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THE

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NATURE

Mary AND *Preston*

DESIGN

OF

CHRISTIANITY.

Extracted from a TREATISE ON
CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

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An EXTRACT, &c.

C H A P. I.

The Nature and Design of Christianity, that its sole End is to deliver us from the Misery and Disorder of this present State, and raise us to a blissful Enjoyment of the Divine Nature.

THE Wisdom of Mankind has for several Ages of the World, been enquiring into the Nature of Man, and the Nature of the World in which he is placed.

The Wants and Miseries of human Nature, and the Vanity of worldly Enjoyments, have made it difficult for the wisest Men to tell what human Happiness was, or wherein it consisted.

It has pleased the infinite Goodness of God, to satisfy all our Wants and Enquiries by a Revelation made to the World by his Son Jesus Christ.

This Revelation has laid open the great Secrets of Providence from the Creation of

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the World, explained the present State of Things, and given Man all the Information that is necessary to quiet his Anxieties, content him with his Condition, and lead him safely to everlasting Rest and Happiness.

It is now only necessary, that the poor Wisdom of Man do not exalt itself against God, that we suffer our Eyes to be opened by him that made them, and our Lives to be conducted by him, in whom *we live, move, and have our Being.*

For Light is now come into the World, if Men are but willing to come out of Darkness.

As Happiness is the sole End of all our Labours, so this Divine Revelation aims at nothing else.

It gives us right and satisfactory Notions of ourselves, of our true Good and real Evil; it shews us the true State of our Condition, both our Vanity and Excellence, our Greatness and Meanness, our Felicity and Misery.

Before this, Man was a mere Riddle to himself, and his Condition full of Darkness and Perplexity. A restless Inhabitant of a miserable disordered World, *walking in a vain Shadow, and disquieting himself in vain.*

But this Light has dispersed all the Anxiety of his vain Conjectures; it has brought us acquainted with God, and by adding
Heaven

Heaven to Earth, and Eternity to Time, has opened such a glorious View of Things, as makes Man even in his present Condition, full of a Peace of God which passes all Understanding.

This Revelation acquaints us, that we have a Spirit within us, that was created after the Divine Image, that this Spirit is now in a fallen corrupt Condition, that the Body in which it is placed, is its Grave, or Sepulchre, where it is enslaved to fleshly Thoughts, blinded with false Notions of Good and Evil; and dead to all Taste and Relish of its true Happiness.

It teaches us, that the World in which we live, is also in a disordered irregular State, and cursed for the Sake of Man; that it is no longer the Paradise that God made it, but the remains of a drowned World, full of Marks of God's Displeasure, and the Sin of its Inhabitants.

That it is a mere Wilderness, a State of Darkness, a Vale of Misery, where Vice and Madness, Dreams and Shadows, variously please, agitate, and torment the short, miserable Lives of Men.

Devils also, and evil Spirits, have here their Residence, promoting the Works of Darkness, and wandering up and down seeking whom they may devour.

So that the Condition of Man in his natural State, seems to be, as if a Person sick

of Variety of Diseases, knowing neither his Distempers, nor his Cure, should be enclosed in some Place, where he could hear, or see, or feel, or taste of nothing, but what tended to inflame his Disorders.

The Excellency therefore of the Christian Religion appears in this, that it puts an End to this State of Things, blots out all the Ideas of worldly Wisdom, brings the World itself to Ashes, and creates all a-new. It calls Men from an animal Life and earthly Societies, to be born again of the Holy Ghost, and be made a Member of the Kingdom of God.

It crushes into nothing the Concerns of this Life, condemns it as a State of Vanity and Darkness, and leads Man to a Happiness with God in the Realms of Light.

It proposes the Purification of our Souls, the enlivening us with the Divine Spirit; it sets before us new Goods and Evils, and forms us to a glorious Participation of the Divine Nature.

This is the one sole End of Christianity, to lead us from all Thoughts of Rest and Repose here, to separate us from the World and worldly Tempers, to deliver us from the Folly of our Passions, the Slavery of our own Natures, the Power of evil Spirits, and unite us to God, the true Fountain of all real Good. This is the mighty Change which Christianity aims at, to put us into a
new

new State, reform our whole Natures, purify our Souls, and make them the Inhabitants of heavenly and immortal Bodies.

It does not leave us to grovel on in the Desires of the Flesh, to cast about for worldly Happiness, and wander in Darkness and Exile from God, but prepares us for the true Enjoyment of a divine Life.

The Manner by which it changes this whole State of Things, and raises us to an Union with God, is equally great and wonderful.

I am the *Way, the Truth and the Life*,
 faith our blessed Saviour, *no Man cometh
 unto the Father but by me.*

As all Things were at first created by the Son of God, and without him was *not any thing made that was made*, so are all Things again restored and redeemed by the same Divine Person.

As nothing could come into Being without him, so nothing can enter into a State of Happiness or Enjoyment of God, but by him.

The Price and Dignity of this Redemption at once confounds the Pride, and relieves the Misery of Man. How fallen must he be from God, how disordered and odious his Nature, that should need so great a Mediator to recommend his Repentance!— And on the other Hand, how full of Comfort, that so high a Method, so stupendous

a Means should be taken, to restore him to a State of Peace and Favour with God!

This is the true Point of View in which every Christian is to behold himself. He is to overlook the poor Projects of human Life, and consider himself as a Creature through his natural Corruption falling into a State of endless Misery, but by the Mercy of God redeemed to a Condition of everlasting Felicity.

All the Precepts and Doctrines of the Gospel are founded on these two great Truths, the deplorable Corruption of human Nature, and its new Birth in Christ Jesus.

The one includes all the Misery, the other all the Happiness of Man.

It is on these great Doctrines, that the whole Frame of Christianity is built, forbidding only such Things as fasten us to the Disorders of Sin, and commanding only those Duties which lead us into the Liberty and Freedom of the Sons of God.

The Corruption of our Nature makes Mortification, Self-denial, and the Death of our Bodies necessary. Because human Nature must be thus unmade, Flesh and Blood must be thus changed, before it can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our new Birth makes the Reception of God's Spirit, and the Participation of the holy Sacraments necessary, to form us to that

that Life to which the Resurrection of Jesus Christ has entitled us.

So that would we think, and act and live like Christians, we must act suitably to these Terms of our Condition, fearing and avoiding all the Motions of our corrupted Nature, cherishing the secret Inspirations of the Holy Spirit, opening our Minds for the Reception of the Divine Light, and pressing after all the Graces and Perfections of our new Birth.

We must behave ourselves conformably to this double Capacity, we must fear, and watch, and pray, like Men that are always in Danger of eternal Death, and we must believe and hope, labour and aspire, like Christians, that are called to fight the good Fight of Faith, and lay hold on eternal Life.

This Knowledge of ourselves, makes human Life a State of infinite Importance, placed upon so dreadful a Point betwixt two such Eternities.

Well might our blessed Saviour say to one, that begged first to go and bury his Father, *Follow me, and let the Dead bury their Dead.*

For what is all the Bustle and Hurry of the World, but dead Shew, and its greatest Agents, but dead Men, when compared with that State of Greatness, that real

Life, to which the Followers of Christ are redeemed?

Had we been made only for this World, worldly Wisdom had been our highest Wisdom; but seeing Christianity has redeemed us to a contrary State, since all its Goods are in Opposition to this Life, worldly Wisdom is now our greatest Foolishness.

It is now our only Wisdom to understand our new State aright, to let its Goods and Evils take Possession of our Hearts, and conduct ourselves by the Principles of our Redemption.

The Nature and Terms of our Christian Calling is of that Concern, as to deserve all our Thoughts, and is indeed only to be perceived by great Seriousness and Attention of Mind.

The Christian State is an invisible Life in the Spirit of God, supported not by sensible Goods, but the spiritual Graces of Faith and Hope; so that the natural Man, especially while busied in earthly Cares and Enjoyments, easily forgets that great and heavenly Condition in which Religion places him.

The Changes which Christianity maketh in the present State of Things, are all invisible, its Goods and Evils, its Dignities and Advantages, which are the only true Standards of all our Actions, are not subject to the Knowledge of our Senses. In

In God we live, and move, and have our Being, but how unseen, how unfelt is all this !

Christ is the *Lamb slain from the foundation of the World*, the true Light, that lighteth every Man that cometh into the World. He is the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the Beginning and End of all Things. The whole Creation subsists in him and by him ; nothing is in any Order, nor any Person in any Favour with God, but by this great Mediator. But how invisible, how unknown to all our Senses, is this State of Things !

The Apostle tells us, that we Christians are come unto *Mount Sion*, and unto the *City of the Living God*, to the *heavenly Jerusalem*, and to an *innumerable Company of Angels*, and to the *general Assembly of the First-born*, which are written in *Heaven*, and to *God the Judge of all*, and to the *Spirits of just Men made perfect*, and to *Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant*, &c. (a)

But our Senses see or feel nothing of this State of Glory, they only shew us a Society amongst vain and worldly Men, labouring and contending for the poor enjoyments of a vain World.

We are Temples of the Holy Ghost, consecrated to God, Members of Christ's mystical Body, of his Flesh and of his Bones,

(a) Heb. xii. 22.

receiving Life, Spirit, and Motion from him our Head.

But our Senses see no farther than our Parents and Kindred according to the Flesh, and fix our Hearts to earthly Friendships and Relations.

Religion turns our whole Life into a Sacrifice to God, a state of probation, from whence we must *all appear before the Judgment-Seat of Christ, that every one may receive the Things done in his Body, &c. (a)*

But our Senses, the Maxims of this Life, and the Spirit of the World, teach quite another turn of Mind; to enjoy the good Things of Life as our Portion, to seek after Riches and Honours, and to dread nothing so much as Poverty, Disgrace, and Persecution. Well may this life be deemed a State of Darkness, since it thus clouds and covers all the true Appearances of Things, and keeps our Minds insensible, and unaffected with Matters of such infinite Moment.

We must observe, that in Scripture Christianity is constantly represented to us, as a Redemption from the Slavery and Corruption of our Nature, and a raising us to a nearer enjoyment of the Divine Glory.

It knows of no Misery, but the Death and Misery which Sin has made, nor of any Happiness, but the Gifts and Graces of the

Holy Ghost, which form us to a greater Likeness of God.

Thus saith the Apostle, *Jesus Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity. (a)*

He was manifested to take away our Sins (b).

Who gave himself for our Sins, that he might deliver us from this evil World.

The same Scriptures teach us, that as we are redeemed from this state of Sin, so we are raised to a new Life in Christ, to a Participation of the Divine Nature, and a Fellowship with him in Glory.

Thus our blessed Saviour prayeth for all his Followers, *That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us. And the Glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one (c).*

Happy he that hath Ears to hear, and a Heart to feel the Majesty and Glory of this Description of our new Life in Christ!

For surely could we understand what our Saviour conceived, when he sent up this Prayer to God, our hearts would be always praying, and our Souls ever aspiring after this State of Perfection, this Union with Christ in God.

(a) Tit. ii. 13. (b) 1. John. iii. 5. (c) Joh. xvii. 21.

To proceed, *In my Father's House, saith Christ, are many Mansions. I go to prepare a Place for you, that where I am, there ye may be also.* (a)

The Apostle tells us, that as we have borne the Image of the Earthly, we shall also bear the Image of the Heavenly. (b)

And that when Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in Glory. (c)

Beloved, saith St. John, now we are the Sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is (d)

I cannot leave this Passage, without adding the Apostle's Conclusion to it. And every Man that hath this Hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Which teaches us this Lesson, that no Man, whatever he may think of his Christian Improvement, can be said to have this Hope in him, unless he shews it by such a Purification of himself, as may resemble the Purity of Christ.—But to return.

St. Paul thus breaks forth into the Praises of God, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual Blessings in heavenly Places*

(a) Joh. xiv. 23.

(b) I Cor. xv.

(c) Col. iii. 4.

(d) I John. iii. 2.

in Christ (a). And again, God who is rich in Mercy, for his great Love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in Sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly Places in Christ Jesus (b).

These Passages teach us, that Christianity introduceth us into a new State, made up of invisible Goods, and spiritual Blessings, that it so alters our Condition, as to give us a new Rank and Degree even in this Life; which the Apostle expresses by making us *sit together in heavenly Places*.

So that though we are still in the Flesh, yet, as the Apostle saith, need we know no Man after the Flesh; though we are still Inhabitants of this Vale of Misery, yet are we ranked and placed in a certain Order amongst heavenly Beings in Christ Jesus.

Would we therefore know our true Rank and Condition, and what Place we belong to, in the Order of Beings, we must search after a *Life that is hid with Christ in God*. We must consider ourselves as Parts of Christ's mystical Body, and as Members of a Kingdom of Heaven. In vain do we consider the Beauty and Strength of our Bodies, our Alliances with Men, the Privileges of Birth, and the distinctions of this World, for these Things no more constitute the

(a) Ephes. i. 3.

(b) Ephes. ii. 4.

State of human life, than rich *Coffins*, or beautiful *Monuments*, constitute the state of the Dead.

We justly pity the last poor Efforts of human greatness, when we see a breathless Carcase lying in *State*. It appears to us to be so far from any real Honour, that it rather looks like ridiculing the Misery of our Nature. But were Religion to form our Judgments, the *Life* of a proud, voluptuous, and sensual Man, tho' shining in all the Splendor of the World, would give us no higher an idea of human Dignity, than that of a poor *Corpse* laid in *State*.

For a *Sinner*, when glorying in the *Lust of the Flesh*, the *Lust of the Eyes*, and the *Pride of Life*, shews us a more shocking Sight of Misery ridiculed, than any Pageantry that can expose the Dead.

We have an Apostle's Authority to say, *that he who liveth in Pleasure is dead while he liveth.*

This shews us, that when we enquire what our Life is, or wherein it consists, we must think of something higher than the Vigour of our Blood, the Gaiety of our Spirits, or the Enjoyment of sensible Pleasures; since these, though the allowed Signs of living Men, are often undeniable Proofs of dead Christians.

When therefore we would truly know what our Life, our State, our Dignity, our Good,

Good, or our Evil is, we must look at nothing that is temporal, worldly, or sensible. We may as well dig in the Earth for Wisdom, as look at Flesh and Blood, to see what we are, or at worldly Enjoyments, to find what we want, or at temporal Evils to see what we have to fear.

Our blessed Saviour put an absolute End to all Enquiries of this kind, when he said, *Be not afraid of them that kill the Body, and after that have no more that they can do (a).*

Here our Bodies and all bodily Enjoyments are at one dash struck out of the Account of Happiness, and the present State of Things made so very low, and insignificant, that he who can only deprive us of them, has not power enough to deserve our Fear.

We must therefore, if we would conceive our true State, our real Good and Evil, look farther than the dim Eyes of Flesh can carry our views, we must, with the Eyes of Faith, penetrate into the invisible World, the World of Spirits, and consider our Order and Condition amongst them, a World which (as St. *John* speaks) *has no need of the Sun, neither of the Moon, to shine in it, for the Glory of God doth lighten it, and the Light of the Lamb.* For it is

(a) Luke xii. 4.

there,

there, amongst eternal Beings, that we must take an eternal Fellowship, or fall into a Kingdom of Darknes and everlasting Misery.

* Christianity is so divine in its Nature, so noble in its Ends, so extensive in its Views, that it has no lesser Subjects than these, to entertain our Thoughts.

It buries our Bodies, burns the present World, triumphs over Death by a general Resurrection, and opens all into an eternal State.

It never considers us in any other Respect, than as fallen Spirits; it disregards the Distinctions of human Society, and proposes nothing to our Fears, but eternal Misery, nor any thing to our Hopes, but an endless Enjoyment of the Divine Nature.

This is the great and important Condition in which Christianity has placed us, above our Bodies, above the World, above Death, to be present at the Dissolution of all Things, to see the Earth in Flames, and the Heavens wrapt up like a Scroll, to stand at the general Resurrection, to appear at the universal Judgment, and to live for ever when all that our Eyes have seen, is passed away and gone.

Take upon thee therefore, a Spirit and Temper suitable to this greatness of thy Condition; remember that thou art an eternal Spirit, that thou art for a few Months
and

and Years in a State of Flesh and Blood, only to try, whether thou shalt be for ever happy with God, or fall into everlasting Misery with the Devil.

Thou wilt often hear of other Concerns, and other Greatness in this World ; thou wilt see every Order of Men, every Family, every Person pursuing some fancied Happiness of his own, as if the World had not only Happiness, but a particular kind of Happiness for all its Inhabitants.

But when thou seest this State of human Life, fancy that thou seest all the World asleep, the Prince no longer a Prince, the Beggar no longer begging, but every Man sleeping out of his proper State, some happy, others tormented, and all changing their Condition as fast as one foolish Dream can succeed another.

When thou hast seen this, thou hast seen all that the World awake can do for thee ; if thou wilt, thou mayst go to *sleep* for a while, thou mayst lie down and *dream* ; for, be as happy as the World can make thee, all is but sleeping and dreaming, and what is still worse, it is like sleeping in a Ship when thou shouldst be pumping out the Water ; or dreaming thou art a Prince, when thou shouldst be redeeming thyself from Slavery.

Now this is no imaginary Flight of a melancholy Fancy, that too much exceeds the
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the Nature of Things, but a sober Reflection justly suited to the Vanity of worldly Enjoyments.

For if the Doctrines of Christianity are true, if thou art that Creature, that fallen Spirit, that immortal Nature which Religion teaches us, if thou art to meet Death, Resurrection, and Judgment, as the Fore-runners of an eternal State, what are all the little Flashes of Pleasure, the changing Appearances of worldly Felicities, but so many Sorts of Dreams?

How canst thou talk of the Happiness of Riches, the Advantages of Fortune, the Pleasures of Apparel, of State, and Equipage, without being in a Dream?

Is the *Beggar* asleep, when he fancies he is building himself fine Houses? Is the *Prisoner* in a Dream, when he imagines himself in open Fields, and fine Groves? And canst thou think that thy immortal Spirit is awake, whilst it is delighting itself in the Shadows and Bubbles of worldly Happiness?

For if it be true, that Man is upon his Trial, if the Trial is for Eternity, if Life is but a Vapour, what is there that deserves a serious Thought, but how to get well out of the World, and make it a right Passage to our eternal State?

How can we prove that we are awake, that our Eyes are open, but by seeing, and feeling,

feeling, and living according to these important Circumstances of our Life?

