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S O M E
CONSIDERATIONS

Relating to the

P R E S E N T S T A T E

O F T H E

Christian RELIGION,

Wherein the Nature, End and Design
of *Christianity*, as well as the *Principal Evidence*
of the Truth of it, are explained and recom-
mended out of the Holy Scriptures, with a ge-
neral Appeal to the Experience of all Men for
Confirmation thereof.

By Alexander Arscot.

*He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the Witness
in himself, 1 Joh. chap. v. vers. 10.*

P H I L A D E L P H I A :

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THE P R E F A C E.

THE following Sheets were writ in Performance of what I have long believed to be my Duty: I have chose this Time to do it, because of that Liberty which has been of late taken with the Christian Religion: It being evident beyond Dispute, that Infidelity, with a Train of many other Evils, which are the natural Effects of it, has very much prevailed in this Nation; and thereby the Minds of People being freed from those Restraints which Religion would put upon them, are become vitiated, and consequently their Conversations turn'd into such a Channel of Loosness and Impiety, that makes it at least, I hope, excusable, in any one who has the Good of Mankind, especially of his own Countrymen, sincerely at Heart,

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to endeavour according to the best of his Judgment and Understanding to obviate these Evils.

And this I can honestly say, is the single View I have in my thus appearing, being right sensible, that unless it shall please God, in his Wisdom and Providence, kindly to interpose, to turn the Hearts of Men into another Way of thinking than at present they seem dispos'd to, as we cannot but observe the Evils already introduced into the Christian World, so it gives us the most sorrowful Prospect what will become of the next and future Generations; which I doubt not but he will do, if Men do but rightly apply to him; but if they refuse or neglect his Help, their Destruction will be of themselves, tho' their Help is only in him.

To direct to this Help, both for the right Understanding the necessary Truths of Christianity, and practising accordingly, is the chief Design of the following Pages. The Method of doing this, is first, by shewing out of the Holy Scriptures, what the Christian Religion was

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in its primitive State ; and what was the principal Evidence of it to the first Believers. And secondly, what it is, or ought to be now, and what the principal Evidence to us of this Generation: And for Proof of this last, which most nearly concerns us, I appeal to every Man's own Experience, which if duly regarded will confirm to him the Truth of the Christian Religion as here described.

All this I have drawn from the Scriptures themselves, without Regard to the particular Systems of any Sect or Party of Men. For this may be observed, that some of those who have writ against our holy Religion, as well as in the Defence of it, have not clearly defined what they mean by it. But the one have directed their Arrows against some suppos'd Abuses (which perhaps may be real Occasions of Complaint) and have managed their Arguments in such a Manner, as to wound the Cause of Religion in general thro' the Sides of those concern'd in such suppos'd Abuses: On the other hand, some of those who have writ in Defence of

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of Religion, seem to have more Regard to the particular System they are in the Profession of; and to support a particular Set of Ceremonies, and certain Forms and Orders of Men, than the Cause of the Christian Religion in general. I say, some of the late Defenders of our holy Religion, are thus engaged, (for I would not be understood to think the same of all) and where ever this is the Case, the Cause of Christianity, as to the true Nature, End and Design of it, is very little promoted.

To avoid being diverted or biassed by any Errors of this Nature or Tendency, I was resolv'd in the writing these Considerations, to have Recourse to no other Book but my Bible; which has obliged me to make considerable Collections from thence, to shew what the Christian Religion was in its original Constitution, &c. which seems to be at present too much neglected; in which I fear, I shall not be quite acceptable to some of the curious Palates of this Age, who cannot well relish any Thing of this kind; but are bet-
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ter pleased with some fine-spun modern Compositions, which have very little Relation to that sacred Book: I have only this to request of such as these, and of my Readers in general, first, that they will have Patience to peruse the Whole, before they pass their Censure on any particular Parts of it; And for the better judging the Truth of that System of Religion herein recommended, I desire them to compare it with the Accounts of the Christian Doctrines contained in the holy Scriptures, and their own Experience; in which last I doubt not, but they will find such Traces or Footsteps, as if rightly pursued, will effectually confirm to them the Truth of the Whole. And as herein I have recommended to Mankind the Teachings and Instruction of the Divine Spirit, so I now recommend the Reader to the same in the Perusal of it.

THE

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C H A P. I.

*Of the Scriptures of the Old Testament,
and the Miracles of Christ and his
Apostles, considered as Evidences of
the Christian Religion.*

HA V I N G observ'd with a sorrowful Concern of Mind, that the *Christian Religion* has been of late Years, with more Freedom than at any Time since the Reformation from *Popery*, debated and called in Question, as to the Evidence and Certainty of it; and that in an artful conceal'd manner, by some who pretend to be its Friends and Advocates: It has led me into a serious Consideration, wherein the principal Evidence of our Holy Religion consists; and how a Man may attain to such a Certainty, respecting it, as to be well satisfied in himself, and able, if required, to render to others a Reason of his Belief. And having, as I think, met with that Satisfaction as hath put the Matter out of all question with my self; there seems to be some Constraint on my

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Mind, to communicate the same to the Publick, if by any Means I may be instrumental to preserve some, who may be in Danger of falling from their Steadfastness in the *Faith of the Gospel*; or restore others, who may be already in any degree prevailed on to question the Truth of it, by the cunning Craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive.

But before I enter upon what I have in View, I would premise, that it is not my Design to mention particularly the Proofs of the *Christian Religion*, arising from the Prophecies of the old Testament, and the Miracles of our Lord and his Apostles recorded in the New: These being undertaken by others, to whom I refer my Reader; only take Liberty to make one or two short Observations. As to the first, the Prophecies of the *Messiah* recorded in the Old Testament, appear to be well understood by the *Jewish Converts* of that Generation, to relate to our Lord Jesus Christ, and were therefore made use of to that End, as a good Argument, *ad hominem*, to that People, and from thence we have good Reason to believe them, without those unnecessary critical Remarks and Distinctions which have of late appeared in the World; in-

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asmuch as we may well suppose, that the *Jews* of that Generation better understood these Prophecies of their own Prophets, and the true Intent and Design of them, than we at this Distance of Time, and of the Race of the *Gentiles*, can reasonably be supposed to do. That the Scriptures of the Old Testament were thus applyed, and that with Success, appears from many Instances, tho' it must be confessed, they had not always the like Success; which it may be observed, did arise, not from any Defect in the Prophecies themselves, but from an evil Disposition of Mind some were under, which hindred them from a sincere honest Enquiry into the Truth and Pertinency of them, which others, being better dispos'd, were confirmed in.

A remarkable Instance of this, is that of the *Jews* of *Berea*, of whom it was said, Acts xvii. *they were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all Readiness of Mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those Things were so.* Where it is observable, first the different Conduct of the *Berean* and *Thessalonian Jews*, for concerning these last, it is said, that *Paul*, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three

Sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alledging that Christ must needs have suffered, and that this Jesus whom he preached unto them, is Christ; and the Effect was, some of them believed, but others, not only believed not, but being mov'd with Envy (a very unfit Disposition of Mind to give the Apostle a fair Hearing) a Spirit of Persecution entered them, in which they assaulted the House of *Jason*, where the Apostle lodged; which ill Temper of Mind was no doubt the Cause that the Apostle's Reasoning out of the Scripture had no better Effect on them; whereas the *Bereans* being much better dispos'd, received the Word with all Readiness of Mind, and searched the Scriptures daily; which implies not a slight Way of doing it, but Carefulness and Constancy: and the Effect was, many of them believed (more we may well suppose than of the *Thessalonians*) to which no doubt but their careful searching the Scriptures very much contributed, the Holy Spirit opening their Understandings, and working in them a Willingness, or Readiness of Mind, to receive the Truth in the Love of it; from all which, I draw this general Conclusion,

clusion, *That to search the Scriptures with an honest well-dispos'd Mind, is a very good Means which God hath ordained, for receiving and believing the Truths of the Christian Religion.*

Again, the Miracles of our Lord and his Apostles, were good Helps ordained of God, for the introducing the Belief of the *Christian Religion* into the World. And it appears that they were often made instrumental to that End; tho' not always alike successful. For as it was in the Case of the Scriptures, so it was in the Case of Miracles, they were more or less successful as they met with a better or worse Disposition of Mind, in those who were Witnesses of them. Tho' this may be observed in general of them that oppos'd the Miracles of our Lord and his Apostles, that none of them denyed the Reality of the Facts, (as some of late have done) but endeavoured under various Pretences, to frustrate the Influence of them on the Minds of the People, for their Reception of the Doctrine of the Gospel.

Some, which were the worst of all, attributed the Miracles of our Lord to a Diabolical Power, saying, He casteth out Devils by *Belzebub* the Prince of

Devils. These not only received no Benefit by them, but met with a most severe Rebuke from our Lord himself, which ought to be Matter of Caution and Warning to those who endeavour to make void the Truth and Reality of the Miracles of Christ, or any other Facts, which have the Evidence of a divine Power attending them, as well as to those who countenance or encourage such an Attempt. Others did not attribute them to a Diabolical Power, but yet being determined contrary to the Convictions of their own Minds, to oppose and hinder as much as in them lay, the Progress of that Work he was engaged in, viz. *the Conversion of the People to the Christian Faith*: Sometimes opposed them under Pretence of the Publick Good, as when our Lord had raised *Lazarus* from the Dead, it is said, *Some of them went their Way to the Pharisees, and told them what Things Jesus had done; Then gathered the chief Priests and Pharisees a Council, and said, what do we? for this Man doth many Miracles; if we let him thus alone, all Men will believe on him, and the Romans will come and take away both our Place and Nation, Joh. xi.*

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Here was first a plain and full Acknowledgment of the Reality of the Facts in these Words, *This Man doth many Miracles* : and yet instead of believing on him, and regarding that divine Power by which he was acted in the working of them, they under the specious Pretence of Danger from a foreign Power, endeavoured to stir up the People against him : Sometimes under no Pretence at all, but only for the sake of Opposition, as in the Case mentioned, *Acts* the third, where *Peter* restored the lame Man to Soundness, by calling to him in the Name of Jesus Christ of *Nazareth*, rise up and walk : Which being publickly done, was publickly and fully acknowledged, even by those, who notwithstanding oppos'd the Progress of the Apostle's Doctrine : *For beholding the Man that was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it ; but when they had commanded them to go aside out of the Council, they considered among themselves, saying, what shall we do with these Men ? for that indeed a notable Miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all Men that dwell at Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it : But that it spread no farther among the People, let us straightway threaten them that*

they speak to no Man henceforth in this Name, Acts iv. 'The Terms in which this Relation is express'd, are evidently such as cannot be applied to any other than a real Matter of Fact, and acknowledged as such by those who were Enemies to the Faith of the Gospel, who therefore, as they oppos'd the Publishers of it, under such clear confess'd Evidence, must be self-condemned.

There were a third Sort who went farther than these, and yet had not the full Benefit of the Miracles of Christ, &c. which were those who acknowledged not only the Truth and Reality of the Works, but an extraordinary Mission and Qualification in the Person working them, and yet going no farther, these did not receive the End intended fully : Of this Sort was *Nicodemus*, who made this ingenuous free Confession, Joh. xviii. *Rabbi, we know that thou art a Teacher come from God, for no Man can do these Works which thou dost, except God be with him.* Which one would think at first View, should have been sufficient to entitle him to a full Discipleship, to a Place in the Kingdom of God ; but our Lord, who knew his Heart, told him, that there was something wanting in order to that : *Verily, Verily,*

Verily, I say unto thee, except a Man be born again, (or from above) he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God, (or cannot see the Kingdom,) as much as if he had said, From the mighty Works thou hast observed me to do, thou confessest that I am a Teacher come from God, and thou doest well so far, but except thou go farther, this Confession will be of no Service to thee, except thou becomest a Witness of the same Power in measure, by which I work those mighty Works, and thereby be Partaker of a new Nature, which will make thee a new Man, created anew in Righteousness and Holiness, in which the Kingdom of God, which I am come to establish, consists; thy Confession will not give thee a Place in that Kingdom, and therefore, if thou wilt receive the right and true Benefit of these my mighty Works, believe in that Power, a measure of which is in thee, and in all Men, and is given for that End, to bring forth in them this new Birth; which is in Truth as much a Miracle, tho' it does not so directly fall under the Notice of the outward Senses, as those mighty Works which were wrought by our Lord and his Apostles, and is the principal End and Design of them;

them ; and this good Effect the Miracles had in many, who by these Means believed on him, and were really converted in Heart and Spirit, and obtained a Place in the Kingdom of God, by attending not only to the Miracles themselves, but also, and principally to that Power by which they were wrought, as might appear by many Instances.

