

89854

A
DEFENCE
OF
Revealed Religion.
IN
Six SERMONS
Upon ROM. I. 16.

Wherein it is clearly and plainly
shown, That no Man can possibly
have any real Ground or Reason to
be ashamed of Christianity.

By HENRY HALLYWELL,
Master of Arts, and Vicar of *Cornfold*
in *Sussex*.

L O N D O N,
Printed for *Walter Kettilby*, at the
Bishop's-Head in *St. Paul's Church-*
Yard. 1694.

Imprimatur.

*Decemb. 23.
1693.*

Ra. Barker.

To the Most Reverend
Father in GOD,
JOHN,
Lord Archbishop of YORK,
AND
Metropolitan of *England.*

May it please Your Grace

TO permit these Ser-
mons to go under the
Protection of Your
Great Name. Books often
receive a more favourable
A 2 Ac-

6A237Marks

The Epistle Dedicatory.

*Acceptance upon the Account of the Worth and Merit of the Person they are addressed to: But that is not my Design; which if it were, I could never have made a more agreeable choice of a Patron than Your Grace, whose known Integrity and Learning, and whose Noble and Generous Sentiments of Religion, which you have studiously endeavoured to instill into others, are enough to inspire the most sluggish Genius to attempt something that is not Common. I am obliged in Justice and Gratitude to present Your Grace with something, and
this*

The Epistle Dedicatory.

*this being the best I have, if it may not merit Praise and Approbation, yet at least I hope it may appear to Your Grace to be not altogether Contemptible. And if some uncertain and wavering Sceptick shall, by the reading of these Discourses, reap any Benefit and Satisfaction, I shall think my self to have obtained the chiefest end I aimed at. For, as I am sensible I cannot do all that Good that I would, in that narrow Sphere of Action wherein I move, so I had rather venture the various Censures of Men in the publishing my own
Thoughts,*

The Epistle Dedicatory.

*Thoughts, than not be aiding
and assisting (according to the
utmost of my Ability) to form
in the Minds of others the
truest Conceptions of that Re-
ligion by which the Christian
World expects Immortal Bles-
sedness. I most humbly beg
Your Grace's Pardon, both
for the boldness of my Address,
and for the Imperfections
Your Grace will find in what
I offer; which I hope I shall
the more easily obtain upon the
score of the long Acquaintance
I have had the Honour to
have with Your Grace. Now
that GOD would long prosper
Your Grace in Health and
Happi-*

The Epistle Dedicatory!

*Happiness, for the good of
his Church, is the earnest
Prayer of,*

My LORD,

Your Grace's most Humble
and Devoted Servant

Henry Hallywell.

A DE-

A
DEFENCE
 OF
Revealed Religion.

SERMON I.

ROM. I. 16.

*For 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.*

WE Live in an Age
 wherein Vice and
 Sin does infinitely
 abound; and as if the Depravity
 of our Nature were not a sufficient
 Evil,

A Defence of Ser. I.

Evil, and too great a cause of Mens Sorrow and Shame, they add to it and encrease it, by despising, scorning, and trampling under Foot the great means of redressing all their Evils, and doing themselves good.

The Atheist strives to undermine Religion by exposing it to the World as a ridiculous piece of Folly. And this indeed is very agreeable and consentaneous to his own Principles; for if there be no God, there can be no Religion. And as for the Prophane and Debauched Person, though he be not arrived to so high a pitch of Wickedness, as to say, *There is no God*, yet he wishes there were none, and endeavours to discountenance Religion as a flat and dull thing, unfit for a lively and brisk Spirit. And he would have all the World to believe that Religion

is

Ser. I. *Revealed Religion.*

is only adapted to slavish Minds, who are ignorant of the Liberty of their own Natures, and do not know what a rare thing it is for a Man to enjoy all manner of sensual Pleasures to the full.

Some such Persons as these the Apostle had met withal, who scorned the Preaching of the Cross of Christ as a weak and contemptible piece of Folly. And they seem to upbraid him, as if he had undertook to instruct the World in a thing that he was not able to make good. For there seems to be implied an Objection made by some Persons something after this manner; as if some one had said to the Apostle, You have introduced a new Religion into the World, and you seek to persuade Men to embrace it in By-corners and remote Parts of the Empire: There you Preach it to a Company

B 2

of

A Defence of Ser. I.

of poor, silly, and illiterate People, and lead them away, because they are easily deceived and know nothing. But if this which you call the Gospel, be a thing of such mighty concernment to the World, and if it be a Doctrine so highly Rational as you pretend, why do you not come and Preach it at *Rome* it self, the Eye and Glory of the World, where all sorts of wise Men on Earth are gathered together, who are able to detect and discover the Vanity of that Religion you would fain disseminate and spread abroad.

This seems to have been objected to the Apostle; to which he answers, *Ver. 15. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to Preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also; For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.* As if he had said, That Gospel or Religion which I declare,

is

Ser. I. Revealed Religion.

is of such high Consequence to Mankind, and of such an admirable Frame and Divine Contrivance, that I am not ashamed of it wheresoever I come, but am ready to Preach it at *Rome* it self, and do tell you, that it is not like an empty Piece of Jangling and vain Philosophy, but the Power of God to the Salvation of the World, and the most effectual Instrument to wind off the Souls of Men from their Slavery to Sin and Satan, that ever was yet made known; and therefore both Jew and Gentile are obliged to believe and embrace it.

From whence we may make this Observation; *That the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, which we call the Christian Religion, and is contained in the Books of the New-Testament, is of such a Nature that no Man need to be ashamed of the Profession of it.*

B 3

For

For the Apostle tells us, That it is the *Power of God unto Salvation to every one that believes*. And elsewhere he declares the Gospel to be both the Power and the Wisdom of God; 1 Cor. 1. 24. *We Preach Christ Crucified* (that is the Gospel of Christ Crucified) *the Power of God*, it being so effectual to disengage Men from the Kingdom of Satan; and the *Wisdom of God*, in the fitness and suitableness of it for the obtaining that great End and Purpose. Now surely, he that looks upon Religion with a reasonable Eye (as he ought to do) can never think he has any cause to be ashamed of a thing that hath so much of God's Power, and Wisdom conspicuous in it. And for those that can so confidently deride and scoff at it, they would do well to consider how far they are from good Manners, and
from

from that common Civility that even Nature it self teaches all Men, that is, to speak Reverently of what God does, and to have honourable Thoughts of his Works.

But for the further Confirmation of this point, and for the building of us up more firmly in our most Holy Faith, I shall consider what are the main causes of Shame, and upon what grounds we may justly be ashamed of any Doctrine delivered to us; and then shew, that in none of these Respects we have any reason to be ashamed of the Christian Religion.

1. A first cause of shame is, If that which is delivered to us be not true. If a Man should confidently entertain an Opinion that were false, and which there were no Grounds of Credibility for, and should expose his Life and Fortunes to hazard and danger for it,
B 4 he

he would have great reason to be ashamed of his Levity and Rashness, and all Men besides himself would conclude him guilty of an unpardonable Folly.

2. We may justly be ashamed if the thing propounded to us be not Rational, that is, agreeable to those common Notions of Reason and Understanding which God has planted in our Souls.