If a Man should endeavour to please thee, with fine Descriptions of the Riches, and Pleasures, and Dignities, of the World in the *Moon*, adding that its Air is always serene, and its Seasons always pleasant, would'st thou not think it a sufficient Answer, to say, *I am not to live there?*

When thy own false Heart is endeavouring to please itself with worldly Expectations, the Joy of this or that way of Life, is it not as good a Reproof, to say to thyself, *I am not to stay here?*

For where is the Difference betwixt an earthly Happiness, from which thou art to be separated for ever, and a Happiness in the Moon, to which thou art never to go? Thou art to be for ever separated from the Earth, thou art to be eternal, when the Earth itself is lost; is it not therefore the same Vanity to project for Happiness on Earth, as to propose a Happiness in the Moon? For as thou art *never* to go to the one, so thou art to be *eternally* separated from the other.

Indeed the Littleness and Insignificancy of the boasted Honours of human Life, appears sufficiently from the Things themselves, without comparing them to the Subjects of Religion.

For see what they are in themselves.

AHASUERUS,

* *AHASUERUS*, that great Prince of the eastern World, puts a Question to *Haman*, his chief Minister of State, he asks him, *what shall be done unto the Man, whom the King delighteth to honour (a)?*

HAMAN imagining that he was the Person whom the King had in his Thoughts, answered in these Words?

LET the royal Apparel be brought which the King useth to wear, and the Horse that the King rideth upon, and the Crown Royal which is set upon his Head; and let this Apparel and Horse be delivered to the Hand of one of the King's most noble Princes, that they may array the Man withal, whom the King delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the Street of the City, and proclaim before him, thus shall it be done to the Man whom the King delighteth to honour.

Here you see the Sum total of worldly Honours.

An ambitious *Haman* cannot think of any thing greater to ask; *Ahasuerus*, the greatest Monarch in the World, has nothing greater to give to his greatest Favourite; powerful as he is, he can only give such Honours as these.

Yet it is to be observed, that if a poor Nurse was to please her Child, she must talk to it in the same Language, she must

(a) *Esther vi. 6.*

please

please it with the same fine Things, and gratify its Pride with Honours of the same kind.

Yet these are the mighty Things, for which Men forget God, forget their Immortality, forget the Difference betwixt an Eternity in Heaven, and an Eternity in Hell.

There needs no great Understanding, no mighty Depth of Thought, to see through the Vanity of all worldly Enjoyments; do but talk of them, and you will be forced to talk of Gewgaws, of Ribbons, and Feathers.

Every Man sees the Littleness of all Sorts of Honours, but those which he is looking after himself.

A private English Gentleman, that is half distracted till he has got some little Distinction, does at the same time despise the highest Honours of other Countries, and would not leave his own Condition, to possess the ridiculous Greatness of an *Indian King*. He sees the Vanity and Falseness of their Honours, but forgets that all Honour placed in external Things, is equally vain and false.

He does not consider that the Difference of Greatness, is only the Difference of Flowers and Feathers; and that they who are dressing themselves with *Beads*, have as just a Taste of what adorns their Persons,

sons, as they who place the same Pride in *Diamonds*.

When we read of an eastern Prince, that is too great to feed himself, and thinks it a Piece of Grandeur to have other People put his Meat into his Mouth, we despise the Folly of his Pride.

But might we not as well despise the Folly of their Pride, who are ashamed to use their Legs, and think it adds to their State, to be removed from one Place to another by other People ?

For he that thinks it stately to be carried, and mean to walk on Foot, has as true Notions of Greatness, as he who is too haughty to put his Meat in his own Mouth.

Again, It is the Manner of some Countries in the Burial of their Dead, to put a Staff, and Shoes, and Money in the Sepulchre along with the Corpse.

We justly censure the Folly and Ignorance of such a poor Contrivance to assist the Dead; but if we did but as truly understand what Life is, we should see as much to ridicule in the poor Contrivances to assist the Living.

For how many Things in Life do People labour after, break their Rest and Peace to get, which yet when gotten, are of as much real Use to them, as a Staff and Shoes to a *Corpse* under Ground? They are al-
ways

ways adding something to their Life, which is only like adding another Pair of Shoes to a Body in the Grave.

Thou mayst hire more Servants, new paint thy Rooms, make more fine Beds, eat out of *Plate*, and put on richer Apparel, and these will help thee to be happy, as *golden Staves*, or *painted Shoes*, will help a dead Man to walk.

See here therefore the true Nature of all worldly *Shew* and *Figure*, it will make us as great as those are, who are dreaming that they are Kings, as rich as those who fancy that they have Estates in the Moon, and as happy as those, who are buried with Staves in their Hands.

Now this is not carrying Matters too high, or imposing upon ourselves with any Subtilties of Reasoning, or Sound of Words; for the Value of worldly Riches and Honours can no more be too much lessened, than the Riches and Greatness of the other Life can be too much exalted. We do not cheat ourselves out of any real Happiness, by looking upon all worldly Honours as Bubbles, any more than we cheat ourselves by securing Honours that are solid and eternal.

There is no more Happiness lost by not being *great and rich*, as those are amongst we live, than by not being *dressed and adorned* as they are, who live in *China* or *Japan*.

Thou

Thou art no happier for having painted Ceilings, and marble Walls in thy House, than if the same Finery was in thy *Stables*; if thou eatest upon Plate, it maketh thee just as happy, as if thy Horses wore silver Shoes.

To disregard Gold, Jewels, and Equipage, is no more running away from any real Good, than if we only despised a Feather or a Garland of Flowers.

So that he who condemns *all* the external Shew and State of Life as equally vain, is no more deceived, or carried to too high a Contempt for the Things of this life, than he that only condemns the Vanity of the vainest Things.

You do not think yourself imposed upon, or talked out of any real Happiness, when you are persuaded not to be as vain and ambitious as *Alexander*.

And can you think that you are imposed upon, or drawn from any real Good, by being persuaded to be as meek and lowly as the holy Jesus?

There is as much sober Judgment, as sound Sense in conforming to the Fulness of Christ's Humility, as in avoiding the Height and Extravagance of *Alexander's* Vanity.

Do not therefore think to compound Matters, or that it is enough to avoid the
Va-

Vanity of the vainest Men. There is as much Folly in seeking little as great Honours; as great a mistake in needless Expence upon thyself, as upon any thing else. Thou must not only be less vain and ambitious than an *Alexander*, but practise the Humility of the blessed *Jesus*.

If thou rememberest that the whole Race of Mankind are a Race of fallen Spirits, that pass through the World as an Arrow passeth through the Air, thou wilt soon perceive, that all things here are equally great and equally little, and that there is no Wisdom or Happiness, but in getting away to the best Advantage.

If thou rememberest that this life is but a Vapour, that thou art in the Body, only to be holy, humble, and heavenly-minded, that thou standest upon the Brink of Death, Resurrection, and Judgment, and that these great Things will suddenly come upon thee, like a thief in the Night, thou wilt see a Vanity in all the Gifts of Fortune, greater than any Words can express.

Do but therefore know thyself, as Religion has made thee known, do but see thyself in the Light, which Christ has brought into the World, and then thou wilt see that nothing concerns thee, but what concerns an everlasting Spirit that is
B
going

going to God; and that there are no Enjoyments here that are worth a Thought, but such as may make thee more perfect in those holy Tempers which will carry thee to Heaven.

C H A P. II.

Christianity requires a Change of Nature, a new Life devoted to God.

CH R I S T I A N I T Y is not a *School*, for the teaching of moral Virtue, the polishing our Manners, or forming us to a Life of this World with Decency and Gentility.

It is deeper and more divine in its Designs, and has much nobler Ends than these; it implies an *intire Change* of Life, a Dedication of ourselves, our Souls and Bodies unto God, in the strictest and highest Sense of the Words.

Our blessed Saviour came into the World not to make any Composition with it, or to divide Things between Heaven and Earth, but to make War with every State of Life, and to put an end to the Designs of Flesh and Blood, and to shew us, that we must either leave this World, to become

come Sons of God, or by enjoying it, take our Portion among Devils and damned Spirits.

Death is not more certainly a separation of our Souls from our Bodies, than the Christian Life is a separation of our Souls from worldly Tempers, vain Indulgences, and unnecessary Cares.

No sooner are we baptized, but we are to consider ourselves as new and holy Persons, that are entered upon a new state of Things, that are devoted to God, and have renounced all, to be Fellow-heirs with Christ, and Members of his Kingdom.

There is no Alteration of Life, no Change of Condition, that implies half so much as the Alteration which Christianity introduceth.

It is a Kingdom of Heaven begun upon Earth, and by being made Members of it, we are entered into a new State of Goods and Evils.

Eternity altereth the Face and Nature of every thing in this World, Life is only a Trial, Prosperity becometh Adversity, Pleasure a Mischiefe, and nothing a Good, but as it increaseth our Hope, purifieth our Natures, and prepareth us to receive higher Degrees of Happiness.

Let us now see what it is, to enter into this state of Redemption.

Our own Church in Conformity with Scripture, and the Practice of the purest Ages, makes it necessary for us to renounce the *Pomps and Vanities of this World*, before we can be received as Members of Christian Communion

Did we enough consider this, we should find, that whenever we yield ourselves up to the Pleasures, Profits, and Honours of this Life, that we turn *Apostates*, break our Covenant with God, and go back from ~~the~~ express Conditions, on which we were admitted into the Communion of Christ's Church.

If we consult either the Life or Doctrines of our Saviour, we shall find that Christianity is a Covenant, that contains only the Terms of changing and resigning this World, for another, that is to come.

It is a State of Things that wholly regards Eternity, and knows of no other Goods, and Evils, but such as relate to another Life.

It is a Kingdom of Heaven that has no other interest in this World, than as it takes its Members out of it, and when the Number of the Elect is compleat, this World will be consumed with Fire, as having no other Reason of its Existence, than the furnishing Members for the blessed Society which is to last for ever.

I can-

I cannot here omit observing the Folly and Vanity of human Wisdom, which full of imaginary Projects, pleases itself with its mighty Prosperities, its lasting Establishments in a World doomed to Destruction, and which is to last no longer, than till a sufficient Number are redeemed out of it.

* Did we see a Number of Animals hastening to take up their Apartments, and contending for the best Places in a Building that was to be beat down, as soon as its old inhabitants were got safe out, we should see a contention full as wise, as the Wisdom of worldly Ambition.

To return. Christianity is therefore a Course of holy Discipline, solely fitted to the Cure and recovery of fallen Spirits, and intends such a Change in our Nature, as may raise us to a nearer Union with God, and qualify us for such high Degrees of Happiness.

It is no Wonder therefore, if it makes no Provision for the Flesh, if it condemns the Maxims of Human Wisdom, and indulges us in no worldly Projects, since its very End is, to redeem us from all the Vanity, Vexation, and Misery, of this State of Things, and to place us in a Condition, where we shall be fellow heirs with Christ, and as the Angels of God.

B 3

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That Christianity requires a Change of Nature, a new Life perfectly devoted to God, is plain from the Spirit and Tenour of the Gospel.

The Saviour of the World saith, *that except a Man be born again, of Water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God (a)*. We are told, that *to as many as received him, to them he gave Power, to become the Sons of God, which were born, not of Blood, nor of the Will of the Flesh, nor of the Will of Man, but of God (b)*.

These Words plainly teach us, that Christianity implies some great Change of Nature, that as our Birth was to us the Beginning of a new Life, and brought us into a Society of earthly Enjoyments, so Christianity is another Birth, that brings us into a Condition altogether as new, as when we first saw the Light.

We begin again to be, we enter upon fresh Terms of Life, have new Relations, new Hopes and Fears, and an entire Change of every thing that can be called good or evil.

This new Birth, this Principle of a new Life, is the very Effence and Soul of Christianity, it is the Seal of the Promises, the Mark of our Sonship, the Earnest of the Inheritance, the Security of our Hope, and

(a) John iii. 5. (b) John i. 12.

the

the Foundation of all our Acceptance with God.

HE that is in Christ, saith the Apostle, is a new Creature, and if any Man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his (a).

And again, *He who is joined to the Lord, is one Spirit (b).*

It is not therefore any Number of moral Virtues, no partial Obedience, no Modes of Worship, no external Acts of Adoration, no Articles of Faith, but a new Principle of Life, an entire Change of Temper, that makes us true Christians.

If the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the Dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the Dead, shall also quicken your mortal Bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you (c). For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.

Since therefore the Scriptures thus absolutely require a Life suitable to the Spirit and Temper of Jesus Christ, since they allow us not the Privilege of the Sons of God, unless we live and act according to the Spirit of God; it is past Doubt, that Christianity requires an entire Change of Nature and Temper, a Life devoted perfectly to God.

For what can imply a greater Change, than from a carnal to a spiritual Mind?

(a) Rom. viii. 9.

(c) Rom. viii. 11.

(b) 1 Cor. vi. 17.

What can be more contrary, than the Works of the Flesh are to the Works of the Spirit? It is the Difference of Heaven and Hell.

* Light and Darkness are but faint Resemblances of that great Contrariety, that is betwixt the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of the World.

Its Wisdom is Foolishness, its Friendship is Enmity with God.

All that is in the World, the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life, is not of the Father (a).

Worldly Opinions, proud Reasonings, fleshly Cares, and earthly Projects, are all so many false Judgments, mere Lies, and we know who is the Father of Lies.

For this Reason, the Scripture makes the Devil the God and Prince of this World, because the Spirit and Temper which reigns there, is entirely from him; and so far as we are governed by the Wisdom and Temper of the World, so far are we governed by that evil Power of Darkness.

If we would see more of this Contrariety, and what a Change our new Life in Christ implies, let us consider what it is to be *born of God*.

St. John tells us one sure Mark of our new Birth, in the following Words, *He that is born of God, overcometh the World (b).*

(a) 1 John ii. 16. (b) 1 Ep. v. 4.

So

So that the *new Birth*, or the Christian Life, is considered with Opposition to the *World*, and all that is in it, its vain Cares, its false Glories, proud Designs, and sensual Pleasures, if we have overcome these, so as to be governed by other Cares, other Glories, other Designs, and other Pleasures, then are we born of God. Then is the Wisdom of this World, and the Friendship of this World, turned into the Wisdom and Friendship of God, which will for ever keep us *Heirs of God, and Joint-heirs with Christ*.

Again, the same Apostle helps us to another Sign of our new Life in God. *Whosoever, saith he, is born of God, doth not commit Sin, for his Seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God (a)*.

This is not to be understood, as if he that was born of God, was therefore in an absolute State of Perfection, and incapable afterwards of falling into any thing that was sinful.

It only means, that he that is born of God, is possessed of a Temper and Principle, that makes him utterly hate and labour to avoid all Sin; he is therefore said *not to commit Sin*, in such a sense as a Man may be said not to do that, which it is his constant Care and Principle to prevent being done.

(a) 1 Ep. iii. 9.

B 5

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He cannot sin, as it may be said of a Man that has no Principle but Covetousness, that he cannot do Things that are expensive, because it is his constant Care and Labour to be sparing, and if Expence happen, it is contrary to his Intention; it is his Pain and Trouble, and he returns to saving with a double Diligence.

Thus is he that is born of God; Purity and Holiness is his only Aim, and he is more incapable of having any sinful Intentions, than the *Miser* is incapable of generous Expence, and if he finds himself in any Sin, it is his greatest Pain and Trouble, and he labours after Holiness with a double Zeal.

This it is to be born of God, when we have a Temper and Mind so entirely devoted to Purity and Holiness, that it may be said of us in a just Sense, that we cannot commit Sin. When Holiness is such a Habit in our Minds, so directs and forms our Designs, as Covetousness and Ambition direct and govern the Actions of such Men, as are governed by no other Principles, then are we alive in God, and living Members of the mystical Body of his Son Jesus Christ.

This is our true Standard and Measure by which we are to judge of ourselves; we are not true Christians unless we are born of God, and we are not born of God, unless

unless it can be said of us in this Sense that we cannot commit Sin.

When by an inward Principle of Holiness we stand so disposed to all Degrees of Virtue, as the ambitious Man stands disposed to all Steps of Greatness, when we hate and avoid all Kinds of Sins, as the covetous Man hates and avoids all Sorts of Loss and Expence, then are we such Sons of God, as cannot commit Sin.

We must therefore examine into the State and Temper of our Minds, and see whether we be thus changed in our Natures, thus born again to a new Life, whether we be so spiritual, as to have overcome the World, so holy, as that we cannot commit Sin; since it is the undeniable Doctrine of Scripture, that this State of Mind, this new Birth is as necessary to Salvation, as the believing in Jesus Christ.

To be eminent therefore for any particular Virtue, to detest and avoid several Kinds of Sins, is just nothing at all; its Excellency (as the Apostle saith of some particular Virtues) is but as *sounding Brass and a tinkling Cymbal*.

But when the Temper and Taste of our Soul is entirely changed, when we are renewed in the Spirit of our Minds, and are full of a Relish and Desire of all Godliness, of a Fear and Abhorrence of all Evil, then, as St. *John* speaks, *may we know that*
we

we are of the Truth, and shall assure our Hearts before him, then shall we know, that he abideth in us by the Spirit, which he hath given us (a).

We have already seen two Marks of those that are born of God, the one is, that they have overcome the World, the other, that they do not commit Sin.

To these I shall only add a third, which is given us by Christ himself, *I say unto you, love your Enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you, that you may be the Children of your Father which is in Heaven (b).*

Well may a Christian be said to be a *new Creature*, and Christianity an entire Change of Temper, since such a Disposition as this, is made so necessary, that without it, we cannot be the Children of our Father which is in Heaven; and if we are not his Children, neither is he our Father.

It is not therefore enough, that we love our Friends, Benefactors, and Relations, but we must love like God, if we will shew that we are born of him. We must like him have an universal Love and Tenderness for all Mankind, imitating that

(a) 1 Ep. iii. 19, 24.

(b) Mat. v. 44.

Love,

Love, which would that all Men should be saved.

GOD is Love, and this we are to observe as the true Standard of ourselves, that *he who dwelleth in God, dwelleth in Love*; and consequently he who dwelleth not in Love, dwelleth not in God.

It is impossible therefore to be a *true* Christian, and an *Enemy* at the same time.

Mankind has no Enemy but the Devil, and they who partake of his malicious and ill-natured Spirit.

There is perhaps no Duty of Religion that is so contrary to Flesh and Blood as this, but as difficult as it may seem to a worldly Mind, it is still necessary, and will easily be performed by such as are in Christ, new Creatures.

For take but away earthly Goods and Evils, and you take away all Hatred and Malice, for they are the only Causes of those base Tempers. He therefore that *hath overcome the World*, hath overcome all the Occasions of Envy and ill Nature; for having put himself in this Situation, he can pity, pray for, and forgive his Enemies, who want less Forgiveness from him, than he expects from his heavenly Father.

