

The DUTY of KEEPING the
WHOLE LAW. 690. 3
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A

DISCOURSE

ON

St. *JAMES* II. 10, 11.

Wherein are Inserted

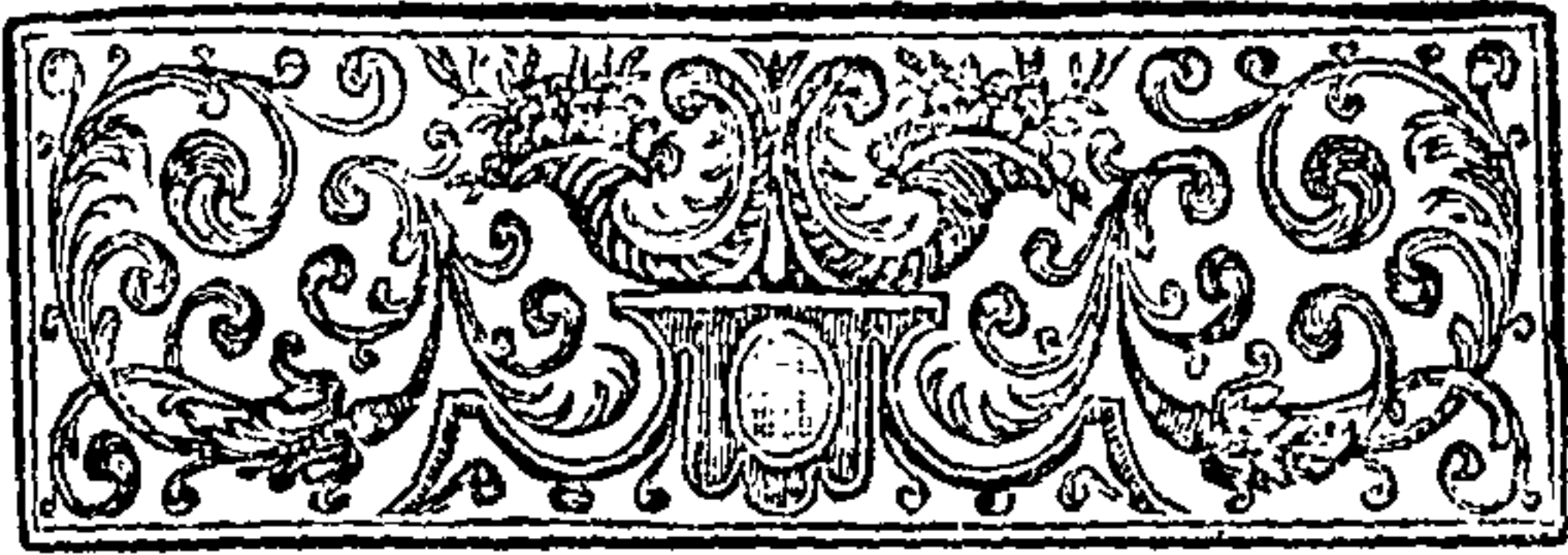
Some Incidental REMARKS upon the
DEISTS.

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L O N D O N :

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PREFACE.



THE Reader will expect a Reason for this Publication, and I'll give him the true one. I have taken some pains to write a plain Discourse upon a very important Practical Subject. Very imperfect as it is, if it be Read with That Attention of mind, and apply'd with That integrity of heart, with which it was written, I flatter my Self, that a much wiser and better Man than the Author may be the better for it.

Such Discourses were never more wanted. Mens thoughts are so busied about the Truths of Religion, that they seem to forget the Practice of it. While

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it is guarded, by excellent writings, against external attacks, it suffers an inward decay from the Lives of its Professors; as a Town, well defended by the Garrison, tho' it be not taken by the Enemy, may run to ruin, thro' the neglect of its Inhabitants.

*Controversies and Disputations are to Religion, what Wars are to a Kingdom; sometimes necessary to its security and preservation, but always attended with danger, and accompany'd with bad effects, however successful. Some will be seduc'd, and others tainted in their principles; many more diverted from employing their leisure hours upon more profitable books. When the head is continually fill'd with nice distinctions, the heart grows dead to religious dispositions. It becomes matter of Amusement, rather than of Religion; and tho' the Understanding may be exercis'd, the Mind may be never the better. Some indeed must be well skill'd and exercis'd in This military Discipline, because Religion will ever be expos'd to Hostilities from
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irreligious Men; but Christians in general, who are neither call'd to the service, nor fit for it, if They venture into the field, un-authoriz'd and un-arm'd, only to see the manner of an engagement, their Curiosity may be their Destruction.

To speak out of Figure. Illiterate persons should not meddle with subtle disputes, because they are not competent Judges of them. They may chance to be perverted for want of understanding the force of an Argument. At least, 'tis odds but they are confounded, and left unsettled in their Faith. What time they have to spare for reading, would be much better spent in practical than in speculative Studies; plain discourses that may teach them their duty; and excite them to the practice of it: but more especially in the frequent reading of the Scriptures, which will not only bring them acquainted with the particulars of their duty, but kindle in their hearts a true spirit of piety; strengthen their faith, and inflame their hope; and be
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the best security against the infection of Infidelity. Those sacred writings, where Men have an intimacy with them, carry their own proof along with them. Men that read them often, and with a serious disposition, feel the Truth of them. But it is highly irrational in those who believe the Bible to be the Will of their Creator and Judge, never to look into it; to be the Rule of their Faith, and yet never to examine what Doctrines it teaches; to be the Measure of their Actions, and yet never to enquire what Duties it enjoins, and to compare their actions with this Rule, to see whether they come up to the conditions of Salvation.





