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Dr. Colman's SERMON

ON THE

Fast which GOD hath chosen.



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The FAST which GOD hath cho,

A

SERMON

Preached at the *Lecture* in *Boston*

March 21. 1734.

Preparatory to an appointed Day of Publick
Fasting and Prayer.

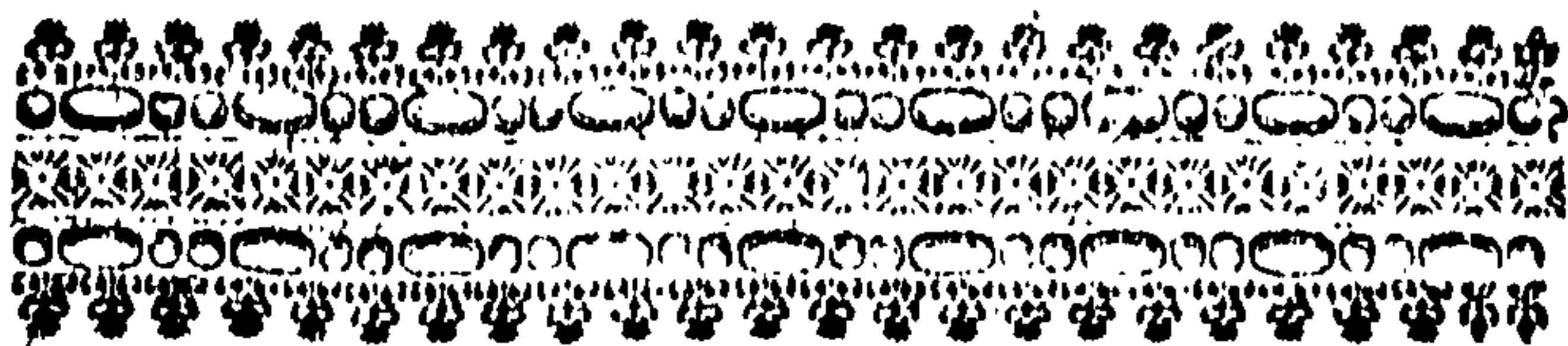
By Benjamin Colman, D.D.

Published at the Desire of Some that heard it, and
judge it may be of *General Use* at this Day thro'
the *Province.*

Zech. vii. 4, 5. *Then came the Word of the LORD OF HOSTS unto me, saying, "Speak unto all the People of the Land, and to the Priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the Fifth and Seventh Month, even these seventy Years, Did ye at all fast unto Me, even to Me?"*

Ver. 9. *Thus speaketh the LORD OF HOSTS, saying, Execute true Judgment, and shew Mercy and Compassion every Man to his Brother.*

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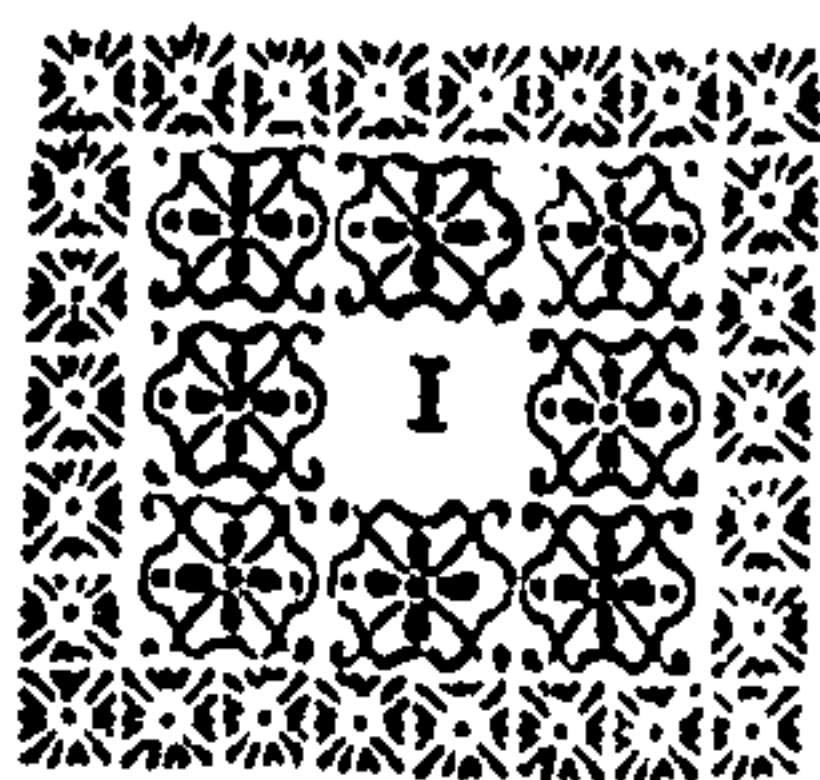


The Fast GOD hath Chosen.



ISAIAH lviii. 5.

Is it such a FAST that I have chosen? — wilt thou call this a Fast, and an acceptable Day to the LORD?



Have chosen these Words for the present *Lecture*; because of the Day of *Fasting* and *Prayer* before us a Week or two hence; to excite the *Audience* to a serious and careful Preparation therefor, and to direct You into the Fast which GOD chuses, and which is acceptable to Him.

THE People of God in our *Context* had been fasting and praying from time to time, as they were ready to think in Obedience to God's Appointment; but God seem'd not to see or regard their doing so. This they complain of to God, and were so bold as to ask Him the Reason of it: ver. 3. *Wherefore have we fasted and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our souls and thou takest no knowledge?* GOD plainly tells them *why*, in the next *Verse*; and charges them with gross Hypocrisie and Wickedness in their very Fasting: *Behold ye fast for Strife and Debate, and to smite with the Fist of Wickedness; ye shall not fast as ye do this Day:*" For, as it follows in my Text, "Is it such a Fast that I &c ...?"

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THE Question is put in a way of Scorn and Disdain; and so is a vehement Answer to it self in the *Negative*: No, you can't in your own Consciences think it an acceptable Fasting, if you will but soberly consider it.