Let us here a while contemplate the Height and Depth of Christian Holiness, and that god-like Spirit which our Religion requireth. This Duty of universal Love
and

and Benevolence, even to our bitterest Enemies, may serve to convince us, that to be Christians, we must be *born again*, change our very Natures, and have no governing Desire of our Souls, but that of being made like God.

For we cannot exercise, or delight in this Duty, till we rejoice and delight only in increasing our Likeness to God.

We may therefore from this, as well as from what has been before observed, be infallibly assured, that Christianity does not consist in any partial Amendment of our Lives, any particular moral Virtues, but in an entire Change of our natural Temper, a Life wholly devoted to God.

To proceed,

This same Doctrine is farther taught by our blessed Saviour, when speaking of little Children, he saith, *Suffer them to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of God.* And again, *Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God, as a little Child, shall in no wise enter therein (a).*

If we are not resolved to deceive ourselves, to have Eyes and see not, Ears and hear not, we must perceive that these Words imply some mighty Change in our Nature.

(a) Luke xviii. 16.

For

For what can make us more contrary to ourselves, than to lay aside all our manly Wisdom, our mature Judgments, our boasted Abilities, and become Infants in Nature and Temper, before we can partake of this heavenly State?

We reckon it Change enough from Babes to be Men, and surely it must signify as great an Alteration, to be reduced from Men to a State of Infancy.

One peculiar Condition of Infants is this, that they have every thing to learn, they are to be taught by others what they are to ~~hope~~ and fear, and wherein their proper Happiness consists.

It is in this Sense, that we are chiefly to become as Infants, to be as though that we had every thing to learn, and suffer ourselves to be taught what we are to chuse, and what to avoid; to pretend to no Wisdom of our own, but be ready to pursue that Happiness which God in Christ proposes to us, and to accept it with such Simplicity of Mind, as Children, that have nothing of our own to oppose to it.

But now, is this Infant-temper thus essential to the Christian Life? Does the Kingdom of God consist only of such as are so affected? Let this then be added as another undeniable Proof, that Christianity requires a *new Nature*, and Temper of Mind; and that this Temper is such, as having renounced the Prejudices of Life, the

the Maxims of human Wisdom, yields itself with a Child-like Submission and Simplicity to be entirely governed by the Precepts and Doctrines of Christ.

Craft and Policy, selfish Cunning, proud Abilities, and vain Endowments, have no Admittance into this holy State of Society with Christ and God.

The Wisdom of this World, the Intrigues of Life, the Designs of Greatness and Ambition, lead to another Kingdom, and he that would follow Christ, must empty himself of this vain Furniture, and put on the meek Ornaments of infant and undesigning Simplicity.

Where is the Wise? Where is the Scribe? Where is the Disputer of this World? saith the Apostle, Hath not God made foolish the Wisdom of this World (a)?

If therefore we will partake of the Wisdom of God, we must think and judge of this World, and its most boasted Gifts, as the Wisdom of God judgeth of them; we must deem them Foolishness, and with undivided Hearts labour after one Wisdom, one Perfection, one Happiness, in being entirely devoted to God.

• This Comparison of the Spirit of a Christian, to the Temper of Children, may also serve to recommend to us a certain

(a) 1 Cor. i. 20.

Simplicity of Manners, which is a great Ornament of Behaviour, and is indeed always the Effect of a Heart entirely devoted to God.

For as the Tempers of Men are made designing and deceitful, by their having many and secret Ends to bring about, so the Heart that is entirely devoted to God, is at Unity with itself, and all others; it being wholly taken up with *one great Design*, has no little Successes that it labours after, and so is naturally open, simple, and undesigning in all the Affairs of Life.

Although what has been already observed in the foregoing Pages might be thought sufficient to shew, that Christianity requires a new Nature, a Life entirely devoted to God; yet since the Scriptures add other Evidences of the same Truth, I must quote a Passage or two more on this Head.

The holy Spirit of God is not satisfied with representing that Change which Christianity introduceth, by telling us, that it is a new Birth, a being born of God, and the like, but proceeds to convince us of the same Truth by another Way of speaking, by representing it as a State of Death.

Thus saith the Apostle, *ye are dead, and your Life is hid with Christ in God (a).*

(a) Col. iii. 3.

That

That is, you Christians are dead as to this World, and the Life which you now live, is not to be reckoned by any visible or worldly Goods, but is hid in Christ, is a spiritual Enjoyment, a Life of Faith, and not of Sight; ye are Members of that mystical Body of which Christ is the Head, and entered into a Kingdom which is not of this World.

And in this State of Death are we as Christians, to continue till *Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, and then shall we also appear with him in Glory* (b).

To shew us that this Death begins with our Christian State, we are said to be *buried with him in Baptism*; so that we entered into this State of Death at our Baptism, when we entered into Christianity.

Know ye not, says the Apostle, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his Death? Therefore we are buried with him, by Baptism into Death (c).

Now Christians may be said to be baptized into the Death of Christ, if their Baptism puts them into a State like to that, in which our Saviour was at his Death. The Apostle shews this to be the Meaning of it, by saying, *if we have been planted together in*

(b) Ibid. 4.

(c) Rom. vi. 4.

the Likeness of his Death, that is, if our Baptism has put us into a State like that of his Death.

So that Christian Baptism is not only an external Rite, by which we are entered into the external Society of Christ's Church, but is a solemn Consecration, which presents us an Offering to God, as Christ was offered at his Death.

We are therefore no longer alive to the Enjoyments of this World, but as Christ was then nailed to the Cross, and devoted entirely to God, that he might be made perfect through Sufferings, and ascend to the Right Hand of God; so is our old Man to be crucified, and we consecrated to God, by a Conformity to the Death of Christ, that *like as Christ was raised from the Dead by the Glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in Newness of Life, and being risen with Christ, should seek those Things which are above.*

This is the true undeniable State of Christianity; Baptism does not make us effectually Christians, unless it brings us into a State of Death, consecrates us to God, and begins a Life suitable to that State of Things, to which our Saviour is risen from the Dead. This, and no other than this, is the Holiness, and spiritual Temper, of the Christian Life, which implies such a Resignation of Mind, such a Dedi-
cation

cation of ourselves to God, as may resemble the Death of Christ. And on the other Hand, such a Newness of Life, such an Ascension of the Soul, such a holy and heavenly Behaviour, as may shew that we are risen with Christ, and belonging to that glorious State, where he now sits at the right Hand of God.

It is in this Sense, that the holy Jesus saith of his Disciples, *they are not of this World, even as I am not of this World*; being not left to live the life of this World, but chosen out of it for the purposes of his Kingdom, that they might copy after his Death, and Oblation of himself to God.

And this is the Condition of all Christians to the Consummation of all Things, who are to carry on the same Designs, and by the same means raise out of this corrupted State, a Number of Fellow-heirs with Christ in everlasting Glory. The Saviour of the World has purchased Mankind with his Blood, not to live in Ease and pleasurable Enjoyments, not to spend their Time in Softness and Luxury, in the Gratifications of Pride, Idleness and Vanity, but to drink of his Cup, to be baptized with the Baptism he was baptized with, to make War with their corrupt Natures, humble themselves, mortify the Desires of the Flesh, and like him to be perfect through Sufferings.

St.

St. Paul so well knew this to be the Design and Spirit of Religion, that he puts his Title to the Benefits of Christ's Resurrection upon it, when he says,

That I may know him and the Power of his Resurrection, and the Fellowship of his Sufferings, being made conformable to his Death (a).

It is his being made conformable to his Death, on which he founds his hopes of sharing in the Resurrection of Christ. If Christians think that Salvation is now to be had on softer Terms, and that a Life of Indulgence and sensual Gratifications is consistent with the Terms of the Gospel, and that they need not now be made conformable to his Death; they are miserably blind, and as much mistake their Saviour, as the worldly Jews who expected a temporal Messiah to deliver them.

Our Redemption is a Redemption by Sacrifice, and none are redeemed but they who conform to it. *If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.*

We must then, if we would be wise unto Salvation, die and rise again like Christ, and make all the Actions of our Life holy by offering them to God. *Whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do, we must do all to the Glory of God.*

(a) Phil. iii. 10.

Since

Since therefore, he that is called to Christianity, is thus called to an Imitation of the *Death* of Christ, to *forbear* from Sin, to overcome the *World*, to be born of the *Spirit*, to be born of God, these surely will be allowed to be sufficient Evidences, that Christianity requireth an *entire Change* of our Nature, a Life perfectly devoted to God.

Now if this is Christian Piety, it may serve to instruct two sorts of People ;

First, those who are content with an outward decency and Regularity of Life : I do not mean such as are hypocritical in their Virtues ; but all those who are content with an outward Form of Behaviour, without that inward Newness of Heart and Spirit which the Gospel requireth.

Charity, Chastity, Sobriety, and Justice, may be practised without Christian Piety ; a *Jew*, a *Heathen*, may be charitable and temperate ; but to make these Virtues becomes Parts of Christian Piety, they must proceed from a Heart *truly* turned unto God, that is full of an *infant* Simplicity, that is *crucified* with Christ, that is *born* again of the Spirit, that has overcome the *World*. Temperance or Justice without this *Turn* of Heart, may be the Temperance of a *Jew* or a *Heathen*, but it is not Christian Temperance till it proceed from a true Christian Spirit. Could we do and suffer

fer all that Christ himself did or suffered, yet if it was not all done in the *same Spirit*, and Temper of Christ, we should have none of his Merit.

A Christian therefore must be sober, charitable, and just, upon the same Principles, and with the same Spirit, that he receives the Holy *Sacrament*, for ends of Religion, as Acts of Obedience to God, as Means of Purity and Holiness, and as so many Instances of a Heart devoted to God.

As the bare eating of Bread, and drinking of Wine in the Holy *Sacrament*, is of no use to us, without those religious Dispositions which constitute the true Frame of a pious Mind, so is it the same in all other Duties; they are mere outward Ceremonies, and useless Actions, unless they are performed in the *Spirit* of Religion: Charity and Sobriety are of no Value, till they are so many Instances of a Heart truly devoted to God.

A Christian therefore is to be sober, not only so far as answers the End of a decent and orderly Life, but in such a Manner as becomes one, who is *born* of the Holy Spirit, that is made one with Christ, who dwells in Christ and Christ in him. He must be sober in such a measure as best serves the Ends of Religion, and practise such abstinence as may make him fittest for the Holiness,

ness, Purity, and Perfection of the Christian Life.

He must be charitable, not so far as suits with Humanity and good Esteem amongst Men, but in such a Measure as is according to the Doctrines and *Spirit* of Religion.

For neither Charity nor Temperance, nor any other Virtue, are Parts of Christian Holiness, till they are made holy and religious, by such a Piety of Heart, as shews that we live *wholly* unto God.

* ~~This~~ is what cannot be too much considered by a great many People, whose Religion has made no change in their Hearts, but only consists in an external Decency of Life, who are sober without the Piety of Sobriety, who pray without Devotion, who give Alms without Charity, and are Christians without the Spirit of Christianity.

Let them remember that Religion is to *alter* our Nature, that Christian Piety consists in a *Change* of Heart, that it implies a new Turn of Spirit, a spiritual Death, a spiritual Life, a dying to the World, and a Living wholly unto God.

Secondly, This Doctrine may serve to instruct those who have lived Strangers to Religion, what they are to do to become true Christians.

Some People who are ashamed of the Folly of their Lives, and begin to look towards

wards Religion, think they have done enough, when they either alter the outward Course of their Lives, abate some of their Extravagancies, or become careful of some particular Virtue.

Thus a Man, whose Life has been a Course of Folly, thinks he has made a sufficient Change, by becoming temperate. Another imagines he has sufficiently declared for Religion, by not neglecting the public Worship as he used to do. A *Lady* fancies that she lives enough to God, because she has left off *Plays* and *Paint*, and lives more at home, than in the former part of her Life.

But such People should consider, that Religion is no one particular Virtue; that it does not consist in the *Fewness* of our Vices, or in any particular Amendment of our Lives, but in such a *thorough Change* of Heart, as makes Piety and Holiness the Measure and Rule of all our Tempers.

It is a miserable Error to be content with ourselves, because we are less vain or covetous, more sober, and decent in our Behaviour, than we used to be; yet this is the State of many People, who think they have sufficiently reformed their Lives, because they are in some degree different from what they were. They think it enough to be changed from what they were, without considering how thorough a Change Religion requires.

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But let such People remember, that they who thus *measure themselves by themselves are not wise*. Let them remember that they are not Disciples of Christ, till they have like him offered *their whole Body and Soul* as a reasonable and lively Sacrifice unto God ; that they are not the Members of Christ's mystical Body, till they are united unto him by a *new Spirit* ; that they have not entered into the Kingdom of God, till they have entered with an *infant Simplicity of Heart*, till they are so born again as not to commit Sin, so full of an heavenly Spirit, as to have *overcome the World*.

Nothing less than this *great Change* of Heart and Mind can give any one any Assurance, that he is truly turned to God. There is but this one Term of Salvation, *He that is in Christ is a new Creature*. How insignificant all other Attainments are, is sufficiently shewn in the following Words: *Many will say to me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name ? And in thy Name have cast out Devils ? And in thy Name have done many wonderful Works ? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work Iniquity (a).*

So that there is no Religion that will stand us in any stead, but that which is the

(a) Matt. vii. 22.

Conversion of the Heart to God ; when all our Tempers are Tempers of Piety, springing from a Soul that is *born again of the Spirit*, that tends with one full bent to a Perfection and Happiness in the Enjoyment of God.

Let us therefore look carefully to ourselves, and consider what manner of Spirit we are of ; let us not think our Condition safe, because we are of this or that Church or Communion, or because we are strict Observers of the external Offices of Religion, for these are Marks that belong ~~to~~ more than belong to Christ. All are not his, that *prophecy* or even *work Miracles in his Name*, much less those, who with worldly Minds and corrupt Hearts are only baptized in his Name.

If Religion has raised us into a *new World*, if it has filled us with new *Ends* of Life, if it has taken possession of our Hearts, and altered the whole Turn of our Minds, if it has changed all our ideas of Things, given us a new Set of Hopes and Fears, and taught us to live by the *Realities* of an invisible World, then may we humbly hope, that we are true Followers of the Holy Jesus, and such as *may rejoice in the Day of Christ, that we have neither run in vain, nor laboured in vain.*

C H A P. III.

On the Renunciation of the World and Self-Denial.

TH E Christian Religion being to raise a new, spiritual, and as yet invisible World, and to place Man in a certain Order amongst *Thrones, Principalities,* and spiritual Beings, is at entire enmity with this ~~present~~ corrupt State of Flesh and Blood.

It ranks the present World along with the Flesh and the Devil, as an equal Enemy to those glorious Ends, and the Perfection of human Nature, which our Redemption proposes.

It pleased the Wisdom of God to indulge the Jews in worldly Hopes and Fears.

It was then said, *Therefore shall you keep all the Commandments which I command you this Day, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the Land, whither you go to possess it.*

The Gospel is quite of another Nature, and is a Call to a very different State, it lays its first Foundation in the Renunciation of the World, as a State of false Goods and Enjoyments, which feed the Vanity and Corruption of our Nature, fill our Hearts
with

with foolish and wicked Passions, and keep us separate from God, the only Happiness of all Spirits.

My Kingdom, saith our blessed Saviour, *is not of this World*; by which we may be assured, that no Worldlings are of his Kingdom.

We have a farther Representation of the Contrariety, that there is betwixt this Kingdom and the Concerns of this World. "A certain Man," saith our Lord, "made a great Supper, and bade many, and sent his Servant at Supper-time, to say to them that were bidden, come, for all Things are now ready; and they all with one Consent began to make Excuse. The first said, I have bought a Piece of Ground, and I must needs go and see it; another said, I have bought five Yoke of Oxen, and I go to prove them, I pray thee have me excused; another said, I have married a Wife, and therefore I cannot come."

We find that the Master of the House was angry, and said, "None of those Men which were bidden, shall taste of my Supper (a)."

Our Saviour a little afterwards applies it all in this Manner, "Whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my Disciple." We are told, that "when the Chief Priests and Pharisees

(a) Luke xiv. 16.

heard our Saviour's Parables, they perceived that he spoke of them. (b)"

If Christians hearing the above recited Parable, are not pricked in their Hearts, and do not feel that our Saviour speaks of them, it must be owned that they are more hardened than Jews, and more unsincere than Pharisees.

This Parable teaches us, that not only the Vices, the Wickedness and Vanity of this World, but even its most lawful and allowed Concerns, render Men unable to enter, and unworthy to be received into the true State of Christianity.

That he who is *over* busied in an honest and lawful Calling, may on that Account be as well rejected by God, as he who is vainly employed in foolish and idle Pursuits.

For worldly Cares are no more holy or virtuous, than worldly Pleasures; they are as great a Mistake in Life, and when they equally divide or possess the Heart, are equally vain and shameful, as any sensual Gratifications.

It is granted that some Cares are made necessary by the Necessities of Nature; and the same also may be observed of some Pleasures; the Pleasures of Eating, Drinking, and Rest, are equally necessary; but yet Reason and Religion do not limit these

(b) Mat. xxi. 45.

Pleasures by the Necessities of Nature, we fall from rational Creatures, into Drones, Sots, Gluttons and Epicures.

In like manner our Care after some worldly things is necessary ; but if this Care is not bounded by the just Wants of Nature, if it wanders into unnecessary Pursuits, and fills the Mind with false Desires and Cravings ; if it wants to add an imaginary Splendor to the plain Demands of Nature, it is vain and irregular ; it is the Care of the Epicure, a longing for Sauces and Ragoes, and corrupt the Soul like any other sensual Indulgence.

The Distinctions of civil Life have their Use, and are in some Degree necessary to Society ; but if any one thinks he may be less devoted to God, less afraid of the Corruptions of Pleasures, the Vanities of Pride, because he was born of one Family rather than another, he is as much mistaken, as he that fancies he has a privilege to steal, because he was born of a Father that was poor.

Our Lord points his Doctrines at the most common and allowed Employments of Life, to teach us, that they may employ our Minds as falsely, and distract us as far from our true Good, as any Trifles and Vanity.

He calls us from such Cares, to convince us, that even the Necessities of Life must be sought with a Kind of Indifference, that

so our Souls may be truly sensible of greater Wants, and disposed to hunger and thirst after enjoyments that will make us happy for ever.

