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From the A

The Witness of the SPIRIT.

A

S E R M O N

Preached before the

UNIVERSITY of OXFORD.

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O X F O R D :

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS Sermon was preached at *St. Mary's* before the *University of Oxford* some Years ago : but as the Subject had been so well, and so fully, handled by many of our Divines, it was not then thought necessary to publish it. The Author pretends to offer nothing new here ; nothing but what has been said before by other Writers, and particularly by Arch-Bishop *Sharp* in his Sermon on this Text, and by Bishop *Bull* in his Discourse on *the Testimony of the Spirit*. These, and all other, the Works of those excellent Writers, he would recommend to be carefully perused by all Students in Divinity. But as a late Enquiry here has discovered that the false Doctrines censured in this Discourse are still diligently propagated, both in this *University*, and in many other Parts of the Kingdom, and *Scripture*

ture wrested to countenance them by *unlearned, unstable,* and unauthorised Teachers, it was thought it might be of some Use to publish it, in Order to put some Stop, if may be, to this growing Evil. If by this means any may be recovered to, or confirmed in, a sound Mind; and prevented from falling into Despair on the one Hand, or vain Presumption on the other, it will fully answer the Intention of the Author.

Lately printed for J. Fletcher.

Jepthah's Vow considered. A Sermon preached before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's, on Sunday, June 8. 1766. with an Appendix &c.

The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion stated and explained. A Sermon preached before the University of Oxford, at St. Peter's in East, on Sunday March 7. 1762.

Christ the Lord of Glory. A Sermon preached before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's, Dec. 9. 1759. with Additions confirming and enforcing the Doctrine.

The Certainty of a future State asserted and vindicated against the Exceptions of the late Lord Bolinbroke. A Sermon preached at St Mary's in Oxford, at the Assizes, Mar. 6. 1755.

A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity from the Exceptions of a late Pamphlet entitled, an Essay on Spirit, in 3. parts, with an Appendix.

The above by D^r. RANDOLPH:

ROM. VIII. 16.

The Spirit itself beareth Witness with our Spirit that we are the Children of God.

ST. Paul's chief Design in this Epistle was to abate the vain Confidence of the *Jews*; to set forth the great Deficiencies of their *Law*, and the peculiar Excellency, and Privileges of the *Gospel*. One great Defect of the *Law* was, that it contained no Promise of Divine Grace, or Assistance. The Apostle prosecutes this Argument at large in his seventh Chapter. *The Law of Moses* (and in this respect ^a *the Law of Nature* was the same), *was holy, and just, and good.* ^b *But I* (says the Apostle, speaking in the Character of all unregenerate Persons) *am carnal, sold under Sin.* *The Law* might teach Men what was good: but it gave them no Power to per-

^a *Rom.* vii. 12. ^b *Ib.* v. 14.

form it. ^a *But the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the Law of Sin and Death.* Christ hath not only given us the most perfect Rule of Life : but he hath promised us the Assistance of his *Holy Spirit*, ^b to enable us to *fulfill the Righteousness of the Law.* And as, before the Coming of Christ, Men who were sensible of their many Failings, and Transgressions, must labour under uneasy Doubts, and Fears, so the *Holy Spirit of Christ* not only affords us his gracious Assistance, but also his heavenly Comforts. He enables us to *rejoyce in the Testimony of a good Conscience* : and gives us a comfortable Assurance that we are under God's Favour and Protection, and entitled to the Privileges of the Gospel. *The Spirit itself beareth Witness with our Spirit that we are the Children of God.*

By *the Spirit* is undoubtedly here meant *the Holy Ghost*, The Apostle in the preceding Verses was speaking of *the Spirit of God*, and *the Spirit of Christ*. And in these Words he is called *the Spirit itself*, and is opposed to *our own Spirit*.