IN the Words we have, 1. God's strict observing his People in their religious Duties, and in their solemn Fasting in particular. 2. His requiring Them to observe themselves in the same. 3. A Direction to them, what it concerns them to inquire into on such Occasions; "*Is it such as God hath chosen, and what we may call acceptable to the Lord.*"

I. THE first Note therefore from the Words is, *That the Holy GOD strictly observes his People on their days of Fasting.* This is abundantly imply'd in my Text; and indeed in the whole Scope of the Chapter. To their Enquiry of God, "Wherefore have we fasted & thou takest no Knowledge?" my Text severely answers in the Name of God; "Yes, I have taken Knowledge, and critically observed how you have fasted in Times past! It has been thus and thus amiss! plainly and grossly so! and canst thou for shame call this a Fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Your Fasts were all a meer Formality, all in Hypocrisie, without any real Humiliation, Repentance, and Reformation; and can you ask now why when you fasted and appeared to afflict your Souls, but did not, I took no Knowledge?"

God sees and observes us always, in every place, and in all that we think or speak or do. But especially is his Eye upon us in the Duties of his Worship, in secret, private or publick; on his holy *Sabbaths*, at *Lectures*, on *Fasts* or *Thanksgiving Days*. He sees the humble *Publican*, and beholds the boasting *Pharisee*, and knows the Heart and Life of each; justifies the one and rejects the other. He sees who keeps the Day to the LORD and who not: *Zech 7 4, 5* *Speak unto all the People of the Land, and to the Priests saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month, Did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? That is to say, I the LORD saw you that you did not*

A *Fast day* is a voluntary Sabbath; A Day holy to the LORD by our own Will, by the Magistrates Command, to the Honour of HIM by whom He rules. It is a day of Atonement to Persons, Families and a People. A day for holy Convocations, for the reading and hearing God's Law,

Law, and for solemn Prayer, Confession and Intercession before Him. And can we think then that the Eye of God is not upon our Hearts and Frames on such an Occasion? ... Fasts are an instituted Sign and Means, and a publick Profession of Repentance and Mortification of Sin; and will not God then observe us in them, whether we indeed repent, or not! God observed how *David* fasted and repented, when his Child died; and how *Esther* and the *Jews* fasted under the Rod and Sword of *Haman*: how *Daniel*, *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* fasted; and how the *Ninevites*; and how *Jezebel* proclaimed her Fast.

LET us then always awfully realize the Notice God takes of our Hearts and Frames, our Life and Ways, at such Times, and say to Him and to our Selves, "Thou LORD seest me! And so I come to the second Note from my Text.

II. God expects that we strictly observe our selves on our Days of Fasting. The LORD puts it to us in my Text, for our serious Consideration, *Is it such a Fast that I have chosen?*

WE are conscious to our Selves, and made to observe our Selves; or we were not made to Worship. God has made us for Self-Observation, to compare our Selves, our Hearts and Lives, with his holy Word; to examine our Selves, to know our own Selves, and to approve our Hearts before Him. This is the Power Glory and Duty of reasonable Creatures; and to neglect it is their Sin and Shame; *to be as the Horse and Mule that have no Understanding.* — And God has appointed us his Sabbaths, Sacraments and Fasting-days, as special Seasons for this Duty of Self-Observation. The state of our Souls, and the present Posture and Exercise of our Souls, is to be then seriously enquired into.

God observes whether we are thus observant of our Selves. He has directed us to be very observant in our private Fastings: *Mat. 6. 7. Thou when thou fastest anoint thy Head, and wash thy Face, that thou appear not to Men to fast, but to thy Father which sees in secret.* So *Daniel* set his face by Prayer and Fasting unto the LORD his God; to please and glorify Him and find Acceptance with Him, and his Audience. And so the Apostle directs us in every Duty we perform; *1 Thes. 2. 4. Not as pleasing Men, but God which trieth our Hearts.* Our Sincerity and Feivency
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in religious Duties depends upon and appears in this conscientious Observing of our selves in them.

But what is it that we must thus religiously observe in our Days of Fasting and Prayer? This brings me to the third Doctrine.

III. We ought strictly to observe, examine and judge our Selves, *Whether it be the Fast that God hath chosen, and what He will accept from us?* Is it such a Fast that I have chosen? Wilt thou call this an acceptable Day to the LORD?

This is a Matter of the last Importance, and it is to no Purpose at all to fast, if this be not our chief Regard and Care. What other Rule have we to go by? what other End to propose to our selves in Acts of Worship or Obedience to God? Whether we regard God, our Selves, or the Good of all about us; the Welfare of Church or State!

Whom have we to do with in Fasting but God only? It is an Ordinance of God for Himself primarily, his own Glory from us, in all the Mercy Grace and Good that we seek unto Him for, in his own prescribed Way; from such Principles and for such Ends as agree to his glorious Nature and Relations to us. — There is certainly a Praying and Fasting, and so in other Duties, that God has not chosen, cannot chuse and will not accept. He bids us *keep his Sabbath, and chuse the Things that please him.* Acceptance with God is all in all in the Duties we perform to Him. In this we must labour, that whether we Hear, pray, fast, give Thanks, or attend Sacraments, that we may be accepted of the LORD. 2 Cor 5 9. CHRIST JESUS our Lord has sanctified to us this Rule, *John 8. 29. I do always the Things that please Him.*

God has chosen, and will chuse for Himself, that He in all Things may be glorified; that whether we eat or drink, or fast, all may be to the Glory of God. In subordination to this is our Profit, spiritual and temporal, and in Conjunction herewith it is to be sought.

Our Needs carry us to the Footstool of the Throne of Grace, but prior to these God's Honour should move us. We have the Wants of Body and Soul, our own and our Peoples, and God only can supply them; our own and their Sins too and Afflictions, and God only can forgive and relieve us. We are indigent Beggars at the Gate of Heaven, and there we ly in our Sores as well as Rags, unwor-
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thy of a Crumb, but Suppliant for the Riches of Grace, Bounty and Mercy. *We humble our Soul with Fasting, and our Prayer returns into our own Bosom.* God has not said to us, "Seek ye me in vain: But he has said, "Call upon Me in the Day of Trouble, and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. But if our Fast be not that which God has chosen, and if our Prayer be not such as he will accept, there can be neither Glory to God, nor Good to our selves, spiritual or temporal, from either.

