

*Of Revelation and the Messias.*

A  
S E R M O N

Preached at the  
Publick Commencement

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C A M B R I D G E.

*July 5<sup>th</sup> 1696.*

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Chaplain in Ordinary and Library Keeper  
to His MAJESTY.

L O N D O N,

Printed by *J. H.* for *Henry Mortlock*, at the *Phoenix*  
in *S. Paul's Church-Yard.* 1696.

## 1 P E T. III. 15.

*Be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the Hope that is in you.*

**B**Y the *Hope that is in us*, we do understand here, as in other places of Scripture, not only the bare Hope strictly so called, but the Faith too of a Christian. Whence it is, that in the Syriac version of the text, and in some ancient Latin copies, the word Faith is added to the other; *the hope and the Faith that is in you*. And indeed if we consider Hope as a natural passion; we shall find it to be always attended and usher'd in by Faith. For 'tis certain, there is no Hope without some antecedent Belief, that the thing hoped for may come to pass; and the strength and steadiness of our Hope is ever proportional to the measure of our Faith. It appears therefore why the word Hope in the text may with sufficient propriety of speech comprehend the whole Faith of a Christian; and that, when the Apostle exhorts us, *to be ready always to answer every man that asks the reason of our Hope*; 'tis the same,

as if he enjoined us, to be never unprepared nor unwilling to reply to any doubts or questions about the grounds of the Christian Faith.

At the date of this Epistle, the whole World (with relation to the text) might be consider'd under one general division, Jews and Gentiles: First, the  
Rom. 3. 2. Jews, *To whom the Oracles of God were committed*, and who from thence had the information and expectation of the Messias. These, when they asked a Christian the reason of his Hope, were themselves already persuaded, that the Messias would come: and the only controversie between them was, Whether *Jesus* was He? according to the message of *John* the  
Luk. 7. 19. Baptist, *Was Jesus he that should come, or must they look for another?* Secondly, the Gentiles, who having no means of knowledge besides mere natural Reason, could have no notions nor notices of this expected Messias. These therefore, when they demanded the reason of a Christian's Hope, were first to be acquainted with the purpose and promise of God to send the Messias, were to be instructed about the reasons and designs of that great embassy; about his quality and office, and all the circumstances of his Person: and then was the proper time to shew, That *Jesus* was He; that the description of the Messias was truly exhibited and represented in His character; and the ancient prophecies all accomplish'd in His actions and events.

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'Tis not for nothing, that the Apostle so presseth this advice in the text, *Be ready always to give a reason of the hope that is in you.* As if he had foretold, That there would be no age of the Christian world, wherein this preparation would be superfluous. It hath pleas'd the divine Wisdom, never yet to leave Christianity wholly at leisure from opposers; but to give its professors that perpetual exercise of their industry and zeal. And who can tell, if without such adversaries to rouse and quicken them, they might not in long tract of time have grown remiss in the duties, and ignorant in the doctrines of Religion? Perhaps before this time even some of the Records of it might have perish'd by mens negligence: as the Jews had like to have lost their Law, if divine Providence had not preserved one copy of it in the Temple. It is, *while men sleep*, while they  
Math. 13. 25. live in peace and security, and have no enemies to contest with, that the great *Enemy comes and sows tares among the wheat.* But of all the ages since the coming of Christ, I suppose this present has least reason to complain for want of work and employment in defence of Religion. Here are not only the two parties in the text, Jews and Gentiles, still in the world to engage with; but even in the midst of Christianity are the most dangerous designs form'd against it: as if our Saviour's prediction of particu-  
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lar families were to be verified too of the whole Church, *That its worst enemies should be they of its own Household.*

Marth. 10.  
36.

There are a sort of persons baptized indeed into the Christian Faith, and educated in the profession of it: but in secret, I wish I might say so, nay even openly they oppose and blaspheme it; repudiating at once the whole authority of Revelation, and debasing the sacred Volumes to the rank of ordinary Books of History and Ethicks. The being of God and a Providence they profess to believe, to acknowledge a difference between Good and Evil, to be verily persuaded of another Life to come; and to have their expectations of that state, as their behaviour is in this. Nay even the whole system of Christian Morals they can willingly embrace: but not as a collection of divine Statutes and Ordinances sent us by an express from Heaven, but only as useful rules of life, discoverable by plain Reason, and agreeable to natural Religion. So that they cannot see the mighty occasion, that should invite even the eternal Son of God from the bosom of the Father, to act so mean and calamitous a part upon the stage of this sorry world. What need of so great a master to read mankind lectures of Morals, which they might easily learn without any teacher? 'Tis true, they are often told of some sublime mysterious doctrines

doctrines deliver'd by him, which they own would ne'er have been thought of by natural Reason. But then, that is so far from recommending to them the importance of his errand from Heaven; that for that very reason they deny the truth of his message. For whatever comes imperiously in the name of divine Mystery, and soars above the pitch of humane knowledge, whatsoever things they cannot fathom and grasp through all the causes, designs, modes and relations of them, as the notion of the Messias, his incarnation, mediation, satisfaction; all these they reject and explode, as incomprehensible to pure Reason, which they set up as the only principle and measure of belief.

