

Benévolence and Integrity Essentials of
CHRISTIANITY.

A
SERMON

PREACH'D at the

Old Fury, March 3, 1735-6.

TO THE

SOCIETY

FOR

RELIEF

OF THE

WIDOWS *and* CHILDREN

OF

DISSENTING MINISTERS.

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LONDON,

Printed in the YEAR M.DCC.XXXVI.

JAMES I. 27.

Pure Religion, and undefiled before God, even the Father, is this: To visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the World.

THERE are two Things which in an especial Manner render God worthy of the Homage and Adoration of his reasonable Creatures, and recommend him to their highest Affection and Esteem: These are the absolute and unchangeable Rectitude of his Nature, and the constant diffusive Care and Goodness of his Providence. And therefore as true Religion may justly be said to consist in the real Conformity of our Natures to God, and an Imitation of his all perfect Example, the Description given by the inspired Apostle, in my Text, hath the most certain Foundation of Truth to support it, *viz. That pure Religion, and undefiled before God, even the Father, is this: To visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the World.* A Subject which I shall insist on with the greater Pleasure, not only as it is an Argument of the highest Importance in it self, but because 'tis a proper Description of your Disposition, and what shews the Sincerity and Acceptableness of your Piety, who have voluntarily united your selves to carry on the Work of Charity, and to visit and relieve both the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction. This is the Worship that you pay to God, even the Father, and 'tis Worship that is pure and undefiled.

In the preceding Verses the Apostle exhorts them to whom he wrote, to an uniform, constant Obedience to the Doctrines

and Precepts of Christianity: *Be ye Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only*^a. Think it not enough, that you give Attention to the Gospel Doctrine, and profess to believe it. 'Tis a Doctrine according to Godliness, and the Belief of it should lead you to universal Virtue and Goodness; and unless this be the Effect of it, your Profession is vain; and you deceive and impose on your selves, if you expect the Rewards of Christianity upon any other Foundation. *For if any Man be an Hearer of the Word, and not a Doer, he is like unto a Man beholding his natural Face in a Glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his Way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of Man he was*^b. i. e. The Person who contents himself merely with hearing the Gospel Doctrine, without mending his Temper, reforming his Life, and putting in Practice the great Duties it recommends, can gain no more Advantage hereby, than a Man doth, who takes a transient View of his Face in a Glass, and who, though the Mirror is designed to shew him the Defects of his Person or Dress, yet immediately forgets what is represented to him, without taking any care to rectify what he sees in either disorderly and amiss. *But whoso looketh into the perfect Law of Liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful Hearer, but a Doer of the Word, this Man shall be blessed in his Deed*^c. The *Law of Liberty* is the Christian Religion, in opposition to the burthensome Superstitions and Ceremonies of *Gentiles* and *Jews*. He that looketh into this Law, παρακωλυας, stoops down, and considers with a becoming Attention and Diligence the Requirements and Obligations of it; and continues therein; doth not only take a transient View of it, as Men do of their Faces in a Glass, but makes it his constant Study, and keeps the Principles of it habitually present with his Mind: The Man who remembers what he hears, practises what he remembers; this is the Man who shall be approved and rewarded of God. Religion is of an uniform, fixed Nature, that extends to the Whole of a Man's Behaviour and Conversation, that regulates his Discourse as well as governs his Actions: And therefore *if any Man amongst you seems to be*

^a Ver. 22.^b Ver. 23, 24.^c Ver. 25.

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religious, boasts of his Godliness, and professes himself a Worshiper of the true God, and yet *doth not bridle his Tongue*, but allows himself in profane, impure, censorious, and reproachful Discourse; such a one is destitute of the Spirit of Christianity, *deceives his own Heart*, by resting on such a Form of Godliness; *his Religion* is empty and ineffectual, and must therefore be altogether *vain* and unprofitable; neither acceptable to God, nor beneficial to himself. No; true Religion, Religion pure and uncorrupted, that substantial Worship which God approves, and will finally reward, consists in *visiting the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction*, and in *keeping our selves unspotted from the World*. In speaking to which Words I shall,

- I. Consider what it is in which the Apostle fixes the Nature of true Religion.
- II. Endeavour to demonstrate that this Account of pure and undefiled Religion is true.

