires to be found in CHRIST, and to know the Power of his Resurrection; *i. e.* to have an experimental Proof of receiving the HOLY GHOST, purchased for him by the Death, and insured and applied to him by the Resurrection of JESUS CHRIST.

THE Sum of the Matter is this: Christianity includes Morality, as Grace does Reason; but if we are only mere *Moralists*, if we are not *inwardly* wrought upon, and changed by the powerful Operations of the *Holy Spirit*, and our Moral Actions proceed from a Principle of a *new Nature*, however we may call ourselves *Christians*, it is to be feared we shall be found naked at the Great Day, and in the Number of those, who vainly depend on their own Righteousness, and not on the Righteousness of JESUS CHRIST, imputed to and inherent in them, as necessary to their eternal Salvation.

3. NOR, Thirdly, will this Doctrine less condemn those, who rest in a Partial Amendment of themselves, without going on to Per-

fection, and experiencing a thorough, real, inward Change of Heart.

A little Acquaintance with the World will furnish us with Instances of no small Number of Persons, who, perhaps, were before openly profane; but seeing the ill Consequences of their Vice, and the many worldly Inconveniencies it has reduced them to, on a sudden, as it were, grow civilized; and thereupon flatter themselves that they are very religious, because they differ a little from their former Selves, and are not so scandalously wicked as once they were: Whereas at the same time they shall have some secret darling Sin or other, some beloved *Dalilah* or *Herodias*, which they will not part with; some hidden Lust; which they will not mortify; some vicious Habit, which they will not take pains to root out.— But wouldst thou know, O vain Man! whoever thou art, what the LORD thy GOD requires of thee? thou must be inform'd, that nothing short of a *thorough, sound* Conversion will avail for the Salvation of thy Soul: It is not enough to turn from *Profaneness* to *Civility*; but thou must turn from *Civility* to *Godliness*: Not only *some*, but *all Things* must become *new* in thy Soul: It will profit thee but little to do many Things, if yet some *one Thing* thou lackest: In short, thou must not be only an *almost*, but
altogether

altogether a new Creature, or in vain thou hopest for a saving Interest *in* CHRIST.

4. Fourthly and lastly, If he that is *in* CHRIST must be a *new Creature*, then this may be prescribed as an infallible Rule for every Person of whatever Denomination, Age, Degree or Quality, to judge himself by; this being the only solid Foundation, whereon we can build a well-grounded Assurance of Pardon, Peace, and Happiness.

WE may indeed depend on the broken Reed of an external Profession; we may think we have done enough, if we lead such sober, honest, moral Lives, as many Heathens did. We may imagine we are in a safe Condition, if we attend on the publick Offices of Religion, and are constant in the Duties of our Closets. But unless all these tend to reform our Lives, and change our Hearts, and are only used as so many Channels of Divine Grace; as I told you before, so I tell you again, Christianity will profit us nothing.

LET each of us therefore seriously put this Question to our Hearts: Have we received the HOLY GHOST since we believed? Are we *new Creatures* in CHRIST, or no? At least, if we are not so *yet*, it is our daily Endeavour to *become* such? Do we make a constant and conscientious Use of all the Means of Grace required

quired thereto? Do we fast, watch, and pray? Do we not only lazily seek, but laboriously strive to enter in at the strait Gate? In short Do we *renounce* ourselves, take up our Crosses, and follow CHRIST? If so, we are in that narrow Way which leads to Life: We are, at least shall in Time, become *new Creatures in CHRIST*: The good Seed is sown in our Hearts, and will, if duly water'd and nourish'd by a regular persevering Use of *all* the Means of Grace, grow up to ternal Life. But, on the contrary, if we have only *heard*, and know not *experimentally*, whether there be any HOLY GHOST; if we are Strangers to Fasting, Watching, and Prayer, and all the other spiritual Exercises of Devotion; if we are content to go in the broad Way, merely because we see most other People do so, without once reflecting whether it be the right one or not; in short, if we are Strangers, nay, Enemies to the Cross of CHRIST, by leading Lives of Softness, Worldly-mindedness, and sensual Pleasure; and thereby make others think, that Christianity is but an empty Name, a bare formal Profession; if this be the Case, I say, then CHRIST is as yet dead in vain as to *us*; we are yet under the Guilt of our Sins; we are unacquainted with that true and thorough

Con-

Conversion, which alone can intitle us to the Salvation of our Souls.

BUT, Beloved, I am persuaded better Things of you, and Things that accompany Salvation, tho' we thus speak; and humbly hope, that you are fully and heartily convinced, that nothing but the Wedding Garment of a *new Nature*, can gain Admission for you at the Marriage Feast of the Supper of the Lamb; that you are sincerely persuaded, that he that hath not the Spirit of CHRIST, is none of his; and that, unless the SPIRIT, which raised JESUS from the Dead, dwell in you here, neither will your mortal Bodies be quickened by the same SPIRIT to dwell with him hereafter.

LET me therefore (as was proposed in the last Place) earnestly exhort you, in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, to act suitable to those Convictions, and to live as *Christians*, that are commanded in Holy Writ, to put off their former Conversation concerning the *Old Man*, and to put on the *New Man*, which is created after GOD, in Righteousness and true Holiness.

IT must be owned indeed, that this is a great and difficult Work; but, blessed be GOD, it is not impossible. Many Thousands of happy Souls have been assisted by a Divine Power to bring it about, and why should *We* despair of Success?

Success? Is GOD's Hand shortened, that it cannot save? Was He the GOD of our *Fathers*, is He not the GOD of their *Children* also? Yes, doubtless, of their Children also. It is a Task likewise that will put us to some Pain; it will oblige us to part with some Lust, to break with some Friend, to mortify some beloved Passion, which may be exceeding dear to us, and perhaps as hard to leave, as to cut off a right Hand, or pluck out a right Eye. But what of all this? Will not the being made a real living Member of CHRIST, a Child of GOD, and Inheritor of the *Kingdom of Heaven*, abundantly make Amends for all this Trouble? Undoubtedly it will. Lastly, Setting about and carrying on this great and necessary Work, perhaps may, nay, assuredly will, expose us to the Ridicule of the unthinking Part of Mankind, who will wonder, that we run not into the same Excess of Riot with themselves; and because we may deny our sinful Appetites, and are not conformed to this World, being commanded in Scripture to do the one, and to have our Conversation in Heaven in Opposition to the other, they may count our Lives Folly, and our End to be without Honour. But will not the being numbered among the Saints, and shining as the Stars for ever and ever, be a more than a sufficient Recompense for

for all the Ridicule, Calumny, or Reproach we can possibly meet with here?

INDEED, was there no other Reward attended a thorough Conversion, but that Peace of GOD, which is the unavoidable Consequence of it, and which, even in this Life, passeth all Understanding, we should have great Reason to rejoice. But when we consider this is the least of those Mercies GOD has prepared for those that are in CHRIST *new Creatures*; that this is but the Beginning of an eternal Succession of Pleasures; that the Day of our Deaths, which the unconverted, unrenewed Sinner must so much dread, will be, as it were, but the *first* Day of our *new Births*, and open to us an everlasting Scene of Happiness and Comfort; in short, if we remember, that they who are regenerate and born again, have a real Title to all the glorious Promises of the Gospel, and are infallibly certain of being as happy, both here and hereafter, as an All-wise, All-gracious, All-powerful GOD can make them; methinks, every one that has but the least Concern for the Salvation of his precious, his immortal Soul, having such Promises, such an Hope, such an Eternity of Happiness set before him, should never cease watching, praying, and striving, till he find a real, inward, saving Change wrought in his
Heart;

Heart; and thereby knoweth of a Truth, that he dwells in CHRIST, and CHRIST in him; that he is a *new Creature* in CHRIST; that he is therefore a Child of GOD; that he is already an Inheritor, and will ere long, if he endure to the End, be an actual Possessor of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Which GOD of his Infinite Mercy grant,
through JESUS CHRIST our LORD; *To*
whom, &c.

THE
NECESSITY and BENEFITS
OF
SOCIETY in general,
AND OF
Religious Society in particular.

A SERMON preached in the Parish
Church of *St. Nicholas* in *Bristol*, and be-
fore the Religious Societies, at one of their
General Quarterly-Meetings in *Bow-Church*,
London, in the Year 1737.

T O T H E
M E M B E R S
O F E V E R Y
R E L I G I O U S S O C I E T Y

In and about the
Cities of *London, Westminster,*
and *Bristol.*

G E N T L E M E N,

AS *this SERMON was preached with an Intent to promote and encourage your SOCIETIES, I hope you will accept it, as a Testimony of my Gratitude for those many Benefits I have received, under GOD, by associating some Time with you.*

It's true indeed I had not the least Thought of letting any other of my Discourses see the Light: But such was the Zeal of some of my Bristol Friends (though certainly in this In-
D *stance*

stance of it, as the Discourse itself will shew, misguided) that having gotten a very incorrect Copy, they ordered it to be published, and near four Hundred of the first Impression were sold off in Bristol, before I was apprized of any such Design being carrying on, at least before a Letter, which I sent absolutely to forbid the Prosecution of it, could reach that City. But when I came to peruse one of them, I found so many Things left out, so many Pages inserted, which (though written by Me on a particular Occasion) had little or no Reference to the main Design of the Discourse, that I was obliged in my own Defence to let a Second, less incorrect, Edition (tho' very unworthy of any Publication at all) be printed off.

AND now if GOD (as he often works by the meanest Instruments) should vouchsafe to bless it to any of your Members, I shall not repent (though I did repent) of its being published without the Consent or Knowledge of,

GENTLEMEN,

Your hearty Well-wisher

And unworthy Servant in CHRIST,

G. W.

S E R M O N II.

On Religious Society.

ECCLES. IV. 9, 10. II, 12.

Two are better than One; because they have a good Reward for their Labour.

For if they fall, the One will lift up his Fellow: But woe be to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.

Again, if Two lye together, then they have Heat; but how can One be warm alone?

And if One prevail against him, Two shall withstand him; and a Threefold Cord is not quickly broken.

AMONG the many Reasons assignable for the sad Decay of *True Christianity*, perhaps the neglecting to assemble ourselves together, in *Religious Societies*, may not be one of the least. That I may therefore do my endeavour towards promoting so excellent

a Means of Piety, I have selected a Passage of Scripture drawn from the Experience of the Wisest of Men, which being a little enlarged on and illustrated, will fully answer my present Design; that being to shew, in the best Manner I can, the *Necessity and Benefits of Society* in general, and of *Religious Society* in particular.

Two are better than One, &c.

FROM which Words I shall take Occasion to prove,

First, The Truth of the Wise Man's Assertion, *viz. Two are better than One*, and that in Reference to *Society* in general, and *Religious Society* in particular.

Secondly, To assign some Reasons why *Two are better than One*, especially as to the last Particular. 1. Because Men can raise up one another when they chance to slip: *For if they fall, the One will lift up his Fellow.* 2. Because they can impart Heat to each other: *Again, if Two lie together, then they have Heat; but how can One be warm alone?* 3. Because they can secure each other from those that do oppose them: *And if One prevail against him, Two shall withstand him*
and

and a Three-fold Cord is not quickly broken.

From hence,

Thirdly, I shall take Occasion to shew the Duty incumbent on every Member of a *Religious Society*.

Fourthly and lastly, I shall draw an Inference or two from what shall have been said; and then conclude with a Word or two of Exhortation from the whole.

First then, I am to prove the Truth of the Wise Man's Assertion, *viz.* that *Two are better than One*, and that in reference to *Society* in general, and *Religious Societies* in particular.

AND how can this be done better than by shewing that it is absolutely necessary for the Welfare both of the Bodies and Souls of Men? Indeed if we look upon Man as he came out of the Hands of his Maker, we imagine him to be *perfect, entire, lacking nothing*. But GOD, whose *Thoughts are not as our Thoughts*, saw something still wanting to make *Adam* happy. And what was that? Why, an Help meet for him. For thus speaketh the Scripture: *And the LORD GOD said, It is not good that the Man should be alone, I will make an Help meet for him.*

OBSERVE, GOD said, *It is not good*, thereby implying that the Creation would have been

imperfect, *in some sort*, unless an *Help* was found out *meet for Adam*. And if this was the Case of Man before the Fall; if an *Help* was *meet* for him in a State of Perfection; surely since the Fall, when we come naked and helpless out of our Mother's Womb, when our Wants increase with our Years, and we can scarcely subsist a Day without the mutual Assistance of each other, well may we say, *It is not good for Man to be alone*.

SOCIETY, then, we see is absolutely necessary in respect to our *bodily* and *personal* Wants. If we carry our View farther, and consider Mankind as divided into different Cities, Countries, and Nations, the Necessity of it will appear yet more evident. For how can Communities be kept up, or Commerce carried on, without *Society*? Certainly not at all, since Providence seems wisely to have assigned a particular Product to almost each particular Country, on Purpose, as it were, to oblige us to be social; and hath so admirably mingled the Parts of the whole Body of Mankind together, *that the Eye cannot say to the Hand, I have no need of Thee; nor again, the Hand to the Foot, I have no Need of Thee*.

MANY other Instances might be given of the *Necessity of Society*, in reference to our *bodily, personal, and national* Wants. But what
are

are all these when *weighed in the Balance of the Sanctuary*, in comparifon of the infinite greater Need of it, with refpect to the *Soul*? It was chiefly in regard to this better Part, no doubt, that GOD *faid, It is not good for the Man to be alone.* For let us fuppofe *Adam* to be as happy as may be, placed as the Lord of the Creation in the *Paradife* of GOD, and fpending all his Hours in adoring and praifing the Bleffed Author of his Being; yet as his Soul was the very Copy of the *Divine Nature*, whose peculiar Property it is to be communicative, *without the Divine All-Sufficiency* he could not be compleatly happy, becaufe he was alone and incommunicative, nor even Content in *Paradife* for want of a *Partner* in his Joys. GOD knew this, and therefore *faid, It is not good that the Man fhall be alone, I will make a Help meet for him.* And tho' this proved a fatal Means of his falling; yet that was not owing to any natural Confequence of *Society*; but partly to that curfed Apoftate, who *craftily lyes in wait to deceive*, partly to *Adam's* own Folly, in rather chufing to be miserable with one he loved, than trust in GOD to raife him up another Spoufe.

IF we reflect indeed on that familiar Inter-
course our firft Parents could carry on with
Heaven, in a State of Innocence, we fhall be

apt to think he had as little Need of *Society*, as to his *Soul*, as before we supposed him to have, in respect to his *Body*. But yet, as GOD and the Holy Angels were so far above him on the one hand, and the Beasts so far beneath him on the other, there was nothing like having one to converse with, who was *Bone of his Bone, and Flesh of his Flesh*.

MAN, then, could not be fully happy, we see even in *Paradise*, without a Companion of his own Species, much less now he is driven out. For, let us view him a little in his natural Estate now, since the Fall, as *having his Understanding darkened, his Mind alienated from the Life of GOD*; as no more able to see his Way wherein he should go, than a Blind Man to describe the Sun: That notwithstanding this, he must receive his Sight ere he can see GOD: And that if he never sees him, he never can be happy. Let us view him, I say, in this Light (or rather this Darknes) and deny the *Necessity of Society* if we can. A Divine Revelation we find is absolutely necessary, we being by Nature as unable to know, as we are to do our Duty. And how shall we learn except one teach us? But was GOD to do this immediately by Himself, how should we, with *Moses* exceedingly quake and fear? Nor would the Ministry of Angels in this Affair be without

out too much Terror. It is necessary, therefore (at least God's Dealing with us hath shewed it to be so) that we should be *drawn with the Cords of a Man*. And that a Divine Revelation being granted, we should use one another's Assistance, under God, to instruct each other in the Knowledge, and to exhort one another to the Practice of those Things which belong to our everlasting Peace. This is undoubtedly the great End of Society intended by God since the Fall, and a strong Argument it is, why *Two are better than One*, and why we should *not forsake the Assembling ourselves together*.

BUT farther, let us consider ourselves as *Christians*, as having this natural Veil, in some measure taken off from our Eyes, by the Assistance of God's Holy Spirit, and so enabled to see what he requires of us. Let us suppose ourselves in some Degree to have *tasted the good Word of Life*, and to have felt the Powers of the World to come, influencing and moulding our Souls into a religious Frame: To be fully and heartily convinced that we are *Soldiers* listed under the *Banner of CHRIST*, and have proclaimed open War at our *Baptism, against the World, the Flesh, and the Devil*; and have, perhaps, frequently renewed our Obligations so to do, by partaking of the *Lord's Supper*:
That

That we are surrounded with Millions of Foes Without, and infested with a Legion of Enemies Within: That we are commanded to shine as Lights in the World, in the midst of a crooked and perverse Generation: That we are travelling to a long Eternity, and need all imaginable Helps to shew us, and encourage us in our Way thither. Let us, I say, reflect on all this, and then how shall each of us cry out, Brethren, what a necessary Thing it is to meet together in *Religious Societies*?

THE Primitive *Christians* were fully sensible of this, and therefore we find them continually keeping up Communion with each other: For what says the Scripture? *They continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship, Acts ii. 42.* Peter and John were no sooner dismissed by the Great Council, than they haste away to their Companions. *And being set at Liberty, says the Text, they came to their own, and told them all these Things which the High Priest had said unto them, Acts iv. 23.* Paul, as soon as converted, *tarried three Days with the Disciples that were at Damascus, Acts ix. 19.* And Peter afterwards, when released from Prison, immediately goes to the House of Mary, where there were *great Multitudes assembled, praying, Acts xii. 12.* And it is reported of *Christians* in After-Ages, that they used

used to assemble together before Day-light, to sing a Psalm to CHRIST as GOD. So precious was the *Communion of Saints* in those Days.

If it be asked, what Advantage we shall reap from such a Procedure now? I answer, much every Way. *Two are better than one, because they have a good Reward for their Labour: For if they fall, the One will lift up his Fellow; but woe be to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lye together, then they have Heat; but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, Two shall withstand him; and a Threefold Cord is not quickly broken.*

WHICH directly leads me to my Second general Head, under which I was to assign some Reasons why *Two are better than one*, especially in *Religious Society*,

I. As Man in his present Condition cannot always stand upright, but by reason of the Frailty of his Nature cannot but fall; one eminent Reason why *Two are better than One*, or in other Words, one great Advantage of *Religious Society* is, *That when they fall, the One will lift up his Fellow.*

AND an excellent Reason this, indeed! For alas! when we reflect how prone we are to be drawn into Error in our Judgments, and into
Vice

Vice in our Practice ; and how unable, at least how very unwilling, to espy or correct our own Miscarriages ; when we consider how apt the World is to flatter us in our Faults, and how few there are so kind as to tell us the Truth ; what an inestimable Privilege must it be to have a Set of true, judicious, hearty Friends about us, continually watching over our Souls, to inform us where we have fallen, and warn us that we fall not again for the future. Surely it is such a Privilege that (to use the Words of an *eminent Christian*) we shall never know the Value of, till we come to Glory.

BUT this is not all ; for supposing that we could always stand upright, yet whosoever reflects on the Difficulties of Religion in general, and his own Propensity to Lukewarmness and Indifference in particular, will find that he must be *zealous* as well as *steady*, if e'er he expects to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Here, then, the Wise Man points out to us another excellent Reason why *Two are better than One*. Again, says he, *if Two lye together, then they have Heat ; but how can One be warm alone ?*

WHICH was the next Thing to be considered under the *Second* general Head, *viz.* to assign a second Reason why *Two are better than One*, because they can impart *Heat* to each other.

IT is an Observation no less true than common, That kindled Coals, if placed asunder, soon go out, but if heaped together, quicken and enliven each other, and afford a lasting Heat. The same will hold good in the Case now before us. If *Christians* kindled by the Grace of God unite, they will quicken and enliven each other; but if they separate and keep asunder, no marvel if they soon grow cool or tepid. If *Two* or *Three* meet together in CHRIST'S Name, *they will have Heat: but how can One be warm alone?*

OBSERVE, *How can One be warm alone?* The Wise Man's expressing himself by way of Question, implies an Impossibility, at least a very great Difficulty, to be warm in Religion without Company, where it may be had. Behold here, then, another excellent Benefit flowing from *Religious Society*; it will keep us *zealous* as well as *steady*, in the Ways of Godliness.

BUT to illustrate this a little farther by a Comparison or two. Let us look upon ourselves (as was above hinted) as *Soldiers* listed under CHRIST'S Banner; as going out with *Ten Thousand* to meet *One* that cometh against us with *Twenty Thousand*: as Persons that are to *wrestle not only with Flesh and Blood, but against Principalities, against Powers, and spiritual Wickednesses in high Places*. And then tell me, all ye
that

that fear GOD, if it be not an invaluable Privilege to have a Company of *Fellow Soldiers* continually about us, animating and exhorting each other to stand our Ground, to keep our Ranks, and manfully to follow the *Captain of our Salvation*, though it be through a Sea of Blood?

Lastly, LET us consider ourselves in another View before mentioned, *viz.* as Persons travelling to a *long Eternity*; as rescued by the *free Grace of GOD* in some measure from our natural *Egyptian Bondage*, and marching under the Conduct of our *Spiritual Joshua*, through the *Wilderness of this World*, to the Land of our *Heavenly Canaan*. Let us farther reflect how apt we are to startle at every Difficulty; to cry, *There are Lions! There are Lions in the Way! There are the Sons of Anak* to be grappled with, ere we can possess the *promised Land*: How prone we are, with *Lot's Wife*, to look wishfully back on our *Spiritual Sodom*, or, with the foolish *Israelites*, to long again for the *Flesh-Pots of Egypt*, and to return to our former natural State of Bondage and Slavery. Consider this, my Brethren, and see what a blessed Privilege it will be to have a Set of *Israelites indeed* about us, always reminding us of the Folly of any such cowardly Design, and of the intolerable Misery we shall run into, if

we

we fall in the least short of the *promised Land*.

MORE might be said on this Particular, did not the Limits of a Discourse of this Nature, oblige me to hasten,

3. To give a Third Reason, mentioned by the Wise Man in the Text, why *Two are better than One*; namely, because they can secure each other from Enemies without. *And if One prevail against him, yet Two shall withstand him; and a Threefold Cord is not quickly broken.*

HITHERTO we have considered the Advantages of *Religious Societies*, as a great Preservative against falling (at least dangerously falling) into Sin and Lukewarmness, and that too from our own Corruptions. But what says the Wise Son of *Sirach*? *My Son, when thou goest to serve the Lord, prepare thy Soul for Temptation*: And that not only from inward, but outward Foes; particularly from those two grand Adversaries, the *World* and the *Devil*: For no sooner will thine Eye be bent Heaven-ward, but the former will be immediately diverting it another Way, telling thee thou needest not be *singular* in order to be *religious*; that one may be a *Christian* without going so much out of the *Common Road*.

NOR will the *Devil* be wanting in his *artful* Insinuations, or *impious* Suggestions to divert or terrify thee from pressing forwards, *that thou mayest*

mayest lay hold on the Crown of Life : And if he cannot prevail this Way, he will try another; and, in order to make his Temptation the more undiscerned, but withal more successful, he will employ, perhaps, some of thy nearest Relatives, or most powerful Friends, (as he set *Peter* on our *blessed Master*) who will always be bidding thee *spare thyself* ; telling thee thou needest not take so much Pains ; that it is not so difficult a Matter to get to Heaven as some People would make of it, nor the Way so narrow as others imagine it to be.

BUT see here the Advantage of Religious Company ; for supposing thou findest thyself thus surrounded on every Side, and unable to withstand such *horrid* (though seemingly *friendly*) Counsels, *haste* away to thy Companions, and they will teach thee a truer and better Lesson ; they will tell thee, that thou must be *singular* if thou wilt be *religious* ; and that it is as impossible for a *Christian*, as for a City set upon a Hill to be hid : That if thou wilt be an *almost Christian* (and as good be none at all) thou mayest live in the same idle, indifferent Manner as thou seest most other People do : But if thou wilt be not only *almost*, but *altogether a Christian*, they will inform thee thou must go a great deal further : That thou must not only *faintly seek*, but *earnestly strive to enter* ;

in

in at the Strait Gate: That there is but *One* Way now to Heaven as formerly, *viz.* through the narrow Passage of a *sound Conversion:* And that in order to bring about this mighty Work thou must undergo a constant, but necessary Discipline of Fasting, Watching, and Prayer. And that, therefore, the only Reason why these Friends give thee such Advice is, because they are not willing to take so much Pains themselves; or, as our Saviour told *Peter* on a like Occasion, because they *savour not the Things that be of God, but the Things that be of Men.*

THIS, then, is another excellent Blessing arising from *Religious Society*, that Friends can hereby secure each other from those that oppose them. The *Devil* is fully sensible of this, and therefore he has always done his utmost to suppress, and put a Stop to the *Communion of Saints.* This was his grand Artifice at the first planting of the *Gospel;* to persecute the Professors of it, in order to separate them. Which, tho' God, as he always will, overruled for the better; yet it shews what an Enmity he has against *Christians assembling themselves together;* nor has he yet left off his old Stratagem; it being his usual Way to entice us *by ourselves,* in order to tempt us; where, by being destitute of one another's Helps, he hopes to lead us *captive at his Will.*

E.

BUT

BUT, on the contrary, knowing how his own Interest is strengthened by *Society*, he would first persuade us to neglect the *Communion of Saints*, and then bid us *stand in the Way of Sinners*, hoping thereby to put us into *the Seat of the Scornful*. *Judas* and *Peter* are melancholy Instances of this. The former had no sooner left his Company at Supper, but he went out and betrayed his Master: And the dismal Downfall of the latter, when he would venture himself amongst a Company of Enemies, plainly shews us what the *Devil* will endeavour to do, when he gets us by ourselves. Had *Peter* kept his own Company, he might have kept his Integrity; but a *single Cord*, alas! how quickly was it broken? Our *Blessed Saviour* knew this full well, and therefore it is very observable, that he always sent out his *Disciples Two by Two*.

AND now, after so many Advantages to be reaped from *Religious Society*, may we not very justly cry out with the Wise Man in my Text, *Woe be to him that is alone; for when he falleth, he hath not another to lift him up? When he is cold, he hath not a Friend to warm him; when he is assaulted, he hath not a Second to help him to withstand his Enemy.*

III. I NOW come to my *Third* general Head, under which was to be shewn the several Duties incumbent on every Member of a *Religious Society*, as such, which are three. 1. *Mutual Reproof*; 2. *Mutual Exhortation*; 3. *Mutual assisting and defending each other*.

1. *Mutual Reproof*. *Two are better than One; for when they fall, the One will lift up his Fellow*.

Now, Reproof may be taken either in a more extensive Sense, and then it signifies our raising a Brother by the gentlest Means, when he falls into Sin or Error; or, in a more restrained Signification, as reaching no farther than those little Miscarriages, which unavoidably happen in the most holy Men living.

THE Wise Man in the Text, supposes all of us subject to both: *For when they fall*, (says he, thereby implying that each of us may fall) *the One will lift up his Fellow*. From whence we may infer, that *when any Brother is overtaken with a Fault, he that is spiritual* (that is, regenerate, and knows the Corruption and Weakness of Human Nature) *ought to restore such a one in the Spirit of Meekness*. And why he should do so, the Apostle subjoins a Reason *considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted: i. e.*

considering thy own Frailty, lest thou also fall by the like Temptation.

WE are all frail unstable Creatures; and it is merely owing to the *Free Grace and good Providence of GOD* that we *run not into the same Excess of Riot* with other Men. Every offending Brother, therefore, claims our *Pity* rather than our *Resentment*; and each Member should strive who should be most forward, as well as most gentle, in restoring him to his former State.

