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TREATISE

ON

Christian Prudence.



Extracted from Mr. *NORRIS*,

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FELLOW of *Lincoln-College*, OXON.



The THIRD EDITION.



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C H R I S T I A N P R U D E N C E.



C H A P. I.

*Of the End proposed by Christian Prudence,
and the General Means of obtaining it.*

1: **B**Y Prudence I here mean; the same with Wisdom, a practical Knowledge of the best End and the best Means to attain it, actually directing us to the Choice of that End, and the Use of those Means.

2: The End of every reasonable Creature is God: For He alone is the true Object of our Happiness: All the Happiness we desire, or are capable of, being to be found in Him, and Him only.

3. That the Happiness of Man is not to be found in any Thing but in God, is usually proved by shewing that it cannot consist in sensual Pleasure, Riches, Honour or Power. But the shortest Way of proving it is, by shewing at once that it cannot consist in any created Good. For as by Happiness we mean a State wherein the Mind totally acquiesces, and takes full Rest and Satisfaction, so that which is the Object of Happiness must be such a Good, as perfectly satisfies the Mind, contents all its Desires, and gives it an absolute Tranquility and Repose. But that no Creature does this is plain from

Experience, from the Vanity which we find in all Things, and that Restlessness and Desire of Change which is consequent upon it. We try one Thing after another, as the searching Bee wanders from Flower to Flower; but we go off from every one with Disappointment, and a deluded Expectation; almost every Thing promises, but nothing answers. and even the Succession of new Enjoyments (the best Remedy for the Emptiness we find in each) amuses, but does not satisfy. And as no created Good actually does this, so 'tis plain by Reason none can. For as none but infinite Truth can satisfy the Understanding, so only infinite Good can satisfy the Will. But this the Creature is not. As its Being is, so is its Goodness, both of a limited Extent, and so by no Means fit to satisfy the Capacity of that Mind, which aspires after all Good. Every Creature therefore must confess its utter Insufficiency to be the Object of our Happiness: Nay, the whole Collection and Amassment of created Good, must acknowledge the same; the very Depth and Abyss of it must say, *It is not in me.*

4. It is in God alone: He is the Fountain of eternal Blessedness; all the Springs of our Happiness are in Him: He is our Good, and our End, as being every Way sufficient for our Happiness. For He is all Goodness; He is that infinite Good which is the entire and adequate Object of our Will; and which being the proper Object of all its Inclinations, must needs be able to satisfy them. They cannot aspire to any Thing beyond Him, and therefore must needs center and acquiesce in Him. *When I awake up after Thy Likeness, I shall be satisfied with it. Then, and not before, which all resolves into that pious Saying of St Austin, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our Heart has no Rest 'till it rests in Thee.*

5. It must therefore be the first Office of Christian Prudence, to make God our End. For indeed not to do so, is the greatest Folly that any Man can possibly be guilty of. For what can we expect but Vanity and Disappointment all over, a fruitless Labour, and a deluded and abortive Hope, if we place our Happiness any where in Him, but who is the true Object of it? 'Tis like leaning with our full Force upon what cannot bear our Weight,

Weight, the Consequence of which is, to fall with Violence. And what an Imprudence is this, especially for a Christian, since the clear Revelation of the Gospel, concerning the true End and final Happiness of Man: Wherein our Saviour hath plainly declared, *This is Life eternal to know Thee, the Only True God!* Since God has not only given us a Nature capable of Happiness, but has also endued us with Faculties and Desires, which nothing but Himself can satisfy, and He both can and will; and above all, since He has been pleas'd, lest we should miss the End of our Being, to point it out to us, and to tell us that Himself is the Good, which we so passionately desire, and so blindly seek; it must be the very Foolishness of Folly for any Christian not to make God his End; much more, so to forget himself and Him, as to place it in any Thing of this vain World: Whether it be directly and professedly, according to the Language of the rich Epicure, *Soul, take thy Ease;* or consequentially, by pursuing the World, and cleaving to its Interests, as if it were his End. And besides the Folly of this Conduct, it bespeaks also such a Contempt of God, and of his immense Greatness and Goodness, as nothing can either parallel or excuse! Especially since the Son of God hath been pleas'd to concern Himself so far for our Happiness, as to make this great and excellent End attainable to us, preparing and providing, and procuring an Union and Communion of God with Man, by uniting them both in his own Person. Whether, therefore, we consider the Excellency, or the Attainableness of this Good, or the Manner or Price whereby it becomes attainable, God, by all Means, is to be made our End, the End of all our Desires, and the End of all our Designs, the End of all our Undertakings, all our Actions, and all our Hopes, to which we are to refer whatever we think, whatever we speak, and whatever we act, and, in one Word, to which our whole Life is to be directed.

6. What a thorough Concern then ought every Christian to feel, how hearty a Care ought he to take for the obtaining and securing this his Right and only End, the Fruition of God? This our Saviour calls *The one Thing needful*, in Opposition to the many Things that are apt

to trouble and distract us in this busy Life, which unless so far as they fall in with this, are all mere Trifle and Amusement. Even those Affairs which carry the Face of the greatest Seriousness, and pretend to be of the weightiest Consequence, if they are not so many Parts of this, are *lighter than Vanity and nothing*. For indeed a Man has but one Business in the World, and that is, to make sure his everlasting Happiness, and to secure to himself the Fruition of that excellent Good, which is the true End of his Being. This is the whole of Man, his only considerable Interest, and that upon which all depends. 'Tis not necessary, that he should be born to an Estate, or that he should acquire one. 'Tis not necessary that he should succeed in his Attempts, for this or that Dignity or Preferment; that he should live long to enjoy his Wealth or Greatness, or even that he should live at all. But it is absolutely necessary that he should arrive at his End, that he should attain to the Fruition of God, whose Loving-Kindness is better than Life, and without whom he cannot be happy. All the rest may be spared, but there is no dispensing with this. Should he lose all besides, and gain this one Thing, yet still he would be happy. And should he gain all besides, and lose this one Thing, yet still he would be miserable: For what Gain will ever make amends for such a Loss? Not that of the whole World, if we believe our Saviour: *What shall it profit a Man, if he shall gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul?* Which is then only lost, when it loses God. 'Tis therefore one great Part of the Prudence of every Christian, after he has fixed this his right End, to endeavour, by much Consideration, to possess his Mind with a due Sense of its Moment and Importance; and of what Consequence it is, that he should succeed in this Affair, whatever he miscarries in beside: Which when he is once thoroughly convinced of, he will then diligently apply himself to the Use of such Means as are necessary thereto.

7. All the particular Acts of Prudence with regard to these Means, may be sum'd up in one general one, and that is, to chuse those very Means to this our great End.

End, which God has chosen for us already. To follow his, is indeed an implicit Choice, but at the same Time 'tis a very safe and a very wise one. For He cannot but know what Means are most fit to procure the End for which He made us. And He will not impose upon our Weakness, or do what He hath forbidden us, *Make the Blind go out of his Way*. And therefore, without enquiring into its intrinsic Nature, we may securely depend upon this in general, that the Way which He has prescribed, must be the very best, and consequently, that it is our Wisdom to walk in it.