It behoves us therefore carefully to observe and consider *this*, "Is it the Fast, the Sabbath, the Lecture, the Thanksgiving-day which God chuses, and that is acceptable to Him.

AND now I will look into my *Context*, and shew you *the Fast which God chuses, and the Day that is acceptable to Him.* There we have two *General Rules* laid before us, 1. *Sincerity, and Uprightness of Heart.* 2. *The Manifestation of this in a diligent and earnest Attention to the Word and Will of God, zealously and fervently preach'd to us; with an immediate Reformation of all known Sin, and an instant earnest Application unto the Practice of all known Duties; Whether 1. Those that regard the Divine Worship; or 2. Those that respect our Neighbours or our selves.*

I. First then, We must observe and look to *the Sincerity and Uprightness of our Hearts* before God, if we would keep the Fast which He chuses and will be acceptable to Him.

THE great *Crime* charged in my *Context* is that of *Hypocrisie*, under a fair and specious shew, a great and high Profession of Devotion and Humiliation. ver. 2. *Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my Ways, as a Nation that did Righteousness, and forsook not the Ordinances of their God; they ask of Me the Ordinances of Justice, they take Delight in approaching to God.* Insincerity under such an Appearance is a very crying Guilt in the Ears of *the Lord of Sabbath*, and hainous Falshood in the Sight of Conscience. What greater Indignity, Affront and Mockery, can Infidelity and Contempt offer to the Omniscient God, and the God of Truth! As if He could only see our Faces and hear our Words and not look into our Hearts! or as if He were not the holy and righteous One to regard the Frame of our Spirits, and resent the Falseness

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of them ! As if we tho't the God we worship were not a Spirit, and the infinite Spirit, the Father of all Spirits, who searches and weighs the Spirits of Men, and seeks those to worship him that do it in Spirit and in Truth ! It is to treat the blessed God as if He were a Stock or a molten Image, that has neither Eye to see, nor Hand to strike. There is no greater Profanation of the Name and Ordinances of God than in this vain Form of external Devotion. Wherefore the first and great Commandment of the Law is *Sincerity* ; " *All thy Heart and all thy Soul !* What else should the God of thy Spirit require or accept from thee ? *His Eyes are as a Flame of Fire and He will make the Churches to know that he searches the heart &c. The prayer of the Upright is his Delight, and the Sacrifice of the Wicked is an Abomination to Him.* He sees Nathaniel under the Fig-tree with his open Heart, and the *Publican* in the Temple with his humble Eye ; and he hears the vain *Pharisee* with his " *God I thank thee, I fast twice in the week.* Luk. 18 12. This is the monstrous Iniquity of People's Hypocrisie in their customary formal Fasts and Sabbaths, that they fancy to themselves a Righteousness from their Shews of Devotion, meritorious of God's Acceptance ! *Wherefore have we fasted ?* said they, &c. A most provoking Impiety & Absurdity ! *Thou blind Pharisee !* that boastest of thy Fasting, buildest on it and trustest in it, that thou art righteous. Meritorious Creature ! that tellest God (as it were) how much he is beholden to thee ; what thou hast done for Him, and even gone beyond the Law in so many voluntary Fasts, and Works of Supererogation ! When as the poor foolish *Formalist* had done nothing in Sincerity, nothing that God had chosen or could accept ! but had come before God full of odious Pride, Vanity and Ostentation. It is the common Guilt of ignorant, careless customary Worshipers, in all places to this Day. In *popish* Countries, what are their numbred Prayers, and what their numerous Fasts and Festivals, but a *Treasury of Merit* in the Conceit of the miserable Worshipers ? And so with Multitudes in *Protestant* Places, the publick worship of Sabbaths and Fasts is but a meer bodily Exercise, ignorantly rested in, as something acceptable to God and profitable to Themselves, when indeed it is neither. I hope there are few in the Churches of our Denomination, but who have better learned CHRIST, and the Doctrine of *Spiritual Worship* :

Worship: Yet how many are there that keep Fasts in Hypocrisy, without any Care about their Sincerity in the Sight of God, or Sollicitude about their Acceptance with Him. Tho' we do not go away boasting of what we have done, yet unconcerned it may be how we have done, or tho'tless about the Divine Acceptance! or about the Provocation given to God by a careless Observation of a Day to the LORD? Fasting is good and so is Prayer, if in Sincerity; but as the Corruption of the best things makes the worst of Filth; so it is if *these* are corrupted and purified by Hypocrisie.

II. AND so I come to the *second Rule* laid down in our Context; which respects *the Manifestation of a People's Sincerity or Insincerity*, their Uprightness or Hypocrisie in their Fasting and Praying. And the whole Context, the whole Chapter, is in a manner spent on this Argument.

1. A serious, earnest, diligent and *affectionate Attention* to the Word preached, and the fervent *Preaching* of it by the Ministers of Religion, belong to the Fast that God hath chosen, and to a Day acceptable to the LORD. So the Chapter begins, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a Trumpet, and shew my People their Transgressions, &c." Both Ministers and People must unite their Hearts in the Exercises of Preaching and Hearing, as well as in the Prayers and Supplications of a Fast day; the One in delivering, the Other in receiving the Mind and Will of God, with Reverence and Fear, Affection and holy Zeal.

WHAT a *Preacher* was the Prophet *Isaiab* to be on such an Occasion? and how adapted is the Preaching to the Occasion? both with respect to the *Matter* of it, to shew God's *People their Transgression*; and also as to the *Manner* Cry aloud and not spare, lift up thy voice as a Trumpet.

SINCERITY is strongly implied in this Vehemence, or the Vehemence were but the louder and bolder Hypocrisie. Sincerity makes earnest Preaching at any Time, but there are singular and more solemn Occasions, that call for a more singular strain of Vehemence and Zeal both in praying, preaching and hearing.

NOT that a *Fast-Day* is more than a *Lord's Day*, or the weekly Sabbath; and much less that Days appointed by *Men* are reverend and solemn to us like That which is ordained and commanded by God: But indeed Days of Fasting on futable and great Occasions are the Institution

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and Appointment of God both under the Law & Gospel and ought to be to Us as Holy Sabbaths of the Lord, and accordingly to be observed as Acceptable Days unto Him with all possible Reverence and Solemnity: And the Intent and Work of these Days being to humble and afflict our Souls for Sin, and with great Concern to implore the Remission of it, and Grace to turn and keep from it; this calls for a more special *Application of Ministers* to the convincing Sinners of their Guilt and Danger, and for a more special *Attention of People* unto the Word preached for that End.