St. JAMES ii. 10, 11.

For whoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, is guilty of all.

For he that said, Do not commit Adultery, said also, Do not Kill: wherefore, if thou commit no Adultery, yet, if thou Kill, thou art become a Transgressor of the Law.



THESE words were spoken upon a particular occasion; a notorious instance of injustice and partiality shewn to a rich man in a cause depending before the Jewish Consistories: and they seem to have been levell'd against a loose maxim of the Jewish Doctors, viz. That God gave so many Commandments to them, that by doing any ONE of them they might be sav'd. In consequence of which

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opinion, they singled out some *one* commandment, esteem'd by them among the *weightier* matters of the Law, wherein they exercis'd themselves in a more especial manner, in hopes by that means to obtain, if not a *Dispensation*, yet at least a *Pardon*, for neglecting the rest. ——— To this pernicious error St. *James* gives a direct answer in my Text; and supports it by a clear argument. He declares, that if we are ever so strict in the observance, not only of one of the most *important* Commandments of the Law, but even of the *whole* Law, excepting only *one single* point, wherein we knowingly and wilfully transgress, such a wilful transgression makes us guilty of the *whole*; and the Reason assign'd for it is this, that every part of the Christian Law is enforc'd by the same authority.

AND to the same purpose our Blessed Saviour himself says, That *whoſo breaketh one of the LEAST* of his *Commandments*, and *teacheth Men ſo*, shall be called the *LEAST* in the *Kingdom of Heaven*: meaning, as I apprehend, those who held the lawfulness of transgressing *some* of the divine precepts, under a pretence of their being of *little moment*, or for the sake of a *more careful* and *punctual* observance of some *other* parts of the Law.

HAVING thus open'd these words of the Apostle, the Reader must perceive of what infinite consequence it is rightly to understand them, lest we wrest them to our own destruction

either thro' *licentiousness*, or *despair*: and a little observation upon the *world*, and reflection upon our *selves*, may serve to convince us, that we are *all* of us, *more or less*, concern'd in the application of them. Wherefore I beg his careful and serious attention while I treat of these following particulars.

I. *I shall more particularly state and explain the Doctrine contain'd in these words of St. James, and shew in what sense it is that the Apostle requires an universal Righteousness, or an observance of the whole Law of God.*

II. *I shall consider the Apostle's manner of expressing this Doctrine, with what Propriety we may be said to be guilty of the whole Law, when we transgress only a particular part of it.*

III. *I shall endeavour to shew the Reasonableness of the Doctrine, and that any Law which does not insist upon our observance of every part of it, can be of no efficacy at all.*

IV. *I shall make some seasonable and useful Deductions from the foregoing Doctrine.*

And Lastly, *Apply the Discourse to Practice.*

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I. *I shall more particularly state and explain the Doctrine contain'd in these words of St. James, and shew in what sense it is that the Apostle requires an universal Righteousness, or an observance of the whole Law of God.*

By the *Law* St. James undoubtedly means the *Will of God* reveal'd to us in his *holy Word*.

AND if we understand the Apostle in a *strictly literal* sense, he may be thought to require an *absolute, unfinning* obedience, and to declare that a transgression of *any one* part of the Christian Law is inconsistent with the *terms of Salvation* propos'd to us by *Christ*.

BUT This interpretation cannot be the true one, because it is not only inconsistent with the condition of human nature in our present state of imperfection, but contrary to the general language of the Gospel, and the method of our Redemption by *Jesus Christ*.

THE Scripture every where represents us as *liable to Sin*; that we are *ALL* gone out of the way; that we are altogether become *abominable*; that there is *NONE* righteous, no not *ONE*. If there be any expressions which seem to require *absolute perfection*, and *unfinning obedience*; if we are commanded to *perfect holiness in the fear of God*, and to be *perfect even as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect*;

perfect; such expressions are to be taken in a restrain'd and limited sense, as obliging us to imitate the divine perfections to the *utmost stretch of human capacity*. For the Scripture, like other writings, must be so understood as to make it consistent with its self in the several parts of it, and with the general scope and tenor of the whole; and my Text must be construed in such a sense as may agree with the general account which the *New Testament* gives of the *nature of Man*, and the state of Religion between God and Man under the *Christian Dispensation*.

SUCH indeed were the rigorous conditions of the *Jewish Covenant*, that the *Law of Moses* requir'd an exact performance of *every jot and Tittle* of it, in order to Justification by that Law; for which Reason it was call'd the *Covenant of Works*. And accordingly, when the Apostle sets forth the conditions of it, he says, *He that does these things shall live by them*. But the *Christian Covenant* has the Title of the *Covenant of Grace and Mercy*, because it was establish'd upon *better terms and conditions*, as well as upon *better promises*. By fulfilling all Righteousness in his *own Person*, our Blessed Saviour became *our Righteousness*, *his Righteousness* being so far imputed to *us* who believe in him, as to render our *sincere*, tho' *imperfect*, obedience accepted; that, as by the *offence of one*, many were made *Sinners*, so by the *Righteousness of one*, shall many be made *Righteous*.

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FROM hence therefore it appears, that St. *James* cannot mean to represent the *Christian Covenant* as absolutely condemning every Man who transgresseth any part of the *Christian Law*, because it supposeth us all to be guilty of *frequent Transgressions*, and provides a *Remedy* for them; satisfaction to God by the blood of his Son, and pardon for us upon the terms of sincere *Repentance* and *Amendment*. But That *Universal Righteousness*, which is requir'd by the Apostle in my Text, is only an *universal regard* to all the divine precepts; so as not to commit any known, deliberate, wilful Sin, in hopes that a strict observance of some duties will atone for the breach of others, or because we may imagine some of the divine precepts to be of a less important nature than others.