8. Now the Means which God hath chosen for us are no other than his Commandments, which were intended by God for our Direction to Happiness. As He made us for Himself, so the Laws which He prescribes to us are but a Pursuance of the same kind Design, namely, to bring us to Himself. For since we cannot suppose Him to propose any Advantage of his own, by giving us Rules of Life; and since we can as little suppose that He does it for so poor a Reason as only to shew his Authority, and much less that He does it for no Reason at all, we cannot but conclude, that the Laws of God are given us with this Design, to shew us the Path of Life, the true Way to that great End for which we were made, the everlasting Fruition of God. A Consideration which, by the Way, ought greatly to endear the Laws of God to us, and invite us to yield a free, ready, and chearful Obedience to them. Especially if we add,

9. That as they were given for our Direction to Happiness, so they actually lead to it: *If thou wilt enter into Life, saith our Saviour, keep the Commandments*. This is the Path of Life, the Way of the Kingdom, the direct Road that leads to Happiness, describ'd to us by Him who is Himself the Way, the Truth and the Life. Men may employ their Wits, consult their Ease, and flatter their Hopes in the Invention of other Ways; but if we will believe our Guide, the Way of Happiness is the Way of Obedience.

10. That it is so by the positive Order and Appointment of God, is plain from the whole Tenor of the Gospel.

Gospel. And equally plain it is, that He therefore appointed these Means, because they naturally conduce to our Happiness. For some Things are, by the very original Constitution of their Being, conducive to our Good, as others to our Hurt; the former He commands, and the latter He forbids. That there is this Difference in Things with Regard to our present Happiness, is evident from Experience. Temperance, for Instance, is more conducive than Intemperance to the Health of the Body, and consequently to the Health of the Mind too, as depending upon the other. The Power which Plants have variously to affect our Bodies, either by the Way of Physick or Poison, is not more plain and certain than the different Influence which different Dispositions have upon the well or ill-being of our Souls. And God in his Laws concerning these Things, does but what a Physician does for those, whose Health he takes Care of; he prescribes the wholsom Diet or Physick, and forbids the Poison.

11. The same Observation will hold as to future Happiness; which resulting (as all Happiness does) from a certain Proportion and Agreement between the Faculty and the Object, must depend upon, and require a certain Temper and Disposition of the Mind; as a natural Qualification for it. We find it is so even in the Pleasures of Sense. Let the Ear be unmusically disposed, and the sweetest Sounds put together with the greatest Art, will give it no Entertainment. And if the Organs of Taste are indisposed, either naturally or by a Disease, the most delicious Food is brought in vain, which, as it finds no Taste, will give no Relish. And if it be thus in the lowest Pleasures, can it be otherwise in the highest? If a Guest sit idle at a nice and plentiful Table, merely because he wants a Stomach to eat, or a Palate to relish what he finds there, shall an indisposed Soul enjoy God? Is there no Disposition requisite to make it relish the heavenly Banquet? Are these the *only* Pleasures that are to be enjoyed at any Rate, and however disposed we come to them? No, without doubt there are Dispositions, for this, as well as for other Enjoyments, a certain Temper of Mind, which as the

Apostle

Apostle speaks, is to make us *meet Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light.*

12. Now this Temper that qualifies us for Happiness, must be in general, to be like Him who is the Object of it, to have our Minds conformable to his Mind, and our Wills conformable to his Will; to resemble Him as far as He is imitable by us, to have a Godlike Frame of Spirit, or, as the Apostle expresses it, *to be Partakers of the Divine Nature.* And that for this clear Reason, because without being in some Measure like GOD, 'tis not possible we should enjoy Him, or take any Delight in beholding his excellent Glory. But *when I awake up after thy Likeness, I shall be satisfied with it.* LORD, what a satisfying Likeness is Thine? our Likeness to the World makes us love it, but the Love of it does not satisfy. O make us like unto Thee, that we may be satisfied with Thee!

13. More particularly, the Temper that qualifies us for Happiness, consists in those virtuous Dispositions, which the Gospel enjoins to all Christians, such as Truth, Justice and Mercy: Because in these consists that Part of the Divine Nature, wherein alone we can be like Him: His other Perfections being peculiar to Himself, and such as no Creature can partake of. And accordingly we are exhorted to *be Holy, as the LORD our GOD is Holy; to be Followers of GOD, as dear Children; to be Perfect, as our Father which is in Heaven is Perfect.* There is therefore a Necessity for us, as to be like GOD, that we may enjoy Him, so to be endued with virtuous Habits, without which we cannot be like Him, nor consequently enjoy Him.

14. But there are two Dispositions, which are more particularly necessary to qualify us for the Fruition of GOD, Charity and Purity: That Charity, as it signifies the Love of our Neighbour, is a necessary Qualification is plain, because without this we can't be like GOD, who is all Love and Goodness, overflowing with Kindness to all his Creatures, and continually doing Good to them all, as far as they are capable of receiving it. If ever therefore we mean to be happy with and in Him, we must be of the same good and loving Spirit.

rit. And as to Charity, taken in its proper primary Sense, for the Love of GOD, this is so immediate a Qualification for Happiness, that nothing can be more so; since all Enjoyment depends upon the Love of what we are possess'd of, and therefore unless we love GOD, 'tis impossible we should enjoy Him. And for this Reason it is, that the Love of GOD is so strictly enjoin'd, and in so high a Measure, no less than that of our whole Heart and Soul, and Mind and Strength; and that the Precept which requires it is call'd, The First and Great Commandment: First and Great in many Respects, and particularly in this, that 'tis the fundamental Qualification for Happiness, as immediately respecting the Object of it, which if we do not love, we can never enjoy.

15. The other great Qualification for the Enjoyment of GOD is Purity; that Part of it especially which relates to the Pleasures of Sense. Now the Reason why this is such a Qualification for our final Happiness is this: GOD the Object of it is a spiritual Being, and the Happiness of Heaven which consists in the Fruition of Him, is all over of a rational and intellectual Nature: Being indeed no other than this, the Pleasure of the Understanding contemplating the Supreme Truth, and of the Will transported with the Love of the Sovereign Good. And therefore a Love of sensual Pleasure must indispose us for the Love of a Good so purely Spiritual. And if ever it rises so high as to become the prevailing and governing Affection of the Soul (the Case and Character of those who are *Lovers of Pleasure more than Lovers of GOD*) it must utterly unqualify us for it. For what can a sensualized Soul find in Heaven, that will suit with his distemper'd Taste? A *Mahometan Paradise* would suit with such Affections well; but in Heaven they would meet with nothing but Disappointment; and therefore St. Peter, with a pressing Earnestness, cautions us against them: *Dearly Beloved, I beseech you as Strangers and Pilgrims, abstain from fleshly Desires that war against the Soul,* They war against the Soul, not only by betraying us into Sin, either by consenting to them in unlawful Circumstances, or by indulging them.

them in an immoderate Degree, but chiefly by indisposing us for the Enjoyment of a far nobler Happiness. And accordingly St. *John*, among all virtuous Dispositions, singles out Purity as a Preparation for Heaven. *Every Man*, says he, *that hath this Hope, purifieth himself as He is pure.* And our Saviour applies this Purity to the Heart, to shew how that ought to be disposed for Happiness. *Blessed is the Pure in Heart, for they shall see God.* O infinite Purity, what Heart will be fit to see Thee, if Thou dost not purge and cleanse it? O purify us by thy Grace, and so fit us for thy Glory!