It may be therefore owing to the Negligence, Coldness and Formality of Ministers, that the Fast be not such as God chuses; and it should be awful to Them to consider how much lies upon Them, by the Help and Power of God, to make it so; in their leading in the Prayers of the Day, and in their Addressing to the Consciences of Men: *But who is sufficient for these things!*

In the 8 & 9 Chapters of *Nehemiah* we find the Jews assembled on two solemn Days of Worship; the first a *Feast* day, the other a *Fast*; and on both the *Law* solemnly read and preached to them. *Ezra* was the Preacher, a ready Scribe in the Law of God, and an accomplish'd Master of the Assembly. With what Life and Light did He speak, instructing them in Duty, and convincing them of Sin! He was first the People's Mouth to God upon the solemn Day, and then God's Mouth to them: *And the Ears of all the People were attentive to the Book of the Law: He opened the Book in the sight of all the People, and they all stood up. From Morning till Mid-day he read the Law to them, he read distinctly and gave the Sense, and caused them to understand it.* How good was it (think you) to see him in the Pulpit! *Paul* and *Apollos*, and the *Boanerges* of the New Testament, came afterward in his Spirit. This preaching and hearing made an acceptable Day to the Lord. They all answered to the Word and Prayers, *Amen, Amen!* lifting up their Hands on High, and bowing with their Faces to the Ground: in token of their ardent Desire and profound Reverence.

Every thing is sanctified to us by the Word & Prayer. Fasts are so and so are Sabbaths. Nor should we call either Duty a *Weariness*, even tho' one fourth part of the Day be spent in the one, and another fourth in the other. If we preach and hear with Affection and Earnestness, the
Time

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Time passes presently pleasantly and profitably, and the Day is acceptable to the LORD.

But if People turn away their Ear from hearing the Law, their Prayers become Sin. Prov. 28. 9. How should God hear their Prayers, who will not hear his Word! If that be not hearkened to and obey'd, the Day is spoilt and lost, and turn'd into Sin and Provocation. Rebellion is as the Sin of Witchcraft, as Samuel told King Saul, when he pleaded that he had been offering Sacrifices to the Lord. So Isaiah begins his Prophecy, "Hear the Word of the LORD, ye Rulers of Sodom! give Ear to the Law of our GOD, ye People of Gomorrah! to what purpose else is the Multitude of your Sacrifices to Me! but if ye be willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the Land. See also Zechariah vii. 7, 11, 12, 13.

2. THE Reformation of all known Sin, and an instant zealous Application to all known Duty, this makes the Fast that God chuses, and the acceptable Day to Him.

THESE two things are the Summ and Comprehension of all practical Religion, and of our religious Professions and Promises to God, in one Solemnity or other wherein we come before the Lord and bind our Souls to Him. They are also the Test of our Sincerity in the Sight of God and Man; and prove our Attention to his Law with Reverence and Affection. And they are the great things insisted on in our Context.

1. THE Reformation of all known Sin: "Behold in the Day of your Fast you find Pleasure, and exact all your Labour! behold you fast for Strife and Debate and to smite with the Fist of Wickedness! Ye shall not fast as ye do this Day: But this is the Fast that I have chosen, to loose the Bands of Wickedness, to undo the heavy Burdens, to break every Yoke, and let the Oppressed go free

2. An instant zealous Application to all known Duty is prescribed and commanded: "Is it not to deal thy Bread to the hungry? and that thou bring the Poor that are cast out to thy House? when thou seest the Naked that thou cover him! that thou draw out thy Soul to the Hungry, and satisfy the afflicted Soul: "That thou turn away thy Foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy Pleasure on my Holy Day! and call the Sabbath a Delight, the Holy of the LORD and Honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thy own Ways, nor finding thy own Pleasure, nor speaking thy own Words.

AFTER

ART. 2. In this manner it has pleased the HOLY GHOST to teach us, in my Context, how to sanctify a *Fast*, and to keep an *acceptable Day to the LORD*: That upon solemn Enquiry into the Divine Law, whatsoever we find amiss among us be reformed, and all that it requires us to do be diligently performed by us, in the Strength of God and by the Help of his Grace. All which is reduced here to those *three* comprehensive Heads, which are the Summary of the Law and the Prophets.

1. THOSE things that more immediately respect God, his Worship and Sabbaths.

2. THOSE that more immediately respect *Men*, the great Laws of Justice, Charity and Mercy.

3. THOSE that respect *Our Selves*, the Mortification of our Lusts, and the Government of our Appetites and Passions.

So that the *Sins* against God, our Neighbours and our Selves, must be searched out and reformed; and the *Duties* we owe to God, our Selves, and our Neighbours, must be made Conscience of; and *this* is the *Fast* which God hath chosen, and nothing *less* can we call an *acceptable Day* to Him. Thus *broad* is the Law of our God to us, and of no less Breadth is the *Fast* that He has chosen.

I. OUR *Sins* against God, *his* Worship, *his* Sabbaths and Ordinances must be immediately reformed; and we must set our Selves to a *reverend* Observation of the *Day* of GOD, and of *his* Instituted Worship.

THIS refers us to the *First Table* of the Law, to search out and reform all our *Sins* against it; and to see to the reverent Performance of all the *Duties* required in the *four first Commandments*. And because the religious Observation of the *Fourth* is a special Means and Security of our observing the *Duties* of the *other three*, therefore *this* is in a particular manner instanc'd in, viz our keeping the *Sabbath day*. For indeed, if the *Lord's-days* be strictly and duly sanctified by us, there is no doubt but the other *Duties* of the *first Table* will be made Conscience of. We shall certainly honour, reverence and fear the *Name* of God, and not dare to take it in vain; we shall observe *all the instituted* Worship of GOD and that *only*, and also worship Him in secret as well as public, if our Hearts be right with Him in keeping his *Sabbaths*. We shall certainly repent of and reform all the *Profanities*

sanctify of our Hearts, Lips and Lives, and abound in Adoration, Prayer, Thanksgiving and Praise, mental and vocal, stated and occasional, if we make Conscience to *sanctify* the *weekly Sabbath*. For *this* comes from a Principle of *Universal Devotion* within us, and leads into it and confirms us in it.