In order the more fully to understand what is this *Testimony of the Spirit*, which is here

a Rom. viii. 2. b *Ib.* v. 4.

said to be the Privilege of *Christians*, it will be necessary to consider, *First*, what it is which *the Spirit* is said to *bear Witness* to: *Secondly*, the Manner, in which he *bears* this *Witness*: *Thirdly*, the Degree of Assurance arising from this his *Testimony*.

As to the *First Point*, *the Spirit* is here said to *bear Witness that we are the Children of God*. We must enquire therefore who are *the Children of God*. All *Christians* may in some Sense be said to be *the Children of God*. At our Baptism we all entered into Covenant with *God*, and were thereby made *Members of Christ, Children of God, and Inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven*. All of us therefore, who have kept the Conditions of the Covenant, which we then entered into, are still *the Children of God*. But those who have broken these Conditions, who have indulged themselves in sinful Courses, and still continue in them, are no longer *the Children of God*, nor entitled to any *Inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven*. Those only therefore are truly and properly *the Children of God*, who live in Obedience to his Laws. And this is the Mark, which *St. John* gives us, whereby we may distinguish *the Children of*
A 2 : God.

God.—^a *In this the Children of God are manifest, and the Children of the Devil: Whosoever doeth not Righteousness is not of God.* —^b To the same Purpose speaks our *Blessed Saviour* himself to the *Jews*, who called *God* their *Father*—*Ye are of your Father, the Devil, and the Lusts of your Father ye will do—He that is of God heareth God's words.* — And in the Verses preceding my Text we find the same Doctrine delivered. ^c *If ye live after the Flesh (says the Apostle) ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the Deeds of the Body ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God. They therefore, and they only, are the true Children of God, who do Righteousness; who hear, and obey, God's Words; and through the Spirit mortifie the Deeds of the Body. And all good Christians, who live according to the Rules of the Gospel, have the Testimony of the Spirit within them bearing them Witness that they are such. But, if such Men afterwards relapse into sinful Courses, they are then no longer the Children of God, but become the Children of the Devil^d. They grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and forfeit the Earnest of their*

^a 1 *Job.* iii. 10. . ^b *Job.* viii. 41. ^c *Rom.* viii. 13, 14. *Eph.* iv. 30.

Inheritance. It is in vain therefore to expect from *the Spirit* any absolute Assurance of our final Salvation: for that must depend on our own Behaviour. That the best of Men *may depart from Grace, and fall into Sin*, is the Doctrine, both of our *Articles*, and of the *Holy Scriptures*. — ^b *Brethren* (says *St. Peter*) give Diligence to make your Calling and Election sure: for, if ye do these things ye shall never fall. — From hence it is plain that without Diligence our Calling and Election are not sure: and that even the *Elect*, if they do not these Things, may, and will fall. This Life is throughout the *Scripture* represented as a State of Trial, and Warfare. ^c We are exhorted to *work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*: ^d *He that thinketh he standeth* is admonished to *take heed lest he fall*: ^e *he who standeth by Faith* is called upon *not to be high-minded: but fear, lest he also be cut off*. ^f We read of some, *who were once enlightened, and had tasted of the heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost*. Who have yet afterwards *fell away*: ^g and of others *who had escaped the Pollution of the World through the*

^a *Art.* xvi. ^b *2 Pet.* i. 10. ^c *Pbil.* ii. 12. ^d *1 Cor.* x. 12.
^e *Rom.* xi. 20. ^f *Heb.* vi. 4. ^g *2 Pet.* ii. 20.

Knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; who have been again entangled therein and overcome, whose latter End was worse than the Beginning. St. Paul does indeed in one Place seem to speak with some Degree of Confidence of his future Salvation —^a *I have fought a good Fight, (says he) I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness.* — But if this great Apostle^b, who had so abundantly laboured in the Gospel, when he had finished his Course, and was now ready to be offered, was supported by such Assurances, it will not follow that all Christians, though in far different Circumstances, may always expect the same. All we can reasonably infer from hence is, that, if we should ever be called to such fiery Trials, as St. Paul was, God will support us with such Assurances of his Favour, as he sees necessary, or expedient for us. After all, the Words do not necessarily import any such extraordinary, and supernatural Assurance. St. Paul was conscious to himself that *he had fought a good Fight*; and therefore might, without any extraordinary Revelation, speak with a comfortable

^a 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. ^b 1 Cor. xv. 20.