But how unlike are Christians to christianity! It commands us *to take no thought, saying what shall we eat, or what shall we drink?* Yet Christians are restless and laborious till they can eat in *Plate*.

It commands us to be indifferent about Raiment; but Christians are full of Care and Concern to be cloathed in Purple and fine linen. It enjoins us to take no thought for the Morrow, yet Christians think they have lived in vain, if they do not leave Estates at their Death. Yet these are the Disciples of that Lord, who saith, *Whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my Disciple.*

It must not be said, that there is some Defect in these Doctrines, or that they are not plainly enough taught in scripture, because the Lives and Behaviour of Christians are so contrary to them; for if the Spirit of the World, and the temper of Christians, might be alledged against the Doctrines of Scripture, none of them would have lasted to this Day.

It is one of the ten Commandments, *Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain*; our Saviour has in the most solemn Manner forbid Swearing; yet where
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is there more Swearing than amongst Christians, and amongst such Christians as would think it hard to be reckoned a Reproach to the Christian Name?

The Scripture says of Christians, that they are born of God, *and have overcome the World*; can they be reckoned of that Number, who have not so much as overcome this flagrant Sin, and to which they have no Temptation in Nature?

Well therefore may the Doctrines of Humility, Heavenly-mindedness, and Contempt of the World, be disregarded, since they have all the Corruptions of Flesh and Blood, all the innate and acquired Pride and Vanity of our Nature to conquer, before they can be admitted.

Every Duty or Virtue of the Christian Life is founded in Truth and Reason, and is required because of its Fitness to be done, and not because God has power to command what he pleases.

If we are commanded to be meek and humble, it is because Meekness and Humility are as true Judgments, and as suitable to the Truth of our State, as it is a true Judgment, and suitable to the State of every dependent Being, to be thankful for Mercies.

If we are bid to rejoice, it is at something that is truly joyful; if to fear, it is to fear something that is really dreadful. Thus we

are called to no Tempers, but such as are so many true Judgments, and as truly founded in the Nature and Reason of Things, as if we were bid to believe *Two* to be the half Part of *Four*.

God is Reason and Wisdom itself, and he can no more call us to any Tempers or Duties, but such as are strictly reasonable in themselves, than he can act against himself, or contradict his own Nature.

As we can say with Assurance, that God cannot lye: so we may with the same certainty affirm, that he cannot enjoin any Things to rational Creatures, that is contrary to the Reason of their Nature, no more than he can enjoin them to love Things that are not lovely, or hate Things that are in their Nature not hateful.

When God speaks, we are as sure that infinite Reason speaks, as we are sure there is a God.

A little Reflection upon this matter, will give us the utmost Assurance in such Reasonings as this.

As sure therefore as there is a God, so sure is it, that a Religion from God has only reasonable Commands to reasonable Creatures. No tempers can be imposed upon us by way of *Task* and *Imposition*, which we might as reasonably be without, if it was not required of us. God can only will, that reasonable
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Creatures should be more reasonable, more perfect and more like himself, and consequently can enjoin us no Duties, or Tempers of Mind, but such as have this Tendency. All his Commands are for our Sakes, founded in the Necessities of our Natures, and are only so many Instructions to become more happy, than we could be without them.

There are no truths of Christianity more plainly delivered in the Scriptures, or more universally acknowledged by all Christians than these two; *viz.* the *general Corruption* of Human Nature, and the *absolute Necessity* of Divine Grace. Now these two Doctrines make the Reason and Necessity of a continual Self-denial plain and obvious to the meanest Capacity, and extend it to all those Things or Enjoyments, which either strengthen the Corruption of our Nature, or grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and cause him to leave us.

Let any one but reflect upon the Nature of these two fundamental Truths, and he will find himself soon convinced, that all those Enjoyments are to be abstained from which either support our natural Blindness and corruption, or resist and abate the Inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

He will find also, that this Self-denial must extend itself to every Day of our Lives, unless he can find a Day that he is free

free from Weakness, or out of the Way of all Temptations, a Day which offers nothing suitable to the Corruption of his Nature, or nothing contrary to the good Motions and Directions of the Holy Ghost. Most People acknowledge this in general; they think it right to avoid things which strengthen our Corruption, and grieve the Spirit of God; but then not conceiving this with any sufficient Exactness, they think that an Abstinence from gross Sins is a sufficient Security.

But let such People consider, that the Corruption of our Nature is like any other bodily Illness, that never keeps at one Stand, but is either increasing or abating by every Thing that we do.

A *Dropsy* or a *Gangrene* is not only increased by Drunkenness, or disorderly Indulgences, but receives constant Strength by all little Indulgences that suit with it.

Now the Corruption of our Nature is an inbred Distemper, that possesses us in the Manner of a *Dropsy* or *Gangrene*; if we give into notorious Sins, we become Slaves to this Corruption, and are straitway dead in Sin.

But though we keep clear of such great Offences, yet if we indulge or allow ourselves in such Practices as suit with the Corruption of our Nature, we as certainly nourish a slow Death, and destroy ourselves by
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Degrees, as a Man in a *Dropsy* who abstains from Drunkenness, yet allows himself in such ways as will not suffer his Dis-temper to abate.

If a Person was to walk upon a *Rope* cross some great River, and he was bid to deny himself the pleasure of Walking in *silver Shoes*, or looking about at the Beauty of the Waves, or listening to the Noise of Sailors; if he was commanded to deny himself the Advantage of *fishing* by the Way; would there be any Hardship in such Self-denial? Would not such Self-denials be as reasonable, as commanding him to love Things that will do him good, or to avoid things that are hurtful?

Streight is the Gate, and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto Life, saith our blessed Saviour. Now, if Christians are to walk in a *narrow way that leadeth to eternal Life*, the chief Business of a Christian must be, to deny himself all those things which may either stop or lead him out of his narrow Way. And if they think that Pleasures and Indulgences are consistent with their keeping this narrow Way, they think as reasonably as if the Man upon the *Rope* should think that he might safely use silver Shoes, or stop in his way to catch Fish.

Too many People imagine this Life to be something that is substantial in itself, and valuable for its own Goods, and look upon Religion as something that is added

to it, to make a worldly Life more easy, regular, and happy ; and so embrace Religion with no other Spirit, nor to any farther Degree, than as it complies with the Ease, Order, and Happiness of that way of Life in which they live.

Our blessed Saviour has fully confuted this Opinion, by teaching us that there is but *one Thing Needful*. If therefore we are but so far Christians, as to believe that what our Saviour has here taught, is strictly true ; then all the pretended Grievances of Self-denial and Sufferings are all struck off at once.

For be the hardships or Self-denials what they will, if they make us more like to Christ, they have done more for us, than all the prosperity in the world can do ; because there is but *one thing Needful*, the Salvation of our Souls. It is this that changes the Nature of all human Things, and makes every Thing Good or Evil only so far as it promotes or hinders this *one End of Life*. The Salvation of the World is the only Happiness of the World ; and he that has secured his Share in that, has secured to himself all the Joy and Gladness that can befall human Nature.

A Christian therefore that is not content with Salvation, that wants to add a worldly Joy and Pleasure to the great Things of Religion, is more senseless than the Man,
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that should think he had hard Usage to be saved from a *Shipwreck*, unless he was carried off upon a *Cedar Plank*.

Christians are called from a State of Disorder, Sin, and ignorance, to a State of Holiness and Resemblance of the Divine Nature. If therefore there are any things, or any ways that corrupt our Minds, support our Vanity, increase our Blindness, or nourish Sensuality, all these are as necessary to be avoided, as it is necessary to be holy.

If there are any Denials or Mortifications that purify and enlighten the Soul, that lessen the Power of bodily Passions, that raise us to a heavenly Affection, and make us taste and relish the Things that be of God; these are as necessary to be practised, as it is necessary to believe in Jesus Christ.

So that the Matter comes to this: If there are no Indulgences in *eating* that do us harm, then *fasting* is of no use; but if there are, if they enslave the Soul, and give it a sensual Taste, then we are as much obliged to abstain from what does us this Harm, as we are obliged to pray for any thing that can do us good.

No Christian that knows any thing of the Gospel, can doubt whether *fasting* be a common Duty of Christianity, since our Saviour has placed it along with secret Alms and private Prayer. *When thou fastest,*
anoint

anoint thy Head, and wash thy Face, that thou appear not unto Men to fast, but to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly (a).

Eating and Drinking are the common Supports ; of Life but then as they are the Support of a corrupt Life, the Nourishment of a disordered Body that weighs down the Soul, whose Appetites and Tempers are in a State of Enmity with the Life and Purity of the Soul, it is necessary, that we take care so to support the Life of the Body, as not to occasion the Sickness and Death of the Soul.

We may also observe that the Reason of Self-denial and Abstinence is constant and perpetual, because we are perpetually united to a Body, that is more or less fit to join with our Souls in Acts of Holiness, according to the State that it is in.

Now Christian Temperance is no more that which may pass for Temperance in the Sight of Men, than Christian Charity, is that which is visible to the World.

A worldly man may think himself sufficiently temperate, when he only abstains from such Excesses, as may make him fitter to enjoy a healthful *Sensuality*.

But Christian Temperance is of quite another Nature, and for other Ends ; it is to put the Body into a State of *Purity and Sub-*

(a) Matt. vii. 15.

mission,

mission, and give the Soul a divine and heavenly Taste.

It is therefore to be observed, that Christian Temperance is never enough practised, but when it puts the Body in the fittest State for Devotion, and other acts of Holiness : When our Bodies have all that good done to them, have all that Purification, and right Tempers, which abstinence and Self-denial can give them ; then do we practise Christian Temperance.

There is no other rule than this to go by ; for since Christian Temperance is in order to Holiness, Purity, and heavenly Affection, he can only be said to be *truly* temperate, whose Temperance is the most serviceable to the *highest* Degrees of Holiness.

And to stop short of any known Degrees of Temperance is like stopping short of any known Degrees of Charity.

A Man that lives in such a State, as not to be called either a *Glutton* or a *Drunkard*, may yet be so near them, as to partake of those Tempers and Inclinations, which are the effects of Gluttony and Drunkenness.

For there are such Degrees in these, as in other ways of Life. A man may be vain and uncharitable, yet not so as to be remarkable for his Vanity and Uncharitableness ; so he may be also under the Guilt and evil Effects of eating and drinking, though not so as to be esteemed either a *Glutton* or *Intemperate*.

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So that the only Security for a good Christian, is to make it the Care of his Life, to resist all Enjoyments that cherish Vanity and Uncharitableness, not only in such Degrees as are *scandalous* and *visible* in the Eyes of Men, but such as *inwardly* hurt the Humility and Charity of his Mind.

In like manner as to Eating and Drinking, he is constantly to practise such Abstinence, as may secure him not only from Sensuality in the Sight of the World, but such as may best *alter, purify, and bumble* his Body, and make it the holy Habitation of a Soul devoted to a spiritual Life.

St. Paul saith, *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beath-eth the Air. But I keep under my Body, and bring it into Subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a Cast-away (a).*

Let it therefore be observed that the Apostle practised this Self-denial and Mortification, not only as a good and advisable Thing, and suitable to Holiness, but as of the last Necessity. It was not, as he was an *Apostle*, and that he might be fitter for the Miraculous Gifts of the Holy Ghost; but it was to secure his Salvation, lest when he had preached to others, he should be a *Cast-away*.

Let it be considered that this Apostle, who lived *in Infirmities, in Reproaches, in*

(a) 1 Cor., ix

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Necessities, in Persecutions, in Distresses for Christ's Sake, who was also full of Signs and Wonders, and mighty Deeds, and who had been caught up into the third Heavens; yet reckons all his Virtues as unsecure, and his Salvation in Danger, without this severity of Self-denial; he thought all his other Advancements in Piety, without this, to be as a Labourer, as beating the Air (a).

So run I, saith he, *not as uncertainly*; by which he plainly teaches us, that he who does not thus run, who does not thus mortify the Body, runs uncertainly, and fighteth to as little purpose as he that beatheth the Air.

Can they therefore, who live in Ease, and Softness, and bodily indulgences, who study and seek after every Gratification, be said to be of St. Paul's Religion, or to be governed by that Spirit which governed him?

An Apostle preaching the Gospel with Signs and Wonders in the midst of Distress and Persecution, thought his own Salvation in Danger, without this Subjection of his own Body; and shall we who are born in the Dregs of Time, who have no Works like this to appeal to, think it safe to feed and indulge in Ease and Plenty?

A Man may indeed practise the outward Part of a Christian, he may be orthodox in his Faith, and regular in the Forms of Religion, and yet live in Ease and Indulgence.

(a) 2 Cor. ii.

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But if he would *put on Christ*, and be cloathed with the Humility and Meekness of his true Disciples ; if he would *love* his Enemies, and be in Christ a *new Creature* ; if he would live by *Faith*, and have his Conversation in Heaven ; if he would be *born again* of God, and *overcome* the world, he must lay the Foundation of all these Graces in the Mortification and Subjection of his Body. For not only Religion, but Reason can shew us, that almost every ill Temper, every Hindrance of Virtue, every Clog in our Way of Piety, and the Strength of every Temptation arises in a great measure from the *State* of our Bodies.

A Life of Idleness, Indulgence, and Self-love, is an entire Resignation of ourselves to every Vice, except such as cannot be committed without Trouble ; and we may assure ourselves, that if we are in this State, we are not only Strangers to Virtue, but ready for every Sin that suits with Ease and Softness.

Ambition and worldly *Cares* distract the Mind, and fill it with false Concerns ; but even these Tempers are in a nearer State to Religion, and less indispose the Soul to it, than Idleness and Indulgence. For Ambition and worldly Cares, though they employ the Mind wrong, yet as they employ it, they preserve some Degree of Activity in it, which by some Means or other may happen to take a right Turn ; but *Idleness* and

and *Indulgence* is the Death and Burial of the Soul.

I have been more particular upon this Temper of Indulgence, because it is so common, and even acknowledged without Shame. People who would not be thought *Reprobates*, are yet not afraid to let you know that they hardly do any thing but *eat*, and *drink*, and *sleep*, and take such *Diversions* as suit with their Ease; whereas if such a State of Life be examined by the Rules of Reason and Religion, it will appear as dangerous and frightful, as any other reprobate State of Sin. For it is a State that nourishes all the Corruption of our Nature; that exposes us to all the Vanity of the World; that resigns us up to all the Power of the Devil.

Did we design to set ourselves in the fairest Posture for the Devil to hit us, we ought to chuse that of Idleness and Indulgence.

Watch and Pray, saith our Saviour, *that ye fall not into Temptation*. The Devil's Advice is, Be idle and indulge, and then ye will yield to every Temptation. For if Watching and Prayer have any Tendency to prevent our falling into Temptation, it is certain that Idleness and Indulgence must, in an equal Degree, make us incapable of resisting them.

When we speak of Self-denial, we are apt to confine it to Eating and Drinking; but we ought to consider, that though a strict Temperance be necessary in these things,

things, yet these are the easiest and smallest Instances of Self-denial. Pride, Vanity, Self-love, Covetousness, Envy, and other Inclinations of the like Nature, call for a more constant and watchful Self-denial, than the Appetites of Hunger and Thirst.

We are always in a State either of *Self-love*, Vanity, Pride, Hatred, Spite, Envy, Covetousness, or Ambition: Some one or other of these Passions is in some Degree affecting our Spirits, in the same Manner that any violent Passion, or heat of Liquor affects our Spirits, differing only in the Degree.

A silent *Envy*, a secret *Vanity*, which no body sees, raises Thoughts in our Heads, and disorders our Judgments in the same Manner as more violent Passions.

We may increase the *Vanity* and *Envy*, till it ends in Distraction and Madness, as it sometimes happens; but then we may be sure, that it disorders our Understanding in the same Manner, and made us foolish and extravagant in some Degree, long before it came to Madness. Whilst therefore we are in the Body, we are constantly in a State of Disorder, like to those who are drunk, or in a violent Passion, we have some Passion or other, either of Self-love, Vanity, Envy, or the like, that affects our Spirits, and disorders our Judgment in the same Manner, though not in the same Degree, as their Spirits are affected who are

in the heat of Drink, or in some violent Passion.

Religion has little or no hold of us, till we have these right Apprehensions of ourselves; it may serve for a little Decency of outward Behaviour, but it is not the Religion of our Hearts, till we feel the Weakness and Disorder of our Nature, and embrace Piety and Devotion, as the Means of recovering us to a State of Perfection and Happiness in God.

A Man that thinks himself in *Health*, cannot lament the Sickness of his State.

If we are pleased with the Pride and Vanity of our Minds, if we live in Pleasure and Self-satisfactions, we shall feel no Meaning in our Devotions, when we lament the Misery and Corruption of our Nature. We may have Times and Places to mourn for Sins; but we shall feel no more inward Grief, than *bired Mourners* do at a Funeral.

So that as the Corruption of our Nature, is the Foundation and Reason of Self-denial; so a right Sense and Feeling of that Corruption, is necessary to make us rightly affected with the Offices and Devotions of Religion.

I shall now shew, that the Reasonableness and Necessity of Self-denial, is also founded upon another fundamental Doctrine of Religion, namely, the *Necessity* of *Divine Grace*, which I shall leave to be the Subject of the following Chapter.

C H A P.

C H A P. IV.

Of the Necessity of Divine Grace.

I COME now to another Article of our Religion, namely, the *absolute Necessity of Divine Grace*, which is another universal and constant Reason of *Self-denial*.

The invisible Operation and Assistance of God's Holy Spirit, by which we are disposed towards that which is good, and made able to perform it, is a confessed Doctrine of Christianity.

Our natural Life is preserved by some Union with God, who is the Fountain of Life to all the Creation, to which Union we are altogether Strangers; we find that we are alive, as we find that we think; but how, or by what Influence from God our Life is supported, is a Secret into which we cannot enter. It is the same Thing with relation to our spiritual Life, or Life of Grace; it arises from some *invisible Union* with God, or Divine Influence, which in this State of Life we cannot comprehend. Our blessed Saviour saith, *The Wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the Sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of*

of God (a). This shews us how ignorant we are of the Manner of the Operations of the Holy Spirit; we may feel its Effects, as we may perceive the Effects of the Wind, but are as much Strangers to its Manner of coming upon us, as we are Strangers to that exact Point, from whence the Wind begins to blow, and where it will cease.