In all this, these persons act the part, and place themselves in the condition of Gentiles, whom we may imagine in the text, *to ask the reason of a Christians hope*: since the whole body of these mens Religion is no more than what even Heathens attain'd to: the modern Deism being the very same with old Philosophical Paganism, only aggravated and damn'd with the additional crime of Apostacy from the Faith. But besides this, these very persons will on other occasions personate the Jews too, those other enquirers suppos'd in the text; and dispute with Jewish objections against the Christian Religion: though they no more believe the matter of those objections,

objections, than the thing they object against: like *Celsus* and *Julian* of old, that gather'd arguments against the Christians from all the different Sects and Hypotheses of Philosophy, though inconsistent one argument with another; and brought objections too from the Old Testament, which they did not believe, against the New one, which they were engaged by all methods to oppose.

In our present Discourse therefore, we shall endeavour to refute these modern adversaries under their double shape and character: first as they are mere Deists or Pagans, renouncing all Revelation, and the very notion of the Messias: and secondly, as they fight under Jewish colours; so as admitting, there be a promised Messias the Saviour of the world, yet men ought to reject the person of *Jesus*, and still to wait for another.

- I. And first we shall consider them in the quality of Deists and Disciples of mere natural Reason. We profess our selves as much concerned, and as truly as themselves are, for the use and authority of Reason in controversies of Faith. We look upon right Reason, as the native lamp of the soul, placed and kindled there by our Creator, to conduct us in the whole course of our judgments and actions. True Reason, like its divine Author, never is it self deceived, nor ever deceives any man. Even Revelation

lation it self is not shy nor unwilling to ascribe its own first credit and fundamental authority to the rest and testimony of Reason. Sound Reason is the touchstone to distinguish that pure and genuine gold from baser metals; Revelation truly divine from imposture and enthusiasm. So that the Christian Religion is so far from declining or fearing the strictest trials of Reason; that it every-where appeals to it, is defended and supported by it, and indeed cannot continue, in the Apostle's description, *pure and undefiled* without it. 'Tis the benefit Jamasi. 27. of Reason alone, under the providence and spirit of God, that we our selves are at this day a Reformed Orthodox Church: that we departed from the errors of Popery, and that we knew too where to stop; neither running into the extravagancies of Fanaticism, nor sliding into the indifferency of Libertinism. Whatsoever therefore is inconsistent with natural Reason, can never be justly imposed, as an Article of Faith. That the same Body is in many places at once; that plain Bread is not Bread; such things, though they be said with never so much pomp, and claim to infallibility; we have still greater authority to reject them, as being contrary to common sense and our natural faculties, as subverting the foundations of all Faith, even the grounds of their own credit, and all the principles of civil life.

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So far are we from contending with our adversaries about the dignity and authority of Reason : but then we differ with them about the exercise of it, and the extent of its province. For the Deists there stop and set bounds to their Faith; where Reason, their only guide, does not lead the way further and walk along before them. We on the contrary, as *Moses* was shewn by divine power a true sight of the promised Land, though himself could not pass over to it : so we think, Reason may receive from Revelation some further discoveries and new prospects of things, and be fully convinced of the reality of them; though it self cannot pass on, nor travel those regions, cannot penetrate the fund of those truths, nor advance to the utmost bounds of them. For there is certainly a wide difference between what is contrary to Reason, and what is superior to it, and out of its reach. To give an instance in created Nature : how many things are there, whose being we cannot doubt of, though unable to comprehend the manner of their being so? That the human soul is vitally united to the Body by a reciprocal commerce of action and passion; this we all consciously feel and know, and our adversaries will affirm it. Let them tell us then, what is the chain, the cement, the magnetism, what they will call it, the invisible

Deut. 34.

invisible tie of that union, whereby Matter and an incorporeal Mind, things that have no similitude nor alliance to each other, can so sympathize by a mutual league of motion and sensation? No, they will not pretend to that; for they can frame no conceptions of it. They are sure, there is such an union from the operations and effects : but the cause and the manner of it are too subtle and secret to be discovered by the eye of Reason; 'tis mystery, 'tis divine magick, 'tis natural miracle. If then in created beings, they are content with us, to confess their ignorance of the modes of existence, without doubting of things themselves: have not we much more reason to be humble and modest in speculations about the essence of God, about the reasons of His counsels, and the ways of His actions? yes certainly : under those circumstances we may believe with Reason even things above and beyond Reason.