BUT supposing a Person not to be *overtaken*, but to fall *wilfully* into a Crime; yet who art thou that deniest Forgiveness to thy offending Brother? *Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall.* Take ye, Brethren, the holy Apostles as eminent Examples for you to learn by, how you ought to behave in this Matter. Consider how quickly they joined the Right Hand of Fellowship with *Peter*, who had so wilfully denied his Master: For we find *John* and him together but two Days after, *John* xx. 2. And *ver.* 19, we find him assembled with the rest. So soon did they forgive, so soon associate with their sinful, yet relenting Brother.— *Let us go and do likewise.*

BUT there is another kind of Reproof incumbent on every Member of a *Religious Society*; namely, a *gentle Rebuke for some Miscalriage*

carriage or other, which, though not actually sinful, yet may become the Occasion of Sin. This indeed seems a more easy, but perhaps will be found a more difficult Point than the former: For when a Person has really sinned, he cannot but own his Brethren's Reproof to be just; whereas, when it was only for some little Misconduct, the Pride that is in our Natures will scarce suffer us to brook it. But however ungrateful this Pill may be to our Brother, yet if we have any Concern for his Welfare, it must be administered by some friendly Hand or other. By all means then let it be applied; only, like a skilful Physician, *gild* over the ungrateful Medicine, and endeavour, if possible, to *deceive* thy Brother into Health and Soundness. *Let all Bitterness, and Wrath, and Malice, and Evil-speaking be put away* from it. Let the Patient know his Recovery is the only Thing aimed at, that thou delightest not *causelessly to grieve thy Brother*; and then thou can't not want Success.

2. *Mutual Exhortation* is the second Duty resulting from the Words of the Text.—*Again, if Two lye together, then they have Heat.*

OBSERVE here again, the Wise Man supposes it as impossible for religious Persons to meet together and not to be the warmer for each other's Company, as for two Persons to

lye in the same Bed, and yet freeze with Cold. But now, how is it possible to communicate Heat to each other, without mutually *stirring up the Gift of God* which is in us, by Brotherly Exhortation? Let every Member then of a *Religious Society* write that zealous Apostle's Advice on the Tables of his Heart; *See that ye exhort, and provoke one another to Love, and to good Works; and so much the more as you see the Day of the LORD approaching.* Believe me, Brethren, we have need of Exhortation to rouse up our sleepy Souls, to set us upon our Watch against the Temptations of the *World, the Flesh, and the Devil*; to excite us to renounce ourselves, to take up our Crosses, and follow our blessed Master, and the glorious Company of Saints and Martyrs, *who through Faith have fought the good Fight, and are gone before us to inherit the Promises.* A third Part, therefore, of the Time wherein a *Religious Society* meets, seems necessary to be spent in this important Duty: For what avails it to have our Understandings enlightened by pious Reading, unless our Wills are at the same Time inclined, and inflamed by mutual Exhortation, to put it in Practice? Add to this, that this is the best Way both to receive and impart Light, and the only Means to preserve and increase that Warmth and Heat which each Person first brought with him;

him; GOD so ordering this, as all other spiritual Gifts, that *to him that hath, i. e. improves and communicates what he hath, shall be given; but from him that hath not, i. e. does not improve the Heat he hath, shall be taken away even that which he seemed to have.* So needful, so essentially necessary, is Exhortation to the Good of a Society.

3. Thirdly and lastly, THE Text points out another Duty incumbent on every Member of a Religious Society, viz. to defend each other from those that do oppose them. *And if One prevail against him, yet Two shall withstand him; and a Threefold Cord is not quickly broken.*

HERE the Wise Man takes it for granted, that Offences will come, nay, and that they may prevail too. And this is no more than our Blessed Master has long since told us. Not, indeed, that there is any Thing in Christianity itself that has the least Tendency to give rise to, or promote such Offences: No, on the contrary, it breathes nothing but Unity and Love.

BUT so it is, that ever since the fatal Sentence pronounced by GOD, after our first Parents Fall, viz. *I will put Enmity between thy Seed and her Seed; He that is born after the Flesh,* that is, the unregenerate unconverted Sinner, has in all Ages persecuted him that is

born after the Spirit: And so it always will be. Accordingly we find an early Proof given of this in the Instance of *Cain* and *Abel*; and of *Ismael* and *Isaac*; of *Jacob* and *Esau* afterwards. And, indeed, the whole *Bible* contains little else but an History of the great and continued Opposition between the Children of this World and the Children of God. The first *Christians* were remarkable Examples of this; and though those troublesome Times, blessed be God, are now over, yet the Apostle has laid it down as a general Rule, and all that are sincere can experimentally prove the Truth of it, That *they that will live godly in CHRIST JESUS must (to the End of the World, in some Degree or other) suffer Persecution*. That therefore this may not make us desert our Blessed Master's Cause, every Member should unite their Forces, in order to stand against it. And for the better effecting this, each would do well from Time to Time to communicate his Experiences, Grievances, and Temptations, and beg his Companions (first asking God's Assistance, without which all is nothing) to administer Reproof, Exhortation, or Comfort, as his Case requires: So that *if One cannot prevail against it, yet Two shall withstand it; and a Threefold (much less a many-fold) Cord will not be quickly broken*.

IV. BUT it is time for me to proceed to the *Fourth* general Thing proposed, *viz.* to draw an Inference or two from what has been said.

I. AND first then, if *Two are better than One*, and the Advantages of *Religious Society* are so many and so great, then it is the Duty of every true *Christian* to set on foot, establish and promote, as much as in him lyes, *Societies* of this Nature. And I believe we may venture to affirm that if ever a Spirit of true Christianity is revived in the World, it must be brought about by some such Means as this. Motives, surely, cannot be wanting, to stir us up to this commendable and necessary Undertaking: For, granting all hitherto advanced to be of no Force, yet methinks the single Consideration that great Part of our Happiness in Heaven will consist in the *Communion of Saints*; or that the Interest as well as Piety of those Sectarists that differ from us, is strengthened and supported by nothing more than their frequent Meetings; either of these Considerations, I say, one would think, should induce us to do our utmost to copy after their good Example, and settle a lasting and pious *Communion of the Saints* on Earth. Add to this, that we find the Kingdom of Darkness established daily by such like Means; and shall not the Kingdom of CHRIST be set
in

in Opposition against it? Shall the Children of *Belial* assemble and strengthen each other in Wickedness; and shall not the Children of GOD unite, and strengthen themselves in Piety? Shall *Societies* on *Societies* be countenanced for midnight Revellings, and the promoting of *Vice*, and scarcely one be found intended for the Propagation of Virtue?— Be astonished, O Heavens, at this!

2. BUT this leads me to a second Inference, namely, to warn Persons of the great Danger those are in, who either by their Subscriptions, Presence, or Approbation, promote *Societies* of a quite opposite Nature to Religion.

AND here I would not be understood to mean only those publick Meetings which are designed manifestly for nothing else but Revellings and Banquetings, for Chambering and Wantonness, and at which a modest *Heathen* would blush to be present; but also those seemingly *innocent* Entertainments and Meetings which the *politer* Part of the World are so very fond of, and spend so much Time in: But which, notwithstanding, keep as many Persons out of a Sense of *True Religion*, as Intemperance, Debauchery, or any other Crime whatever. Indeed, whilst we are in this World, we must have proper Relaxations, to fit us both for the Business of our Profession and Religion. But then, for Persons
who

who call themselves *Christians*, that have solemnly vowed at their *Baptism*, to renounce the *Vanities of this sinful World*; that are commanded in Scripture to *abstain from all Appearance of Evil*, and to have their *Conversation in Heaven*. For such Persons as these to support Meetings, that (to say no worse of them) are vain and trifling, and have a natural Tendency to draw off our Minds from God, is absurd, ridiculous, and sinful. Surely *Two are not better than One* in this Case: No; it is to be wished there was not *one* to be found concerned in it. The sooner we forsake the *assembling ourselves together* in such a manner, the better; and no matter how quickly the Cord that holds such *Societies* (was it a thousand Fold) is broken.

BUT you, Brethren, have not so learnt CHRIST: But on the contrary, like true Disciples of your LORD and Master, have by the Blessing of GOD (as this Evening's Solemnity abundantly testifies) happily formed yourselves into such *Societies*, which if duly attended on, and improved, cannot but strengthen you in your Christian Warfare, and *make you fruitful in every good Word and Work*.

WHAT remains for me to do, but as was proposed, in the last Place, to close up what has been said, in a Word or two, by way of
 Exhortation

Exhortation from the whole, and to beseech you, in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, to go on in the Way you have begun; and by a constant conscientious Attendance on your respective *Societies*, to discountenance Vice, encourage Virtue, and *build each other up in the Knowledge and Fear of GOD.*

ONLY permit me to *stir up your pure Minds, by way of Remembrance*, and to exhort you *if there be any Consolation in CHRIST, any Fellowship of the Spirit*, again and again to consider, that as all *Christians* in general, so all *Members of Religious Societies* in particular, are in an especial Manner, as Houses built upon an Hill; and that therefore it highly concerns you to *walk circumspectly* towards those that are without, and to *take heed to yourselves, that your Conversation*, in common Life, *be as becometh* such an open and peculiar Profession of *the Gospel of CHRIST*: Knowing that the Eyes of all Men are upon you, narrowly to inspect every Circumstance of your Behaviour; and that every notorious wilful Miscarriage of any single Member will, in some measure, redound to the Scandal and Dishonour of your whole Fraternity.

LABOUR, therefore, my beloved Brethren, to let your *Practice* correspond to your *Profession*: And think not that it will be sufficient for you
to

to plead at the last Day, LORD, have we not assembled ourselves together *in thy Name*, and enlivened each other, by *singing Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs*? For, verily, I say unto you, notwithstanding this, our Blessed LORD will bid you *depart from him*; nay, that you shall *receive a greater Damnation*, if, in the midst of these great Pretensions, you are found to be *Workers of Iniquity*.

BUT GOD forbid that any such Evil should befall you; that there should be ever a *Judas*, ever a Traitor amongst such distinguished Followers of our *Common Master*. No, on the contrary, the Excellency of your Rules, the Regularity of your Meetings, and more especially your pious Zeal in assembling in such a publick and solemn Manner so frequently in the Year, persuade me to think, that you are willing, not barely to *seem*, but to *be in Reality, Christians*; and hope to be found at the *Last Day*, what you would be esteemed *now, viz. holy, sincere Disciples of a Crucified Redeemer*.

OH, may you always continue thus minded! and make it your daily, constant Endeavour, both by Precept and Example, to turn all your converse with, more especially those of your own *Societies*, into the same most blessed Spirit and Temper. Thus will you adorn the Gospel of our LORD JESUS CHRIST in all Things: Thus will

62 *The Necessity and Benefits, &c.*

will you anticipate the Happiness of a future State, and by attending on, and improving *the Communion of Saints* on Earth, make yourselves meet to join the Communion and Fellowship of the Spirits of Just Men made perfect, of the Holy Angels, nay, of the Ever Blessed and Eternal GOD in Heaven.

Which GOD of his infinite Mercy grant, thro' JESUS CHRIST our Lord; to whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, Three Persons, and One Eternal GOD, be ascribed, as is most due, all Honour and Praise, Might, Majesty and Dominion, now and for ever.

T H E

THE
B E N E F I T S
O F A N
E A R L Y P I E T Y.

A SERMON preach'd at *Bow-Church, London*, before the Religious Societies, at one of their General Quarterly-Meetings, &c. on *Wednesday Sept. 28, 1737.*

S E R M O N III.

Of the *Benefits* of an EARLY
PIETY.

E C C L E S. xii. 1.

*Remember now thy Creator in the Days
of thy Youth.*

THE Amiability of Religion in itself, the innumeral Advantages that flow from it to Society in general, as well as each sincere Professor of it in particular, cannot but recommend it to the Choice of every considerate Person, and make even wicked Men, as they wish to dye the Death, so, in their more sober Intervals, envy the Life of the Righteous. And indeed we must do the World so much Justice, as to confess, that the Question about Religion does not usually arise from a Dispute whether it be necessary or not (for most Men see the Necessity of doing some-
F thing

thing for the Salvation of their Souls;) but when is the best Time to set about it. Persons are convinced by universal Experience, that the first Essays or Endeavours towards the Attainment of Religion are attended with some Difficulty and Trouble, and therefore they would willingly defer the Beginning such a seemingly ungrateful Work as long as they can. The wanton Prodigal, that is spending his Substance in riotous Living, cries, a little more Pleasure, a little more Sensuality, and then I'll be sober in Earnest. The covetous Worlding, that employs all his Care and Pains in *heaping up Riches*, though *he cannot tell who shall gather them*, does not flatter himself this will do always; but hopes, with the rich Fool in the Gospel, to lay up Goods for a few more Years on Earth, and then he will begin to lay up Treasures in Heaven. And, in short, thus it is that most People are convinc'd of the Necessity of being religious some time or another; but then, like *Felix*, they put off the acting suitably to their Convictions, 'till (what they imagine) *a more convenient Season*: Whereas, would we be so humble as to be guided by the Experience and Counsel of the Wisest of Men, we should learn that Youth is the fittest Season for Religion; *Remember now thy Creator, says Solomon, in the Days of thy Youth.* By
 which

which Word *Remember*, we are not to understand a bare speculative Remembrance, or calling to Mind, (for that, like a dead Faith, will profit us nothing) but such a Remembrance as will constrain us to Obedience, and oblige us, out of Gratitude, to perform all that the LORD our GOD shall require of us. For as forgetting GOD in Scripture Language, implies a total Neglect of our Duty, in like Manner remembering him signifies a perfect Performance of it: So that, when *Solomon* says, *Remember thy Creator in the Days of thy Youth*, it is the same as if he had said, *Keep GOD's Commandments*; or in other Words, be religious *in the Days of thy Youth*; thereby implying that *Youth* is the most proper Season for it.

I shall in the following Discourse, *First*, endeavour to make good the Wise Man's Proposition imply'd in the Words of the Text, and to shew that Youth is the fittest Season of Religion.

Secondly, by Way of Motive, I shall consider the many unspeakable Advantages that will arise from *Remembering our Creator in the Days of our Youth*.

Thirdly and *lastly*, I shall conclude with a Word or two of Exhortation to the younger Part of this Audience.

I. And *First* then, I am to make good the Wise Man's Proposition implied in the Words of the Text, and to shew that *Youth* is the fittest Season for Religion: *Remember now thy Creator in the Days of thy Youth.*

But in order to proceed more clearly in this Argument, it may not be improper, first, to explain what I mean by the Word *Religion*. By this Term then I would not be understood to mean a bare outward Profession or naming the Name of CHRIST; for we are told, that *many that have even prophesied in his Name, and in his Name cast out Devils, shall notwithstanding be rejected by him at the last Day: Nor would I understand by it barely being admitted into CHRIST'S Church by Baptism; for then Simon Magus, Arius, and the Heresiarchs of old might pass for Religious Persons; for these were baptized: Nor yet the Receiving the other Seal of the Covenant; for then Judas himself might be canoniz'd for a Saint: Nor indeed do I mean any or all of these together, considered by themselves; but a thorough, real, inward Change of Nature, wrought in us by the powerful Operations of the HOLY GHOST convey'd to and nourish'd in our Hearts, by a constant Use of all the Means of Grace, evidenc'd*

denc'd by a good Life, and bringing forth the Fruits of the Spirit.

THE attaining this real inward Religion, is a Work of so great Difficulty, that *Nicodemus*, a learned Doctor and Teacher in *Israel*, thought it altogether impossible, and therefore ignorantly asked our Blessed LORD, How this Thing could be? And *truly* to rectify a disorder'd Nature, to mortify our corrupt Passions, to turn Darkness to Light, to put off the old Man, and put on the new, and thereby to have the Image of GOD reinstanc'd upon the Soul; or in one Word, to be born again, however light some may make of it, must, after all our Endeavours, be own'd by Man impossible. 'Tis true indeed CHRIST'S Yoke is said to be an easy or a gracious Yoke, and his Burthen light; but then it is to those only who have been accustomed to bear and draw in it. For, as the wise Son of *Sirach* observes, *At first Wisdom walketh with her Children in crooked Ways, and brings them into Fear; and torments them with her Discipline, and does not turn to comfort and rejoyce them, till she has try'd them and prov'd their Judgment.*—No; we must not flatter ourselves, that our deprav'd Natures can be renewed, unless we submit to a great many Difficulties. The spiritual Birth is attended with its Pangs, as well as the natural: For

they that have experienc'd it, (and they only are the proper Judges) can acquaint you, that frequent Acts of Self-Denial must be exercised, a constant regular Discipline kept up, lest, after all, when we come to the Birth, we should want Strength to bring forth.

BUT if these Things are so; if there are Difficulties and Pangs attending our being *born again*, and Discipline must be called in, What Season more proper than that of *Youth*; when, if ever, our Bodies are robust and vigorous, and our Minds active and courageous; and consequently we are then best qualified to endure Hardness as good Soldiers of JESUS CHRIST?

WE find in secular Matters People commonly observé this Method, and send their Children abroad among the Toils and Fatigues of Business, in their younger Years, as well knowing they are then fittest to undergo them. And why do they not act with the same Consistency in the grand Affair of Religion? Because, as our Saviour has told us, *the Children of this World are wiser in their Generation, than the Children of Light.*

BUT, Secondly, if pure Religion and undefiled, consists in the total Renewal of our corrupted Natures, then 'tis not only a Work of Difficulty, but of Time: For, as the old
was

was not, so neither is the new Creation compleated in a Day. No, good Men know by certain Experience, that it is a long while ere *old Things can pass away, and all Things become new* in them. The Strong Man armed has gotten too great Possession of their Hearts to be quickly driven out, and they are obliged to combat many a weary Hour, ere their Corruptions, which is the Armour in which the Strong Man trusted, be wholly taken from him. Nay, they find their whole Lives short enough to perfect the Work of *Regeneration*, which they were sent into the World to do, and never expect to say, *it is finish'd*, 'till with their blessed Master they bow down their Heads, and give up the Ghost.

AND if this be the Case, if the Renovation of our Nature be not only difficult, but requires so long a Space to compleat it in; then it highly concerns every one to set about it betimes, and to *work their Work while it is Day, before the Night cometh, when no Man can work.*

Could we indeed live to the Age of *Methuselah*, and had but little Business to employ ourselves in, we might then be more excusable, if we made no other Use of this World than what too many do, *take our Pastime therein*: But since our Lives are so very short, and the working out our Salvation requires so much

Time, we have no Room left for Trifling, lest we should be snatch'd away while our Lamps are untrimmed, and we are entirely unprepared to meet the Bridegroom.

DID we know a Friend or Neighbour, who had a long Journey of the utmost Importance to make, and yet should stand *all the Day idle*, neglecting to set out till the Sun was about to go down, we could not but pity and condemn his egregious Folly: And yet it is to be feared most Men are just such Fools; they have a long Journey to take, nay, a Journey to Eternity, a Journey of infinite Importance, and which they are obliged to dispatch before the Sun of their natural Life be gone down; and yet they loiter away their Time allotted them to perform their Journey in, 'till Sickness or Death surprizes them; and then they cry out, *What shall we do to inherit eternal Life?* But alas! Is this a proper Season to ask such a Question? Is this a Time to *begin* their Journey, when they should be at the End of it; or to inquire what they must do, when perhaps they have hardly any Strength or Ability left to do any thing to purpose, and when they should be waiting with humble Patience, in Hopes of speedily receiving their Wages for Work already done? *O foolish People and unwise! If ye offer the Blind for Sacrifice, is it*

not

not evil? And if ye offer the Lame and Sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy Governor, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy Person? saith the LORD of Hosts. But leaving such to the Mercies of GOD, I pass on to

II. The *Second* general Thing proposed, *viz.*
To shew the Advantages that will arise from remembering our Creator in the Days of our Youth; which may serve as so many Motives to excite and quicken all Persons immediately to set about it.

I. And the First Benefit resulting from thence is, that it will bring most Honour and Glory to GOD. This, I suppose, every serious Person will grant, ought to be the Point in which all our Actions should center: For to this End were we born; to this End were we redeemed by the precious Blood of JESUS CHRIST, that we should promote GOD's eternal Glory. And as the Glory of GOD is most advanced by paying Obedience to his Precepts, they that begin soonest to walk in his Ways, act most to his Glory: For the common Objection against the Divine Laws in general, and the Doctrines of the Gospel in particular, is, that they are not practicable, that they are contrary to Flesh and Blood, and that all those Precepts concerning Self-Denial, Renunciation
of,

of, and Deadness to the World, are but so many arbitrary Restraints imposed upon human Nature. But when we see mere Striplings not only practising, but delighting in such religious Duties, and in the Days of their Youth, when, if ever, they have a Relish for sensual Pleasures, subduing and despising the *Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eye, and the Pride of Life* — This, this is acceptable with GOD; this vindicates his injured Honour; this shews that *his Service is perfect Freedom, that his Yoke is easy, and his Burden light.*

2. But, Secondly, as an early Piety redounds most to the Honour of GOD, so it will bring most Honour to ourselves: For those that honour GOD, GOD will honour. We find it therefore remarked to the Praise of *Obadiab*, that *he served the LORD from his Youth*: Of *Samuel*, that *he stood, when young, before GOD in a Linen Ephod*: Of *Timothy*, that *from a Child he had known the Holy Scriptures*: Of *St. John*, that *he was the youngest and most beloved Disciple*; and of our blessed LORD himself, that *at Twelve Years old he went up to the Temple, and sat among the Doctors, both hearing and asking them Questions.*

3. Nor, Thirdly, will an early Piety afford us less Comfort than Honour, not only because it renders Religion habitual to us, but also
because

because it gives us a well-grounded Assurance of the Sincerity of our Professions. Was there no other Argument against a Death-bed Repentance but the Unsatisfactoriness and Anxiety of such a State, that would be sufficient to deter all thinking Persons from deferring the most important Business of their Life to such a dreadful Period of it. For supposing a Man be sincere in his Professions of Repentance on a Death-bed (which is very much to be doubted) yet he can take no great Comfort in them, because he is uncertain whether his Convictions and Remorse proceed from a true Sorrow for Sin, or a servile Fear of Punishment.— But a young Saint need fear no such Perplexity; he knows that he loves God for his own Sake, and is not driven to him by a Dread of impending Evil: He does not decline the Gratifications of Sense, because he can no longer *hear the Voice of Singing-Men and Singing Women*; but willingly takes up his Cross, and follows his Blessed Master in his Youth, and therefore must have great Confidence of his Sincerity towards God. But farther, as an early Piety assures the Hearts of its Sincerity, so likewise it brings its present Reward with it, as it renders Religion, and all its Duties, habitual and easy. A young Saint, was you to ask
him,

him, would joyfully tell you the unspeakable Comfort of beginning to be good betimes: As for his Part, he knows not what Men mean by talking of Mortification, Self-denial, and Retirement, as hard and rigorous Duties; for he has so accustomed himself to them, that they are now become even natural, and he takes infinitely more pleasure in practising the severest Precepts of the Gospel, than a luxurious *Dives* in a Bed of State, or an ambitious *Haman* at a Royal Banquet. And, oh! how happy must that Youth be, whose Duty is become a second Nature, and to whom those Things, which seem terrible to others, are grown both easy and delightful.

4. BUT the greatest Advantage of an early Piety is still behind, *viz.* That it lays in the best Provision of Comfort and Support against such Times as we shall stand most in need thereof, *viz.* in all Times of our Tribulation, and in particular against the Time of old Age, the Hour of Death, and the Day of Judgment.

This is the Argument the Wise Man makes use of in the Words immediately following the Text. *Remember now, says he, thy Creator in the Days of thy Youth; while the evil Days come not, nor the Years draw nigh, wherein thou shalt say, I have no Pleasure in them.* Observe, the Time of old Age is an evil Time, Years wherein

wherein there is no Pleasure; and ask those that are grown old, and they will inform you so. Cordials surely then must be exceeding proper to support our drooping Spirits: And, oh! What Cordial comparable to the grateful Review of a well-spent Life? When the Eyes, like *Isaac's*, are grown dim with Age; when *the Keepers of the House*, i. e. the Hands shall tremble; as the Wise Man goes on to describe the Infirmities of old Age, when *the strong Men bow themselves*, i. e. when the Legs grow feeble; and *the Grinders*, i. e. the Teeth, shall cease to do their proper Office, because they are few; for a Person then to hear the Precepts of the Gospel read over to him, and to be able to lay his Hand on his Heart, and to say sincerely, *All these have I kept from my Youth*: This must fill him with such unspeakable Comfort, that I want Words to express, and Thoughts to conceive it. But, supposing it was possible for us to escape the Inconveniencies of old Age, yet still Death is a Debt we all must pay; and, what is worse, it generally comes attended with such dreadful Circumstances, that it will make even a *Felix* tremble. But as for the Godly, that have served the LORD from their Youth, it is not so with them; no, they look upon Death, not as a *King of Terrors*, but as a welcome Messenger that is come to conduct them to their

their wish'd-for Home. All the *Days* of their *appointed* Time have they waited, and it has been the Business of their whole Lives to prepare themselves for the coming of their great Change; and therefore they rejoice to hear that they are called to meet the heavenly Bridegroom. Thus dies the early, (I mean the early, if persevering) Pious; whose *Path* has been as the *shining Light*, that *shineth more and more unto the Perfect Day*. But follow him beyond the Grave, and see with what an holy Triumph he enters into his Master's Joy; with what an humble Boldness he stands at the dreadful Tribunal of JESUS CHRIST; and can you then forbear to cry out, *Let me die the Death of the Righteous, and let my latter End, and future State, be like his.*

Need I then, after having shewn so many Advantages to arise from an early Piety, use any more Arguments to persuade the younger Part of this Audience, to whom,

III. In the *Third* and *last* place, I address myself, to *remember their Creator in the Days of their Youth?*

WHAT! will not a Desire of bringing Glory to GOD, Honour and Comfort to themselves;

selves; will not the Pleasure of an habitual Piety, and the comfortable Assurance of being sincere; above all, will not the hopes of an honourable old Age, a peaceful Death, and a glorious Appearance at the tremendous Day of Judgment; will not these, I say, prevail with them to leave their Husks, and return home to eat of the fatted Calf? What, will they thus requite our Saviour's Love? That be far from them! Did he come down and shed his precious Blood to deliver them from the Power of Sin; and will they spend their youthful Strength and Vigour in the Service of it, and *then* think to serve CHRIST, when they can follow their Lust no longer? Is it fit, that many who are endowed with excellent Gifts, and are thereby qualified to be Supports and Ornaments of our sinking Church, should notwithstanding forget the God that gave them, and employ them in Things that will not profit? O why will they not arise, and, like so many *Phineas's*, be zealous for the LORD of Hosts? Doubtless, when Death overtakes them, they will wish they had: And what hinders them, but that they may live as well now, as they will wish they had, when they leave the World? Think you that any one yet ever repented that he began to be good too soon? But how many, on the contrary, have repented that they began

to be good too late? May we not well imagine, that young *Samuel* now rejoices that he waited so soon at the Tabernacle of the LORD? Or young *Timothy*, that from a Child he knew the Holy Scriptures? And if you wish to be Partakers of their Joy, let me persuade you to be Partakers of their Piety.

I could still go on to fill my Mouth with Arguments; but the Circumstances and Piety of those amongst whom *I am now preaching the Kingdom of GOD*, remind me to change my Style; and instead of urging any more Dissuasives from Sin, to fill up what is behind of this Discourse, with Encouragements to persevere in Holiness.