From all which, I draw this general Conclusion, that Miracles were a Means in the Hand of God, not only of convincing Men of the Truth of our Lord's divine Mission, &c. but of converting those who duly regarded the divine Power by which they were wrought, unto the true Faith of the Gospel, by which their Hearts were purified, and all the good Fruits and Effects agreeable were brought forth, of which, Miracles were often the remote Cause, by raising the Attention, and begetting a favourable Reception of the Doctrines and Precepts delivered by him that was endued with that Power ; but the principal and immediate Cause, which render'd these and all other external Means effectual, for the right receiving and believing the Truths of the Gospel, was the Spirit of God opening the Understanding, and working
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a right Disposition of Mind for these Ends. And this was the Reason of the different Effect of Miracles on those who were Witnesses of them : Some only regarding the Miracles themselves, as outward Acts, and the Effect as to these was no more, but to beget an Admiration of them, as of something extraordinary, and their Attention terminating there, they received no real Profit or Benefit by them. Others, believing a divine Power attended them who wrought those mighty Works, and therefore giving Credit to the Doctrines delivered by them, the good Spirit of God disposing them thereto, were really converted unto the Faith through that Occasion. Thus Miracles as outward Acts, had a Relation to inward and spiritual Effects, and so far may have a spiritual Application; but from thence to represent them as only true, in a spiritual or allegorical Sense, as some of late have done, is manifestly contrary to the Nature and Design of them, which was to rouse the Attention to Things spiritual, and inconsistent with the Accounts we have of them in the holy Scriptures, and tends to make void the good Ends of the Gospel, which depends on the Truth
and

and Reality of the Whole, as related by the Evangelists and sacred Writers; more especially that greatest of all Miracles, *the Resurrection of our Lord from the Dead*; whereby a substantial Foundation of Faith in God, through Jesus Christ, was laid, (of which, and the blessed Effects of it more particularly hereafter) and therefore to endeavour to make void the Truth and Reality of it, is to make void the Faith of the Gospel itself, according to the express Words of the Apostle, 1 Cor. xiv. *If Christ be not risen, our Preaching is vain, and your Faith is also vain, ye are yet in your Sins.*

C H A P. II.

A summary Account what the Christian Religion was in its primitive State, as the same is delivered in the Holy Scriptures.

HA V I N G said thus much by Way of Testimony, in behalf of these two great Evidences of Christianity, to wit, *The Prophecies of the Prophets, and the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles,*

Apostles: I shall proceed to treat of an Evidence, which appears to me greater than these, and yet more neglected; arising from the Nature of the *Christian Religion* itself, and the Influence it has, where it is rightly understood and received, on the Minds of Men, of which, every Man has, or may have, a Testimony in his own Breast, which to him that attends to it, is certain and unquestionable. In Order to it, I would in the first Place lay before you briefly, and yet with as much Clearness as I am capable; what the *Christian Religion* is, as to its Nature, End and Design, as the same is delivered in the Holy Scriptures, and what was the principal Evidence of the Truth of it, to Believers in the primitive Times; and in the next Place, what is the principal Evidence of the same to us in this Generation.

Now, *Christianity* is a divine Institution, by which God declares himself reconciled to Mankind, for the Sake, and on the Account of his beloved Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and what he did and suffered for them, on Condition of Repentance, Amendment of Life, and Perseverance in a State of Holiness; for which End, he also offers them the Help
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of his Grace and good Spirit, which is sufficient for that End : All which taken together, may be called Salvation, tho' in a proper Sense, Salvation consists in the last, *viz.* in that Help which Men receive from the Grace and good Spirit of God, according to the Words of the Apostle, *Rom. v. 10. If when we were Enemies, we were reconciled unto God, by the Death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his Life.* Again, *Eph. ii. 8. By Grace are ye saved thro' Faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the Gift of God.* *Tit. iii. 5. According to his Mercy he saved us, by the Washing of Regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.*

Now by considering this Definition, it may be observed, that the *Christian Religion*, so far as concerns the great and good Ends of its Institution, consists of two Parts, first, what our Lord Jesus Christ did, and suffered for Mankind in the Days of his Flesh, without them. And secondly, what he did, and continues to do for them, in them; or in other Words, what they are enabled to do for themselves, thro' that Help and Assistance which he is pleased to afford them. The first includes the se-

veral Particulars of his holy Life, the good Works which he wrought, in which he is our Example; the Miracles which he did for the Confirmation of his Doctrine and Divine Mission, his Death, by which thro' the Appointment of God, he became a propitiatory Sacrifice for the Sins of Mankind, his Resurrection, by which he was fully declared to be the Son of God with Power, all which, tho' the Effects of them are lasting and permanent, yet were then done once for all, and no more to be repeated. But the second, viz. what Christ does for Mankind in them, or what they are enabled to do for themselves, through his Help in Order to Repentance and Conversion, and Perseverance in a Life of true Piety and Holiness. This being the standing Experience of Believers in him, throughout all Generations, remains to be more particularly considered in this Place, being that, whereby all the good Ends of Religion are answered to Mankind: The first of these I call *the External Historical Part of Christianity*, the last, *the Internal, Experimental Part*. And tho' I consider them for Distinction Sake, as two Parts, yet as they have a near Relation and Dependance one upon the other,

ther, they are not to be divided in the Influence they have on Man's Salvation, the one being the Effect or Consequence of the other: According to these Scriptures, *Tit. ii. 14. He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works.* *2 Cor. v. 15. He died for all, that they who live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again.* So that all the Blessings of the Gospel, which are comprehended in these particulars, *Remission of Sins that are past, Redemption from the Power of it, being purified, sanctified and justified;* all are conveyed to us by Jesus Christ, and are the Effects and Consequence of what he did, and suffered in his own Person without us, but yet wrought in us by his good Spirit; which I mention once for all, that when I speak of these Experiences, it may be so understood.

Let us therefore now consider a little more particularly, what a *Christian Life* is, according to the Account we have of it in the Holy Scriptures. He that with Seriousness and Attention reads the Writings of the New Testament, will find, that as the Pollutions and Defile-

ments which Men have contracted, are in the Heart; out of which, as out of a polluted Fountain, they issue forth into Words and Actions; so it is the principal Business of a Christian, when he becomes engaged in the Work of Religion and Godliness, to begin there first, to make clean the Inside, to suppress the first Motions and Inclinations to Evil, which arise in the Heart, to regulate the Mind with all its Faculties and Powers, which *John the Baptist* calls, *laying the Ax to the Root of the Tree*, *Mat. iii. 10.* which being in some good Measure done, such may be safely trusted with Respect to their outward Actions; for all our Actions being in Conformity to the Will, Inclination or Desire of our Minds, if these are taken off from Things that are evil, and become rightly directed, that Person cannot but in the general Course of his Actions, eschew Evil, (the Desire after it being taken away) and pursue Good; or in the Words of our Lord, *Mat. xii. 33. make the Tree good, and the Fruit will be good*: The whole Conversation will be so. That this is the peculiar Business of the *Christian Religion*, where it takes Place, will appear to any impartial Person,

son, who shall with a sincere and honest Mind, peruse the Doctrines and Precepts left us by our Lord Jesus Christ and his Apostles, and especially in that excellent Part of them, contained in the 5th, 6th, and 7th of *Matthew*.

I hope it will be readily allowed, that this Work, if it can be effected, is a most excellent Attainment; but some may say, it is more easy to write or speak of such a Regulation of the Mind, than to attain to it: I allow it, and will go so far in allowing of it, as to say, that as to any Ability which we as Men have, or can have of ourselves, it is impossible. And herein consists the Excellency of the *Christian Religion*, that what is in itself otherwise impossible, according to the weak, depraved State of our Minds, God has made possible unto us, by affording us such Help, as if rightly applied to, is sufficient for that End: What that Help is, by what Means conveyed to us, and how to be made Use of for this great and good Purpose, I am next to speak to.

C H A P. III.

A further Account of the Christian Religion out of the Scriptures, particularly of that Help which the Primitive Christians received for living a Religious Life, and practising the Precepts of the Gospel.

IN Order to the right Understanding the Nature of this Help, let us again look back to what our Lord did for us in his Appearance in the Flesh, which will lead us to what he is now doing for us in Spirit, (the one as I said, having a necessary Relation to the other) after our Lord had done, and suffered in this Life, according to the Will of God, being at last offered up a Sacrifice on the Cross; by which he became a Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World, for the Remission of Sins that are past: There being something farther necessary, in order to our Acceptance with God, to wit, the delivering of us from

the Power of Sin for the future, and bringing us up into a Life of Holiness, and preserving us in it. It being most reasonable to suppose, that God is no more reconciled to Men in a sinful State of Life, since the Death of Christ, than he was before; Sin being as much contrary to the Purity of his Nature, since as before; therefore for the rendering that Work which our Lord came to do compleat, after having humbled himself unto Death, He was again exalted, by being raised from the Dead through the Power of the Father, thereby effectually declaring himself to be the Son of God the Saviour of the World.

Of this, as the Apostles themselves were Witnesses, so with holy Confidence and Assurance they built upon it, as a most sure Foundation; and having at the same Time, according to his Promise, received the Gift of the Holy Ghost; they went forth in the Virtue thereof, and their Preaching became powerful and effectual, to the converting Multitudes to the Faith of the Gospel.

It is not my present Intention, neither do I think it necessary, to use
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Arguments to convince my Reader of the Truth of our Lord's Resurrection, the Account thereof, as delivered in Scripture, being so convincing, that I know no Matter of Fact at such a Distance of Time, better attested and confirmed to us. And many learned Men having already collected the several Proofs, and thereby established the Truth of the Fact beyond Contradiction ; my principal Design at present is, to shew by Instances from the Holy Scriptures, that the Apostles in the first Publication of the Doctrines of the Gospel, had constant Reference to this as a Foundation of Faith, on which they themselves built, and on which they persuaded others to build also; as appears by the several short, but powerful Sermons, which we have recorded in the *Acts* of the Apostles; and no doubt but this was the Case where-ever they preached: As also the same is to be observed in most of their Epistles to the gathered Churches. This Article being made Use of, as a suitable Introduction to establish the Doctrines and Precepts they were about to communicate to them; for what could be more reasonable? being about to intro-

duce a Religion, the principal Business of which, was to give Men Power over their Souls Enemies, the *World*, the *Flesh*, and the *Devil*; (in which Salvation consists) to let them see that the Author of that Salvation was all-powerful, having himself overcome Death, and him that had the Power of it, which is the Devil.

But this Foundation however good, is but a Foundation, and something is to be built upon it. What is that? believing in him, and in that Faith, receiving the Gifts of his Holy Spirit, which were *Repentance*, and *Conversion*, and *turning from the Evil of their Ways*: Unto you first, says the Apostle Peter, Acts iii. 26. *God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning every one of you from his Iniquities.* Acts. v. 31, 32. *Him hath God exalted with his Right Hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give Repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of Sins, and we are his Witnesses of these Things, and so is the Holy Ghost also, whom God hath given to them that obey him.* Here was a Testimony to the Power of Christ's Resurrection, as well as a twofold Evidence of the Coming of Christ, and the blessed Effects of it, to wit,

wit, that of the Apostles, who were themselves Witnesses of what they preached, and that of the Holy Ghost, which God gave, not only to the Apostles, though to them in a very eminent Degree, to fit them for the great Work, in which they were engaged; but also to all those who obeyed him, that is, all Believers in Christ through their Preaching; which last was an internal Evidence, manifesting itself in the Hearts of those which had it.