Our *Sabbaths* teach us to worship all the *Week* long, and all the *Year* long. They move us to worship *daily* and help us to do so. They are the perpetual Means, ordained by God and blessed for this End. All our *Time* is sanctified to God, by the Sanctification of this part of it; and our *Souls* and all that is within us are sanctified by Him, for Himself, in this Way. No wonder then, that the *Prophet* here describing the *Fast* which God chuses, brings in the keeping his *Sabbath*, as the singular Means of our whole Devotion toward God! and that he calls upon us in the solemn Professions of our Repentance toward God, on our Fast-days, to look to our careful Observation of the Sabbath-day; and that we do in a particular manner repent of, and humble our selves for, our Profanations of the Lord's-day, in Thought Word and Behaviour, as ever we would keep the Fast that God chuses.

“ If thou turn away *thy Foot* (says God) from the *Sabbath* &c, then and not till then wilt thou keep *Fasts* aright, and in a manner acceptable to Me. Let the *Tho't* enter deep into us: How can it be possible to keep *Fasts* aright, when God's *Sabbaths* are not kept by us! If we do one, we shall the other also: But if our *Weekly Sabbaths* are profaned among us, how should an *Annual Fast* be kept by us!

VERILY we must *begin with GOD* in our repenting of Sin; and where or how can we begin with Him but in our Humiliations for Want of Devotion toward Him, in secret and public? It ought to give us Light and Pleasure to see the Reason, Justice and necessity of the *Prophets* inserting our reverend Observation of the *Lord's-day*, into our keeping an acceptable *Fast* to the LORD. For how should one or two Fast-days in a Year be acceptable to God, if our many Lord's-days within the Year be none of them so? On the other hand, If our returning *Sabbaths* from Week to Week, be so kept by us, thro' the Grace of God, as to be acceptable to Him; doubtless (by the same Grace) we shall also sanctify the *Fasts* of the *Year*

Year in an acceptable manner ! If by the Grace of God we keep *One Day in seven*, from Year to Year, holy to the Lord, shall we not also *once a Year*, by the same Assistance and from the same Principle, keep a *holy Fast to the Lord* ! The Reason of the Thing speaks for it self : *Sabbath Sanctification is the special Means of our sanctifying Fasts*. It is as plain as the Light, that we shall never keep the Fast which God chuses, till we keep Sabbaths as he chuses.

II. *Our Sins against our Neighbours, even all the Want of Righteousness Charity and Mercy toward one another, must be repented of and reformed, to make the Fast that GOD hath chosen, and the acceptable Day to Him.*

This is the *second Commandment of the Law*, which is like unto the *First*, that *we love our Neighbour as our Selves*. And if this be not observed by us we are *irreligious and profane*, how many Sabbaths and Fasts soever we keep. *To do Judgment and Justice is more acceptable to the LORD than Sacrifice.*

This is at large taught in my Context, "*Behold in the Day of your Fasts ye exact your Labours* (are rigorous, cruel and oppressive in your Dealings with one another.) "*You fast also for Strife and Debate*, (are contentious, censorious and calumniating one another, under pretence of Piety.) "The contending Parties among them were bitter in their Reflections on others, instead of making humble Reflections upon Themselves. From wicked and injurious Words they came to *Actions* ; whether in Form of Law or against it matter'd little ; all was wicked, *You smite with the Fist of Wickedness*. Whereas the Fast that God chuses is *to loose the Bands of Wickedness, to undoe the heavy Burdens, to break every Yoke, and free the Oppressed* : Yea it is *to deal out Bread to the Hungry, to bring the Poor and Outcast to our House, to cover the Naked, and not hide our Selves from Them* that should be to Us as *our own Flesh* : i. e. Our poor Brother, whom we ought to love and pity as our own Flesh.

HERE then you see the great and amiable Laws of *Justice and Charity*, the two great Branches of the *Second Table*, insisted and enlarged on by the HOLY GHOST, as necessary to the Fast which God hath chosen, and to any acceptable Day of Worship.

1. **THERE** cannot be the *Fast* which God chuses, nor the *Sabbath* neither acceptable to Him, unless we repent of and reform our *Unrighteousness and Injustice between Man and Man*, and make Conscience of being *just and righteous* in our Dealings with one another.

To fast to God and to be unjust to *Men*, how absurd is this as well as impious! For is not Justice and Righteousness between Man and Man one of the Great Laws of God? And is not God righteous? and can He approve or accept any but the righteous? Psalm 11. 5. *The righteous LORD loveth Righteousness; the wicked and him that loveth Violence his Soul hateth.*

1. A GOVERNMENT must be just and righteous, or why do They proclaim a Fast? *Jezebel*, an abhorred Instance, proclaim'd an impious Fast for the sake of *Naboth*, his Vineyard and his Blood, for Robbery and Murder! It was like *the painted and scarlet Whore*, and far be it from any but that Mother of Abominations, *the Church of Rome*, drunken with the Blood of Saints.

It must be the *Legislators* Care and Work, and also that of the *Judge*, to see the Oppressed freed, the heavy Burdens undone, and the Bands of Wickedness broken. Zech. 7. 10, 17. *Thus speaketh the LORD OF HOSTS, Execute true Judgment, oppress not the Widow and Fatherless; and let none of you imagine Evil against your Brother: Speak every Man Truth to his Neighbour, execute Judgment and Peace in the Gates, and love no false Oath; for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.* If there be publick Injustice reigning among us, God will hate our Fasting and Prayer. The Cry of the one will drown the Voice of the other.

But there are also *Bands of Wickedness*, which are not within the Power of *Rulers* to loose or break: All They can do, it may be, is to *frown* upon the cruel Men, who will not loose them. And these may fear that God will, if Men do not. Wherefore

2. PRIVATE *Persons* must take heed to be very righteous, just and good in their common Dealings with one another, or they cannot fast as God chuses, and will be acceptable to Him.