17. By all these Considerations it appears, that the Commandments of God are the Means that lead us to Happiness. And for this Reason it is, that God who is willing we should be happy, having made us for that very End, requires them of us, and obliges us to them by all the Authority He has over us. For this Reason it is, for Instance, that He commands us to love Him. What is our Love to Him? Nothing at all. But tho' it be nothing to Him, yet it is to ourselves, as being a necessary Qualification for our Happiness. This God knows, and therefore requires us to love Him; nay, to love Him with all our Heart and all our Strength, because He knows a less Degree of Love is neither worthy of Him, nor will qualify us to be happy in Him. And so in every other Instance, God makes those Things our Duty, which have a close Connection with our Happiness; and this is that which makes his Laws so good and so excellent, and his Service a truly reasonable Service; for certainly nothing can be more reasonable, than for a Man to pursue his own Good, nor consequently than to serve and obey God, since this is a certain Means to that End, and his own Good is the natural Fruit of that Obedience; and how should this (as was intimated before) endear the Service of God to us? How should it make us in love with our Duty to Him, and glad to be subject to his Government? How should it incite us, to yield the most free, ready, chearful and zealous Obedience to his Laws? In a Word, to do his Will on Earth as the Angels do it in Heaven, since

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our own Advantage is both the Reason of his Laws and the sure Consequence of keeping them. Every prudent Christian therefore looks upon the Commandments of God, not as so many imperious Curbs and Retrenchments of his Liberty, nor as so many arbitrary Impositions, much less as Burthens and Grievances (as Human Laws sometimes are, for want of Wisdom or Goodness in those that make them) but as so many kind Provisions for our Happiness, and so many merciful Instructions to bring us to our true End: And in this View He yields them Obedience, not such as is forced and violent, servile and extorted by Fear, such as Slaves pay to Tyrants, but such as is liberal and ingenuous, and wherein Love is the prevailing Principle; as becomes one who is under a Government so Good and Gracious, and so every Way directed and administered for the best Advantage of the Subject, as that of God is.

18. And now since it appears that the Means that lead to our End, the great Highway to Happiness, are no other than the Commandments of God, it appears with equal Clearness, that the One Business of every prudent Christian is, to pay a due Obedience to all these Commandments. This is our Wisdom, and indeed the only wise Thing we can do, not to indulge our own Fancies, not to fulfil our own Will, or to follow the Devices and Desires of our own Hearts, but to apply ourselves to the Law of God, to lay Hold of those *Paths of Life* which He hath describ'd to us. By doing this, we shall give a better Proof of our Wisdom, than by all the fine-wrought Plots, and cunning Intrigues of worldly Policy, or by the most acute Reasonings of Philosophy, or deepest Treasures of Learning. These Things cast indeed a dazzling Light, and make a Figure in the World: But after all, the Wisdom of Man is, to attain to his End, and consequently to find and use the true Means of attaining it. And since the Commandments of God are those true Means, *to keep and do them is our Wisdom and Understanding*, Or, as *Job* expresses it: *Behold, the Fear of the LORD, that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is Understanding.*

19. It is not only Wisdom, but *our* Wisdom, the Wisdom of *Man*, the Wisdom that belongs to his *Nature*, as being made for Happiness; that belongs to the present *State* and *Condition* of his Nature, as having Capacities to qualify himself fully for this; whereas his Faculties will carry him but a very little Way in speculative Knowledge: It is the Wisdom that belongs to his present *Circumstances* in this World, which is wholly in Order to the other, and is no farther considerable than it is a Preparation for Eternity: And after this I need not say, it is the Wisdom that belongs to his *Interest*, nothing being more evident, than that it is every Man's greatest Interest to be everlastingly happy. Upon all which Considerations it appears, that the Study and Practice of God's Commandments, the devoting himself to his Service, and to the Obedience of all his Laws, is the true and proper Wisdom of Man, in which alone he is concern'd to employ and improve himself, and to which all his other Learning, Knowledge and Business, all he thinks, says or does, is to be-referr'd.



C H A P. II.

How far Christian Prudence is concern'd in the Manner of keeping God's Commandments.

1. **A**S to the Manner of keeping God's Commandments, the main Difficulty is in the *doing* and not in determining what in Prudence ought to be done. Prudence doubtless (as well as Duty) requires, that we should keep them in as good a Manner as we can. For since the Commandments of God are evidently the Means that qualify us for Happiness, it follows, that the better they are kept by *us*, the more we shall be qualified by *them*. Now 'tis unquestionably the Part
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of every prudent Man, to obtain as much Happiness as he can: And consequently to do his best to serve God, and keep his Commandments, in the most perfect Manner he is able; because the better he keeps them, the happier he will be; and no wise Man would be less happy when he may be more so.

2. Setting aside therefore all Inducements of either Love or Fear, all Arguments of Gratitude or Generosity, all the Reasonableness and Justice of serving God, and living in Obedience to his Laws, all the Pleasures of Religion, and the present Advantage of it both to our Souls and Bodies: I say, tho' we should set aside all these Considerations, yet there is a prudential Consideration, sufficient to engage every wise Christian to do his best, and to be as holy as he can, *viz.* That the better he is, the happier he will be; every Addition to his Virtue being so much Stock laid in for his future Happiness. The Question concerning *Degrees of Glory*, seems to have been put merely for Argument's Sake, for it can't be put seriously, but by one that is as ignorant of the Nature of Things, as of Divine Revelation: Were the Scripture silent, yet the very Nature of the Thing infers it; for since Holiness is a natural Qualification for Happiness, it necessarily follows, that the more Holiness the more Happiness; and consequently, that the best must be the happiest Man; and therefore 'tis great Prudence for every Christian, to labour to be excellently Good, as good as he can be, according to the Measure of Grace imparted to him. To reduce this to an Instance, our Saviour has annex'd to Purity of Heart a particular Blessedness, even that of seeing God: Whence we may gather, that this is a particular Qualification for the beatifick Vision, and accordingly, that those who have most of this Purity, will be most happy, as either seeing more of God, or as being more delighted with what they see of Him; and therefore every prudent Christian *that hath this Hope*, will study to *purify himself* as much as he can, that so he may be a more meet Partaker of that Happiness, which is promised to the Pure in Heart.