Assurance of *the Crown of Righteousness*, which the Lord the righteous Judge would give unto him, and unto all them also who love his *Appearing*. And other good Christians, who have led an holy Life, and rejoice in *the Testimony of a good Conscience*, may die, and have died, with the like Assurance. But this same great Apostle speaks at other Times with great Diffidence, and Doubt, of his own Salvation. — ^s *Brethren*, (says he) *I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one Thing I do, forgetting those Things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those Things which are before, I press toward the Mark for the Prize of the high Calling of God in Christ Jesus.* — And again in another place — ^t *I keep under my Body, and bring it into Subjection: lest that by any Means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a Cast-away or ^u Reprobate.* — *The Spirit* does not therefore usually bear *Witness* to what we shall be, for that would be Prophecy, not Testimony: but to what we at present are. He does not assure us, that we shall certainly be saved, for that must depend on ourselves: but he *beareth Wit-*

^s Phil. iii, 13, 14. ^t 1 Cor. ix. 27. ^u ἀδόκιμος.

ness, that we are the Children of God, and now at present in a State of Salvation.

We come now therefore in the *Second Place* to enquire in what Manner *the Spirit beareth this Witness*. Some Persons have imagined this *Witness* to be some inward Suggestion, and secret Impulse of the *Spirit*, infallibly assuring them, that they are *the Children of God*, and undoubted Heirs of Salvation. And this they assign as a distinguishing Mark of the *Elect*. They would persuade you that, if you feel such Assurance within your own Breast, you are certainly one of *the elect Children of God*: but if you feel no such Assurance, you are then most certainly in a State of Damnation. But this Doctrine, as it has no Foundation in *Scripture*, so is it a most false and dangerous Delusion. That it is most false we need no other Argument than this. There have been at all Times wild Enthusiasts, who have fancied themselves possessed of the strongest Assurances of their *Election*, and who have at the same Time lived in the Practice of Iniquity. But it has been already proved that no one, who commits Iniquity, can be *the Child of God*. On the other Hand, some good Men, who have lived a virtuous and

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religious Life, have yet sometimes entertained great Doubts, nay, have absolutely despaired, of their own Salvation. Nay, we find these very Persons, who talk so much of these Assurances, yet at other Times most sadly complaining of being troubled with Doubts, and Misgivings. We cannot therefore always certainly judge from our own inward *Feelings*, whether, or no, we are *the Children of God*. And this Doctrine is most dangerous, as well as false. It takes off our Hopes from the only Foundation, on which they can reasonably be placed, and rests them on the false Bottom of Fancy and Imagination. It deprives us of some of the best Motives to an holy Life: and is destructive of that Humility, and godly Fear, without which we cannot serve God acceptably in this State of Probation. It has plunged Men, and sometimes even good Men, into horrible Fears and Perplexities, nay, into downright Despair. Men taught to look for these *Assurances*, and yet no way conscious of any such inward Feelings, are led to think that they are not in a State of Salvation, and thus abandon themselves to Despair. Others it has betrayed into careless Indifference, and Security. Men of a warm Imagination; possessing themselves with strong Fancies that they

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are of the Number of the *Elect*, undoubted Heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven, grow careless and remiss in working out their Salvation. *Counting themselves to have already attained, and to be already perfect*, they *press not toward the Mark*, and so fall short of *the Prize*. Nay, some fancying themselves in a State of sinless Perfection, think themselves licensed to commit the grossest Enormities. ^w The Villanies, and Impieties, which this Doctrine of *Assurance* has given Birth to among the *Anabaptists* abroad, and some of our Sectaries at home, are too many, and too choquing, to be here related. It is more to our Purpose to examine whether there is any Foundation for such a Doctrine in the Words before us. — *The Spirit beareth Witness with our Spirit that we are the Children of God*. Let it then be observed that *the Spirit* is here said to bear *Witness*, not *to our Spirit*, but *with our Spirit*. — Τὸ Πνεῦμα συμμάρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν — Our own *Minds* and *Consciences* therefore have a Share in giving this *Testimony*: it is not the immediate *Testimony* of *the Spirit* alone.