The Spirit of God is like the Nature of God, too high for our Conceptions, whilst we are in these dark Houses of Clay. But our blessed Saviour has in some Degree helped our Conceptions in this Matter, by the Manner of his giving the Holy Spirit to his Disciples. *And he breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive the Holy Ghost.* Now by this Ceremony of Breathing, we are taught to conceive of the Communications of the Holy Spirit, with some Likeness to Breath or Wind, that its Influences come upon us in some Manner most like to a gentle Breathing of the Air. Representations of this Kind are only made in Compliance with the Weakness of our Apprehensions, which not being able to conceive Things as they are in their own Nature, must be instructed, by comparing them to such Things as our Senses are acquainted with. Thus the *Wisdom* and *Knowledge* that is revealed from God, is compared to

(a) John iii. 8.

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Light;

Light; not because *Light* is a true Representation of the Wisdom of God; but because it serves best to represent it to our low Capacities. In like manner, the *Influences* of the Holy Spirit are set forth by the Ceremony of *Breathing* upon us; not because *Breath*, or *Air*, or *Wind*, are true Representations of the Gifts of the Spirit; but because they are the properest Representations that yet fall within our Knowledge.

But that which is most necessary for us to know, and of which we are sufficiently informed in Scripture, is the *absolute Necessity* of this Divine Assistance.

We are used to consider those only as *inspired* Persons, who are called by God to some extraordinary Designs, and act by immediate Revelation from him. Now as Inspiration implies an *immediate Revelation* from God, in this Sense there have been but few inspired Persons; but Inspiration, as it signifies an *invisible Operation*, or *Assistance* and *Instruction* of God's Holy Spirit, is the common Gift and Privilege of all Christians; in this Sense of Inspiration they are all *inspired Persons*. Know ye not, saith St. Paul, that your Body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you? St. John likewise, Hereby know we that he dwelleth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us: For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, are the
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Sons of God. Again, *Now if any Man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his* (a). From these, and many other Passages of the like Nature, it is undeniably plain, that the Life which we now live, is a Life in and by the Spirit of God, and that they only are the Sons of God, who are led by this Spirit. Now this Doctrine plainly proves the Necessity of a constant Self-denial; for it must be necessary that we deny ourselves all those Tempers and Ways of Life, which may make God *withhold* his Grace from us; and likewise all those Enjoyments and Indulgences, which may make us *less able* and *less disposed* to improve and co-operate with those Degrees of Divine Grace, that are communicated to us.

Our blessed Saviour saith, *If any Man love me, he will keep my Words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.* (b) This teaches us how we are to *invite* the good Spirit of God to dwell in us: We are to *prepare* ourselves for the Abode of this Divine Guest, by loving Christ, and keeping his Commandments: Whence we also learn, that the Spirit of God does not *equally visit* all Persons in all Ways of Life, but that we must *prepare* ourselves for his Presence.

(a) Rom. viii. 11.

(b) John xiv. 23.

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We are also told, that *God resisteth the Proud, but giveth Grace unto the Humble.* This also explains to us the Method of Divine Grace, that it is bestowed with Regard to the *State* and *Temper* of Persons; that there are some Dispositions which *separate* us from the Spirit of God, and others that procure to us a larger Share of its Gifts and Graces. We are also here taught to consider *Pride*, not only as a Sin that has its particular Guilt, but as it has this certain Effect, that it *extinguishes* the Divine Light, *deprives* us of God's Spirit, and leaves us to sink under the Corruption and Weight of our Nature.

We are to consider *Humility* also, not only as it is a reasonable Duty, and proper to our State; but as it *qualifies* and *prepares* us for larger Degrees of Divine Grace, such as may purify and perfect our Souls in all Manner of Holiness. All Instances therefore of Pride are to be avoided, all Sorts of Humility to be practised, not only for their own Sakes, but as necessary *Preparations* for Divine Grace, that we may be *fit Temples* for the Holy Ghost to dwell in. Now seeing we are none of Christ's, if the Spirit of Christ be not in us, seeing we are only so far Christians, as we are renewed by the Holy Ghost; nothing can be more necessary to true Piety, than that we form every Part of our Lives with Regard to this Holy Spirit.

Spirit. That we consider all our *Tempers, Pleasures, Cares, Designs* and *Ways* of Life, whether they be such as *suit* with the Wisdom and heavenly Guidance of the Holy Spirit. This Doctrine shews us to ourselves in a *new Point* of View, and may serve to teach us several Truths, which we should otherwise not so readily apprehend.

When we are left to consider our Duty with relation to the express Commandments of God, there are many Ways of Life, which we think ourselves at Liberty to follow, because they seem to be no plain Breach of any Commandment. But we are to look to a farther Rule, and to consider our Pleasures and Cares, our Designs and Endeavours, not only whether they are according to the Letter of the Law, but whether they are according to the Spirit of God; for if they are contrary to the Spirit of God, if they suit not with his secret Inspirations, they are as truly to be avoided, as if they were contrary to some express Commandment. For we are assured from Scripture, that they only are the Sons of God, *who are led by the Spirit of God*; and none can be said to be led by the Spirit of God, but they whose Lives are according to it, whose Actions, Cares and Pleasures, Hopes and Fears, are such as may be said to be guided by the Motions of the Holy Ghost.

We are therefore to consider ourselves as *inspired Persons*, that have no Knowledge or Wisdom, but what comes from God, and that this Wisdom will no longer dwell with us, than so long as we act and conduct ourselves conformably to it. So that we must not vainly deceive ourselves in saying, where is the harm of such *Indulgences*, or such *Vanities* and idle *Amusements*? But must consider, whether they are such as are conformable to a Life that is to be directed by the Holy Ghost, whether they will *invite* his Assistance, and make him *delight* to dwell with us. In this Manner must we examine and try all our Ways of Life, as well our Cares as our Pleasures, and all our Tempers and Inclinations. For unreasonable Cares, as well as unreasonable Pleasures, are equally contrary to the Wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and equally separate us from him. People often think their Designs and Diversions innocent, because they are not *sinful* in their Nature, but they should also consider whether they are not *vain* and *foolish*, and *unsuitable* to the State and Condition of a Christian. For a Life of *Folly*, and *Vanity*, and *trifling Designs*, is no more living by the *Spirit of God*, than a Life of *gross Sins* is keeping the *Commandments*. So that the safest Rule to judge of our Actions by, is to consider them with relation to that Spirit, by which we are to be guided.

guided. Is this Design, or this Diversion according to the Wisdom of the Spirit of God? Am I in these Things improving the secret Inspiration of the Holy Ghost? Am I here governed by a Wisdom from above? Are these Ways such as I can truly say, that I am led into them by the Spirit of God? Do I allow myself in them, because they serve to set forth the Glory of God, and are agreeable to the Condition of a Disciple of Christ? Are they good Proofs that the Spirit of God dwelleth in me, and that by thus sowing to the Spirit, I shall of the Spirit reap everlasting Life? This is the Rule of Perfection, by which Christians are to regulate their Thoughts, Words, and Actions; for we are called by God to a State of Purity and Holiness, to act by the Motions of his Holy Spirit, and make no other Use of ourselves, or the World we are in, than such as is conformable to that Dignity of Life, and State of Glory to which we are called. The Spirit of our Religion is to be the Spirit of our Lives, the constant Principle of all our Tempers and Inclinations, which is to render us reasonable, and wise, and holy, in all our Progress through the World.

The *Renewal* of our Hearts by the Spirit of God consists in *new Thoughts* and *new Desires*, in filling our Minds with great and sublime Truths, and in giving us Desires

and Inclinations, Hopes and Fears, Cares and Pleasures, suitable to them.

This is being born of the Spirit: Hence appears a plain Reason of an *universal Self-denial*, because the Spirit of the World, and the Spirit of our corrupt Hearts, is in a State of Contrariety to this Spirit and Wisdom which is from above. So that it is to be the main Business and Labour of our Lives, to contradict those Motions of our Hearts, and those Tempers of the World, which are *contrary* to this Spirit, which is to be the Principle of our new Life in Christ.

We must therefore deny ourselves all those Ways of Life, all Cares and Enjoyments which too much possess our Minds, and render them insensible of these great Truths. We must practise all that *Self-denial, Temperance, Abstinence, Care and Watchfulness*, which can any way *fit and prepare* our Minds to hear and receive, to comprehend and relish the Instructions and Doctrine which come from the Spirit of God. For all these Truths, every thing that relates to God and Religion, have a different Effect upon us, according to the State or Way of Life that we are in: As *Land* must be prepared to receive the best Seed, as *Rocks* can bring forth no Fruit; so unless our Minds are in some *proper State* and Disposition to *co-operate* with the Holy Spirit,

Spirit, and receive his Instructions, his Gifts and Graces will bring forth no Fruit.

Our blessed Saviour saith, *Wo unto you Pharisees, for you love the uppermost Seats in the Synagogues, and Greetings in the Markets.*

(a) The Wisdom of this World would find little to condemn in such a Behaviour as this; but yet we see that the Wisdom of God condemns it with a *Woe*, teaching us, that every *wrong Turn* of Mind, every false Satisfaction, puts the Soul in a State that is *contrary* to Religion, and makes Men *unfit* to receive its Doctrines. This is the Reason why Religion calls us to a State of *Self-denial*, *Humility*, and *Mortification*, because it is a State that awakens the Soul into right Apprehensions of Things; and qualifies us to see, and hear, and understand the Doctrines of eternal Truth. We must deny ourselves all our Ways of Folly and Vanity, let go every false Satisfaction, that the Soul may be at Liberty with its full Attention; to listen to the Instructions of Religion.

Would we see any thing exactly, we must take our Eyes from every thing else; so if we would apprehend truly the Things of Religion, we must take our Minds from all other Objects; we must empty ourselves of all false Satisfaction, or we shall never

(a) Luke xi. 43.

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know.

know the Want, or feel the Excellency of our true Good.

We see even in worldly Matters, that if we propose any thing to a Man when he is in the Pursuit of something else, he hardly hears or understands us, we must stay for a season of more Leisure and Indifference, till his Thoughts and Passions are at rest.

Now this holds much stronger in Matters of Religion; its Doctrines are neither heard nor understood, because it always finds us in the Pursuit of *something else*; it matters not what this *something else* is, whether it be *loving uppermost Seats in the Synagogues*, a Fondness for *Trifles*, a Joy in *Luxury*, and *Idleness*, or a Labour after *Riches*; the Mind is equally employed wrong, and so not in a Condition to like, or at Leisure to listen to any other Happiness. If you were to propose the same Truths to a Man in another State, when Weariness or Disappointment has made him give up all Designs, or when Sickness or the Approach of Death shews him that he must act no longer in them, they would have quite another Effect upon him; then the great Things of Religion appear great indeed; he *feels* their whole Weight, and is *amazed* that he did not see them always in the same Manner. Now it is the great End and Design of *Self-denial*, to put a stop to the Follies of Life, and mortify all our Passions, that our

Souls may quietly consider, and fully comprehend the Truths which come from God; that our Hearts being at Liberty from a croud of foolish Thoughts, may be ready to obey and co-operate with the *Inspirations* of that Spirit, which is to lead and quicken us in all Holiness; that *Death* and *Judgment*, *Heaven* and *Hell*, may make as deep Impressions upon our Minds in the Middle of our Lives, as at our last Hour; that we may be as wise and prudent as *sick* and *dying* Men, and live with such Apprehensions as most People die with; that we may see the Vanity of the World, the Misery of Sin, the Greatness of Eternity, and the Want of God, as they see it, who stand upon the Brink of another World.

This is the great and happy work of Self-denial, which is to fill us with a Spirit of Wisdom, to awaken us into a true Knowledge of ourselves, and shew us who, and where, and what we are. Till this Self-denial has put a stop to our Follies, and opened our Eyes, our Life is but a *Sleep*, a *Dream*, a mere Succession of *Shadows*; and we act with as little Reason and Judgment, as a Child that is pleased with blowing about a *Feather*. We must therefore not only deny our wicked and sinful Inclinations, but also all our Follies, Impertinences and vain Satisfactions; for as plain and known Sins harden and corrupt, so Impertinences and false Satisfactions delude and blind our
Hearts.

Hearts, and render them insensible of our real Misery or true Happiness.

We are true Members of the Kingdom of God, when the Kingdom of God is within us, when the Spirit of Religion is the Spirit of our Lives ; when seated in our Hearts, it diffuses itself into all our Motions ; when we are wise by its Wisdom, sober by its Sobriety, and humble by its Humility ; when it is the Principle of all our Thoughts and Desires, the Spring of all our Hopes and Fears ; when we like and dislike, seek and avoid, mourn and rejoice, as becomes those who are born again of God. Now this is the Work of the Holy Spirit in our Hearts, to give us a *new Understanding*, a *new Judgment*, Temper, Taste, and Relish, new Desires, and new Hopes and Fears. So far therefore, as we *prepare* ourselves by Self-denial for this Change of Heart and Mind, so far we *invite* the Assistance, and *concur* with the Inspirations of the Holy Spirit. And so far as we nourish any foolish Passion, indulge any Vanity of Mind, or Corruption of Heart ; so far we *resist the Graces* of God's Holy Spirit, and render ourselves *indisposed* to relish and improve his secret Inspirations. Christians are therefore to consider themselves, not only as men that are to act by a Principle of Reason, but as spiritual Beings, who have a higher Principle of Life within them, and are to live by

by the *Wisdom* and *Instructions* of the Spirit of God.

As reasonable Men would do every thing that tended to strengthen and improve their Reason ; so wise Christians ought to practise every way of Life, that can fit them for farther Degrees of Grace, that can strengthen and preserve their union with the Spirit of God. For as a Man without Reason, has but the *Figure* of a Man ; so a Christian without the Spirit of God, has but the *Form* of a Christian. And as the Perfection of a Man consists in the highest Improvement of his Reason ; so the Perfection of a Christian consists in his growth in Grace, in the *spiritual Turn* and *Temper* of his Heart and Mind. Here therefore must we fix all our Care and Concern, that we may remove all Hindrances of Divine Grace, and preserve this Kingdom of God within us ; that we may be truly spiritual in all our Ways and Designs, and indulge no Tempers that may lessen our Union with the Spirit of God.

Some Persons will perhaps refrain from *Grief*, when they find that it hurts their *Eyes* ; they will avoid *Passion* and *Anger*, if it ends in Pains of the Head ; but they would do well to consider that these Tempers are to be abstained from upon much greater Accounts. *Passion* may disorder our Bodies, waste our Spirits, and leave
Pains

Pains in our *Heads*; but it leaves greater Marks of Injury in our better Part, as it throws us into a State of Madness, and *bannishes* the Holy Spirit of Peace and Gentleness, and *prepares* us for the Suggestions of the Spirit of Darkness. *Grief* may hurt our *Eyes*, but it much more hurts our *Souls*, as it sinks them into a State of Gloom and Darkness, which *expels* and *quenches* the Spirit of God; for Light may as well unite with Darkness as the Spirit of God dwell with the gloomy Dulness and horror of stupid Grief. What I have observed of these two Passions, ought to be concluded of every other *Passion* and *Temper*; we are to consider it as it *suits* with, or *resists* that new Spirit, by whose holy Motions we are to be preserved in a State of Holiness.

Now seeing this Change of our Hearts, and *Newness* of Spirit, is the whole of Religion; we must fear and avoid all *Irregularity* of Spirit, every *unreasonable Temper*, because it affects us in the Seat of Life, because it hurts us in our principal Part, and makes us *less capable* of the Graces, and *less obedient* to the Motions of God's Holy Spirit. We must labour after a State of Peace, Satisfaction and Thankfulness, free from the Folly of vain Hopes, idle Fears, and false Anxieties, that our Souls may be disposed to feel the Joys, to rejoice in the Comforts, and advance in the Graces of the Holy Ghost.

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With what *Care* and *Exactness* we are to conduct ourselves, with regard to the Spirit of God, is fully set forth in the following Words: *Let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is good to the Use of Edifying, that it may minister Grace unto the Hearers; and grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the Day of Redemption.* (a) That we may not here mistake what is meant by *corrupt Communication*, that we may not fancy it only implies sinful and wicked Discourse, the Apostle adds; *but that which is good to the Use of Edifying, that it may minister Grace unto the Hearers.* So that it is a Conversation that does not edify and profit the Hearer, that the Apostle condemns as corrupt, and such as is to be avoided. Let it be observed, that the Apostle does not prohibit this Kind of Conversation, because it is *useless*, impertinent, and better to be avoided; but for a Reason of the utmost Consequence, that we may not *grieve the Holy Spirit of God.* This shews us, that we Christians are to govern ourselves by no less a Rule, than a *Conformity* to the Spirit of God; that we are not only to deny ourselves vain and foolish Actions, but also idle and unedifying Discourse, and conduct ourselves in all our Behaviour with

(a) Eph. iv. 29.

such

such a Spirit of Wisdom and Purity, as may make the Holy Ghost *delight* to dwell in us. This Rule of Perfection is highly conformable to the Nature of our Religion. For as our Religion consists in a *new* Heart and *new* Spirit; it is certain that we are then only arrived to the true State of our Religion, when it governs our Words and Actions, and is the *constant Temper* of our Minds at all Times, and on all Occasions. A *covetous* Man is not only covetous, when he is in his *Counting-room*; he is the same Person, and governed by the same Temper and way of Thinking where-ever he is. And the same Thing is equally true of every Way of Life, when it has once entered into our Heart, and become a settled Temper; it is not occasionally exercised in this or that Place, or at set Times; but is always in being, and constantly disposing us to Thoughts, and Words, and Actions suitable to it.

Some Persons seem to know so little of Religion, that they confine it to Acts of *Devotion*, and *Publick Occasions* of Divine Service; they do not consider that it consists in a *new* Heart and *new* Spirit, and that Acts of Devotion, Prayer and Preaching, Watchings, Fastings, and Sacraments, are only to fill us with this *new Heart and Spirit*, and make it the common constant Spi-

Spirit of our Lives every Day and in every Place.