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3. Let not therefore any Christian content himself with his present State, or his past Attainments in Goodness; much less let him designedly aim at a slender Degree, such as he thinks may just carry him to Heaven. He may be mistaken in his Measure, and when laid in the Balance be found wanting: But suppose he be not, yet he stands in his own Light, and is frugal to his own great Loss: For, 'tis but an ill Thrift to deal hardly for Heaven, and to think to go thither the cheapest Way; since beside the Danger of Miscarrying, so much as he abates of his Holiness, so much he abates of his own Perfection, and cuts short his own Happiness: And where is the Gain or the Wisdom of such a Thrift? 'tis Folly and Loss all over. Let us not therefore rest satisfied with narrow and scanty Measures, much less expressly design them: For besides, that 'tis not easy to *persevere* in such a weak and languishing State of Piety (every little Blast of Temptation being ready to blow out a Lamp that is fed with so little Oil.) Suppose we should persevere in it, yet there is no getting over this Consideration, that the more we come short in Goodness, the more we shall fall short in Happiness; that every Abatement in the former is so much deducted from the latter, a Jewel taken out of their Crown. Therefore let no one who pretends to Christian Prudence, sit down with a low Infant-State of Goodness, but let him endeavour to grow in Grace, and always to abound in the Work of the LORD: Not contenting himself with his present State, but always studying to excel himself, to grow better and better, and to make a constant Progress in Religion, correcting what is amiss, and supplying what is wanting, and aspiring after the largest Measures and fullest Degrees of Holiness, always remembering, that all the while he is thus serving GOD, he is consulting his own Interest, and that the more Goodness he brings with him to Heaven, the more Happiness he will find there.

4. In Consequence of this, a prudent Christian will begin betimes, and set out early in the Ways of Piety; not only that he may have the Advantage of the Morning, the proper Time for Travelling, and the Satisfac-

tion of serving God in the Prime of his Age, and the Vigour of his Strength : But also that he may lengthen his Day, and have the more Time to serve God in, and to prepare himself for the Fruition of Him in Glory ; that he may have the more Time before him, to correct his Disorders, to fill up his Deficiencies, to regulate his Passions, to purify his Heart, to perfect his Habits, to adorn his Soul with all Christian Virtues ; in a Word, to compose the State and Frame of his Mind for Happiness, and to put himself in a due Order for Heaven. For these Reasons 'tis Christian Prudence to begin betimes, to run the Way of God's Commandments, and not to defer that Work to the declining Part of Life, which is the One Business of the Whole.

5. But if it be Prudence, as to keep the Commandments of God, so to keep them in the very best Manner we can, what shall we think of those who serve God by Halves, who halt between two Masters, the almost Christians? Because this is so common a Case, it may be proper to bestow some Reflections upon it. I shall therefore consider more at large,

First, what it is that hinders their rising any higher than to be almost Christians. And

Secondly, The Imprudence of this lame Way of serving God, of being Christians by Halves.

6. First, The general Hindrance to our being more than Almost Christians, is the corrupt Perverseness of Human Nature: This it was that made the fair Inclinations of King *Agrippa* proceed no farther than they did ; than to extort from him that ingenuous Confession, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*. Then, it seems, he was not absolutely perswaded, tho' he was inclining toward it. Poor *Agrippa*! He had heard St. *Paul* giving an Account of his Manner of Life from his Youth, and of his miraculous Conversion to Christianity, with great Plainness, Modesty and Simplicity, and was not a little affected with the Discourse ; especially with the Conclusion, *King Agrippa, believest thou the Prophets? I know that thou believest*. This nearly touch'd him, and left a very sensible Impression upon his Heart.

Heart. And yet there was something more prevalent within him, that would not suffer him quite to yield. He had a good Mind to be a Christian, but Fear, Interest and Prejudice outweigh'd that Inclination, and after some uncertain Suspenses, the Scale turn'd on the other Side. And this is the Case of too many: They have several good Thoughts and Purposes; but their Thoughts and Purposes are too much like the Endeavours of those that are trying to wake out of a deep Sleep, into which they sink back again, overcome by the dead Weight that hangs upon them. There is a Weight, an Impediment in their Will, that stops the Wheels of virtuous Action, so that there can be no Motion, tho' the Springs of Religion bear ever so hard upon them. Sometimes indeed Conscience works strongly, that she wants but little of gaining her Point. But even that little, it seems, is too much; she is like a Bowl thrown up against a steep Bank, which it nimbly climbs, 'till it is just about to lodge and settle at the Top: But wanting some Degrees of Force to overcome the Resistance, it cannot reach it, and rolls back again.

7. *Thou art not far from the Kingdom of GOD*, was just such a Cast as this: And *yet lackest thou one Thing*, was such another. These Men's Religion had carried them a good Way, and they were well onward in their Journey to Heaven; but it tired, and grew faint in the latter Stages of the Road, which was found either too narrow or too long, and so they stop'd short, and made an eternal Halt, when a little more Resolution would have carried them through. The same Thing we now see every Day; there are many who have a Liking to Religion, who have had a good natural Disposition, assisted by a religious Education. Nor are they only inclined to Religion, but partly practice it; they do many Things, and forbear others. All goes on hopefully toward a thorough Conversion; they are already past the most painful Part, of it and are now upon the critical Point; so that a Grain or two more would turn the Scale; inso-much, that there begins to be Joy in Heaven, and the Angels are tuning their Harps: Yet there wants a little more Weight on the Side of Religion, for Want of

which the Counter-Weight prevails against it; against Reason, Religion and Divine Grace together. They have indeed the Workings of Religion upon them; they feel several Pangs of the New-Birth; but after all, they want Strength to bring forth.

8. The Imprudence of this lame Way of serving God (which I was to shew in the second Place) appears first from this, that it is insufficient. Such a Half Religion can never hold Weight in the Balance of the Sanctuary. Such Men, 'tis true, are almost good; but almost to hit the Mark is really to miss it. For Religion consists in an entire Love of God, and an effectual Resolution to obey Him. Even a bad Man may love what is good in some Degree, but not with an effectual, prevailing Love. This therefore is what denominates a Man good, when Religion is the commanding Bias of his Soul. And none but those who are thus thoroughly good, are so good as to be fit for Happiness. To make us capable of that, there must be a peculiar Frame of Mind, to effect which in us is the one Business of Religion. And if it does this only almost, and by Halves, as it can never bring us to Heaven, so neither if it could, would it be able to make us happy there.

9. This imperfect Piety is farther condemn'd by Christian Prudence as very absurd. If we did not intend to go through, why did we set out? If we did, why do we stop? If we think there is no Reason in Religion, why do we do any Thing? But if we think there is, why don't we do enough? For the same Reason that we do so much, why don't we do more? For either Religion has Truth on its Side, or not. If not, why do we take so much Labour *needlessly*? But if it has, why do we take so much Labour *in vain*? 'Tis, I own, a strange Piece of even brutal Indifference, to do nothing in order to our eternal Happiness: And yet, methinks, to do a Part only, has something in it more extravagant than the other. He that does nothing, whatever he loses besides, has yet no Labour to lose. But to labour by Halves, is to lose the same Good, and all that we do in order to it. The Athiest and Libertine has something to pretend; but the Half-religious has no Excuse;
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since that very Religion he has will condemn him as an unconsistent, unprincipled Fool.