THERE are *Bands* which Men sometimes foolishly eno^r and sinfully bring themselves into, and at last it will be Cruelty and Wickedness in their Brother, if he
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refuse to loose them, or if he too rigorously insist upon them, tho' the Law of the Land may not oblige him. In many a Case, extream Right is extream Wrong.

"THERE are *Bands* (says the pious Mr. Henry on my Context) which it may be we have wickedly tied to bind *out* others from their Right, or by which they are bound *down* under severe Usage". Such Bands must be broken, or we break our Fasts and Sabbath.

THERE are *Bands* also which might be at first Bands of *Justice*, whereby Men have tied themselves to pay a due Debt; yet if this Debt is exacted with *Rigor* from such as Providence has reduc'd and emptied, they become Bands of *Wickedness*, and will make the Bands of Guilt strong upon us.

LET the *Prisoner for Debt*, (says that Man of God) who has nothing to pay be discharged: let *vexatious Actions* be let fall". I wish *They* would think of these Words, before their fasting and praying, who throw poor Men into *Jails* which pay no Debts! "*And there let 'em lie and rot*, says the cruel *Creditor*; while their Families starve, and their Wives and Children are Widows and Fatherless before their Time.

INDEED it must be own'd, that some *run into Debt* with so much Fraud and Deceit, and others *ly in Debt*, and refuse to pay when they can, with so much Injustice and Knavery, that they are little better than *Theives* and Robbers, and might as well almost have broken into their Neighbours Stores, and taken their Goods away. The Bands of these Sinners against their own Souls must be broken by *Repentance* and by *Reparation* if they are able; else they have little Pretence to the Favour and Compassion of their injured Brethren. — Yet even to *these* we must not be too rigorous or cruel, no not to the wicked and unjust: How much less to Those, of whom we have Reason to think, that they have a Principle of Honesty and Piety in them; and are ready to say with the insolvent Debtor in the Gospel, Matth. 18. 26. "*Have Patience with me and I will pay thee all*

It may be thy *poor Debtor* will readily fall down at thy Feet, *thou hard Man!* and beseech thee to have Compassion on him: And wilt thou *take him by the Throat*, deaf to his Supplications to thee? How wilt thou answer it to Him another Day, to Whom thou owest ten thousand Talents, and hast nothing to pay, but hopest
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to have all frankly forgiven to thee! Or how can you expect He should regard your Prayers and Fasting now, on whose Mercy and Alms you and yours subsist from day to day,

TRULY I fear that of late Years this has been our Danger, and is like to be more so in the Years that are coming on, lest our Fasts be too much for Strife and Debate, and to smite with the Fist of Wickedness! we are so opposite to one another and fierce in our Opinions respecting our Civil Privileges, and the Means of preserving them, and at the same time are run so much in Debt to one another, and are arresting and haling one another to Judgment; by which means Debtors are devoured of the very Law, and only render'd the more insolvent.

BUT I am got, ere I am aware, from the Head of Justice, to that of Charity and Mercy which is the other Part of our Duty to our Neighbour, insisted on in my Context, if we hope to have our Fasting Days acceptable to the LORD.

THERE cannot be the Fast that GOD chuses, nor will any of our Days of Worship be acceptable to the LORD, unless we repent of and reform all our Uncharitableness and Unmercifulness to our Brethren, and unless the Law of Kindness and Love rule in our Hearts and Lives.

GOD is Love, and Love is the Fulfilling of his Law, As He requires us to be just and righteous to one another, so also to be good, and kindly affectioned, with Brotherly Love.

A new Commandment has CHRIST given us, the same which we heard from the Beginning, "That he who loveth God, love his Brother also." "Love worketh no ill to his Neighbour: let it be without Dissimulation: not in Word and Tongue only, but in Deed and in Truth: with a pure Heart, fervently: have it among your Selves and toward all Men." "Owe no Man any thing, but to love one another: let all your Things be done with Charity, and by Love serve one another." "Let every Man seek another's Wealth: A good Man sheweth Favour, and lendeth: Put on, as the Elect of God, holy and beloved, Bowels of Mercies, Meekness, Long-suffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another,

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“ Give Alms of such things as you have, and behold all
“ things are clean to you: For as merciful as your FATHER
“ in Heaven is merciful. “ Blessed is he that considereth
“ the poor, the LORD will deliver him in time of Trou-
“ ble: But whose stoppeth his Ears at the Cry of the
“ poor, shall cry himself and shall not be heard: He shall
“ have Judgment without Mercy that sheweth no Mercy.

This is the Voice of Scripture, teaching us that the Spirit of Humiliation and Prayer acceptable to God, must be that of Love, Mercy and Bounty to the poor, the needy and afflicted. And this my Context is express and abundant in: “ Is not this the Fast that I have chosen? to deal thy Bread to the hungry, to bring the poor to thy House; when thou seest the Naked that thou cover him, and hide not thy self from thy own Flesh! from thy poor Brother, who is so, and ought to be such unto thee.

It brings to mind the Cry of the People to Nehemiah in his Day, the Complaint which the Poor brought to him against their cruel Creditors: Nehem. 5. 1, ——— 13. And there was a great Cry of the People, and of their Wives, against their Brethren the Jews: For there were that said, We, our Sons, and our Daughters are many: therefore we take up Corn for them, that we may eat, and live. Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our Lands, Vineyards, and Houses, that we might buy Corn, because of the Dearth. There were also that said, We have borrowed Money for the King's Tribute, and that upon our Lands and Vineyards. Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our Brethren, our Children as their Children: and lo, we bring into bondage our Sons and our Daughters, to be Servants, and some of our Daughters are brought into bondage already, neither is it in our power to redeem them: for other Men have our Lands and Vineyards. And I was very angry when I heard their Cry, and these words. Then I consulted with my self, and I rebuked the Nobles, and the Rulers, and said unto them, You exact Usury, every one of his Brother. And I set a great Assembly against them. And I said unto them, We, after our Ability, have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the Heathen; and will you even sell your Brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then they held their peace, and found nothing to answer; Also I said, It is not good that ye do: Ought ye not to walk in the Fear of our God, because of the reproach of the Heathen our enemies? I likewise, and my Brethren, and my Servants might exact

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exact of them Money and Corn: I pray you, let us leave off this Usury. Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their Lands, their Vineyards, their Olive-yards, and their Houses, also the hundredth part of the Money, and of the Corn, the Wine, and the Oyl, that we exact of them. Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the Priests, and took an Oath of them, that they should do according to this Promise. Also I took my lap, and said, So God shake out every Man from his House, and from his Labour, that performeth not this Promise, even thus he be shaken out, and emptied. And all the Congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the People did according to this promise,

A very affecting Story truly! and a very teaching one. This was a good Preparation for their Day of Fasting and Prayer.