I. I shall consider wherein the Nature of true Religion consists, as here described and laid down by the Apostle. It is *in visiting the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction*, and in *keeping a Man's self unspotted from the World*.

1. In *visiting the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction*. *Fatherless Children*. The original Word is *Orphanos*. Orphans are properly such who have lost their natural Parents, in Infancy or Youth, before they are attained to Years of Age and Maturity, and who are left by them either in Circumstances of Want and Distress, or deprived of their Counsel, Assistance and Friendship; these are Objects of great Pity and Compassion, because of their helpless and defenceless Age, and because bereaved of those, who by the strongest Ties of Nature, and from the Dictates of the most tender Affection, must have been solicitous for their Welfare, careful of their Education, and diligent in their Endeavours to have provided for them the Necessaries and Comforts of Life. How real and solid is the Loss when Children are stripped of this Blessing, left in their Infancy and Childhood wholly unprovided for, cast upon

the World without Friend or Fortune, born with animal Passions and Appetites, without any to check them in their early Rise, or teach them the Art to regulate and subdue them; surrounded with innumerable Temptations and Snares, without Guide to lead them, and Instructor to teach them either how to avoid or overcome them; and who are thereby almost abandoned to the Distresses of Poverty and Want, and in the utmost Danger of being as well corrupted in their Morals, as destitute and miserable in their Lives. These are oftentimes the Afflictions of Orphans; and what renders their Case more compassionate is, that they neither know their Loss, nor are concern'd for their Danger, and have neither the Inclination or Power to assist themselves, or prevent their Ruin.

And as to the State of *Widowhood*, how many are the Inconveniencies and Afflictions that attend it, from the natural Weakness of the Sex it self, and from the prevailing Laws and Customs of Nations; oftentimes liable to be defrauded of what they have by Treachery and Deceit, or to be oppressed by the Violence of the Rich and Powerful: Or who, if they are left in Distress and Want, are generally incapable of procuring a tolerable Subsistence, or extricating themselves from the Straits and Difficulties of Poverty. Labour and Toil are made properly for Men; the liberal Professions are their peculiar Study; the Arts of Negociation, and the Mysteries of Trade, are Provinces assigned by the God of Nature to them; the assiduous Application, the free Converse with the World, the frequent Exchanges of Places and Countries, that are necessary to carry on the Affairs of Life with Success, are indisputably Services which belong to them. So that when the Husband, and Father of the Family is removed by Death, the Means of Subsistence generally die with him, the desolate *Widow* loses the proper Source of her Maintenance and Support, and hath oftentimes no future Dependance for the very Necessaries of Life, but the cold and uncertain Affections of the World, and the immediate Compassions and Care of Providence. Afflictions of this Kind are extremely moving, and the Fears, Distresses, and Straits of a destitute *Widowhood* too tender for me to describe, without an undue
Emotion,

Emotion, or for you, I believe, even to be put in mind of, without Resolutions of Charity and Goodness.

For the Apostle tells us, that pure Religion, and undefiled, is to *visit* these Orphans and Widows in their Affliction. The original Word *επισκεπτεσθαι* denotes properly to inspect with Attention and Care, and to examine with Diligence any Affair in all its Circumstances, that we may know how to manage our Conduct with regard to it. And accordingly when applied to Objects in Distress, it implies, not an ineffectual Sympathy, or formal Condolence: For as our Apostle expresses it, *If a Brother or Sister be naked, and destitute of daily Food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in Peace; be you warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those Things which are needful to the Body: What doth it profit^d?* No, the *Visiting* here spoken of implies something more substantial, *viz.* such a benevolent Affection of Mind towards them, as leads us to a compassionate Consideration of their Case, and prompts us to afford them a suitable Relief. Thus *Matth.* xxv. 36. our blessed Saviour tells us, that at the universal Judgment he will acknowledge and reward his faithful Disciples, because, *When I was sick ye visited me, kindly pitied me, and administer'd what was proper and necessary for my Comfort and Relief.* And thus to visit the Orphans and Widows in their Afflictions, is to be tenderly affected towards their destitute and mournful State; to take their Condition into our most serious Thoughts; to give them that real Assistance which they need, and contribute with willing and chearful Minds towards alleviating their Sufferings, and supporting them under the Straits and Burthens of Life.