THIS then is the Doctrine of St. *James*, these are the *terms* of the *Christian Covenant*; not, that Christians are expected to perform *unsinning*, but *impartial*, obedience; not, to be *absolutely perfect*, but to *endeavour* studiously to do the will of God in *every part* of it. To be without *blemish* and without *spot*, was never (since the Fall) the privilege of human nature, except in the person of *Christ*, That immaculate Lamb, who died to expiate for *our Sins*; but to be *sincere* and *uniform* in our endeavours to observe *all* God's commands, this is what all of us are capable of performing, and without which there can be no Re-
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gard to the authority of God, nor any Religion at all, as I shall shew in the Sequel of this Discourse. But I must next,

II. Consider the Apostle's manner of expressing This Doctrine, with what propriety any one may be said to be guilty of the whole Law, who transgresses only a part of it.

IN the obvious sense of this Phrase, it may seem to contradict *common reason*, to confound the *distinction* of Sins, and to make *any one Sin equal to all*. Yet *Drunkeness* cannot be *Fornication*, nor *Murder Adultery*; much less does any *one* of these Sins contain *all* of them. But the Apostle's *meaning* is evident enough from his manner of *reasoning* upon the case, and his way of expressing it is proper, and agreeable to the usual way of speaking in the like cases. He *means*, that whoever transgresseth *any part* of a Law, transgresseth against the *Will and Authority* of the *Lawgiver*, which unites the several parts of it together. The *several* Precepts and Prohibitions, which God has publish'd in his *holy Word*, are so many *parts* of his Will; and therefore they may *all* be consider'd as *one Law*, because *all* of them *together* make up the *one whole* Rule of Action to us his Creatures; and consequently a breach of any *one* particular may be call'd a breach of the *whole*. Suppose, for instance, a *Statute* of the Land to consist of many *distinct* *Clauses*, a breach of any *one* of those *Clauses* would be call'd, and not improperly, a breach of *That Statute*.

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Statute. Thus, again, the *Body* of a *Man* is said to be maim'd when only *one Member* is cut off, and a *Limb* to be broken, tho' it be broken only in *one* place: but as the *Body* may be *more* or *less* injur'd in the loss of its *parts*, and a *Fracture* may be *more* or *less* complicated, so we may break the *Body* of *God's Laws*, transgress his *Will* in *many* or *fewer* particulars; and every breach may be *more* or *less* criminal, according to *different circumstances*, which may either *heighten*, or *mitigate* the *Guilt* of our *Actions*.

HAVING, as I hope, clearly explain'd this *seemingly* difficult passage of Scripture, and fully stated the Doctrine contain'd in it; I shall proceed,

III. *To consider the REASONABLENESS and NECESSITY of it; and to shew that a LAW, which does not require an EQUAL REGARD to every part of it, can have no effect, can be NO LAW at all.*

THE Argument of the Apostle upon this point is grounded upon the following words, For *he* that said, *Do not commit Adultery*, said also, *Do not Kill*. And the force of his Reasoning is very clear and obvious: For, if every part of the *Christian Law* has the *same Sanction*, if every precept and prohibition of *God* be enforc'd by the *same authority*, then all of them must be *equally* binding upon us, and a wilful transgression of *any one* must in-

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cur the displeasure of the Divine Lawgiver, because it is a *violation* of his *Will*, and an *infringement* of his *Authority*. In short, it is, in the nature of things, an *absolute absurdity* to suppose that *one* part of a Law, that *one* command of God should be *less* obligatory than another; or that God should leave us at *liberty* to disobey him in *one* instance of duty, which must effectually subvert his authority in *every other* instance, and render *all* his laws *ineffectual*. If we may *choose* what parts of the *Christian Law* we are to observe, there is, at once, an end of God's *Legislative Authority*; for then we follow our *own*, not the will of God. And if our *own inclinations* are to be the rule and measure of our duty, of *what use* will the *Law of God* be, when it has no *coercive power* over us? And wherein has it any *coercive power*, if we be at *liberty* to *dispense* with the obligation at pleasure? A duty of *obedience to God*, and a *liberty to disobey* him; an *authority to command*, where there is no *obligation of obedience* upon the *subject*, these are, in *themselves*, palpable *contradictions*. Either, therefore, we are oblig'd to observe *every part*, or *no part at all*, of God's Law; and an *obstinate disobedience* in *one* instance only implies a *denial* of God's *authority*, as much as a *total* disobedience. The Truth of This is acknowledg'd by *all mankind* in the procedure of their *own Courts of Judicature*. If any person be cited to an appearance, tho' upon a matter of a most *trifling* nature, his *voluntary non-appearance* is consider'd as a *con-*

tempt of the Jurisdiction of the Court, and consequently a crime of the most heinous nature, because it subverts the very foundation upon which Government subsists, and destroys the very being of Authority.