Nor was this the peculiar Privilege of the *Jews*, though to them it was first preached; but was extended to the *Gentiles* also: As first, in that memorable Instance of *Cornelius*, upon which Occasion, *Peter* introduces what he had to say, with this General Confession or Acknowledgment, viz. *Of a Truth I perceive, that God is no Respector of Persons, but in every Nation he that feareth him, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted of him*, Acts x. And having in the Progress of his Discourse, preached Christ crucified, and raised from the Dead, &c. We find that the Effect was, while *Peter* yet spake the Words, *the Holy Ghost fell on all those that heard the Word*. And when *Peter* was brought

under some Reprehension by the *Jews*, on this Account, that he went in unto Men uncircumcised, and did eat with them ; After having rehearsed the whole Matter, he concludes, *for as much then, as God gave the like Gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?* When they heard these Things, they held their Peace, and glorified God, saying, *then hath God also to the Gentiles granted Repentance unto Life.*

This was the good Effect of their Conversion, as the same Apostle farther explains it, *Chap. xv.* When another Dispute having arisen about Circumcision, *Peter* rose up, and said unto them, referring no doubt to this Passage, *Men and Brethren, you know how that a good while ago, God made Choice among us, that the Gentiles by my Mouth should hear the Word of the Gospel and believe. And God which knoweth the Hearts, bare them Witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us, and put no Difference between us and them, purifying their Hearts by Faith.* Here again was an inward, as well as outward Testimony to the Truth of the Gospel preached by the Apostle, *viz.* God who
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knew the Sincerity of their Hearts, testifying to them inwardly, by the Holy Ghost which he gave them, by which he enlarged their Understandings, and wrought in them a Willingness to receive and believe the Gospel ; the Effects of which, was Repentance unto Life, and a purifying or cleansing the Heart by Faith : All which implies an inward Work in the Mind, known and experienced by the Help of the Holy Spirit, which bore Witness with their Spirit, to the Truth of the Word preached, in that Work of Repentance and Purification which it wrought.

And this was henceforward extended unto the *Gentiles*, as well as the *Jews* ; though as the first Publishers of the Gospel were of the Stock of *Abraham*, their Brethren of that Nation had for a Time the Preference where they came, as appears in their Preaching the Word at *Antioch*, at *Athens*, at *Rome*, &c. at the first of these Places, *Chap. xiii.* after the Apostle having recounted the Mercies of God to the *Jews* in general, from *ver. 16*, to *26* ; and by Way of Complaint against those who dwelt at *Jerusalem*, and their Rulers, mentioned their delivering him (Christ) to *Pi-*
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late to be slain ; and after having asserted his Resurrection from the Dead, and expatiated upon it from *ver.* 30, to 37, he proceeds in these Words, *Be it known unto you therefore, Men and Brethren, that through this Man, is preached unto you forgiveness of Sins : And by him, all that believe are justified from all Things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses.* That is, all that believe in Christ, and obey the Gospel, are freed and delivered from both the Guilt and Power of Sin ; from which they could not be delivered by the Law of *Moses* : For that being a Dispensation which related chiefly to outward Actions, did not make the **Comers** thereunto perfect, as pertaining to the Conscience ; and for that Reason there was a Repetition of Sacrifices and Oblations at certain Times : Whereas Christ, by the one Offering of himself once made, obtained not only Remission of Sins that are past, but *Grace* to help to overcome Sin in the Lust of it, and to renew and sanctify the Powers and Faculties of our Souls, that we might thro' Strength received from him, walk in Newness of Life.

And herein consists the Perfection of the *Christian Religion*, and for this End the Ministry of the Gospel was ordained as the Apostle *Paul* declares of himself, in his Defence before *Agrippa*, viz. Having first mentioned the *Gentiles*, he says, *To whom I now send thee, to open their Eyes, to turn them from Darkness to Light, from the Power of Satan to God, that they may receive Forgiveness of Sins, and an Inheritance among the Sanctified by Faith, which is in me, (Christ Jesus) Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the Heavenly Vision, but shewed first unto them at Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the Coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and bring forth Works meet for Repentance, Acts xxvi. 17. 18, 19, 20. Agreeable to this he tells the Romans, that the Gospel itself is the Power of God; in these Words, I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the Power of God unto Salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the Righteousness of God revealed from Faith to Faith, Rom. i. 16. In all which is evidently set forth, both the End and*
Design

Design of the *Christian Religion*, and the Means of obtaining that End. The End is Repentance and Forgiveness of Sins; and the Consequence, an Inheritance among the Sanctified, witnessing the Righteousness of God to be revealed. The Means is Faith in that Light which reveals or makes manifest, both the Evil and the Good; and in that Power of God, which strengthens and enables us to forsake the one and to do the other.

In all these Forms of Expression, are implied a Want of Power in us, and a Supply of that Want from God, to be received by Faith, which the Apostle illustrates by the Faith of *Abraham*, where he says, *that he being not weak in Faith, considered not his own Body now dead, when he was an hundred Years old, neither yet the Deadness of Sarah's Womb, which Faith was imputed to him for Righteousness.* Rom. iv. Nor was it written for his Sake only, but for us also; to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe in him that rais'd Jesus from the Dead: that is, as *Abraham* being an hundred Years old, and his Wife, in the common Course of Nature, past Child-bearing, yet believed that God was able to supply those Defects;

fects ; so we, notwithstanding the Weakness and Incapacity we are under, by Reason of the Depravity of our Nature, yet through Faith in the Power of God, which was eminently exerted in raising up our Lord Jesus, and is offered to us by the holy Spirit, which is given to all that believe in him, are enabled to walk in Newness of Life. To this Effect he argues in the former Part of the Epistle to the *Romans* in the strongest and clearest Terms.

And in the Epistle to the *Ephesians*, he expresses this Incapacity or Weakness, by the Word Death, having in Chap. i. set forth the exceeding Greatness of God's Power to us-ward, who believe according to the working of his mighty Power, which he wrought in Christ when he rais'd him from the dead. He goes on, Chap. ii. *And you hath he quickned, who were dead in Trespasses and Sins, wherein in Times past ye walked. But God who is rich in Mercy, for his great Love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in Sins, hath quickned us together with Christ. By Grace you are saved. And Verse the eighth, for by Grace you are saved, through Faith, not of your selves, it is the Gift of God :*

not of Works, (wrought by ourselves, by our Strength and Ability) *lest any Man should* (as some do in this Day) *boast*. Nor yet are we saved without Works wrought by the Spirit and Power of God thro' Christ; for we are his Workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good Works; which God hath ordained that we should walk in them. Once more he expresses in the same Epistle, Chap. v. ver. 8. this Incapacity by the Word Darknes, *Ye were sometimes Darknes, but now are ye Light in the Lord, walk as Children of the Light*, (for the Fruit of the Spirit is in all Goodness, Righteousness and Truth.) By giving us Light he supplies the Defects of our Understanding; by giving Power, he strengthens the Weakness of our Wills and Affections, respecting Things spiritual, and bringing forth Fruits acceptable to God.

In which Respect the *Christian Religion* doth eminently excell the best Helps that can be obtained from the best *Moralists* among the *Heathen*, in whose Writings it must be confessed are many good Precepts, but little said of applying unto God, depending on him for Help; but all is generally left to the Conduct of our own Understandings, and to the Power

Power of our own Wills, which they tell us indeed, are in many Respects wrong, but yet if they are regulated, must regulate themselves, according to the Rules of right Reason, from which Men have deviated. But how a Thing that is wrong can regulate it self, or set it self right, is to me unaccountable.

And in this Respect, *Christianity* in the Life, Spirit and Power of it, excels *Christianity* in the literal, historical, formal Profession only. That is, the Christian who believing that there is Power afforded to Men by God, through Jesus Christ, for the overcoming Evil, and doing Good, applies himself in this Faith to the Throne of Grace, from time to time, praying for Grace to help in Time of Need, for the forsaking the one and doing the other; and continues in that good Exercise, in a daily Watchfulness thereunto, throughout the whole Course of his Life. Such a Christian I say, has much the Advantage of him, who professes indeed to believe what he finds recorded, of the Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, &c. of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that he has left most excellent Precepts and Doctrines recorded in Holy Scripture, which he

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will endeavour, as far as the Infirmities of human Nature will admit of, to put in Practice, (tho' many do not proceed thus far) but as to the doing the Commands of Christ, he is so far from pretending to do it, that he esteems it a Presumption to assert the Possibility of it: Whereas it is evident to any who reads the New Testament with impartial Seriousness and Attention, that the peculiar Design of the *Christian Religion* was not only to introduce into the World a Set of most excellent Precepts, such as Mankind till then was never blest withal, but also, and more especially, to offer Power to those who are willing to receive it, for the Performance of them.

And indeed without this Power, the *Christian Religion* would not bring so great a Blessing and Advantage to Mankind. For as the Precepts of Christ are more pure and refined than any other, as reaching to the reforming the Mind, which is a Work of a more pure and perfect Nature, than a Conformity to Precepts, relating only to outward Actions: So if Men in this great and necessary Work, are left to themselves, all the Advantage they can reap by it, is this, that they are thereby brought to the Sight of
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good Things, but excluded the Possibility of attaining to the Experience of them. But the Case in Truth is far otherwise, as has been already by divers Instances made evident; and to say otherwise, is contrary to the whole Tenor of the Gospel, the Precepts whereof, are delivered, not as Matters of meer Speculation, but of Practice. And therefore, our Lord after having delivered most excellent Precepts, relating to forsaking Evil, in the very Conception or Root of it, and doing Good from the Heart, in the many Instances mentioned in the 5th, 6th, and 7th Chap. of *Matthew*, concludes, *That whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine, and doth them, I will liken him to a wise Man that built his House upon a Rock, and the Rain descended, and the Floods came, and the Wind blew, and beat upon that House, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a Rock.* To the same Effect he says elsewhere, *Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.* Again, *Ye are my Friends, if you do whatsoever I command you,* John xv. 14.

From hence it is evident, that Obedience to the Command of Christ is required from all those who profess to be his Followers : And it would be very preposterous to suppose that this should be in so express and particular Terms required, and the Performance of it left impossible : The Ways of God are not unreasonable ; but as he commands Obedience, so he enables all who believe in him, to do what he commands, and and for this End he promised, and in due Time gave his good Spirit, to the Power of which is attributed the whole Work of Man's Salvation, consisting, *first*, in Repentance from dead Works, Conversion, Sanctification, or being made holy, Justification, or being made righteous, as well as esteemed such, (which I take to be the true Intent of that Text) viz. *He died for our Sins, and rose again for our Justification* ; that is, that we thro' Power received from him, (which the Apostle calls elsewhere *the Power of his Resurrection*) might be made righteous.

And this Work taken together, is in one Word call'd *Regeneration*, or being born again, made a new Creature, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good Works.

Works, being made Partakers of the Divine Nature, which is the utmost that can be expected from Religion; being a compleat Reparation of that Loss which Mankind sustained by Sin and Transgression. All which is not our Work, simply so understood, but that of the holy Spirit of God. And therefore, the true Believers are said to be born, *not of corruptible Seed, but of incorruptible Seed, by the Word of God which lives and abides for ever, 1 Pet. i. 23.* And again, *who are born not of Blood, nor of the Will of the Flesh, nor of the Will of Man, but of God. John i. 13.*

C H A P. IV.

Containing some general Observations on the foregoing.