For example : If we have sure ground to believe that such a book is the Revelation of God ; and we find in it Propositions expressed in plain words, of a determinate sense without ambiguity ; so as they cannot be otherwise interpreted, by any just metaphor or fair construction allowed in common language : we say we have sufficient reason to assent to those propositions, as divine doctrines and

infallible truths, so far as they are declared there ; though perhaps we cannot our selves comprehend, nor demonstrate to others, the reasons and the manner of them. Neither is this an easy credulity, or unworthy of the most cautious and morose searcher of truth. For observe ; we do not say, Any thing incomprehensible to Reason is separate and alone a proper object of belief : but as it is supported and establish'd by some other known and comprehensible truth. As, if *Abraham* had been told by some ordinary Man, That in His and *Sarah's* decrepit age he should be blessed with a Son: this Promise so alone, without its basis to stand on, could not have challeng'd his assent ; because the thing was impossible in the way of Nature. But since it was God Almighty, *with whom*

Matth. 19.  
26. *all things are possible*, that was the author of that Promise ; by the mediation of that certain truth, the veracity and omnipotence of God, without hesitation he believed, and so obtain'd the glory to be *Father of the faithfull*. And upon the same grounds the Blessed Virgin gave credit to the salutation of the Angel ; though the message in it self seem'd impossible to reason. So true it is, that Reason it self warrants us to proceed and advance by Faith, even beyond the sphere and regions of Reason. We agree then with our adversaries about the

Rom. 4. 11.

the authority of Reason : but we dissent about the exercise of it, and the bounds of its jurisdiction. We believe even the abstrusest Mysteries of the Christian Religion : of which mysteries perhaps we can assign no reasons ; but for our belief we assign a good one : Because they are plainly taught in the word of God, who can neither err nor deceive. And this we affirm to be a reasonable conclusion ; though it carry us even to the confines of Heaven, beyond the limits of Reason. But if the Deists think to oblige us to give a natural account of those mysteries, without the authority of Scripture: for that we must beg their excuse. We will argue from strict Reason, as much as they can pretend to : but we must not submit that our adversaries shall confine us to improper topicks and impossible ways of proof.

It appears therefore, that though we should decline and despair to give any account at all of the reasons and methods of God's counsel in the mission of his Son ; and only appeal to the sentence of Scripture: yet the Deists ought to be satisfied with that proof; since the Doctrine is so expressly taught in the oracles of God. But besides this, what if even natural Light shall discover to us some faint, but yet certain views of that mysterious instance of divine Wisdom and Goodness; and exhibit

hibit to us a rational account, Why the Son of God should condescend to be our Mediator and Redeemer. But before we engage in this attempt, let it be lawfull to implore the candor of our Friends; if, while we endeavour to win over our Enemies, we may seem to some, To do too little, or perhaps to others, To venture too far, and to advance beyond our Lines. To discern then some reasons of this wonderfull Mystery; we must take our prospect from the highest mountain of Nature, from the first Creation, and origin of human Race.

Gen. 1. 31. GOD, who at the beginning viewed all the works of his hands, and *behold, all things were very good*; made Man also upright and compleat, without any defect in his whole composition, without any original perverseness of Soul, or false byass of Will or Judgment, without any natural obliquity or enormity of Inclinations. He made him an intelligent Being, to know God and Himself: to understand and feel present happiness, and to secure it by consideration and contrivance for the future. He endow'd him with liberty of mind: that he might act, not of necessity, nor blind instinct like the Brutes; but with consciousness and voluntary choice. He implanted in him diverse Appetites and Affections, all usefull instruments of his

his happiness, if fitly employed: and none vicious and culpable radically and in their whole nature; but then only, when they are applied to wrong objects, or in right ones are raised or sunk beside their due temper and measure. I say it again, for the justification of our Creator; that not one of the simple affections of the Soul, no not Concupiscence, Hatred, Anger, Revenge, are in themselves criminal and sinfull. Some of the Affections, 'tis true, have very bad names: but those are either mere excesses of simple Passions; or else mix'd and compound ones, which have no proper real essence, but are only notional terms; as *Envy* for example, a very bad thing indeed; but 'tis an evil of our own product, and not of God's creating. For the real constituent parts of it, are Hatred and Grief, very usefull and lawfull affections: but the evil of it is our own; when we entertain that Hatred and Grief at the good that befalls others: which is what we express by the complex name of Envy.