3. We have sufficient cause of Shame and Confusion if the Doctrine offered to us for our Faith and Belief be not Intelligible, *i. e.* easie to be understood by all those to whom it is propounded. For if Christianity were made up of a company of intricate and dark Riddles, only to amuse the World, and to puzzle our Understandings, I do not see but that a Wise and Sober Person might have grounds enough to be ashamed of it.

4. If

4. If it be not useful to the World, but contain only some poor and trivial things that are of no benefit to Men.

If Religion had indeed been thus, the Apostles themselves might have been ashamed to have made such a stir in the World: And all Christians that followed them would have been extremely out of Countenance when they had seen so little good and benefit of all that which was yet delivered as God's Will, and wherein he had shewed such a wonderful piece of Art and Wisdom. But now when we look upon Religion and find that it is most truly and certainly the Will of God delivered to the World. That it came from Heaven, and was attested by all the Evidences and Arguments that such a thing is capable of; That God had an immediate hand in it, and that all
its

its Authority was undoubtedly derived from him. Again, when we shall find that there is nothing in Christianity, but what is highly rational and agreeable to our Intellectual Faculties, and for which we may be able to make the most reasonable Apology and Defence. And further, when Christianity is so plain and easie to be understood in all those things which are indispensably necessary to every Man's Salvation; so that the most ordinary Capacity may apprehend what is God's Will and meaning in it, and what he would have him to do. And lastly, When we shall see, that Religion is a thing of no mean and low Concernment, but a matter of the greatest Benefit and Advantage that ever was communicated to Mankind. When its great End and Design shall be discovered only to make Men everlastingly

lastingly happy in another Life: When these things put together shall appear with irresistible Evidence and Clearness, surely that Man must be bereaved of his Wits and Understanding that can be ashamed of a Doctrine that has all these Qualifications.

In the first place then, to make it manifest that the Christian Faith is a Doctrine worthy of all Acceptation, and of which there may be made the best Defence in the World, I shall shew by a few Arguments the Truth of it, *viz.* That God sent his Son Jesus to communicate this as his Mind and Will, and that he would have all the World to live in the Faith and Obedience of it.

[They that would have more full and ample satisfaction upon this Subject, may consult that excellent *Treatise of Grotius*, of the
Truth

Truth of Christian Religion, translated into English by Dr. Patrick, now the Reverend Bishop of Ely.]

Now to this Purpose, let us consider, That as to the matter of Fact concerning the Life and Actions of our blessed Saviour, his Death and Resurrection, and his Ascension into Heaven (which is the Ground and Foundation upon which Christian Religion is built) it is not at all probable, either,

1. That the Apostles should be deceived; Or,

2. That they should deceive others.

1. It is not likely the Apostles should be deceived, because they received not the Relations which they delivered, by here-say, but were constant Attendants of our Lord and Saviour, and saw him work his Miracles, when he cured Diseases, raised the Dead, and cast
out

out Devils. And therefore when the Apostles chose another into the room of Judas, there is this reason given for it, *Acts* 1. 21. 22. *Wherefore of these Men which have Companioned with us, all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst us, beginning from the Baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be Ordained to be a Witness with us of his Resurrection.* Here was one who together with the rest of the Apostles, was to assert upon his own Knowledge, the Actions of Jesus, his Resurrection from the Dead, and his Ascension into Heaven. And therefore *St. Luke*, Chap. 1. 2. tells us, That the things which he wrote were such as were delivered by them who were *αὐτῶν* Eye-witnesses of them. And doubtless there can be no better Testimony in the World concerning the Truth of a
mat.

matter of Fact, than from an Eye-witness of it, according to that common saying, *Pluris est unus ocularis testis, quam auriti decem*, one ocular Demonstration is worth ten Hear-says. And this was the Answer that Peter and John gave to the great Council of the Jews, *Acts 4. 20. We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

But that we may not run over the whole History of things in the Gospel, I shall content my self with that one, which is the Confirmation of all the rest of the Miracles of Jesus, that is, his Resurrection from the dead. For (as St. Paul speaks, *1 Cor. 15. 14.*) if Christ be not risen, then our Preaching is vain, and the Faith of Christians is likewise vain. The Preaching of the Apostles would have been vain, because they Exhorted Men to the Practice of the Commands and Pre-

Precepts of the Gospel, in hopes of a glorious Immortality, and that their Labour and Pains should be rewarded by the Resurrection of their Bodies to eternal Life. Whereas if Christ be not risen, there is then no Reward for Believers; and the great Noise and Talk of the Joys and Felicities of Pious Souls after this Life are nothing but the Dreams of Melancholick Persons to amuse the rest of Mankind. And the Faith of Christians (if Christ be yet in the Grave and under the Power of Death) will be as empty and vain, because it is built upon a false Foundation. For the great Argument brought by the Apostles to prove the Divine Authority of the Doctrine they Preached, was the Resurrection of Jesus from the Dead; which if there had been no such thing, St. Paul, *1 Cor. 15. 15.* says of himself and the rest

rest of the Apostles, that they had been no better than so many *False-Witnesses* of God, abusing his Name for the countenancing an Imposture ; which their Preaching had certainly been, if Christ had not really risen from the Dead.

The Scripture assures us, *Acts* 1. 3. That Jesus shewed himself alive after his Death to his Disciples, by many infallible Proofs [i. e. such Evidences wherein there could be no mistake] being seen of them Forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. And if we diligently read the History of the Gospels, we shall find the Apostles to be very scrupulous in believing Christ's Resurrection, till they had all seen him, and were convinced by as high Proofs as possibly could be offered to Mankind. And this their Cautiousness and Wariness of being imposed upon

upon, is a good Argument to us of their Sincerity and care of being fully satisfied of the Truth of it, before they went to divulge it to others. We read in *Mark* 16. 9. That Jesus first appeared to *Mary Magdalen*, and she ran with Joy to tell his weeping Friends, that she had seen the Lord, but they believed her not, v. 11. Then he appears to two of his Disciples in another Form, as they went to *Emaus*, and they told the rest, but neither would they believe them. v. 13. Then he appears to the Eleven Apostles, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of Heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen, ver. 14. And that he might confirm the Faith of one of his Disciples who doubted more than all the rest, shews him the very hole that was made in his side with the Spear, and the prints of the

the Nails in his Hands and Feet. And all this, to the end that they might be sensibly assured that it was he himself, no delusive Spectrum or Ghost, but the very same Jesus which was Crucified upon the Cross. Now from hence we see it plain, that the Apostles could not be deceived; for they took all imaginable care to avoid it; they Eat and Drank with him, and saw him with their own Eyes, leisurely lifted up from them and carried up into Heaven.

II. It is not probable the Apostles would go about to deceive others; For,

1. They might easily have been discovered. They lived in a knowing Age, wherein all Arts and Sciences flourished more than ever they had done before; and there wanted not those who had Sense and Wit enough to have found

found it out, if it had been a Cheat. The Apostles peremptorily affirmed, That Jesus who suffered under *Pontius Pilate* was the Author of the Religion they Preached, and that after his Crucifixion he rose again from the Dead. Now if there had been no such Person as Jesus that had then lived; If he had not been Crucified, and really dead on the Cross; or if there had been no such Governour of *Judea* as *Pontius Pilate*, nor any such *Roman* Emperour as *Tiberius*. If the Apostles had failed in any of these remarkable Circumstances of Story, there had been great reason to have questioned what they delivered. But we find all this confirm'd by the *Roman* Historians themselves; and neither *Jews* nor *Pagans* ever denied the Matters of Fact which the Apostles relate, because they were so newly done,

that if there had been any thing of Untruth, it would very easily have been detected by Persons then living. Besides, had the Resurrection of our Lord been a Falsehood, St. *Paul* must be extremely Impudent, nay Imprudent to bring Five hundred upon the Stage to assert a Lye ; since it is not the manner of a Cheater to provoke so many Witnesses.