Blessed, for ever blessed, be GOD and the Father of our Lord JESUS CHRIST! I am not speaking to Persons inflamed with youthful Lusts, but to a Multitude of young Professors, who, by frequently assembling together and forming themselves into *Religious Societies*, are in a ready Way to be of the Number of those *young Men* who have overcome the *Wicked One*.

BELIEVE me, it gladdens my very Soul to see so many of your Faces set Heavenwards; and the visible happy Effects of your uniting together, cannot but rejoice the Hearts of all sincere *Christians*, and oblige them to wish you
good

good Luck in the Name of the LORD. The many Souls that are nourished weekly by the spiritual Body and Blood of JESUS CHRIST by your Means; the Weekly and Monthly Lectures that are preached by your Contributions; the daily Incense of Thanksgiving and Prayer which is publickly sent up to the Throne of Grace by your Subscriptions; the many Children which are trained up *in the Nurture and Admonition of the LORD* by your Charities; and lastly, the commendable and pious Zeal you exert in promoting and encouraging Divine *Psalmody*, are such plain and apparent Proofs of the Benefit of your *Religious Societies*, and they call for a publick Acknowledgment of Praise and Thanksgiving to our Blessed Master, who has not only put into your Hearts such good Designs, but enable you also to bring the same to good Effect.

It is true, it has been objected, “ that young
 “ Men forming themselves into *Religious So-*
 “ *cieties* has a Tendency to make them spiritu-
 “ ally proud, and *think more highly of them-*
 “ *selves than they ought to think.*” And per-
 haps the imprudent imperious Behaviour of
 some Novices in Religion, who, *though they*
went out from you, were not of you, may have
 given too much Occasion for such an Asper-
 sion.

But you, Brethren, have not so learned CHRIST. Far be it from you to look upon yourselves as righteous, and despise others, because you often assemble yourselves together. No, this, instead of creating Pride, ought to beget an holy Fear in your Hearts, lest your Practice should not correspond with your Profession, and that, after you have benefited and edified others, you yourselves should become Cast-aways.

WORLDLY-MINDEDNESS, my Brethren, is another Rock against which we are in Danger of splitting. For, if other Sins have slain their Thousands of professing *Christians*, this has slain its Ten Thousands. I need not appeal to past Ages; your own Experience, no doubt, has furnished you with many unhappy Instances of young Men, who, after, (as one would have imagined) they had *escaped the Pollution which are in the World through Lust*, and had *tasted the good Word of Life*, and *endured for a Season*, whilst under the Tuition and Inspection of others, yet when they have come to be their own Masters, through a Want of Faith, and through a too great an Earnestness in *labouring for the Meat which perisheth*, have cast off their first Love, been again entangled with the World, and *returned like the Dog to his Vomit*, and *like the Sow that was washed to*
her

her wallowing in the Mire. You would therefore do well, my Brethren, frequently to remind each other of this dangerous Snare, and to exhort one another to begin, pursue, and end your Christian Warfare, in a thorough Renunciation of the World, and worldly Tempers; so that, when you are obliged by Providence to provide for yourselves, and those of your respective Households, you may continue to walk by Faith, and *still seek first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness;* not doubting but *all other Things, upon your honest Industry and Endeavours, shall be added unto you.*

And now *what shall I say more?* To speak unto you Fathers, who have been in CHRIST so many Years before me, and know the Malignity of Worldly-mindedness, and Pride in the Spiritual Life, would be altogether needless: To you therefore, O young Men (for whom I am distressed, for whom I fear as well as for myself) do I once more address myself, in the Words of the beloved Disciple; *Look to yourselves, that we lose not those Things which we have wrought; but receive a full Reward:* Be ever mindful then, of the Words that have been spoken to us by the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour: *Give Diligence to make your Calling and Election sure. Beware, lest ye also being led away by the Error of the Wicked, fall*

from your own Stedfastness. Let him that thinketh he standeth take Heed lest he fall. Be not high-minded but fear. But we are persuaded better Things of you, and Things that accompany Salvation, tho' we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous, to forget your Work and Labours and Love. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same Diligence, to the full Assurance of Hope unto the End: That ye be not slothful but Followers of them who thro' Faith and Patience inherit the Promises. 'Tis true we have many Difficulties to encounter, many powerful Enemies to overcome, ere we can get Possession of the promis'd Land. We have an artful Devil, an ensnaring World, and above all, the Treachery of our own Hearts to withstand and strive against. For straight is the Gate, and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto eternal Life. But wherefore should we fear? since he that is with us is far more powerful, than all who are against us. Have we not already experienced his Almighty Power, in enabling us to conquer some Difficulties which seemed as insurmountable then, as those we struggle with now? And cannot he who delivered us out of the Paws of those Bears and Lions, preserve us also from being hurt by the strongest Goliath?

Be stedfast therefore, my Brethren, be immoveable. Consider the infinite future Rewards as well as present Comforts that attend an Early Piety. Be not *ashamed of the Gospel of CHRIST: For it is the Power of GOD unto Salvation.* Fear not Man; fear not the Contempt and Revilings which you must meet with in the Way of Duty; For *one of you shall chase a Thousand, and two of you put Ten Thousand of your Enemies to Flight.* And if you will be content to be abus'd for a short Time here, *I speak the Truth in CHRIST, I lye not;* then shall ye be exalted to sit down with the Son of Man, when he shall come in the Glory of his Father with his holy Angels to Judgment hereafter.

May Almighty God give every one of us such a Measure of Grace, that we may not be of the Number of those that draw back unto Perdition, but of them that believe and endure unto the End, to the Saving of our Souls.

Which God, &c.

THE

EXTENT and REASONABLENESS

OF

SELF-DENIAL.

A SERMON preached at the Parish
Church of *St. Andrew, Holborn,*
on *Sunday October 9, 1737.*

S E R M O N I V.

The *Extent* and *Reasonableness* of SELF-DENIAL.

LUKE ix. 23.

And He said unto them all, If any Man will come after me, let him deny himself.

WHOMEVER reads the GOSPEL with a single Eye, and sincere Intention, will find that our Blessed LORD took all Opportunities of reminding his Disciples that his Kingdom was not of this World; that his Doctrine was a Doctrine of the Cross; and that their professing themselves to be his Followers would call them to a constant State of voluntary or *Self-suffering* and *Self-denial*.

THE Words of the Text afford us one Instance, among many, of our Saviour's Behaviour in this Matter; For having in the preceding Verses revealed himself to *Peter*, and the other Apostles, to be *The CHRIST of GOD*; lest they should be too much elated with such a peculiar Discovery of his Deity, or think that their Relation to so great a Personage would be attended with nothing but Pomp and Grandeur, He tells them, in the 22^d Verse, that *the Son of Man was to suffer many things* in this World, though He was to be crowned with Eternal Glory and Honour in the next: And that if any of them or their Posterity would share in the same Honour, they must bear a Part with him in his Self-denial and Sufferings. For *He said unto them all, If any Man will come after me, let him deny himself.*

FROM which Words I shall consider these three Things:

I. *First*, THE Nature of the *Self-denial* recommended in the Text; and in how many Respects we must deny ourselves, in order to come after JESUS CHRIST.

II. *Secondly*, I SHALL endeavour to prove the Universality and Reasonableness of this Duty of *Self-denial*.

III. *Thirdly*

III. *Thirdly and lastly*, I SHALL offer some Considerations, which may serve as so many Motives to reconcile us to, and quicken us in the Practice of this Doctrine of *Self-denial*.

I. AND *first* then, I am to shew the Nature of the *Self-denial* recommended in the Text; or in how many Respects we must *deny ourselves*, in order to follow JESUS CHRIST.

Now as the Faculties of the Soul are distinguished by the Understanding, Will, and Affections; so in all these must each of us *deny himself*. We must not *lean to our own Understanding*, being *wise in our own Eyes, and prudent in our own Sight*; but we must submit our short-sighted Reason to the Light of Divine Revelation: For there are Mysteries in Religion, which are above, though not contrary to, our natural Reason: And therefore we shall never become *Christians* unless we cast down *Imaginations, and every high Thing that exalteth itself against the Knowledge of GOD, and bring into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of CHRIST*. It is in this respect, as well as others, that we must *become Fools for CHRIST's sake*, and acknowledge we know nothing without Revelation, as we ought to know. We must then, with all Humility and
Reverence,

Reverence, embrace the mysterious Truths revealed to us *in the Holy Scriptures*; for thus only can we become truly Wise, even *Wise unto Salvation*. It was Matter of our Blessed LORD's Thanksgiving to his Heavenly Father, that he had *hid these Things from the Wise and Prudent, and had revealed them unto Babes*. And in this respect also we must *be converted and become as little Children*, teachable, and willing to follow the Lamb into whatsoever Mysteries he shall be pleased to lead us; and believe and practise all divine Truths, not because we can demonstrate them, but because GOD, *who cannot lie*, has revealed them to us.

HENCE then we may trace Infidelity to its Fountain Head: For it is nothing else but a Pride of the Understanding, an Unwillingness to submit to the *Truth* of GOD, that makes so many, professing themselves Wise, to become such Fools as to *deny the LORD who has so dearly bought them*; and dispute the Divinity of that Eternal Word, *in whom they live, and move, and have their Being*: Whereby, 'tis justly to be feared, they will bring upon themselves sure, if not swift, Destruction.

BUT to return: As we must deny ourselves in our Understandings, so must we deny, or, as it might be more properly rendered, renounce our Wills: That is, we must make our own
Wills

Wills no Principle of Action, but *whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we must do all*, not merely to please ourselves, but *to the Glory of GOD*. Not that we are therefore to imagine we are to have no Pleasure in any Thing we do, (*Wisdom's Ways are Ways of Pleasantness*) but pleasing ourselves must not be the principal, but only the subordinate End of our Actions.

AND I cannot but particularly press this Doctrine upon you, because it is the Grand Secret of our Holy Religion. It is this, my Brethren, that distinguishes the true *Christian* from the mere Moralist and formal Professor; and which alone can render any of our Actions acceptable in God's Sight: For *if thine Eye be single*, says our Blessed LORD, *Matt. vi. 22.* that is, if thou aimest simply to please God, without any regard to thy own Will, *thy whole Body*, that is all thy Actions, *will be full of Light*; agreeable to the Gospel, which is called *Light*: But *if thine Eye be evil*, if thine Intention be diverted any other Way, *thy whole Body*, all thy Actions, *will be full of Darkness*, unprofitable and capable of no Reward. For we must not only do the Will of God, but do it *because* it is his Will; since we pray that *GOD'S Will may be done on Earth as it is in Heaven*. And, no doubt, the blessed Angels not only do every
Thing

that GOD willeth, but do it chearfully, out of this Principle, because GOD willeth it: And if we would live as we pray, we must *go and do likewise*.

BUT farther; as we must renounce our own Wills in *doing*, so likewise must we renounce them in *suffering* the Will of GOD. Whatsoever befalls us, we must say with good old *Eli*, *It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good*; or with one that was infinitely greater than *Eli*, *Father, not my Will, but thine be done*.—O JESU, thine was an innocent Will, and yet thou renouncedst it: Teach us, even us also, O our Saviour! to submit our Wills to thine, in all *the Evils* which shall be *brought upon us*; and in every thing enable us to give *Thanks*, since it is thy blessed *Will concerning us*!

THIRDLY and lastly, we must deny ourselves, as in our Understandings and Wills, so likewise in our Affections. More particularly we must deny ourselves the pleasurable Indulgence and Self-enjoyment of Riches: *If any Man will come after me, says our Blessed LORD, he must forsake all and follow me*. And again (to shew the utter Inconsistency of the Love of the Things of this World with the Love of the Father) he tells us, that *unless a Man forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my Disciple*.

FAR

FAR be it from me to think that these Texts are to be taken in a literal Sense, as though they obliged rich Persons to go sell all that they have, and give to the Poor, (for that would put it out of their Power to be serviceable to the Poor for the future) but however they certainly imply thus much, That we are to sit loose to, sell, and forsake all in Affection, and be willing to part with every thing, when GOD shall require it at our Hands: That is, as the Apostle observes, we must *use the World as though we used it not*; and though we are *in the World*, we must not be *of it*. We must look upon ourselves as Stewards and not Proprietors of the manifold Gifts of GOD; provide first what is necessary for ourselves and for our Households, and expend the rest, not in Indulgences and superfluous Ornaments, forbidden by the Apostle, but in cloathing, feeding, and relieving the naked, hungry, distressed Disciples of JESUS CHRIST. This is what our Blessed LORD would have us understand by *forsaking all*, and in this Sense must each of us *deny himself*.

I AM sensible that this will seem *an hard Saying* to many, who will be offended because they are covetous, and *Lovers of Pleasure more than Lovers of GOD*: But *if I yet pleased such Men, I should not be the Servant of CHRIST*.

No,

No, we must not, like *Ahab's* false Prophets; have a *lying Spirit in our Mouths*, nor fail to *declare* (with *St. Paul*) *the whole Will of GOD*; and, like honest *Micaiah*, out of Pity and Compassion, tell Men the Truth, though they may falsely think *we prophecy not Good, but Evil concerning them*.

BUT to proceed: As we must renounce our Affection for Riches, so likewise our Affections for our Relations, when they stand in Opposition to our Love of, and Duty to GOD: For thus saith the Saviour of the World: *If any Man will come after me, and hateth not his Father and Mother, his Children and Brethren and Sisters, yea and his own Life also, he cannot be my Disciple*—— Strange Doctrine this! What, hate our own Flesh? What, hate the Father that begat us, the Mother that bare us! *How can these Things be?* Can GOD contradict himself? Has he not bid us Honour our Father and Mother? And yet we are here commanded to hate them. How must these Truths be reconciled? Why, by interpreting the Word *bate*, not in a rigorous and absolute Sense, but *comparatively*: Not as implying a total Alienation, but a less Degree of Affection. For thus our Blessed Saviour himself, (the best and surest Expositor of his own Meaning) explains it in a parallel Text, *Matth. x. 37. He that loveth*
Father

Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me: He that loveth Son or Daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. So that when the Persuasions of such our Friends (as for our Trial they may be permitted to be) are contrary to the Will of God, we must say with *Levi; we have not known them; or, agreeably to our Blessed LORD's Rebuke to Peter, Get you behind me, my Adversaries; for you savour not the Things that be of GOD, but the Things that be of Men.*

To conclude this Head: We must *deny ourselves* in Things indifferent: For it might easily be shewn that as many, if not more, perish by an immoderate Use of Things in themselves indifferent as by any gross Sin whatever. A prudent *Christian* therefore will consider not only what is *lawful*, but what is *expedient* also: Not so much what Degrees of *Self-denial* best suit his Inclinations here, as what will most effectually break his Will, and fit him for greater Degrees of Glory hereafter.

BUT is this the Doctrine of *Christianity*? and is not the Christian World then asleep? If not, whence the Self-indulgence, whence the reigning Love of Riches which we every where meet with? Above all; whence that predominant Greediness of sensual Pleasure, that has so over-run this sinful Nation; that, was a

pious Stranger to come amongst us, he would be tempted to think some Heathen *Venus* was worshipped here, and that Temples were dedicated to her Service. But we have the Authority of an inspired Apostle to affirm that *they who live in such a Round of Pleasure are dead while they live*: Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, *Awake thou that sleepest, and CHRIST shall give thee Light*. But the Power of raising the spiritually Dead belongeth only unto GOD.—
 Do Thou therefore, O Holy JESUS, who by thy almighty Word commandedst *Lazarus* to come forth, though he had lain in the Grave *so many Days*, speak also as effectually to these spiritually dead Souls, whom *Satan* for these many Years has so fast bound by sensual Pleasures, that they are not so much as able to lift up their Eyes or Hearts to Heaven.

II. BUT I pass on to the *Second* general Thing proposed, *viz.* to consider the universal Obligation, and Reasonableness of this Doctrine of *Self-denial*.

WHEN our Blessed Master had been discoursing publickly concerning the Watchfulness of the *faithful and wise Steward*, his Disciples asked him, *Speakest thou this Parable to all, or only to us?* The same Question I am aware has been, and will be put concerning the
 foregoiing

foregoing Doctrine: For too many, unwilling to take CHRIST's easy Yoke upon them, in order to evade the Force of the Gospel Precepts, would pretend that all those Commands concerning *Self-denial*, renouncing ourselves and the World, belonged only to our LORD's first and immediate Followers, and not *to us or to our Children*. But such Persons greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the Power of Godliness in their Hearts. For the Doctrine of JESUS CHRIST, like his blessed Self, is *the same Yesterday, To-day, and for ever*. What he said unto *one*, he said unto *all*, even unto the Ends of the World; *If any Man will come after me, let him deny himself*: And in the Text it is particularly mentioned that *He said unto them all*. And lest we should still absurdly imagine, that this Word *all* was to be confined to his Apostles, with whom he was then discoursing, it is said in another Place, that JESUS turned unto the Multitude and said, *If any Man will come after me, and hateth not his Father and Mother, yea and his own Life also, he cannot be my Disciple*. “ When our blessed LORD had “ spoken a certain Parable, it is said, *the Scribes* “ *and Pharisees were offended, for they knew* “ *the Parable was spoken against them*: And “ if Christians can now read these plain and “ positive Texts of Scripture, and at the same

“ time not think they are spoken of them, they
 “ are more hardened than *Jews*, and more in-
 “ sincere than Pharisees. * ”

IN the former Part of this Discourse I observed that the Precepts concerning *forsaking* and *selling all* did not oblige us in a literal Sense, because the State of the Church does not demand it of us, as it did of the Primitive *Christians*; but still the same Deadness to the World, the same abstemious Use of, and Readiness to part with our Goods for CHRIST'S sake, is as absolutely necessary for, and as obligatory on us, as it was on them. For though the Church may differ as to the outward State of it, in different Ages, yet as to the Purity of its inward State, it was, is, and always will be invariably the same. And all the Commands which we meet with in the *Epistles*, about mortifying our Members which are upon the Earth, of setting our Affections on Things above, and of not being conformed to this World; are but so many incontestable Proofs that the same Holiness, Heavenly-mindedness, and Deadness to the World, is as necessary for us as for our LORD'S immediate Followers.

BUT farther, as such an Objection argues an Ignorance of the Scriptures, so it is a manifest Proof that such as make it are Strangers to *the Power of Godliness in their Hearts*. For since

* *LAW'S Christian Perfection.*

the Sum and Substance of Religion consists in our Recovery from our fallen Estate in *Adam*, by a *New Birth* in CHRIST JESUS, there is an absolute Necessity for us to embrace and practise the *Self-denial* before recommended. Because we have not only a new House to build, but an old one first to pull down; we must necessarily therefore be dead to the World, before we can *live unto GOD*. In short, all Things belonging to the *Old Man* must die in us, before the Things belonging to the *Spirit* can live and grow in us.

When JESUS CHRIST was *about* to make his publick Appearance, and to preach the glad Tidings of Salvation to a benighted World, his Harbinger *John Baptist* was sent to *prepare his Way before him*. In like manner, when this same JESUS is about to take possession of a converted Sinner's Heart, *Self-denial*, like *John the Baptist*, must prepare the Way before him: For we must *mourn* before we are capable of being *comforted*; we must undergo the *Spirit of Bondage*, in order to be made meet to receive the *Spirit of Adoption*.

WERE we indeed in a State of Innocence, and had we, like *Adam* before his Fall, the Divine Image fully stamped upon our Souls, we then should have no need of *Self-denial*; but since we are fallen, sickly, disordered Crea-

tures, and this *Self-suffering*, this *Self-renunciation*, is the *indispensable Means* of recovering our primitive Glory; methinks, in that Case, to endeavour to shake off and reject such a salutary Practice, on account of the Difficulty attending it at first, is but too like the Obstinacy of a perverse sick Child, who nauseates and refuses the Potion reached out to it by a skilful Physician or tender Parent, because it is a little ungrateful to the Taste.

HAD any of us seen *Lazarus* when he lay full of Sores at the Rich Man's Gate; or *Job*, when he was smitten with Ulcers, from the Crown of his Head to the Sole of his Foot: And had we at the same Time prescribed to them some healing Medicines, which because they would put them to Pain, they would not apply to their Wounds, should we not most justly think, that they were either fond of a distempered Body, or were not sensible of their Distempers? But our Souls, by Nature, are in an infinitely more deplorable Condition than the Bodies of *Job* or *Lazarus*, when full of Ulcers and Boils: For, alas! our whole Head is sick, and our whole Heart faint; from the Crown of the Head to the Sole of the Foot, we are full of Wounds and Bruises and putrifying Sores, and there is no Health in us. And JESUS CHRIST, like a good Physician, in the Gospel Doctrine of *Self-denial*, presents

presents us with a spiritual *Medicine to heal our Sickness*: But if we will neither receive nor apply it, 'tis a Sign we are not sensible of the *Wretchedness* of our State, or else that we are *unwilling to be made whole*.

EVEN *Naaman's* Servants could say, when he refused, pursuant to *Elijah's* Orders, to wash in the River *Jordan*, that he might cure his Leprosy, *Father, if the Prophet had bid thee do some great Thing, would'st thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean? And may not I very properly address myself to you in the same manner, my Brethren:— If JESUS CHRIST, our great Prophet, had bid you do some great and very difficult Thing, would you not have done it? much more then should you do it, when he only bids you deny yourselves what would certainly hurt you if enjoyed, and behold you shall be made perfectly whole.*

BUT to illustrate this by another Comparison: In the 12th Chapter of the *Acts*, we read that *Saint Peter was kept in Prison, and was sleeping between two Soldiers, bound with two Chains: And behold an Angel of the Lord came upon him, and smote Peter on the Side, saying, Arise up quickly: And his Chains fell off from his Hands.* But had this great Apostle, instead of rising up quickly, and doing as the blessed

Angel commanded him, hugg'd his Chains and beg'd that they might not be let fall from his Hands, would not any one think that he was in love with Slavery, and deserved to be *executed* next Morning? And does not the Person who refuses to *deny himself*, act as inconsistently as this Apostle would have done if he had neglected the Means of his Deliverance? For our Souls, by Nature, are in a spiritual Dungeon, sleeping and fast bound between the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, not with Two but Ten Thousand Chains of Lusts and Corruptions. Now JESUS CHRIST, like St. Peter's good Angel, by his Gospel comes and opens the Prison Door, prescribes *Self-denial*, Mortification, and *Renunciation of ourselves and the World*, as so many spiritual Keys which will unlock our *Shackles*, make them fall off from our Hearts, and so restore us to *the glorious Liberty of the Sons of GOD*. But if we will not arise quickly, gird up the Loins of our Mind, and *deny ourselves*, as he has commanded, Are we not in love with Bondage, and deserve never to be *delivered* from it?

INDEED I will not affirm that this Doctrine of *Self-denial* appears in this just Light to every one. No, I am sensible that to the *Natural Man* it is *Foolishness*; and to the *Young Convert* an *hard Saying*. But what says our Saviour?

If

If any Man will do my Will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of GOD, or whether I speak of myself. This, my dear Friends, is the best, the only Way of Conviction: Let us up and be doing; let us arise quickly and *deny ourselves*, and the Lord JESUS will remove those Scales from the Eyes of our Minds, which now like so many Veils hinder us from seeing clearly the Reasonableness, Necessity, and inexpressible Advantage of the Doctrine that has been now delivered. Let us but once thus *shew ourselves Men*, and then the Spirit of GOD will move on the Face of our Souls, as he did once upon the Face of the great Deep; and cause them to emerge out of that confused Chaos, in which they are most certainly now involved, if we are Strangers and Enemies to *Self-denial* and the Cross of CHRIST.

BUT notwithstanding this Doctrine of *Self-denial* is, when rightly understood, so reasonable and beneficial; yet many, it is to be feared, like the young Man in the Gospel, are ready to go away sorrowful.

III. PROCEED we therefore now to the *Third* and *last* general Thing proposed; *viz.* To offer some Considerations which may serve as so many Motives to reconcile us to, and *quicken us* in the Practice of this Duty of *Self-denial*.

I. And

1. AND the first Means I shall recommend to you, in order to reconcile you to this Doctrine is, to meditate frequently on the Life of our Blessed Lord and Master JESUS CHRIST. Oh! may we *often* think on Him our grand Exemplar! follow him from his Cradle to his Cross, and see what a *self-denying Life* He lead! And shall not *we drink of the Cup that He drank of, and be baptized with the Baptism that He was baptized with?* Or think we that JESUS CHRIST did and suffered every Thing in order to have us excused, and exempted from Sufferings? No, far be it from any sincere *Christian* to judge after this manner: For St. Peter tells us, *He suffered for us, leaving us an Example, that we should follow his Steps.* Had CHRIST, indeed, like *those that sat in Moses's Chair, laid heavy Burthens of Self-denial* upon us, (supposing they were heavy, which they are not) and refused to *touch them himself with one of his Fingers*; we might have had some Pretence to complain: But since He has enjoined us nothing but what he has first put in practise himself, *Thou art inexcusable, O Disciple, whoever thou art, who would'st be above thy persecuted self-denying Master: And thou art no good and faithful Servant, who art unwilling to suffer and sympathize with thy mortified, heavenly-minded LORD.*

2. NEXT

2. NEXT to the Pattern of our Blessed Master, think often on the Lives of the glorious Company of the *Apostles*, the goodly Fellowship of the *Prophets*, and the noble Army of *Martyrs*; who by a constant *looking to the Author and Finisher of our Faith*, have fought the good Fight, and are gone before us to inherit the Promises. View, again and again, how holily, how self-denyingly, how unblameably they lived; And if *Self-denial* was necessary for them, why not for us also? Are we not Men of like Passions *with them*? Do we not live in the same wicked World as they did? Have we not the same good Spirit to assist, support, and purify us, as they had? And is not the same Eternal Inheritance reached out, as a Reward of our *Self-denial* and *Renunciation of the World*, as was offered to them? And if we have the same Nature to change, the same wicked World to withstand, the same good Spirit to help, and the same Eternal Crown to reward our Obedience; why should not we lead the same Lives as they did? Do we think They did Works of Supererogation? If not, why don't we do as they did? Or why does the Church set apart Festivals to commemorate the Deaths and Sufferings of the Saints, but in order to excite us to follow *Them as they did CHRIST*?

3. THIRDLY,

3. **THIRDLY**, Think often on the Pains of Hell: consider whether it is not better to cut off a Right Hand or Foot, and pluck out a Right Eye, if they offend us (or cause us to sin) *rather than to be cast into Hell, into the Fire that never shall be quenched; where the Worm dieth not, and the Fire is not quenched.* Think how many thousands there are now reserved with damned Spirits in Chains of Darkness unto the Judgment of the Great Day, for not complying with the Precept in the Text. And think withal that This, this must be our own Case shortly, unless we are wise in time, and submit to those easy Conditions our Saviour has prescribed us, in order to avoid it. Think you they now imagine JESUS CHRIST to be an hard Master; or rather think you not they would give Ten thousand times ten thousand Worlds, could they but return to Life again, and take CHRIST's easy Yoke upon them? And can we dwell with everlasting Burnings more than they? No; if we cannot bear this Precept, *Come, deny yourselves, take up your Crosses.* How shall we bear that irrevocable Sentence, *Depart from me, ye Cursed, into everlasting Fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels?* But I hope those, amongst whom I am now preaching the Kingdom of God, are not so disingenuous as to need to be driven to their Duty by the Terrors of the LORD, but rather desire to be drawn by the Cords of Love.