God therefore having so created Man, in every capacity pure and perfect, might justly require of him, that he should maintain and preserve this original rectitude; that in all his desires, designs and actions, he should constantly adhere to the dictates of Reason and Nature; so as the least deviation



Gen 4. 7.

violation would make him obnoxious to God's displeasure, and nothing less than compleat obedience recommend him to his favour: according to the terms proposed to Cain, *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lies at the door.* God, I say, might expect and require of man such a perfect obedience to the Law of Nature: because it was both reasonable and possible for Man to perform it. Reasonable it was, because every Statute of that Law promotes the true interest and felicity of Mankind, even in the very performance. 'Tis true, in the present posture of human affairs, a man's duty is frequently inconsistent with his temporal interest. *But from the beginning it was not so:* neither would it be now, if the whole world at once could be just and innocent. For 'tis not my keeping the Law, but another's transgressing it, that involves me in any misery. The scope and tendency of the Law it self is always mine and every man's advantage. For 'tis not a thing foreign and aliene to our nature, imposed on us purely to try our obedience; but it all results from our very frame and constitution. The general preservation of man's Natural good is the sole root and fountain of the Moral: the universal Profit and Pleasure, the publick Happiness of human Life gives being and denomination to every virtue

virtue and vice: and the true rules and directions to preserve and secure that happiness make up the whole Volume, the Code and Pandect of the Law of Nature. Without doubt then it was reasonable to obey, where nothing was commanded us, but to pursue our own interest; nothing forbidden us, but not to do our selves harm. And secondly, it was possible for man to perform that entire obedience. For since, as we have proved before, all his natural faculties are right and good, and the Law it self accommodated and proportion'd to those faculties; there appears no necessary intrinsic impediment, why he may not adequately observe it. If every particular precept be possible to be done, 'tis not absolutely impossible to fulfill the universal. And methinks they, that on other accounts acknowledge that God requires such perfect obedience upon the terms of the Law of Nature, should be very averse from believing, that there is a natural and fundamental insufficiency in man to perform it. For certainly the just God cannot be so importune and unreasonable a Master, as to enjoin us what is physically impossible, *to expect to reap where he has not sown, to require Bricks without allowance of Straw.*

But then, though there was no such original and natural disability in Man; yet there arose a moral  
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and circumstantial one, an accidental incapacity supervening to his Nature, an impossibility from event, that ever any person from the beginning of the world to the last period of it (always excepting the *Man Christ Jesus*) should be wholly pure and free from the contagion of Sin. For our first Parents having fallen from their native state of innocence; the tincture of evil, like an hereditary disease, infected all their posterity: and the leaven of sin having once corrupted the whole Mass of Mankind, all the species ever after would be sowed and tainted with it; the vitious ferment perpetually diffusing and propagating it self through all generations. For let us but consider the state of human life; first a perpetual conversation among evil Examples, and the strongest principle of our nature, Imitation; and then, the ignorance and prejudices of Childhood, the fervour and temerity of Youth; the force and the frequency of Temptations, and the narrow dubious confines between Virtue and Vice: and we may pronounce it impossible, that any man should so govern his steps through all the lubricous paths of Life, as never once to slip and fall from his duty. Agreeably to the testimony of Scripture, *which bath concluded all under sin*, Gal. 3. 22. and again;

<sup>1</sup> Joh. 1. 8. *If we say, we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the*

*the truth is not in us: and again, both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin; all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Every mouth then be stopp'd; and all the world must plead guilty before the tribunal of God: for by the deeds of the Law (the Law of nature as well as of Moses) no flesh can be justified in his sight.* It is evident then from the principles of pure Reason, beside the authority of Scripture; that upon the Deists Hypothesis, upon the terms of natural Religion, no Salvation can be obtain'd; no Life and Immortality can be expected. For that being the free offer and favour of God; he might justly set what price he pleas'd upon it; even the greatest that we can possibly pay; nothing less than entire obedience, than unsportted innocence, than consummate virtue.