So that the first Thing in which the Apostle places true Religion is *Benevolence* of Disposition, and the consequent Effects of Mercy and Goodness towards all Persons whatsoever, whose Circumstances are afflicted, and call for our Compassion and Relief. Orphans and Widows in Affliction are real Objects of Charity; and the Apostle particularly mentions these, because they are Cases that peculiarly affect us,

^d Chap. ii. 15, 16.

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and do indisputably deserve and claim our Sympathy and Assistance; and to teach us, that our Compassion and Charity must be wisely regulated, and directed to real Objects of Necessity, in order to their becoming Instances of real and acceptable Religion; and that the tender Regards of a generous Mind towards all Persons whatsoever, in Circumstances of real Affliction and Distress, discovering themselves in all the genuine Fruits of Goodness, are Acts of Piety towards God, and that Worship in which the Father delights. But,

2. As true Religion is uniform and consistent, and extends to the Whole of our Character and Behaviour, hence the Apostle farther adds, with great Propriety and Truth, that Religion, pure and undefiled, is *to keep our selves unspotted from the World*, as well as *to visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Afflictions*. Benevolence and Charity to others are not sufficient to compleat the Character of a religious Man, unless he takes a *proper Care of himself*, maintains the Dignity and Rectitude of his own Nature, and preserves himself free from the Corruptions and Impurities of a wicked and degenerate World. Vicious Habits, contracted and indulged, lessen the Value, and soil the Beauty, even of Benevolence it self. They are indeed Arguments that this divine Disposition is defective, partial, and inconstant; and that how extensive and effectual soever such a Person's Good-will may be to others, he is wanting in a due Concern and Tenderness for his own Welfare and Happiness; and amidst all the Expressions of his Generosity to them, is cruel and relentless to his own Wants; and hath neither the Heart to pity, nor the Hand to extend Relief to himself, under his own greater Misfortunes and Misery.

Integrity and conscious Virtue are the greatest Ornaments and most valuable Treasures of human Nature. And one of the noblest Instances of Resemblance that Men can bear to God himself consists, in maintaining all their Powers and Faculties freed from every corrupt and criminal Bias, in preserving themselves from the Influence of irregular Passions and dishonourable Affections, in cultivating every good and worthy Disposition, in a steady uniform Obedience to the Dictates of Reason, and Principles of Truth, and in the Conformity
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of all their Actions to the everlasting Laws, and immutable Obligations of Righteousness; in opposition to the false and destructive Principles of the vicious Part of Mankind, the Force and Prevalence of their evil Examples, and all the various Temptations and Snares that may offer themselves, to engage us to a Conformity with them in Practice, and to a Participation with them in their Wickedness and Guilt. This is to *keep our selves unspotted from the World*, and an essential Part of pure and rewardable Religion; and though Benevolence of Disposition, attended with suitable Works of Charity and Mercy, is very amiable in it self, and an indisputable Part of the Christian's Character; yet I think no Doctrine can be more pernicious in its Consequences, or false in its Foundation, than that which teaches Men to imagine, that by Beneficence to others they can compensate for personal Vices, and secure themselves, by certain Works of private or publick Charity, from the Effects of that Guilt, which they contract by an habitual Course of Immorality and Wickedness. No: Benevolence of Disposition, manifested by the substantial Fruits of Goodness, and accompanied with strict Integrity of Heart, and an universal Probity of Life and Manners, is that pure and undefiled Religion which the Father approves; that genuine Worship of him in Spirit and in Truth which he seeks, and will finally reward. And this brings me,