^w If the Reader desires to see some Account of these, he may consult *Sleidan's History of the Reformation*. — *Spanhem Diatrib. Histor.* — *Edward's Gangræna* — *Walker's History of Independency*. — *Moravians compared and detected*.

Then

Then therefore may we be assured that we are *the Children of God*, and *led by the Spirit of God*, when we perceive in ourselves the Effects and *Fruits of the Spirit*. —^x The Fruit of the Spirit (saith the Apostle) *is in all Goodness, and Righteousness, and Truth*. — And again —^y *The Fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance*. — If we perceive these Things to *be in us, and abound*, then we have the *Testimony* within ourselves that we are *the Children of God*. And therefore the Apostle tells us that ^z *as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God*. * And the same Apostle teaches us that *our Rejoicing is this, the Testimony of our Conscience*. And St. John assures us that, ^a *if our Heart condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God*. — But it may be asked — If this *Confidence* arises from *the Testimony of our own Consciences*, how is it *the Witness of the Spirit*? — It may very properly be called so for these two Reasons. First, because all our virtuous Affections are the *Graces, and Fruits of the Spirit*: ^b *he worketh in us both to will, and to do*: Secondly,

^x Eph. v. 9. ^y Gal. v. 22, 23. ^z Rom. viii. 14. * 2 Cor. 12.
^a 1 Job: iii. 21. ^b Phil. ii. 13.

because he empowers us to discern the Graces, which he hath wrought in us, and enables us to *rejoice in the Testimony of a good Conscience.* ^c *The God of Hope* (as the Apostle expresses it) *fills us with all Joy and Peace in believing, that we may abound in Hope through the Power of the Holy Ghost.* When therefore *the Fruits of the Spirit* shew themselves in our Life and Conversation, and the *Holy Ghost* enlightens our Understandings, and gives us a just Apprehension, and lively Sense of the Graces, which he hath wrought in us, then we enjoy solid, and rational Comfort, and a well-grounded *Confidence towards God:* ^d then does *the Peace of God, which passeth all Understanding, keep our Hearts through Christ Jesus.* The particular Manner, in which *the Spirit* works, we presume not to determine: this only we know that in both the Cases above-mentioned, *the Holy Spirit* concurs, and co-operates, with our own Endeavours. *The Spirit of God* does not infuse into us Virtue, and Religion, without our own Concurrence. And his Comforts, as well as his Assistances, act jointly with our own Mind, and *Spirit.*—*The Spirit beareth Witness with our Spirit that we*

^c Rom. xv. 13. ^d Phil. iv. 7.

are the Children of God. — These comfortable Assurances are called in Scripture, *the Seal and Earnest of the Spirit.* ^e *Ye were sealed* (saith St. Paul) *with that Holy Spirit of Promise, which is the Earnest of our Inheritance.* The Use of a *Seal* is either for the Confirmation of Covenants; or for marking, and distinguishing, Property. The Graces wrought in us by *the Holy Spirit of God* are a Confirmation of the Covenant, which God through *Christ* hath made with us: and a sure Mark that we are *the Children of God*, and his peculiar Property. And, when we perceive these Graces abound in us, and our Conscience bears us Witness, that we are *led by the Spirit of God*, the Joy hence arising is an *Earnest of our Inheritance*, a Kind of Foretaste of the Joys, which are laid up for us in Heaven. And this is a Privilege peculiar to *Christianity*. As neither *Jew* nor *Gentile* had any Promise of the *Spirit*, so neither could the *Law of Moses*, or *Nature*, give them any Assurance of Salvation, but on the Condition of perfect Obedience. Those therefore, who were sensible of their own Failings, and Transgressions; (and of this the best and wisest Men were