Thus far then even Reason evinceth, and holds the Lamp to Revelation. Some means of Reconciliation between God and Man, the Judge and the Offender, must be contrived; some vicarious satisfaction to justice, and model of a new Covenant; or else the whole bulk of Mankind are for ever unhappy. And surely to prevent that, to retrieve a perishing world, was a weighty concern; even of greater importance than the very creating it, and more worthy of the care and consult of Heaven. I say, the care of Heaven; for alas here

on Earth, what expedient could Man find out? How could Dust and Ashes take upon him to speak unto the Lord? Could any of the Sons of Adam presume to be advocate for the rest? himself one of the criminals, himself in want of another advocate? and what friend knew we at the court of Heaven; of that high power and favour with God, as to offer his intercession? or so wonderfully kind to Us, as to pay our satisfaction? We must freely own to the Deist; that here Reason was at a stand: even Nature her self languish'd between hope and despair; and in the stile of the Apostle, *the whole Creation groan'd and travell'd in pain together*; when behold (what Revelation hath informed and assured us of) the eternal Son of the Almighty, *the brightness of the Paternal Glory and the express image of his Substance*, even He vouchsafed to be our Patron and Mediator, to take our Nature upon him and to dwell among Men, to fulfill that Law of righteousness wherein we were deficient, to bear our guilt and our burthen upon himself, and to offer his most precious blood, as an expiation for our offences, as the seal of a new Covenant better than the Law of Nature; a Covenant of more gracious terms, terms of Repentance and Remission of sins: so that if we truly believe in Him, and sincerely endeavour to observe his Commands; our imperfect

Rom. 8. 22.

Heb. 1. 3.

imperfect Righteousness through the merits of his Sufferings shall be imputed, accepted and rewarded; as if it were an entire obedience to the strict Law of Works and of natural Perfection.

And now I dare presume to ask even our adversaries themselves, what flaws or fallacies they can shew in all this. If it be true then, that Reason it self discovers such absolute necessity of some way of Reconciliation between God and Man; and if it was necessary for Man, as being the party concern'd, to know the particular way that God did approve and accept of; and if mere Reason could never find that out, but Revelation alone must and ought to inform us; and lastly, if such Revelation be actually made, attested, and promulgated to the world: what pretence is there left, why we should not believe and acquiesce in it? if upon examination it bear all the marks of true Revelation; if it contain nothing unworthy of it self, and of the wisdom and goodness of its Author.

And is not the Oeconomy of man's Salvation, as it is set forth in Holy Scriptures, every way agreeable to that divine character? No, if we ask our Adversaries; 'tis an improper and unequal method; 'tis inconsistent with the justice and impartiality of God. *Rex Jupiter omnibus idem*. God, say they, if he had design'd such an universal benefit

ness for Mankind, would have exhibited it equally and indifferently, to every Age and Nation alike. But the conditions of Salvation proposed in the Gospel are incompetent and much too narrow; being restrain'd to those times and countries alone, that can hear of the fame of *Jesus*, and believe in his Person. And what becomes then of all the former Ages of men, before He was born? What of those remote Nations ever since, that could have no intelligence of him, nor hear the least tidings of *Judea* and *Jerusalem*? must all those Myriads of Souls perish for invincible ignorance, for want of impossible Faith? For how could they believe on him, of whom they had not heard? and how could they hear without a Preacher? And why should the God of the whole earth, the God that is no respecter of persons, no nor of nations, be so unaccountably kind, so unjustly fond and partial to any single country? much less to a little obscure people, the *Jews*, scarce heard of in the rest of the world, till they were captives and slaves in it? and withdraw his paternal love from so many other Nations much more considerable, and more worthy of his providence? Is he God of the *Jews* only? Is he not also of the *Gentiles*?

Rom. 10.  
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Rom. 9. 29.

This way of discourse we may expect from the Deists: And I hope, according to the advice of the text, we are both able and ready to give a Reply.

For

For first as to that imagined Partiality of God, in preferring any one country before the rest of the World, to be the Land of Christs Nativity; what a poor and contemptible cavil? For upon supposition, that the Messias of God was to take human nature upon him, and be born of a Woman: must he not of necessity be born in some one particular Country, exclusively to all the rest? And is not that then a ridiculous objection against any single Country; that may equally be urged against all whatsoever?