I Would not be understood, by attributing all this to the Spirit of God, as if Man was no wise concerned, or acted no Part in the working out his own Salvation; but was to be considered as
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purely passive, (as some have misrepresented this Doctrine.) He that made us rational Creatures, does not destroy the Faculty of Reason in us, but improves it, by convincing and enlightning our Understandings, moving and enclining our Wills towards such Objects as are acceptable to himself, and out of the contrary, and this in a Manner always clear and evident. And the Mind thus enlightned and affected, puts itself upon Action, not as of itself, but under the Conduct and Influence of him that enlightens and inclines it, having its Trust and Dependance always on him, being sensible, that without him he can do nothing, cannot move one Step rightly ; as on the other Hand, believing that through Strength received from God, through Christ, he can do all Things appertaining to Life and Godliness : And this not irresistibly, but by reasonable Ways and Persuasions, giving the Mind, which was under the Power and Dominion of sinful Habits, a different Turn or Inclination, which if it does not neglect, but makes Use of the Help offered, it gains Victory over them : But if through Neglect or Wilfulness, it disregards or resists these gentle, yet effectual Strivings,

Strivings, it remains under the Power and Dominion of Sin still.

Thus the Doctrine of Rewards, and Punishments, is established on an equal and reasonable Foundation; and without this, it cannot be equitably and reasonably supported: For as it would be unjust to punish Men for Omission or Commissions, which are not in their Power to do or not to do; so it is altogether just and reasonable, where sufficient Help is offer'd, and yet neglected, that they who are in this Neglect or Disobedience, should be punished. As on the contrary, in our making Use of the Help offer'd us, and thereby coming up in the Practice of our Duties, we should receive the Rewards promised to well doing.

Thus when we find in Scripture, the good Actions of Men under this Direction, call'd the *Fruits of the Spirit*, we are to understand, not that Man acts no Part in them, but that the Spirit or Grace of God, quickning or moving upon him, he is prevailed upon to act by his Help; as on the other Hand, when we are advised or commanded to work, to bring forth good Fruits, to eschew Evil, and do Good, to come into the Practice of those excellent Virtues recommended through-

out the holy Scriptures; it is to be understood, that we are to set about them, not trusting in our selves, or in our own Strength, but in God, through Christ: And for that Reason we are commanded to trust in him, to look unto Jesus, who is the Author and Finisher of our Faith; and not to cast away our Confidence, &c. Hence the Righteousness brought forth by Christians, is called the Righteousness of Christ, the Righteousness of God, and the Righteousness of Faith; because Christ is the principal Agent or Efficient in it, and we through Faith in him, and not otherwise, are made able to act. This Distinction, all that enter upon a Life of Religion and Godliness, ought to take with them in every Step, without which they cannot proceed rightly, as with it they may persevere, with a good Assurance of Success unto the End.

It may be further observed, that not only the *Christian Religion* properly so called, but the Religion of the Ancients from the Beginning, stood on the same Bottom, and the Righteousness which was in all Ages acceptable to God, was the Righteousness of Faith; that is, it consisted in their believing in God, and obeying

obeying his Will revealed to them, either immediately to those whom it particularly concerned, or to some of his Servants and Prophets, who were to communicate the same to the People; and for their Help and Assistance in doing the Will of God thus revealed, he gave them his good Spirit in all Ages, by which he call'd to them, strove with them, invited them, warned the Ungodly, supported and comforted the Righteous, as might easily be confirmed by very many Instances out of the Books of the old Testament, there being nothing more frequent throughout the holy Scriptures of all Ages, but more especially in the Book of the Psalms. and other Prophetical Writings, than strong Exhortations to trust in God, to believe in him, to look unto him in all Dangers, Difficulties, and Temptations, whether national or particular; and to wait on him diligently for Strength, and for renewing of it. So that true Religion in the Ground of it was always the same, and was indeed as old as the Creation; being not the Religion of Nature, but the Religion of God, having for its Foundation, not human Reason, but Faith in God's Power and all-sufficiency,

And the Difference between the Religion of the Ancients, and the *Christian Religion*, was not in their different Ground and Foundation; but that the Precepts of the Gospel, being in general more inward and spiritual, than those of former Dispensations; the Faith of the Gospel, in the Nature and Degree of it, was suited to such a Dispensation. And for this Reason, it pleased God to shew forth his Power, in the most extraordinary and wonderful Manner, in the Resurrection of our Lord from the Dead, and the great Effusion of the Holy Spirit which followed thereupon; by which, the most sure and certain Foundation of Faith was laid; not only for Help and Strength to do the Will of God in this Life, but a most reasonable Ground of Hope, for our Resurrection to Eternal Life, and a Partaking of the Rewards promised to well-doing, in that Life which is to come. In which Respect, the *Christian Religion* is an Improvement upon the Religion of the former Ages of the World, that is, as it is a Dispensation more inward and spiritual, and thereby Life and Immortality brought more clearly to Light through the Gospel.

As to what some object, that this Dependence on God, and Trust and Confidence in him, as it supposes Man to be a weak, helpless, depending Being, is a debasing human Nature. There would be some Reason for this Objection, if one frail, fallible Man, was to be subject to another, equally frail and fallible, or to any other Being below their Creator: But that the Thing formed, should depend on, and be subject to him that made it, has not the least Absurdity in it: But on the contrary, as every one that knows himself rightly, must be sensible of the Shortness of his own Understanding, as well as the Weakness and Deficiency of the Faculties of his Mind in general, and by taking a View of others, cannot but observe the like Imperfections in them, from those Inconsistencies and Contradictions which appear among the greatest Pretenders to mere natural Reason: He that considers this rightly, will find it difficult in the Nature of Things, to fix a Standard of Certainty in Understanding, and Stability in Practice, in any Thing, but in God the Fountain of Truth, and all Perfection. And therefore, this is so far from debasing human Nature, that

that it is the only true Means of exalting of it, in the most eminent Manner. For Man having by Sin and Disobedience, debased himself, and cast himself down from that State of Purity and Uprightness, in which (it is both reasonable in itself, as well as agreeable to Scripture, to believe that) God made him, it is the highest Honour to Mankind, as well as an Act of the greatest Love in God, to interpose with his Help, in Order to restore him to that blessed State in which he was at first created.

That this is truly the Case, is so evident from the general Tenor of the Gospel, that it has been often Matter of Admiration to me, that any should be found to disclaim such Help, and set up for self-sufficient independent Beings ; and yet at the same Time, to pretend to be Christians ; when almost every Chapter in the New Testament, as well as other Parts of the Scriptures, is a Witness against them : And to say all that may be said in Defence of this Principle, would be to transcribe the greatest Part of these sacred Writings. And I can account for this degenerate Principle, which has of late appeared

in some, no otherwise, than by supposing it to be the Effect of the same Pride and Selfishness, which prevailed on our first Parents to disobey the Command of God, *viz.* it being then suggested, that upon their so doing, they should be no longer in a State of Dependence as before, but that they should be as Gods; and what less do these modern Writers suggest, when they tell us, that we are able of ourselves to do every Thing that is necessary for our Acceptance with God; that is, that we are self-sufficient or independent, or in other Words, as Gods, (that being one of the incommunicable Attributes of the Divine Being) which to mention, is with me enough to confute it.

Upon the whole, the Sum and Substance of the *Christian Religion*, according to what has already been advanced out of Holy Scriptures, is this, *viz.* Man having by transgressing the Commands of God, rendered himself an Object of his Displeasure, as well as put himself out of a Capacity of restoring himself to the Favour of God, through that Weakness and Depravity, which Sin hath brought him under, it has pleased

fed God to appoint a Means for his Help, and Recovery, in both these Respects, to wit, Jesus Christ, through whom, for the Sake of that one Offering once made by him on the Cross, God the Father has declared himself reconciled unto sinful Man, upon Condition of Repentance for Sins past, and Amendment of Life, forsaking Evil, and doing Good ; in a Word, obeying God's Commands, and not without this Condition : To which End, he also offers him the Light and Help of his Grace and good Spirit, that he may see and distinguish Good and Evil, be assisted and strengthened to do the one, and eschew the other, and live for evermore ; Which is complete Salvation, and a Religion worthy of God, in itself most reasonable, and deserving our ready Acceptation.

I thought it necessary thus to collect from the Holy Scriptures, what the *Christian Religion* is in its pure primitive State, because some of those who have writ of late on that Subject, have not thought fit to define what they mean by *Christianity*, in such clear explicit Terms as might be expected.

Some seeming to intend thereby, only a Belief of the History of our Lord Jesus Christ, on the same Evidence which we believe all other Histories. Whereas by what has been said, it appears, that the *Christian Religion* includes this Belief, (that is, where the Gospel has been preached and professed) but extends also farther, to wit, to the sanctifying and purifying the Hearts of those that rightly receive it, by the Spirit of Christ: Without which last, the first avails nothing to our Acceptance with God. Others again make the *Christian Religion* to consist in mere Morality, and would have it to be only an Improvement of natural Religion, (as they call it) and that thereby nothing new is introduced into the World, which we had not before, but this, that Men are in more plain and express Terms thereby informed what all Men had before as rational Beings, which is sufficient to shew them their Duty to God and one another, and bring them into the Practice of it, without any farther Help than what they have in themselves, of themselves. Some of these have gone so far, as to make it even an indifferent Thing, whether Men believe
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what is recorded in the Holy Scriptures, of our Lord Jesus Christ, or not. This is an Extream on the other Hand, and both alike pernicious: Whereas the true Medium is, that those to whom the Gospel is preached, ought to believe, and receive both the outward and inward Appearance of the Son of God, by the one of which, they are put in a Capacity of Salvation; by the other, they are actually and really saved thro' the Power and Virtue of his Spirit.

C H A P. V.

Upon what Evidence, principally the Primitive Christians believed the Truth of the Christian Religion.

IT remains now to enquire, upon what Evidence principally the Primitive Christians believed the Truth of the *Christian Religion*. *Answer*, Upon this Evidence, to wit, the powerful Influence which it had on the Minds of those

those to whom the Gospel was preached, and who with an honest sincere Heart attended to it ; not only to the convincing their Understandings of the Truth of the Doctrine, but prevailing on their Wills to a Conformity thereunto, by the lively Operation of the Spirit of Christ, which was given for that End. That this was the Case, appears from many Instances, some of which follow, As first, Mat. vii. 28, 29. *When Jesus had ended these Sayings, (meaning his Sermon on the Mount, a Set of the best Doctrines and Precepts the World was ever blest with) the People were astonished at his Doctrine, for he taught as one having Authority, and not as the Scribes.* And Mark i. 21, 21. *And they went into Capernaum, and straightway, on the Sabbath he went into the Synagogue and taught, and they were astonished at his Doctrine, for he taught them as one that had Authority, and not as the Scribes.* Again, Luke iv. 32. *And they were astonished at his Doctrine, for his Word was with Power.* These Forms of Expression imply a peculiar Virtue and Efficacy in the Words of Christ, beyond the Words of common Teachers ; these reaching the outward Ears, and at best but moving the Understanding

derstanding to an Assent, where the Matter is true and convincing; but those, besides convincing the Understanding, affect the Will, and all the Faculties of the Soul to Obedience, by a lively and powerful Influence, which is peculiar to them. To the like Effect we read, *John vi.* when some of his Disciples had taken Offence, and went back, and walked no more with him, *then Jesus said unto the Twelve, will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered, and said, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life; and we believe, and are sure, that thou art Christ the Son of the living God.* The like Confession the same Apostle made, *Mat. xvi. 16.* upon which our Lord told him, *Flesh and Blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven.* Here was again a complete Assurance of his being the Son of the living God, from the lively Effects of his Words, which were not only in themselves living and powerful, but communicated of that Virtue and Power to them, which put the Matter out of all Question, as to his Divine Mission: And therefore, they might well say as they did, *whither shall we go? what is there wanting*

wanting to a compleat Evidence, that thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.

To the like Effect, our Lord farther asserts the Evidence of his Doctrine; speaking of himself as a Shepherd, and his Followers as Sheep; *When he putteth forth his own Sheep, he goeth before them, and the Sheep follow him, for they know his Voice; and a Stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the Voice of a Stranger*, John x. 4, 5. Here is a plain Distinction between Voice and Voice, respecting the Evidence or Certainty of them, the one being self-evident, the other uncertain; the one well known, the other unknown: And this self-evidence, this Knowledge applied to the Voice of Christ; The Uncertainty or Defect of Knowledge, to the Voice of a Stranger, that is every other Voice, whether it be that of our own deceitful Hearts, or that of others, not under the Conduct or Direction of the Voice of Christ. From all which it is farther evident that the Voice of Christ (whether we understand it of his outward Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, as in that Day, or his inward Discoveries to the Understanding of Believers, by his Light and good Spirit) has an Evidence peculiar

to itself, exceeding all other Evidences, to a Mind rightly dispos'd to receive it.