II. To the second General; which is to demonstrate, that this Account of pure and undefiled Religion is true. Religion, or the Worship of God in general, implies that Regard which reasonable Creatures shew and express towards him, upon the Account of his Perfections and Benefits, and in Obedience to his Will, whether discovered by Reason or Revelation, either in the inward Affections of their Minds, the Words of their Mouths, or the Actions of their Lives, upon the Views, and with the Hopes of a Reward in a future State. Hence it follows, that Religion is in its Nature a reasonable Service, because the Service of reasonable Beings; and that nothing can deserve the honourable Character of Religion that is not founded in Truth, and directed by Reason and Understanding.

derstanding. It is also plain from hence, that Actions, which are in themselves intrinsically good and commendable, yet if they are not performed with a becoming Regard to God, from a Sense of his Authority, and with a View to his Approbation and Acceptance, they are not properly the Actions and Expressions of Religion and Piety; for *he who comes to God, as a Worshipper of him, must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* Whatsoever Men do through the Dictates of natural Affections, and the Sway and Influence of their Passions, is properly *Humanity*. When the Rule they act by is the Truth and Fitness of Things; Reason, and the natural Obligation which results from it; this is strictly *Morality and Virtue*. When to this they add the Authority of God, the Consideration of his Will, the Desire of Conformity to him, and the Expectation of a Reward from him, as the Motives of their Actions; this is properly *Religion and Piety*: And when all these Considerations meet together in the Mind, and have their Weight to influence and direct the Actions of Men's Lives, then they act an human, virtuous, and religious Part; a Part suitable to the Constitution of their Frame, and the Relations in which they stand as created and dependent Beings.

'Tis not therefore the mere visiting the Fatherless and Widows in their Afflictions, nor any other like Actions of Benevolence and Charity; 'tis not our abstaining from the grosser Vices of a profligate and degenerate Age, and thus keeping our selves unspotted from the World, which of it self constitutes the Nature of Religion; in like manner as Piety, and the Worship of God, doth not consist in the mere Attention to the Word preached, the uttering certain Forms of Expression with our Mouths, and the engaging in any of the positive Institutions of Christianity; to which Things, I know not for what Reason, the Name of Religion hath been appropriated, greatly to the Prejudice of other very substantial and important Branches of Christian Piety.

1. For if Religion and Piety, strictly speaking, be placed in the *serious Disposition* of the Heart, and the Turn of the Affections towards God, then whatever proceeds from such a Temper,

Temper, and hath such Affections attending it, must be, in the Nature of Things, and in the Regards of God, properly Religion; and by Consequence the Cultivating a benevolent Temper, and chearfully abounding in the Fruits of Goodness, in Imitation of the Divine Example, out of Deference to God's Authority, and with the Desire of pleasing him, and being approved by him, must deserve this honourable Character. And for the same Reason, it must be as real an Instance of solid and rational Piety, when Men, from the Consideration of the absolute Perfection and Rectitude of the Divine Nature, from the intire Approbation of it in their Judgment, and a strong and prevailing Ambition to resemble God, and be cloathed with his Likeness; keep themselves at the utmost Distance from the Impurities of an evil World, are careful to maintain all their Powers and Faculties in their due State of Subjection and Order, to preserve their Minds pure from every criminal Deformity and Blemish, and to abound in the Practice of all moral Virtue. Even the Prayer of an upright Heart, and the Thanksgivings of a grateful Breast, are not nobler Instances of Worship and Homage to God than this.

2. If Religion be represented as consisting in a Regard to the *Reason* and *Fitness* of Things, and the Obligation to the great Duties of it, be considered as resulting from the necessary Relation we bear to God; is not the benevolent Temper every way proper and fit? Are not the Bounties of a generous Charity altogether reasonable and becoming? Do they not naturally result from certain and fixed Relations, and even from the Relations which every Man bears to his great Creator and sovereign Lord? Is it not the necessary and unalterable Duty of a reasonable Creature, to maintain the Dignity, and preserve the Rectitude of his Nature, amidst the most powerful Inducements to Vice? Is there not an unchangeable Propriety and Fitness in this, immediately flowing from his Dependance on God for Life and Happiness?