LASTLY

LASTLY therefore, and to conclude, — often meditate on the Joys of Heaven: Think, think with what unspeakable Glory those happy Souls are now incircled, who when on Earth were called to *deny themselves* as well as we, and were not disobedient to that Call: Lift up your Hearts frequently toward the Mansions of eternal Bliss, and with an Eye of Faith, like the great *St. Stephen*, see the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man with his glorious Retinue of departed Saints sitting and solacing themselves in eternal Joys, and with unspeakable Comfort looking back on their past *Sufferings* and *Self-denials*, as so many glorious Means which exalted them to *such a Crown*. Hark! methinks I hear them chanting forth their everlasting *Hallelujahs*, and spending an eternal Day in echoing forth triumphant Songs of Joy. And do you not long, my Brethren, to join this heavenly Choir? Do not your Hearts burn within you? *As the Hart panteth after the Water Brooks*, do not your Souls so long after the blessed Company of these *Sons of GOD*? Behold then a heavenly Ladder reached down to you, by which you may climb to this Holy Hill. *If any Man will come after them, let him deny himself and follow them*. It was this, my Brethren, exalted the Holy JESUS himself, as Man, to sit at the Right Hand of his adorable Father.

110 *The Extent and Reasonableness, &c.*

Father. By this alone every Saint that ever lived, *ascended into the Joy of their LORD:* And by *this* we, even *we* also may be lifted up into the same most blisful Regions, there to enjoy an eternal Rest with the People of GOD, and join with them in singing *Doxologies* and *Songs of Praise*, to the Everlasting, Blessed, All-glorious, most Adorable Trinity, for ever and ever.

*Which GOD of his infinite Mercy grant,
&c.*

INTERCESSION

Every *Christian's* DUTY.

A SERMON preach'd at the Parish
Church of *Great St. Helen*, on
Tuesday December 27, 1737.

S E R M O N V.

INTERCESSION every *Christian's* Duty.

I T H E S S. V. 25.

Brethren, Pray for us.

IF we enquire, why there is so little *Love* to be found amongst *Christians*, why the very Characteristick, by which every one should know that we are Disciples of the Holy **JESUS**, is almost banished out of the Christian World,—We shall find it, in a great measure, owing to a Neglect or superficial Performance of that most God-like Part of secret Prayer *Intercession*, or imploring the Grace or Mercy in behalf of others.

SOME forget this Duty of Praying for Others, because they seldom remember to Pray for Themselves: And even good People, who are constant in Praying to their Father which is in

I

Heaven,

Heaven, are often so constrained and selfish in their Addresses to the Throne of Grace, that they do not enlarge their Petitions for the Welfare of their Fellow Christians as they ought ; and thereby fall short of attaining that Christian Charity, that unfeigned Love of their Brethren, which their sacred Profession obliges them to aspire after, and without which, though they would *bestow all their Goods to feed the Poor, and even give their Bodies to be burned, yet it would profit them Nothing.*

SINCE then these Things are so, I shall from the Words of the Text (though originally intended to be more confined) endeavour to shew,

I. *First*, THAT it is every *Christian's* Duty to Pray for Others, as well as for Himself.

II. *Secondly*, WHO are Those that we ought to Pray for, and in what Manner we should do it. And,

III. *Thirdly*, I SHALL offer some Motives to excite all *Christians* to abound in this great Duty of *Intercession*.

I. *First* then, I shall endeavour to shew, That it is every *Christian's* Duty to Pray for Others, as well as for Himself.

Now

NOW *Prayer* is a Duty founded on Natural Religion; the very Heathens never neglected it, though many Christian Heathens amongst us *do*: — And it is so essential to Christianity, that you might as reasonably expect to find a living Man without Breath, as a True *Christian* without the Spirit of Prayer and Supplication. — Thus, no sooner was St. *Paul* converted, but *behold he Prayeth*, saith the LORD Almighty. And thus will it be with every Child of GOD, as soon as He becomes such: Prayer being truly called, *The natural Cry of the New-born Soul*.

FOR in the Heart of every True Believer there is a Heavenly Tendency, a Divine Attraction, which as sensibly draws him to converse with GOD, as the Loadstone attracts the Needle.

A DEEP Sense of Their own Weakness, and of CHRIST'S Fullness; a strong Conviction of their Natural Corruption, and of the Necessity of Renewing Grace; will not let them rest from Crying Day and Night to their Almighty Redeemer, that the Divine Image, which they lost in *Adam*, may through His All-powerful Mediation, and the Sanctifying Operations of His blessed Spirit, be begun, carried on, and fully perfected both in their Souls and Bodies.

THUS earnest, thus importunate, are all sincere *Christians* in Praying for Themselves: But then, not having so lively, lasting, and deep a Sense of the Wants of their Christian Brethren, They are for the most part too remiss and defective in their Prayers for *them*. — Whereas, was the *Love of GOD* shed abroad in our Hearts; and did we Love our Neighbour in that Manner in which the Son of God our Saviour *loveth us*, and according to his Command and Example, We could not but be as importunate for their Spiritual and Temporal Welfare, as for Our own; and as earnestly desire and endeavour that Others should share in the Benefits and Blessings of the Death and Passion of JESUS CHRIST as We ourselves.

LET not any one think, that This is an uncommon Degree of Charity; an High Pitch of Perfection, which every one cannot attain unto; — since it is no such Thing: — For if we are all commanded to *Love our Neighbour* (that is, every Man) even *as ourselves*, nay to *Lay down our Lives for the Brethren*; Then, it is the Duty of *all* to Pray for their Neighbours as much as for Themselves, and by possible Acts and Expressions of Love and Affection towards Them, at all Times, to shew their Readiness even to lay down their Lives for them, if

if ever it should please GOD to call Them to it.

OUR Blessed Saviour as He hath set us an Example that we should follow his Steps in every Thing else, so hath He more especially in This: — For in that most Divine, that most Perfect and Inimitable Prayer (recorded in the 17th of St. *John*) which He put up just before His Passion, We find but *few* Petitions for His Own, though *many* for His Disciples Welfare: And in that most Perfect Form which He has been pleased to prescribe us, We are taught to say, — not *My*, but *Our Father*, — Thereby to put us in mind, that, whenever we approach the Throne of Grace, We ought to Pray, — not in Our own Name alone, but in the Name of all our Brethren in CHRIST.

INTERCESSION then is certainly a Duty incumbent upon all *Christians*.

II. WHOM we are to intercede for, and How this Duty is to be performed, comes next to be considered, — under my *Second General Head*:

I. AND First, our Intercession must be universal. — *I will* (says the Apostle) *that Prayers, Supplications, and Intercessions, be made for All Men;* — For as GOD's Mercy is over All

His Works, as JESUS CHRIST Died to Redeem a People out of All Nations and Languages; so, We should Pray, that All Men may come to the Knowledge of the Truth, and be saved. Many precious Promises are made in Holy Writ, that the Gospel shall be published through the whole World, that the Earth shall be covered with the Knowledge of the Lord, as the Waters cover the Sea: And therefore it is our Duty not to confine our Petitions to our own Nation, but to Pray that All those Nations, who now sit in Darkness and in the Shadow of Death, may have the Glorious Gospel shine out upon Them, as well as upon Us. But You need not that any Man should teach you This, since Ye yourselves are Taught of GOD, even of JESUS CHRIST himself, to Pray that His Kingdom may come; Part of the Meaning of which Petition is, That GOD's Ways may be known upon Earth, and His Saving Health among All Nations.

2. NEXT to the Praying for All Men, we should, according to St. Paul's Rule, Pray for Kings; particularly, for our present Sovereign King GEORGE, and all that are put in Authority under Him: that we may lead *quiet Lives, in all Godliness and Honesty.* — For, if we consider how heavy the Burden of Government is, and how much the Welfare of any People depends

pende on the Zeal and godly Conversation of Those that have the Rule over them: If we set before us the many Dangers and Difficulties, to which Governours by their Station are exposed, and the continual Temptations they lye under to Luxury and Self-Indulgence; We shall not only Pity, but Pray for Them,— That He who preserved *Esther, David, and Josiah, unspotted from the World*, amidst the Grandeur of a Court, and gave Success to their Designs, would also preserve Them Holy and Unblameable, and prosper all the Works of their Hands upon Them.

3. BUT, Thirdly, You ought in a more especial Manner, to Pray for those whom *the Holy Ghost hath made Overseers over You*. This is what St. Paul begs, again and again, of the Churches to whom He writes: — *Brethren*, says He in the Text, *Pray for Us*; and again, in his Epistle to the *Ephesians*, — *Praying always*, says He, *with all manner of Supplication, and for Me also, that I may open my Mouth boldly to declare the Mystery of the Gospel*. And in another Place, to express his Earnestness in this Request, and the Great Importance of Their Prayers for Him, — He bids the Church *Strive*, (or, as the original Word signifies, *Be in an Agony*) *together with Him in Their Prayers*. And surely if the Great St. Paul,

that Chosen Vessel, that Favourite of Heaven, needed the most importunate Prayers of His Christian Converts; — much more do the ordinary Ministers of the Gospel stand in need of the Intercession of their respective Flocks.

AND I cannot but in a more especial Manner insist upon This Branch of Your Duty, because it is a Matter of such Importance: For no doubt, much Good is frequently withheld from many, by reason of their neglecting to Pray for their Ministers, which they would have received, had they Prayed for Them as they ought. Not to mention, that People often complain of the Want of Diligent and Faithful Pastors. — But how do They deserve Good Pastors, who will not earnestly Pray to GOD for *such*?

THE Church has set apart Four Seasons in the Year for *this* Purpose, and to call down a Blessing on those who are to be Ordained to any Holy Function: But by how very few are the *Ember Days* observed! And if we will not *Pray to the Lord of the Harvest*, can it be expected — *He will send forth Labourers into his Harvest?*

BESIDES, What Ingratitude is it — not to Pray for your Ministers! For shall They Watch and Labour in the Word and Doctrine for You, and for your Salvation, and shall not

Yours

You Pray for Them in Return? If *any* bestow Favours on your Bodies, You think it right, meet, and your bounden Duty, to Pray for Them; and shall not They be remembered in Your Prayers, who daily feed and nourish your Souls? Add to all this, that Praying for your Ministers, will be a manifest Proof of your believing — That though *Paul* plant, and *Apollos* water, yet it is GOD alone who giveth the Increase. And you will also find it the best Means you can use, to promote your own Welfare: Because GOD, in answer to your Prayers, may impart a double Portion of his Holy Spirit to Them, whereby they will be qualified to deal out to you larger Measures of Knowledge in Spiritual Things, and be enabled more skilfully *to divide the Word of Truth*.

WOULD Men but constantly observe this Direction, and when their Ministers are Praying in Their Name to GOD,—humbly beseech Him to Perform all their Petitions: Or, when They are speaking in GOD'S Name to Them, — Pray that *the Holy Ghost may fall on all them that Hear the Word*; we should *then* find a more visible Good Effect of their Doctrine, and a greater Mutual Love between Ministers and their People. For Ministers Hands would *then* be held up by the People's Intercessions, and the People will never dare to vilify or traduce

duce Those who are the constant Subject of their Prayers.

4. NEXT to our Ministers, our *Friends* claim a Place in our *Intercessions*; but then we should not content ourselves with Praying in general Terms for Them, but suit our Prayers to Their particular Circumstances. When *Miriam* was afflicted with a Leprosy from GOD, *Moses* cried and said, *LORD Heal Her*: And when the Nobleman came to apply to JESUS CHRIST in behalf of his Child, He said, *LORD, my little Daughter lyeth at the Point of Death, I pray Thee come, and Heal Her*. In like manner, when any of our Friends are under any afflicting Circumstances, We should endeavour to Pray for Them, with a particular regard to those Circumstances. For Instance, Is a Friend sick? We should Pray, That if it be GOD's good Pleasure, it may not be unto Death; but if otherwise, That He would give Him Grace so to take his Visitation, that, after this painful Life ended, He may dwell with him in Life Everlasting? Is a Friend in Doubt in a Matter? We should lay His Case before GOD, as *Moses* did that of the Daughter of *Zelophebad*, and Pray, That GOD's Holy Spirit may lead Him into all Truth. Is He in Want? We should Pray, That his Faith may never fail, and that in GOD's due
Time

Time He may be relieved. And in all other Cases, we should not Pray for our Friends only *in Generals*, but suit our Petitions to Their *particular Sufferings and Afflictions*; for otherwise, we may never ask perhaps for the Things our Friends *most want*.

IT must be confessed, that such a Procedure will oblige us sometimes to break from the Forms we use; but if we accustom ourselves to it, and have a deep Sense what we ask for, the most illiterate *Christians* will not want Words to express themselves.

WE have many noble Instances in Holy Scripture of the Success of this Kind of *particular Intercession*; but none more remarkable than That of *Abraham's* Servant, in the Book of *Genesis*— who being sent to seek a Wife for his Son *Isaac*, Prays in a most particular Manner in His Behalf. — And the Sequel of the Story informs us how remarkably his Prayer was answered. And did *Christians* now Pray for their Friends in the same particular manner, and with the same Faith as *Abraham's* Servant did for his Master; They would, no doubt, in many Instances, receive as visible Answers, and have as much Reason to bless God for Them as He had.

5. BUT farther, as we ought thus to intercede for our Friends, so in like manner must we

we also Pray for our *Enemies*. *Bless them that Curse you*, says JESUS CHRIST, *and Pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you*: Which Commands He enforced in the strongest Manner by His own Example, when in the very Agonies and Pangs of Death, He Prayed even for his *Murderers*, — *Father, Forgive Them, for they know not what they do!* — This, it must needs be confessed, is a difficult Duty, yet not impracticable to those, who have renounced the Things of this present Life, (from an inordinate Love of which alone, all Enmities arise) and who knowing the terrible *Woes* denounced against Those *who offend Christ's Little Ones*, can, out of real Pity and a Sense of their Danger, Pray for *those by whom such Offences come*.

6. LASTLY, and to conclude this Head, — We should Intercede for All that are any Ways afflicted, in Mind, Body, or Estate; — for All who desire, and stand in need of our Prayers: — And for All who do not Pray for Themselves.

AND Oh! that All who hear me, would set apart some Time every Day for the due Performance of This most necessary Duty! — In Order to which,

I SHALL now proceed to the *Third General Thing* proposed; namely,

III. To

III. To shew the Advantages, and offer some Considerations to excite you to the Practice of *Daily Intercession.*

I. AND First, it will fill your Hearts with *Love to one another.* — He that every Day intercedes at the Throne of Grace for all Mankind, cannot but in a short Time be filled with Love and Charity to *all*: And the frequent Exercise of his Love in this Manner, will insensibly enlarge his Heart, and make Him Partaker of that exceeding Abundance of it which is in CHRIST JESUS our Lord! Envy, Malice, Revenge, and such like hellish Tempers, can never long harbour in a Gracious Intercessor's Breast; — But He will be filled with Joy, Peace, Meekness, Long-Suffering, and all other Gifts and Graces of the Holy Spirit. By frequently laying his Neighbour's Wants before God, He will be touched with a Fellow-Feeling of them; — He will rejoice with those that do rejoice, and weep with those that weep. — Every Blessing bestowed on Others, instead of exciting Envy in Him, will be looked on as an Answer to his particular Intercession, and fill his Soul with *Joy unspeakable and full of Glory.*

INDEED

INDEED I will not affirm, that this Blessed Temper of Mind can be acquired all at once: No, — as other Graces; so must this Christian Love be obtained by Degrees: But Do you abound in Acts of general and particular Intercessions; and when you hear of your Neighbours Faults, instead of relating them to; and exposing them before Others; — Lay them in secret before GOD, and beg of Him to correct and amend them. When you hear of a notorious Sinner; instead of Thinking, *You do well to be angry*; beg of JESUS CHRIST to convert and make Him a Monument of His Free Grace: And you cannot imagine what a Blessed Alteration this Practicé will make in your Heart, and how much you will increase Day by Day in the Spirit of Love and Meekness towards all Mankind!

BUT farther to excite you to the constant Practice of this Duty of Intercession; consider the many Instances given us in Holy Scripture, of the Power and Efficacy of it: Great and Excellent Things are there recorded as the Effects of this Divine Employ. It has stopped Plagues, it has opened and shut Heaven; and has frequently turned away GOD'S Fury from his People. How was *Abimelech's* House freed from the Disease GOD sent amongst them, at the Intercession of *Abraham*; When
Phinees

Phinees stood up and *prayed*, how soon did the Plague cease! When *Daniel* humbled and afflicted his Soul, and Interceded for the LORD's Inheritance, How quickly was an Angel dispatched to tell him, *His Prayer was heard*; And, to mention but one Instance more, How does GOD own Himself as it were quite overcome with the Importunity of *Moses*, when he was Interceding for his Idolatrous People, — *Let me alone*, says GOD!

THIS sufficiently shews, I could almost say the Omnipotency of *Intercession*, and how we may, like *Jacob*, wrestle with GOD, and by an holy Violence prevail both for Ourselves and Others. And no doubt 'tis owing to the secret and prevailing *Intercessions* of the few Righteous Souls who still remain among us, that GOD has yet spared this miserable sinful Nation: For were there not some such Faithful ones, like *Moses*, left to stand in the Gap, — We should soon be destroyed even as was *Sodom*, and reduced to Ashes like unto *Gomorrhah*.

BUT, to stir you up yet farther to this God-like Exercise of *Intercession*, consider that, in all probability, it is the frequent Employment even of the Glorified SAINTS: For though they are delivered from the Burden of the Flesh, and restored to the glorious Liberty of the
Sons

Sons of GOD, yet, as their Happiness cannot be perfectly consummated 'till the Resurrection of the Last Day, when all their Brethren will be glorified with them, — We cannot but think They are often importunate in beseeching our Heavenly Father, shortly to accomplish the Number of His Elect, and to hasten His Kingdom. And shall not We, who are on Earth, be often exercised in this Divine Employ with the Glorious Company of *the Spirits of Just Men made Perfect*? Since our Happiness is so much to consist in the Communion of SAINTS in the Church Triumphant *above*, shall we not frequently *intercede* for the Church Militant *here below*; and earnestly beg, that We may all be One, even as the Holy JESUS and His Father are One, that we may also be made Perfect in One!

To provoke you to this Great Work and Labour of Love, — Remember, that it is the never-ceasing Employment of the Holy and Highly-exalted JESUS Himself, who sits at the Right Hand of GOD to hear all our Prayers, and to make continual *Intercession* for us! So that He who is constantly employed in *interceding* for Others, is doing *that* on Earth, which the Eternal Son of GOD is always doing in Heaven.

IMAGINE

IMAGINE therefore, when you are lifting up Holy Hands in Prayer for one another, — That you see the Heavens opened, and the Son of GOD in all His Glory; as the Great High Priest of your Salvation, offering up and pleading for you, the All-sufficient Merit of His Sacrifice before the Throne of His Heavenly Father! — Join then Your *Intercessions* with His, and beseech Him that *they* may through Him come up as Incense, and be received as a Sweet-smelling Savour, acceptable in the Sight of GOD! This Imagination will strengthen your Faith, excite a holy Earnestness in your Prayers, and make you wrestle with GOD, as *Jacob* did, when he saw Him Face to Face and his Life was preserved; as *Abraham*, when he pleaded for *Sodom*; and as JESUS CHRIST himself, when He prayed, being in an Agony, so much the more earnestly the Night before his bitter Passion!

AND now, Brethren, What shall I say more, since *You are taught of JESUS CHRIST Himself to abound in Love*, and in this Good Work of *praying* one for another? — However, I cannot but recommend to you one general Means in order to make your *Intercession* more effectual, that is, — To lead such Lives as may make your Prayers *accepted in the Beloved*. *The effectual fervent Prayer of*

a Righteous Man availeth much, saith St. James. You shall go to my Servant Job, says GOD, and He shall Pray for You. It is This, It is This, my Brethren, must make your Intercessions pierce the Clouds! For the Prayers of the Wicked are an Abomination to the LORD. Would you therefore prevail with GOD for Others, Be Holy even as GOD is Holy yourselves: Labour daily after fresh Degrees of Grace, and your Intercessions will acquire fresh Degrees of Acceptance and Efficacy in Heaven. Do but walk as becometh the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST; be but in Earnest about Working out your own eternal Salvation; and your Intercessions will Then come forth as Incense before GOD, and the lifting up of your Hands be as an Evening Sacrifice.— Though ever so mean, though as poor as Lazarus, you will then become Benefactors to all Mankind; Thousands, and Twenty times Ten Thousands, will then be Blessed for your sakes! and after you have employed a few Years in this Divine Exercise here, you will be translated to that Happy Place, where you have so often wished others might be advanced; and be exalted to sit at the Right Hand of our All-powerful, All-prevailing INTERCESSOR, in the Kingdom of His Heavenly Father hereafter!

However, I cannot but in an especial manner press This upon you now, because all
ye,

ye, amongst whom I have now been Preaching, in all Probability will see me no more:— For I am now going (I trust under the Conduct of GOD's most Holy Spirit) from you, knowing not what shall befall me: I need therefore your most importunate *Intercessions*, that nothing may move me from my Duty, and that I may not count even my Life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my Course with Joy, and the Ministry I have received of the Lord JESUS, to testify the Gospel of the Grace of GOD!

Whilst I have been here, to the best of my Knowledge I have not failed to declare unto you the whole Will of GOD:— And though my Preaching may have been *a Savour of Death unto Death* to some; yet I trust it has been also *a Savour of Life unto Life* to others: And therefore I earnestly hope that those will not fail to remember me in their Prayers. As for my own Part, the many unmerited Kindnesses I have received from you, will not suffer me to forget you: Out of the Deep therefore I trust shall my Cry come unto GOD; and whilst the Winds and Storms are blowing over me, unto the LORD will I make my Supplication for you. For it is but a little while, and *We must All appear before the Judgment-Seat of CHRIST*; where I must

give a strict Account of the Doctrine I have preached, and You of your Improvement under it. And Oh! that I may never be called out as a swift Witness, against any of those my dear Brethren in CHRIST, for whose Salvation I have sincerely, though too faintly, longed and laboured! —

It is true, I have been censured by some as acting out of sinister and selfish Views: *But it is a small Matter with me* to be judged by Man's Judgment; — I hope my Eye is single, but I beseech you, Brethren, by the Mercies of GOD in CHRIST JESUS, pray that it may be more so! — and that I may increase with the Increase of Grace in the Knowledge and Love of GOD through JESUS CHRIST our Lord.

AND now, Brethren, What shall I say more? — I could wish to continue my Discourse much longer: For I can never fully express the Desire of my Soul towards you! — Finally therefore, Brethren, *Whatsoever Things are Holy, whatsoever Things are Pure, whatsoever Things are Honest, whatsoever Things are of Good Report; if there be any Consolation in CHRIST, if any Fellowship of the Spirit, if any Hopes of our appearing to the Comfort of each other at the awful Tribunal of JESUS CHRIST, — Think of the Things that you have heard, and of those which your Pastors*
have

have declared and will yet declare unto you ; and continue under their Ministry to *work out your own Salvation with Fear and Trembling* :— So that whether I should never see you any more, or whether it shall please God to bring me back again at any time, I may always have the Satisfaction of knowing that your Conversation is *such as becometh the Gospel of CHRIST*.

I almost persuade myself, that I could willingly suffer *all Things*, so that it might any ways promote the Salvation of your precious and immortal Souls ;— And I beseech you, as my last Request, *Obey them that have the Rule over you in the LORD* ; and be always ready to attend on their Ministry, as it is your bounden Duty. Think not that I desire to have myself exalted at the Expence of another's Character, but rather think this — *Not to have any Man's Person too much in Admiration ; but esteem all your Ministers highly in Love*, as they justly deserve *for their Work's sake*.

And now, Brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His Grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an Inheritance amongst all them that are sanctified. May God reward you for all *your Works of Faith, and Labours of Love* ; and make you to abound more and more in every good Word and Work towards all Men. May he truly convert

all that have been convinced, and awaken all that are *Dead in Trespasses and Sins!* May He confirm all that are wavering! — And may you all go on from one Degree of Grace unto another, 'till you arrive unto the Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of CHRIST; and thereby be made meet to stand before that GOD, *in whose Presence is the Fulness of Joy, at whose Right Hand there are Pleasures for evermore!*

Amen! Amen!

T H E

Almost **CHRISTIAN.**

A SERMON preach'd at the Parish
Church of *St. John, Wapping,*
&c.

SERMON VI.

The ALMOST-CHRISTIAN.

ACTS xxvi. 28.

*Almost thou persuadest me to be a
Christian.*

THESE Words contain the ingenuous Confession of King *Agrippa*; which having some reference to what went before, it may not be improper to relate to you the Substance of the preceding Verses, to which these Words are so closely connected.

THE Chapter then, out of which the Text is taken, contains an admirable Account the great St. *Paul* gave of his wonderful Conversion from *Judaism* to *Christianity*, when he was called to make his Defence before *Festus* and another *Gentile* Governor. Our Blessed LORD had long since foretold, that *When the Son of Man should be lifted up, his Disciples should be brought*

brought before Kings, for his Name's sake, for a Testimony unto them. And very good was the Design of Infinite Wisdom in thus ordaining it: For *Christianity* being from the very Beginning a Doctrine of the Cross, the Princes and Rulers of the Earth thought themselves too high to be instructed by such mean Teachers, or too happy to be disturbed by such unwelcome Truths; and therefore would have always continued Strangers to *JESUS CHRIST* and him Crucified, had not the Apostles, by being arraigned as Criminals before them, gained Opportunities of Preaching to them *JESUS* and the Resurrection. St. Paul knew full well that this was the main Reason, why his Blessed Master permitted his Enemies at this time to arraign him at a publick Bar: And therefore, in compliance with the Divine Will, thinks it not sufficient barely to make his Defence, but endeavours at the same Time to convert his Judges. And this He did with such Demonstration of the Spirit, and of Power, that *Festus*, unwilling to be convinced by the strongest Evidence, cries out with a loud Voice, "*Paul, much Learning doth make thee mad.*" To which the brave Apostle (like a true Follower of the Holy *JESUS*) meekly replies, *I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the Words of Truth and Soberness.*

ness. But in all Probability seeing King *Agrippa* more affected with his Discourse, and observing in him an Inclination to know the Truth, he applies himself more particularly to Him: *The King*, says he, *knoweth of these Things; before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these Things are hidden from him.* And then, that if possible he might compleat his wished-for Conversion, he, with an inimitable Strain of Oratory, addresses himself still more closely, — *King Agrippa, Believest thou the Prophets? I know that thou believest them.* At which the Passions of the King began to work so strongly, that he was obliged in open Court, to own himself affected by the Prisoner's Preaching, and ingenuously to cry out, — *Paul, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

WHICH Words, taken with the Context, afford us a lively Representation of the different Reception the Doctrine of CHRIST'S Ministers, who come in the Power and Spirit of Saint *Paul*, meets with now-a-days in the Minds of Men. For notwithstanding they, like this great Apostle, *speak forth the Words of Truth and Soberness*; and with such Energy and Power, that *all their Adversaries cannot gainsay or resist*; yet too many, with the most noble *Festus* before mentioned, being, like him, either too proud to be taught, or too sensual, too careless,

or too worldly-minded to live up to their Doctrine,—in order to excuse themselves cry out, that *much Learning*, much Study, or, what is more unaccountable, much Piety, *bath made them mad*. And though, blessed be God! all do not thus disbelieve our Report; yet amongst those many others, who gladly receive the Word, and confess that we speak the Words of Truth and Soberness, there are so few, who arrive at any higher Degree of Piety than that of *Agrippa*, or are any farther persuaded than to be *almost Christians*,—that I cannot but think it highly necessary to warn my dear Hearers of the Danger of such a State. And therefore from the Words of the Text shall endeavour to consider these three Things:

First, WHAT is meant by an *almost Christian*.