If it be enquired, what does this Voice discover to them? It may be answered, Truths agreeable to the Will of God, and their Duty accordingly, and that in a Way suitable to the present State the Mind is under. And those that attend unto these, in the first and smallest Manifestation, and become obedient thereto, they are made Witnesses of farther and greater Discoveries, and an Inlargement of Understanding, respecting the Doctrine of Christ, according to our Lord's Saying, *John vii. 16, 17. My Doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.* And for this End, to wit, the enlarging our Understandings, relating to the Doctrines and Precepts of Christ, in the most certain and evident Manner, the Holy Spirit was promised by him, and in due Time given, whose Office was to teach them all things, to bring all Things to their Remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them, to testify of him, (Christ) to reprove the World of Sin, &c. to guide them (the Disciples and Followers of Christ)

Christ) into all Truth, to receive of his, and shew unto them, &c. By all which it is evident, that as Christ died to put Mankind in a Capacity of Salvation, so all the Benefits of the Gospel are conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit, which is given to Believers; by which they are put in Remembrance of the Sayings, that is, the Doctrines and Precepts of Christ. And it is this, as it comes from him, so it bears Testimony to him, and is a sufficient Teacher, for it guides them into all Truth necessary for them to believe and practice; and lastly, it receives of his, and shews unto them, that is, it applies unto them all the Benefits accruing by the Gospel, as they come under Qualifications fit to receive them: To the Penitent it gives Remission of Sins, that is a Sense of it, in those Times of Refreshment which come from his Presence, and as they continue in Faithfulness and Perseverance, attending to it, sanctifies them more and more, and justifies them, and gives them Peace: And all this in a convincing self-evident Manner, as is clearly implied in these Forms of Expression, *to teach them all Things, to testify of Christ, to guide them into all Truth*, which it could

not properly be said to do, unless it did it with Certainty; neither could it otherwise answer the End for which it was given.

And that it was so in Fact, will farther appear, by shewing, that as the Holy Spirit was promised, so it was in due Time given, to be a lasting permanent Teacher, as well as Help to Believers. For this Promise of the Holy Ghost had Reference, not only to that great and notable Effusion, or pouring out of the Spirit at the Time of *Pentecost*, which was a solemn Confirmation of the new and spiritual Dispensation of the Gospel; but also to that Instruction, which those that attended to it were to receive from it continually, according to the Promise of Christ, *John xvi. I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, viz. The Spirit of Truth.* So that the Spirit of Truth was to supply the Want of his personal Presence, and to become a Teacher or Instructor, as well as a Comforter to his Disciples and Followers, after his Departure from them. In which consisted the peculiar specifick Difference, (if I may so call it) between the Gospel Dispensation

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and all others: Under this, Men having an *inward* Instructor always abiding with them; Whereas, under the former *outward* Dispensations, as the Law was given to *Moses*, and by him committed to Writing, and delivered to the People, so after Ages, they were to receive the Interpretation of it from the Priests Lips, which were therefore said to preserve Knowledge.

Now, that this Promise of the Holy Ghost was fulfilled, appears by the Account we have of it in the *Acts* of the Apostles, which tho' a brief History of what followed after the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, yet in this necessary Point is very full, as *Chap. ii.* where we have a particular Relation of the great Effusion of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, which it is certain, was particularly miraculous and extraordinary, the Divine Wisdom so ordering it, for raising the Attention, and begetting Faith, in that which afterwards followed, to wit, the Preaching and Propagation of the Gospel to the World. Concerning which, I shall not speak now particularly, but only observe, that though this, in the Manner of it was extraordinary, yet the

Thing, *viz.* the Gift of the Holy Spirit to Believers in general, was designed to be, and actually was given to them, as a common permanent Privilege, not only in the gathering the Church of Christ, but to remain with the Churches when gathered. And that not only to the first Publishers of the Gospel, for their Assistance in that Work, and afterwards to the Ministers of the Churches, when gathered into Societies, but also to those that heard them, and to all Members of the Churches, by which they were assisted, and their Understandings opened, to receive the Gospel when preached, and to be with them for a Teacher and Instructor, as well as Helper, in their whole Conduct, when outward Teachers were absent from them.

A few Instances of this Tendency may suffice; as first, when *Peter* took Occasion from the great Concourse of People that were gathered at the Day of Pentecost, to preach the Gospel to them, it is said, *When they heard this, they were pricked in their Hearts, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and Brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the*

the Name of Jesus Christ, for the Remission of Sins, and ye shall receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost, for the Promise is unto you and your Children, and to all that are afar off: Which was a very extensive Declaration of the Promise of the Holy Ghost, both as to Time, being not only to them, but to their Posterity; and Place, being not confined to them there present, but to all that were afar off, as well Believers in common, as Ministers and Preachers. And *Chap. v. vers. 32.* After Peter had preached Christ to them in these Words, *The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew, and hanged on a Tree, him hath God exalted with his Right Hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give Repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of Sins, and we are his Witnesses of these Things, and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.* Again, *Chapter x. Verse 44.* *They (the Gentiles) were filled with the Holy Ghost.* By these Passages it appears, that in the Preaching the Gospel by the Apostles, the Holy Ghost was given to the Disciples, the Hearers, to those that obeyed God without Distinction, as well as to the Apostles or Preachers

of the Word ; and that it was a Witness to them of the Truth of Christ's Divine Mission, and the good Effects of it, according to the Promise of Christ before cited, *viz. He shall testify of me.*

That this was also given to Christians in common, for the same End, when gathered into Churches, may appear by many Instances from the Epistles, directed to the several Churches, by those who were instrumental in that Work : A few Instances may suffice, as *Romans viii. vers. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.* *If any Man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the Body is dead because of Sin, but the Spirit is Life, because of Righteousness ; but if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the Dead, dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the Dead, shall also quicken your mortal Bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore Brethren, we are Debtors, not to the Flesh to live after the Flesh, for if ye live after the Flesh 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. For ye have not received the Spirit of Bondage again to fear : But ye have received*

received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father, the Spirit it self beareth Witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God. In this Passage may be observed, first, the Necessity of having the Spirit of Christ, so that those who have it not, do not belong to him, are none of his. Secondly, the Work of it, that it mortifies the Deeds of the Body, and quickens the Soul to a Life of Holiness, insomuch, that those that are led by it, become the Sons of God, begotten into his Image or Likeness. And lastly, that it bears Witness with their Spirits, that they are his Children, that is, gives them a certain Sense or Understanding of it, by an Evidence peculiar to itself.

Again, *1 Cor. Chap. ii, and iii.* are full of Testimonies to the Evidence and Certainty of this Principle: What is most directly to that Purpose, we have in *Chap. ii. vers. 11, and 12.* *What Man knoweth the Things of Man, save the Spirit of Man which is in him? Even so the Things of God knoweth no Man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the Spirit of the World, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the Things which are freely given to us of God.*

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We have here a plain Distinction between the Spirit of Man, and the Spirit of God, and the distinct Office of the one and the other, as they are imploy'd about Things of a very different Nature, *viz.* the Things of a Man, or natural Things, and spiritual Things, or the Things of God, or which are freely given to us of him: By which must be meant the Benefits we receive by the Coming of Christ, the free Grace or Favour of God through him, which are only known to belong to us, by the Sense or Evidence which his Spirit gives us of it, in our faithful walking with him; for which End he tells them *Chap. iii. vers. 16. That they are the Temples of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in them.* It does not once visit them, and then leave them, but abides with them for a Constancy: And therefore the same Apostle charges it on the *Galatians* as Folly and Degeneracy, that they, having once received this Principle through the Faith of the Gospel, were declining from it, and returning to *Jewish Ceremonies.* *This only would I learn of you, Chap. iii. vers. 2, and 3. Received ye the Spirit by the Works of the Law, or by hearing of Faith; Are you so foolish,*

foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the Flesh? Having received a Principle, in which there is an Evidence and Certainty, by which you may know; as well as Virtue and Power, by which you may do the good and acceptable Will of God; are you for leaving this living powerful Principle, and turning again to the weak and beggarly Elements, viz. Circumcision, and the Observation of Days, &c. from which Things it is evident, that the principal Design of this Epistle, was to withdraw them, and to establish them on this divine Principle, as a most sure Foundation. And therefore, having Chap. v. vers. 22, 23. enumerated the most excellent Virtues, in which a Christian Life consists, viz. Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance, which he calls Fruits of the Spirit: He adds, if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. And with Respect to outward Ceremonies, such as Circumcision, he tells them Chap. v. vers. 6. neither Circumcision availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumcision, but Faith which worketh by Love. And Chap. vi. vers. 15. In Christ Jesus, neither Circumcision availeth any Thing,

Thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a New Creature; which is the Work and Effect of the Divine Spirit. But I would confine my self at present to such Passages as speak of the Holy Spirit as an Evidence and Ground of Certainty to Believers, respecting the Truth of Christianity, of which, having produced some Instances out of the Writings of this great Apostle of the Gentiles, from which many more might be cited from every one of his Epistles, and almost every Chapter, to avoid unnecessary Repetitions, I shall proceed to cite some Passages out of the first Epistle of John, which are most direct and apposite to the present Purpose, as containing a clear Testimony to this Principle of Certainty. First, under the Term of Anointing, Chap. ii. vers. 20. Ye have an Unction from the Holy One, and ye know all Things, and vers. 26, 27. These Things have I written unto you, concerning them that seduce you: But the Anointing which ye have received of him, abideth in you, and ye need not that any Man teach you, but as the same Anointing teacheth you of all Things, and is Truth, and is no Lye, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in it, (for so it may be justly

justly rendered.) The Occasion of this Expression, was to establish them against Seducers and Apostates, for he mentions *vers. 19. Some that went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us they would no doubt have continued with us, but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us*, and then proceeds, *but you have an Unction, &c.* The obvious Construction of all which, is, that though the good Apostle wrote to them by Way of Advice and Caution, relating to the Danger they were under of being deceived, and drawn from the Faith by Apostates and Seducers; yet his principal Business, was to put them in Remembrance of an Instructor, which they had always with them, to which, if they duly attended, they would not absolutely need his Instruction, or that of any other Man; for by this they knew all Things, and were taught all Things necessary for them: And therefore he advises them principally to regard this, to abide under its Teaching, and then they would be in no Danger from Seducers, but having received from God (the Holy One) a Ground of Certainty, which was always with them, attending constantly to it, as by this
they

they were first begotten into the Faith of the Gospel, so by the same they would be preserved and established in it, against all Opposition.