2. *Cui bono* ? To what end or Purpose should they assert a Falsehood ? Or what Inducements could they have to broach a Delusion ? All that can be said is, That perhaps they might do it, to have the Name and Glory of being the Authors of a new Sect. This indeed might please the light and frothy Humour of some vain-glorious Person, but the sedate and composed Spirit of the Holy Apostles was far from any such poor design.

sign. But to answer to this more particularly :

1. It is not likely they should lay the Foundation of the best Religion in the World upon a mere Cheat. There was no colour for Lying or Fraud in the matter, and we know that *Nemo gratis fit malus*, 'tis rare for a Man to be wicked for nothing. They sought not themselves in it ; for it is evident that they were Persecuted, Disgraced, and suffered exquisite Tortures for Professing that Jesus was raised from the Dead. And for Secular and worldly Advantages they could hope for none, because all those things were in the hands either of *Jews* or *Pagans*, who were both professed Enemies of the Name of Christ. Nor can we think that the Apostles should take it upon their Death, and stand to it to their last Breath, if they had

not believed themselves sufficiently assured of that Truth for which they died. Surely Men of calm and sober Reason, would not be so prodigal of their Blood, as to throw it away upon some vain Rumour or popular Report.

Let us consider a little the Apostle St. Paul, who was a Man of great Learning among the *Jews*, very zealous for his Religion, and one that had attained to no small favour among the Grandees of his Nation, for his vigorous Persecution of the Christians. This Man tells us, that when he was going to *Damascus* with a Commission from the High-Priests to bring them bound to *Jerusalem* that professed the Faith of Christ, to be Punished: Jesus met him in the way in a Light brighter than the Sun, tells him who he was, and warns him that he should no longer

ger Persecute his Disciples: Upon this the Apostle turns Christian, and became a zealous Professor of the Faith which before he Persecuted. Now, if there had been any Fraud or Deceit in this, can we imagine St. Paul would so confidently appeal to it, and tell King *Agrippa*, *That this was not a thing done in a Corner, where there was no Body to attest it.* If therefore we believe St. Paul to be a Man of Sense and Reason, we cannot imagine that he would have quitted all the Favour and Encouragement he might have had among the *Jews*, and run himself into certain Dangers, even to the loss of his very Life, if he had not been well assured that Jesus was alive, and able to make good all he said.

2. We find that the Apostles in their Writings were Men of

great Integrity and Uprightness, of exemplary Humility, and hearty Lovers of God and all the World, and we may reasonably believe that such Persons as those would not set on foot a Falshood; and such a Falshood as they saw would draw vast multitudes to Ruine and Destruction. Nor is there any thing more contrary to the Principles of Christ's Religion, which not only banishes all Lying and Deceit as hateful Crimes, but enjoins such a sincere and universal Love to the whole World, as to be ready to lay down our Lives for one another.

If Men could be so wicked as upon Self-ends to broach a Falshood, yet if we attend to the Goodness of God, we must necessarily conclude, that he would long ere this, have discovered the Forgery. For Christianity is so framed,

framed, that the most innocent and harmless Persons in the World, who are the most sincere in their Love to God and Man, are the most easily taken with it. And therefore if it had been built upon a Falshood and an Untruth, the goodness of God was highly concerned to detect the Imposture, and not to suffer those who endeavoured to serve him in the best manner they could, to be so fatally entangled with an Error that would expose them to inevitable Ruine and Destruction.

Now, That I may compleat this Argument against all Objections and Cavils whatsoever, I shall further add, That the Apostles gave as full and high a Testimony of the Resurrection of Jesus as it is possible for Men to give for any Matter of Fact in the World. To which purpose

*See a late
Treatise,
Intituled,
A Letter
to a Deist.*

I shall borrow some few Particulars from a late Ingenious Author: *We must consider* (says he) *what those Circumstances are, which are most commonly requisite to make Humane Testimony credible, and received by all the World as true.*

1. The first thing is, if Men testify nothing but what they saw.

2. If they testify it at no long distance of time from the matter of Fact, or thing done.

3. If their Witness and Testimony be plain, and delivered without ambiguous and doubtful Expressions.

4. If a great number shall agree in testifying the same thing.

5. Lastly, If they are ready to part with all that is valuable to Mankind, rather than deny the Truth of what they have testified.

Now,

Now, where all these meet and agree, it were meer Frowardness and Humour to expect any further Evidence of the Truth of a matter of Fact. Let us examine then the Testimony of the Apostles concerning Christ's Resurrection by these Rules.

1. The Apostles witnessed nothing but what they themselves saw. They beheld our Saviour divers times after his Resurrection, they Eat and Drank with him; nor were they hasty and rash in their Belief, but suspended their Assent, till after the most full and convictive Evidence, that is the Testimony of their Senses: which Testimony, when rightly circumstantiated is infallibly true, as may easily be demonstrated. Hence it is that the Apostle appeals to them as one sure Evidence against which there can be no dispute, *1 John 1.1.*

That

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our Eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled.

2. The Apostles did not stay any long time before they made this their Testimony, but soon after the matter of Fact, and while all the Circumstances were lively and fresh in their Memories. And by this their early and timely Witness, they prevented the cavils of their Enemies, who would have been ready to have objected (had they stayed any long time) if the things they now avouched were true, why had they not discovered them sooner? Therefore upon the day of *Pentecost*, which was but a few days after our Saviour Christ's Ascension into Heaven, the Apostles in a full Assembly declared Christ's Resurrection (those very Men that
put

put him to Death being alive and in being) which they constantly afterwards and boldly asserted in the open face of the World.

3. If the Apostles had had a Mind to deceive when they affirmed, that Christ was risen from the dead, they would without question have spoken it in such doubtful terms that their meaning should not presently have been understood. And whenever the thing should be examined and narrowly looked into, they might securely escape by the favour and benefit of some ambiguous Expression, which might cunningly be drawn to different Senses and Acceptations. But on the contrary the Apostles give their Testimony of Christ's Resurrection in open, plain, and direct Terms, on purpose that no body should
mi-

mistake their meaning; *Acts 2. 32.*
 36. *This Jesus* [he whom before he had told them they had taken, and by wicked hands Crucified and Slain] *hath God raised up, whereof we all are Witnesses. Therefore let all the House of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have Crucified, both Lord and Christ.* And hence it is that this very same Apostle, divers Years afterwards with great Integrity and Sincerity makes this open profession, *2 Pet. 1. 16, 17, 18. For we have not followed cunningly devised Fables, when we made known unto you the Power and Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were Eye-witnesses of His Majesty; For he received from God the Father Honour and Glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent Glory, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from*

from Heaven we heard, when we were with him in the Holy Mount.