As this is a matter of infinite moment, I shall endeavour to illustrate and enforce the Truth of it by another instance taken from *common Life*; which perhaps may better awaken the attention, and direct the observation, of *common Readers*. Let us suppose any *Father, or Master, to command his Children, or Servants, to do such and such things; part of the Command they readily execute, the other part they resolutely refuse to comply with. Would he not with reason conclude, that they disobey'd his command, and deserv'd his displeasure, notwithstanding their punctual observance of his will in some particulars? And if they should pretend that they had a reverential regard to his authority while they slighted his positive orders, would he not think their plea an aggravation of their crime, because an open affront to his understanding? And can any one of us imagine that the Great Father and Master of the Universe will be trifled with after a manner which we should resent as the highest indignity from our Fellow-Creatures? The case, I think, is too obvious to require any farther illustration.*

BUT I would take notice of another *kind of partial obedience, besides That of neglecting*
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ing *particular Duties*, or committing *particular Sins*, upon the pretence of their being, on any account, of a *less important*, or *less binding* nature; or because we are more particularly careful in the performance of some *other* parts of our duty. What I mean is *This*; that many persons *deliberately* go on in the *neglect* of something which they acknowledge to be their *duty*, thinking it sufficient to resolve within themselves to do it at some other more convenient time. I have nothing to do, upon *This* occasion, with the *uncertainty* whether we shall ever have *That future* opportunity; nor with the greater *difficulty* in doing our duty, which necessarily encreases with the neglect of it; my present Subject leads me only to observe, that such a *deliberate* and *wilful*, tho' *temporary*, neglect of a *plain duty*, is as utterly inconsistent with *any Religious* principle, as if we intended *always* to *continue* in *That* neglect, because it is equally *Rebellion* against the *Dominion* of God over us, absolutely destructive of his *Legislative Authority*, and must unavoidably *invalidate* his commands. I shall explain my meaning by an instance or two, knowing that few Readers will be at much trouble in understanding, or applying to themselves, an unwelcome Truth. A Man in Business finds, or thinks, it his interest to keep company with *irregular* people, and to partake with them in their *Irregularities*. He owns that *Intemperance* is expressly forbidden, and determines to live more *regularly* and *soberly*, when he gets above the

world, and can afford to break off so profitable an Acquaintance. Thus likewise a Person in the fervour of his Youth, or the vigour of Health, feels strong inclinations towards the *other Sex*; he does not think it expedient, in respect to his *outward circumstances*, to bring the expences of a *Family* upon himself, nor cares to be at the trouble and uneasiness of denying his importunate desires; upon which he indulges in prohibited pleasures, flattering himself that they'll be excus'd, so long as he entertains thoughts, one time or another, of discontinuing them, when he shall find it expedient to *alter his condition*. These two cases I know, from the open confessions of several, to be frequent ones. But if This discourse should fall into the hands of any such *deceivers of themselves*, I beg them seriously to consider how impossible it is, that the *authority* of God can subsist, or that his *Laws* can have any effect, if we be at *liberty* to observe them only when we think it *convenient*, and consistent with our *present pleasure*. If *Intemperance* and *Uncleanneſs* be *Vices*, they are as much so to day, as they'll be five years hence, when *our* circumstances may be chang'd; and it is as much our *duty*, tho' perhaps not so *easy*, to abstain from them. If the *difficulty* of *performing* a duty will discharge us from the *obligation*, the very *notion* of Religion is destroy'd, which supposes *difficulties* and *temptations*, and requires us to *resist* and *overcome* them. It would be as justifiable to *renounce Christianity* in a time of *Persecution*, as to trans-

transgress a *particular precept* of it only to avoid some present uneasiness. Again; if God has commanded us to be *temperate* and *chaste*, the reasons, upon which those precepts are grounded, must *always* be the *same*, because they have their foundation in the *eternal* and *immutable relation* of things, the *nature* of *Man*, and the *good* of *Society*; consequently it must *always* be the *Will* of the Great Lawgiver that we should observe them, and they must at *all times*, or *never*, be in force. And if *we*, for our present conveniency, can *suspend* the *obligation* of a divine precept, and act contrary to the *known Will* of *God*, for a certain time, we may do it as long as we live, as it shall best suit with our inclinations. But then is not This an absolute Renunciation of the *Dominion* of our *Creator*, and a *Subversion* of his *Authority*? Is it possible for any sense of *Religion* or *Duty* to subsist, unless we are *ever* oblig'd, under *all possible* circumstances, however *disagreeable* or *painful* to us *at present*, to conform *our Wills* to the *Will* of *God*. The Reader will excuse Me for recalling to his memory the instance already given; What would he think? what would he do? should his own Servant refuse to obey him in any instance, till he could do it without any difficulty or trouble to himself? I need not surely give any Answer to this Question.

THE result of what has been said upon This head is, That *every part* of *God's Law* must be binding, and his *Will* is *at all times*

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to be observ'd, or else that his *Will* can be no *Law* to us, nor have *any effect*.

FROM the Doctrine of St. *James* thus stated, explain'd, and establish'd, I shall make some seasonable and useful Deductions.

IT follows from the foregoing Doctrine, that the notion of *Venial Sins*, professedly maintain'd in the Church of *Rome*, and but too much countenanc'd by the *Practice* of *Protestants*, is either very *absurd* in it self, or else very *impertinent* to the corrupt purposes for which it is intended.

1. Do they mean by *Venial Sins* such *involuntary Transgressions* as are inseparable from the condition of human nature? It is very true, that our nature is imperfect, and that the *best* of Men are subject to *failings* and *infirmities*. The *Christian Covenant* supposes them, and makes allowances for them; accepting us upon a *general* acknowledgement of such inadvertent Slips, and humble Supplication to God for his mercy. But what then? This gives no countenance to *licentiousness* or *indulgences* of any kind. For we are requir'd to *strive* against our infirmities and failings, and to *labour* after the *highest perfection* of which we are capable. It may be only our *misfortune* to be inclin'd by constitution to a particular Sin; but it will be our *crime*, and our *condemnation*, if we give way to it.