10. The Censure of Christian Prudence upon the Half-way State of Piety, is, that it is very unhappy, I mean even in this World. The Almost Christian is the *Double-minded Man* St. James speaks of, who has two Wills, one for God and another for the World, between which he variously fluctuates. Such an one is *unstable in all his Ways*: He is a mix'd, doubtful, unsettled, wavering Creature, never out of Perplexities and Intanglements, always disconformable to himself, doing what he would not, and not doing what he would and should, never long satisfied with himself. He has indeed a Kindness for Religion, but he has a greater Kindness for something else; so that his Religion just serves to disturb the Enjoyment of his Lusts, as his Lusts to deprive him of the Comfort of his Religion. Nor can he be perfectly at Peace with himself, but by being thoroughly wicked or thoroughly good. So wicked as to *have his Conscience fear'd with a hot Iron*, or so good as to act up to his Principles. He must be of a single Mind, one Way or the other, before he can be at Rest. And yet this Double-mindedness is the State in which most Men chuse to live and die, having Religion enough to disturb them in their Sins, but not enough to engage them to part with them.

11. And now, methinks, I hear one saying within himself, *Almost thou perswadest me to be a Christian*. Alas! why not *quite*? Is it that we want the Art of Address, that we do not touch the right Spring of your Soul? But sure our Cause has Weight enough to bear itself out, and to supply any Defect in the Management of it. For is there not Truth and Reason enough in Religion, to gain a reasonable Creature: Or can any Motive have a greater Force or Persuasion, than the Joys of Heaven and the Pains of Hell? Or do you question whether God be able to reward your entire Love and compleat Obedience? If you indeed *believe that God is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*, as even your indifferent Way of serving Him seems to suppose, then you must needs think it Wisdom,

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to lift up the Hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble Knees; to be heartily and thoroughly Religious, and not to be guilty of so inconsistent a Folly as to take *some* Pains all your Life for Heaven, and yet go at last to Hell.

12. Considering then the Insufficiency, the Absurdity, and the Unhappiness of a Half-Religion, let us instantly labour *to fill up the Things that are behind*, that are wanting to the Measure of our Righteousness. Let us earnestly endeavour to bring ourselves under the full Power and Influence of Religion, that it may have its due Work upon our Hearts and Lives, that we may *be perfect, entire, and wanting nothing*: Always imploring the Holy Spirit of God, by the victorious Sweetness of his Divine Grace, to give the last Finishing to that Holy Birth, He is forming in us, that it may *come to a perfect Man, to the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of CHRIST*: That so, according to the Apostle's Wish, we may be both almost, and altogether Christians!



C H A P. III.

Of the subordinate Means that serve to assist us in keeping the Commandments of God.

1. **W**E have seen that the immediate Means to Happiness are the Commandments of God. We come now to consider the subordinate Means to it, which serve to assist us in the keeping of those Commandments. And these are of two Sorts: Either such as are appointed and commanded by God, or such as are recommended by human Prudence.

2. Of the first Sort is Prayer. This is a glorious Means, to withdraw our Thoughts and Affections from sensible Objects, and to fix them upon God and the Things of Heaven: To stir up in us a Sense of our
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Wants and Infirmities, and to quicken our Desires of what we pray for: To maintain a religious Warmth in our Minds, and to keep up there a Spirit of Devotion, the Flame of which would soon be extinct without the Breathings of Prayer to fan it, and give it Motion: To nourish our Communion with God, and make us continually mindful of Him, *in whom we live, move, and have our Being*. It is also a Key to open the Store-Houses of God's Treasures to us, whereby we may obtain a Supply of all our Wants, and particularly *Grace to help in Time of Need*, to enable us to resist all Temptations.

3. A prudent Christian will therefore pray often: For temporal Things conditionally, as not knowing whether, or how far these may be for his Good, or serve as Means to his End. But for spiritual, such as Pardon of Sin, and Grace to leave it, he will pray not only with greater Earnestness, but also absolutely, and without any Condition, because he knows that God *would have all Men to be saved*, to attain the Happiness for which He made them; and that those (if he be not wanting to himself) are certain Means to his Salvation.

4. Reading of the Scriptures is the next Means which God has ordained to assist us in keeping his Commandments. And an excellent Means it is, both to enlighten our Understanding, and to compose our Minds into a religious Temper. *All Scripture is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness; that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnish'd unto all good Works*. And therefore every prudent Christian gives all Attendance to reading it. And that not out of Curiosity, or for Speculation only, but with a practical Design, to learn and do the whole Will of God. And accordingly he will not lay them aside, when he thinks he understands them, but will renew and continue his Perusal of them, for his constant and greater Edification. His Delight will ever be in the Law of the LORD, and in his Law will he meditate Day and Night.

5. A third Means of Religion appointed by God, is the hearing the Word preach'd. This is a standing Provision

vision which God has made for the Edification of his Church; therefore a prudent Christian, who never thinks himself too wise to learn, or too good to be better, and who never omits any Means that may bring him nearer his End, is careful to pay his due Attendance to it, humbly waiting for the Grace and Blessing of God in the Use of his own Ordinance.

6. Neither will the Sacraments, fourthly, be ever undervalued or neglected by a Prudent Christian, who never thinks himself either too wise or too good for any Institution of God. As to the *LORD'S-Supper* in particular, he never omits any Opportunity of receiving it, knowing the excellent Ends for which it serves, and its great Usefulness to serve them. It serves as a sensible Image of the Death of CHRIST, and of our Spiritual Communion with Him; as a Memorial of his Atonement for our Sins, actually applying it to ourselves. In short, it serves as a Channel to convey all the Blessings of God to us, and as a Pledge to assure us of them. And in all this he admires the Wisdom and Goodness of God, in making this merciful Provision for his Church, who, considering our Frame, and how large a Share Sense has in our Composition, was pleas'd, in Condescension to our Infirmary, to address Himself to us by that weaker Side of our Nature; And lest, in such a Croud of sensible Objects as we daily converse with, we should (as we are too apt) to be tempted to forget Him, was pleas'd, by those very Objects, to bring us to Himself, by making Use of some of them as his *Remembrancers*, and as Steps whereby we might ascend to the Contemplation of the most spiritual and heavenly Mysteries.

7. *Church-Communion*, in the last Place, is an excellent Means for the mutual Edification of Christians; for the Preservation of the Christian Faith and Doctrine, and for the Encouragement of Christian Practice. And since for these and the like Reasons, God, by his Son JESUS CHRIST, has erected and constituted that spiritual Society call'd a *Church*, whereof the same JESUS CHRIST is the Head, as that is his Body, according to the Apostle; Christian Prudence obliges every Man not

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to look upon himself only as a private or independent Christian that is at Liberty to serve God as he pleases, in his own solitary Way, but as a Member of this one Church, whereof CHRIST is the Head, and consequently bound to hold Communion with it. This therefore, a prudent Christian will be sure to do, and think it a great Happiness and Privilege to have such a Help, to enjoy the Communion of Saints, and worship God in the Assemblies of his People. From these he will by no Means *excommunicate* himself: But as he is in Spirit united to the whole Christian Church, so he actually communicates with that particular Branch of it, whereof he is a Member: And hereby he shews his Union with the whole, in which he will be careful to make no Schism; lest, by dividing from that Church whereof CHRIST is the Head, he be divided from CHRIST, his End as well as his Way.