^e *Eph. i. 13. 2 Cor. i. 22.*

most sensible) must labour under Doubts and Fears, and be *all their Life-time subject to Bondage.* ^f But Thanks be to God, *through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the Attonement.* He hath assured us of Pardon, and Peace : ^g and hath given us *the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father.*

Having thus seen what this *Witness of the Spirit* is, it remains in the *Third* and Last Place to enquire what Degree of Assurance may arise to us from this *Testimony.* As *the Spirit of God* is infallible, so he might, if he thought proper, give us infallible Assurance *that we are the Children of God.* But this is not his usual Way of dealing with Men. His Gifts, and Operations, are usually adapted to the Condition of the Receiver. If *the Spirit beareth Witness with our Spirit,* this *Testimony* must partake of the Fallibility, and Weakness of *our Spirit.* If *our Rejoicing* is founded on *the Testimony of our own Consciences,* this Assurance cannot be stronger, or more infallible than this *Testimony* is. Those therefore who live in Sin, can have no reasonable Hope at

^f Rom. v. 11. ^g Rom. viii. 15.

all, while they thus continue to live. ^h *There is no Peace, saith the Lord, unto the Wicked.* And, if such Persons speak Peace to themselves, they deceive their own Heart. As to those, who are in a doubtful, and imperfect, State of Goodness, not yet thoroughly cleansed from their Sins, their Assurance must be doubtful in the same Proportion. And even the very best of Men must not expect absolute Infallibility. What then is the Assurance, which we may reasonably expect? *God* does ordinarily to good Men impart such an Hope, and Persuasion, of their Adoption, as may make their Lives comfortable, and encourage them in the faithful Discharge of their Duty. If we keep a *Conscience void of Offence toward God, and toward Men*, we may then *assure our Hearts before him*. And this Assurance is usually bestowed in Proportion to our Proficiency in Virtue, and Piety. The more we take Care to *grow in Grace*, and to *abound in every good Work*, the greater will be our Comfort, and the more assured our Hope. And in Times of Trial, and Temptation, *God* will most powerfully support us. ⁱ *His Grace will be sufficient for us*: and his Comforts will in-

^h *Is.* xlviii. 22. ⁱ *2 Cor.* xii. 9.

crease in Proportion to the Need we have of them. ^k *As the Sufferings of Christ abound in us (saith the Apostle) so our Consolation also aboundeth by Christ.* I said that God does ordinarily impart to good Men a sufficient Perswasion of their Adoption. There may be some Exceptions to this Rule. Some, by entertaining wrong Notions of Religion, may plunge themselves into Doubts, and Perplexities. Others, though good Men, may by the Weakness of their Understanding, or Constitution, be subject to melancholy, or desponding, Thoughts. And God may permit such Persons to labour under this, as he does under other Afflictions, either as the just Reward of their Folly, or for some other Reasons best known to himself. ^l This we know, that he will in the End make all Things *work together for Good to them that love him.* He will either in his good Time relieve them from this deplorable State: or if he should permit them to continue in it during this Life, he will in the World to come greatly reward them, and pour on them abundantly those Comforts, which they deprived themselves of here.

I shall conclude with a Word of Exhorta-

^k 2 Cor. i. 5. ^l Rom. viii. 28.

tion; *First*, to the desponding *Christian*, *Secondly*, to the too confident *Christian*. If then thou entertainest misgiving Doubts of thy Salvation, consider that this Life is our State of Probation. As long as we continue here it is in our Power to work out our Salvation: as long as there is Life there is Hope. Does the Remembrance of thy past Sins fill thee with Terrour? If these Terrours prevail upon thee to amend thy Life, ^a and this *godly Sorrow worketh Repentance*, it will also lead thee to *Salvation*. This thou mayest be assured of, that this very Despondency of Mind is a sign that thy *Conscience* is not *seared*, and that thou art not absolutely *reprobated*. It is in the Diseases of the Mind, as in those of the Body; the very Sense of Pain is often a favourable Symptom, and affords the first Hopes of a Recovery. Much more dangerous is the Case of him, who hardens himself in Iniquity, than of him, whose Conscience is alarmed at his Sins. ^b *A broken and contrite Heart God will not despise*. Doest thou think thy Case desperate, because thou wantest those Marks of *God's Children*, which some Teachers have taught thee to expect? The only Mark