One Reason, why a vain unedifying Conversation *grieves* the Holy Spirit, is, because it not only proceeds from a Corruption of Heart, a disordered State of the Soul; but because it is so powerful in its Influences, and does so much harm to those we converse with. For it is our Communication, our *ordinary Temper* and Manner of *common Life*, that affects other People, that either hardens them in Sin, or awakens them to a Sense of Piety. Let therefore all *Clergymen*, and *Masters*, and *Mistresses* of Families look carefully to themselves; let them consider that if their *ordinary Life*, their Communication be *vain, impertinent, and unedifying*, that they are not only in a corrupt State of Heart, but are guilty of corrupting and perverting the Hearts of those that belong to them. Let them not think that they have sufficiently discharged their Duty, by seeing that those who relate to them, have their proper Instructions; for it is next to impossible for such instructions to have their proper Effect, against the Temper and Example of those we converse with. If a *Clergyman plays, and drinks, and sports* with his Flock in the Week-days; let him not wonder if he preaches them asleep on *Sundays*. If a *Father is intemperate, if he swears, and converses foolishly* with his Friends;

Friends; let him not wonder that his Children cannot be made virtuous. For there is nothing that teaches to any purpose, but our ordinary Temper, our common Life and Conversation; and almost all People will be such as those, amongst whom they were born and bred. It is therefore the necessary Duty of all Christians in all States of Life, to look carefully to their *ordinary Behaviour*, that it be not the Means of poisoning and corrupting the Hearts of those that they converse with. They must consider, that all the Follies and Impertinences of their ordinary Life and Conversation, have the guilt of destroying Souls; and that the Blood of those, whom their Follies have destroyed, will be required at their Hands.

e It is sometimes said of a *foolish irregular*,
 r and *vain* Person, that he is only his *own*
 e *Enemy*; but this is as absurd as to say, that
 e a Person of *exemplary* and *eminent* Piety is on-
 e ly his *own Friend*; for as his lively Piety will
 e certainly communicate itself to those about
 e him; so the folly and impertinent Spirit of
 e an irregular Man, will naturally infect those
 e who are obliged to be near him.

A Mistress, whose daily Conversation is a daily Proof to her *Maid*s, that she is governed by a Spirit of true Piety in all that she says and does, whose regular Life is a continual visible Labour to *work out her Salvation with Fear and Trembling*, is a Blessing to all that stand about her; she com-

communicates Happiness even to those who are born of her Servants ; they will be educated in Piety, because their Parents learnt what Piety was, in waiting on such a *Mistress*.

A good-natured, *drinking, sleeping, playing, swearing Master*, is a Curse to those who tend upon him ; they are led into all Irregularities, by following his steps, and are sent into the World hardened in Follies, and insensible of Religion, by having lived with such a *Master*. This therefore ought carefully to be considered by all Christians, as a mighty Encouragement to an exact Strictness and Regularity of Behaviour ; that as a *holy Conversation* entitles us to a Reward for other People's Virtues ; so an *evil Communication* and the Folly of our Lives, make us liable to a punishment for other Men's Sins. For we can neither live well or ill to ourselves alone ; but must of Necessity do either good or harm to others, by our Manner of Conversation. This is one great Reason why a vain corrupt communication does so *grieve* the Holy Spirit, because it is so infecting an Evil, and does so corrupt the Manners of those we converse with. This Doctrine of abstaining from corrupt Communication, that we may not *grieve* the Spirit of God, teaches us a high Aim, and exalted Degree of Perfection, which is peculiar to Christianity. As
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Christianity lays the Design of uniting us to God, and raising us to a more intimate Participation of the Divine Nature ; so we are to make the *Spirit* of our Religion, and the *Greatness* of its Designs, the *Rule* of our Perfection.

We must not only conduct ourselves by Rules of Morality, but pursue such Degrees of Purity, as can only be expressed by an *Imitation* of God, and aspire after such Wisdom, as is suggested to us, by considering that we are *Temples* of the Holy Ghost, and must live like Beings *consecrated* by the Spirit of Wisdom. If we were frequently to consider the holy Presence of this God within us, and to ask ourselves, Does this Discourse, this Behaviour, become one who is to act according to the *Inspirations* of the Divine Spirit ? We should find, that the very Thought of this Dignity of our State, would determine several Points where no express Law condemns us ; we should find such a Contrariety in many of our allowed Ways to our Christian Greatness, to this Holy Spirit that is given unto us, would sufficiently check our Behaviour, only by shewing us that we acted below ourselves.

It is common in Life to hear a Man say, This does not become a *Gentleman*, That does not become a Man of *Quality* : Now I would have us find out something like this in Religion ; for certainly if any State of
Life.

Life has its Dignity which can excite Men to a suitable Greatness of Action ; surely the State of a Christian, which is a state of such Relation to God, which unites us to his Holy Spirit, ought to raise in us a Desire of acting suitable to so exalted a condition. For who can so justly be afraid of acting *below himself*, as he that is made one with Christ ? Who can so reasonably think that he is never wise, or holy, or pure enough, as he that is to walk with God in the Light of his Holy Spirit, whose Soul and Body is made a *sacred Temple* for the Divine Presence.

The *beatben Philosophers* exhorted Man to reverence his *Reason*, as a *Ray* of the Deity ; but we can go much higher ; we can exhort him to reverence the Deity that dwelleth in him, and to act with such Purity, as becomes Persons that are *inspired* by the Holy Ghost.

This is the Improvement that we are to make of this Doctrine of Divine Grace ; it must make us exact and careful of our Behaviour, that we may walk worthy of that Holy Spirit that dwelleth in us.

C H A P. V.

Christians are called to a constant State of Prayer and Devotion.

IT is one principal Article of our Religion, to believe that our blessed Saviour is now at the right Hand of God, there making *perpetual Intercession* for us, till the Redemption of Mankind is finished. Prayer therefore is undoubtedly a proper Means of drawing near to God, a necessary Method of restoring Sinners to his Favour; since he, who has conquered Sin and Death, who is constituted Lord of all, is yet, as the *great Advocate* for Sinners, obliged to make *perpetual Intercession* for them.

Whenever therefore we are in the Spirit of Prayer; when our Hearts are lifted up to God, breathing out holy Petitions to the Throne of Grace, we have this Encouragement to be *constant* and *fervent* in it, that we are then joining with an Intercession at the right Hand of God, and doing that for ourselves on Earth, which our blessed Saviour is perpetually doing for us in Heaven. This Reason of Prayer is perhaps not much considered; yet it certainly contains a most powerful Motive to it. For who, that considers his Redemption as now carrying
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on by an *Intercession* in Heaven, can think himself so agreeable to God, so like his Saviour, as when the Constancy of his own Prayers bears some Resemblance to that never-ceasing Intercession which is made above? This shews us also, that we are most of all to desire those Prayers which are offered up at the *Altar*, where the Body and Blood of Christ are joined with them. For as our Prayers are only acceptable to God through the Merits of Jesus Christ; so we may be sure that we are praying to God in the most prevailing Way, when we thus pray in the Name of *Christ*, and plead his Merits in the *biggest Manner* that we can.

Devotion may be considered, either as an Exercise of publick or private Prayers at set Times and Occasions, or as a Temper of the Mind, a State and Disposition of the Heart, which is rightly affected with such Exercises. Now external Acts of Devotion, are like other external Actions, very liable to Falseness, and are only so far good and valuable, as they proceed from a right Disposition of Heart and Mind. Zealous Professions of *Friendship*, are but the more abominable Hypocrisy for being often repeated, unless there be an equal Zeal in the Heart; so solemn Prayers, rapturous Devotions, are but repeated Hypocrisies, unless the Heart and Mind be *conformable* to them. Since therefore it is the Heart only
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that is devout; since the Regularity and Fervency of the Heart is the Regularity and Fervency of Devotion; I shall consider Devotion chiefly in this respect, as it is a *State* and *Temper* of the Heart. For it is in this Sense only, that Christians are called to a *constant State* of Devotion; they are not to be always on their Knees in Acts of Prayer; but they are to be always in the State and Temper of Devotion.

Friendship does not require us to be always waiting upon our Friends in external Services; these Offices have their Times and Seasons of Intermision; it is only the Service of the Heart, the Friendship of the Mind, that is never to intermit; it is not to begin and end, as external Services do; but it is to persevere in a Constancy like the Motion of our Heart, or the beating of our Pulse. It is just so in Devotion; *Prayers* have their *Hours*, their Beginning and Ending; but that Turn of Mind, that Disposition of the Heart towards God, which is the Life and Spirit of Prayer, is to be as constant and lasting as our own Life and Spirit.

The repeating of a *Creed* at certain Times, is an Act of Faith; but that Faith, which *overcometh* the *World*, stays neither for Times nor Seasons, but is a living Principle of the Soul, that is always believing, trusting, and depending upon God. In the same manner, verbal Prayers are Acts of Devo-

Devotion; but that Prayer which saveth, which openeth the Gates of Heaven, stops not at *Forms* and *Manuals* of Devotion, but is a Language of the Soul, a Judgment of the Heart, which worships, adores, and delights in God, at all Times and Seasons.

The *Necessity* and *Reason* of Prayer is, like all other Duties of Piety, founded in the Nature of God, and the Nature of Man. It is founded in the Nature of God, as he is the sole Fountain and Cause of all Happiness; it is founded in the Nature of Man, as he is weak and helpless, and full of Wants. So that Prayer is an *earnest Application or Ascent of the Heart to God, as to the sole Cause of all Happiness*. He therefore that most truly feels the Misery, Corruption, and Weakness of his own Nature; who is most fully convinced of these two Truths, is most fully possessed of the Spirit of Prayer. There is but one way therefore to arrive at a true State of Devotion, and that is, to get right Notions of ourselves, and of the Divine Nature; that having a full View of the Relation we bear to God, our Souls may as constantly aspire to him, as they as constantly aspire after happiness. This also shews us the absolute necessity of all those fore-mentioned Doctrines of *Humility, Self-denial, and Renunciation of the World*. For if Devotion is founded in a Sense of the Poverty, Misery, and Weak-

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ness of our Nature, then nothing can more effectually destroy the Spirit of Devotion, than *Pride, Vanity,* and *Indulgence* of any Kind. These Things stop the breath of Prayer, and as necessarily extinguish the Flame of Dévotion, as Water extinguishes common Fire.

If Prayer is also founded in right Notions of God, in believing him to be the sole Fountain and Cause of all our Happiness; then every Thing that takes this Truth out of our Minds, that makes us *less sensible* of it, makes us so far *less capable* of Devotion; so that worldly Cares, vain Pleasures, false Satisfactions, are all to be renounced, that we may be able to pray. For the Spirit of Prayer has no farther hold of us, than so far as we see our Wants, Imperfections, and Weakness, and likewise the infinite Fulness and All-sufficiency of God; when we thoroughly feel these two great Truths, then are we in the true Spirit of Prayer. Would you therefore be in the State and Temper of Devotion, you must practise all those ways of Life that may humble you in your own Sight; you must forbear all those Indulgences and Vanities which blind your Heart, and give you false Notions of yourself; you must seek that Way of Life, accustom yourself to such Practices, as may best convince you of the Vanity of the World, and the Littleness of every Thing
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but God. This is the only foundation of Prayer. When you do not enough see either your own Littleness, or the Greatness of God; when you either seek for Pleasure in yourself, or think that it is any where to be found, except in God, you put yourself out of a State of Devotion. For you can desire nothing, but what you think you want; and you can desire it only in such a Degree, as you feel the want of it. It is certain therefore, that whatever lessens or abates the feeling of your own Wants, whatever takes you from looking to God, as the only possible Relief of them, so far lessens and abates the Spirit and Fervour of your Devotion.

We sometimes exhort People to Fervour in Devotion; but this can only mean as to the outward Acts of it: For to exhort People to be fervent in Devotion, as that implies a Temper of the Heart, is to as little purpose, as to exhort People to be *merry* or to be *sorry*. For these Tempers always follow the Judgments and Opinions of our Minds; when we perceive Things to be as we like them, then we are *merry*; when we find Things in a contrary State, then we are *sorry*. It comes to pass after the same manner in *Devotion*; bid a Man be fervent in Devotion, tell him it is an excellent Temper; he knows no more how to go about it, than how to be merry, be-

cause he is bid to be so. Stay till *old Age*, till *Sickness*, *Misfortunes*, or the Approach of *Death*, has convinced him that he has nothing good in himself; that there is nothing valuable in the World; that all that is good, or great, or glorious, is in God alone; and then he will find himself as disposed to Devotion, and zealous Desires after God, as the Man is disposed to Chearfulness, who sees Things in that State in which he would have them to be. So that the one and only way to be devout, is to see and feel our own Weakness, the Vanity of the World, and the Greatness of God, as dying Men see and feel them. It is as impossible to be *devout* without seeing Things in *this View*, as it is impossible to be *cheerful* without perceiving something in our Condition that is according to *our Mind*. Hence therefore we may learn to admire the Wisdom and Divinity of the Christian Religion, which calls all its Members to *Humility*, *Self-denial*, and a Renunciation of *worldly Tempers*, as a necessary Foundation of Piety and Devotion. It was in these Practices, that our Saviour first instituted his Religion; it was on these Conditions, that the Apostles embraced it, and taught it to others; it was in these Doctrines, that the primitive Christians became such worthy Followers of our Saviour and his Apostles. These Doctrines are still in
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the Gospel, and till they are to be found in our Lives, we shall never find ourselves in a State of Devotion. For I must again repeat, what my Reader cannot too much reflect upon, that since Devotion is an earnest Application of the Soul to God, as the only Cause and Fountain of Happiness, that it is impossible for the Soul to have this Desire, without having such Reasons to produce and support it, as are necessary to produce and support other Tempers of the Mind.

This may teach us to account for the several false kinds of Devotion which appear in the World; they cannot be otherwise than they are, because they have no bottom to support them. Devotion is like *Friendship*, you hear of it every-where, but find it no-where; in like manner, Devotion is every-where to be seen in *Modes* of Worship, in *Forms* of Speech, in outward Adorations, but is in *Reality* scarce to be found. Hence also it is, that you see as much Difference in the Devotion, as in the Faces of Christians; for wanting its true Foundation, being like an affected Friendship, it has as many *Shapes* as there are *Tempers* of Men. Many People are thus far sincere in their Devotions, that they would be glad to pray devoutly; they strive to be fervent, but never attain to it, because they never took the only possible Way.

* They never thought of altering their Lives, or of living different from the rest of the World; but hope to be devout, merely by reading over Books of Devotion. Which is as odd a Fancy, as if a Man should expect to be happy, by reading Discourses upon Happiness. When these People dare take Christianity as it is offered to them in the Gospel, when they deny themselves, and renounce the World, as our Saviour exhorted his Followers, they will then have begun Devotion.

Trebonius asks how often he shall pray: He thinks the Nicety of the Question shews the *Piety* and *Exactness* of his Heart; but *Trebonius* is deceived, for the Question proves, that he is a Stranger to Devotion. *Trebonius* has a Friend, he is constantly visiting him, he is never well out of his Company; if he is absent, Letters are sent at all Opportunities. Now what is the Reason that he never asks how often he shall visit, how often he shall delight in, how often he shall write to his Friend? It is because his Friend has his Heart, and his Heart is his faithful and sufficient Instructor. When *Trebonius* has given his Heart to God, when he takes God to be as great a Good, as substantial a Happiness as his Friend, he will have done asking how often he shall pray.

Julius

Julius goes to Prayers, he confesses himself to be a miserable Sinner, he accuses himself to God with all the Aggravations that can be, as having *no Health* in him; yet *Julius* cannot bear to be informed of any Imperfection, or suspected to be wanting in any Degree of Virtue. Now can there be a stronger Proof, that *Julius* is wanting in the Sincerity of his Devotions? Is not this a plain Sign, that his Confessions to God are only Words of *Course*, an humble *Civility* of Speech to his Maker, in which his Heart has no Share?

If a Man was to confess that his *Eyes* were bad, his *Hands* weak, his *Feet* feeble, and his Body helpless, he would not be angry with those that supposed he was not in perfect Strength, or that he might stand in need of some Assistance. Yet *Julius* confesses himself to be in great Weakness, Corruption, Disorder, and Infirmity; and yet is angry at any one that does but suppose him defective in any Virtue. Is it not the same thing as if he had said, *You must not imagine that I am in earnest in my Devotions?*

It would be endless to produce Instances of false Devotion; I shall therefore proceed no farther in it, but rather endeavour to explain and illustrate that which is true. Devotion, we see, is an earnest Application of the Soul to God as its only Happiness. This

104. is Devotion, considered as a *State* and *Temper* of the Mind. All those Texts of Scripture which call us to God, as our true and only good, which exhort us to a Fulness of Faith, of Hope, of Joy, and Trust in God, are to be considered as so many Exhortations to Devotion; because Devotion is only another Name for the Exercise of all these Virtues. That Soul is devoted to God, which constantly rises and tends towards God in habits of Love, Desire, Faith, Hope, Joy, and Trust. The End and Design of Religion, as ~~it~~ proposes to raise Men to a Life of Glory with Christ at the right Hand of God, carries a stronger Reason for Devotion, than any particular Exhortation to Prayer. *Beloved*, saith St. *John*, *It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* St. *Paul* also saith, *As we have borne the image of the Earthly, we shall also bear the image of the Heavenly.* (a)

Now these and such like Texts seem to me to carry the most powerful Motives, to awaken the Soul into a State of Devotion. For as the Apostle saith, *He that hath this Hope, purifieth himself, even as he is pure:* So he that hath this Hope of being taken into so glorious an Enjoyment of the Divine Nature, must find his Heart raised and en-

(a) 1 Cor. xv.

livened in thinking upon God. For these Truths cannot be believed without putting the Soul into a State of Prayer, Adoration, and Joy in God. The seeing thus far into Heaven, is seeing so many Motives to Praise and Thanksgiving.

It was this View of future Glory, that made the Apostle break out in this strain of Thanksgiving, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead, to an inheritance undefiled, and the fadeth not away.*

(a) And would we praise and adore God with such Thanksgiving as filled the Heart of this Apostle, we must raise it from a Contemplation of the same Truth, that *incorruptible Inheritance*: that is prepared for us.

Again; the same Apostle saith to the *Philippians*, *Our Conversation is in Heaven*; and as the Reason and Motive to this heavenly Conversation, he addeth; *Whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile Body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious Body.* (b) So that the most powerful Motive to Heavenly-mindedness, the plainest Reason for our Conversation in Heaven, is our Expectation of Christ's glorious Appearance when

(a) 1 Pet. i. 3.

(b) Phil. iii. 20.

he shall come to put an *End* to the Miseries of this Life, and cloath us with Robes of Immortality. These Truths much more effectually raise the Heart to God, than any particular precepts to Prayer; they do not so much exhort, as carry the Soul to Devotion: He that feels these Truths, feels himself devout; they leave a light upon the Soul, which will kindle into holy Flames of Love and Delight in God.