C H A P. IV.

The Conduct of a Prudent Christian, with regard to the Government of himself.

1. **H**ITHERTO we have been conducting our prudent Christian to his End, by the Chief of the Ways that lead to it, *viz.* by the direct and immediate Means of Happiness, first, the Duties of the divine Law, and then by the Means to those Means, such of them in particular, as are of divine Appointment. For the Application of which, it may now be convenient to draw a little nearer, and consider the Conduct which a prudent Christian uses in the Government of himself.

2. And first let us consider how a prudent Christian pursues Improvement by the Government of his Senses. He does not study the pleasing of his Senses. This indeed many make the great End of their Lives, which
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are almost wholly devoted to the Pursuit, and spent in the various Entertainments of *Sensible Pleasure*; as if they thought (and perhaps some of them do) that their supreme Happiness consisted in it. But this a prudent Christian will not do; for he knows we are already too much in love with sensible Pleasure, the great Disease of our Nature, and therefore will not by indulging it inflame a Passion which is already too violent. He finds that as the more we abstain from these Pleasures, the more cold we grow to them, so by Indulgence our Appetite acquires a new Edge, and grows the more sharp and keen: He that drinks of this Water shall not only thirst again, but the more he drinks, he shall thirst the more. He considers likewise, how entirely different from these, are the intellectual Pleasures of Heaven, and how apt the Love of them is to indispose us for these, and in this Sense to *alienate us from the Life of God*. He is therefore so far from feasting his Senses (as the Manner of the World is) by all the Variety of studied Entertainments, that he endeavours by all Manner of Ways to mortify them, and instead of setting up for a soft, voluptuous Life (according to *St. Paul's Advice to Timothy*) *inures himself to Hardships, as a good Soldier of JESUS CHRIST*: Not indeed by any such rigid Austerities, as would destroy or impair his Health, but by such a sparing Use of, and well-govern'd Abstemiousness from, even those Pleasures which are lawful in themselves, as may deaden his Love to them, and make him more indifferent to the Enjoyment of them.

4. He will likewise keep a strict Guard over his Senses themselves; as knowing they are the Inlets of Temptation, the Landing Ports of our spiritual Enemies, and the feeble Parts of our Nature, which expose us to continual Danger: Particularly, what can be more dangerous than an unguarded Eye or Ear, while there is every Day so much to be seen and to be heard, to provoke to Wickedness, and so little to encourage Holiness? Over these therefore he keeps a constant Guard, to prevent Invasion and Surprise, especially over the Eye, the most dangerous of the Two, as being concerned
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with more Objects: Praying also to God, without whose keeping the City the Watchman waketh but in vain, *To turn away his Eyes lest they behold Vanity, and to quicken him in his Way*; that nothing he either sees or hears in this his Pilgrimage, may either turn him out of it or hinder him in it.

5. We may, Secondly, observe, how a prudent Christian pursues Improvement by the Government of his Understanding. Considering, in the first Place, what an excellent Faculty and great Endowment Understanding is, and for what great Ends it was given him by God, he thinks himself concerned not to let it lie idle, but to employ and improve it as much as possible, that he may hereafter give a good Account of his Talent: But were no Account of it to be given, yet considering himself farther as a Traveller in his Way to his End, and his Understanding as a Torch that is to light him in it, he would think it very proper to take Care of it, and that not only to preserve it from going out, but to feed it with such Supplies of Oil, that it might shine the more brightly and clearly.

6. But yet as much as he is for improving his Understanding, he does not affect universal Knowledge, as well knowing the Vanity of pretending to it, by one whose Capacity is no greater and whose Life is no longer: Neither is he for filling his Head with little Things, no nor with such great Things as do not conduce to his End, and whose Impertinency to his Business renders them as very Trifles to him as the other: Nor will he apply himself to the Study of vain and unprofitable Sciences, nor yet of such Theories as exceed the Proportion of his Understanding: But as he must be ignorant of great Things, so he will not so much as endeavour to know such as are not to be comprehended: Indeed if God reveals them, he does not think their being above his Understanding, any Reason why they should not be believ'd. But though he believes them, yet he can see no Cause, to engage his Thoughts or employ his Time in the Search and Study of such Things, only to lose himself in unfathomable Depths, to the Neglect of other Matters which he can comprehend, and is more

concern'd so to do. And for the same Cause he declines prying into the hidden Scenes of Providence, those secret Things that belong to GOD, which, tho' not absolutely incomprehensible in themselves, yet being lock'd up in the Womb of Futurity, are by that Wall of Partition, as inaccessible to us as the other.

7. The same Wisdom directs him not to study such Things as require great Expence of Time and Labour to master them, unless they bring him in an Advantage answerable to the Time and Pains which he bestows upon them. For as he has so little Time, and so great an Interest depending, he can't think it frugal to throw away a Moment. Upon the same Ground he does not regard what is in Reputation, and in the Vogue of the World passes for Learning, but what is true and real Knowledge, and fit to perfect the Mind of Man. And even in pursuing this he is on his Guard, not suffering himself to be transported by an immoderate Thirst of it: But as his Enquiries into Truth are modest, so he is discreet and select in making them, applying himself to those most which are of greatest Importance, most serviceable to his moral Conduct; especially to the Knowledge of God and of himself, wherein is contained the Sum of human Wisdom.

8. In all his Studies he takes Care to avoid the two great Disorders incident to studious Men, Curiosity and Vain-glory: Curiosity, which puts them upon useles Enquiries, only to please themselves; and Vain-glory, which puts them on many dry and insipid Studies, only to please and procure the Admiration of others. Nor does he make any Knowledge an End, but refers all to the great Ends of Virtue and Happiness: In all his Intellectual Applications making this his one Care, to love GOD, and to be loved by Him.

9. After the Regulation of his Understanding, the next Work of a prudent Christian is, the Government of his Will and Affections. These of themselves are in the utmost Disorder, caus'd by the general Corruption of our Nature: And unless this is removed, no Man can be either good here, or happy hereafter.

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10. His first Step toward this, is to teach his Will to follow in all Things, not natural Inclination, but the Will of GOD revealed to us in his Word: For the Will of GOD sways more with a prudent Christian than any Inclination of his own, which he is ready at all Times, and in all Cases, to sacrifice to his Duty; and his only Care is to conform his Will to the Will and Word of GOD, as knowing that GOD, being infinitely wise as well as good, cannot possibly command any Thing, but what, upon the whole Account, it is best for him to do. Most chearfully therefore does he depose his own Will from the Throne, and sets up the Will of GOD.