2. IF by *Venial* they mean only *Pardonable*, then either *all* Sins would be venial, or *none* would be so, because *all* Sins are pardonable upon the conditions of *Repentance* and *Amendment*; and *no* Sin is pardonable while we *continue in the practice of it*. But,

3. THE only notion of *Venial Sins*, that can answer *any end* to the Advocates of it, must be this; That some Sins, being *in themselves of less importance*, are *excusable*: or, in other words, That we may transgress some of the *less weightier matters* of the Law, without contracting any *guilt*, and without any danger of *future punishment*. And indeed this Doctrine would effectually answer their purpose; for Men would easily persuade themselves, that those Sins, to which they are most inclin'd, are the *smallest*; and that those Duties, to which they are most averse, are of a *trifling* nature; by which means they would at once free themselves from the *restraints of Religion*, and the *terror of its Sanctions*.

BUT the Doctrine is as *absurd* as it is *wicked*. When express'd in proper terms, it means, that *some Sins are no Sins at all*, and that God *commands what he permits*. Men may please themselves, and amuse the ignorant, by subtle distinctions; but there can be no *possible medium* between *lawful* and *unlawful*, between *Guilt* and *Innocence*. Sin is the *transgression of some Law*, or a *deviation from the Rule of*
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our Actions. Either therefore our *Actions do*, or they *do not*, deviate from our Rule; unless a line could be both strait and crooked at the same time. The *Will* of God is this Rule or Law. Either therefore God *has*, or he has *not*, commanded or forbidden such an action; if he has done *neither*, the Action is of an *indifferent nature*; but every command, and every prohibition of God, must be a *Law* to us; and every wilful *Transgression* of it is a violation of his *Will*: And it is an idle fancy to suppose that God will indulge us in an *obstinate violation* of his *Will*, tho' in the smallest instance, because, besides that he would thereby give up his *Dominion* and *Authority*, it is supposing God to *will*, and *not will* a thing at the same time.

NEITHER is it consistent with the *Attributes* and *Perfections* of the divine nature, that God should *alter* his Will in respect to the precepts of the *Gospel*. Every part of it has always been, since its first publication, and must always continue to be, till the consummation of all things, *indispensibly* binding upon us. What we call *Moral* duties, are as *immutable* as the *Nature* and *Relations* of things upon which they are grounded. They are, in their *own nature*, fit and reasonable; and it must always be the *will* of a *wise* and *good* Being (whatever *dispensing* power the Church of *Rome* may claim) that *all* Creatures should, at *all times*, act agreeably to their *nature* and *relation* to other Beings.

THE *positive* duties of *Christianity* have likewise *wise* and *good reasons* for their appointment, which will last as long as the *Gospel Dispensation*; and That will be to the *end of the World*, as the *Gospel* itself declares. Therefore the *Sacraments*, and *other* parts of *Christian Worship*, in their proper *time* and *place*, can no more be neglected, without a direct breach of the *Christian Law*, and a Violation of *God's will*, than the *Moral* duties. It is as lawful to live in the habit of *Fornication*, or *Adultery*, as in the habitual neglect of *Baptism*, the *Lord's Supper*, and the *Assembling of our selves together* for publick devotions. However different they may be in their *nature*, they agree in having the *command*, and *authority* of *God* to enforce them, and good reasons for their being commanded.

2. I OBSERVE in the next place (in answer to our *Modern Unbelievers*, who are very forward to bring a charge of *Cruelty* against *Revelation*, for laying *unreasonable restraints* upon human nature) that there is no room for any objection against the *Christian Religion*, on account of the *Terms* and *Conditions* of it, as if they were too *rigid* to deserve the character of a *gracious* and *merciful* Covenant.

THE *Severity*, if there be any, must lie either in the *duties themselves*, or in the *manner* in which the observance of them is requir'd.

NOW, as to the *Duties themselves*; we may, with the Apostle, say of the *Christian Law*, that it is *holy, just, and good*. All the Adversaries of it have been driven by the mcer force of *Truth*, tho' in opposition to their *principles* and *intentions*, to bear Testimony to the excellency of its *Morality*. Even the Author of *Christianity as old as the Creation*, That most bitter and inveterate Enemy of *Jesus Christ*, has acknowledg'd it, not only in the frequent passages which he has cited from our greatest Divines, with the highest expressions of applause, and in the strongest terms of approbation; but has over and over exprest the same sentiments in words of his own: He says farther, *That should Revelation require less of us, 'twould be an imperfect Rule.*

IT is true indeed, that, with regard to *Christian Institutions* and *Doctrines*, he does inveigh in the most pompous and elaborate manner against the *Tyranny* of imposing such *arbitrary* precepts upon us; but can they make any Man of sense believe, that the *real* quarrel against *Christianity* is for the sake of some few *speculative points*, (as they term them) the two *Sacraments*, and the other parts of *Christian Worship*? Were its *Moral Precepts* less *pure* and *strict*, were its *Sanctions* less *terrible*, their anger would soon be appeas'd, when they could pursue their present pleasures without controul, without remorse, or foreboding apprehensions?

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THEN, as to the *manner* in which these duties are requir'd, I have prov'd, that if a *less strict* observance of them were exacted from us, the *Gospel* must lose the force of a *Law*, and leave every Man to the guidance of his *own appetites* and *inclinations*, because a liberty to *dispense* with the performance of *any one* duty, either *wholly*, or for a *certain time*, must imply the same power of *dispensing* with *all* the duties of Religion, for as long a time as we please; and an *obstinate* transgression of *one* part of a *Law* is a *virtual* renunciation of the *Authority* of the *Lawgiver*, as much as a transgression of the *whole Law*.