The way therefore to live in true Devotion, is to live in the Contemplation of these Truths; we must daily consider the End and Hope of our Calling, that our Minds may be formed and raised to such Tempers and Desires as are suitable to it, that all little Anxieties, worldly Passions, and vain Desires may be swallowed up in one great Desire of future Glory. When the Heart is in this State, then it is in a State of Devotion, tending to God in such a manner as justly suits the Nature of our Religion: For whither should our Hearts tend, but where our Treasure is? This Devotion to God, is signified in Scripture, by living by *Faith and not by Sight*, when the invisible Things of the other Life are the Reason, the Motive, and the Measure of all our Desires and Tempers. When Christians are thus settled in right Judgments of Things, and tending towards God in such Motions and Desires as are suitable to them, then are they devout Worshippers of

of God every where ; this makes the common Actions of their Life, Acts of Religion, and turns every Place into a *Chapel*. And it is to this State of Devotion that we are called, not only by particular Precepts, but by the whole Nature and Tenor of our Religion.

Now as all States and Tempers of the Mind must be supported by Actions and Exercises suitable to them, so Devotion, which is an earnest Application of the Soul to God, as its only Happiness, must be supported and kept alive by Actions and Exercises suitable to it, that is, by *Hours* and *Forms* of Prayer both publick and private. The Devotion of the Heart disposes us to observe set Times of Prayer ; and on the other hand, set Times of Prayer as naturally increase and enliven the Devotion of the Heart. It is thus in all other Cases ; Habits of the Mind dispose us to Actions suitable to them, and these Actions likewise strengthen and improve the Habits from whence they proceed.

It is the habitual Taste for *Musick*, that carries People to *Consorts* ; and again, it is *Consorts* that increase the habitual Love for *Musick*. So it is the right Disposition of the Heart towards God, that leads People to outward Acts of Prayer ; and on the other side, it is outward Acts of Prayer, that preserve and strengthen the right Disposition of the Heart towards God. As therefore we are to judge of the Significancy of our
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Prayers, by looking to the State and Temper of our Heart, so are we also to judge of the State of our Heart, by looking to the *frequency, constancy, and importunity* of our Prayers. For as we are sure that our Prayers are insignificant, unless they proceed from a right Heart, so unless our Prayers be *frequent, constant, and full of Importunity*, we may be equally sure that our Heart is not right towards God.

Let me now only add this one Word more. That he who has learned to pray, has learned the greatest secret of a holy and a happy Life. ~~Which~~ ^{Which} way so-ever else we let loose our Hearts, they will return unto us again empty and weary. Time will convince the vainest and blindest Minds, that Happiness is no more to be found in the Things of this World than it is to be dug out of the Earth. But when the Motions of our Hearts are Motions of Piety, tending to God in constant acts of Devotion, Love and Desire, then we have found rest unto our Souls; then is it that we have conquered the Misery of our Nature, and neither love nor desire in vain; then is it that we have found out a Good suited to our Natures, that is equal to all our wants, that is a constant source of Comfort and Refreshment, that will fill us with Peace and joyful expectations here, and eternal Happiness hereafter. For he
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that lives in the Spirit and Temper of Devotion, whose Heart is always full of God, lives at the top of human Happiness, and is the farthest removed from all the Vanities and Vexations, which disturb and weary the Minds of Men that are devoted to the World.

C H A P. VI.

All Christians are required to imitate the Life and Example of Jesus Christ.

OUR Religion teaches us, that as we have borne the Image of the earthly, so we shall bear the Image of the heavenly; that after our Death we shall rise to a State of Life and Happiness, like to that life and Happiness which our blessed Saviour enjoys at the right Hand of God. Since therefore it is the great end of our Religion to make us Fellow-Heirs with Christ, and partakers of the same Happiness, it is not to be wondered at, that our Religion should require us to be like Christ in this Life, to imitate his Example, that we may enter into that State of Happiness which he enjoys in the Kingdom of Heaven.

For how can we think that we are going to the blessed Jesus, that we are to be hereafter as he is, unless we conform to his Spirit in this Life, and make it our great Endeavour

deavour to be what he was when he was here. Let it therefore here be observed, that the *Nature* of our Religion teaches us this Duty in a more convincing Manner, than any particular precepts concerning it. For the most ordinary Understanding must feel the Force and Reasonableness of this Argument. You are born to depart out of this World, to ascend to that State of Bliss, to live in such Enjoyment of God to all Eternity, as our blessed Saviour now enjoys; you ~~are~~ therefore to live in the Spirit and Temper that he lived, and make yourselves first like him here, that you may be like him hereafter. So that we need not look for particular Texts of Scripture, which command us to imitate the life of Christ; because we are taught this Duty by a stronger and more convincing Authority; because as the End and Design of our Religion is to make us one with Christ hereafter, Partakers of the same State of Life; so it plainly calls us to be one with him here, and to be Partakers of the same Spirit and Temper in which he lived on Earth. When it is said, that we are to imitate the Life of Christ, it is not meant, that we are called to the same manner of Life, or the same Sort of Actions, for this cannot be; but it is certain that we are called to the same Spirit and Temper, which was the Spirit and Temper of our blessed Saviour's Life and Acti-

Actions. We are to be like him in Heart and Mind, to act by the *same Rule*; to look towards the *same End*, and to govern our Lives by the *same Spirit*. This is an Imitation of Jesus Christ, which is as necessary to Salvation, as it is necessary to believe in his Name, This is the sole End of all the Counsels, Commands, and Doctrines of Christ, to make us like himself, to fill us with his *Spirit* and *Temper*, and make us live according to the Rule and Manner of his Life. As no Doctrines are true, but such as are according to the Doctrines of Christ, so it is equally certain, that no Life is regular or christian, but such as is according to the Pattern and Example of the Life of Christ. For he lived as infallibly as he taught; and it is as irregular to vary from his Example, as it is false to dissent from his Doctrines. To live as he lived, is as certainly the one sole Way of living as we ought, as to believe as he taught, is the one sole way of believing as we ought *I am, saith the blessed Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.*

We may as well expect to go to a Heaven where Christ is not, as to go to that where he is, without the Spirit and Temper which carried him thither. If Christians would but suffer themselves to reflect upon this Duty, their own Minds would soon

soon convince them of the Reasonableness and Necessity of it. For who can find the least Shadow of a Reason why he should not imitate the Life of Christ, or why Christians should think of any other Rule of Life? It would be as easy to shew that Christ acted amiss, as that we need not act after his Example. And to think that there are Degrees of Holiness, which, though very good in themselves, are yet not necessary for us to aspire after, is the same Absurdity as to think, that it was not necessary for our Saviour to have ~~been~~ so perfect himself as he was. For, give but the Reason why such Degrees of Holiness and Purity became our Saviour, and you will give as good a Reason for us to aspire after them. For as the blessed Jesus took not on him the Nature of Angels, but the Nature of Man, as he was in all Points made like unto us, Sin only excepted; so we are sure that there was no Spirit or Temper that was excellent in him, that recommended him to God, but would be also excellent in us, and recommend us to God, if we could arrive at it.

If it should be said, that Jesus was the *Saviour* of the World, that he was born to *redeem* Mankind, was the *Son of God*, and therefore in a Condition so different from ours, that his Life can be no Rule of our Life. To this it may be answered, that these Differences do not make the Life of Christ to be less the *Rule and Model* of all Christ-

Christians. A *Servant* of the lowest Order is in a very different State from his Master ; yet we may very justly exhort such a one to follow the Example of a pious and charitable Master ; not because he can perform the *same Instances* of Piety and Charity, but because he may shew the *same Spirit* of Piety and Charity in the Actions proper to his State. This may shew us, that the different State of our Lord and Master leaves him still the *exact Rule* and *Pattern* of his lowest Servants, who, tho' they cannot come up to the Greatness of his ~~Actions~~, may yet act according to that Spirit from whence they proceeded ; and then are they true Followers of Christ, when they are following his Spirit and Temper, acting according to his Ends and Designs, and doing that in their several States which Christ did in his.

The blessed Jesus came into the World to save the World ; now we must enter into this same Design, and make *Salvation* the greatest Business of our Lives ; though we cannot, like him, contribute towards it, yet we must contribute all that we can, and make the Salvation of ourselves and others, the one only great Care of our Lives.

The Apostle saith, *Destroy not him with thy Meat for whom Christ died, (a)*. We may therefore justly reason thus with ourselves, that as it lies much in our Power to hinder the Salvation, so it must be in our Power in an equal Degree to edify and promote

(a) Rom. xiv. 15.

mote the Salvation of those whom Jesus Christ died to save. Destroy not therefore by thy Negligence, by thy Impatience, by thy Want of Care, that Relation for whom Christ died, nor think that thou hast done enough to save those that relate to thee, till there is no more that thou canst do for them. This is the State in which all Christians are to consider themselves, as appointed by God in their several Stations, to carry on that great Work, for which Christ came into the World. *Clergymen* are not the only Men that have a *Cure* of Souls, but every Christian has some People about him, whose Salvation he is obliged to be careful of, with whom he is to live in all Godliness and Purity, that they may have the Benefit of his Example and Assistance in their Duty to God. So that all Christians, though ever so *low*, and *mean*, and *private*, must consider themselves as *hired* by Christ to work in his *Vineyard*; for as no Circumstances of Life can hinder us from saving ourselves, so neither can they hinder us from promoting the Salvation of others. Now though we have, according to our different Stations, different Parts to act: yet if we are careful of that Part which is fallen to our Share, we may make ourselves equally Objects of God's Favours.

Thou, it may be, art not a *Prophet*, God has not honoured thee with this Post
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in his Service, yet needest thou not fall short of this Happiness; for our Saviour hath said, *That he that receiveth a Prophet in the Name of a Prophet, shall receive a Prophet's Reward.* Now this shews us, that though all men have not the same Part to act in the common Salvation; yet that none will be Losers by that State they are in, if they be but true to the particular Duties of it. If they do all the Good they can in their *particular State*, they will be looked upon with such Acceptance as the *poor Widow* that gave all that she had. Hence we may learn the Greatness of their Folly, who neglecting the exact Performance of such Duties as fall within their Power, are pleasing themselves with the great Things they would do, were they but in another State.

Clemens has his Head full of imaginary Piety. He is often proposing to himself what he would do if he had a great Estate; he would outdo all charitable Men that are gone before him: He would retire from the World; he would have no Equipage; he would allow himself only Necessaries, that Widows and Orphans, the Sick and Distressed might find Relief out of his Estate. He tells you, that all other Ways of spending an Estate is Folly and Madness.

Now *Clemens* has at present a moderate Estate, which he spends upon himself in the same

same Vanities and Indulgences, as other People do : He might live upon one Third of his Fortune, and make the rest the Support of the Poor ; but he does nothing of all this that is in his Power, but pleases himself with what he would do, if his power was greater. Come to thy Senses, *Clemens* ; do not talk what thou wouldst do if thou wast an *Angel*, but consider what thou canst do as thou art a *Man*. Make the best use of thy *present State*, do now as thou thinkest thou would do with a great Estate, be *sparing*, *deny* thyself, *abstain* from all Vanities, that the Poor may be better maintained, and then thou art as charitable as thou canst be in any Estate. Remember the poor *Widow's Mite*.

Fervidus is a regular Man, and exact in the Duties of Religion ; but then the Greatness of his Zeal to be doing Things that he cannot, makes him overlook those little Ways of doing Good, which are every Day in his Power. *Fervidus* is only sorry that he is not in Holy Orders, and that his Life is not spent in a Business the most desirable of all Things in the World. He is often thinking what Reformation he would make in the World, if he was a *Priest* or a *Bishop* ; he would have devoted himself wholly to God and Religion, and have had no other care but how to save Souls. But do not believe yourself, *Fervidus* ; for if you desired in earnest

earnest to be a Clergyman, that you might devote yourself entirely to the Salvation of others, why then are you not doing all that you can in the State that you are now in? Would you take extraordinary Care of a *Parish*, or a *Diocese*, why then are you not as extraordinary in the Care of your Family? If you think the Care of other People's Salvation to be the happiest Business in the World, why do you neglect the Care of those who are fallen into your Hands? Why do you shew no concern for the Souls of your Servants? If they do their Business for which you hired them, you never trouble your Head about their Christianity. Nay, *Fervidus*, you are so far from labouring to make those that are about you truly devout and holy, that you almost put it out of their power to be so. You hire a *Coachman* to carry you to Church, and to sit in the Street with your *Horses*, whilst you are attending upon Divine Service. You never ask him how he supplies the Loss of Divine Service, or what Means he takes to preserve himself in a State of Piety. You imagine that if you were a *Clergyman*, you would be ready to lay down your Life for your Flock; yet you cannot lay aside a *little State* to promote the Salvation of your Servants. It is not desired of you, *Fervidus*, to die a *Martyr* for your Brethren; you are only
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required to go to *Church* on Foot, to spare some *State* and *Attendance*, to bear sometimes with a little *Rain* and *Dirt*, rather than keep those Souls, which are as dear to God and Christ as yours is, from their *full Share* in the common Worship of Christians. Do but deny yourself such small Matters as these, let us but see that you can take the least trouble to make all your Servants and Dependants true Servants of God, and then you shall be allowed to imagine what Good you would have done, had you been devoted to the Altar.

Eugenia is a good young Woman, full of pious Dispositions; she is intending, if ever she has a Family, to be the *best Mistress* of it that ever was, her House shall be a *School* of Religion, and her Children and Servants shall be brought up in the strictest Practice of Piety; she will spend her Time, and live in a very different Manner from the rest of the World. It may be so, *Eugenia*; the Piety of your Mind makes me think that you intend all this with Sincerity. but you are not yet the Head of a Family, and perhaps never may be. But, *Eugenia*, you have now one Maid, and you do not know what Religion she is of; she dresses you for the Church, you ask her for what you want, and then leave her to have as little Christianity as she pleases. You turn her away, you hire another, she comes, and goes

goes no more instructed or edified in Religion by living with you, than if she lived with any body else. And all this comes to pass, because your Mind is taken up with greater Things, and you reserve yourself to make a whole Family religious, if ever you come to be Head of it. You need not stay, *Eugenia*, to be so extraordinary a Person, the Opportunity is now in your Hands, you may now spend your Time, and live in as different a Manner from the rest of the World, as ever you can in any other State. Your *Maid* is your Family at present, she is under your Care, be now that religious Governess that you intend to be; teach her the *Catechism*, hear her read, exhort her to pray, take her with you to Church, persuade her to love the Divine Service as you love it, edify her with your Conversation, fill her with your own Notions of Piety, and spare no pains to make her as Holy and Devout as yourself. When you do thus much good in your present State, then are you that extraordinary Person that you intend to be; and till you thus live up to your present State, there is but little hope that the altering of your State will alter your Way of Life.

I might easily produce more Instances of this Kind, where People are vainly pleasing themselves with an *imaginary* Perfection to be arrived at some time or other, when they
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are in different Circumstances, and neglecting that real good which is proper to their State, and always in their Power. But these are, I hope, sufficient to shew my Reader how to examine his own Life, and find out himself, if I have not done it for him.

There is no Falseness of our Hearts, that leads us into greater Errors, than imagining that we shall some time or other be better than we are, or need be now ; for *Perfection* has no dependence upon *external* Circumstances, it wants no *Times* or *Opportunities* ; but is then in its highest State, when we are making the *best Use* of that Condition in which we are placed. The *poor Widow* did not stay till she was *Rich*, before she contributed to the Treasury ; she readily brought her Mite, and little as it was, it got her the Reward and Commendation of great Charity. We must therefore all of us imitate the Wisdom of the poor Widow, and exercise every Virtue in the same manner that she exercised her Charity. We must stay for no Time or Opportunities, wait for no *Change* of Life, or *fancied Abilities*, but remember that every Time is a Time for Piety and Perfection. Every thing but Piety has its Hindrances ; but Piety, the more it is hindered, the higher it is raised. Let us therefore not vainly say, that if we had lived in our Saviour's Days, we would have followed him, or if we could
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work Miracles, we would devote ourselves to his Glory. For to follow Christ as far as we can in our present State, and to do all we are able for his Glory, is as acceptable to him, as if we were working Miracles in his Name.

The Greatness that we are to aim at, is not the Greatness of our Saviour's *particular Actions*; but it is the Greatness of his Spirit and Temper, that we are to act by in all parts of our Lives. Now every State of Life, whether *publick* or *private*, whether *bond* or *free*, whether *high* or *low*, is capable of being conducted and governed by the same *Spirit* and *Temper*, and consequently every State of Life may carry us to the same Degree of Likeness in Christ. So that though we can in *no Respect* come up to the Actions, yet we must in every Respect act by the Spirit and Temper of Christ. *Learn of Me*, saith our blessed Lord, *for I am meek and lowly in Heart*.

He doth not say, Be ye in the State and Condition that I am in, for that was impossible; yet though ever so different in State and Condition, he calls upon us to be like him in Meekness and Lowliness of Heart and Spirit, and makes it necessary for us to go through our particular State with that Spirit and Temper which was the Spirit and Temper of his whole Life. So far therefore as we can learn the Heart and Spirit of our Saviour, so far as

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we can discover the Wisdom, Purity, and Heavenliness of his Designs; so far we have learned what Spirit and Temper we ought to be of, and must no more think ourselves at Liberty to act by any other Spirit, than we are at Liberty to chuse another Saviour.

In all our Actions and ways of Life we must appeal to this Rule, we must reckon ourselves no farther living like Christians, than as we live like Christ; and be assured, that so far as we depart from the Spirit of Christ, so far we depart from that State to which he has called us. For the blessed Jesus has called us to live as he did, to walk in the same Spirit as he walked, that we may be in the same Happiness with him when this Life is at an End. And indeed who can think that any thing but the *same Life* can lead to the *same State*?

The Spirit and Temper of Christ is the *strict Measure* of the Spirit and Temper of all Christians. It is not in this or that particular Temper of Christ, that we are to follow his Example; but we are to aspire after his whole Spirit, to be in all Things as he was, and think it as dangerous to depart from his Spirit and Temper in one Instance, as in another. For besides, that there is the same Authority in all that our Saviour did, which obliges us to conform
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his whole Example: Can any one tell why we should have more Value for this World than our Saviour had? What is there in our *State* and *Circumstances*, that can make it proper for us to have more Affection for the Things of this Life, than our Saviour had? Is the World any more our *Happiness*, than it was his *Happiness*? Are Riches, and Honours, and Pleasures, any more our *proper Good*, than they were his? Are we any more born for this Life than our Saviour was? Are we in less Danger of being *corrupted* by its Enjoyments, than he was? Are we more at leisure to take up *our Rest*, and spend our Time in worldly Satisfactions, than he was? Have we Work upon our Hands that we can *more easily finish*, than he could finish his? That requires of us less *Mortification* and *Self-denial*, less *Devotion* and *Watching*, than our Saviour's required of him? Now as nothing of this can be said; so nothing can be said in our Excuse, if we follow not our Saviour's Temper in this Respect. As this World is as little our *Happiness*, and more our *Danger*, than it was his; as we have a Work to finish that requires *all our Strength*; that is as *contrary* to the World, as our Saviour's was; it is plain there was no reason or necessity of his disregard of the World, but what is the same Reason and Necessity for us to disregard it in the same Manner.