3. If Religion be consider'd as the *Homage* and *Adoration* of a reasonable Being paid to God, as including solemn Acts of Worship, performed in Honour to him; an uniform Virtue; and an active Benevolence, will justly come under this

sacred Character, and are indeed some of the noblest Instances of Esteem and Veneration that can be shewn him. The Man who is destitute of the benevolent Temper, and a Stranger to the Dictates of Goodness; who enters into all the Vices of a degenerate Age, and debases his Nature by criminal Indulgences; whatever may be his Professions of admiring, honouring, and worshipping God, yet demonstrates by his Practice, that he hath no prevailing Reverence for him, and denies him the most acceptable Worship that he can pay him. But can there be a nobler Proof of Sentiments of solid Piety in the Heart, than the regular Actions of an exemplary useful Life? Can there be a more valuable Sacrifice offered to God than an upright Heart, and an uncorrupted Behaviour? Can any one express an higher Approbation, or more honourable Regard for the Rectitude of the Divine Nature, than by endeavouring to maintain the Purity of his own? Or manifest a stronger Esteem for, or pay his Adorations to God, as the most beneficent and friendly Being, in a more worthy and becoming Manner, than by following the Divine Example, in being as extensively useful as he can? The regular Virtue of a good Man, living under the fixed Belief and Awe of God, is the Payment of a perpetual Homage, the doing him the highest Honour he is capable of, and the most effectual Method by which he can in reality glorify him.

4. If Religion be made to consist in a *Conformity* to, and *Resemblance* of God, Benevolence and Integrity will, in a peculiar Manner, deserve this honourable Character. There are some Acts of Piety, which however reasonable in themselves, and becoming our dependent and necessitous State, yet are so far from carrying in them, or inferring a real Likeness to God, that they are demonstrative Proofs of the contrary: Prayer is the Acknowledgment of our Wants: Thanksgivings are the Expressions of our Obligations; and the Use of all instituted positive Means of Worship, are Proofs of our Ignorance, Inattention, and great Imperfection. But none of these can be, without great Impiety, ascribed to God; and by Consequence, such Acts of Worship and Religion are the Evidences of the Meanness of our Condition, and of the infinite

nite Difference and Distance that there is between God and us. Whereas the maintaining the inward Purity of our Hearts, and an unblemished Holiness of Life and Conversation, carries in the very Notion of it a Conformity to God, and is that very Image and Likeness to God which stamps on those who wear it the truest Dignity, and renders them capable, and even worthy, of his Acceptance. And though the Rectitude of his Nature be in every respect perfect; and he is infinitely amiable upon account of all his Perfections; yet that which creates in us the highest Esteem for him, excites our warmest Affections towards him, and produces a firm Confidence and Trust in him, is the Benevolence of his Nature, his Compassion to our Wants, his Readiness to supply them, the unbounded Liberality of his Providence, and the infinitely various Effects of his Goodness and Mercy. And by Consequence, if Religion consists in an Imitation of, and Conformity to God, the Benevolence of a good Man, expressed in all suitable Instances of Kindness and Love, is Religion in the highest and noblest Sense; as it carries in it the most perfect Resemblance to God, in that which is his loveliest Glory, and spreads a Lustre and Beauty over every other Attribute of his Nature.

5. If by Religion we mean those Expressions of our Homage and Duty to God, which are founded upon his *express Command*, and inculcated immediately and directly by his Authority, Benevolence, and Integrity of Heart and Life, will come under this Denomination equally with any other Instances of Duty whatsoever. For though their primary Obligation flows from the unchangeable Nature of Things, and our Character and Relation as reasonable Beings, and must therefore be so far antecedent to, and independent of all positive Will and Command; yet this natural Obligation is strengthen'd by the express Authority of God himself; and what the Frame of our Beings, and the Dictates of our own Reason lead us to, receives an additional Enforcement from Divine Revelation. *He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is*

^c Mic. vi. 8.