^a 2 Cor. vii. 10. *Psal.* i. 17.

of *God's Children*, which the *Scriptures* assign, is *to do the Works of God*. Do these, and thou wilt become *the Child of God*. Amend thy Life, and do thy Duty diligently, and conscientiously, and leave thy Comfort to ^a *the Father of Mercies, and God of all Comfort*, who will dispense it to thee, as he sees best and fittest for thee. This thou mayest rest assured of that *God reprobates* no Man, but him, who wilfully hardens himself in Iniquity, ^b *He hath no Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked, but that the Wicked turn from his Way, and live*. Turn therefore to the Lord, and he will turn to thee. ^c *Walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit: and the Spirit of God shall dwell in thee*, and give thee in this Life Comfort, and Peace of Mind, and in the next an Inheritance in Joy and Glory.

Let me next turn my Discourse to the more assured *Christian*. Dost thou feel in thyself a strong Persuasion that thou art *the Child of God*? Happy art thou, if this Persuasion is well-grounded: If your Conscience also bears you Witness that you *work the Works of God*, then are you truly *the Sons of God*. ^d *If on a*

a 2 Cor. i. 3. b Ezek. xxxiii. 11. c Rom. viii. 1. d 1 Joh. iii. 21.

strict, and impartial, Examination *your Heart* condemn you not, then have you Confidence towards God. But, if any one promises you any other Assurances than these, which arise from, and are accompanied with, *the Testimony of your own Consciences*, he is either a vain Deceiver, or is himself under *strong Delusions*.

a The Foundation, or Covenant, of God standeth sure, (saith the Apostle) having this Seal — The Lord knoweth them that are his, And — Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from Iniquity. — To depart from Iniquity is the Condition on our side: this is the Seal of the Covenant, the Mark of God's Children. Those, and those only, who bear this Mark, will God acknowledge to be his.

b Let no Man therefore deceive you with vain Words: he that doeth Righteousness is righteous. Set about your Duty with Humility, and Diligence: and work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling. The very best of us have need enough of St. Paul's Caution —

c Be not high-minded, but fear. — Are we confident that we are in a State of Salvation? let us take Care to continue in this State.

b He only, who shall endure unto the End, shall

a 2 Tim. ii. 19. b 1 Job. iii. 7. c Rom. xi. 20. d Matt. xxiv. 13.

be saved. Let us not look on our selves as already perfect: but, like St. Paul, press toward the Mark for the Prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus. ^a Let us grow in Grace, and ^b abound more and more. Finally, Let me again press on you all the Necessity of good Works. Let me leave on your Minds this most concerning Truth, that ^c without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord. To keep a Conscience void of Offence is the only Means to obtain Peace of Mind here, or Happiness hereafter. ^d God hath set before you Life and Death, Blessing and Cursing. ^e If ye live after the Flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortifie the Deeds of the Body, ye shall live. ^f If ye do the Works of the Devil ye are the Children of the Devil, and must depart with him into everlasting Fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels. ^g But, if ye are led by the Spirit of God, then are ye the Sons of God. And if Children, then Heirs, Heirs of God, and Joynt Heirs with Christ, in everlasting Glory and Happiness.

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a 1 Phil. iii. 12. &c. *b* 2 Pet. iii. 18. *c* 1 Theff. iv. 1. *d* Heb. xii. 14. *e* Deut. xxx. 19. &c. *f* Rom. viii. 13. *g* 1 Job. iii. 8. *Matt.* xxv. 41. *h* Rom. viii. 14. 17.

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