Neither was it mere Fondness in the Deity, that he chose the obscure land of *Palestine* for the birth place of his Son, rather than *Greece*, or *Italy*, or *Asia*, the theatres of Art and Learning, and the seats of Empire? For not to mention *Abraham* and the Patriarchs, whose singular faith and piety justly obtain'd of God, that their Posterity should have the adoption and the glory, and the covenants and the promises, and the consanguinity of Christ: it appears also from event; that the circumstances of that nation were of all others the most suitable to the design of the Messias. For since it was fit and necessary, that Prophecies should foretell of him long before his coming; that his pedigree and extraction should be accurately deduced through a long series of Ancestors; and other such marks be assigned

signed of him, that men might know, This was He: what more proper to those purposes, than the state of the Jews, that *peculiar people*, secluded and distinguish'd one tribe from another, and the whole from all the rest of Mankind, by the very frame of their polity? So that the Genealogies were less confused, the Histories and Prophecies more faithfully recorded, and the accomplishment of all more certain and illustrious, than they could have been in any other Nation upon Earth; all of which, within that long compass of time, were blended together by mutual commerce and mutual conquest, and other omnifarious causes of mixture and confusion.

And then as to that other surmise, that God would have proposed fair and equal means of general salvation; and not upon such narrow and insufficient terms, as an actual Faith in the person of Jesus; a condition impossible to the much greater part of Mankind: we acknowledge it to be true, infallibly true; Faith in Christ Jesus the only way to Salvation since the preaching of the Gospel: so as whosoever rejects that, when it is duly declared to him, and refuses his assent and obedience to it, can have no portion in the Kingdom of Heaven. But for those, that never once heard of the Lord of Life; that's an undecided case, which we  
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do not determine. For who has authority to give sentence, where God and Scripture are silent? Thus far we are assured there; that let the future condition of those be as God pleases, at least he will not condemn them for invincible ignorance. *For there is no respect of persons with Him; but as* Rom. 2.11, *many as have sinned without Law, shall perish without* 12. *Law.* The meaning whereof is, that the Gentile world shall not be judged and condemned for the breach of the law of *Moses*, which never was given them; but for sins against the law of Nature, and the common light of Conscience. We may infer then by parity of argument, That as *many as shall sin without the Gospel, shall perish without the Gospel*; that is, not because they believed not in Jesus, whom they had not the least notice of: but they will be tried and sentenced for sins against natural Reason, for things within their power and capacity; *because when they knew God, they glorified* Rom. 1.18, *him not, as God; because they held the truth in unrighteousness,* 20, 21. *so that they are without excuse.*

But if the Deist shall still insist; that though we have justified God from the calumny, as if he would condemn the Gentiles for want of impossible Faith: yet still he maintains it to be unjust and incredible, that while one small part of Mankind enjoys the favour of the Gospel; all under  
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the state of Nature shall have the hard measure of *Suumum Jus*; must be all damn'd by rigid inflexible Justice, without equity or mercy, without any act of pardon, or the least room for Repentance: if he will rather obstinately believe, or hope, or wish; that *the God of tender compassions, who loveth all things that he hath made, who will not require much, where little has been given, cannot be so extreme with the Gentile world as to mark all that is done amiss*; and yet to slight and overlook those shining examples of virtue not unfrequent among them. If this be all he sticks at: God forbid, that on this single account, he should exclude himself from the Communion of Faith. We can allow him this opinion; as at worst a charitable error, as some indication of a large heart and a generous love of Mankind. But then he must always remember, that even those virtuous Heathens, whom he would so gladly place in some part of Heaven, can be saved on no other account than by the merits and mediation of Jesus their Saviour. For without his satisfaction, there is no remission of sins nor acceptance of repentance: and without remission of sins, *by the deeds of the Law, and natural Righteousness, no flesh can be justified in the sight of God.* They are saved therefore, if they be saved at all, by the sole benefit of Christ; though in this

Rom. 3. 20.

Life

life they could not know nor thank their Benefactor. For though they lived in the earliest ages of time, long before his Incarnation, yet even then they might be purified by the blood of the Lamb, manifested indeed in latter times, but pre-ordained before the foundation of the world: so that from the first origin of it, he might extend and impart, to all that were worthy, the efficacy of his Merits, and the privileges of Faith and Grace, and a share in the inheritance of Glory and Immortality.

1 Pet. 1. 20

II. And now we may expect, that our Adversaries will put off the garb and character of Deists; and make a new attempt for the fortune of the day, under the arms and conduct of the Jews.