4. If there had been but one single Witness of Christ's Resurrection, the World would have been apt to have suspected the Truth of this Testimony: But this being a thing upon which the Ground and Foundation of Christianity lay, it was confidently affirmed by the Twelve Apostles; as in the forementioned place, *Of this we all are Witnesses, says St. Peter.* Neither were the Apostles only Witnesses of our Lord's Resurrection, but above Five hundred more, who at one time saw Jesus after he was risen from the Dead, as *St. Paul* tells us, *1 Cor. 15. 6.* And among all this Company, it is very hard to think that there should be none so honest as to discover the Cheat, if there had been any, especially when the free and open

open Profession of it was every way attended with so much Danger, Infamy, and Disgrace.

5. Lastly, That which compleats the Credibility of this Testimony is this, That there was no one of the Apostles, nor scarce any of the rest, but exposed themselves to the hazard and danger of losing all that was dear and valuable to them, rather than they would deny the Truth of what they Witnessed. If these things had hapned in a careless and drowsie Age, when People had been so indifferent about Religion as never to matter what was propounded to them; it is possible then that Men might have gone on so long in a Lye, till they had gotten Interest enough to propagate it for a Truth. But the Apostles no sooner appeared witnessing these things, but they met with

an

an early and vigorous opposition, and that from the chiefeſt Men in Power, who made it their business to suppress them. Both *Jews* and *Gentiles* were set against them, and they had no other favour shewed them but this, that if they would Recant what they had said of Jesus, and leave off speaking any more in his Name, they might enjoy their Ease and Quiet, and perhaps have some Rewards into the Bargain: But if they would persist and go on, they must look for the sharpest Trials and Persecutions which indeed these Holy Men met withal almost in all Places where they came. Now had the Resurrection of Jesus from the Dead been only a feigned Story of the Apostles, and the rest that had combined to spread it abroad, it is possible that while they met with no hazard nor danger, they might

D

carry

carry on the Cheat, yet when Life lay at Stake, it is very hard to think that any one would die for that which he knew to be an Untruth. But here we find in this case that the Apostles freely and joyfully ventured their Lives for the Truth of this, and the most of them actually lost their Lives for it. Now, he must be of a very easie and credulous Nature, and fit for nothing but to be imposed upon, that can believe so many Men of good Sence and sound Understanding, would die for a Story of their own Invention, and which their own Consciences would tell them was a notorious Falshood.

By what hath been said, it is apparent, that there was as high and full a Testimony given to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as is possible to be given to any matter of Fact. And this being put out

out of doubt, there can be no scruple left for any of the other Parts of the History of the Gospel, since the same Persons that attested the one, did likewise assure to the World the other. That is, the same Arguments which convince us of the Truth of Christ's Resurrection, do likewise establish us in the Faith of the whole Christian Religion. Neither do I know what can with any colour be objected against this, unless Men out of an obstinate Humour, will rather adhere to that poor Subterfuge of the *Jews*, and for the spreading abroad of which they gave large Money to the Soldiers, viz. *That his Disciples came by Night and stole him away while the Watch Slept.* Which because by it they intended to discredit our Saviour and his Doctrine, I shall shew how vain it is.

1. It is not likely the Disciples, who fled from him when he was taken, and the stoutest of them denied him, should now, that he was dead, venture to steal his Body from a Guard of Soldiers.

2. How improbable is it that all the Watch should be asleep at one time?

3. If they were all asleep, how could they tell that the Disciples took him away, and not that he arose from the dead by the mighty Power of God, as the Apostles affirmed?

4. How could it be, that the Disciples should come just at that very time, when they were all asleep?

5. How could they go so silently to work, as to roll away the Stone, and to take out the Body (all which would have made some noise, and took up
some

some time) and yet none of the Watch hear them? Besides, there is another Circumstance, which cannot well agree with the haste and fear these poor Disciples must needs be in, in such an Attempt; and that is, That care which was taken to lay the Linnen Cloaths by themselves in the Sepulchre, *Luke 24. 12.* And yet the Napkin that was about his Head, did not lie with the rest of the Linnen Cloaths, but was wrapped together in a place by it self: *Joh. 20. 7.* which is the most unlikely thing in the World, that the Disciples should be so curious in sorting the Linnen, which they would either have taken away with the Body, or at least not have spent time to wrap it so carefully together.

6. Lastly, Suppose they had taken away the Body, *Quid ex cadavere emolumenti?* What benefit

could they hope from a dead Carcass? Would that be enough to make them forsake their dearest Relations, to lay aside the Sentiments and Opinions in which they had for a long time been Educated and Instructed, to expose themselves to a thousand vexatious Reproaches, and at last to a vile and ignominious Death, and all to maintain the Credit of a Person that had so grossly frustrated their Expectations? Surely, he that can believe such things of the Apostles, must offer the greatest Violence in the World not only to his own, but to the Understanding of all Mankind.

And now we cannot but see the unreasonableness of Infidelity; that it must be either a very crooked and untoward Education, or an obstinate, base, and perverse Spirit, that carries Men with so much

con-

contempt and scorn against the belief of the Holy Scriptures. For if these Persons were asked upon what account they give credit to *Thucydides's History of the Peloponnesian War*, or *Plutarch's Lives*, or any other ancient Historian; they must say that the constant and universal consent of the most Learned and Judicious, hath all along determined those Persons to be the Authors of those Books, and that they were Persons of Credit and Veracity. And is it not meer Frowardness, Humour, and Fantastickness to reject the Testimony of the Catholick Church handed down successively for Sixteen hundred Years and upwards, concerning the Books of the New-Testament? Let them but have the same Temper and Disposition of Mind in respect of the History of the Gospels that they retain in

behalf of the forementioned Historians, and they must of necessity confess that there are at least as many and as weighty Motives of credibility for that as possibly can be excogitated for these.

Moreover, according to the different Natures of things, there are different ways of Probation, and no Man will expect a Mathematical Demonstration to prove a Moral Proposition; It is sufficient to every Ingenuous Nature that there be as full and clear Evidence as the matter can bear. Hence our Lord and Saviour (though it might seem more satisfactory to have seen him as the Apostles did with a Man's own Eyes) yet pronounces them *Blessed that have not seen, and yet have believed*: intimating, that it is a more generous Faith to believe unsuspected Witnesses upon

John 20.
29.

upon the full and clear Evidence of the matter of Fact, than if this Faith were constrained, and as it were necessitated by ocular Demonstration. Hence we may understand the meaning of those words of our Saviour, *Mat. 12. 32. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: But whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this World, neither in the World to come*; that is, though it were a great Sin not to believe our Saviour to be sent from God, after he had given such manifest proof of it by his numerous and stupendous Miracles, yet the Sin was not come to its height, because there wanted yet further Evidence; Our Lord was not yet risen from the Dead: But after his Resurrection and Ascension into

into Heaven, and as a Confirmation of this, the Mission of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles (who was also one of Christ's Witnesses) then the Sin became deadly, because the last means were used, and the fullest proofs of Credibility given that could be expected for matter of Fact; that is, there was every thing done which might procure Belief in a disinterested Person; And therefore, for any obstinately to contradict this, is quite to prescind his own hopes, and shut the door against himself, by wilfully rejecting all those Arguments which might and ought to have gained belief. I pray God open the Eyes of those who slight and undervalue Christianity, as if it were not *πιστὸς λόγος, καὶ πάντως ἀποδο-*
χῆς ἁΐτιος, a faithful and true Word,
 and

1 Tim. 4.
9.

and every way *Worthy to be Received*, that they may timely see and repent of their Error, and through a sincere acknowledgment of the Truth may be eternally Saved.