3. FROM hence therefore I proceed to another Deduction, naturally following from the preceding observations and arguments, and very seasonable at This time, by way of caution, against the artifices of the *Deists*. Their pretences of *freeing* Mankind from *Tyranny*, and *Slavery*, are as popular and captivating, as they are fallacious and disingenuous. They would willingly *be thought* to allow, that all the *Moral* Duties, and *great Truths* of Religion, are discoverable by the *Light* of Nature, and *obligatory* without any *external* command; I say, they would willingly *be thought* to allow it, because they not only *acknowledge* and *assert* it, but they *argue* from *hence* against the *Expediency*, and consequently against the *actual Truth* of *Revelation*. But were those Men sincere in the profession, and regular in the

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practice,

practice, of *Natural Religion*, they would have no *sufficient Temptation* to reject *Christianity*, because they would *still* remain under the *same restraints* and *apprehensions*, which are the *great stumbling-block* of *Offence*, and the true cause of their *uneasiness*. If the duties of *Natural Religion* be (as they themselves are forc'd to allow) the *same* which are taught by the *Gospel*; and if the *Great Truths* concerning the *being of a God*, a *Providence*, and a *future State*, be necessary in order to support the practice of those duties; (as they most certainly are) they will be no considerable gainers by their *Infidelity*; they part with all the *advantages* of *Revelation*, without any proportionable *recompence* for so great a loss. For, if they be men of probity, if they mean what they profess, if they really intend to hearken to the voice, and obey the dictates of *uncorrupted Reason*, they must, upon their own principles, be as virtuous in every instance of *Morality*, as if they were *Christians*: *Uncleanness*, *Fraud*, *Drunkenness*, and other favourite Vices, being as much prohibited by their allow'd System of *Natural Ethicks*, as they are by *Christ*; and a wilful *Indulgence* in any Vice being utterly inconsistent with any principles of Religion whatsoever. So that whoever listens to the *Deistical* proposals, upon an expectation of being set loose from the *strict precepts* and *conditions* of *Christianity*, and from the dreadful apprehension of a *future Judgment*, let him first calmly consider whether he can reconcile *downright Atheism* to his sober and cool thoughts; for, if

if he be a Man of any understanding and serious reflection, when he has thrown off *Revelation*, he must go on to throw off *Natural Religion* too, before he can make himself tolerably easy in the free enjoyment of his pleasures. This is true, not only in *Speculation*, but in *Fact*. Both in the *Writings* and *Conversation* of those who would pass for *Deists*, the mask will drop off, or they think it proper to take it off sometimes, and shew their *real* face, hoping to draw Disciples after them by the beauty and comeliness of it. I confess, it is my opinion (and, I think, I have good grounds for it) that there is scarce such a Person in the *Christian* world as a *true Deist*; by which I mean, *one who disbelieves REVELATION, after a diligent and impartial examination of the evidence on both sides of the question, yet retains a firm belief of Natural Religion, and resolves, to the utmost of his power, to live up to the duties of it.* This, in a Country where *Christianity* is the Religion *establish'd*, and the Religion of Mens *younger* Years, is a meer *Chimerical* Character. Men do not overcome the *prejudices of Education*, and the *force of receiv'd* opinions, by the strength of cool conviction from better information, and afterwards turn *Libertines* because they have discover'd that *Religion* is a *Cheat*; but they first grow loose in their *Morals*, and then set themselves against Religion, because it is a restraint upon Inclination, and disturbs the quiet of their Minds. This being the case, they stop short of the mark, unless they go farther than

Deism.

Deism. They want *more Liberty* than *right Reason* will allow them; to follow the impulse of their *passions* in an *unrestrain'd* course of *Indulgence*, and to rid themselves of the fears of a *future Reckoning*. If *precepts* must domineer over *appetite*, human Nature is still under the *yoke* of *Tyranny*. If an Order of Men must be appointed to bind on This heavy Yoke, by *teaching* and *enforcing* those Precepts, what is This but *Priestcraft*? If *Gentlemen* must be continually haunted by the thoughts of an *after-punishment*, what is This but *intolerable Superstition*? *Restraint* and *Fear* will not change their nature by changing *Reveal'd* for *Natural Religion*: Nothing will answer their purpose, but an entire removal of the *Effects*, by removing the *Cause*, *viz.* Religion in General. Were it not beside the intention of this Discourse, I could easily shew, by quotations from their books, that these seeming Advocates for *Natural Religion* mean nothing less than living according to the Rules of it. Their catalogue of *Virtues* is as short as their *Creed*. The *Relation of things*, so often the Subject of their encomiums, means no more than the Relation between their *desires*, and the *objects* of them; and their *Fitness of things*, signifies only the fitness of *gratifying their desires* in the most agreeable and extensive manner. But I shall mention one particular, *habitual* practice, wherein they act in a flagrant opposition to *Moral Virtue*, and are ready enough to justify it upon all occasions.

THE *promiscuous* use of Women, or *such a Commerce* with them, as is contrary to the *declar'd Sense*, and *establish'd Laws*, of our Country, must be a breach of the *Moral Law*, if there be such a thing as *Morality*, or *Virtue*. I am fully convinc'd, that *Matrimony*, as settled by the *Christian Religion*, and by the *Constitution* of our Country, will better secure the *common happiness* of Society, than *any other* method whatsoever. But at present I have no occasion to enter into any debate with them upon That Head. It can admit of no dispute, whether the wisdom of the *private* Members of a Society ought not to submit to the *publick* wisdom of the *Legislature*. There can be no such thing as *Society* without such a Submission. Hardy as these Advocates for *Licentiousness* are, they'll scarce offer to say, that the order and happiness of Society cannot subsist upon the *Matrimonial* Scheme; and whether a *greater liberty* would not, in their opinion, be more *expedient*, as well as agreeable to their *inclinations*, is not the question. It is the Business, not of the *Governed*, but of the *Governors*, to determine matters of *Expediency*. If they can persuade the *Legislature* to declare for *Infidelity*, they'll have then an Opportunity, and a Right, to offer their opinion, and their reasons. But while the Wisdom and the Laws of the *Nation* are *against* them, they are oblig'd (if there *can* be an obligation in the *nature* and *reason* of things) to conform to them. If their corrupt Imaginations,