It must be granted on all hands, that the Messias, whensoever he is manifested to the world, must appear in that very manner, as the Jewish Prophets describe him. All the characters must hit and correspond one to another; the same features, the same lineaments visible in both; the one the shadow and picture, and the other the substance. Now, say they, it is evident from the Prophets; That the Messias is to be a temporal Prince, to sit on the throne of David his royal ancestor, and to make Jerusalem the seat of an

universal and perpetual Empire. But the character of Jesus is as different from this description, as a stable from a palace. 'Tis true, we Christians endeavour to shew a similitude between them by figurative interpretations of Scripture: which we call the spiritual and mystical sense; but they call arbitrary and precarious, as having no foundation in the native and naked Letter: which is not to be racked and wrested from its obvious meaning; little credit being to be given to such extorted confessions.

Thus far our Objectors. But I suppose, the Prophetick language and character is better understood, than that this surmise should pass without a just answer. Indeed if it were in this case alone, that the expressions of the Prophets need a figurative interpretation, the exception might appear fair and plausible. But it cannot be denied, that on many other occasions, besides the matter of the Messias, their discourse (after the genius of the Eastern nations) is thick set with metaphor and allegory: the same bold comparisons and dithyrambick liberty of stile every-where occur. Which is an easie and natural account (besides the more secret reasons that the Holy Spirit might have) why the kingdom of Messias, though really spiritual and not of this world, is so often dressed and painted

painted by them with the glories of secular Empire. For when *the spirit of God came upon them*, and breathed a new warmth and vigour through all the powers of Body and Soul; when by the influx of divine light the whole scene of Christ's heavenly kingdom was represented to their view; so that their hearts were ravished with joy, and their imaginations turgid and pregnant with the glorious ideas: then surely, if ever, their stile would be strong and lofty, full of allusions to all that is great and magnificent in the kingdoms of this world. But then in other passages of the same Prophets, as it were on purpose to hint to us the true meaning of the former, the Messias is describ'd plainly without poetical colours, *to be a person of low condition, to have no form nor comeliness in him, a man acquainted with sorrows, and numbred among transgressors*; and by other characters so clear and express: that some of the Jewish Rabbies, to elude so strong a conviction, have maintain'd and propagated an absurd opinion, as if two Messiahs were foretold by the Prophets, the one a triumphant monarch, and the other an unfortunate and afflicted person. What will not perverse and refractory minds take hold of, rather than submit to an unwelcome truth?

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It is evident then, that the kingdom of Christ so magnified in the Prophetick stile is a spiritual kingdom. And yet to be free and ingenuous, we must own that the whole nation of the Jews mistook the meaning of those passages. Even our Saviour's own disciples were not exempted from the common error. And the whole posterity of that people are pertinacious in it to this day: which to many is a mighty prejudice against the credit of the Gospel. What? as if it were such a matter of astonishment, that they obstinately adhere to the literal sense, which promises them a temporal kingdom with worldly honours and pleasures? an interpretation both specious in it self, and agreeable to their proud hopes and carnal apprehensions, which are miserably defeated and disappointed in Jesus? There seems to be nothing so very unnatural and unaccountable in this. But then that very Disappointment, so far it is from being an objection, that to a sagacious mind and uncorrupt judgment, it self is a convincing proof, that he was truly the Messias. For let us reflect upon the state of those times. 'Tis certain in fact, that the whole nation was possess'd with an inveterate persuasion, that the Messias was then a coming. And 'tis as certain, that *Jesus* the Son of Mary profess'd himself that Messias. Let us argue now upon

upon human reasons and the common principles of action. If he was not the true Messias: we are then to consider him, as an ordinary Jew, of mean quality and education. Now to give any tolerable account, why such a one should pretend himself to be the Messias, there are but two ways possible. Either he was act'd by ambitious design, which he hoped to compass by that imposture; or by a complexional and natural enthusiasm, verily imagining himself to be the Messias. I suppose, I scarce need to say, that both these suppositions are fully confuted by every word and action of his life. But what I now observe, is this; that upon either of those principles, whether Ambition or Enthusiasm, he would certainly have act'd the part of the Messias, in such a character as men then ascribed to him; according to the popular expectation, and the received notion of those times. Now the whole Nation expected, that the Messias was to be a great General; to rescue them from the *Roman* power, and to *restore the kingdom to Israel*. 'Tis certain then, that upon either of those motives, he would have blown the trumpet to rebellion, and attempted their deliverance. Ambition would have animated him to it; as the only way to his hopes and wishes: or if Enthusiasm had inspir'd him, what would he not have promised.