A D E-

A
DEFENCE
OF
Revealed Religion.

SERMON II.

ROM. I. 16.

*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel
of Christ —*

WE have shewn from
these Words, That
the History of the
Life and Actions of our blessed
Saviour, his Death, Resurrection,
and Ascension into Heaven is true,
and being so, we have no reason
to be ashamed of our Religion,
which

which is built upon these things. Truth is a thing that none need to be ashamed of, because it is a Perfection, a Ray, and Beam that descends from God the Fountain of all Truth. Now the Truth of the History of the Gospel depending upon the Veracity of those that wrote it, we shewed that the Apostles could not be deceived, because they were present and Eye-witnesses of the things they set down. And we have no reason to suspect they would deceive others, because they might have been discovered, and besides had no self-ends nor designs in broaching a Falshood, but on the contrary, were ready to Sacrifice their own Lives for the Truth of what they said; and lastly, That they gave as high a Testimony of the Resurrection of Jesus (on which all his other Miracles depended)

as

as possibly can be given by Men to any Thing or Matter in the World.

2. The next cause of Shame is, if the Doctrine delivered to us be not Rational; therefore we come now to shew that Christianity, or the Doctrine of the Gospel is rational, that is, agreeable with those common Notions of Reason and Understanding, which God has planted in the Souls of all Mankind. And indeed, if we believe that it is true, and came from God, it must necessarily follow, that there can be nothing contained in it that is unreasonable; forasmuch as God being the highest Reason, cannot be the Author of any thing that is unreasonable; for then he would be the Author of something unlike himself, and that had no Analogy or Correspondence with any of his Attributes.

butes. And therefore to affirm that God can propound to us what is altogether Irrational, and bears no Harmony or Agreement with any of our Faculties, is to make him the Author of Nonsense, Contradictions, and Impossibilities.

Reason is that Light and Candle of the Lord, which he has set up in the Souls of Men to guide them safe from Error, Falshood, and Delusion. And when we say a thing is reasonable, we say that it hath a Conformity with those Intellectual Principles the sovereign Author of our Beings has planted in us. There is a suitableness and agreeableness of such things with the rational frame and make of our own Souls. Therefore the Apostle calls our Conformity to the Divine Will (which he terms *Rom. 12. 1. a presenting our Bodies a living Sacrifice,*
Holy

holy and acceptable unto God) a reasonable Service, that is, such a Worship (as if we understand our selves) is fitted and accommodated to our natural Faculties of Reason and Understanding. And hence it is that St. Peter bids us *to be ready, πρὸς ἀπολογία* to give an Answer, or make an Apology to every Man that asks us a Reason of the hope that is in us, i. e. he would have us prepared to give a satisfactory and rational account why we are Christians. But now if there were any thing in Christian Religion that were unreasonable, what Apology could be made for it? Or how should any Man defend a thing that were wholly contrary to that Light which God has set up in his Soul to discern between Truth and Falshood: So that if there lie an Obligation upon us to give a Reason of our Faith,
E then

then we may be sure there is no part of it unreasonable.

But here we must note in the mean time, that it is one thing to say that there are some Articles of the Christian Faith above Humane Reason, and another thing to say they are unreasonable or contrary to sound Reason. The frame of Christianity it self is called by St. Paul, 1 Tim. 3. 16. *μυστήριον μέγα*, a great Mystery, and a Mystery we know must have something hidden and recondit in it, which is discerned only by capable Minds. And there may be, and doubtless are, some sacred and hidden Doctrines in Christian Religion above Humane Reason in this Sense, viz. That our Reason could never have lighted upon them, or found them out, without a Divine Revelation. But notwithstanding these Myste-
rious Truths are very agreeable
with

with our Reason now they are discovered, and there is a rational Defence to be made for them, and a satisfactory Account to be given of every one of them. We could never by the bare help of Reason, have known any thing of the Union of God with Humane Nature; nor discovered the Doctrine of the sacred Trinity, nor the Mystery of the Resurrection of our Bodies, nor the Joys and Felicities of Heaven, if God had not revealed these things to us. But now, that they are made a part of our Faith, we can shew that none of them is contradictory to the Principles of sound Reason.

If therefore there be any unreasonableness in Christianity, it must arise either,

1. From the Frame and Contexture of it. Or,

E 2

2. From

2. From the Doctrines contained in it.

That there is no unreasonableness or incongruity in the Frame of Christianity will appear thus; the great End and Design of it, is to release and free the Souls of Men from a State of Sin and Evil, into which they had unhappily plunged themselves, and to recover them into a holy, blameless, and heavenly Life and Nature, that behaving themselves harmlessly and unblameably as the Children of God, though encompassed with many Hardships and Afflictions which they meet withal in their Passage through the Wilderness of this World, they may at last, thro' his infinite Goodness, arrive by orderly steps and degrees to the Land of Righteousness, their ancient Inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the free Coun-

Counsel and Determination of Almighty God, which flowed only from his immense and boundless Love.

Now, the Methods and Ways which God hath made choice of to bring this great design about, are such, so fitted and adapted to to our Case and Condition, and so agreeable to the Nature of reasonable Creatures, that if a disinterested and unprejudiced Person were to speak his Mind, he would say, That neither the Wit of Men nor Angels could find out a more agreeable and effectual means for the recovery of the World, than what is already made use of in the contrivance of the Gospel. For here God hath consulted the Weaknesses, Infirmities, Prejudices and Imperfections of Mankind, which they had contracted by a long Degeneracy and Corruption,
E 3 and

and Corruption, and which were become so inveterate and deeply radicated, as not to be removed but by such a Dispensation as might so far gratifie Humane Affections and natural Propensions, as might be consistent with the Honour and Sanctity of the Divine Nature. And this is that which St. Paul calls the *Foolishness of Preaching*, 1 Cor. 1. 21. *For after that, in the Wisdom of God, the World by Wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the Foolishness of Preaching to save them that believe.* Which is not so to be understood, as if the Pagan World had no knowledge of the one only true God, the Creator and Governour of all things, (forthen the Apostle would have contradicted what he had said in another place, Rom. 1. 19. where he says the *τὸ γνωστὸν τῷ θεῷ*, that which is knowable, or may be

be known of God, was manifest within them) but that the generality of the World before Christianity, by their natural Light and Contemplation of the Works of God, did not attain to such a Practical Knowledge of God, as might both free them from Idolatry, and effectually bring them to a Holy Life; to both which ends Christian Religion was designed of God that it should attain: Therefore it pleased God [by the foolishness of Preaching] to save them that believe, i. e. by a way of condescending Wisdom, gratifying all our innocent Propensions, and accommodating it self so far to the radicated and inveterate Prepositions of Humane Minds.