The same Apostle in the following Passages, is yet more clear and express, if possible to our present Purpose, *Chap. iii. vers. 24. Hereby we know that he abideth in us by his Spirit, which he hath given us. Chap. iv. vers. 13. Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. Chap. v. vers. 9, 10, 11, 12. If we receive the Witness of Men, the Witness of God is greater; for this is the Witness of God, which he hath testified of his Son, He that believeth in the Son of God, hath the Witness in himself, he that believeth not God, hath made him a Liar, because he believeth not the Record that God gave of his Son. And this is the Record that God hath given unto us, eternal Life, and this Life is in his Son: He that hath the Son hath Life, and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not Life. And vers. 20. We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an Understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ.*

By comparing these Texts, it will clearly appear, first, that the Spirit of God, which was given to Believers, was not only in it self certain, but was that by which they had an Evidence or Assurance of their being in his Favour, and that not transiently, but that he abode in them, and they dwelt in him for a Continuance, which enabled them to live according to the Will of God, and gave them Peace and Consolation in their so living; and as this was given to them of God, so he calls it the Witness or Testimony of God, and declares it to be greater than that of Man, or any human Testimony: as if he had said, If we receive the Testimony of Men, whether it be that of our own Senses, or the Report of others, whom we have just Reason to believe for their Veracity; we do well so far. But the Testimony of the Holy Spirit of God, consisting in the lively Operation of it upon our Spirits, to the quickning and raising of them to a Life of Holiness and true Righteousness, who were dead in Sins and Trespases, this is greater than any human Testimony whatsoever; and this Testimony is not at a Distance from us, but he that believeth has it in himself,

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he that hath the Son of God, hath this Life, this Virtue, this Power, by which he acts vigorously in the Things of God; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not this Life. And lest they should think this only as an Amusement, or something unintelligible, designed blindly to move the Affections only, and not to inform the Understanding; he adds *Verse 20.* that it was from an Understanding *he had given them*, (which therefore of themselves they had not) that they knew the Son of God was come, and that from that Truth and Sincerity, which he had begotten in them, they knew him that was the Fountain of Truth, or Truth itself, and that they were in him, being made like unto him, which was a wise and just Way of Reasoning.

Agreeable hereunto, the Apostle *Paul* calls the Holy Spirit of God, *the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation, in the Knowledge of him, the Eyes of their Understanding being enlightned*, Eph. i. 17, 18. and 2 Cor. iv. 6, 7. *God who commanded Light to shine out of Darkness, hath shined in our Hearts, to give us the Light of the Knowledge of the Glory of God, in the Face of Jesus Christ.* So that from hence
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it abundantly appears, that in those early Times of Christianity, the Spirit of God, which was given to Believers, through Jesus Christ, did influence all the Powers and Faculties of the Soul, the Understanding as well as Will and Affections, and in their certain Experience of this, consisted the *principal* Evidence of the Truth of the whole; I say *principal* Evidence, because in this Experience, the great End of the Coming of Christ, which was to destroy the Works of the Devil, to purify and sanctify the Hearts of Men, was fully and compleatly answered: And therefore, those that were Witnesses of it, believed the Gospel for its own Sake, because they knew it to be what it was declared to be, *The Power of God to Salvation*: And all other Evidences *ab extra*, were designed as Means to bring Men to this great End, and for the Sake of it; and this being found true, the Truth of the whole was established beyond Contradiction: Whereas, if this had failed, if those who had received the Gospel had found themselves never the better for it, there was great Reason to suppose that all had been suspected for Imposture, notwithstanding
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those external Evidences attending it. But now the primitive Believers might say as the Samaritans did, *John* iv. 42. having put the Matter upon an Experiment, and found it compleatly to answer its main Design, which was *the Reformation of Mankind*; Now we believe not because of the Report of others, or for the Sake of any external Evidence or Credentials only, (though we do not slight or disesteem them) but *we have heard him our selves*, we have had Experience ourselves of the good Effects of his Coming, therefore, *we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the World.*

C H A P. VI.

What the Christian Religion is, or ought to be now, and upon what Evidence principally true Christians of this Generation, receive and believe it.

IT remains now to enquire, upon what Evidence *principally* true Christians of this Generation, receive and believe the Christian Religion. Before I directly answer

answer this Inquiry, I would observe, that the Christian Religion is or was designed, to be the same in succeeding Generations that it was in the primitive Times; that is, as the Gospel was then an *inward* and *powerful* Thing, whereby the Hearts of Men were *sanctified* and *purified* from their Defilements, so it is the same at this Day, and was so at all Times since its first Publication. And the true Reason why this does not appear so generally among the Professors of it, is not any Defect in the Thing, but Mens Unbelief and Error in Judgment, they not believing it to be so; and consequently not applying for Help where alone it is to be had. And this I take to be the first ground and Foundation of that Degeneracy which has so generally appear'd, and still remains among Christians. Men erroneously supposing, that the Effusion of the Spirit, and the Gifts, and Graces accompanying it, was a Thing peculiar to the Infancy of Christianity; and as it did in a great Measure cease very early after the Apostles Days, so it was designed that it should in after Ages cease intirely, and Men to be left to the Instructions left them by the Inspired Writers in the holy Scrip-

tures, out of which every Man is to collect his Duty relating to Faith and Practice, in the best Manner he can: I call this an Error in Judgment, because it is contrary to the Scriptures themselves; which those who are in this Belief, would have to be their Rule in all Things, then surely in this as well as other Things; there being nothing more fully declared in those sacred Writings, than the Necessity, the Power and Sufficiency of this *Principle*, infomuch that it appears, that the very Essence of the *Christian Religion*, as to the real peculiar Benefit and Excellency of it consists in this, which is inseparable from it in the Nature of the Thing. And therefore, however Men may have supposed it to be altered, and would represent it to differ from what it was originally, unless we lay aside a great Part of the Holy Scriptures, it is the same now it was then.

This Sameness of the *Christian Religion*, is not only agreeable to Scripture, but to the Nature of the Thing, for the Thing in its Nature, End and Design, is unchangeable; former Dispensations, because of their Weakness and Unprofitableness, were changeable, and
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were designed to be changed; it being the Will of God, not to dispense to sinful Men all his Blessings at once, but by weaker Dispensations to make them see their own Frailties and Infirmities, in order to make Way for one that was more powerful; the Law of the *New Covenant* being inward, and powerful, and the Priesthood perfect in every Respect, and unchangeable: For what Alteration can there be expected in a Thing which is already compleat; and such was the *Christian Religion* in its first Institution, as tending to destroy Sin in the very Root or Conception of it, by the inward Operation of the Holy Spirit against its first Motions; as well as perfectly to atone for Sins past, by the Offering of Christ once made on the Cross.

I would also have it observed, that by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, which I affirm to be designed to remain in the Christian Church in all Ages, I do not mean the Gift of Miracles, such as were in the primitive Times, which were thought necessary (the Divine Wisdom so ordering it) for the introducing the *Christian Religion* into the World: But by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit to

remain in the Church, I mean the Helps afforded us thereby, for the great Ends of Sanctification, and renewing the Mind into a State of Holiness; and this Distinction is evidently to be observed, **1 Cor. xii. 7.** where the Apostle takes Notice in the Verses foregoing, that there were Diversities of Gifts, and Differences of Administrations, and Diversities of Operations, which were peculiar, some to one, and some to another, he adds, *verse 7. though there are these Diversities, &c.* yet there is one Thing in which they all agree, to wit, *that the Manifestation of the Spirit is given to every Man to profit withal*, that is, to improve in Virtue, in Holiness, in Religion, and in godly Living, which as 'tis equally necessary in all Ages, so it is afforded to Men in all Ages, and that in a Way plain, intelligible and self-evident, otherwise 'tis improperly called a *Manifestation*, which admits of no Doubtfulness or Obscurity; as on the other Hand, if the Discoveries of the Spirit were doubtful and obscure, Mankind were still left at Uncertainties about their Duty as **Christians**, contrary to the very Tenor of the New Covenant, wherein it is said **Heb. viii. 10, 11.** *I will put my Laws into their*

their Minds, and write them in their Hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a People; and they shall not teach every Man his Neighbour, and every Man his Brother, saying, know the Lord, for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest. Now was this spoken to that Generation only, or does it relate to us also? Certainly to us as well as to them, inasmuch as in this Knowledge of the Lord thus attain'd, consists the very Character of the New or Gospel Covenant, as distinguish'd from the Old or Legal one: And therefore, unless we should suppose the Gospel to be one Thing at one Time, and another Thing at another Time, which is an Absurdity not to be admitted: as Knowledge implies Certainty, so the Laws of God written in the Mind, and the Knowledge of him arising from thence, is certain and evident to those that rightly attend to it, at all Times.

From which it may be justly concluded, that as the *Christian Religion* is in all Ages the same, so the *principal* Evidence of it is the same in all Ages, consisting in the Knowledge and Experience of the Virtue and Power of the Faith of the Gospel, to the purifying and sanctifying the Heart and bringing forth the

good Fruits of the Spirit, according as the same are inwardly discovered to us, by the Light and Manifestation thereof; and in this Experience, the Truth and right Understanding of the general Doctrines of Religion contained in the Holy Scriptures, is best secured and established for all the good Ends and Purposes of them. And all the Precepts of Christianity are only effectually complied with this Way, to wit, by the Faith of the Operation of the Spirit of God; so that we may truly say in this Case, as the Apostle did, relating to the Law in that Day, viz. *Do we make void the Scriptures through Faith? Nay, we establish the Scriptures.* And it is for Want of Men's applying themselves to the acquiring this Experience through Faith, that the general Doctrines of Religion are perverted, and the Scriptures themselves wrested, in order to reconcile the *Christian Religion* (the most pure Institution that ever was in the World, or can be) to a State of Sin and Iniquity, to our beloved Lusts and Passions; Men erroneously supposing, that as long as they are in the Profession of the *Christian Faith*, that is as they account it, in the Belief of certain Facts and

and Propositions, which they have collected out of the Scriptures, they are intitled to the Benefits of the Coming of Christ, notwithstanding their continuing in a sinful State more or less, which they are very ready to indulge themselves in, when thus persuaded; than which, nothing is more contrary to the whole Tenor of the Gospel as delivered in the Scriptures, and consequently to the Scriptures themselves.

But it may be asked, how may we become Witnesses of this Work? *Answer*, Not by learned Dissertations about it, for the generality of Mankind are not qualified for these; not by long Arguments, or Deductions of nice Reasonings, for the far greater Part of Mankind are not capable of those, though they may have a sufficient Share of Understanding, to act that Part in the Creation which Providence has allotted them; nor even by the Exercise of that Portion of Reason and Understanding which we have as Men, unassisted by the Illumination of the Holy Spirit of God: For the Mind with all its Faculties, the Reason or Understanding, as well as Will and Affections, being the Thing which is out of Order, and wants Regulation;

gulation; it is preposterous to suppose that it should regulate itself, without Help received somewhere; and it is as absurd to imagine, that one Man equally fallible, should regulate the Errors of another, notwithstanding any supposed Superiority of Judgment from Learning or other Acquirements: The learned Part of Mankind being notoriously as much at Variance, as the illiterate or ignorant; and rather more so about the Things of God, and even natural Things; there being a great Disagreement among them, about the very first Principle of Knowledge in these Things, in which they have brought forth nothing which may be depended upon for certain, saving in those Parts which are capable of Demonstration, such as *Mathematical Learning*, and that which depends on *Experiments*; and this last is the principal Ground of Certainty in Religion; for as in natural Knowledge, which depends on *Experiments*, the Certainty does not terminate in the Judgment or Assent of the Mind barely, though from the Reasonableness of the Thing, the Mind may have a good Degree of Certainty concerning it, but yet there remains some Degree of Suspence or Doubtfulness, till

an Experiment be rightly made and found to succeed; this removes every Appearance of Uncertainty: So in Religion, from the Credibility of the History, which we have as much Reason to believe as any of the best attested Accounts of Things at that Distance of Time, and from other undoubted Marks of Sincerity and Veracity, which appear every where in the Writings of the New Testament; from these Considerations there is just Reason to believe the Truth of what is recorded: But as the main End of the *Christian Faith* is to make Men better, to renew and sanctify the Mind, which has been deprav'd, when Men apply themselves to this Work, not trusting in themselves, but in the Grace of God, (which is sufficient for that End) for his *Help* and Assistance, and in their so doing, find themselves helped and assisted by him, these are satisfied beyond all Doubt or Hesitation, concerning the Truth of the *Christian Religion*, being in the actual Possession of the good Effects of it, by which they not only believe the Doctrines of Christianity, but know them fulfilled in their own Experience, as to their main End and Design.