Secondly, WHAT are the chief Reasons why so many are no more than *almost Christians*.

Thirdly, I SHALL consider the Ineffectualness, Danger, Absurdity, and Uneasiness that attends those that are but *almost Christians*.

Fourthly, I SHALL conclude with a general Exhortation, to set all upon striving not only to be *almost* but *altogether Christians*.

I. AND

I. AND first, I am to consider, What is meant by an *almost Christian*.

AN *almost Christian* then, if we consider him in respect to his Duty to GOD, is one that halts between two Opinions, that wavers between CHRIST and the World; that would reconcile GOD and Mammon, that is, Light and Darkness, CHRIST and Belial. It is true, He has an Inclination to Religion, but then he is very cautious how he goes too far in it: His false Heart is always crying out, Spare thyself, do thyself no Harm. He prays indeed, that GOD's Will may be done on Earth, as it is in Heaven: but then, notwithstanding he is very partial in his Obedience, and fondly hopes that God will not be extreme to mark every Thing that he wilfully does amiss; though an inspired Apostle has told him, that he that wilfully offends in one Point is guilty of all. Above all he is one that depends much on outward Ordinances, and upon that account looks upon himself as Righteous; and despises Others, though at the same Time he may be as great a Stranger to the Divine Life as any other Person whatsoever. In short, he is fond of the Form, but never experiences the Power of Godliness in his Heart: He goes on Year after Year, feeding and attending on the Means of Grace; but then, like Pharoah's Lean Kine, is never the better, but rather the worse for them.

IF you consider him in respect to his Neighbour, he is one that is strictly just to all ; but then this does not proceed from any Love to GOD or Regard to Man, but only out of a Principle of Self-Love ; because he knows Dishonesty will spoil his Reputation, and consequently hinder his Thriving in the World.

HE is one that depends much on being Negatively Good, and contents himself with the Consciousness of having done no one any Harm ; tho' he reads in the Gospel, that *the Unprofitable Servant was cast into outer Darkness*, and the Barren Fig-Tree cursed and *dried up* from the Roots, not for bearing *bad*, but *no* Fruit.

HE is no Enemy to Charitable Contributions, if not too frequently recommended ; But then he is quite unacquainted with the kind Offices of *Visiting the Sick and Imprisoned, Cloathing the Naked, and Relieving the Hungry*. He thinks that these Things belong only to the Clergy, though his own false Heart tells him, that nothing but Pride keeps him from exercising these Acts of Humility, and that JESUS CHRIST, in the 25th Chapter of *St. Matthew*, condemns Persons to everlasting Punishment, not for being Fornicators, Drunkards, or Extortioners, but merely for neglecting these charitable Offices, *When the Son of Man, says our Blessed Lord himself, shall come in his Glory,*
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He shall set the Sheep on his Right-Hand, and the Goats on his Left. And then shall He say unto them on his Left Hand, Depart from me, ye Cursed, into everlasting Fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no Meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no Drink; I was a Stranger, and ye took me not in; Naked, and ye cloathed me not; Sick and in Prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also say, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or a-thirst, or a Stranger, or naked, or sick, or in Prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall He answer them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have not done it unto one of the least of these my Brethren, ye did it not unto me: And these shall go away into everlasting Punishment. I thought proper to give you this whole Passage of Scripture at large, because our Saviour lays such a particular Stress upon it; and yet notwithstanding it is so little regarded, that were we to judge by the Practice of *Christians*, one should be tempted to think there were no such Verses in the *Bible*.

BUT to proceed in our Character of an *almost Christian*: If we consider him in respect to himself; as before we said he was strictly honest to his Neighbour, so he is likewise strictly sober in himself: But then both his Honesty and Sobriety proceed from the same Principle of a
false

false Self-love. It is true, he *runs not into the same Excess of Riot* with other Men; but then it is not out of Obedience to the Laws of GOD, but either because his Constitution will not away with Intemperance; or rather because he is cautious of forfeiting his Reputation, or unfitting himself for temporal Business. But tho' he is so prudent as to avoid Intemperance and Excess, for the Reasons before mentioned; yet he always goes to the Extremity of what is lawful. It is true, he is no *Drunkard*; but then he has no *Christian Self-denial* to plead for him. He cannot think our Saviour to be so austere a Master, as to deny us to indulge ourselves in some Particulars: And so by this Means he is kept out of a Sense of true Religion, as much as if he lived in Debauchery, or any other Crime whatever. As to settling his Principles as well as Practice, he is guided more by the World than by the Word of GOD. As for his Part, he cannot think the Way to Heaven so narrow as some would make it: And therefore considers not so much what Scripture requires, as what such and such a good Man does, or what will best suit his own corrupt Inclinations. Upon this Account, he is not only very cautious himself, but likewise very careful of young Converts, whose Faces are set Heavenward; and therefore is always acting the Devil's Part,

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and bidding them *spare themselves*, though they are doing no more than what the Scripture strictly requires of them to do : The Consequence of which is, that *he suffers not himself to enter into the Kingdom of GOD, and they that are entering in he hinders.*

Thus lives the *almost Christian*: Not that I can say, I have fully described him to you ; but from these Out-lines and Sketches of his Character, if your Consciences have done their proper Offices, and made a particular Application of what has been said to your own Hearts, I cannot but fear that some of you may observe some Features in his Picture, odious as it is, too near resembling your own ; and therefore cannot but hope, at the same time, that you join with the Apostle in the Words immediately following the Text, and wish yourselves *not only almost, but altogether Christians.*

II. BUT it is time for me to proceed to the *Second general Thing* proposed ; namely, to consider the Reasons why so many are no more than *almost Christians.*

I. AND the first Reason I shall mention is, because so many set out with false Notions of Religion ; and though they live in a *Christian Country*, yet know not what *Christianity* is. This perhaps may be esteemed a hard Saying,

but Experience sadly evinces the Truth of it: For some place Religion in being of this or that Communion; more in Morality; most in a Round of Duties and a Model of Performances; and few, very few acknowledge it to be, what it really is, a thorough, inward Change of Nature, a Divine Life, a Vital Participation of JESUS CHRIST, an Union of the Soul with GOD; which the Apostle expresses by saying, *He that is joined to the LORD, is one Spirit.* Hence it happens that so many, even of the most knowing Professors, when you come to converse with them concerning the Essence, the Life, the Soul of Religion, I mean our *New Birth* in JESUS CHRIST, confess themselves quite ignorant of the Matter, and cry out with *Nicodemus*, *How can this Thing be!* And no wonder then, that so many are only *almost Christians*, when so many know not what *Christianity* is: No Marvel so many take up with the *Form*, when they are quite Strangers to the *Power of Godliness*; or content themselves with the *Shadow*, when they know so little about the *Substance* of it. And this is one Cause why so many are *almost*, why so few are *altogether Christians*.

2. A SECOND Reason that may be assigned why so many are no more than *almost Christians*, is a servile Fear of Man: Multitudes there
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there are, and have been, who though awakened to a Sense of the Divine Life, and *have tasted and felt the Powers of the World to come*; yet out of a base sinful Fear of being counted singular, or contemned by Men, have suffered all those good Impressions to wear off again. It is true they have some Esteem for JESUS CHRIST; but then, like *Nicodemus*, they would *come to him only by Night*: They are willing to serve him; but then they would do it *secretly, for fear of the Jews*: They have a mind to see JESUS, but then *they cannot come to him because of the Jews*, for fear of being laughed at, and ridiculed by those with whom they used to sit at Meat. But well did our Saviour prophesy of such Persons, *How can ye love me which receive Honour one of another?* Alas! have they never read, that *the Friendship of this World is Enmity with GOD*; and that our LORD himself has threatened, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me or of my Words, in this wicked and adulterous Generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father and of his Holy Angels?* But no wonder that so many are no more than *almost Christians*, since so many love the Praise of Men more than the Honour which cometh of GOD.

3. A THIRD Reason why so many are no more than *almost Christians*, is a reigning Love

of Money. This was the pitiable Case of that forward young Man in the Gospel, who came running to our Blessed LORD, and kneeling before him, enquired what *He must do to inherit Eternal Life*; to which our Blessed Master replied, *Thou knowest the Commandments, Do not Kill, Do not commit Adultery, Do not Steal*: To which the young Man replied (Oh that every young Man here present could do so too) *All these have I kept from my Youth*. But when our LORD proceeded to tell him, *Yet lackest thou one Thing, Go sell all that thou hast and give to the Poor,—* he was grieved at that Saying, and went away sorrowful, for he had great Possessions! Poor Youth! He had a good Mind to be a *Christian*, and to inherit Eternal Life, but thought it too dear, if it could be purchased at no less an Expence than of his whole Estate! And thus many, both Young and Old, now-a-days come running to worship our Blessed LORD in publick, and kneel before him in private, and enquire at his Gospel, what they must do to inherit Eternal Life: But when they find they must renounce the Self-Enjoyment of Riches, and forsake *all* in Affection to follow Him, they cry, *The LORD pardon us in this Thing!—We pray Thee, have us excused.—*

BUT is Heaven so small a Trifle in such Men's Esteem, as not to be worth a little gilded Earth?

Is Eternal Life so mean a Purchase, as not to deserve the temporary Renunciation of a few transitory Riches? Surely it is. But however inconsistent such a Behaviour may be, this inordinate Love of Money is too evidently the common and fatal Cause why so many are no more than *almost Christians*.

4. NOR is the reigning Love of Pleasure a less uncommon, or a less fatal Cause why so many are no more than *almost Christians*. Thousands and ten Thousands there are, who despise Riches, and would willingly be true Disciples of JESUS CHRIST, would parting with their Money make them so; but when they are told that our Blessed LORD has laid it down as an indispensable Condition, that *Whosoever will come after Him must deny himself*;— like the pitiable young Man before mentioned, *they go away sorrowful*: For they have too great a Love for sensual Pleasures: They will, like *Herod*, perhaps send for the Ministers of CHRIST, as he did for *John*, and *hear them gladly*: But touch them in their *Herodias*, tell them they must part with such or such a darling Pleasure; and with wicked *Ahab* they cry out, *Hast thou found us, O our Enemy?* Tell them of the Necessity of *Mortification, Fasting, and Self-Denial*, and it is as difficult to them to hear, as if you was to bid them *cut off a Right Hand*

or pluck out a Right Eye : They cannot think our Blessed LORD requires so much at their Hands, though an inspired Apostle has commanded us to *mortify our Members which are upon the Earth* : And he himself, even after he had converted Millions, and was very near arrived to the End of his Race, yet professed that it was his daily Practice to *keep under his Body, and bring it into Subjection, lest after he had preached to Others, he himself should be a Cast-away* !

BUT some Men would be wiser than this great Apostle, and chalk out to us what they falsely imagine an easier Way to Happiness. They would flatter us we may go to Heaven without offering Violence to our sensual Appetites ; *and enter into the strait Gate without striving* against our carnal Inclinations. And this is another Reason why so many are only *almost*, and not *altogether Christians*.

5. THE fifth and last Reason I shall assign why so many are only *almost Christians*, is a Fickleness and Instability of Temper.

IT has been, no doubt, the Misfortune that many a Minister and sincere *Christian* has met with, to weep and wail over Numbers of promising Converts, who seemingly began in the Spirit, but after a while have fell away, and basely ended in the Flesh ; and this not for want
of

of right Notions in Religion, nor out of a servile Fear of Man, nor out of a Love of Money or sensual Pleasure, but out of an Instability and Fickleness of Temper. They looked upon Religion merely for Novelty; as something which pleased them for a while, but after their Curiosity was satisfied, they have laid it aside again: Like the young Man that came to see JESUS with a Linen Cloth about his naked Body, they have followed him for a Season, but when Temptations have come to take hold on them, for want of a little more Resolution, they have been stripped of all their good Intentions, and fled away *naked*. They at first, *like a Tree planted by the Water-side*, grew up and flourished for a while; but *having no Root in themselves*, no inward Principle of Holiness and Piety, like *Jonah's Gourd*, were soon *dried up, cut down, and withered*. Their good Intentions are but too like the violent Motions of the Animal Spirits of a Body newly beheaded, which though impetuous, are not lasting. In short, they set out well in their Journey to Heaven, but finding the Way either narrower or longer than they expected,——through an Unsteadiness of Temper, they have made an Eternal Halt, and so *returned like the Dog to his Vomit, or like the Sow that was washed to her wallowing in the Mire!*

BUT I tremble to pronounce the Fate of such unstable Professors, *who having put their Hands to the Plow, for want of a little more Resolution, shamefully look back.* How shall I repeat to them that dreadful Threatning, *If any Man draw back, my Soul shall have no Pleasure in him!* And again, *It is impossible, that is, exceeding difficult at least, for those that have been once enlightened, and have tasted the good Gift of GOD's Holy Spirit, and the Powers of the World to come, if they should fall away, to be renewed again unto Repentance.* But notwithstanding the Gospel is so severe against Apostates, yet many that begun well, through a Fickleness of Temper, (Oh that none of us here present may ever be such) have been by this means of *the Number of those that turn back unto Perdition.* And this is the fifth and last Reason I shall give, why so many are only *almost, and not altogether Christians.*

BUT you, Brethren, have not so learned CHRIST. GOD forbid that a Fear of a little Contempt, a Love of a little worldly Gain, or a Fondness for a little sensual Pleasure, or Want of a steady Resolution, should hinder you from entering into Eternal Life, or make you so sottish as to think you may compound Matters between GOD and your Souls.

III. PROCEED we therefore now to the *Third General Thing* proposed, namely, to consider the Folly of being no more than an *almost Christian*.

AND the first Proof I shall give of the Folly of such a Proceeding is,—that it is ineffectual to Salvation. It is true, such Men are almost Good, but *almost* to hit the Mark is *really* to miss it. GOD requires us to *love him with all our Hearts, with all our Souls, and with all our Strength*: He loves us too well to admit any Rival; because so far as our Hearts are empty of GOD, so far must they be unhappy. The Devil, indeed, like the false Mother that came before *Solomon*, would have our Hearts divided, as she would have had the Child; but GOD, like the true Mother, will have all or none. *My Son give me thy Heart, thy whole Heart,* is the general Call to all: And if we do not perform this Condition, we never can expect the Divine Mercy.

PERSONS may indeed flatter themselves, that a partial Obedience will serve their Turn; but GOD at the Great Day will strike them dead, as he did *Ananias* and *Sapphira* by the Mouth of his Servant *Peter*, for pretending to offer him all their Hearts, when they *keep back* from him the greatest *Part*. They may perhaps
impose

impose upon their fellow Creatures for a while, but He that enabled *Elijah* to cry out, *Come in, thou Wife of Jeroboam*, when she came disguised to enquire about her sick Son, will also discover them through their most artful Diffimulations, and if *their Hearts are not whole with him*—appoint them their Portion with Hypocrites and Unbelievers.

BUT Secondly, What renders an half-way Piety more inexcusable is, that it is not only insufficient to our own Salvation, but also most prejudicial to that of Others.

AN *almost Christian* is one of the most hurtful Creatures in the World: He is a *Wolf in Sheep's Cloathing*; He is one of those false Prophets our Blessed LORD bids us beware of, in his Sermon on the Mount, who would persuade Men, that the Way to Heaven is broader than it really is; and thereby, as it was observed before, *enter not into the Kingdom of GOD themselves, and those that are entering in they hinder*. These, these are the Men that turn the World into a lukewarm *Laodicean* Spirit; that hang out false Lights, and so shipwreck unthinking benighted Souls in their Voyage to the Haven where they would be. These are they that are greater Enemies to the Cross of CHRIST, than Infidels themselves: For of an Unbeliever every one will be aware; but an *almost*

almost Christian, through his subtle Hypocrisy, draws away many after him; and therefore must expect to receive the greater Damnation.

BUT Thirdly, As it is most prejudicial to ourselves and hurtful to others, so it is the greatest Piece of Ingratitude we can express towards our Lord and Master JESUS CHRIST. For did He come down from Heaven, and shed his precious Blood, to purchase these Hearts of ours, and shall we only give him half of them? Oh how can we say we love him, when our Hearts are not wholly with Him? How can we call Him our Saviour, when we will not endeavour sincerely to approve ourselves to Him, and so let Him see the Travail of his Soul, and be satisfied!

HAD any of us purchased a Slave at a most expensive Rate, that was before involved in the utmost Miseries and Torments, and so must have continued for ever,—had we shut up our Bowels of Compassion from him; and was this Slave afterwards to grow rebellious, or deny giving us but half his Service: How, how should we exclaim against his base Ingratitude! And yet this base ungrateful Slave thou art, O Man, who acknowledgest thyself to be redeemed from infinite unavoidable Misery and Punishment by the Death of JESUS CHRIST, and yet wilt not give thyself wholly to Him. But shall
we

we deal with GOD our Maker in a manner we would not be dealt with by a Man like ourselves? Shall we mete out a less Measure of Love to our Saviour, than we would have dealt to ourselves? GOD forbid!

IV. No, (that I may come to the *last Thing* proposed, namely, to add a Word or two of Exhortation to be not only *almost*, but *altogether Christians*) let us scorn all such base and treacherous Treatment of our King and Saviour, nay our GOD. Let us not take some Pains all our Lives to go to Heaven, and yet plunge ourselves into Hell at last. Let us give GOD our whole Hearts, and no longer *halt between two Opinions*: *If the World be GOD, let us serve That*; *If Pleasure be a GOD, let us serve That*; but *if the LORD He be GOD, let us, Oh let us serve Him alone*. Alas! Why, why should we stand out any longer? Why should we be so in Love with Slavery, as not wholly to renounce the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, which, like so many spiritual Chains, bind down our Souls, and hinder them from flying up to GOD. Alas! what are we afraid of? Is not GOD able to reward our entire Obedience? If He is, as the *almost Christian's* lame Way of serving Him seems to grant,—— Why then will we not serve Him entirely? For

For the same Reason we do so much, why do we not do more? Or do you think that being only half Religious will make you happy, but that going farther will render you miserable and uneasy? Alas! this, my Brethren, is Delusion all over: For what is it but this *half Piety*, this wavering between God and the World, that makes so many that are seemingly well-disposed, such utter Strangers to the Comforts of Religion? They chuse just so much of Religion as will disturb them in their Lufts, and follow their Lufts so far as to deprive themselves of the Comforts of Religion. Whereas, on the contrary, would they sincerely *leave all* in Affection, and *give their Hearts wholly to GOD*, they would then (and they cannot 'till then) experience the unspeakable Pleasure of having a Mind at Unity with itself, and enjoy such a Peace of God, which even in this Life passes all Understanding, and which they were entire Strangers to before. It is true, if we will devote ourselves entirely to GOD, we must meet with Contempt; but then it is because Contempt is necessary to heal our Pride. We must renounce some sensual Pleasure; but then it is because those unfit us for Spiritual ones, which are infinitely better. We must renounce the Love of the World; but then it is that we may be filled
with

with the Love of GOD: And when that has once enlarged our Hearts, we shall, like *Jacob* when he served for his beloved *Rachel*, think nothing too difficult to undergo, no Hardships too tedious to endure, because of the Love we shall then have for our dear Redeemer. Thus easy, thus delightful will be the Ways of GOD even in this Life: But when once we throw off these Bodies, and our Souls are *filled with all the Fullness of GOD*, Oh! what Heart can conceive, what Tongue can express, with what unspeakable Joy and Consolation we shall then look back on our past sincere and hearty Services, which have procured us so invaluable a Reward! Think you then, my dear Hearers, we shall repent we had done too much; or rather think you not we shall be ashamed that we did no more; and blush we were so backward to give up All to GOD; when He intended hereafter to give us Himself?

LET me therefore, to conclude, exhort you, my Brethren, to have always the Unspeakable Reward of an entire Obedience set before you: And think withal, that every Degree of Holiness you neglect, every Instance of Piety you pass by, is a Jewel taken out of your Crown, a Degree of Blessedness lost in the Vision of GOD. Oh! do but always think and act thus, and you will no longer be labouring to compound

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pound Matters between God and the World; but on the contrary, be daily endeavouring to give up yourselves more and more unto Him; you will be always Watching, always Praying, always aspiring after farther Degrees of Purity and Love, and so consequently always preparing yourselves for a fuller Light and Enjoyment of that God, in whose Presence there is Fullness of Joy, and at whose Right Hand there are Pleasures for evermore. *Amen! Amen!*

OF
JUSTIFICATION
BY
CHRIST.

A SERMON preach'd at the Parish
Church of *St. Antbolin*, &c.

S E R M O N VIII.
Of Justification by CHRIST.

I C O R. VI. II.

But ye are Justified.

The whole Verse runs thus : ——— *And such were some of you ; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God.*

IT has been objected by some, who are so unhappy as to dissent from, nay, I may add, by others also, who actually are Friends to the present Ecclesiastical Establishment, That the Ministers of the Church of *England* preach themselves, and not CHRIST JESUS our Lord ; that they entertain their People with Lectures of mere Morality, without declaring to them the glad Tidings of

Salvation by JESUS CHRIST. How well grounded such an Objection may be, is not my Business to enquire: All I shall say at present to the Point is this; namely, that whenever such a grand Objection is urged against the whole Body of the Clergy in general, every honest Minister of JESUS CHRIST should do his utmost to *cut off* all manner of *Occasion from those that desire an Occasion* to take offence at us; that so by hearing us continually sounding forth the Word of Truth, and declaring with all Boldness and Assurance of Faith, *that there is no other Name given under Heaven whereby they can be saved, but that of JESUS CHRIST*; they may be ashamed of this their same confident Boasting against us.

IT was an Eye to this Objection, joined with the Agreeableness and Delightfulness of the Subject (for who can but delight to talk of that which the Blessed Angels desire to look into?) that induced me to discourse a little on that great and fundamental Article of our Faith; namely, our being freely justified from all our Sins by the precious Blood of JESUS CHRIST. *But ye are washed, says the Apostle, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, and by the Spirit of our GOD.*

THE Words beginning with the Particle *But*, have plainly a Reference to something that went before; it may not therefore be improper before I descend to Particulars, to consider the Words, as they stand related to the Context. The Apostle, in the Verses immediately foregoing, had been reckoning up many notorious Sins, such as Drunkenness, Adultery, Fornication, and such like, the Commission of which, without a true and hearty Repentance, He tells them plainly, would certainly shut them out of the Kingdom of God. But then, lest the sincere *Corinthian* Converts, who we find were once infamous for most or all of these Vices, should either on one hand grow spiritually proud by seeing themselves differ from their unconverted Brethren, and therefore should be tempted to set them at nought, and to say with the selfconceited Hypocrite in the Prophet, *Come not nigh me, for I am holier than thou*: or, on the other hand, by looking back on the Multitude of their past Offences, should be apt to think their Sins were too many and grievous to be forgiven: He first, in order to keep them humble, reminds them of their sad Estate before Conversion, telling them in plain Terms, *Such* (or as it might better be read *these things*) *were some of you*; that is, Not only one, but all that sad

Catalogue of Vices I have been before drawing up, some of you were once guilty of; but then at the same time to preserve them from Despair, behold he brings them glad Tidings of great Joy: *But ye are washed, says he, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, and by the Spirit of our GOD.*

THE former Part of which Text, namely our being *Sanctified*, I did, in some measure, treat of, when I discoursed on *the Nature and Necessity of the New Birth*: I come now, as was before proposed, to enlarge on the latter Part of it, namely, of our being freely *Justified* from all our Sins, by the precious Blood of JESUS CHRIST: *But ye are Justified in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST!*

FROM which Words I shall endeavour to consider these Three Things:

I. *First*, WHAT is meant by the Word *Justified*.

II. *Secondly*, I shall endeavour to prove, that all Mankind in general, and every individual Person in particular, stands in need of being *justified*.

III. *Thirdly and lastly*, That there is no possibility of obtaining this *Justification*, which we so much want, but by the *precious Blood of JESUS CHRIST*.

I. *First*

I. *First* then, I am to consider what is meant by the Word *justified*:

BUT *ye are Justified*, says the Apostle; which is all the same as though he had said, You have your Sins forgiven, and are looked upon by God, as though you never had offended him at all: For that is the Meaning of the Word *justified*, in almost all the other Passages of Holy Scripture where this Word is mentioned. Thus when this same Apostle writes to the *Romans*, he tells them, that whom God calls, those he also *justifies*; that is, forgives them their Sins: And again, speaking of *Abraham's Faith*, he tells them, that *Abraham believed on Him that justifies the Ungodly*: That is, who forgives the ungodly Man his Sins: Which Expression the Apostle himself explains by a Quotation out of the *Psalms*; *Blessed is the Man*, says he, *to whom the LORD imputeth no Sin*. From all which Proofs, and many others that might be urged, it is evident that being *justified*, or having our Sins forgiven, are the same as to Signification: So that what the Apostle here affirms of the *Corinthian Converts*, namely, that they were *justified*, amounts to what all of us profess to hold when we just now repeated our *Creed*, and each of us declared in his own Person, *I believe the For-*
M 4 *giveness*

givenness of Sins. Which leads me directly to the

II. *Second* Thing proposed, namely, To endeavour to prove that all Mankind in general, and every individual Person in particular, stands in need of being thus *justified*, or having his Sins forgiven.

AND indeed the Apostle supposes this in the Words of the Text: *But ye are justified*, says he, thereby implying that the *Corinthians* (and consequently all Mankind, there being no Difference, as will be shewn hereafter) stood in need of being thus *justified*.

BUT, not to rest in bare Suppositions, in my farther Enlargement on this Second Head, I shall endeavour to prove that we all stand in need of being *justified*, on two Accounts: First, as we stand chargeable with Original, — Secondly, as we have been guilty of Actual Sin.

AND First, I affirm that we all stand in need of being *justified*, as we are chargeable with Original Sin: Which, though a Proposition that may be denied by a self justifying Infidel, who *will not come to CHRIST that he may have Life*, and stoop to those Terms GOD has graciously settled for his Salvation; yet can never be denied by any one who believes that *St. Paul's Epistles* were written by Divine Inspiration; where we are told, that *in Adam all die*; that is, *Adam's Sin* was imputed to
all:

all: And lest we should forget to make a particular Application, it is farther added in another Place, that *there is none that doth good* (that is by Nature) *no, not one*: That we are all *gone out of the Way*; namely of Original Righteousness; and are by Nature the Children of Wrath. And even *David*, who was the Man after God's own Heart, and if any one could, might surely plead an Exemption from this universal Corruption, yet he confesses that he was *shapen in Wickedness, and that in Sin did his Mother conceive him*. And, to mention but one more Text, as immediately applicable to the present purpose, *St. Paul*, in his Epistle to the *Romans* says, that *Death came upon all Men, for the Disobedience of one Man, namely, of Adam, even upon those*, says he, (that is little Children) *who had not sinned after the Similitude of Adam's Transgression*; or, had not been guilty of actual Sin, and therefore could not be punished with temporal Death (which came into the World, as this same Apostle elsewhere informs us, only by Sin) had not the Disobedience of our first Parents been imputed to them. So that what has been said on this Point seems to be excellently summed up in that Article of our Church, where she declares, "That *Original Sin* standeth not in the following of *Adam*, but it is the Fault and Cor-
ruption

“ ruption of the Nature of every Man, that
 “ naturally is ingendred of the Offspring of
 “ *Adam*; whereby Man is very far gone from
 “ Original Righteousness, and is of his own
 “ Nature inclined to Evil, so that the Flesh
 “ lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and
 “ therefore in every Person born into this
 “ World it deserveth GOD’s Wrath and Damna-
 “ tion.”