To give some Instances of this condescending Wisdom; besides the general Impurity and Corruption of the Lives of Men,

See Dr.
Cudworth
Intel. Syst.
l. I. c. 4.
p. 468.

a Learned Jewish Author gives this Account of the *Pagan* Polytheism and Idolatry ; 'The Idolaters (says he) first argued thus in respect of GOD; That since he 'was of such transcendent Perfection above Men, it was not possible 'for Men to be united to, or have 'Communion with him, otherwise than by means of certain 'middle Beings or Mediators ; 'as it is the manner of Earthly 'Kings to have Petitions conveyed 'to them by the hands of Mediators and Intercessors. Secondly, 'They thus argued also in respect 'of themselves; That being Corporeal, so that they could not 'apprehend GOD abstractly, they 'must needs have something sensible to excite and stir up their 'Devotion, and to fix their imaginations upon. Here being then so early a Prepossession and general

ral debauching of Men's Minds, Divine Goodness and Wisdom hath so condescended to Humane Frailties and Inclinations, as instead of that multitude of *Middle Beings* or *Mediators* (which *Apuleius* calls, *Inter terricolae Calicolasque Vectores*, *hinc precum, inde donorum, qui ultrò curòque pertant, hinc Petitiones inde Suppetias* : A kind of Carriers between the Inhabitants of Heaven and Earth, who travelling to and fro, carry our Prayers and Petitions thither, and bring from thence Gifts and Supplies for us) to constitute and appoint *One Mediator between God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus*, who offers up our Petitions, and intercedes with GOD and procures Blessings and Favours for us. By his Intervention we receive seasonable Supplies for all our Exigences and Necessities here, and he takes care to conduct us at last

De Deo
Socratis.

to

to that Immortal Glory that he himself is now possessed of. And that we may not err in transferring our Worship upon the Creature, upon the Account that we can have no abstracted Conception of G O D, and in this our Earthly State need something to invigorate our Devotion, and fix our Imagination upon, G O D hath cloathed himself with our Flesh and Blood, and taken into a near Union with himself the Soul and Body of our Lord Jesus ; so that though rude and ignorant Mortals might fancy G O D as a pure and immense Spirit too, raised an Object for them in this their degenerate Condition to have any Conception of, yet what is sensible and visible and congenerous with themselves, they must needs have an apprehension of, and such is the Body of our Lord Jesus, which is the Temple wherein now
the

the Divinity is enshrined, and wherein the *Schechinah* or glorious Majesty and Presence of God resides and manifests it self. Which is a clear Instance of the condescending Wisdom of G O D, which in compliance with the Prepossessions and Mistakes of Mankind, wherein they were fatally and inextricably involved, hath provided a visible Object of their Worship and Adoration, by uniting himself with Humane Flesh. I might instance in divers other Congruities, wherein Christianity is so exquisitely fitted to redeem the World from the Tyranny of Satan, and yet to gratifie even in a sensible manner all the more innocent Propensions and Inclinations of Mankind: But I shall have occasion to take notice of some in the Progress of my Discourse.

It will now be requisite to take a more near and intimate view of the frame and contexture of Christianity, wherein we shall with admiration behold a mighty congruity with our natural Faculties, and a wonderful compliance all along with our Infirmities and Necessities. For what can be thought more becoming and reasonable, than

1. That some extraordinary Person should be sent from Heaven, who should in the most convincing manner assure Men of the Will of God? Now this is already done; For by the Gospel we are assured that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God hath appeared upon Earth to declare his Father's Will unto Men. And by this way of proceeding, God not only conciliates Reverence and Esteem to the Doctrine that was deli-

delivered, but gives an evident and mighty demonstration of his infinite Love and Goodness, and that he is really desirous of Mens eternal Happiness and Welfare. In that the Will of God was discovered and made known by a Person so near and dear to him as his own Son, is a sufficient ground of Reverence and Esteem. Since all People in the World have ever received a Message from Heaven with the highest Veneration, and so much the more as the Person that delivered it was of higher and greater worth. And this was so general a Persuasion, that the most famous Law-givers amongst the *Pagans*, that they might make their Laws pass the better, and find a more ready Acceptation with the People, they feigned some Heavenly Power or other to be Author of them. And what was but pretended

tended by them, was really and truly performed by our blessed Saviour, who being the eternal Son of G O D, clothed himself with Flesh and Blood, and asserted his Commission to be from G O D, and was owned by a Voice from Heaven to be what he declared himself. And lest this should not be enough to convince the World, and through their gross Infidelity, they should not give that reverence and ready compliance that is due to so great a Majesty; besides, the reiterating this Voice at two other times before unsuspected Witnesses, G O D endues our Lord and Saviour with such a miraculous Power as no Man ever had before. So that it was truly said of him by the Multitude, upon the casting out of a Devil, *Mat. 9. 33.* *That it was never so seen in Israel.* Here was sufficient Evidence to
 prove

prove that Christ was sent from G O D. But that there might be nothing wanting to give the highest certainty that so great a Truth is capable of, after the *Jews* had put Jesus to Death as a Deceiver, G O D openly vindicates his Innocency, by raising him from the Dead, by which we have all the assurance imaginable, that what our Lord spake and did in his Life-time, he acted by divine Designation and Appointment.

2. It appears very reasonable that this Person whom G O D intrusts with the Delivery of his Will, should shew us by his own Example what kind of Life it is that G O D requires of us, and which will at last procure our happiness. For by how much the more Examples prevail with Men than naked Precepts and Persuasions, by so much the more will this Divine
 Person

Person 'consult our Frailties and Infirmities, who are with greater easiness allured to walk in that Path wherein we have seen another go before us. And such a course as this will give great Ease and Relief to the Minds of Men, that G O D requires no Impossibilities of them, when they see one dwelling in their own Nature, and surrounded with the same Infirmities, and yet living up exactly to the Rules of that Divine Life he prescribes to others.

And in this Example of Christ, there is a double Convenience,

1. Here we are taught in a familiar way, by one of the same Flesh and Blood with our selves. When the Will of G O D was delivered upon Mount Sinai to the Jews, it was in such a terrible and amazing manner, that the People were affrighted and astonished at it.

it. As it is natural for all unusual and terrible things to cause a horror and dread in weak and frail Mortals. Therefore it is infinitely more agreeable and desirable that G O D should manifest his Will in the mildest, sweetest, and most attractive manner, which could no better way be done, than that this Person who came from him should be clothed with Flesh and Blood. For hereby our Weakness is consulted, and we have a mighty comfort in our greatest Streights and Necessities, being assured (as the Scripture speaks, *Heb. 4. 15, 16.*) *That we have not such an High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our Infirmities, but such an one as was in all points tempted as we are, though without Sin.* And because through a sense of our own Guiltiness, we are apt to be afraid of the Majesty of G O D, and dare

F

not

not approach unto him ; Now, that he condescends to visit us in our own Likeness, and instruct us by one of our Brethren, we come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy, and find χάριν eis ἑνώμητον βοήθειαν Grace for seasonable Relief.

2. In the Example of Christ we see what little regard is had of all those things which the carnal and sensual Man so much prizes and values ; and that the Divine and Heavenly Life is no part of any of these things. Such as Pride and Vain-glory, Worldly Power, and Dominion, Covetousness, and an immoderate desire and hankering after sensual Pleasures. These are things that debase, inebriate, and intoxicate the carnal Mind, and from which luscious and powerful Inescations our Lord and Saviour came to loose and set us free.

And

And therefore our Lord chose not to be born in a splendid manner, but of a poor Virgin that had but a pair of Turtle-Doves to offer for his Redemption, and to be Cradled in a Manger among the meanest of his Creatures. And as his Birth was humble and mean, so all his Life-time he refused all Earthly Splendor and Glory ; To instruct us, That the true Advancement and Perfection of our Souls consists in the lowest and most humble Resignation of themselves to the Will of G O D. And that the more unaffected a Man lives to the Complacencies and Delights of the Animal Life, the more he Spiritualizes his Soul, and makes it capable of enjoying Communion with G O D.

