



Mr. WHITEFIELD'S
SERMON
ON

Religious Society, &c.

The Second Edition, Corrected and Amended.





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The Nature and Necessity of SOCIETY in general,
And of
RELIGIOUS SOCIETY *in particular.*

A
SERMON

PREACH'D in the PARISH CHURCH of
St. Nicholas, BRISTOL,

And before the
RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES

At one of their
GENERAL *Quarterly* MEETINGS

IN
Bow-Church, LONDON, 1737.

By GEORGE WHITEFIELD, A. B.
OF *Pembroke-College,* OXFORD. *R.*

The Second EDITION, Corrected and Amended.

Publish'd for the Use of the *Religious Societies* in those Cities.


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To the Members of every Religious Society in and about the Cities of BRISTOL, LONDON and WESTMINSTER.

Gentlemen,

 **A**S 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 sometime with you.

IT'S

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, (tho' certainly in this Instance of it, as the Discourse itself will shew, misguided) that having gotten a very incorrect Copy, they order'd 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

that City: But when I came to peruse one of them, I found so many Things left out, so many Pages inserted, which (tho' 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 (tho'

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(tho' I did repent) of it's being published without the Consent or Knowledge of,

Gentlemen,

Your hearty well wisher,

And unworthy Servant in CHRIST,

G. W.





Eccles. iv. 9, 10, 11. 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 two be to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up. Again if Two lie together then they have Heat; but how can One be warm alone? And if One prevail against him, Two shall withstand him; and a Three-fold Cord is not quickly broken.

AMONG the many Reasons assignable for the sad Decay of *True Christianity*; perhaps the neglecting to *assemble our selves 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
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of the Wifest 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. *First*, because Men can raise up one another when they chance to slip. *For if they fall, the One will lift up his Fellow.* *Secondly*, because they can impart Heat to each other. *Again, if Two lie together then they have Heat; but how can One be warm alone?* *Thirdly*, Because they can secure each other from those that do oppose them; *And if one prevail against him, Two shall withstand him; 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.

AND *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 Society* 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

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 as it were, 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 Wombs, when our Wants encrease 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,*

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 alas! what are all these when *weighed in the Ballance of the Sanctuary*, in Comparison of the infinite greater Need of it, with Respect to the *Soul*? It was chiefly in Regard to this better Part, no doubt, that *GOD said, It is not good for the Man to be alone.* For let us suppose *Adam* to be as happy as may be, placed as the Lord of the Creation in the *Paradise of God*, and spending his happy Hours in adoring and praising the Blessed Author of his Being: Yet as his *Soul* was the very Copy of the *Divine Nature*, whose peculiar Property it is to be communicative, he could not as it were be happy, because he was *alone*, nor even content in *Paradise* for want of a *Partner* in his Joys. *GOD* knew this, and therefore said, *It is not good that the Man should be alone, I will make an Help meet for him.* And tho' this proved a fatal Means of his falling; yet that was not owing to any natural Consequence of *Society*; but partly to that cursed Apostate, who *craftily lies in wait to deceive*, partly to *Adam's* own Folly, in rather choosing to be miserable with One he loved, than trust in *GOD* to raise him up another Spouse. IF

IF we reflect indeed on that familiar Inter-
course our first Parent could carry on with
Heaven in a State of Innocence, we shall 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 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*
darkned, his Mind alienated from the Life of
GOD, as no more able to see the Way wherein
he should go, than a Blind Man to describe
the Sun: That notwithstanding this, he must
receive his Sight e'er 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 *So-*
*ciet*y 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 him-
self

self, how should we with *Moses*, exceedingly quake and fear? Nor would the Ministry of Angels in this Affair be without 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 further let us consider our selves 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 our selves 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,*

Devil, and have perhaps frequently renewed our Obligations so to do, by partaking of the *Lord's Supper*: 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 is it 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 steadfastly in the Apostle's 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. 10.* And Peter afterwards when released from Prison immediately goes to the House of *Mary*, where

where there were *great Multitudes assembled praying*, Acts xii. 12. And it is reported of Christians in After-Ages, that they 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.

It is to 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 wo be to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if Two lie together then they have Heat; but how can One be warm alone? And if One prevail against him, Two shall withstand him; and a Three-fold 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*.

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 Re-
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ligious

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 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 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 into 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 lie together then*

then they have Heat; but how can One be warm alone?