24 *The DUTY of keeping*

tions, and debauch'd Manners, make them impatient under the restraint of those Laws to which they are subject, they have no remedy but removing into some other Country, where the Laws will be more indulgent to them. While they think fit to receive the protection and benefit of any Government, they ought to submit to the *establish'd Rules* of it. To live in an avow'd violation and contempt of *Authority*, This is not *Liberty*, but *Licentiousness*; not *Deism*, but an *Apostacy* from *Order*, from the *eternal Fitness* of things, from *common Reason*, and *common Sense*.

IF it be objected (for they are not ashamed of this weak argument) that these inclinations being implanted in our Natures by God, Men have a natural Right to the Indulgence of them, and that no power can take away a Right which is founded in our *very beings*; I answer, that those Inclinations may be *regulated*, so as to make the gratification of them, in *particular* persons, most conducive to the good of Mankind in *general*. Men are naturally subject to *Hunger* and *Thirst*, which must give them a Right to *eat* and *drink*; but, if the good of the Society should require it, it is lawful to prescribe Rules in respect to the *manner* and *measure* of their eating and drinking. So, in respect to *Concupiscence*, tho' it must be lawful to gratify those desires which are *natural* and *necessary*, yet surely our *Creator* or (if *he* has not interpos'd) *human* authority may direct, without offering *Violence* to our
 Natures,

Natures, in what *Manner*, and under what *Restrictions*, they are to be indulg'd. As no Man has a *natural Right* to eat and drink *as much* as he can get down, whenever he has an inclination, or wherever he can meet with Meat and Drink; neither has any Man a *right*, tho' a corrupted Imagination may create an *Inclination*, to a *promiscuous* and *arbitrary* use of Women, such as shall agree best with his particular temper. The utmost that these Gentlemen can make out, is, that every Man has a *natural Right* to *one* Woman, provided he will take her *for Life*, and be contented with her; but his Right can extend no farther amongst *us*, whether *Revelation* be true, or not, because This is the particular *manner* and *measure*, which the Authority of the *Legislature* has prescrib'd to That Passion.

BUT there is another Objection that I must take notice of, for the commonness of it, tho' it is really so trifling, that I should otherwise be asham'd to think it worth mentioning.

THERE are some who pretend, that while they *confine* themselves to *one* Woman, they answer the *end* of the *Institution*, and of the *Laws*, tho' the *Ceremony* (which is only matter of *Form*) be omitted. No; they neither come up to the *Letter* of the Law, nor answer the *Intention* of it. They have neither the *Form*, nor the *Essence* of *Matrimony*. Such a *Cohabitation* is only *durante bene placito*, during pleasure; that is, till the Gentleman grows

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wearry of his Companion, or meets with a more agreeable one; but *Matrimony* is a *strict Engagement* between two parties to live together, and to be true to one another, *for Life*. Such a *Contract*, if there really be any in the *other* case, is *private* and *precarious*; but the very *intention* of the Law in *This*, is to make the *Contract* *publick*, and to *secure* the performance of it.

BESIDES, tho' any *particular Form* be a matter of an indifferent nature, yet it is not indifferent whether there be any *stated, publick Form*, or not. The nature of the thing requires thus much; and obedience to Government obliges every Member to observe the *appointed Form*. Is it no crime, no breach of their *Moral Law*, to disobey the Laws of their *Country*?

I HAVE mention'd This particular Vice of *Fornication*, because I take it to be the most general and prevailing cause of *Infidelity*. It is too plainly prohibited by *Christianity*, to be evaded by the help of *Sophistry*, and too dear a Favourite to be discarded. But *Christianity* is not the *only* obstruction to this darling Vice. They must not only reject the *Gospel*, but get the *Laws* of their *Country* repeal'd; they must bid open defiance, not only to *Jesus Christ*, but to *Civil Authority*, before they can justify, or wilfully continue in the habit of a practice prohibited by *both*, without acting contrary to the *Law of Reason*.

THE *Deists*, as they affect to be call'd, being so very industrious to propagate their Opinions, and make Profelytes, I was willing to lay hold of This opportunity of detecting their pretences, and shewing the true tendency of their Principles, that the younger, or more unthinking, part of Mankind may know whether their *Atbeistical* Guides are leading them; for nothing can be more evident, than that they must run with their Leaders *to the same excess of Riot*, if they mean to procure the *Liberty* which their lawless appetites require. *Natural Religion* will be too troublesome to those who think *Christianity* a heavy yoke. And when people are going to be seduc'd by the cunning craftiness of *Infidels*, or deluded by the false suggestions of their own corrupt hearts, the utter ruin of many of them might be prevented, if they would but ask themselves a few short questions. I am inclin'd to disbelieve the *Christian Religion*; but what is my *real inducement*? Have I *fairly*, and *honestly*, without any *bias* or *prepossession*, examin'd into the evidence for the Truth of it, and found it insufficient to induce a *rational Conviction*? Is it not rather an *unwillingness* to believe, that occasions my *disbelief*? Do I sincerely intend to live a *good Moral Life*? And do I believe those Truths of *Natural Religion*, a *God* that *Governs* and will *Judge* the world, without which the *Law of Morality* will want a Sanction sufficient to enforce it? On the contrary, Do I not allow myself