Our most Holy Lord never coveted after Earthly Riches and Possessions, that he might lead our

F 2

Minds

A Defence of Ser.II.

Minds from this Dunghil to the fair Mansions of Heaven, and shew us that *Man lives not by Bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds out of the Mouth of God.* The whole course of his Life was a continued contradiction of the flattering Pleasures of Flesh and Blood, and a perpetual slighting and undervaluing all that which the World calls Happiness, teaching us that the true divine Life (though it be not accompanied with any Earthly Advantages, such as Honour, and Wealth, and Power) is more dear and valuable in GOD'S Eyes, than any thing in the whole comprehension of Nature besides.

3. It seems further mighty agreeable and consentaneous to Reason, that since Mankind had so foully revolted from GOD, and lapsed so deeply from the eternal

Laws

Ser.II. Revealed Religion. 69

Laws of Righteousness, there should be some effectual course found out, whereby to demonstrate the Anger and Displeasure of GOD conceived against Sin, and withal to reconcile the World unto himself.

Though it be true, that it is no breach of Law or Justice for a Person to recede from his Right, yet God being the supream Governour of the World, if he should have pardoned Sin upon no Terms, or upon such as had been light and trifling, it would have emboldned Men in their Wickedness, since they could obtain their Pardon at such a cheap and easie rate. Therefore God in his infinite Wisdom, that he might shew his extream hatred of all Sin and Evil, and the most powerfully wind off Men from it, he takes this way, *viz.* That his only begotten Son should offer up

F 3

his

his Life for the Redemption of the World, and that his Death should be an Expiatory Sacrifice for all Mens Sins.

Whereby God both discovers to us the ugly and polluted nature of Sin, and his just Displeasure against it, in that strange way he has taken to punish it by the Death and Passion of his only begotten Son; And withal, takes away all jealous and misgiving Thoughts out of our Minds, and quiets our Consciences, by shewing that he is no Adamantine and Rocky, no Implacable and Inexorable Being, that is for ever deaf to the pitious Complaints of the miserable and Calamitous, but will take us again into Grace and Favour upon our Submission and Repentance.

More-

Moreover, in this Sacrifice of the Death of Christ, there was a manifest condescension and purposed compliance with that early Persuasion so universally rooted in the Minds of all Nations of the World, That the offended *Numen* was only to be appeased by Sacrifice. And this was the Reason the *Gauls* gave for their Sacrificing of Men; *Pro vitâ hominum nisi vitâ hominis reddatur, non posse Deorum Immortalium Numen placari arbitrabantur: i. e.* They thought the Anger of God could not otherwise be averted, unless the Life of some Man were offered as a *Piacular* Sacrifice for the safety of the rest. Now our Lord, by his Death, extricated Men from this insulting Pride and Cruelty of the Devil, in his barbarous Usage and infinite Contempt of humane Race; and the shedding of his Blood be-

Caesar.
Comment.

came a real Propitiatory Sacrifice, to appease the Anger of God, and to obtain Terms of Reconciliation and Peace with him for all his lapsed Brethren.

4. It is highly reasonable that this Preacher of Righteousness, the Person who should undertake to bring back the strayed Souls of Men to their Obedience to God, should have all Power committed into his hands both in Heaven and Earth. For since he humbled himself so far as to take upon him the form of a Servant, and vilified his own Life in comparison of that great benefit that would accrue to the World by his laying it down, and submitted to the ignominious and accursed Death of the Cross, Divine Justice was concerned to Reward these Exinanitions with a proportionable Glory. And that he might be

be instated in a capacity to Reward his faithful Friends and Adherents, and Punish his refractory and stubborn Enemies, it became necessary that he should have the Government of Heaven and Earth put into his hands. For this is a great Security to us, That our Lord is able to make good whatever he has promised to his Servants, and a powerful Encouragement to us to persevere and go on to the end in Virtue, though we pass through many Troubles and Afflictions. And being thus made God's Vicegerent, we cannot doubt but he will order all Affairs of the World for the good of his Church, and at last remarkably Triumph over all the Powers of Darkness.

You see now the reasonableness and becomingness of the Frame of Religion, and how suitable and agreeable it is to our Capacities and

and Necessities. All which, when St. Paul had considered, he breaks out into a kind of Admiration, *Rom. 11. 33. O the depth of the Riches both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgments, and his ways past finding out!* God being an infinite Wisdom, has various ways and methods of Governing and Ordering his Creatures far above our shallow Comprehensions; But the way of recovering Men is that which he has made choice of, and discovered to us by Jesus Christ, in which there are such easie compliances with those inveterate Prejudices the World laboured under, and such apt Condescensions to Humane Nature, as when the whole Frame and Contexture is laid open to an entire view, we cannot wonder that the Angels desire to look into it.

Which

Which plainly shews, that Religion is no confused Jumble or Nonsense, but a Contrivance wherein appears the greatest Art and highest Wisdom in the World. And if all sober Persons admire the infinite Wisdom of God in the Works of Nature, as the creation of the Sun, Moon, and Stars; they have much more reason to stand amazed at this great Work of the New Creation, or recovery of Mens Souls to their first and Original Happiness. And if we can give a satisfactory Account of the Order and Management of the several *Phænomena* of Providence in the natural World, so in like manner there is a very reasonable Defence to be made for the Contrivance and Conduct of Affairs in the Moral.

A D E-

A
DEFENCE
 OF
Revealed Religion.

SERMON III.

ROM. I. 16.

*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel
 of Christ —*

THat there is no unreasonableness in the Frame and Composition of Christianity, but that it is infinitely agreeable and suitable to our Case and Necessities, we have clearly demonstrated : It remains now that we shew with the same Plainness,

ness, that there is nothing disagreeing with sound Reason in the Doctrines contained in it, that so we may see that upon neither of these two Accounts we have any cause to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

The Doctrines of Christianity consist either,

1. Of such things as are to be believed as Articles of Faith. Or,
2. Of such things as are commanded as Duties and Matters of our Practice. Or,
3. Of Promises of great Rewards to them that shall be Obedient, and severe Punishments and Threatnings to the Stubborn and Rebellious, who refuse to walk according to those Rules laid down in the Gospel.

As to the Articles of Faith, we shall briefly run over some of the chief of them, that it may appear
how

how consonant they are to the light of our own Reasons and Understandings.

That our blessed Saviour should be born in an unusual and extraordinary manner of a pure and immaculate Virgin ; that there should be an Apparition of Angels at his Birth ; that the Wise Men of the *East* should have notice and come to see him, are all things so highly becoming, that we should wonder if the same, or something like them, had not been done. For our Lord being to be the greatest Person that ever appeared in the World, and being designed to be the fairest Copy of a Holy and Pure Life, and to correct all the carnal Exorbitances and Corporeal Impurities in which Mankind wallowed, as if their only Felicity had consisted in the highest and rankest Exercise of their
Ani-

Animal Powers, it was very agreeable that his Birth should be different from the common manner. And that he should have no other Father but God, was a way very suitable to gain a greater Authority to those Holy Precepts that he should deliver to the World; this being the universal Sense of Mankind, that there is the greatest Reverence due to what any Person nearly related to God communicates. And that the Angels should usher in his wonderful Nativity with a solemn Anthem, is no more than what served to enhance and set forth the Eminency, Value, and Dignity of his Person, who was to be the great Prince of Angels as well as Men; and in that Christ was designed to be the Hope of all the ends of the Earth, and the Person in whom the Gentiles should trust, though the *Magi* or Wise-Men

Men intended no such thing, yet it may well seem a Prefiguration of that chearful Submission the Gentile World should yield to him as their Prince and Redeemer, so soon as he should come to be manifested to them.