I HAVE been the more particular in treating of this Point, because it is the very Foundation of the *Christian* Religion: For I am verily persuaded, that it is nothing but a Want of being well grounded in the Doctrine of *Original Sin*, and of the helpless; nay I may say damnable, Condition each of us comes into the World in, that makes so many Infidels oppose, and so many that call themselves *Christians* so very Lukewarm in their Love and Affections to JESUS CHRIST, It is this, and I could almost say this only, that makes Infidelity abound amongst us so much as it does: For, alas! we are mistaken if we imagine that Men *now* commence or continue Infidels, and set up corrupted Reason in Opposition to Revelation, merely for want of Evidence, (for I believe it might easily be proved, that a modern Unbeliever is the most credulous Creature living;) No, it is only for want of an humble Mind, of
 a Sense

a Sense of their Original Depravity, and an Unwillingness to own themselves so depraved, that makes them so obstinately shut their Eyes against the Light of the Glorious Gospel of CHRIST. Whereas on the contrary, were they but once pricked to the Heart with a due and lively Sense of their natural Corruption and Liableness to Condemnation, we should have them no more scoffing at Divine Revelation, and looking on it as an Idle Tale; but they would cry out with convicted *Paul*, ——— *Lord, What wouldest thou have me to do?* or, with the trembling Jailor, on a like Occasion, *Men and Brethren, What shall we do to be saved?* It was an Error in this Fundamental Point, that made so many resist the Evidence the Son of God himself gave of his Divine Mission, when he tabernacled amongst us. Every Word he spake, every Action he did, every Miracle he wrought, proved that He came from God. And why then did so many harden their Hearts, and would not believe his Report? Why He himself informs us, when He tells us, *they will not come to me that they may have Life*: They will obstinately stand out against those Means God had appointed for their Salvation: And *St. Paul* tells us, that *if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them*
which

which believe not, lest the Light of the Glorious Gospel of CHRIST, who is the Image of GOD, should shine upon them.— 2 Cor. iv. 3. 4.

BUT to return from this Digression, which I could not very well avoid making; If it be asked, How it suits with the Divine Goodness to impute the Guilt of one Man's Sin to an innocent Posterity? I should think it sufficient to make use of the Apostle's Words: *Nay but O Man, Who art thou that repliest against GOD? Shall the Thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?* But, to come to a more direct Reply, — Persons would do well to consider, that in this first Covenant GOD made with Man, *Adam* acted as a Publick Person, as the common Representative of all Mankind, and consequently we must stand or fall with Him. Had He continued in his Obedience, and not eaten the forbidden Fruit, the Benefits of that Obedience would doubtless have been imputed to us: But since he did not persist in it, but broke the Covenant GOD made with Him, and us in Him; Who dares charge the Righteous Judge of all the Earth with Injustice, for imputing that to us also; But I shall have an Occasion, by and by, to vindicate the Divine Proceeding in this Point more particularly, and therefore I chuse to wave all farther Consideration of it in this

Place,

Place, and proceed to the other Thing proposed under this Second general Head ; namely,

II. To endeavour to prove, That we all stand in need of being *justified*, not only as we are chargeable with *Original*, but as we stand convicted of *Actual Sin*.

THAT GOD, as he made Man, has a Right also to demand his Obedience, I suppose, is a Truth no one will deny: That He hath also given us both a natural and a written Law, whereby we are to be judged, cannot be questioned by any one who believes St. Paul's Epistle to the *Romans* to be of Divine Authority: For in this we are told of a Law written in the Heart, and a Law given by *Moses*; and, that each of us hath broken these Laws, is too evident from our own sad and frequent Experience. Accordingly the Holy Scriptures inform us that *there is no Man which liveth and sinneth not*; that *in many things we offend all*; that *if we say we have no Sin we deceive ourselves*, and such like. And if we are thus found Offenders against GOD, it follows that we stand in need of Forgiveness for thus offending Him; unless we suppose GOD should enact Laws, and at the same Time not care whether they are obeyed or no; which is as
absurd

absurd as to suppose that a Prince should establish Laws for the proper Government of his Country, and yet let every Violater of them come off with Impunity. But GOD has not dealt so foolishly with his Creatures: No, as he gave us a Law, he demands our Obedience to that Law, and has obliged us universally to obey it, under no less a Penalty than incurring his Curse and eternal Death for every Breach of it. For thus speaks the Scripture: *Cursed is he that continueth not in all Things that are written in this Book to do them*; as the Scripture also speaketh in another Place, *The Soul that sinneth, it shall die*. Now it has already been proved that we have all of us sinned; and therefore, unless some Means can be found out to satisfy GOD's Justice, we must perish eternally.

LET us here then stand a while, and see in what a deplorable Condition each of us comes into the World, and still continues, till we are put into a State of Grace: For surely nothing can well be supposed more deplorable than to be born under the Curse of GOD; to be charged with *Original Guilt*, and not only so, but to be convicted as actual Breakers of GOD's Law, the least Breach of which justly deserves Eternal Damnation. Surely this can be but a melancholy Prospect to view ourselves
in,

in, and must put us upon contriving some Means whereby we may satisfy and appease our offended Judge. But what must those Means be? Shall we repent? Alas! there is not one Word mentioned about Repentance in the First Covenant: *The Day that thou eatest thereof, says GOD, thou shalt surely die.* So that if GOD be true, unless there be some Way found out to satisfy his Justice we must perish; and there is no room left for us to expect a Change of Mind in GOD, though we should seek it with Tears. Well then, if Repentance will not do, shall we plead the Law of Works? Alas! *By the Law shall no Man living be justified: For by the Law comes the Knowledge of Sin.* It is that which convicts and condemns, and therefore can by no means acquit, much less justify us. *Wherewith then shall we come before the LORD, and bow down before the Most High GOD; in order to procure the Forgiveness of our Sins? Shall we come before him with Calves of a Year old, with thousands of Rams, or ten thousands of Rivers of Oil? Alas! GOD has shewed thee, O Man, that this will not avail.* For he hath declared, *I will take no Bullock out of thy House, nor He-Goat out of thy Fold: For all the Beasts of the Forest are mine, and so are the Cattle upon a thousand Hills.* Will not the LORD then be pleased to accept our First-born for our Transgression,

gression, the Fruit of our Bodies for the Sin of our Souls? Even this will not purchase our Pardon: For He has declared that *the Children shall not bear the Iniquities of their Parents.* Besides, they are Sinners, and therefore, being under the same Condemnation, equally stand in need of Forgiveness with ourselves. They are impure, and will the LORD accept the Blind and Lame for Sacrifice? *O wretched Men that we are! Who shall deliver us from this Body of Death?* why I thank GOD, our Lord JESUS CHRIST. Which naturally leads me to the *Third general Thing* proposed, which was to endeavour to prove,

III. THAT there is no Possibility of our obtaining this *Justification*, which we so much want, but by the *precious Blood* of our Lord JESUS CHRIST: *But ye are justified in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST.*

BUT this having been in some measure proved by what has been said under the foregoing Head, wherein I have shewn that neither our Repentance, Works, or Sacrifices could possibly take away, or make Attonement for our Sins; nothing remains for me to do
under

under this Head, but to shew that the Death of JESUS CHRIST has done it for us.

AND here I shall still have recourse *to the Law and to the Testimony*. For after all the most subtle Disputations on either side, nothing but the lively Oracles of GOD can give us any Satisfaction in this momentous Point: It being such an inconceivable Mystery, that the Eternal, only-begotten Son of GOD should die for sinful Man, that we durst not have presumed so much as to have thought of it, had not GOD revealed it in his Holy Word. It is true, Reason may shew us the Wound, but Revelation only can lead us to the Means of our Cure. And though the Method GOD has been pleased to take to put us in a Way of being happy, may be to the Infidel *a Stumbling-block*, and to the wise Opiniator and Disputer of this World *Foolishness*; yet *Wisdom*, that is, the Dispensation of our Redemption, *will be justified* or approved of and submitted to *by all her* truly wise and holy *Children*, by every sincere and honest *Christian*.

BUT to come more directly to the Point before us. Two Things, as was before observed, we wanted in order to make our Peace with GOD.

I. To be freed from the Guilt of *Original Sin*: And,

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2. FROM

2. FROM that Punishment we had most justly deserved for our *actual Breaches* of GOD's Law.

AND both these (*Thanks be to GOD for this unspeakable Gift*) are abundantly secured to us by the Death and Passion of JESUS CHRIST. For what says the Scripture?

1. As to the first, or our being freed from the Guilt of *Original Sin*,—it informs us, that *as in Adam all die, even so in CHRIST shall all be made alive.* And again, *As by the Disobedience of one Man, or by one Transgression, namely, that of Adam, many were made Sinners, so by the Obedience of one, JESUS CHRIST, many were made Righteous.* And again, *As by the Disobedience of one Man, Judgment came upon all Men into Condemnation; that is, all Men were condemned, on having Adam's Sin imputed to them: so by the Obedience of one, that is, JESUS CHRIST, the Free Gift of Pardon and Peace came upon all Men unto Justification of Life.* Which by the way clears up (as I promised to do before) that seeming Disagreement between GOD's Attributes, in imputing *Adam's Sin* to us, (namely, his Justice and Mercy) and wholly takes off that Imputation of Injustice, which wicked and ungodly Men would blasphemously cast upon the *Righteous Judge of all the Earth.* Had GOD indeed im-
puted

puted *Adam's* Sin to his innocent Posterity, and left them to perish in it: Had he looked upon and punished them all as Sinners, without providing them a Saviour, we might perhaps have had some Pretence to complain of his Severity, though we could not even then but acknowledge his Justice in the Punishment of Sin. But since *He has not dealt with us after our Deserts, nor rewarded us according to our Iniquity*: Since the same Revelation acquaints us, that *As in Adam all die, even so in CHRIST shall all be made alive*: Since the same GOD that informs us that *Death came even upon those who had not sinned after the Similitude of Adam's Transgression*, declares likewise, that *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*, or put into a State of Salvation: I say, since these Things are so, What Reason have such Worms as we to quarrel with the Most High GOD? Doubtless no more than a condemned Criminal has to find Fault with his Judge for condemning him for breaking the Law, only that he might give him the Pleasure of a Reprieve. No; as for GOD, his Ways are perfect, and his Dealings with his Creatures are *holy, just and good*; and as in all his Dispensations, so more especially in our Recovery from our fallen Estate by the Death of JESUS, we may justly say, *Mercy and*

Truth have met together, Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other. But,

2. PARDON for our *actual Transgression* of GOD'S LAW was another Thing which we wanted to have secured to us, before we could be at Peace with GOD. And this the Holy Scriptures inform us is abundantly done by the Death of JESUS CHRIST. The Evangelical Prophet foretels that the promised Redeemer should be *wounded for our Transgressions, and bruised for our Iniquities*; that *the Chastisement of our Peace should be upon him*; and that *by his Stripes we should be healed, Isaiah liii. 6.* The Angel at His Birth says, that he should *save his People from their Sins*: And St. Paul declares, that *this is a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation, that JESUS CHRIST came into the World to save Sinners*: And here in the Words of the Text, *Such (or, as I observed before, these Things) were some of you; but ye are washed, &c.*—And St. Peter, alluding to the aforementioned Passage of *Isaiab*, testifies of CHRIST, that *His own Self bare our Sins in his own Body on the Tree, that we being dead to Sin, should live unto Righteousness*; by whose *Stripes, says he, ye are healed, 1 Pet. ii. 24.* And in another Place the same Apostle says, *Neither is there Salvation in any other; for there is none other Name under Heaven given*
among

among Men, whereby we must be saved, but the Name of JESUS CHRIST, *Acts* iv. 12.

How GOD will be pleased to deal with the Gentiles, who yet sit in *Darkness* and in the *Shadow of Death*, and on whom the *Sun of Righteousness* never yet arose, is not for us to enquire. *What have we to do to judge those that are without?* To GOD's Mercy let us commend them, and wait for a Solution of this Point till the Great Day of Accounts, when all GOD's Dispensations, both of Providence and Grace, will be fully cleared up, by Methods to us, it may be, at present unknown, because unrevealed. However, this we know that *the Judge of all the Earth will, most assuredly, do right.*

BUT it is time for me to draw towards a Conclusion.

I HAVE now then, Brethren, by the Blessing of GOD, discoursed on the Words of the Text in the Method I proposed; and have in as plain a manner as I could, shewn you what is meant by the Word *Justified*, that it signifies our having our Sins forgiven: And have also in some measure proved that we all stand in need of being thus *justified*, as we are chargeable with *Original*, and have been guilty of *Actual Sin*: And lastly, that nothing but the *precious Blood* of JESUS CHRIST has, or can procure this inestimable Privilege for us.

MANY useful Inferences might be drawn from what has been delivered ; but as I have detained you I fear too long already, permit me only to make a Reflection or two on what has been said, and I have done.

IF then we are *freely justified* by the Death of JESUS CHRIST, let us here pause a while ; and as before we reflected on the *Misery*, let us now turn aside and admire the *Happiness* of Man. But alas ! how am I lost to think that GOD the Father, when we were in a State of Enmity by *original*, and of Rebellion by our *actual Sins*, should notwithstanding yearn in his Bowels towards us his fallen, his apostate Creatures : And because nothing but an infinite Ransom could satisfy an infinitely offended Justice, should send his only and dear Son JESUS CHRIST (who is GOD blessed for ever, and who had lain in his Bosom from all Eternity) to die a cursed, painful, ignominious Death, for us and for our Salvation ! O who can avoid crying out, on the Consideration of this great Mystery of Godliness,— *O the Depth of the Riches of GOD's Love* to us his wretched, miserable, undone Creatures ! *How unsearchable is his Mercy, and his Loving Kindness past finding out !* Now know we of a Truth, O GOD, that thou hast loved us, *since thou hast not withheld thy Son, thy only Son JESUS CHRIST, from thus dying for us.*

BUT

BUT as we admire the FATHER sending, let us likewise humbly and thankfully adore the SON coming, when sent to die for Man. But alas! what Thoughts can conceive, what Words express the infinite Greatness of that unparalleled Love, which drew the Son of GOD down from the Mansions of his Father's Glory to die for sinful Man! The Jews, when he only shed a Tear at poor *Lazarus's* Funeral said, *Behold how he loved him*: How much more justly then may we cry out, *Behold how he loved us*, when he did not spare to shed not only a Tear, but his own precious Blood for us!

AND can any poor returning Sinner, after this, despair of Mercy? What, can they see their Saviour hanging on a Tree, with Arms stretched out to embrace them, and yet, upon their true Repentance, doubt of finding Acceptance with him? No, away with all such dishonourable, such desponding Thoughts.—— Look on his Hands, bored with Pins of Iron; look on his Side, pierced with a cruel Spear on purpose to unloose the Sluices of his Blood, and *open a Fountain for Sin, and for Unclean-ness*;—— And then despair of Mercy if you can! No, do but leave those Sins he came to dye for; *Do not crucify Him afresh, and put him again to open Shame*, by leading wicked, lukewarm, ungodly Lives: In short, do but

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labour to attain *that Holiness, without which no Man shall see the LORD*; and then though your Sins be as Scarlet, yet shall they be as Wool; though they be as Crimson, yet shall they be whiter than Snow.

WHICH GOD of his Infinite Mercy grant,
&c.

THE

THE
HEINOUS SIN
OF

Profane Cursing and Swearing.

A SERMON preached at the Pa-
rish Church of St. *Nicholas Cole-*
Abbey.

S E R M O N VIII.

The Heinous Sin of Profane
Cursing and Swearing.

MATTH. V. 34.

But I say unto you, Swear not at all.

AMONG the many heinous Sins for which this Nation is grown infamous, perhaps there is no one more crying, but withal more common, than the abominable Custom of *profane Swearing and Cursing*. Our Streets abound with Persons of all Degrees and Qualities, who are continually provoking the Holy One of *Israel* to Anger by their detestable Oaths and Blasphemies: And our very Children, *out of whose Mouths*, the Psalmist observes in his Days, *was perfected Praise*, are now grown remarkable for the quite opposite ill Quality of *Cursing and Swearing*. This cannot but be a melancholy Prospect for every sincere

sincere and honest Minister of JESUS CHRIST, to view his Fellow *Christians* in ; and such as will put him on contriving some Means to prevent the spreading at least of so growing an Evil ; knowing that the LORD (without Repentance) will assuredly visit for these Things. But, alas! what can he do? Publick Animadversions are so neglected amongst us, that where shall we find a common Swearer punished as the Laws direct? And as for private Admonition, Men are now so *hardened through the Deceitfulness of Sin*, that to give them sober and pious Advice, and to shew them the Evil of their Doings, is but like *casting Pearls before Swine, they only turn again and rent you*. Since Matters then are come to this pass, all that we can do is this, that as we are appointed Watchmen and Ambassadors of the LORD, it is our Duty from time to time to *shew the People their Transgression, and warn them of their Sin*; so that *whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, we however may deliver our own Souls*. That I therefore may discharge my Duty in this Particular, give me leave, in the Name of GOD, humbly to offer to your most serious Consideration some few Observations on the Words of the Text, in order to shew the Heinousness of *profane Cursing and Swearing*.

By T

BUT before I proceed directly to the Prosecution of this Point, it will be proper to clear this Precept of our LORD from a Misinterpretation that has been put on it by a Set of Men, who heedlessly infer from hence that our Saviour prohibits *Swearing* before a Magistrate when required on a solemn and proper Occasion. But that all *Swearing* is not absolutely unlawful for a *Christian*,— is evident from the Writings of *St. Paul*, whom we often find upon some solemn Occasions using several Forms of Imprecation and Swearing, as, *I call GOD to Witness*,— *GOD is my Judge*,— *By your Rejoicing in CHRIST JESUS*, and such like. And that our Saviour does by no means forbid *Swearing* before a Magistrate, in the Words now before us, is plain, if we consider the Scope and Design he had in view, when he gave his Disciples this Command. Permit me to observe to you then, that our Blessed Master had set himself, from the 27th Verse of this Chapter, out of which the Text is taken, to vindicate and clear the Moral Law from the corrupt Glosses and Misconstruction of the *Pharisees*, who then sat in *Moses's* Chair, but without were notoriously faulty in adhering too closely to the literal Expression of the Law, without ever considering the due Extent and spiritual Meaning of it. Accordingly they imagined,

gined, that because GOD had said, *Thou shalt not commit Adultery*, that therefore, supposing a Person was not guilty of the very Act of *Adultery*, he was not chargeable with the Breach of the Seventh Commandment. And likewise in the Matter of *Swearing*, because GOD had forbidden his People in the Books of *Exodus* and *Deuteronomy*, to take his Name in vain, or to *Swear falsely* by his Name; they therefore judged it lawful to *swear* by any Creature in common Discourse, supposing they did not directly mention the Name of GOD. Our Blessed Saviour therefore, in the Words now before us, rectifies this their Mistake about *Swearing*, as he had done in the Verses immediately foregoing that concerning *Adultery*, and tells the People, that whatever Allowances the *Pharisees* might give to *swear* by any Creature, yet he pronounced it absolutely unlawful for any of his Followers to do so. *You have heard*, says he, *that it has been said by them of old Time*, (namely, by the *Pharisees* and Teachers of the *Jewish Law*) *Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but perform unto the LORD thine Oaths: But I say unto you*, (I who am appointed by the FATHER to be the great Prophet and true Law-giver of his Church) *Swear not at all, in your common Conversation, neither by Heaven, for it is GOD's Throne; and therefore*

to

to swear by That, is to swear by Him that sits thereon; *neither by the Earth, for it is his Footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the City of the Great King; neither shalt thou swear by thy Head, because thou canst not make one Hair white or black: But let your Communications* (which plainly shews that CHRIST is here speaking of *Swearing*, not before a Magistrate, but in common Conversation) let your Communications, says he, *be Yea yea, Nay nay, a strong Affirmation or Negation at the most; for whatever is more than this cometh of Evil, that is, cometh from an evil Principle, from the Evil One, the Devil, the Author of all Evil.*

WHICH by the way, methinks, should be a Caution to all such Persons who though not guilty of *Swearing* in the gross Sense of the Word, yet attest the Truth of what they are speaking of, though ever so trifling, by saying *Upon my Life, As I live, By my Faith, By the Heavens*, and such like: which Expressions, however harmless and innocent they may be esteemed by some sorts of People, yet are the very Oaths which our Blessed LORD condemns in the Words immediately following the Text; and Persons who use such unwarrantable Forms of speaking, must expect to be convicted and condemned as *Swearers* at our Saviour's second Coming to judge the World.

BUT

BUT to return: It appears then from the whole Tenour of our Saviour's Discourse, that in the Words of the Text he does by no means disannul or forbid *Swearing* before a Magistrate (which, as might be easily shewn, is both lawful and necessary) but only *profane Swearing* in common Conversation; the Heinousness and Sinfulness of which I come now, as was above proposed, more immediately to lay before you.

AND here, not to mention that it is a direct Breach of our Blessed Master's and great Lawgiver's Command in the Words of the Text, as likewise of the third Commandment, wherein God positively declares, *he will not hold him guiltless* (that is, will assuredly punish him) *that taketh his Name in vain*: Not to mention that it is the greatest Abuse of that noble Faculty of Speech, whereby we are distinguished from the Brute Creation; and the great Hazard the *common Swearer* runs of being perjured some time or other: Not to mention these Reasons against it I say, which of themselves would abundantly prove the Folly and Sinfulness of *Swearing*:— I shall at this time content myself with instancing in four Particulars, which highly aggravate the Crime of *profane Swearing*; and those are such as follow.

First,

First, BECAUSE there is no Temptation in Nature to this Sin, nor does the Commission of it afford the Offender the least Pleasure or Satisfaction.

Secondly, BECAUSE it is a Sin which may be so often repeated.

Thirdly, BECAUSE it hardens Infidels against the Christian Religion, and must give great Offence, and occasion much Sorrow and Concern to every true Disciple of JESUS CHRIST.

Fourthly, BECAUSE it is an Extremity of Sin which can only be matched in Hell.

THE *First* Reason then why *Swearing* in common Conversation is so heinous in God's Sight, and why we should not swear at all, is because it has no Temptation in Nature; nor does the Commission of it, unless a Man be a Devil Incarnate, afford the Offender the least Pleasure or Satisfaction.

Now here, I presume, we may lay it down as a Maxim universally agreed on, that the Guilt of any Crime is increased or lessened in proportion to the Weakness or Strength of the Temptation by which a Person is carried out to the Commission of it. It was this Consideration that extenuated and diminished the Guilt

of *Saul's* taking upon him to offer Sacrifice before the Prophet *Samuel* came, and of *Uzza's* touching the Ark, because it was in danger of falling: As on the contrary what so highly aggravated the Disobedience of our first Parents and *Lot's* Wife was, because the former had so little Reason to eat the forbidden Fruit, and the latter so small a Temptation to look back on *Sodom*.

AND now if this be granted, surely the common *Swearer* must of all Sinners be the most without Excuse, since there is no manner of Temptation in Nature to the Commission of his Crime. In most of the other Commands, Persons perhaps may plead the Force of Natural Inclination in Excuse for their Breach of them: One, for Instance, may alledge his strong Propensity to Anger, to excuse his breaking of the Sixth: Another, his Proneness to Lust, for his Violation of the Seventh. But now surely the *common Swearer* has nothing of this kind to urge in his Behalf: For though he may have a natural Inclination to this or that Crime, yet no Man, it is to be presumed, can say, he is born of a *swearing* Constitution.

BUT farther, as there is no Temptation to it, so there is no Pleasure or Profit to be reaped from the Commission of it. Ask the Drunkard why he rises up early to follow strong Drink,
and

and he will tell you; because it affords his sensual Appetite some kind of Pleasure and Gratification, though it be no higher an one than that of a Brute. Enquire of the covetous Worldling, why he defrauds and over-reaches his Neighbour, and he has an Answer ready,—To enrich himself, and to lay up Goods for many Years. But it must certainly puzzle the *profane Swearer* himself, to inform you what Pleasure he reaps from *Swearing*: For alas! it is a fruitless, tasteless Thing, that he sells his Soul for: But indeed he does not sell it at all: In this Case he prodigally gives it away (without Repentance) to the Devil; and parts with a blessed Eternity, and runs into everlasting Torment, merely for nothing!

BUT *Secondly*, what increases the Heinousness of *profane Swearing*, is; that it is a Sin which may so often be repeated.

THIS is another Consideration which always serves to lessen or increase the Guilt and Malignity of any Sin. It was some Excuse for the Drunkenness of *Noah*, and the Adultery of *David*, that they committed these Crimes but once: As on the contrary of the Patriarch *Abraham's* Distrust of God, that he repeated the dissembling of *Sarah* to be his Wife two several times. And if this be admitted as an Aggravation of

other Persons Crimes, surely much more so of the Guilt of *common Swearing*, because it is a Sin which may be and is for the generality often repeated. In many other gross Sins it cannot be so: If a Man be overcome in Drink, there must be a considerable Time ere he can recover his Debauch and return to his Cups again: or if he be accustomed to profane the Sabbath, he cannot do it every Day, but only one in seven. But alas! the *profane Swearer* is ready for another Oath almost before the Sound of the first is out of our Ears: Yea some double and treble them in one Sentence, even so as to confound the Sense of what they say, by an horrid Din of Blasphemy! Now if the great and terrible *JEHOVAH* has expressly declared that he *will not hold him guiltless*, that is, will assuredly punish him, *that taketh his Name but once in vain*: What a vast Heap of these heinous Sins lyes at every *common Swearer's* Door! It would be apt to sink him into an intolerable Despair, did he but see the whole Sum of them. And Oh! what a feared Conscience must that Wretch have, that does not feel this prodigious Weight!

BUT, *Thirdly*, what makes the Sin of *profane Swearing* appear yet more exceeding sinful is, that it hardens Infidels against the *Christian Religion*.