Liberties that are as repugnant to my *sober Reason*, and the *Laws of the Society*, whereof I am a member, as to *Revelation*? And do I not fly to *Infidelity* as the only refuge from the *remorse* and *reproaches* of my own mind? If men are not wholly lost to all *Rational* and *Manly* sentiments, such reflections must have their weight. If they are resolutely determin'd not to live after a *reasonable* manner, they are not qualify'd to perform the offices of a *sociable* being, or capable of giving a proper *Security* for their behaviour; and are intitled to nothing that belongs to *Society* but the necessary punishment appointed for the *common Enemies* of it. Having spoken so freely upon This head, and knowing how apt they are to charge *us* of the *Clergy* (especially those whom they style *High-Church* Clergy, that they may have the better pretence, and more scope, for abusing them) I shall cite the Opinion of Mr. *Locke*, " Those are not at
 " all to be tolerated who deny the being of a
 " *God*. Promises, Covenants, and Oaths,
 " which are the bonds of human Society, can
 " have no hold upon an *Atheist*. The taking
 " away a *God*, but in thought, dissolves *all*.
 " Besides also, those that by their *Atheism*
 " undermine and destroy *all Religion*, can
 " have no pretence of Religion whereupon to
 " challenge the privilege of a *Toleration*."

I SHALL now apply myself in a few words to *Christian* Readers; many of whom are much more concern'd in the application of
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the preceding discourse, than they may imagine; if not for holding, *professedly*, any erroneous opinions concerning *Indulgences* and *Dispensations*, yet for living *habitually* in *opposition* to plain precepts, and *omitting* plain duties. Various are the instances of a *partial* obedience, because various are the *passions* and *inclinations* of Mankind. Very ready are they to practise those duties which agree with their *natural temper*, and are not inconsistent with their *present views in Life*; But deaf to instruction, however reasonable; to admonition and reproof, however gentle; to exhortation, however moving; when the *Preacher*, or the *Writer*, undertakes to dissuade them from the enjoyment of a *beloved Vice*, or excite them to the practice of *disagreeable* and *irksome* duties. The practice of *meekness* is no difficult Virtue, where the texture of the blood, and the disposition of the spirits, conspire to give That frame and cast of Mind. Attendance upon *public devotions*, and the duties of the *Closet*, to those who have but little employment, and as little Taste for the diversions of the World, are no hard Task, but rather an amusement, to a Mind fatiated with Idleness, and tir'd with having nothing to do. But tell the *Indolent*, that the service of his Country requires him to *take pains*, and endure *hard labour*; the *Greedy Worldling*, and the *Voluptuary*, that the business and pleasures of *This Life* must sometimes give way to the concerns of *another*; the *Soft* and *Meek-spirited*, that he must *rouze* and *exert* himself in de-

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fence of *Religion*, against a *Confederacy* of Enemies; your arguments will have but little force, because you argue against *Inclination*, against *Constitution*, against *Nature*, or *Habits*. The *Indolent* will be *indolent still*, contenting himself with doing *no hurt*, tho' he wilfully neglects the opportunity of *doing good*; the *Worldling* will be a *Worldling still*, under the cloak of *Industry*, and a *prudent Care* for himself and Family; the *Coward* will be a *Coward still*, tho' you endeavour to animate him by every proper motive, persuading himself that his want of *Courage* and *Zeal*, is *Meekness* and *Humility*. The *Drunkard* would willingly commute for his *Intemperance*, by *Generosity*, and *Good-nature*: The *Fornicator*, for his *Unclean-ness*, by some acts of *Charity*, which are to cover the multitude of his beloved Sins: The *Miser* will willingly be *temperate*, because he has no inclination to the *opposite Vice*; or perhaps, because he does not care to be at the *expense* of it: The *Ambitious* Man will readily observe any Duties that won't interfere with his *political Views*, because the Lust after *honour* and *power* being the predominant passion of his Soul, there is no *Self-denial* in the practice of other Duties. But try to persuade the *Drunkard* to forsake his *Bottle*, the *Miser* to be *liberal*, the *Unclean* Person to be *chaste*, the *Ambitious* to forego an opportunity of recommending himself to the favour of a *Court* by *indirect means*; by *injustice*, by *cruelty*, by *oppression*, and *irreligion*; demonstrate ever so clearly that they are acting in a flagrant opposi-

tion to the direction of God's Law, they'll still go on steadily in the pursuit of their several views, and gratification of their particular affections, trusting to the efficacy of their observance of the *other* parts of the Law, tho' they wilfully and habitually offend in *one Point*. But the *perfection*, shall I say? or rather the very *nature* and *essence* of Virtue, consists in *rectifying* the *irregularities*, and *subduing* the *predominancy* of our passions, so as to reduce them to an obedience to the commands of God. If we act upon a true principle of *Love* and *Duty* to *him*, we shall make *his will*, not our *own inclination*, the Rule of our actions; and if we observe his precepts only in those instances which are agreeable to *our Selves*, we reject his Government. And therefore, if we be in *earnest* in Religion, we shall strictly observe the *natural*, or *habitual bent* of our hearts, our most favourite and prevalent passions; have a watchful Eye over our selves in those points, and honestly and heartily endeavour to subject them to our duty. For however we may flatter our own inclination, or impose upon the world, by some outward appearances, the Doctrine of St. *James* will, at the day of Judgment, to their eternal confusion, be found true, That *whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, is guilty of all*. For he that said, *Do not commit Adultery*, said also, *Do not Kill*: wherefore, *if thou commit no Adultery, yet, if thou Kill, thou art become a Transgressor of the Law*.



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