WHICH was the next Thing to be consider'd 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's an Observation no less true than common, That kindled Coals, if placed assunder, soon go out, but if heaped together, quicken and enliven each other, and afford a lasting Heat. The same will hold good in the Subject 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 assunder, 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

zealous as well as *steady*, in the *Ways of Godliness*.

BUT to illustrate this a little farther by a Comparison or too. Let us look upon our selves (as was above hinted) as *Soldiers* lifted 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 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*, tho' it be thro' a *Sea of Blood*?

Lastly, LET us consider our selves 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*, thro' 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 Li-*

ons in the Way! There are the Sons of Anack to be grappled with, e'er 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 intollerable Misery we shall run into, if 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 to give a

THIRD Reason, mentioned by the Wife 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 Three-fold Cord is not quickly broken.*

HITHERTO we have considered the Advantages of Religious Societies as a great Preservative against falling (at least dangerously falling)

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 need'st 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 may'st 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'll imploy 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 thy self*, telling thee thou need'st 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 thy self thus surrounded,

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on every Side, and unable to withstand such *horrid* (tho' 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 to be hid, as for a City set upon an Hill: That if thou wilt be an *almost Christian* (and as good be none at all) thou may'st 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 farther: That thou must not only *faintly seek*, but *earnestly strive to enter in at the strait Gate*: That there is but *One Way* to Heaven as formerly, *viz.* thro' 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

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, over-ruled 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 our selves*, in order to tempt us, where, by being destitute of one another's Help; he hopes to lead *us Captive at his Will*.

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 our selves. Had *Peter* kept to his own Company, he might
have

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; *Wo 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.

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. *First, mutual Reproof; Secondly, mutual Exhortation; Thirdly, mutual assisting* and defending each other.

First, 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
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Signification;

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 thy self, 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's 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

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 join'd 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 Verse 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 Mis-carriage or other, which tho' 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 Brethrens Reproof to be just; whereas when it is 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 administred by some friendly Hand or other. By all Means then let it be apply'd; Only like a skilful Physician *gild* o'er the ungrateful Medicine, and endeavour if possible to
deceive

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 aim'd at; that thou delightest not Causelessly to grieve thy Brother, and then thou can't not want Success.

Mutual Exhortation is a second Duty resulting from the Words of the Text. Again, if Two lie 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 lie 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 had need of Exhortation to rouse up our sleepy Souls, to set us upon our Watch against the Temptation of the *World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, to excite us to renounce ourselves

selves to take up our Crosses, and follow our Blessed Master, and the glorious Company of Saints and Martyrs, *who thro' 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 enlightned by pious Reading, unless our Wills are at the same Time inclined, and enflamed 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 encrease that Warmth and Heat, which each Person first brought with 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.*

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 Three-fold Cord is not quickly broken.

HERE

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 happen'd, that ever since that fatal Sentence pronounced by God, after our first Parent's fall, *I will put Enmity between thy Seed, and her Seed, that he that is born after the Flesh, i. e.* the unregenerate, unconverted Sinner, has, and always will persecute him that is *born after the Spirit*; and accordingly we find an immediate Proof given of this in the Instance of *Cain and Abel*, of *Ismael and Isaac*, and of *Jacob and Esau* afterwards. And, indeed, the whole Bible contains little else but an History of the great and continued Opposition, that was made between the Children of this World, and the Children of God. The first *Christians* were remarkable Examples of this; and tho' 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,

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 G O D'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 Three-fold, much less a many-fold, Cord will not be quickly broken.*

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.

A N D *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 lies, *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 *Under-taking*:

taking: 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 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!

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

AND here I would not be understood to mean only those Publick Meetings, which are designed manifestly for nothing else, but Revelings and Banquetings, for Chambering and Wantonneis, 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 call themselves *Christians*, that have solemnly vow'd, 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's to be wished, there was not One to be found concerned in it. The sooner we forsake the *assembling our selves together* in such a Manner, the better; and no Matter how

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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 from the Whole, and to beseech you in the Name of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, to go on in the good Way you have begun; and by a constant conscientious Attendance on your respective *Societies*, 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,
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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 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 plead at the last Day, LORD, have we not assembled our selves together *in thy Name*, and *in thy Name* enliven'd 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 Pretentions, you are found to be *Workers of Iniquity*.

BUT GOD forbid that any such Evil should happen unto you; That there should be ever a *Judas*, ever a Traytor amongst such distinguished

guished 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 like minded! and make it your daily constant Endeavour, both by Precept and Example, to turn all you 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 you anticipate the Happiness of a future State, and by attending on, and improving *the Communion of Saints* on Earth, make your selves meet to join in 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.

1754

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