11. Nor is he less obedient to the *Providential* than to the *written* Will of GOD. Not adhering to any private Fancies, Opinions or Wishes of his own, he absolutely refers himself to GOD, to his gracious and all-wise Disposal. He lodges all his Concerns in his Hands, and is willing he should chuse for him; and when he does so, concluding it best that Things should be as the Governor of the World would have them, he thankfully accepts his Choice, and humbly acquiesces in the Wisdom of his Providence: And accordingly, instead of cherishing any Thought, or using any Language of Discontent, he is in all Things ready to say with his LORD, *Not as I will, but as thou wilt.* LORD, thy Will was an innocent Will, and yet thou didst resign it. How much more should we resign our perverse and corrupt Wills?



C H A P. V.

A Perswasive to the Study of Christian Prudence, with some Advices relating to the Practice of it.

1. **H**AVING thus laid the Principles of Christian Prudence, what remains but to persuade Men to the Study of it. And the first Consideration I shall offer to recommend the Study of this Wisdom, is, That it is attainable. Many Things employ the Search of studious Men, which, after all, they can never master, but must sit down, if not with a *contented*, yet with an *unavoidable* Ignorance of. But it is not so with Wisdom: The Acquisition of this depends not upon great Parts, but upon a willing Mind, Speculation indeed is infinite, and the Well of Truth has no Bottom, and besides, *Many have nothing to draw with*. But Wisdom, like a Fountain, lies open, and within common Reach. Some Care and Pains and Diligence only it takes to drink of it; an *easy Price* for so precious a Treasure. Now this Certainty of Success is an encouraging Motive to search after it in good Earnest. Men may seek for Silver, and not find it, and search for hid Treasures, without being able to break in upon their dark Retirements. And yet they search on: How much more should we search for Wisdom, when we are sure not to be disappointed in our Search?

2. But may we not be so in our *finding*? Many Things are attainable by our Labour, which are not worth our Labour to attain. But Wisdom is not of those; on the contrary, nothing is so well worth attaining. Wisdom it is that keeps the World in order, and makes living in it a Blessing, that is the Parent of Laws, the Foundation of Government, and the great Upholder and Sweetner of all Society. Wisdom it is that teaches a Man how to obey, and how to govern even that ungovernable Creature

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ture himself: To moderate his Passions, to compose his Manners, to behave well in all Circumstances of Life. In a Word, that teaches a Man to know God and himself, and by the shining Paths of Virtue leads him to everlasting Glory and Happiness.

3. Therefore it is that *Solomon* exhorts us with so passionate an Earnestness, *With all thy Gettings, get Wisdom.* As much as to say, Whatever thou gettest, or with the Expence of all thou hast gotten, get Wisdom, as being of infinitely more Value than all. It is a Pearl of so great Price, that the Merchant who finds it, will buy it with the Price of all that he has. And a wise Merchant he is who buys it even at this Price, for it can never be bought too dear. Honour and Greatness may; nay, and so may the whole World, if the Price be a Man's Soul. But Wisdom cannot; therefore again, *get Wisdom, and with all thy Gettings get Understanding.* If we get Wisdom 'tis no Matter what else we lose. And if we lose it, tis no matter what else we get. And indeed it matters not what we get or lose, so we get that which directs us in the Way to Happiness, which giveth *Life* to them that have it, and teaches them how to *live*.

4. Another Consideration to persuade us to the serious Study of Wisdom, is this, That if we do not now apply ourselves to it, we shall hereafter earnestly wish we had. I know hardly any other Study, the Neglect of which we shall finally repent of. He that has not studied Mathematicks, suppose, tho' he may perhaps sometime while he lives, reflect upon himself with some Blame for the Neglect of such an Accomplishment, yet when he comes toward the concluding Scene of Life, and that of Eternity begins to open, I presume he will not then think this a Neglect worth repenting of. And so as to other Studies. But he who has not studied Wisdom, will then most certainly wish he had, and think it the greatest Gain, could he exchange all the Sciences he is Master of, for this one, The Science of Life. This is the Science that receives our last and best Approbation, when other Things that make a greater Shew and Noise, and which perhaps we liked better when we knew less, do not find so great a Share in our Esteem. Useless No-

tions and new Systems and fine spun Theories, will not always please us, The Days will come when we shall say, We have no Pleasure in them. But Wisdom will relish with us to the very last, and more at last than ever. When other Things leave us, Wisdom will stay behind, and more than supply their Loss: And when we have outlived the Pleasures of the World, then will it be in the greatest Esteem with us, as being the only Thing of all our Acquirements, whose Possession and Enjoyment too is immortal.

5. When the Gaieties and Follies of Life are over (for Folly will not always please) when ever the more serious Entertainments of Manhood appear to us as more solemn Titles; when Covetousness itself, the last Folly that forsakes us, because it begins so late, that it often settles upon the Dregs of Life, as upon a firm and immoveable Ground, when even this cleaving Folly shall uncling and drop from us, when the World itself shall be a Burden to us: Then shall the Remembrance of Wisdom be sweet unto us, and we shall delight in her Conversation, and every Step in her Ways will give us more Comfort than all the little Things of the World. Those who have been Strangers to Wisdom before, will be ready enough to claim Acquaintance with her then and to say unto Wisdom, *Thou art my Sister, and to call Understanding their Kinswoman.* But she will not then be so forward to own them. And therefore happy is he that has contracted a Friendship with her in the Days of his Youth and Strength, that he may not be disown'd by her in that Hour wherein he most wants her Favour; that he may not have Wisdom then to learn, when he should be actually wise, and have the Benefit and Comfort of her Light to guide him thro' the Vale of the Shadow of Death. In order to which we should always remember that excellent Advice of St. Bernard, *To rejoice in those Things when we are young, which we shall not repent of when we are old.*

6. I have now only to add a few prudential Advices relating to the Practice of a Christian Life. Of which the first shall be that of the Apostle, *To walk circumspectly*, that is warily, and heedfully, with all possible
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Care, Caution and Exactness. This is such Walking as shews we are duly apprehensive of our Condition: The Danger of which must be allowed to be exceeding great, since besides our own corrupt Nature, and the Wickedness of the World that surrounds us, we have the Prince of Darknes for our profest Enemy; *even our Adversary the Devil, who as a roaring Lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.* He does not stay 'till the Prey comes in his Way, but *seeks* after it, but walks about seeking who is fit to be made a Prey of; whose Idleness or whose Business, whose Temper or Constitution, whose Age or whose Carelessness may give him any Advantage. He begins with us very early, laying his Siege against us in our very Infancy. Then he tempts us with sensible Objects, and easily increases our natural Propension to them. For Reason is then in a dead Sleep, and Sense altogether awake, being in its greatest Perfection, by Reason of the Fineness of the Blood and Spirits, and the Tenderness of the Parts, which easily yielding to the Impression of sensible Objects, endear them more and more to us, and so confirm that *Friendship with the World, which is Enmity with God.* This thoughtless Age is succeeded by Childhood and Youth; and then indeed Reason begins to awake; but so slowly, that we are all this Time, as it were, between sleeping and waking; the Weight still hangs upon our Temples. Our Passions are much too strong for our weak Reason to govern, which accordingly our Enemy makes his Advantage of. and tempts us with the Baits of Sensuality, with those *youthful Lusts* which 'tis then hard to fly. This boisterous Season also blows over, and is follow'd by Manhood. And now indeed Reason is stronger and Passion cooler, and so the Devil changes his former Bait for that of Pride and Ambition, whereby himself fell, and wherewith he assaulted even the Son of God. Now he lifts us up to, and shews us the Grandeur and Glory of the World, and tries to persuade us what a Happiness it would be, could we make a Part of that glittering Scene. Well, but neither will this last always; our Sun soon begins to decline, and old Age comes on, the Winter of our Year, or rather the Evening of our short Day. And now our Reason grows