good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love Mercy, and walk humbly with thy God, was the Doctrine of the inspired Prophets under the Old Testament Dispensation, teaching Men to *know the Righteousness of the Lord*^f, or instructing them in the Nature and Duties of acceptable Religion. And when God was pleased to warn his rebellious and degenerate People of old of their Danger, and to beseech them to take the proper Methods to prevent their Ruin, this was the Exhortation: *Wash ye, make you clean, put away the Evil of your Doings from before mine Eyes, cease to do Evil, learn to do well, seek Judgment, relieve the Oppressed, judge the Fatherless, and plead for the Widows*^g. The very Doctrine of the Apostle in my Text; that *pure Religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is to visit the Orphans and Widows in their Afflictions, and to keep himself unspotted from the World.*

The peculiar Character by which God is described in the New Testament, is that of a Father, both as he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as he is our God and Father in and through him. And therefore when the Apostle declares, that the Visiting the Fatherless and Widow in their Afflictions, &c. is pure Religion, and undefiled before God, *even the Father*, he means, that 'tis pure, genuine, uncorrupted Christianity; the Religion that the Father hath appointed by his Son Jesus Christ, which he expects from all that wear his Name, and which he will accept and finally reward. The Words *pure and undefiled* are, as a learned Expositor observes, taken from Jewels, the Value of which consists in their being bright and clear. So that Beneficence and Integrity are genuine, unadulterated Christianity, that like a finished Diamond, hath an unclouded Lustre, is brilliant, without spot or blemish.

There seem to have been some, even in the early Days of the Church, during the very Lives of the Apostles, who imagined that Christianity consisted in certain external Ordinances, such as hearing of the Word, and the like Forms of Godliness, or in an unactive and ineffectual Faith, *i. e.* in the

^f Micah vi. 5.

^g Isa. i. 16, 17.

mere Belief of the Truths of the Gospel, that did not exert it self in the good Works of a Christian Obedience. This is what our Apostle directly opposes, by exhorting those he wrote to, *To be Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only*^h, for that otherwise they would but *deceive themselves*; and by putting the Question home to their own Consciences: *What doth it profit, my Brethren, though a Man say he hath Faith, and have not Works? Can Faith save him*ⁱ? And finally, by laying down this plain Conclusion, *Ye see then, how that by Works a Man is justified, and not by Faith only*^k.

Hearing of the Word, believing Principles of Truth, and the Observance of positive Institutions, are very far from constituting and compleating the Religion of a Christian, and being the most excellent and acceptable Parts of Christian Piety and Worship; though the Words Religion and Godliness, and serious Piety, have been too frequently applied and appropriated to such kind of Things. They have indeed their proper Use, and are not to be neglected. Hearing the Word is to be attended on as the proper Means of Instruction and Knowledge; and Men are to seek after and embrace the Truth, that they may always have within their Breasts proper Principles and Motives of Action. Positive Institutions are also appointed, and ought to be regarded as Means and Helps to a more excellent End, even to subserve the Interest, and promote the Spirit and Practice of substantial Godliness; but they are so far from containing the Whole, or principal Part of Religion and Piety, that they have neither the Substance, nor deserve the Name of Religion, when they are rested in, and not made conducive to higher and more valuable Purposes. And indeed there cannot be a Mistake of a more dangerous Consequence, than in making serious Piety to consist merely in such kind of Observances as these; which, when they don't purify the Heart, and dispose Men for all the good Works of Christian Obedience, have not one single Circumstance to recommend them, and can be of no Advantage to those who engage in them; yea, which have in them the very Nature of Sin, as they are cer-

^h Ver. 22.ⁱ Chap. ii. 14.^k Ver. 24.

tain Proofs of Insincerity and Hypocrisy, and are declared to be the Aversion and Abhorrence of God.

'Tis for this Reason that we find but very little said about positive Institutions in the New Testament, which are but few in Number, and plain in their Nature, as appointed by our Saviour; that Men might not be led to be over solicitous and zealous about them, nor to lay too great a Stress and Dependance on them; but might learn to apply themselves to, and exercise themselves in those nobler Duties, and Instances of more substantial Godliness, which are of immutable and eternal Obligation; in which consists that Worship in Spirit and Truth which the Father seeks, and which are therefore frequently and expressly recommended and commanded.