ied and assumed to himself? *to fight the battles of the Lord; to execute vengeance upon the Heathen; to bind their Kings with chains, and their Nobles with fetters of iron.* Such were the designs of *Barcobab* and some other impostors of old: setting up to be the Messias; they put their followers in arms, and proclaimed liberty to the people. Not so the blessed Jesus: but when the multitude would have made him their King, he withdrew himself even by miracle to avoid it. He did not summon to arms, but to repentance and newness of life. He had a kingdom indeed: but *not of this earthly Jerusalem, but of that which is above.* He was truly their deliverer: but not from the *Roman* yoke; but from the more slavish yoke of the Law, from the more wretched bondage to sin and death. Was this the air and language of Ambition? Was this the meen and spirit of Enthusiasm? Nay rather does not Nature her self cry out and declare; that for one of his low condition and vulgar education, to profess himself the Messias in so surprizing a manner, in a character so unthought of, by an interpretation of Prophecies so spiritual and divine, so infinitely better than the literal meaning, against the universal prejudice of the nation, and the hopes and solicitations of his very followers; was certainly a thing more than human, an invincible testimony, that he was really

really the Christ, and his doctrine from God and not of men.

But our Adversaries have another objection still behind: and our answer thereto will put an end both to it and to the present discourse. And this objection is borrow'd from the Law of *Moses*: which, say they, having a promise of eternity annexed to it, to be *an everlasting covenant, a perpetual statute, a covenant of an everlasting Priesthood*, ought of necessity to be continued and confirmed by the true Messias: whereas *Jesus* endeavoured to abolish it, and thereby wholly subverted the credit of his own pretensions. But we answer in our Saviour's declaration, *that he came not to destroy the* Matth. 5. *Law, but to fulfill it.* We are to distinguish then <sup>17.</sup> between the moral part of the Mosaic Law, and the political and ceremonial. As to the Rites and Ceremonies; 'tis apparent, they had no intrinsic nor moral holiness in them; no natural tendency to promote the happiness of men; nay rather they were inconvenient and grievous, *a yoke of bondage and servile discipline, which none were able to bear.* Even the rewards and penalties, which enforced their observation, did not naturally flow and result from them, as effects from proper causes; but they were miraculously added to them by the sole virtue of the divine promise. 'Tis true, they were fit and proper

proper for the ends of their institution ; to be types and shadows of better things to come ; to preserve the people from Idolatry ; by allowing no intercourse nor commerce with other nations. But 'tis evident for that very reason, as well as many more, that those ceremonies were neither calculated for eternity, nor modelled for mankind in common. So that when the reasons of their sanction no longer continued, when the things they typically represented, were come to pass ; when *the wall of partition was to be removed*, and according to the Prophecies, *all nations to be called to Christ*, and *the ends of the earth to be his possession* : they must needs be antiquated and abolished, like scaffolds that are removed when the buildings are finished : since under that new state none of them had any further use, and several of them became impossible to be observed. And so for the Political institutions of *Moses* : 'tis plain they were accommodated to the circumstances of affairs, and the necessities of time and place ; not absolutely the very best, but the best that those ages of the world and the genius of that people would bear. As for instance, the toleration of Polygamy and causeless Divorces ; these were indulged them, not as most pleasing to their Law-giver, but *because of the hardness of their hearts*, in the words of our Saviour : because they were too stiff.

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stiff-necked and headstrong to admit of a shorter bridle. These civil ordinances therefore, when better precepts were once proposed and accepted in their place, must of necessity drop and die of themselves, and become obsolete without any repeal : just as the temporary edicts in war, and the agreements of the cartel do expire of their own accord, when the peace is concluded. But then the Moral part of the law of *Moses*, which is the sap and marrow, the soul and substance of the whole, that indeed is of eternal and universal obligation. But then, who can say, that this is abrogated and cancelled by *Jesus* ? so far from that, that every branch of it is ingrafted and incorporated into his Gospel. In this best of senses therefore the Mosaic Law is confirmed and fulfilled by our Saviour. For Morality is a thing immutable ; and unless human nature it self should be new molded by our maker ; vice and virtue must be always what they have been. So foolish was the cavil of the Deists against our Saviour's descent from Heaven ; because he gave no other Lectures of Morals, than what Nature and Reason had taught before. Nay if he had taught us the reverse of those Morals, this had been an objection indeed. But in that even the divinity of his doctrine most eminently appears ; that the finger of God upon the tables of our hearts, and

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and the pens of the inspired Writers in the volume of the Gospel have prescribed us one and the same lesson. As for Us, whose employment it is to teach that lesson to others; let us but express it also in our own lives and conversations; let us but add that credit to our doctrine, that reputation to our profession: so may we expect to bring over all our adversaries to the truth and power of Religion; so may we expect, when we give the account of our talents, to be received with that blessed approbation, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Master.*

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