

CHRISTIAN MAGNANIMITY:

A

SERMON,

Preached at Princeton, September, 1775—the Sabbath preceeding the

Annual Commencement;

And again with Additions, September 23, 1787.

To which is added,

A N

A D D R E S S

T O T H E

S E N I O R C L A S S ;

Who were to receive the Degree of

BACHELOR OF ARTS;

B Y

JOHN WITHERSPOON,

D. D. L. L. D.

President of the College of New-Jersey:

PRINCETON:

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M.DCC.LXXXVII.

A N
A D D R E S S
T O T H E
S T U D E N T S
O F T H E
S E N I O R C L A S S,
On the Lord's Day preceeding Commencement,
September 23, 1776.

G E N T L E M E N,

AS you have now finished the usual course of study in this place, and are to enter upon public life in a variety of ways, as each shall be determined by inclination or other circumstances, I willingly embrace the opportunity of addressing an exhortation to you, at this important and interesting period of your lives. I do not mean to say much if any thing that you have never heard before, but to lay hold of your present situation, with some hope, that what may be said now, will remain upon your memory, and have an influence upon your future conduct. That I may speak with the greater clearness and precision, I will divide what I have to say, into three branches: I. your duty to God, and the interest of your souls: II. the prosecution of your studies, or the improvement of your talents as members of society: III. Prudence in your commerce with the world in general, your outward provision and other circumstances in life.

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As to the first of these, it is to all men of the greatest moment. Some of you, I know, and more, I hope, are intended for the service of Christ in the ministry. To this we have the universal suffrage, that true religion is absolutely necessary, with which I heartily agree. But I with those who are destined for other employments, may not sometimes make a comparison here unjust in itself, and dangerous, perhaps even ruinous to their own souls. Because true religion is necessary to a minister, and they are conscious to themselves, or at least suspect that they are without religion; instead of laying to heart the things that belong to their peace, they only determine that they will follow some other calling. But alas, though the difference to the public is very great, the difference to the persons themselves, seems to me but very small. A clergyman without religion, to be sure is a dreadful character, and when visible, a detestable one; but truly one would think at the close of life, it will be but little comfort to a man, that he must go to the place of torment, not as a minister, but as a lawyer, physician, soldier, or merchant. Therefore suffer me to say to you, and to all who now hear me, that the care of your souls is the *one thing needful*. All mankind, of every rank, denomination and profession, are sinners by nature. The ministers of the New Testament have received a commission to preach the gospel to every creature: "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."

While I say this, I beg of you to consider that the advantages which you have enjoyed, will be an
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aggravation of your guilt, if they are unimproved. There is an equity as well as wisdom often to be observed in the Providence of God. Unless reasons of sovereignty, that is reasons unknown to us, prevent it, judgment will be inflicted, when a person or people is ripe for the stroke. Therefore as some plants and seeds, both from their own nature and from the soil and situation in which they are placed ripen sooner than others, so some persons, by the early pains taken upon them, and the privileges they have enjoyed, fill up the measure of their iniquities sooner than others, and are more speedily overtaken with deserved vengeance. There are many common sayings that are the effects of error and prejudice; for example, that which you will be told by many, that the children of good men are as bad as any. If this is intended to insinuate that a regular and pious education affords no ground to hope for good behaviour in after life, it is at once contrary to reason and experience. But if we should say that when young persons piously educated, burst restraining bonds asunder, and are seduced into vicious courses, they commonly run faster and farther than others, it is a certain fact, which may be easily accounted for, and affords an important instruction to all.

After intreating you to lay religion to heart, I must beseech you to guard against being too easily satisfied in a matter of infinite moment. Do not think it enough to be prudent, cautious, or decent in your conduct, or to attain a character formed upon worldly principles and governed by worldly motives. I am not against (as you all know) introducing