Purity of Heart¹, hungriſg and thirſting after Righteouſneſs^m, and the Exercise of Mercy, was the Religion recommended by our Lord himſelf; and that Perfection which he enjoins as the beſt Imitation of his heavenly Fatherⁿ, is the Perfection of Love and Goodneſs; the Love of our Enemies, the Bleſſing them that curſe us, and the doing Good to them that hate us^o. The Religion taught by his Apoſtles was of the ſame excellent and friendly Nature. *They that are Chriſt's have crucified the Fleſh, with the Affections and Luſts^p; and the Fruit of the Spirit is Love and Goodneſs as well as Faith^q. In Chriſt Jeſus neither Circumciſion availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumciſion, but Faith which worketh by Love^r; and the very End of the Chriſtian Commandment is Charity out of a pure Heart, and of a good Conſcience^s. The peculiar Habit, and diſtinguiſhing Ornament of Chriſtians, thoſe holy, beloved, and elect of God, are Bowels of Mercies, Kindneſs, Meekneſs, Longſuffering, and Forgiveneſs^t; and whatever they forget, they ſhould always remember to communicate, and to do good, becauſe with ſuch Sacrifices God is well pleaſed^u. So that if Religion be conſidered as the ſpecial Appointment of God, Integrity and Benevolence muſt be allowed to be eſſential Branches of it.*

¹ Mat. v. 8. ^m Ver. 6. ⁿ Ver. 48. ^o Ver. 44. ^p Gal. v. 24.
^q Ver. 22. ^r Chap. v. 6. ^s 1 Tim. i. 5. ^t Col. iii. 12. ^u Heb. xiii. 16.

6. And finally, if we consider it as the *Preparation* for, and attended with the *Promise* of a peculiar *Reward* from God in a future State, Goodness in Disposition, and Practice, joined with uncorrupted Morals, and an unblemished Probity of Behaviour, will necessarily be included in the Notion and Account of it, and be indeed the grand, constituent and essential Parts of it. The infinite Blessedness of God himself is founded upon the absolute Rectitude of his Nature, and his perfect Freedom from all moral Evil. Was it possible for him to be subject to those sinful Disorders and Infirmities that more or less infect all Mankind, he would in proportion be subject to their Afflictions and Miseries also. But as he is not capable of any of those disordered impotent Affections and Passions, to which our Vices and Calamities are peculiarly owing, 'tis impossible his Happiness can ever be interrupted or disturbed, or that he can know by Experience a Moment's Uneasiness and Distress. As his Actions are all directed by everlasting Righteousness and Truth, he can't but view them with the most intimate Approbation and Complacency. As the Benevolence of his Nature is an incorruptible Principle, as the Objects of his Care are innumerable, as the Effects of his Goodness are boundless, and large as the Number of his Creatures, and the infinite Variety of their Wants; what must be the Satisfaction arising in the eternal Mind, from the Contemplation of all those infinitely various Capacities for Happiness which he himself hath formed, and those liberal and never-failing Communications, by which he continues to supply and gratify them? And in Proportion as any of his reasonable Creatures are possessed of the like Rectitude and Perfection of Mind, cultivate the same Benevolence of Disposition, and employ themselves in correspondent Acts of Goodness and Mercy, so far their Happiness must necessarily be of the same Kind, and built upon the same Foundation with the Happiness of God himself: They have the unalterable Disposition for Blessedness, and in whatever World they dwell, they will, they must, *be satisfied from themselves.*

And in whatsoever the peculiar Blessedness promised in the Gospel consists, 'tis assured, and even confined to the Persons

whose Characters I have been describing. *Blessed are the Pure in Heart, for they shall see God; blessed are the Merciful, for they shall obtain Mercy.* And when our blessed Lord is describing the Process of the final Judgment, and the Reasons of those Rewards and Punishments which shall be respectively distributed at that great Day, he tells us: *Then shall the King say unto them on his right Hand, Come ye Blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the Foundation of the World: For I was hungry, and ye gave me Meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me Drink; I was a Stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in Prison, and ye came unto me. For in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my Brethren, ye have done it unto me.* So that for you who pass through the World untainted, and unsubdued with the Lusts of it, and delight in Goodness, and shew your Love to the Son of God, by your cheerful Liberality to his Followers and Friends, for you is this heavenly Kingdom prepared, and the Saviour himself shall adjudge to you the Rewards of it.