grows heavy and sleepy again, and our Passions also flag with it, hang their Wings, and make our Flight nearer the Earth, as not being able to bear up in the higher Regions. We are now no longer fit for our former Entertainments, and having seen what little Dependance there is on the World, having lost some of our Friends, and proved the Insincerity of others, this Experience, together with the natural sinking of our Spirits, makes us grow timorous, jealous and distrustful, and solicitous to secure ourselves in this forlorn State, and so we stand fairly disposed for Covetousness. And accordingly the Devil now draws us into this Snare, which reigns the more absolute over us, as having us almost entirely to itself, without Competition from other Vices. Thus our Adversary is always intent upon our Ruin, meeting us at every Turn of our Lives, and suiting his Temptations to the several States and Conditions of them. And therefore it highly concerns us to walk circumspectly, as knowing both the infinite Worth of our Souls, and the numberless Hazards they are exposed to, from which (next to the Grace of GOD) nothing but an extraordinary Caution can secure them.

7. And because these Hazards are chiefly from sensible Objects, my next Advice shall be, *To walk by Faith, not by Sight*; to order your Conversation not by what you see of this World, but by what you believe of the next. *Not to look at the Things which are seen, but at the Things that are not seen; because the Things that are seen are temporal, and so doth not affect our final State: But the Things that are not seen are eternal, and so the proper Objects of an Happiness that is never to expire.* A Christian then ought to keep his Eye always fix'd on his Happiness; to walk continually in View of this his End, and have it before him as near as he can, in every Action and Word, in every deliberate Step of his Christian Progress: Not to content himself with having refer'd all he does to it once in general; but to renew and repeat the Proposal of it, as often as conveniently he can. Beside the habitual Reference of his Actions to their End, let every prudent Christian be more and more diligent to have an actual Regard to it, as far as is possible, in every Step of his Life. For the

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having before us that eternal Weight of Glory, that Crown that fadeth not away, must needs quicken our Devotion and inflame our Zeal, and inspirit us with new Life and Vigour in the running our Christian Course, and help us with Ease to overcome all those vain Impediments, which the World, the Flesh and the Devil throw in our Way. Nothing shall be able to separate us from our End, or turn us out of the right Way to it, if we keep our Eye intent upon it, and have it in our View all the Way of our Christian Walk. For indeed the Excellence of it is so transcendent, that nothing of this World can stand together with it, or shine in its Light, any more than a feeble Star can shine in the Presence of the Mid-day Sun. The greater Light swallows up the less; we must lose the one before we can be dazzled with the other; we must intermit the View of our chief Good, before any other can appear considerable enough to tempt us.

9. And now we are got into the right Way, there is no better Means of fixing ourselves there, than to keep toward the Middle of it, pretty far within the Lines, so as not to tread upon the Edges: Not to go to the Outside of what is lawful, but rather set ourselves in all our Actions at the greatest Distance from Sin, by abstaining from all the Appearances and Beginnings of it. But chiefly from the Beginnings. The full Accomplishments of Wickedness we have a Horror of. But we have not the same Dread of the Beginnings, and of the Things that have a Tendency to gross Crimes. So we are easily perswaded to begin; and when we have once made an Entrance, the Progress grows easier and easier. For the next Degree being but a Degree beyond it, carries as little Horror in it as the first; and so the next to that, being but a Degree farther, carries the like Appearance: And so the rest that follow, we measuring every Degree not (as we should do) by all the preceding ones which it contains, but only by the last, which it immediately exceeds, considering it only as a Degree farther than that, and so as a small Thing, 'till by Degrees we slide unawares into the Commission of those Sins, which look'd frightful, and would have choak'd us in the Lump, but being thus taken by Piece-meal are easily swallow'd.

10. And

10. And no Wonder, since the first Liberties we take, the first Approaches we make to any Sin, inflame our Passions, raise our Appetites, which were before quiet, and increase our Desires of the forbidden Object. So that our Task is now harder than it was at first, and we might much easier have forborn the whole, Beginning and all, than forbear making a further Progress, when we have once begun. And why should we make our Duty more difficult and painful than it is? Therefore the wisest Way is, not to begin; that being true of all Sin, which *Solomon* observes of Strife, *The Beginning of it is as when one letteth out Water*, which is easily prevented from running at first, but being once let out, the Passage grows more open, and the Stream more difficult to command. Therefore, says he, *Leave off Contentions before it be meddled with, i. e.* Do not meddle with it all, it being much easier to have nothing to do with it, than to govern yourself in it. They that once begin, are insensibly carried to do what at first they never design'd, and then vainly complain, that God did not preserve them from falling, when they placed their own Feet on slippery Ground.

11. To conclude: If we will be truly wise, let us set the Gospel and Example of CHRIST before us, and endeavour to be wise in our Generation, as the Men of this World are in theirs, be as diligent in pursuing our true and great End, as they are pursuing their false and little ones. They are intent upon the *Present*, and solicitous to provide for the short *Future* of an uncertain Life. Let us be intent upon providing for that future Life, which will soon be present, and never past. For this Purpose we should retire as much as we can conveniently from the World, and have as little to do with it; we should lay aside every Weight, and every Incumbrance, and not be *troubled about many Things*, that we may the more quietly and entirely attend upon the one Thing needful. Not that I plead for a Hermit's Solitude, not understanding the Agreement of such a State to human Nature, nor what Authority Men have thus to buy themselves alive, and to excommunicate themselves from human Society. But so much of Solitude as disengages us from the Affairs and Incumbrances of the World,

World, and places us out of the Noise, Hurry and Bustle of it, and out of the Way of its Temptations, must certainly be of vastly great Advantage to a truly Christian Life. Being much abroad may teach us to know *the World*; but Retirement only can teach us to know *ourselves*. For to know ourselves, we must converse much with ourselves. Let us therefore *retire*, and when we are alone, let us remember, that we are not alone, for God is with us. And while we think and act as in his Presence. Solitude has all the Safety of Company, without the Temptations and Interruptions. And here let us think much of Eternity, and of our Nearness to it, of the future Judgment, and the two final Sentences of that Day, of the glorious Things that are spoken of the City of God, and unspeakable Misery of being forever banish'd from his Presence; and lastly, of the Thoughts which we shall have of all these Things when we come to die. Every Man is wise *then*, and has a right Sense of Things; let us endeavour to have the same *now*, as we shall then wish we had, which is the Sum of all Christian Prudence.

F I N I S.