I came down from Heaven (saith our Saviour) *not to do my own Will, but the Will of him that sent me.*

And again, *My Meat and Drink is to do the Will of him that sent me.* Now can any Christian shew, why he may think otherwise of himself, than our Saviour here thought? Or that he need be *less devoted* to the Glory of God than he was? What is there in our Nature and *Condition* to make any difference of this Kind? Do we not stand in the same Relation to God that our Saviour did? Have we not the same Nature that he had? Are we too great to be made happy in the same Way that he was? Or can any Thing else be the Happiness of our Nature, but that which was the Happiness of his? Was he a *Sufferer, a Loser*? Did he leave the true Happiness of *human Life*, by devoting himself to the Will of God? Or can this be our Case, though it was not his? Can we be *Losers*, by looking to God *alone*, and devoting ourselves to his Glory? Was it not the Greatness and Happiness of our Saviour that he lived to God alone? And is there any other Happiness or Greatness for us, but by making that the End and Aim of our Life, which he made the End and Aim of his Life?

For we may as well seek out for another God, as for another Happiness, or another Way to it, than that in which Christ is
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gone before us. He did not mistake the Nature of *Man*, or the Nature of the *World*; he did not overlook any *real Felicity*, or pass any *solid Good*; he only made the best Use of Human Life, and made it the Cause of all the Happiness and Glory that can arise from it. To find a Reason therefore, why we should live otherwise than he lived; why we should less seek the Glory of God, than he sought it; is to find a Reason why we should less promote our own Greatness and Glory. For our State and Condition in this Life says us under *all the Obligations* that our Saviour was under, to live as he did; his Life is as much our *right Way*, as it was his; and his Spirit and Temper is as *necessary* for our Condition, as it was for his, for this World and all the Things of the World signify as *little* to us, as they did to him; we are no more in our *true State*, till we are got out of this World, than he was; and we have no other Way to arrive at true Felicity and Greatness, but by so *devoting* ourselves to God, as our blessed Saviour did. We must therefore make it the great Business and Aim of our Lives, to be like Christ; and this not in a *loose* or *general* Way, but with great *Nicety* and *Exactness*, always looking to his *Spirit*, to his *Ends* and *Designs*, to his *Temper*, to his Ways and Conversation in

the World as the *exact Model* and *Rule* of our Lives.

Again, *Learn of me*, (saith our blessed Saviour) *for I am meek and lowly of Heart*. Now this passage is to be considered, not as a piece of good Advice, that would be of Use to us, but as a *positive Command*, requiring a *necessary Duty*. And if we are commanded to learn of Christ Meekness and Lowliness, then we are commanded in the same *positive Manner*, to learn his *Meekness* and *Lowliness*. For if we might take up with a Meekness and Lowliness of Heart that was *not his*, then it would not be necessary to learn them of him. Since therefore we are commanded to learn them of him, it is plain, that it is his Meekness and Lowliness that we are commanded to learn; that is, we are to be meek and lowly, not in any *loose* or *general* Sense of the Words, not according to the *Opinions* and *Practices* of Men, but in such *Truth* and *Reality* as Christ was meek and lowly.

It ought also be observed, that there must be something very *extraordinary* in these Dispositions of the Heart, from the Manner in which we are taught them. It is only in this Place, that our Saviour says expressly, *Learn of me*; and when he says, *Learn of me*, he does not say, for I am just and equitable, or kind or holy, but *I am meek and lowly of Heart*; as if he would teach

teach us, that these are the Tempers which most of all *distinguish* his Spirit and which he most of all requires his Followers to learn of him: For consider, does Christ, when he describes himself, chuse to do it by *these Tempers*? When he calls upon us to learn of him, does he only mention *these Tempers*? And is not this a sufficient Proof that these are Tempers, which the Followers of Christ are most of all obliged to learn; and that we are then most *unlike* to Christ, when we are wanting in them?

I shall now leave this Subject to the Reader's own Meditation, with this one farther Observation.

We see the Height of our Calling; that we are called to follow the Example of our Lord and Master; and to go through this World with his Spirit and Temper. Now nothing is so likely a Means to fill us with his Spirit and Temper, as to be frequent in reading the *Gospels*, which contain the History of his Life and Conversation in the World. We are apt to think that we have sufficiently read a Book, when we have so read it, as to know what it contains: This reading may be sufficient as to many Books; but as to the *Gospels*, we are not to think that we have ever read them enough, because we have often read and heard what they contain. But we must read them as we do our *Prayers*, not to know

know what they contain, but to fill our
 Hearts with the Spirit of them. There is
 as much Difference betwixt reading, and
 reading, as there is betwixt praying, and
 praying. And as no one prays well, but
 he that is daily and constant in Prayer; so
 no one can read the Scriptures to sufficient
 Advantage, but he that is daily and con-
 stant in the reading of them. By thus con-
 versing with our blessed Lord; looking into
 his Actions and Manner of Life; hearing
 his Divine Sayings; his Heavenly Instruc-
 tions; his Accounts of the Terrors of the
 Damned; his Descriptions of the Glory of
 the Righteous, we should find our Hearts
 formed and disposed to *Hunger and Thirst*
after Righteousness. Happy they, who saw
 the Son of God upon Earth converting Sin-
 ners, and calling *fallen Spirits* to return to
 God! And next happy are we, who have
 his Discourses, Doctrines, Actions, and
 Miracles, which then converted *Jews and*
Heathens into *Saints and Martyrs*, still pre-
 served to fill us with the same Heavenly
 Light, and lead us to the same State of
 Glory!

CHAP.

C. H. A. P. VII.

An Exhortation to Christian Perfection.

THE Apostle thus exhorts the Corinthi-
ans, wherefore my beloved Brethren,
be ye stedfast, immovable, alway abounding in
the Work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know,
that your Labour will not be in vain in the
Lord. (a) This is an Exhortation founded
upon solid Reason; for what can be so wise
and reasonable, as to be always abounding
in *that Work* which will never be *in vain?*
Whilst we are pleased with ourselves, or
pleased with the World, we are pleased
with Vanity, and our most prosperous La-
bours of this Kind are, as the Preacher saith,
but Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity. But
whilst we are labouring after Christian
Perfection, we are labouring for Eternity,
and building to ourselves higher Stations in
the Joys of Heaven. *As one Star differeth*
from another Star in Glory, so also is the
Resurrection of the dead: We shall surely
rise to different Degrees of Glory, of Joy
and Happiness in God, according to our
different Advancements in Purity, Holi-
ness, and good Works.

(a) I Cor. xv.

No Degrees of Mortification and Self-denial, no private Prayers, no secret Mourning, no Instances of Charity, no Labour of Love will ever be forgotten, but all treasured up to our everlasting Comfort and Refreshment. For though the Rewards of the other Life are free Gifts of God; yet since he has assured us, that every Man shall be rewarded according to his Works, it is certain, that our Rewards will be as different as our Works have been.

Now stand still here a while, and ask yourself, whether you readily believe this to be true, that the more perfect we make ourselves here, the more happy we shall be hereafter. If you do not believe this to be strictly true, you know nothing of God or Religion. And if you do believe it to be true, is it possible to be *awake*, and not aspiring after Christian Perfection? What can you think of, what can the World shew you, that can make you any amends for the Loss of *any Degree of Virtue*? Can any way of Life make it reasonable for you, to die *less perfect* than you might have done?

If you would now devote yourself to Perfection, perhaps you must part with some Friends, you must displease some Relations, you must lay aside some Designs, you must refrain from some Pleasures, you must alter your Life; nay, perhaps you must do more
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than this, you must expose yourself to the Hatred of your Friends, to the Jest and Ridicule of *Wits*, and the Scorn and Derision of worldly Men: But had you not better do and suffer all this, than to die *less perfect*, less prepared for Mansions of eternal Glory? But indeed, the suffering all this, is suffering nothing. For why should it signify any thing to you, what *Fools* and *Madmen* think of you? And surely it can be no wrong or rash Judgment, to think those both *Fools* and *Mad*, who condemn what God approves, and like that which God condemns. But if you think this too much to be done, to obtain eternal Glory, think on the other hand, what can be gained instead of it.

Fancy yourself living in all the Ease and Pleasure that the World can give you, esteemed by your Friends, undisturbed by your Enemies, and gratifying all your *natural Tempers*. If you could *stand still* in such a State, you might say, that you had got *something*; but alas! every Day that is *added* to such a Life, is the same thing as a Day taken from it, and shews you that so much Happiness is gone from you; for be as happy as you will, you must see it all sinking away from you; you must feel yourself *decline*; you must see that your Time *shortens apace*; you must hear of *sudden*

den Deaths; you must fear *Sickness*; you must both dread and desire *old Age*; you must fall into the hands of *Death*; you must either die in the painful, bitter *Sorrows* of a deep *Repentance*, or in a sad, gloomy *Despair*, wishing for *Mountains to fall upon you*, and *Seas to cover you*. And is this a *Happiness* to be chosen? Is this all that you can gain by neglecting *God*, by following your own *Desires*, and not labouring after *Christian Perfection*? Is it worth your while to separate yourself from *God*, to lose your Share in the *Realms of Light*, to be thus *happy*, or, I may better say, to be thus *miserable*, even in this *Life*? You may be so blind and foolish, as not to think of these *Things*; but it is impossible to think of them, without labouring after *Christian Perfection*. It may be you are too young, too happy, or too busy to be affected with these *Reflections*; but let me tell you, that *all* will be over before you are aware; your *Day* will be spent, and leave you to such a *Night*, as that which surpris'd the *foolish Virgins*. And at *Midnight* there was a great *Cry* made, *Behold! the Bridegroom cometh, go you out to meet him.* (a).

The *last Hour* will soon be with you, when you will have nothing to look for but your *Reward* in another *Life*; when you will

(a) Matth. xxv. 6.

stand with nothing but *Eternity* before you, and must begin to be *something* that will be your State for ever. I can no more *reach* Heaven with my Hands, than I can describe the Sentiments that you will then have; you will then feel Motions of Heart that you never felt before; all your Thoughts and Reflections will pierce your Soul, in a Manner that you never before experienced; and you will feel the Immortality of your Nature by the Depth and piercing Vigour of your Thoughts. You will then know what it is to die; you will then know, that you never knew it before, that you never thought worthily of it; but that dying Thoughts are as *new* and *amazing*, as that State which follows them.

Let me therefore exhort you to come prepared to this Time of Trial; to look out for Comfort, whilst the Day is before you; to treasure up such a *Fund* of good and pious Works, as may make you able to bear that State, which cannot be borne without them. Could I any way make you apprehend, how dying men feel the want of a pious Life; how they lament Time lost, Health and Strength squandered away in Folly; how they look at Eternity, and what they think of the Rewards of another Life, you would soon find yourself one of those, who desired to live in the highest State of Piety and Perfection, that by this Means

Means you may grow old in Peace, and die in full Hopes of eternal Glory.

Consider again, that besides the Rewards of the other Life, the labouring after Christian Perfection, or devoting yourself wholly to God, has a great reward even in this Life, as it makes Religion *doubly* pleasant to you. Whilst you are divided betwixt God and the World, you have neither the Pleasures of Religion, nor the Pleasures of the World; but are always in the uneasiness of a divided State of Heart. You have only so much Religion as serves to disquiet you; to check your Enjoyments; to shew you a *Hand-Writing upon the Wall*; to interrupt your Pleasures; to reproach you with your Follies; and to appear as a *Death's-Head* at all your Feasts; but not Religion enough to give you a Taste and Feeling of its proper Pleasures and Satisfaction. You dare not wholly neglect Religion; but then you take no more of it, than is just sufficient to keep you from being a Terror to yourself; and you are as loth to be *very good*, as you are fearful to be *very bad*. So that you are just as happy as the *Slave*, that dares not run away from his Master, and yet always serves him against his Will. So that instead of having a Religion that is your *Comfort* in all Troubles, your Religion is itself a *Trouble*, under which

which you want to be comforted ; and those Days and Times hang heaviest upon your Hands, which leave you only to the Offices and Duties of Religion. *Sunday* would be very dull and tiresome, but that it is but one Day in *seven*, and is made a Day of *Dressing* and *Visiting*, as well as of Divine Service : You do not care to keep away from the publick Worship, but are always glad when it is over. This is the State of a *Half-piety* ; thus they live who add Religion to a worldly Life ; all their Religion is mere *Yoke* and *Burden*, and is only made tolerable by having but little of their Times.

Urbanus goes to Church, but he hardly knows whether he goes out of a Sense of Duty, or to meet his Friends. He wonders at those People who are *prophane*, and what Pleasure they can find in Irreligion ; but then he is in as great a wonder at those, who would make every Day, a Day of Divine Worship ; he feels no more of the Pleasures of Piety, than of the Pleasures of *Prophaneness*. As Religion has every thing from him, but his *Heart*, so he has every thing from Religion, but its *Comforts*. *Urbanus* likes Religion, because it seems an *easy* Way of pleasing God ; a *decent* Thing, that takes up but little of our Time, and is a proper *Mixture* in Life. But if he was reduced to take *Comfort* in it, he would be
as

as much at a Loss, as those who lived without God in the World. When *Urbanus* thinks of Joy, and Pleasure, and Happiness, he does not think at all of Religion; He has gone through a hundred Misfortunes, fallen into Variety of Hardships; but never thought of making Religion his *Comfort* in any of them; he makes himself quiet and happy in another Manner. He is content with his Christianity, not because he is *Pious*, but because he is not *Prophane*. He continues in the same Course of Religion, not because of any real good he ever found in it, but because it does him no hurt.

To such poor Purposes as these do Numbers of People profess Christianity. Let me therefore exhort you to a *solid Piety*, to devote yourself wholly unto God, that entering deep into Religion, you may enter deep into its Comforts, that serving God with all your Heart, you may have the Peace and Pleasure of a Heart that is at Unity with itself. When your Conscience once bears you Witness, that you are *steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the Work of the Lord*, you will find that your Reward is already begun, and that you could not be less devout, less holy, less charitable, or less humble, without lessening the most substantial Pleasure that ever you felt in your Life. So that to be content

tent with any lower Attainments in Piety, is to rob ourselves of a present Happiness, which nothing else can give us.

You would perhaps devote yourself to Perfection, but for this or that *little Difficulty* that lies in your way; you are not in so convenient a State for the full Practice of Piety as you could wish. But consider, that this is Nonsense, because Perfection consists in conquering Difficulties. You could not be perfect, as the present State of Trial requires, had you not those Difficulties and Inconveniencies to struggle with. These things therefore which you would have removed, are laid in your Way, that you may make them so many Steps to Perfection and Glory.

As you could not exercise your Charity, unless you met with Objects; so neither could you shew that you had *overcome* the World, unless you had many worldly Engagements to overcome. If all your *Friends* and *Acquaintance* were Devout, Humble, Heavenly-minded, and wholly intent upon the one End of Life, it would be less Perfection in you to be like them. But if you are *Humble* amongst those that delight in Pride, *Heavenly-minded* amongst the Worldly, *Sober* amongst the Intemperate, *Devout* amongst the Irreligious, and labouring after *Perfection* amongst those that despise and ridicule your Labours; then are you truly

truly devoted unto God. Consider therefore, that you can have no Difficulty, but such as the World lays in your Way, and that Perfection is never to be had, but by parting with the World. It consists in nothing else. To stay therefore to be perfect, till it suits with your Condition in the World, is like staying to be charitable, till there were no Objects of Charity. It is as if a Man should intend to be courageous some Time or other, when there is nothing left to try his Courage.

Again; you perhaps turn your Eyes upon the World; you see all Orders of People full of other Cares and Pleasures; you see the generality of *Clergy* and *Laity*, Learned and Unlearned; your Friends and Acquaintance, mostly living according to the Spirit that reigneth in the World; you are perhaps content with such a *Piety*, as you think contents great *Scholars*, and *famous* Men; and, it may be, you cannot think that God will reject such Numbers of Christians. Now all this is amusing yourself with nothing; it is only losing yourself in vain Imaginations; it is making that a *Rule*, which is no Rule, and cheating yourself into a false Satisfaction. As you are not censoriously to damn other People; so neither are you to think your own Salvation secure, because you are like the Generality of the World.

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The *foolish Virgins* that had provided no Oil for their Lamps, and so were shut out of the Marriage-feast, were only thus far foolish, that they trusted to the *Assistance* of those that were *Wise*. But you are more *foolish* than they; for you trust to be saved by the *Folly* of others; you imagine yourself safe in the *Negligence, Vanity, and Irregularity* of the World. You take confidence in the *broad Way*, because it is *broad*; you are content with yourself, because you seem to be along with the *many*, though God himself has told you, that *narrow* is the Way that leadeth unto Life, and *few* there be that find it.

Lastly, One word more and I have done; think with yourself what a Happiness it is, that you have it in your power to secure a Share in the Glories of Heaven, and make yourself one of those blessed Beings that are to live with God for ever. Reflect upon the Glories of bright Angels, that shine about the Throne of Heaven; think upon that fulness of Joy, which is the State of Christ at the right Hand of God; and remember, that it is this same State of Glory and Joy that lies open for you. You are less, it may be in Worldly Distinctions than many others: but as to your Relation to God, you have no superior upon Earth. Let your Condition be what it will, let your Life be ever so mean, you may make the

End

End of it the beginning of eternal Glory. Be often therefore in these Reflections, that they may fill you with a wise Ambition of all that Glory, which God in Christ hath called you to. For it is impossible to understand and feel any thing of this, without feeling your Heart affected with strong Desires after it. The hopes and Expectations of so much Greatness and Glory, must needs awake you into earnest Desires and Longings after it. There are many Things in human Life, which it would be in vain for you to aspire after; but the Happiness of the next, which is the Sum of all Happiness, is secure and safe to you against all Accidents. Here no Changes or Misfortunes can prevent your Success; neither the Treachery of Friends, nor the Malice of Enemies can disappoint you; it is only your own false Heart that can rob you of this Happiness. Be but your own true Friend, and then you have Nothing to fear from your Enemies. Do but you sincerely labour in the Lord, and then neither Height nor Depth, neither Life nor Death, neither Men nor Devils can make your Labour in vain.



F I N I S.