After the many Charities in which most of you have been engaged, and to which many of you have liberally contributed, it might have been thought an improbable Undertaking to have attempted another intirely new. But Christian Benevolence; when joined with a Capacity to do Good, knows no end of its Bounty, never ceases to exert it self in Acts of Kindness, whilst there are Objects to need and deserve its Assistance. You engaged as readily as you were asked, and when the destitute Widows and Orphans of the Ministers of Christ were named to you, for your Compassion, you cheerfully resolved to visit them in their Affliction, and became a Society for their Succour and Relief.

The Friendship of good Men I ever esteemed an Honour and Happiness; and the Opportunity Providence gave me of employing that Share of Interest I had in them, for the carrying on so noble and excellent a Charity, as this of relieving the Widows of your Ministers, and putting their helpless Children to such Employments as may procure them a comfortable Assistance, I shall always reflect on with the sincerest
Pleasure,

Pleasure, and Gratitude to Almighty God; and shall ever think my self under peculiar Obligations to you, who voluntarily became Parties in this Affair on the first Proposal, and by your Bounty in contributing to it, and Steadiness and great Prudence in the Management of it, have given me the desirable Prospect, that it shall not barely live, but even flourish and prosper too.

This Charity many of you have already engaged in, and to which I beg all your Assistance, is of such a Nature, as speaks and pleads powerfully for it self; 'tis to visit Orphans and Widows in their Afflictions; Widows in such Circumstances as to be deprived of the common Methods of procuring a Subsistence for themselves, or a Maintenance for their Children. Orphans, quite destitute of all worldly Provision, and who have generally few Friends to help or pity them, though they have as generally paternal Merit to recommend them, and should not be wholly overlooked, out of regard to their Father's Piety and Usefulness.

For 'tis in behalf of the Orphans and Widows of the Ministers of our Lord Jesus that I stand here as an Intercessor; Men, who contented themselves with Poverty that they might fill others with the *unsearchable Riches of Christ*; and chose Usefulness with a good Conscience and a due Regard to Liberty, rather than any worldly Advantages with the Want of either; Men, whom God made instrumental to beget others to Salvation and Happiness through the Gospel, living themselves in many Necessities, and leaving their Widows and Children, after Death, wholly destitute and unprovided. Send not away therefore the Widows of such Men empty, nor despise the Cry of their fatherless Children.

The Charity it self is built upon the most extensive and generous Foundation: 'Twas never begun with a Party Spirit, and I trust in God, will never be managed with Partiality. The Widows and Children of the Ministers of all our Denominations, without Exception, are entitled to Assistance; and the Preference that will be made will be only of such whose Necessities are most pressing, and first deserve Compassion and Regard. The View of the Charity reaches to Futurity, and

if God is pleased to encourage the Design, and stirs up your Hearts to lend your Assistance towards the carrying it on, the Supply that is minister'd will be annual.

If therefore there be any Consolation in Christ, if any Comfort of Love, if any Fellowship of the Spirit, if any Bowels and Mercies, encourage this my Hope, and fulfil my Joy. Forgive me, that I thus beseech you to be Imitators of that God, whose affecting Character it is, that he is a Father to the Fatherless, and an Husband to the Widow. Bear with me, that I exhort you with Earnestness and Love, thus to copy after the Example of the Best of Beings, and to help those destitute and forsaken Objects whom God himself points out as peculiarly Worthy your Compassion and Assistance. Thanks be to God for what hath been already done, and may the Blessing of Heaven reward you seven fold, for your Labour of Love, and the generous Proofs of your kind Affection towards them. And let every one, who goes from hence, lend his Assistance, according to his Ability, to a Service so necessary in it self, and so acceptable to God; that as pure and undefiled Religion consists in visiting the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction, so you may be able to say with the same Sincerity and Pleasure as *Job* did; *The Blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the Widows Heart to sing for Joy.*

F I N I S.