I fear We of this Town and Land are coming apace into too much the like Circumstances, both the Rich and the Poor. The poorer Brethren have too many of them run themselves into Bonds, for Moneys taken up of the rich. The rich are like to suffer much in that part of their Estate that lies in Bonds; that is to say, the Moneys which they have put out to Use. We are going, I fear, into excessive Usury, which yet may not seem so, considering the yearly Fall of our Paper-Currency. The Rich can scarce think that they oppress the Borrower, because the poor Man courts and begs the Loan at any Rate, as a Favour; and readily offers much more than many a Lender has the Conscience to take. But it is easy to see that in the End it must come out much as it did between the Usurers and the Poor in Nebemiah's Time.

THERE will be, I apprehend, a great Cry, of Many that will be very Poor in some Years to come, their Wives, their Sons and Daughters, against their Brethren whom they now importune, and sometimes even constrain and overcome by their Importunity, to serve and save them. They will say hereafter, it is likely, "We took up Money's
" for Corn that we might eat and live! tho' it is no such
matter, but it may be for Superfluities, or to purchase
Houses and Lands, or to trade and get Gain. " Our
" Flesh (will they say) is as the flesh of our Brethren, our
" Children as their Children, and lo we are bro't into Bon-
" dage, and cast into Prisons, or our Inheritances are lūd
out

put in a Course of Law, and taken away from us, and the very Costs of Suit we are unable to pay; but our pitiless Brethren "hide Themselves from us, that are their own Flesh! they regard not our Affliction and Oppression.

When this Cry comes among Us, it may be we shall find no tender-hearted *Nehemiab* in the Chair, to rebuke even the Greatest and say to them, "You exact cruel Usury every one of his Brother: Or it may be we shall not find the Great Assembly to joyn with Him, and set against the Exactions. Or let 'em be never so tender and righteous, it may not be in their Power to redress the Wrong; but the Law must have its Course. And least of all are we like to find the *Exactors* silent and submissive, restoring the mortgaged Lands, and the hundred parts of the Money which (says the judicious *Mr. Clark*) "they received Monthly for Interest, after the Rate of twelve per Cent. for the Year. And many among us, it is said, are already got to Ten per Cent. I leave the Matter to your wise and sober Consideration! It is a surprising Agreement of Circumstances, which I with may find as religious an End, both on the Part of the Borrower, and Lender, that both may praise the LORD together, and all the Congregation joyn with them.

In our Fasts we come before the LORD to cry to Him for his Compassions and Mercies, but with what Face can we do it if we are without Bowels of Mercy to those about us that are in Misery? Do we come to weep before God in our Troubles and Afflictions, in our Indigence and Wants, for a rich Supply, without and against our Desert; and should we not be able to say with *Job*; "Did I not weep with Him that was in trouble? was not my Soul griev'd for the Poor.

This is the lifting up holy Hands, in Humbleness of Mind; but the Want of Love and Charity hinders Prayers, public as well as private. The Spirit and Grace of Prayer is wanting, and how should it be heard and accepted by God? But the Spirit of Love makes the public Spirit; which is Essential to an acceptable publick Fast, and was always one of the Glories of the Fasting, and Prayers of *Moses*, *Nehemiab*, and other Men of God.

III. My Context hints at another *Requisite* to the *Fast* which God chuses, and to the *Day* that is acceptable to Him; and that is --- *That we deeply repent of, and carefully reform the Sins that do more immediately respect our Selves.* Fasting is for the *Mortification* of *fleishly Lusts*, *Appetites* and *Inordinate Passions*; the *intemperate Desires* of the *Flesh* and of the *Mind*. The want of *this* spoils the *Fasting* boasted of in my Context; "*Behold,*" *in the Day of your Fast ye find Pleasure, i. e.* You pretend to pinch and humble the *Body*, and to afflict your *Souls*, but do neither! The *Flesh* is not crucified with its *Affections* and *Lusts*, nor do you mortify your *Members that are upon the Earth*; *Fornication, Uncleaness, inordinate Affection, evil Concupiscence and Covetousness which is Idolatry!* Sin is as pleasant to you as it was before, and as much indulg'd and liv'd in as if you had never fasted! He that was *unchaste* is so still, and he that was *drunken* is so still, and he that was *unjust* is unjust still! You are as *sensual* as ever, as *proud* passionate and injurious as ever, as *worldly* and covetous as ever, and living in *Malice* and *Envy* as much as ever! You do your own *Ways*, speak your own *Words*, find your own *Pleasure*, are set upon your own *Wills*, and persist in your old *Courses*.

We read of *Those that assembled themselves for Corn and Wine*, not to serve God in the Use hereof, but to *rebel against Him*. *Hol. 7. 14.* And of *Them that ask'd that they might consume it on their Lusts*: *James 4. 3.* Upon which (says the *APOSTLE*) "*Ye Adulterers and Adulteresses!* know ye not that the *Friendship of the World is Enmity to God!* Cleanse your *Hands ye Sinners*, and *purify your Hearts ye double-minded!* Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you! *Be afflicted and mourn and weep!* let your *Laughter be turned into Mourning*, and your *Joy into Heaviness!* *Humble your Selves in the Sight of God* and he shall lift you up.

Our *Fasts* mean to make us *humble, meek, sober, temperate, chaste, circumspect, diligent, frugal, modest and self-denying.* God will not accept us in our *Pride, Passions, Intemperances, Uncleanesses, Idleness, Self-indulgence and Excess.* If these continue our *Fasts* are a *vain and false Shew of afflicting our Souls.* *Spiritual Lusts* and *fleishly* also may be *living and ruling* in us, while we

hang down our Head as a Bulrush. The old Lusts are not at all stay'd by our fasting; but return with new Appetite and Craving, and are gratify'd with new Pleasure.