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IT is the Apostle St. *Peter's* Advice to the married Persons of his Time, that they should walk as became the Gospel of CHRIST, that those that were without might be won to embrace the *Christian Religion*, by seeing and observing their pious Conversation coupled together with Fear. And what the Apostle presses on married Persons we find elsewhere enjoined each particular Member of the Church. Accordingly we are commanded by our Blessed LORD to *let our Light so shine before Men, that they may see our good Works, and glorify our Father which is in Heaven.* And the Apostle St. *Paul* bids us *walk circumspectly towards them that are without, redeeming the Time, that is, embracing all Opportunities to do them good, because the Days are evil.* But alas! in what a direct Contradiction does the *profane Swearer* live to this and such Precepts,—who, instead of gaining Profelytes to CHRIST from the unbelieving Part of the World, does all he can to oppose it! For how can it be expected that Infidels should honour our GOD, when *Christians* themselves despise him; or that any should embrace our Religion, when Professors of it themselves make so light of one of its strictest Commands? No, to our Grief and Shame be it spoken, it is by reason of such Impieties as these that our holy Religion (the best and purest

in itself) is become a By-word among the Heathen; that the sacred Authority of the holy JESUS and his Doctrine is despised; and GOD's Name, as it is written, *blasphemed among the Gentiles.*

THESE cannot but be sad Blocks and Offences in the way of our Brethren's Conversion: *But woe be to those Men by whom such Offences come: We may say of them, as our blessed LORD did of Judas, It had been better for such Men that they had never been born: Or, as he threatens in another Place, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment than for such Sinners.*

BUT this is not all; as *profane Swearing* must undoubtedly harden those in their Infidelity that are without, so must it no less grieve and give great Offence to those honest and sincere Persons that are within the Church. We hear of *David's* complaining and crying out, *Woe is me that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech, and to have my Habitation amongst the Tents of Kedar:* That is, that he was obliged to live and converse with a People exceedingly wicked and profane. And *St. Peter* tells us, that *Lot's* righteous Soul was grieved day by day, whilst he saw and observed the ungodly Conversation of the Wicked. And no doubt it was one great Part of our blessed Master's Sufferings whilst

whilst on Earth, that he was compelled to converse with a wicked and perverse Generation, and to hear his heavenly Father's sacred Name profaned and scoffed at by unrighteous and wicked Men. And surely it cannot but pierce the Heart of every true and sincere *Christian*, of every one that does in any measure partake of the Spirit of his Master, to hear the Multitude of Oaths and Curses which proceed daily and hourly out of the Mouths of many People, and those too whose liberal Education and seeming Regard for the Welfare of Religion, one would think, should teach them a more becoming Behaviour. To hear the great and terrible Name of God polluted by Men, which is adored by Angels, and to consider how often that sacred Name is profaned in common Discourse, which we are not worthy to mention in our Prayers: This, I say, cannot but make each of them cry out with holy *David*, *Woe is me that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech, and to have my Habitation amongst the Tents of Kedar.* And though the Blasphemies and profane Discourses of others will not be imputed to sincere Persons for Sin, so long as they *have no Fellowship with such hellish Fruits of Darkness, but rather reprove them*; nay rather will be imputed to them for Righteousness, for thus lamenting the Wickedness of *Sion*: yet it will greatly enhance the

present Guilt, and sadly increase the future Punishment of every *profane Swearer*, by whom such Offences come. For if, as our Saviour tells us, *it had been better for a Man to have a Mill-stone tied about his Neck, than that he should offend one of his little Ones*, that is, the weakest of his Disciples, *how much sorer Punishment will they be thought worthy of*, who not only cause God's Name to be blasphemed among the *Gentiles*, and the Religion of our dear Redeemer to be abhorred; but who make his Saints to weep and mourn, and *vex their righteous Souls from day to day*, by their ungodly, profane, and blasphemous Conversation? Surely as God will put the Tears of *one* into his Bottle, and recompense them with eternal Glory at the great Day of Retribution, so it will be just in him to punish the *other* with eternal Sorrow for all their ungodly and hard Speeches, and cast them into a Lake of Fire and Brimstone, where they shall be glad of a Drop of Water to cool those Tongues with which they have so often blasphemed the LORD of Hosts, and grieved the People of our GOD.

BUT it is time for me to proceed to give my *Fourth* and last Reason, why *common Swearing* is so exceeding sinful. And that is, because it is such an Extremity of Sin that can only be
 matched

matched in Hell, where all are desperate and without Hope of Mercy. The damned Devils and damned Souls of Men in Hell may be supposed to rave and blaspheme in their Torments, because they know that the Chains wherein they are held can never be knocked off; But for Men that swim in the River of God's Goodness, *whose Mercies are renewed to them every Morning*, and who are visited with fresh Tokens of his infinite unmerited Loving-kindness every Moment: For these favourite Creatures to *set their Mouths against Heaven*, and to blaspheme a gracious, patient, all-bountiful God; is a Height of Sin which exceeds the Blackness and Impiety of Devils and Hell itself.

AND now, after what has been here offered, to shew the Heinousness of *profane Cursing and Swearing* in common Conversation, may I not very justly address myself to you in the Words of the Text, *Therefore I say unto you, Swear not at all*; since it is a Sin that has no Temptation in Nature, nor brings any Pleasure or Profit to the Committer of it; since it hardens Infidels in their Infidelity, and affords sad Causes of Grief and Lamentation to every honest *Christian*; since it is a Sin that generally grows into a Habit; and lastly, such a Sin that can only be matched in Hell.

I. AND first then, if these Things be so, and the Sin of *profane Swearing*, as hath been in some measure shewn, is so exceeding sinful, what shall we say to such unhappy Men, who think it not only allowable, but fashionable and polite to *take the Name of GOD in vain*; who imagine that *Swearing* makes them look big amongst their Companions, and really think it a Piece of Honour to abound in it? But alas! little do they think that such a Behaviour argues the greatest Degeneracy of Mind and Fool-hardiness that can possibly be thought of: For what can be more base than one Hour to pretend to adore GOD in publick Worship, and the very next Moment to blaspheme his Name? Indeed such a Behaviour from Persons who deny the Being of a GOD (if any such Fools there be) is not altogether so much to be wondered at: But for Men, who not only subscribe to the Belief of a Deity, but likewise acknowledge him to be a GOD of infinite Majesty and Power; for such Men, I say, to blaspheme his holy Name by *profane Cursing* and *Swearing*, and at the same time confess that this very GOD has expressly declared he *will not hold him guiltless*, that is, will certainly and eternally punish (without Repentance) him *that taketh his Name in vain*; is such an Instance of Fool-hardiness as well as Baseness, that can scarcely be parallel'd.

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This is what they presume not to do in other Cases of less Danger: They dare not revile a General at the Head of his Army, nor rouse a sleeping Lion when within reach of his Paw. And is the almighty GOD, the great *JEHOVAH*, the everlasting King, who can consume them by the Breath of his Nostrils, and frown them to Hell in an Instant; is he, I say, the only contemptible Being in their Account that may be provoked without Fear, and offended without Punishment? No, though GOD bear long, he will not bear always: Time will come, and that too perhaps much sooner than such Persons may expect, when GOD will vindicate his injured Honour, when he will lay bare his almighty Arm, and make those Wretches feel the eternal Smart of his Justice, whose Power and Name they have so often vilified and blasphemed. Alas! what will become of all their Bravery then? Will they then wantonly sport with the Name of their Maker, and call upon the King of all the Earth to damn them any more in Jest? No, their Note will then be changed: Indeed they shall call, but, alas! it will be for *the Rocks to fall on them, and the Hills to cover them from the Wrath of him that sitteth upon the Throne, and from the Lamb for ever.* It is true, Time was when they prayed, though without Thought perhaps, for Damna-

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tion both for themselves and others: And now they will find their Prayers answered,—*They delighted in Cursing, therefore shall it happen unto them; they loved not Blessing, therefore shall it be far from them; they cloathed themselves with Cursing like as with a Garment, and it shall come into their Bowels like Water, and like Oil into their Bones.*

2. BUT farther, if the Sin of *Swearing* is so exceeding heinous, and withal so common, then it is every particular Person's Duty, especially those that are in Authority, to do their utmost towards discountenancing and suppressing so malignant a Crime. The Duty we owe both to GOD and our Neighbour requires this at our Hands: By the one we are obliged to assert our Maker's Honour; by the other to prevent our Neighbour's Ruin: Not to mention that it is the greatest Proof we can give of our undissembled Love to our Master, and is but *doing as we would be done by*, and as we ourselves act in Cases of lesser Consequence. Were we to hear either our own or our Friend's good Name vilified and traduced, we think it our bounden Duty to vindicate the wronged Reputation of each: And shall the great terrible and holy Name of our best and only Friend, our King, our Father, nay our GOD; shall this, I say, be daily, nay every Moment defied and blasphemed; and
will

will no one dare to stand up in Defence of his Honour and Holiness? *Be astonished, O Heavens*, at this! No, let us scorn all such base and treacherous Treatment: Let us, for once at least, resolve to support the Cause of Religion, and with a becoming prudent Courage manifest our Zeal for the Honour of the LORD of Hosts. Men in Authority have double the Advantages of ordinary *Christians*: Their very Office shews they are intended for the Punishment of Evil-Doers: And such is the Degeneracy of Mankind, that the generality of them will be more influenced by the Power of Persons in Authority, than by the most laboured Exhortations from the Pulpit. To such therefore, if there are any here present, I humbly address myself, beseeching them in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, to do their utmost to put a Stop to and restrain *profane Cursing and Swearing*. And though it must be confessed that this is a Work which requires a great deal of Courage and Pains, yet they would do well to consider it is for GOD they undertake it; who certainly will support and bear them up in a due Execution of their Office here, and reward them with an exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory hereafter. But it is time to draw towards a Conclusion.

4. LET me therefore once more address myself to every Person here present, in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST; and if any amongst them have been any way guilty of this notorious Sin of *Swearing*, let me intreat them by all that is near and dear to them, that they would neither give the Magistrate the Trouble to punish, nor their Friends any reason for the future to warn them against committing the Crime; but keep a constant and careful *Watch over the Door of their Lips*, and withal implore the Divine Assistance (without which all is nothing) that *they offend no more so scandalously with their Tongues*. Let them seriously lay to Heart what with great Plainness and Simplicity has here been delivered: And if they have any Regard for themselves as Men, or their Reputation as *Christians*; if they would not be a publick Scandal to their Profession, or a Grief to all that know or converse with them: In short, if they would not be Devils Incarnate here, and provoke GOD to punish them eternally hereafter,—— I say unto them in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, *Swear not at all.*

THE
GREAT DUTY
OF
FAMILY RELIGION.

A SERMON preach'd at the Parish
Church of St. *Vedast*, *Foster-Lane*.

S E R M O N IX.

The great Duty of FAMILY-
RELIGION.

JOSHUA. XXIV. 15.

*As for me and my House, we will
serve the Lord.*

THESSE Words contain the holy Resolution of pious *Joshua*, who having in a most moving, affectionate Discourse recounted to the *Israelites* what great Things God had done for them, in the Verse immediately going before the Text, comes to draw a proper Inference from what he had been delivering; and acquaints them, in the most pressing Terms, that since God had been so exceeding gracious unto them, they could do no less than, out of Gratitude for such uncommon Favours and Mercies, dedicate both themselves and Families to his Service. Now

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therefore, says he, Verse 14. fear the LORD, and serve him in Sincerity and Truth, and put away the Gods which your Fathers served on the other Side of the Flood. And by the same engaging Motive does the Prophet Samuel afterwards enforce their Obedience to the Commandments of GOD, 1 Sam. xii. 24. Only fear the LORD, and serve him in Truth, with all your Heart: for consider (says he) how great Things he hath done for you. But then, that they might not excuse themselves (as too many might be apt to do) by his giving them a bad Example, or think he was laying heavy Burdens upon them, whilst he himself touched them not with one of his Fingers, he tells them in the Verse out of which the Text is taken, that whatever Regard they might pay to the Doctrine he had been preaching, yet he (as all Ministers ought to do) was resolved to live up to and practise it himself: Choose you therefore, says he, whom you will serve, whether the Gods which your Fathers served, or the Gods of the Amorites in whose Land ye dwell: But as for me and my House, we will serve the LORD.

A Resolution this worthy of *Joshua*, and no less becoming, no less necessary for every true Son of *Joshua*, that is intrusted with the Care and Government of a Family in our Day: And, if it was ever seasonable for Ministers to

preach up, or People to put in practice *Family Religion*, it was never more so than in the present Age ; since it is greatly to be feared, that out of those many Households that call themselves *Christians*, there are but few that serve GOD in their respective Families as they ought.

It is true indeed, visit our Churches, and you may perhaps see something of the *Form of Godliness* still subsisting amongst us ; but even That is scarcely to be met with in private Houses. So that were the blessed Angels to come, as in the patriarchal Age, and observe our spiritual Œconomy at Home, would they not be tempted to say, as *Abraham* said to *Abimelech*, *Surely the Fear of GOD is not in this Place?* Gen. xx. 11.

How such a general Neglect of *Family Religion* first began to overspread the *Christian World*, is difficult to determine. As for the primitive *Christians*, I am positive it was not so with them : No, they had not so learned CHRIST, as falsely to imagine Religion was to be confined solely to their Assemblies for publick Worship ; but on the contrary behaved with such Piety and exemplary Holiness in their private Families, that *Saint Paul* often styles their House a Church : *Salute such a one*, says he, *and the Church which is in his House*. And, I believe, we must for ever de-

spair of seeing a primitive Spirit of Piety revived in the World, till we are so happy as to see a Revival of primitive *Family Religion*; and Persons unanimously resolving with good old *Joshua*, in the Words of the Text,—*As for me and my House, we will serve the LORD.*

FROM which Words I shall beg Leave to insist on these three Things.

First, THAT it is the Duty of every Governour of a Family to take care, that not only he himself, but also that those committed to his Charge *serve the LORD.*

Secondly, I SHALL endeavour to shew after what manner a Governour and his Household ought to *serve the LORD.*

Thirdly and lastly, I SHALL offer some Motives in order to excite all Governors, with their respective Households, to *serve the LORD* in the Manner that shall be recommended.

AND *First*, I am to shew that it is the Duty of every Governour of a Family to take care, that not only he himself, but also that those committed to his Charge should *serve the LORD.*

AND this will appear, if we consider that every Governour of a Family ought to look upon himself as obliged to act in three Capacities: as a Prophet, to instruct; as a Priest,
to

to pray for and with; as a King, to govern, direct, and provide for them. It is true indeed the latter of these, *viz.* their kingly Office, they are not so frequently deficient in, (nay in this they are generally too solicitous;) but as for the two former, *viz.* their priestly and prophetick Office, like *Gallio*, they care for no such Things. But however indifferent some Governours may be about it, yet they may be assured, that God will require a due Discharge of these Offices at their Hands. For if, as the Apostle argues, *He that does not provide for his own House, in temporal Things, has denied the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel;* to what greater Degree of Apostasy must he have arrived, who takes no Thought to provide for the spiritual Welfare of his Family!

BUT farther, Persons are generally very liberal of their Invectives against the Clergy, and think they justly blame the Conduct of that Minister who does not take heed to and watch over the Flock, of which the HOLY GHOST has made him Overseer: But may not every Governour of a Family be in a lower Degree liable to the same Censure, who takes no thought for those Souls that are committed to his Charge? For every House is as it were a little Parish, every Governour (as was before observed) a

Priest, every Family a Flock: And if any of them perish through the Governor's Neglect, their Blood will GOD require at their Hands.

WAS a Minister to disregard teaching his People publickly and from House to House, and to excuse himself by saying, that he had enough to do to work out his own Salvation with Fear and Trembling, without concerning himself with that of Others; would not any one be apt to think such a Minister to be like the unjust Judge, *One that neither feared GOD nor regarded Man?* And yet, odious as such a Character would be, it is no worse than that Governour of a Family deserves, who thinks himself obliged only to save his own Soul, without paying any Regard to the Souls of his Household. For (as was above hinted) every House is as it were a Parish, and every Master is concerned to secure, as much as in him lyes, the spiritual Prosperity of every one under his Roof, as any Minister whatever is obliged to look to the spiritual Welfare of every individual Person under his Charge.

WHAT Precedents Men, who neglect their Duty in this Particular, can plead for such Omission, I cannot tell: Doubtless not the Example of holy *Job*, who was so far from imagining that he had no Concern, as Governour of a Family, with any one's Soul but his
own,

own, that the Scripture acquaints us, *When the Days of his Children's Feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and offered Burnt-Offerings according to the Number of them all; for Job said, It may be that my Sons have sinned and cursed GOD in their Hearts: Thus did Job continually.* Nor can they plead the Practice of good old *Joshua*, whom in the Text we find as much concerned for his Household's Welfare as his own. Nor lastly, that of *Cornelius*, who *feared GOD*, not only himself, but with *all his House*: And were *Christians* but of the same Spirit of *Job*, *Joshua*, and the *Gentile Centurion*, they would act as *Job*, *Joshua*, and *Cornelius* did.

BUT, alas! if this be the Case, and all Governours of Families ought not only to serve the LORD themselves, but likewise to see that their respective Households do so too; what will then become of those who not only neglect serving God themselves, but also make it their Business to ridicule and scoff at any of their House that do? Who are not content with *not entering into the Kingdom of Heaven themselves; but those also that are willing to enter in they hinder.* Surely such Men are Factors for the Devil indeed. Surely their Damnation slumbereth not: For although God, in his good Providence, may suffer such Stumbling-

blocks to be put in his Children's Ways, and suffer their greatest Enemies to be those of their own Households, for a Trial of their Sincerity, and Improvement of their Faith; yet we cannot but pronounce a *Woe* against those Masters *by whom such Offences come*. For if those that only take care of their own Souls can scarcely be saved, where will such monstrously profane and wicked Governours appear?

BUT hoping there are but few of this unhappy Stamp, proceed we now to the

Second Thing proposed, *viz.* to shew after what Manner a Governour and his Household ought to *serve the LORD*.

I. AND the first Thing I shall mention is reading the Word of God. This is a Duty incumbent on every private Person. *Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have Eternal Life*, is a Precept given by our blessed LORD indifferently to all: But much more so ought every Governour of a Family to think it in a peculiar manner spoken to himself, because (as hath been already proved) he ought to look upon himself as a Prophet, and therefore, agreeably to such a Character, as bound to instruct those under his Charge in the Knowledge of the Word of God.

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THIS we find was the Order GOD gave his peculiar People of *Israel*: For thus speaks his Representative *Moses*, *Deuteronomy* vi. 6, 7. *These Words*, that is, the Scripture Words, *which I command thee this Day, shall be in thy Heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy Children*, that is, as it is generally explained *Servants*, as well as *Children*, *and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy House*. From whence we may infer, that the only Reason why so many neglect to read the Words of Scripture diligently to their Children is, because the Words of Scripture are not in their Hearts: For if they were, out of the Abundance of the Heart their Mouths would speak.

BESIDES, *Servants* as well as *Children* are, for the generality, very ignorant, and mere Novices in the Laws of GOD: And how shall they know, unless some one teach them? And what more proper to teach them by, than the lively Oracles of GOD, *which are able to make them wise unto Salvation*? And who more proper to instruct them by these lively Oracles, than Parents and Masters, who (as hath been more than once observed) are as much concerned to feed them with spiritual as with bodily Bread, Day by Day.

BUT if these Things be so, what a miserable Condition are those unhappy Governours in, who

who are so far from feeding those committed to their Care with the sincere Milk of the Word, to the intent they may grow thereby, that they neither search the Scriptures themselves, nor are careful to explain them to others? Such Families must be in a happy Way indeed to do their Master's Will, who take such prodigious Pains to know it! Would one not imagine that they had turned Converts to the Church of Rome; that they thought *Ignorance* the Mother of *Devotion*; that those were to be condemned as Hereticks who read their *Bibles*? And yet how few Families are there amongst us, who do not act after this unseemly Manner! But, *shall I praise them in this? I praise them not: Brethren, this Thing ought not so to be.*

2. PASS we on now to the second Means whereby every Governour and his Household ought to serve the LORD, *viz. Family Prayer.*

THIS is a Duty though as much neglected, yet as absolutely necessary as the former. *Reading* is a good Preparative for *Prayer*, as *Prayer* is an excellent Means to render *Reading* effectual. And the Reason why every Governour of a Family should join both these Exercises together is plain, because a Governour of a Family cannot perform his *Priestly* Office (which we before observed he is in some Degree invested with) without performing this Duty of *Family Prayer.* WE

WE find it therefore remarked, when mention is made of *Cain* and *Abel's* offering Sacrifices, that they *brought* them. But to whom did they bring them? Why, in all probability to their Father *Adam*, who, as Priest of the Family, was to offer Sacrifice in their Names. And so likewise ought every spiritual Son of the second *Adam*, who is intrusted with the Care of an Household, to offer up the spiritual Sacrifices of Supplications and Thanksgivings, acceptable to GOD through JESUS CHRIST, in the Presence and Name of all who wait upon or eat Meat at his Table.

THUS we read our blessed LORD behaved, when he tabernacled amongst us: For it is said often, that *he was alone* praying with his twelve Disciples, which was then his little Family. And he himself has promised a particular Blessing to joint Supplications: *For wheresoever,* says he, *two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.* And again, *If two or three are agreed touching any Thing they shall ask, it shall be given them.* Add to this, that we are commanded by the Apostle to *pray always, with all manner of Supplication,* which doubtless includes *Family Prayer.* And holy *Joshua*, when he set up the good Resolution in the Text, that he and his Household would *serve the LORD,* certainly resolved

resolved withal to pray with his Family, which is one of the best Testimonies they could give of their serving him.

BESIDES, there are no Families but what have some common Blessings, of which they have been all Partakers, to give Thanks for; some common Crosses and Afflictions, which they are to pray against; some common Sins, which they are all bound to lament and bewail: But how this can be done without joining together in one common Act of Humiliation, Supplication, and Thanksgiving, is difficult to devise.

FROM all which Considerations put together, it is evident, that *Family Prayer* is a great and necessary Duty; and consequently those Governours that neglect it are certainly without Excuse. And it is much to be feared, if they live without *Family Prayer*, they live *without GOD in the World*.

AND yet such an hateful Character as this is, it is to be feared, that, was GOD to send out an Angel to destroy us, as he did once to destroy the *Egyptians* First-born, and withal give him a Commission, *as then*, to spare no Houses but where they saw the Blood of the Lintel sprinkled on the Door-post, so *now* to let no Families escape but those that called upon him in Morning and Evening Prayer; few would remain unhurt by his avenging Sword.

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stians shall I term such Families, or *Heathens*? Doubtless they deserve not the Name of *Christians*; and *Heathens* will surely rise up in Judgment against such profane Families of this Generation: For they had always their Household Gods, whom they worshipped, and whose Assistance they frequently invoked. And a pretty pass those Families surely are arrived at who must be sent to School to *Pagans*. But will not the LORD be avenged on such profane Households as these? Will he not pour out his Fury upon those that call not upon his Name?

3. BUT it is time for me to hasten to the third and last Means I shall recommend, whereby every Governour ought with his Household to *serve the LORD*, viz. by *catechizing* and *instructing* their Children and Servants, and bringing them up in the Nurture and Admonition of the LORD.

THAT this, as well as the two former, is a Duty incumbent on every Governour of an House, appears from that famous Encomium or Commendation GOD gives of *Abraham*. *I know*, says the most High, *that he will command his Children and his Household after him to keep the Way of the LORD, to do Justice and Judgment*. And indeed scarce any thing is more frequently pressed upon us in holy Writ than this Duty of *Catechizing*. Thus
says

says GOD in a Passage before cited, *Thou shalt teach these Words diligently unto thy Children.* And Parents are commanded in the *New Testament*, to *breed up their Children in the Nurture and Admonition of the LORD.* The holy Psalmist acquaints us, that one great End why GOD did so great Wonders for his People was, *to the Intent that when they grew up they should shew their Children, or Servants, the same.* And in *Deuteronomy*, Chap. vi. at the 20^h and following Verses, GOD strictly commands his People to instruct their Children in the true Nature of the ceremonial Worship, when they should enquire about it, as he supposed they would do in time to come. And if Servants and Children were to be instructed in the Nature of *Jewish* Rites, much more ought they *now* to be initiated and grounded in the Doctrines and first Principles of the Gospel of CHRIST: Not only because it is a Revelation, which has brought Life and Immortality to a fuller and clearer Light, but also because many Seducers are gone abroad into the World, who do their utmost Endeavour to destroy not only the Superstructure, but likewise to sap the very Foundation of our most holy Religion.

Would then the present Generation have their Posterity be true Lovers and Honourers of GOD, Masters and Parents must take *Solo-*

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man's good Advice, and train up and catechize their respective Households in the Way wherein they should go.

I AM aware but of one Objection that can, with any Shew of Reason, be urged against what has been advanced; which is, that such a Procedure as this will take up too much Time, and hinder Families too long from their worldly Business. But it is much to be questioned whether Persons that start such an Objection are not of the same hypocritical Spirit as the Traytor *Judas*, who had Indignation against devout *Mary*, for being so profuse of her Ointment, in anointing our blessed LORD, and asked why it might not be sold for two hundred Pence, and given to the Poor. For has GOD given us so much Time to work for ourselves, and shall we not allow some small Pittance of it, Morning and Evening, to be devoted to his more immediate Worship and Service? Have not People read, that it is GOD who gives Men Power to get Wealth, and therefore that the best Way to prosper in the World is to secure his Favour? And has not our blessed LORD himself promised, that if we seek first the Kingdom of GOD and his Righteousness, all outward Necessaries shall be added unto us?

ABRAHAM, no doubt, was a Man of as great Business as such Objectors may be; but

yet he would find Time to command his Household to *serve the LORD*. Nay, *David* was a King, and consequently had a great deal of Business upon his Hands; yet notwithstanding, he professes that he would walk in his House with a perfect Heart. And, to instance but one more, holy *Joshua* was a Person certainly engaged very much in temporal Affairs; and yet he solemnly declares before all *Israel*, that, as for him and his Household, they would *serve the LORD*. And did Persons but redeem their Time, as *Abraham*, *David*, or *Joshua* did, they would no longer complain that Family Duties kept them too long from the Business of the World.

BUT my *Third* and last general Head, under which I was to offer some Motives, in order to excite all Governours, with their respective Households, to *serve the LORD* in the Manner before recommended, I hope, will serve instead of a thousand Arguments, to prove the Weakness and Folly of any such Objection.

1. AND the first Motive I shall mention is the Duty of Gratitude, you that are Governors of Families owe to GOD.—Your Lot, every one must confess, is cast into a fair Ground: Providence hath given you a goodly Heritage, above many of your fellow Creatures, and therefore,

therefore, out of a Principle of Gratitude, you ought to endeavour, as much as in you lyes, to make every Person of your respective Households to call upon him as long as they live: (Not to mention that the Authority, with which God has invested you as Parents and Governours of Families, is a Talent committed to your Trust, and which you are bound to improve to your Master's Honour.) In other Things we find Governours and Parents can exercise Lordship over their Children and Servants readily, and frequently enough can say to one *Go*, and he goeth; and to another *Come*, and he cometh; to a third, *Do this*, and he doeth it. And shall this Power be so often employed in your own Affairs, and never exerted in the Things of God? Be astonished, O Heavens, at this!

Thus did not faithful *Abraham*; no, God says, that he knew *Abraham* would *command his Servants and Children after him*. Thus did not *Joshua*: No, he was resolved not only to walk with God himself, but to improve his Authority in making all about him do so too: *As for me and my Household, we will serve the LORD*. Let us go and do likewise.

2. BUT Secondly, if *Gratitude* to God will not, methinks *Love* and *Pity* to your Children should move you, with your respective Families, to *serve the LORD*.

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Most People express a great Fondness for their Children: Nay so great, that very often their own Lives are wrapped up in those of their Offspring. *Can a Woman forget her sucking Child, that she should not have Compassion on the Son of her Womb?* says God by his Prophet *Isaiab*. He speaks of it as a monstrous Thing, and scarce credible. But the Words immediately following affirm it to be possible, *Yea they may forget*; and Experience also assures us they may. *Father and Mother* may both *forsake their Children*: For what greater Degree of Forgetfulness can they express towards them, than to neglect the Improvement of their better Part, and not bring them up in the Knowledge and Fear of God.

It is true indeed Parents seldom forget to provide for their Children's Bodies, (though, it is to be feared, some Men are so far sunk beneath the Beasts that perish, as to neglect even that;) but then how often do they forget, or rather when do they remember to secure the Salvation of their immortal Souls? But is this their Way of expressing their Fondness for the Fruit of their Bodies? Is this the best Testimony they can give of their Affection to the Darling of their Hearts? Then was *Dalilah* fond of *Sampson*, when she delivered him up into the Hands of the *Philistines*: Then were those

those Ruffians well affected to *Daniel*, when they threw him into a Den of Lions.

3. BUT Thirdly, if neither *Gratitude* to GOD, nor *Love* and *Pity* to your Children, will prevail on you; yet let a Principle of common *Honesty* and *Justice* move you to set up the holy Resolution in the Text.

THIS is a Principle which all Men would be thought to act upon. But certainly, if any may be truly censured for their Injustice, none can be more liable to such Censure than those who think themselves injured if their Servants withdraw themselves from their bodily Work, and yet they in return take no care of their inestimable Souls. For is it just that Servants should spend their Time and Strength in their Master's Service, and Masters not at the same time give them what is just and equal for their Service?