To return therefore to the Enquiry, how Men may attain this Experience? *Answer*, by attending to that which discovers to them the State of their Minds, in the several Circumstances (if I may so call it) of a *Christian Life*; and obeying its Discoveries, that is, in the first Place, as it finds Men in a sinful polluted State, so it sets their Sins in Order before them, which is the first right Step in order to the overcoming of them; and when through Faith in his Power and Sufficiency, and Obedience thereunto, they have gained some Degree of Victory, then by attending from Time to Time, for farther Discoveries of those Evils which yet remain, and waiting for farther Degrees of Strength from him, for the ~~de~~stroying of them, and entering into, and persevering in a virtuous religious Course of Life, as the same is gradually opened to them, by that Light which makes all Things manifest, not only what relates to Men's Words and Actions, but also, and more especially what their Thoughts, and the secret Springs and Designs of all their Words and Actions are; for as the State and Condition spiritually of every particular Man, hath something in it pecu-

liar to itself, by which it differs from the State of all others, so it is the Spirit of God alone, which at Times and Seasons, discovers to every Man truly and impartially what its State is, in such evident Manner, that it cannot be deceived, if duly regarded.

It is true, the Holy Scriptures contain general Rules relating to our Duty, both what we ought to do, and what to leave undone: But it is this faithful Monitor in our own Breast, that tells every Man in particular, Thou art the Man, this is thy State, this Thing thou oughtest to have omitted, and the other to have done, the Thoughts of thy Heart in this or the ~~other~~ Action, were or were not right: ~~And~~ this it does frequently, by ~~bringing~~ to our Remembrance some Text of Scripture (where the Scripture is read and professed) and opening and applying it powerfully to the present State of every Man, in such a Manner, that he sees himself clearly, the Spirit of God bearing Witness with his Spirit to the Truth of his State, as it really is in the Sight of God, and either justifying or condemning of him, according as he is found obeying or disobeying this *inward Law*, which will
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bear Witness for or against him, in the great Day of Account, when God shall judge the secret Thoughts, as well as Words and Actions of all Men, by Jesus Christ. Now this is a plain, intelligible, rational Thing, equally so to the Unlearned and Learned, to the Foolish and Wise, for every Discovery of it is certain to the one, as well as to the other; God having given to every Man according to their several Abilities, and requiring Obedience accordingly, so that all are left without Excuse; and this plain intelligible Way of attaining the Knowledge of God, and the necessary Truths of Religion, however it may be esteemed by the Wise and Prudent of this World, ~~is, what~~ recommends it to those who rightly consider the true End and Design of its Institution, as an Instance of the great Wisdom and Goodness of God; it being most unreasonable, seeing all are equally concerned in the great Affair of Salvation, that the Way which leads to it should be so intricate and difficult, that none but the Learned and polite Part of Mankind could understand, and the Unlearned and common Sort must seek to them for Instructions about it; whereas in Fact, this is

so far from being the Case, that to impartial Observers of Things it appears, that these are they who have most of all perplexed the Cause of Religion, by departing themselves, and leading others from the Simplicity of the Truth as it is in Jesus, into vain Janglings, and mere Strife of Words, applying their learned Notions and Distinctions, (which when true and rightly applied, may be of Use) to Objects, to which they are not, nor can not be adequate or adapted: And in this Manner exposing one another, and leading others with them to expose one another, to the Destruction of *Christian Charity*, which is the Bond of Perfection of all Goodness.

And this has been evidently one Cause (among others, and no small one) of those Freedoms which have been used of late, relating to the Truth of *Religion* in general: The Enemies of it, taking Occasion from these imprudent Contentions (to say no worse of them) to represent the Thing itself as uncertain, thereby introducing *Scepticism* in Religion, as well as *Deism* and *Infidelity*: Whereas, those who know the Truth of the *Christian Doctrines* this plain Way, as they are satisfied themselves, knowing

knowing him in whom they have believed, so they dare make an Appeal to every Man's Conscience, for a Testimony concerning it: And though they do not presently commence complete Casuists in Divinity, nor do they desire it, knowing that many of the Controversies on Foot are of little Signification to the main End of Religion, yet being in the actual Experience of the good Ends of the Coming of Christ, they not only believe the great Truths of *Christianity* relating thereto, and what he did and suffered for them, but have a reverend Regard for them, knowing that thereby a Foundation was laid, for all that Good which they are in the Possession of.

Upon the whole, as the great End of the *Christian Religion*, so far as concerns the Part Mankind are to act in it, is to renew and sanctify the Mind, and consequently to reform the whole Conversation, through the Power and Efficacy of the good Spirit of God, which is given for that End: So the principal Evidence of the Truth of it, is the Experience of the effectual working of this *Power*, by which those who are so happy as to become Witnesses of it, not only are satisfied for ever themselves,

as to the Truth of the whole, but are also Lights in the World, by which others seeing their good Works, wrought by the Power of Godliness, are (or may be, if they apply themselves rightly to it) induced to make a Proof of the same Thing, in order that they may glorify God their Father, who is in Heaven.

C H A P. VII.

Containing Answers to some Objections, with some general Observations on the whole.

I AM sensible it has been made an Objection against the Truth and Efficacy of the *Christian Religion*, that there are such Diversities of Judgments about it, some of which must be erroneous, and so great Degeneracy of Practice, as appears among the Professors of it at this Time: But this Objection has not any just Ground, for it does not follow, because there are

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many Errors among Men, about this most necessary Affair, that therefore there is no Truth or Certainty in it ; but this is rather a Confirmation of the Shortness of human Understanding, when left to itself, and applied to *spiritual* and *divine subjects* ; and therefore, that Men have a real Need of Help and Instruction from God. And as to that Looseness of Practice which appears at this Time among the Professors of *Religion*, and is made an Objection by the Enemies of it, to the Verity and Sufficiency of *Religion* itself, it is a very wrong Way of Arguing ; that because many of those who have taken upon them the Profession of Religion, by neglecting the *Help* which God has ordain'd for them, which would preserve them from falling into Evil, are overcome by it, that therefore there is no such *Help* offered to Men ; unless it could at the same Time be proved (as certainly it cannot) that no such Power is given, and that never any, by their utmost Application to it, have been enabled to do the Will of God ; the contrary of which is most apparent, both from the Accounts of holy Scripture, wherein we find that many were turned from Evil to Good,

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from Unrighteousness to Righteousness, from a State of Nature, in which they brought forth the Fruits of the Flesh, to a State of Grace, in which they brought forth the *Fruits of the Spirit*. And not only so, but from the History of all Ages of *Christianity*, though a Degeneracy in Practice prevailed over too many, yet there were some in whom the *Power of Religion* appeared, and thereby became Lights of the World in all Ages, and even at this Time, some such among all Professions; though it must be confessed, that Wickedness in a remarkable Manner prevails at present: But to make this an Objection against the Virtue and Power of *Religion*, sounds very oddly in the Mouths of the present Objectors, because it is most apparently owing to those loose Principles, which they themselves have of late introduced and propagated in the World; and is so far from being any real Objection, that 'tis a Confirmation of the Weakness and Depravity of Human Nature when left to it self; and consequently that Mankind has an absolute Need of *Help* in this Respect also from God, which it is the great Design of the Gospel to supply them with: And the true Reason

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of the Prevalency of Wickedness among Mankind, at this and all other Times, is not that there is no Help afforded them, but their neglecting and even denying of it; which is at this Time too much the Case, not only of the Opposers of Religion, but the Professors of it; which the Apostle *Paul* foretold, *2 Tim. iii. 1, 2, 3, 4 5.* in these Words, *This know also, that in the last Days, perilous Times shall come; for Men shall be Lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to Parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural Affection, Truce-breakers, false Accusers, incontinent, fierce Despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, high Minded, Lovers of Pleasure more than Lovers of God, having a Form of Godliness, but denying the Power thereof: Which last, to wit, denying the Power of Godliness, is the Cause of all the rest, and is at this Time the true Fountain or Source, from whence that Torrent of Wickedness which runs down the Streets, takes its Rise; so that it may be truly said, that perilous Times are come, and Men too, many of them such as here described.*

If it be enquired, how may we distinguish that Understanding received from God, and the Help which he gives us, to believe and act accordingly, from the Understanding which arises from the Exercise of our Reason, and that Power which results from our own Will barely? I answer, (besides what has been already said of an Evidence which is peculiar to it, which cannot be so fully described to others, as it is felt and experienced by him that hath it) that those who have this Experience, know certainly, that as at Times in their silent Retirements, and humble Waitings on God, they receive an Understanding of his Will relating to their present Duty, in such a clear Light as leaves no Doubt or Hesitation; so at other Times, when this is withdrawn from them, they are at a Loss again, and see themselves as they really are, ignorant and destitute; and the Case is the same in Respect to Power, they are sensible at Times of a certain Vigour and Liveliness attending them, by which they are not only preserved from Evil of all Kinds, but their Hearts, all the Powers and Faculties of their Souls, are enlarged to run the Ways of God's Com-

mands with Chearfulness: Whereas at other Times, when this seems to be withdrawn from them a little, they are reduced to a deep Sense of their own Weakness and Insufficiency, in which they are humbled, and led to apply again for Help to the Throne of *Grace*, which in due Time is renewed to them, to their great and unspeakable Comfort. And as this *Understanding*, and this *Strength*, is sometimes in a sensible Manner present with them, and sometimes seems to be hid from them: So from hence they know it to be a Thing not of themselves, or in their own Power, but the Gift of God; and therefore they find it their great Duty and Interest, in all Times of Difficulties, or Temptations, from whatever Cause they may proceed, to trust in the Lord, and to depend upon him for Help, in which they never are disappointed, but finding always Success in this holy Dependance on a Divine Aid, their Heart becomes more and more fixed and established, trusting in him in all their Afflictions and Besetments, and praising of him for those lively Helps and Encouragements already received.

Now in all this, there is an obvious Distinction between what arises from our own Understanding, merely so, and an Understanding received from God; and yet our own Understandings as Men, are not unconcerned in it, but are in an agreeable Manner exercised and employed; for those necessary Truths relating to Faith and Practice, being thus presented to them, and the Mind being convinced thereof, either by one clear View, or by undeniable Deductions of certain Reasonings agreeable to the Capacity of the Person whom they concern, joins with these Convictions; and the Judgment thus informed, moves the Will to practice, not in an irresistible Manner, so as to destroy its Liberty, but by rational Motives and Persuasions, which if duly attended unto, determines the Choice in favour of a religious, virtuous Course of Life: But if through the Prevalence of any beloved Lusts or Passions, the Mind is prevailed on not to listen to these secret Calls and Invitations, but to adhere to its old vicious Habits; In this Case, the Destruction of all such is of themselves, by neglecting that *Help* which God has offered them. And

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therefore, though our Salvation is principally, and originally the Work of God, yet our own Consent is required, in order to our partaking of it; and our utmost Diligence and Application of Mind, with humble Prayer and Supplication to God, and constant Watchfulness and Attention to that *Light* that discovers both the Evil and the Good; and a steady Dependance on the *Power* of his *Grace*, that we may thereby be enabled to eschew the one, and do the other; which though it may seem somewhat difficult at first, by Reason of that Cross to our present Inclinations, which attends it, until the Power of vicious Habits, to which Men have been long accustomed, be weakned and broken; yet by Degrees it will not only become more easy, but exceeding pleasant and delightful, according to the Saying of our Lord, *Take my Yoke upon you, for my Yoke is easy, and my Burden is light.* And the Words of the Wise Man, *Prov. iii. 17. All her Ways (the Ways of Virtue and Wisdom) are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Paths of Peace.* For what greater Pleasure can there be conceived, than that which a virtuous, pious Soul enjoys, when

when in its faithful walking in Obedience to God, it finds its Peace to flow, and the Light of his Countenance to shine upon it; by which, those that are Injoyers of it, are sensible of more real Comfort at Heart, than when their Corn and Wine, or any other external Thing, increased; and much more so, than in the pretended Counterfeit Pleasures of a vicious Course of Life, which however pleasant it may seem for a Season, at the last biteth like a Serpent, and stingeth like an Adder; the Pleasure arising from hence, being but imaginary, brutal, unbecoming a rational Being, as well as very short and uncertain in its Duration, and in the main, attended with a certain Tormentor, Anxiety of Mind, which is out of the Power of any the most deceitful Glosses and false Reasonings to quiet, or put an End to even in this Life, as hath appeared by many dismal Examples; but the Sense of it hath gnawed as a Worm, and burnt as a Fire in the Breasts of evil Doers, which they have not been able to quench or conceal; and what is yet worst of all, we are told by our Lord, *that this Worm never dies, and the Fire is never quenched.* Whereas the virtuous, religious
 Man,