THESE are the Pleasures of the *Beast*, and those of *Devils*: The corrupt Souls of Men crave the one as much as their defiled Bodies do the other. Some have their Pleasure in *Fraud* and worldly *Gains*, others in *Strife* and *Debate* and *Smiting*, others in *Lasciviousness* or *Excess of Wine*; But the *GRACE OF GOD*, which has appeared to us, bringing *Salvation*, teaches us || to deny all *Ungodliness* and every *worldly Lust*; to cleanse our Selves from all *Filthiness* both of *Flesh* and *Spirit*; to take *Heed* to our Selves, lest at any *Time* our *Hearts* be overcharged with the *Cares* of *this World*, as well as with *Surfeiting* and *Drunkenness*; that we be purged from our old *Sins*, and keep our Selves from our own *Iniquity*: that if our *Eye* or *Hand* offend us we pluck it out, and cut it off, and cast them from us; that we put off as concerning the former *Conversation* the *Old Man*, which is corrupt according to deceitful *Lusts*; and as *Pilgrims* and *Strangers* abstain from them, not walking as the *Gentiles* that please not *GOD*: For un'o them that are defiled is nothing pure, but even their *Mind* and *Conscience* is defiled. This is the *Will of GOD*, even our *Sanctification*, that every One possess Himself, *Soul* and *Body*, in *Sanctity* and *Honour*: That we be renewed in the *Spirit* of our *Minds*, and live in the *SPIRIT* and walk in the *SPIRIT*: That we be besought by the *Mercies of GOD* to present our *Bodies* a *living Sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to Him, which is our reasonable *Service*: That we be not conformed to *this World*, but transformed by the *Renewing of our Mind*; that we may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect *Will of GOD*.

THE Ordinance of *Fasting* expressly speaks all this to us, and means to admonish us that the *Body* is for the *LORD*, and the *LORD* for the *Body*; that it is holy to the *LORD* as well as the *Soul*. We fast with it, we pray with it, we use it in the religious *Services* of every *Holy Day*, and on a *Fast-Day* we explicitly renew the *Dedication* of it that has been first made in *Baptism*, when it was washed with pure *Water*, in *Token* of its being *Holy* to *CHRIST*,

|| Tit. ii. 11, 12, 13. 2 Cor. vii. 1. Luk. xxi. 24. 2 Pet. i. 9.
Mat. v. 29, 30. Eph. iv. 22. 1 Pet. ii. 11. Tit. i. 15.
1 Thef. iv. 4. Rom. xii. 1, 2.

his living Temple, never to be defiled by any unclean Lust, but to be yielded in all its Members, as Instruments of Righteousness, to His Glory: For He has bought both Body and Soul with a Price, that we should glorify Him with our Body and Spirit which are His. 1 Cor. 6. 20.

If this be not the pious *Intention*, and the holy Fruit and Consequent of our Fasting, we must by no means think it the *Acceptable Day to the Lord*. But if God see us more sincere and fervent in secret Worship, more careful in Sabbath-Sanctification, more just and righteous in our Dealings, more kind and good, charitable and merciful, more sober chaste and temperate, and all from true Humiliation for Sin and Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; then he will accept our Persons and Prayers, and make good all the great and precious Promises in our Context to his repenting and reformed People; ver. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. *Then shall thy Light break forth as the Morning, and thine Health shall spring forth speedily: and thy Righteousness shall go before thee, the Glory of the Lord shall be thy Reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am: if thou take away from the midst of thee, the Tuke, the putting forth of the finger; and speaking vanity: And if thou draw out thy Soul to the Hungry, and satisfy the afflicted Soul; then shall thy Light rise in Obscurity, and thy Darkness be as the Noon-Day. And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy Soul in Drought, and make fat thy Bones; and thou shalt be like a watered Garden, and like a Spring of Water, whose Waters fail not. And thy that shall be of thee, shall build the old waste Places: thou shalt raise up the Foundations of many Generations, and thou shalt be called, The Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Paths to dwell in. If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy Pleasure on my holy Day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the Holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own Ways, nor finding thine own Pleasure, nor speaking thine own Words: Then shalt thou delight thy Self in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high Places of the Earth, and feed thee with the Heritage of Jacob thy Father; for the Mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.*

See the Price and Value of an Acceptable Fast to the LORD! and so of acceptable Sabbaths and Lectures too. They are a Price in our Hands, inestimable and beyond all Account. Let it never be said, "Why is it in the Hand of a Fool, that has no Heart to get Wisdom?" Prov. 17. 16.

But if our Fasts and Sabbaths are not accepted of God, they turn to as much Hurt and Loss, and that justly. They become the Savour of Death unto Death. By Profaneness and Hypocrisie in Worship we provoke the terrible Anger of God, his Aversion to us and Rejection of us: According to those dreadful Words from the LORD to Jeremiah, which the LORD grant may never come upon us, as they did upon his Hypocritical worshipping People of old: Jerem. vii. 1, ——— 16. *The Word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the Gate of the LORD's House, and proclaim there this Word, and say, Hear the Word of the LORD all ye of Judah, that enter in at these Gates to worship the Lord. Thus saith the LORD of Hosts the God of Israel, Amend your ways, and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this Place. Trust ye not in lying Words, saying, The Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your Ways and your Doings, if ye thoroughly execute Judgment between a Man and his Neighbour. If ye oppress not the Stranger, the Fatherless, and the Widow, and shed not innocent Blood in this Place, neither walk after other Gods to your hurt; Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the Land that I gave to your Fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, ye trust in lying Words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder and commit Adultery, and Swear falsely, and burn Incense unto Baal, and walk after other Gods whom ye know not? And come and stand before Me in this House which is called by my Name, and say, We are delivered to do all these Abominations? Is this House, which is called by my Name, become a Den of Robbers in your Eyes? behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD. But go now unto my Place which was in Shiloh, where I set my Name at the first, and see what I did to it, for the Wickedness of my People Israel. And now because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early, and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not: Therefore will I do un-*

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to this House which is called by my Name, wherein ye trust, and unto the Place which I gave to you, and to your Fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your Brethren, even the whole Seed of Ephraim. Therefore pray not thou for this People, neither lift up Cry nor Prayer for them, neither make Intercession to Me, for I will not hear thee.

T H E E N D .