IT is true, some Men may think they have done enough when they give unto their Servants Food and Rayment, and say, Did not I bargain with thee for so much a Year? But if they give them no other Reward than this, what do they less for their very Beasts? But are not Servants better than they? Doubtless they are: And however Masters may put off their Convictions for the present, they will find a Time will come, when they shall know they ought

to have given them some spiritual, as well as temporal Wages ; and the Cry of those that have mowed down their Fields will enter into the Ears of the LORD of *Sabaoth*.

4. BUT Fourthly, if neither *Gratitude* to GOD, *Pity* to Children, nor a Principle of common *Justice* to Servants, are sufficient to ballance all Objections ; yet let that darling, that prevailing Motive of *Self-Interest* turn the Scale, and engage you with your respective Households to *serve the LORD*.

THIS weighs greatly with you in other Matters : Be then persuaded to let it have a due and full Influence on you in this : And if it has, if you have but Faith as a Grain of Mustard-seed, how can you avoid believing that promoting *Family Religion* would be the best Means to promote your own temporal as well as eternal Welfare ? For *Godliness has the Promise of the Life that now is, as well as that which is to come*.

BESIDES, you all, doubtless, wish for honest Servants and pious Children: And to have them prove otherwise, would be as great a Grief to you as it was to *Elijah* to have a treacherous *Gebazi*, or *David* to be troubled with a rebellious *Absalom*. But how can it be expected they should learn their Duty, except those set over them take care to teach it them ? Is it

not as reasonable to expect you should reap where you had not sown, or gather where you had not strawed?

DID Christianity, indeed, give any Countenance to Children and Servants to disregard their *Parents and Masters according to the Flesh* or represent their Duty to them as inconsistent with their entire Obedience to their *Father and Master which is in Heaven*, there might then be some Pretence to neglect instructing them in the Principles of such a Religion. But since the Precepts of this pure and undefiled Religion are all of them holy, just, and good; and the more they are taught their Duty to God, the better they will perform their Duties to you; methinks then to neglect the Improvement of their Souls, out of a Dread of spending too much Time in religious Duties, is acting quite contrary to your own Interest, as well as Duty.

5. Fifthly and lastly, If neither *Gratitude* to God, *Love* to your Children, common *Justice* to your Servants, nor even that most prevailing Motive *Self-Interest*, will excite; yet let a Consideration of the *Terrors of the LORD* persuade you to put in Practice the pious Resolution in the Text. Remember the Time will come, and that perhaps very shortly, when we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of CHRIST; where we must give a solemn and

strict Account how we have had our Conversation, in our respective Families in this World. How will you endure to see your Children and Servants (who ought to be your Joy and Crown of Rejoicing in the Day of our Lord JESUS CHRIST) coming out as so many swift Witnessees against you ; cursing the Father that begat them, the Womb that bare them, the Paps which they have sucked, and the Day they ever entered into your Houses? Think you not the Damnation which Men must endure for their own Sins will be sufficient, that they need load themselves with the additional Guilt of being accessory to the Damnation of others also? Oh consider this, all ye that forget to serve the LORD with your respective Households, *lest he pluck you away, and there be none to deliver you!*

BUT GOD forbid, Brethren, that any such Evil should befall you: No, rather will I hope that you have been, in some measure, convinced by what has been said of the great Importance of *Family Religion*; and therefore are ready to cry out, in the Words immediately following the Text, *GOD forbid that we should forsake the LORD*; and again, Verse 21, *Nay but we will, with our several Households, serve the LORD.*

AND that there may be always such a Heart in you, let me, to conclude, exhort all Governours

vernours of Families, in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, often to reflect on the inestimable Worth of their own Souls, and the infinite Ransom, even the precious Blood of JESUS CHRIST, which has been paid down for them. Remember, I beseech you remember, that you are fallen Creatures, that you are by Nature lost to and estranged from GOD; and that you can never be restored to your primitive Happiness, till by being born again of the Holy GHOST, you arrive at your primitive State of Purity, have the Image of GOD re-instamped upon your Souls, and are thereby made meet to be Partakers of the Inheritance with the Saints in Light. Do, I say, but seriously and frequently reflect on, and act as Persons that believe such important Truths, and you will no more neglect your Family's spiritual Welfare than your own. No, the *Love of GOD*, which will then be *shed abroad in your Hearts*, will constrain you to do your utmost to preserve them: And the deep Sense of GOD's free Grace, in CHRIST JESUS, (which you will then have) in calling you, will excite you to do your utmost to save others, especially those of your own Household. And though, after all your pious Endeavours, some may continue unreformed; yet you will have this comfortable Reflection to make, that you did

what you could to make your Families *religious*: And therefore may rest assured of sitting down in the Kingdom of Heaven with *Abraham, Joshua, and Cornelius*, and all the godly Householders, who in their several Generations shone forth as so many Lights in their respective Households upon Earth.

THANKS

THANKFULNESS
FOR
MERCIES RECEIVED
A
NECESSARY DUTY.

A Farewel SERMON preach'd on
Board the *Whitaker*, at Anchor near
Savannah in *Georgia*, on *Sunday*
May 17, 1738.

SERMON X.

Thankfulness for Mercies received a *necessary Duty*.

PSALM cvii. 30, 31.

Then are they glad because they are at Rest, and so he bringeth them unto the Haven where they would be.

O that Men would therefore praise the Lord for his Goodness, and declare the Wonders that he doeth for the Children of Men!

NUMBERLESS Marks does Man bear in his Soul, that he is fallen and estranged from God; but no one gives a greater Proof it, than that Backwardness, which every one finds within himself, to the Duty of Praise and Thanksgiving.

WHEN GOD placed the first Man in Paradise, his Soul no doubt was so filled with a Sense of
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the Riches of the Divine Love, that he was continually employing that *Breath of Life* the Almighty had not long before *breathed* into him, in blessing and magnifying that all-bountiful, all-gracious God, in whom he lived, moved, and had his Being.

AND the brightest Idea we can form of the Angelical Hierarchy above, and the Spirits of just Men made perfect, is, that they are continually standing round the Throne of God, and cease not Day and Night, saying, *Worthy art thou, O Lamb, that was slain, to receive Power, and Riches, and Wisdom, and Strength, and Honour, and Glory and Blessing*, Rev. v. 12.

THAT then which was Man's Perfection when Time first began, and will be his Employment when Death is swallowed up in Victory, and Time shall be no more, without Controversy, is part of our Perfection, and ought to be our frequent Exercise on Earth: And I doubt not but those blessed Spirits, who are sent forth to minister to them who shall be Heirs of Salvation, often stand astonished when they encamp around us, to find our Hearts so rarely enlarged, and our Mouths so seldom opened, to shew forth the loving Kindness of the LORD, or to speak of all his Praise.

MATTER for Praise and Adoration can never be wanting to Creatures redeemed by the Blood
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of the SON of GOD; and who have such continual Scenes of his infinite Goodness presented to their View, that were their Souls duly affected with a Sense of his universal Love, they could not but be continually calling on Heaven and Earth, Men and Angels to join with them in praising and blessing that *high and lofty One, who inhabiteth Eternity, who maketh his Sun to shine on the Evil and on the Good,* and daily pours down his Blessings on the whole Race of Mankind.

BUT few are arrived to such a Degree of Charity, as to rejoice with those that do rejoice, and to be as thankful for others Mercies as their own. This Part of Christian Perfection, though begun on Earth, will be consummated only in Heaven; where our Hearts will glow with such fervent Love towards GOD and one another, that every fresh Degree of Glory communicated to our Neighbour, will also communicate to us a fresh Degree of Thankfulness and Joy.

THAT which has a greater Tendency to excite the Generality of us fallen Men to Praise and Thanksgiving, is a Sense of GOD's private Mercies and particular Benefits bestowed upon ourselves. For as these come nearer our own Hearts, so they must be more affecting; and as they are peculiar Proofs, whereby we may know that GOD does in a more especial Manner

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favour us above others, so they cannot but sensibly touch us ; and if our Hearts are not quite frozen, like Coals of a Refiner's Fire, must melt us down into Thankfulness and Love. It was a Consideration of the distinguishing Favours GOD had shewn to his chosen People *Israel*, and the frequent and remarkable Deliverances wrought by him in behalf of *those who go down to the Sea in Ships, and occupy their Business in great Waters*, that made the holy Psalmist break out so frequently as he does in this Psalm, into this moving, pathetic Exclamation, *Oh that Men would therefore praise the LORD for his Goodness, and declare the Wonders that he doeth for the Children of Men !*

His expressing himself in so passionate, fervent a Manner, implies both the Importance and Neglect of the Duty. As when *Moses* on another Occasion cries out, *Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would practically consider their latter End !* Deut. xxxii. 29.

I SAY, Importance and Neglect of the Duty ; for out of those many thousands that receive Blessings from the LORD, how few give Thanks in Remembrance of his Holiness ? The Account given us of the ungrateful Lepers, is but too lively a Representation of the Ingratitude of Mankind in general ; who like them,

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perhaps, when under any humbling Providence, can cry, *JESUS Master, have Mercy on us*, Luke xvii. 13. but when healed of their Sickness, or delivered from their Distress, scarce one in ten can be *found returning to give Thanks to GOD.*

AND yet as common as this Sin of Ingratitude is, there is nothing we ought more earnestly to pray against. For what is more absolutely condemned in holy Scripture than Ingratitude? Or what more peremptorily required than the contrary Temper? Thus says the Apostle, *Rejoice evermore, in every Thing give Thanks*, 1 Thes. v. 16--18. *Be careful for nothing: But in every Thing by Prayer and Supplication, with Thanksgiving, let your Requests be made known unto GOD*, Phil. iv. 6.

ON the contrary, the Apostle mentions it as one of the highest Crimes of the *Gentiles*, that they were not *thankful*. *Neither were they thankful*, says he, Rom. i. 21. As also in another Place, he numbers the *Unthankful*, 2 Tim. iii. 2. amongst those *unholy*, profane Persons who are to have their Portion in the Lake of Fire and Brimstone.

As for our Sins, God puts them behind his Back; but his Mercies he will have acknowledged. *There is Virtue gone out of me*, says *JESUS CHRIST*, Luke viii. 46. And the Woman who was cured of her bloody Issue, must *confess* it: And we generally find, when God
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sent any remarkable Punishment upon any particular Person, he reminded him of the Favours he had received, as so many Aggravations of his Ingratitude. Thus when GOD was about to visit *Eli's* House, he thus exostulates with him by his Prophet, *Did I plainly appear unto the House of thy Fathers, when they were in Egypt in Pharoah's House? And did I chuse him, out of all the Tribes of Israel, to be my Priest, to offer upon my Altar, to burn Incense, and to wear an Ephod before me? Wherefore kick ye at my Sacrifice, and at mine Offering which I have commanded in my Habitation, and honourest thy Sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the Offerings of Israel my People? Wherefore the Lord GOD of Israel saith, I said indeed, that thy House, and the House of thy Father should walk before me for ever, but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me, for them that honour me will I honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*

1 Sam. ii. 27, 28, 29, 30.

IT was this and such like Instances of GOD's Severity against the Unthankful, that inclined me to chuse the Words of the Text as the most proper Subject I could discourse on at this Time.

FOR these four Months, my good Friends, we have now been upon the Sea in this Ship, and have occupied our Business in the great Waters.

At GOD Almighty's *Word*, we have seen *the stormy Wind arise, which hath lifted up the Waves thereof. We have been carried up to the Heaven and down again to the Deep, and some of our Souls melted away because of the Trouble; but I trust we cryed earnestly unto the LORD, and he delivered us out of our Distress. For he made the Storm to cease; so that the Waves thereof were still. And now we are glad, because we are at Rest, for GOD hath brought us to the Heaven where we would be. Oh that you would therefore praise the LORD for his Goodness, and declare the Wonders that he hath done for us, the unworthiest of the Sons of Men.*

THUS *Moses, thus Joshua* behaved. For when they were about to take their Leaves of the Children of *Israel*, they recounted to them what great Things GOD had done for them, as the best Arguments and Motives they could urge to engage them to Obedience. And how can I copy after better Examples? What fitter, what more noble Motives to Holiness and Purity of living can I lay before you than they did?

INDEED, I cannot say, that we have seen *a Pillar of a Cloud by Day, or a Pillar of Fire by Night*, going visibly before us to guide our Course; but this I can say, that the same GOD who was in that Pillar of a Cloud and Pillar of Fire, which departed not from the *Israelites*,

and who has made the Sun to rule the Day, and the Moon to rule the Night, has by his good Providence directed us in our right Way, or else the Pilot had steered us in vain.

NEITHER can I say, that we have seen the *Sun stand still*, as the Children of *Israel* did in the Days of *Joshua*. But surely GOD, during part of our Voyage, has caused it to withhold some of that Heat, which it usually sends forth in these warmer Climates, or else it had not failed but some of you must have perished in the Sicknes that has been, and does yet continue among us.

WE have not seen the Waters stand purposely on an Heap, that we might pass through, neither have we been pursued by *Pharaoh* and his Host, and delivered out of their Hands; but we have been led through the Sea as through a Wilderness, and were once remarkably preserved from being run down by another Ship; which had GOD permitted, the Waters in all Probability would immediately have overwhelmed us, and like *Pharaoh* and his Host, we should have sunk as Stones into the Sea.

WE may indeed, Atheist like, ascribe all these Things to natural Causes, and say, Our own Skill and Foresight has brought us hither in Safety. But as certainly as JESUS CHRIST, that Angel of the Covenant, in the Days of
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his Flesh, walked upon the Water, and said to his sinking Disciples, *Be not afraid, it is I,* so surely has the same everlasting *I am,* who decketh himself with Light as with a Garment, who spreadeth out the Heavens like a Curtain, who claspeth the Winds in his Fist, who holdeth the Waters in the Hollow of his Hands, and guided the wise Men by a Star in the East; so surely, I say, has he spoken, and at his Command the Winds have blown us where we are now arrived. For his Providence ruleth all Things, *Winds and Storms obey his Word;* he saith to it at one Time go, and it goeth; at another, come, and it cometh, and at a third Time blow this Way, and it bloweth.

It is he, my Brethren, and not we ourselves, that has of late sent us such prosperous Gales, and made us ride, as it were, on the Wings of the Wind, into the Haven where we would be.

Oh that you would therefore praise the LORD for his Goodness, and by your Lives declare, that you are truly thankful for the Wonders he hath shewn to us, who are less than the least of the Sons of Men.

I SAY, declare it by your Lives. For to give him Thanks barely with your Lips, while your Hearts are far from him, is but a mock Sacrifice, nay, an Abomination unto the LORD.

THIS was the End, the royal Psalmist says, GOD had in view, when he shewed such Wonders, from Time to Time to the People of *Israel*, *that they might keep his Statutes and observe his Laws*, P^{sal.} cv. 44. and this, my good Friends, is the End GOD would have accomplished in us, and the only Return he desires us to make him, for all the Benefits he hath conferred upon us.

O THEN, let me beseech you, give GOD your Hearts, your whole Hearts; and suffer yourselves to be drawn by the Cords of infinite Love to honour and obey him.

ASSURE yourselves you never can serve a better Master; for his Service is perfect Freedom, his Yoak, when worn a little while, exceeding easy, his Burden light; and in keeping his Commandments there is great Reward, Love, Peace, Joy in the HOLY GHOST here, and a Crown of Glory that fadeth not away hereafter.

You may indeed let other Lords have Dominion over you, and Satan may promise to give you all the Kingdoms of the World, and the Glory of them, if you will fall down and worship him; but he is a Liar, and was so from the Beginning; and has not so much to give you, as you may tread on with the Sole of your Foot; or could he give you the whole World, yet that could not make you happy without GOD. It is GOD alone, my Brethren, whose we are,
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in whose Name I now speak, and who has of late shewed us such Mercies in the Deep, that can give solid lasting Happiness to your Souls; and he for this Reason only desires your Hearts, because without him they must be miserable.

SUFFER me not then to go away without my Errand; as it is the last Time I shall speak to you, let me not speak in vain; but let a Sense of the Divine Goodness lead you to Repentance.

EVEN *Saul*, that abandoned Wretch, when *David* shewed him his Skirt, which he had cut off, when he might have taken his Life, was so melted down with his Kindness, that he lifted up his Voice and wept. And we must have Hearts harder than *Saul's*, nay harder than the nether Millstone, if a Sense of God's late loving Kindnesses, notwithstanding he might so often have destroyed us, does not even compel us to lay down our Arms against him, and become his faithful Servants and Soldiers unto our Lives End.

IF they have not this Effect upon us, we shall of all Men be most miserable; for God is just, as well as merciful; and the more Blessings we have received here, the greater Damnation, if we do not improve them, shall we incur hereafter.

BUT God forbid that any of those should ever suffer the Vengeance of eternal Fire, amongst whom I have for these four Months been

preaching the Gospel of CHRIST, but yet thus must it be, if you do not improve the Divine Mercies; and instead of your being my Crown of Rejoicing in the Day of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, I must appear as a swift Witness against you.

BUT, Brethren, I am persuaded better Things of you, and Things that accompany Salvation, though I thus speak.

BLESSED be GOD, some Marks of a partial Reformation at least, have been visible amongst all you that are Soldiers. And my weak, though sincere Endeavours to build you up in the Knowledge and Fear of GOD, have not been altogether in vain in the LORD.

SWEARING, I hope, is in a great measure abated with you; and GOD I trust has blessed his late Visitations by making them the Means of awakening your Consciences, to a more solicitous Enquiry about the Things which belong to your everlasting Peace.

FULFIL you then my Joy, by continuing thus minded, and labour to go on to Perfection. For I shall have no greater Pleasure than to see, or hear, that you walk in the Truth.

CONSIDER, my good Friends, you are now as it were entering on a new World, where you will be surrounded with Multitudes of Heathens; and if you take not heed to *have your Conversation*

tion honest amongst them, and to walk worthy the holy Vocation wherewith you are called, you will act the hellish Part of Herod's Soldiers over again; and cause CHRIST's Religion, as they did his Person, to be had in Derision of those that are round about you

CONSIDER further, what peculiar Privileges you have enjoyed above many others that are entering on the same Land. They have had as it were a Famine of the Word, but you have rather been in Danger of being surfeited with your spiritual Manna. And therefore as more Instructions have been given you, so from you Men will most justly expect the greater Improvement in Goodness.

INDEED I cannot say I have discharged my Duty towards you as I ought. No, I am sensible of many Faults which I have been guilty of in my ministerial Office, and for which I have not failed, nor, I hope, ever shall fail to humble myself in secret before GOD. However this I can say, that except a few Days that have been spent necessarily on other Persons, whom GOD immediately called me to write and minister unto, and the two last Weeks wherein I have been confined by Sickness; all the while I have been aboard, I have been either actually engaged in, or preparing myself for instructing you. And though you are now to be com-

mitted to the Care of another (whose Labours I heartily beseech God to bless amongst you) yet I trust I shall at all Seasons, if need be, willingly spend, and be spent, for the good of your Souls, though the more abundantly I love you the less I should be loved.

As for your military Affairs, I have nothing to do with them. Fear God, and you must honour the King. Nor am I better acquainted with the Nature of that Land which you are now come over to protect; only this I may venture to affirm in the general, that you must necessarily expect upon your Arrival at a new Colony, to meet with many Difficulties. But your very Profession teaches you to endure Hardship; be not therefore faint-hearted, but quit yourselves like Men, and be strong, *Numb. xiv.* Be not like those cowardly Persons, who were affrighted at the Report of the false Spies, that came and said, that there were People tall as the *Anakims* to be grappled with, but be ye like unto *Caleb* and *Joshua*, all Heart; and say, we will act valiantly, for we shall be more than Conquerors over all Difficulties through JESUS CHRIST that loved us.—Above all Things, my Brethren, take heed and beware of murmuring, like the perverse *Israelites*, against those that are set over you; and *learn whatsoever State you shall be in, therewith to be content, Phil. iv. 11.*

As I have spoken to you, I hope your Wives also will suffer the Word of Exhortation.

YOUR Behaviour on Shipboard, especially the first Part of the Voyage, I chuse to throw a Cloak over ; for to use the mildest Terms, it was not such as *became the Gospel of our Lord JESUS CHRIST*. However of late, blessed be God, you have taken more heed to your Ways, and some of you have walked all the while, as became *Women professing Godliness*. Let those accept my hearty Thanks, and permit me to intreat you all in general, as you are all now married, to remember the solemn Vow you made at your Entrance into the Marriage State ; and see that you be *subject to your own Husbands, in every lawful Thing* : Beg of God *to keep the Door of your Lips, that you offend not with your Tongues ; and walk in Love, that your Prayers be not hindered*. You that have Children, let it be your chief Concern to *breed them up in the Nurture and Monition of the LORD*. And live all of you so holy and unblameable, that you may not so much as be suspected to be unchaste ; and as some of you have imitated *Mary Magdalene* in her Sin, strive to imitate her also in her Repentance.

As for you that are Sailors, what shall I say ? How shall I address myself to you ? How shall I do that which I so much long to do—touch
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your Hearts? Gratitude obliges me to wish thus well to you. For you have often taught me many instructive Lessons, and reminded me to put up many Prayers to God for you, that you might receive your spiritual Sight.

WHEN I have seen you preparing for a Storm, and reefing your Sails to guard against it, how have I wished that you and I were both as careful to avoid that Storm of God's Wrath, which will certainly, without Repentance, quickly overtake us? When I have observed you catch at every fair Gale, how have I secretly cried, Oh that we were as careful to know the Things that belong to our Peace, before they are hid from our Eyes! And when I have taken notice how steadily you eyed your Compass in order to steer aright, how have I wished, that we as steadily eyed the Word of God, which alone can preserve us from *making Shipwreck of Faith and a good Conscience*? In short there is scarce any thing you do, which has not been a Lesson of Instruction to me; and therefore it would be ungrateful in me, did I not take this Opportunity of exhorting you in the Name of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, to be as wise in the Things which concern your Soul, as I have observed you to be in the Affairs belonging to your Ship.

I AM sensible that the Sea is reckoned but an ill School to learn CHRIST in: And to see a
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devout Sailor is esteemed as uncommon a Thing, as to see a *Saul* amongst the Prophets. But whence this wondering? Whence this looking upon a godly Sailor as a Man to be wondered at, as a speckled Bird upon the Earth? I am sure for the little Time I have come in and out amongst you, and as far as I can judge from the little Experience I have had of Things; I scarce know any way of Life, that is capable of greater Improvements than yours.

THE continual Danger you are in of being over-whelmed by the great Waters; the many Opportunities you have of beholding GOD's Wonders in the Deep; the happy Retirement you enjoy from worldly Temptations; and the daily Occasions that are offered you, to endure Hardships, are such noble Means of promoting the spiritual Life, that were your Hearts bent towards GOD, you would account it your Happiness, that his Providence has called you, to *go down to the Sea in Ships, and to occupy your Business in the great Waters.*

THE royal Psalmist knew this, and therefore in the Words of the Text, calls more especially on Men of your Employ, to *praise the LORD for his Goodness, and declare the Wonders he doth for the Children of Men.*

AND oh that you would be wise in time, and hearken to his Voice to Day, *whilst it is called*

to Day! For ye yourselves know how little is to be done on a sick Bed: And how GOD has in an especial Manner of late invited you to Repentance. Two of your Crew he has taken off by Death, and most of you he has mercifully visited with a grievous Sicknefs. The Terrors of the LORD have been upon you, and when burnt with a scorching Fever, some of you have cried out, *what shall we do to be saved?* Remember then the Resolutions you made, when you thought GOD was about to take away your Souls. And see that according to your Promises, you shew forth your Thankfulness not only with your Lips but in your Lives. For though GOD may bear long, he will not forbear always; and if these signal Mercies and Judgments do not lead you to Repentance, assure yourselves there will at last come a fiery Tempest, from the Presence of the LORD, which will sweep away you, and all other Adversaries of GOD.

I AM positive neither you nor the Soldiers have wanted, nor will want any manner of Encouragement to Piety and Holiness of living from those two Persons who have here the Government over you; for they have been such Helps to me in my Ministry, and have so readily concurred in every thing for your Good, that they may justly demand a publick Acknowledgment of Thanks both from you and me.

PERMIT

PERMIT me then, my honoured Friends, in the Name of both your People, to return you hearty Thanks for the Care and Tendernefs you have expreffed for the Welfare of their better Parts

As for the private Favours you have fhewn my Perfon, I hope fo deep a Senfe of them is imprinted on my Heart, that I fhall plead them before GOD in Prayer as long as I live.

BUT I have ftill ftonger Obligations to intercede in your Behalf. For GOD, for ever adored be his free Grace in CHRIST JESUS, has fet his Seal to my Ministry in your Hearts. Some diftant Pangs of the new Birth I have obferved to come upon you; and GOD forbid that I fhould fin againft the LORD, by ceafing to pray, that the good Work begun in your Souls, may be carried on till the Day of our Lord JESUS CHRIST.

THE Time of our Departure from each other is now at hand, and you are going out into a World of Temptations. But though abfent in Body let us be prefent with each other in Spirit, and GOD, I trust, will enable you to be fingularly good, to be ready to be accounted Fools for CHRIST'S Sake; and then we fhall meet never to part again in the Kingdom of our FATHER which is in Heaven.

To you my Companions and familiar Friends, who came over with me to fojourn in a ftange Land, do I in the next Place address myfelf.

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For you I especially fear, as well as for myself; because as we take sweet Counsel together oftner than others, and as you are let into a more intimate Friendship with me in private Life, the Eyes of all Men will be upon you to note even the minutest Miscarriage—— and therefore it highly concerns you to *walk circumspectly* towards those that are without,— I hope nothing but a single Eye to God's Glory and the Salvation of your own Souls, brought you from your native Country. Remember then the End of your coming hither, and you can never do amiss—Be Patterns of Industry, as well as Piety, to those who shall be around you; and above all Things let us have such a fervent Charity amongst ourselves, that it may be said of us, as of the primitive Christians, See how the Christians love one another.

AND now I have been speaking to others particularly, I have one general Request to make to all, and that with Reference to myself.

You have heard, my dear Friends, how I have been exhorting every one of you to shew forth your Thankfulness for the Divine Goodness, not only with your Lips, but in your Lives: But *Physician heal thyself*, may justly be retorted on me. For (without any false Pretences to Humility) I find my own Heart so little inclined to this Duty of Thanksgiving

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for the Benefits I have received, that I had need fear sharing *Hezekiah's* Fate, who because he was lifted up by, and not thankful enough for the great Things God had done for him, was given up a Prey to the Pride of his own Heart.

I NEED therefore, and beg your most importunate Petitions at the Throne of Grace, that no such Evil may befall me—that the more God exalts me the more I may debase myself—and that after I have preached to others, I myself may not be a Cast-away.

AND now, Brethren, into God's Hands I commend your Spirits, who, I trust, through his infinite Mercies in CHRIST JESUS, will preserve you blameless, till his second Coming to judge the World.

EXCUSE my detaining you so long, it is the last Time I shall speak to you perhaps; my Heart is full, and out of the Abundance of it, I could continue my Discourse till Midnight—But I must away to your new World——may God give you new Hearts, and enable you to put in Practice what you have heard from Time to Time to be your Duty, and I need not wish you any thing better. For then God will so bless you, that *you will build you Cities to dwell in*; then will you *sow your Lands and plant Vineyards*, which will yield you *Fruits of increase*, P^{sal}. cvii. 36, 37. Then *your Oxen shall*

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