Man, not only enjoys Peace and Tranquility in his Passage through this World, but has a comfortable Prospect and Assurance of an happy Exit at last ; so that in the Words of the Apostle, *Godliness is profitable unto all Things, having the Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

Therefore, to make a serious and friendly Appeal to the Consciences of all concerned. As your own Reason and Understanding as Men, (in Concurrence with the Testimony of the holy Scripture) must inform you, if you look into your selves, that you are accountable Creatures, I would request you in all your Conduct, to act as such that must render an Account for your Actions ; for this I think is demonstrably true, that 'tis impossible for you to satisfy yourselves, or to convince others, that there will be no future Judgment, or Rewards or Punishments in another Life ; on the contrary, there is the greatest Reason to believe there will be such, from that Foretaste we have of it in our own Breasts, which we have good Reason to believe will accompany us beyond the Grave : At least this is most certain, you cannot be assured of the contrary ;

contrary ; and therefore, what wise Man would risque the Loss of an endless Good, and the procuring an endless Evil, for the Sake of injoying a present short imaginary Pleasure, and losing the present Satisfaction of a real substantial Good, (for such is a religious, virtuous Course of Life, however it may be drest in frightful Colours, by such as are Strangers and Enemies to it) These are reasonable Motives to a virtuous, religious Life, which those would do well to consider, who pretend to a greater Degree of Reason than others, and in that Con-
 ceit, represent the religious Part of Mankind as foolish ; whereas in Truth none act so reasonably, and the Folly is justly chargeable on themselves ; and farther to consider this whole Matter upon a rational Bottom, I believe it would be difficult for the present Objectors to the Truth of our holy Religion, who pretend to a Degree of Understanding superior to others, though they have rais'd so many Objections to the *Christian Doctrine* ; to contrive a System of Religion which would better answer all the Ends of it, which are, *the Glory of God, the Salvation of the Soul,*
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and the general Good of Mankind; considered either in a private or in a social Capacity, than the *Christian System*, already recommended: By which a solid Provision is made for Reconciliation to God, notwithstanding our past Offences; and Power given for overcoming Evil, and preserving from it, and renewing, and sanctifying the Heart and Mind, for the doing Good and persevering in it, in which all our Happiness, both private and publick, is comprehended.

Perhaps it may be said (as it hath been said by some) that all this may be secured without any Help received elsewhere, by the right Use of those Faculties we have as Men: There are those who have tryed both these Ways, and found this last very defective, and this Defect arising from the Weakness of their natural Faculties, and the Powerful Prevalence of vicious Habits. Tho' it must be confessed, that by a close Application to their Reason and Understanding as Men, some have not only been preserv'd from gross Evils, which might render them observ'd or noted by Men, but have raised a fair Super-structure of moral Righteousness; but that *internal*
Regulation

Regulation of our Appeties, and good Government of our Passions, the Power of forgiving Injuries, and even rendring of Good for Evil, that Purity of Heart, that Sincerity or Truth in the inward Parts, that excellent Spirit of Charity, or pure Love to God and Men, in which our Duty to both is fully comprehended; These, in the Extent, which the *Christian Religion* recommends them, who can say, when he considers the weak deprav'd State of Mind he is under, and the Power of vicious Habits which he finds in himself, that it is in his Power to bring forth without Help receiv'd from God? Who can bring a clean Thing, (such is a Conversation according to the Rules of Christianity) out of an unclean Heart, but it must partake of the Defilement? So that from hence it appears absolutely necessary, in Order to the bringing forth these Fruits, that the Heart, the Fountain from whence all Good and Evil proceeds, which in it self is deceitful and desperately wicked, should be changed into another Thing; otherwise if the Fountain remains unclean, the Streams which flow from it, the Conversation of such must be so also:

And

And how is it possible that this Change should be effected, but by him, whose Attribute alone it is to search the Heart and try the Reins, and shew unto Men what their Thoughts are, in order to the Regulation and good Government of them? The *Psalmist* was so sensible of the Necessity of this Change, and of his own Weakness for the Effecting it, that instead of setting himself about it, (of himself only) he made his humble Application to God for *Help* and *Assistance*, as Psal. cxxxix. 23. *Search me, O God, and know my Heart, try me, and know my Thoughts, and see if there be any wicked Way in me, and lead me in the Way everlasting.* And Psal. li. 10. *Create in me a clean Heart, and renew a right Spirit within me.* Agreeable hereunto, God promised by his Prophet *Ezekiel*, chap. xi. verse 19. *I will give them one Heart, and I will put a new Spirit within you; I will take away the stony Heart out of their Flesh, and I will give them a Heart of Flesh.* And chap. xxxvi. 23, 26. *I will sprinkle clean Water upon you, and you shall be clean, a new Heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony*

stony Heart, out of your Flesh, and I will give you an Heart of Flesh. And this is what in the New Testament is called *Sanctification*, renewing the Mind into a State of Holiness and Regeneration, or being Born again, which is said to be the Work of the Spirit of God, and is a fundamental Doctrine of *Christianity*: For without it, Man cannot enter the Kingdom of God. And in the Experience of it, consists the highest Evidence of the *Christian Religion*.

THE CONCLUSION.

THE Sum of the Argument in Defence of the Evidence of *Christianity*, in the foregoing Pages, is this; There are Evidences of the Truth of our Holy Religion, arising from external Testimonials, such as the Prophecies of the Prophets, the Miracles of our Lord and his Apostles, the Credibility of the History of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the first Publication of the Gospel by his Apostles, as the same are contained in the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, all which ought to be duly regarded; and we have full as good Ground to believe them, as the best attested Histories of any Facts whercof we are not Eye-Witnesses: In which Sense, the *Christian Religion*

Religion is to be defended upon the Principles of *Right Reason*, and from the same Motives that other Matters of Fact may be defended. But inasmuch as the principal Delign of the Coming of Christ, was to reform Mankind, and to purify and sanctify the Hearts of Men, through the *Power* of that *Grace* and *Truth* which is come by him; the principal Evidence of the Truth of it, consists in this, that by believing in the *Power* and *Sufficiency* of this *Principle*, and obeying the same, it is found completely to answer that End; that is, true Believers are actually and really reformed in Heart and Spirit, of Sinners become Saints, or in the Language of Scripture, are *washed, sanctified and justified*, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of God.

That this was really the Case with the primitive Believers, has been abundantly proved already from the Holy Scriptures, and there is not the least Shadow of Reason to question the Truth of it: And there being also, (notwithstanding the general Declension or falling away, which came over the *Christian Church*) some Witnesses of the same in all Ages, and even in this Age, who have

born Testimony to the Truth of it; who in their certain Experience of the good Effects of their Faith, have received a full Confirmation of the Truth of the *Christian Doctrine* in general; they cannot therefore tell where better to place the Evidence of the *Christian Religion*, than in this Experience, which therefore they call the *principal Evidence*; not to lessen or undervalue other Helps or Means of believing the Doctrines of the Gospel, but because in this consists the Completion of the whole as to its great Delign, the *Reformation of Mankind*.

And for these Reasons, I thought it not unseasonable at this Time, when great Industry is used to destroy the very Foundation on which the *Christian Religion* stands, which is *Divine Revelation*, and to substitute another, which is *Human Reason*, to remind the present Age what the *Christian Religion* was in its primitive State, (which seems to be very much over-looked at this Time) by which they may judge what it ought to be now, and at all Times.

And because all Pretence to an Evidence of this Kind, in Favour of *Christianity*, would be vain, if upon making

Proof

Proof of it, there appeared no Confirmation of its Truth from Experience, I would therefore take the Liberty to add, That what I have writ on this Subject, is not writ at Uncertainties, or to be considered as a Matter of mere Opinion or Speculation, or as an Hypothesis which may or may not be true, or in the Language of modern Writers, as a Scheme of Religion of my own Invention; but (with humble and thankful Acknowledgments, I speak it) is the Result of a fixt, settled Judgment, grounded on a long Trial of what I have recommended; in which, whilst duly regarding and attending to it, I never was disappointed; but always found it a present Help in every needful Time; which has so settled and stayed my Mind, that (to the Praise of him that has thus helped me, I mention it) it has not been moved from its Stedfastness in the Faith of the Gospel, notwithstanding the fair Glosses the present Adversaries of Religion, have put upon their Arguments against it, which I am not altogether a Stranger to.

And therefore, I would recommend it as a Matter of the greatest Concern to all, that they would make Trial of this

plain, but certain Way, of the Knowledge of God, and their Duty to him, by following of him in the Way he would lead them. And as I am well assured there is no Man, but has some Knowledge of his Duty which is certain to him; and for the Truth of it, dare freely appeal to every Man's Experience; So the only Way to improve rightly in Understanding, is to be faithful to this, though ever so little. And they that enter into a religious Course of Life this Way, find in their faithful Progress therein, that which was at first but a small Thing, as a Grain of *Mustard Seed*, to grow gradually, so as to become a great Tree, bringing forth excellent Fruits, both in Knowledge and Practice. And as this is the only Door by which any Man can rightly enter into the Way of Religion, so I would again make the most solemn Appeal to the Experience of Mankind in general, whether ever any who thus trusted in the Lord, were disappointed or confounded.

I am sensible there have been some, who have pretended that they have, as they alledge, made an Experiment in the closest and most solemn Manner, and
nothing

nothing extraordinary (as they pretend) has happened to them, but have found themselves after all, just where they were. The Reason of this I take to be, that they have over-looked this small plain Thing, *to wit*, that which discovers to them the Pollutions and Defilements of their own Hearts, and sets their Sins in Order before them; as a Thing too mean to proceed from God; and have with the *Jews stumbled* at it, or with the *Greeks* accounted it *Foolishness*. Their Expectation being raised to something of an exalted, extraordinary Nature, (for such they imagine every Thing that comes from God must be) instead of coming unto him in an humble penitent Frame of Spirit, which is always the right Beginning of a true *Christian Life*, they as they think, are disappointed. Not considering, that however small this may be in Appearance, yet thereby a substantial Foundation is laid for a Life of solid Virtue and Piety; as those who have tried the Experiment thoroughly, know very well, to their great Comfort and Satisfaction, as well as Confirmation of the 'Truth of' the *Christian Religion* in general.

I shall conclude therefore, with the most earnest Request to all concerned, that they will be just to themselves, by putting this very necessary Affair rightly upon Trial. Do the Will of God as the same is made known to you, and for that End wait upon him, and pray unto him for the *Help of his Grace* and *good Spirit*. And by this Means, you will gradually understand the Doctrines of Christ; and as you grow in Grace, and in the Strength of it, you will grow more and more in the saving Knowledge of him.

And you that know the Lord in this Manner, follow on to know him in the same: You that have witnessed Strength from him, wait continually for the renewing of it; and I am well assured, that they who do so shall never fall, but an Entrance abundantly will be admitted to them, into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I shall close the whole therefore, with that excellent Exhortation of the Apostle, (by which it will fully appear, wherein a true Christian's Strength and Preservation consists, in his Judgment) *Eph. vi. 11, 12, &c. Finally my Brethren,*

thru, be strong in the Lord, and in the Power of his Might: Put on the whole Armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the Wiles of the Devil; for we wrestle not against Flesh and Blood, but against Principalities, against Powers, against the Rulers of the Darkness of this World, against spiritual Wickedness in high Places. Wherefore take unto you the whole Armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil Day, and having done all, to stand: Stand therefore, having your Loins girt about with Truth, and having on the Breastplate of Righteousness, and your Feet shod with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace. Above all taking the Shield of Faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery Darts of the Wicked. And take the Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Praying always with all Prayer and Supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all Perseverance.

F I N I S.