And that Christ should appear in the World like one of us, Cloathed with Flesh and Blood, is more suitable to our State and Condition, than if God should speak by an Angel, or a Voice from Heaven. For since many Troubles, Afflictions, and Tribulations attend us in our way to Immortality, it cannot but be a greater encouragement to us to bear them with Patience, when we see our most Holy and Innocent Lord suffer a World of Reproaches and Indignities, and much hard usage before he entred into his Glory. Nor is it any more unbecoming

or unworthy the Majesty of God to unite himself with a Humane Body, which his own *hands have fashioned*, and which is *fearfully and wonderfully made*, than it was for the Divine Presence to take up its Residence in the Jewish Temple, and dwell in a House of Stone.

Lastly, That Jesus Christ should be made the visible Judge of Men and Angels, is no less congruous and rational.

1. In respect of himself, this Honour and Triumph of the Divine Life being a just Reward of his voluntary Sufferings and Humiliation; which is the Account our Saviour Christ gives himself, *John 5. 27. And hath given him Authority to execute Judgment also, because he is the Son of Man.* That is, because he humbled himself to so high a degree as not only to take upon him our Flesh and Blood with all
its

its harmless Infirmities and Imperfections, but endured with wonderful Patience the Contradictions of Sinners, the opprobrious Tauntings and Revilings of a Rude Generation, and submitted himself at last to a Death full of Pain, Ignominy and Disgrace.

2. In regard of wicked Men and Devils; For this visible Appearance of Jesus Christ in so solemn a manner, attended with innumerable Legions of mighty Angels, descending into these lower Regions near the Earth, the Glory of whose Presence will be conspicuous to all the World, must needs be a very sensible Conviction to all Wicked Persons of the Folly of their Doings, when they shall see the same Jesus that delivered the Will of God to them, now come to call them to an account for not obeying it. And since there may be,
G 2 and

and doubtless are many Scoffing, Atheistical Spirits in the Aerial Regions as well as here on Earth, who ascribe all great Mutations in the World to Chance and Fortune, or the necessary Combinations of Matter, this appearance of our Lord and Saviour in such a visible manner, according to the sure Predictions of the Holy Scriptures, will effectually confute their vain Philosophy, and force them even against their Wills to acknowledge the Interposition of a Divine Power and Providence. Neither will it be a less afflicting Abasement of the insulting Pride of that Old Serpent and his Rebellious Associates, who so long Tyrannized over Mankind with such Contempt and Scorn, to feel themselves cast down into everlasting Destruction by that Nature which they had so much vilified and abused.

3. In

3. In respect of those who have been faithful Adherents of Christ Jesus, and firmly persisted in Goodness, notwithstanding the many discouragements they met withal, his Appearance in such a sensible manner will be exceeding comfortable and joyful; for they beholding him coming down from Heaven with such transcendent Power and Glory, must needs overflow with transports of Joy, to find that now their Redemption will be fully compleated: For what may not they hope for at his hands, who is both their merciful Redeemer and their Judge? And this very sight of their long-expected Saviour, will invigorate their Souls with such a high degree of Life, as shall, through the inward Operation of the Divine Spirit, transform their vile Bodies into the similitude of the glorious Body of the

G 3

the

the Son of God ; and in these fiery Chariots like *Elijah*, they shall ascend from these mortal Regions to augment the Train of this great and Almighty Judge. So every way agreeable are the Articles of our Christian Faith.

2. We come now to the second Part of the Doctrines of Christianity, which consists of such things as are commanded as Duties and matters of our Practice. Which are only a reviving the natural Inscriptions and Laws of Righteousness Engraven upon our Souls at their first Creation. For it cannot be thought but that that long Degeneracy we lay under, and the powerful and vigorous growth of our Animal Faculties must exceedingly impair, if not wholly obliterate the fair Impresses of the Divine Nature upon us, so that we have need to have all those

those eternal Rules of Righteousness and Holiness to be laid down to us afresh. And the manifestation of the Duties and Obligations that Christianity lays upon us, is the exfufcitating and raising up that decaying, and almost dying spark of Divine Life yet left in us, and which may gain such strength by the powerful energy of the Spirit of Christ, as to consume or convert into its Nature all that Rubbish which hindred and obstructed it. And according to these Measures the Commands and Laws of Christianity are framed, so that they are a part of the ancient Intellectual Furniture of our own Souls. For surely, there can be nothing more natural and consistent with our rational Frame, than to Love and Honour God, from whose infinite Fulness, we and all things, received their Being,

with all our Hearts, and with all our Strength : To depend upon him for all our Supplies, and to acknowledge our own Nothingness, that all that we have proceeds and flows from his inexhausted Bounty : To sit quiet and contented under the various Dispensations of his Providence, and to bring our Minds into a Subordination and perfect Conformity to his Holy Will in all things.

And as Christianity enjoins us to pay all Duty, and Service, and Obedience to God, so it strictly Commands all manner of Justice and Righteousness to others ; forbidding all harm and wrong to any thing living, and instead of that, requiring every Man in his several Station and Capacity to do all that Good that at any time lies in his Power. To be kind and compassionate, forgetting and forgiving all

all manner of Injuries done unto us, and returning Good for the Evil that we have received.

Furthermore, Christianity commands us to avoid all Lying and Hypocrisie, as things beneath the excellency and dignity of our Nature, and to speak the Truth in sincerity and singleness of Heart. To banish out of our Minds all Malignity, Rancour, Malice and Envy, as being the most contrary to the Nature of God, who delights in the Prosperity and Happiness of his Creatures ; and therefore the Soul of a Christian above all others is enlarged and widened with an universal Love and Charity, readily undertaking the help and relief of the Necessitous and Indigent, looking upon all Mankind as Brethren, and thereby joying and delighting in the Felicity of the whole World.

Now

Now as to our selves, we are engaged by the Precepts of our Holy Religion, to exercise great Temperance and Moderation, Sobriety and Chastity, in reference to all Corporeal Satisfactions and Delights: Not to defile and pollute our selves with debauched and sensual Pleasures, but to remember that our Souls once came from the pure and incorruptible Mansions of Heaven, and therefore, that it is very unbecoming to suffer them to wallow and tumble in the Dirt and Mire of the Earth. And since we are of a Divine Extraction, Religion puts us in Mind to behave our selves as Citizens of that Heavenly Country, and to release and withdraw our Affections from this World, and to think of our return thither from whence we have so long banished our selves. For certainly nothing so much effeminates,

minates, debases, and shrivels up the Mind of Man, as Covetousness and a sordid pursuit of Riches, rendring it unfit for any Noble and Generous Action, and is really the most despicable Drudgery and Slavery that any one can fall under. It were endless to pursue every single Vertue that is propounded and countenanced in the Rules of Christianity; and therefore this may suffice to conclude this Head withal, that there is nothing that is truly Heroical and Divine, nothing that is Graceful and Lovely, and matter of good Report and Praise, but it is a part of the Duty of a Christian.

And now we may safely appeal to the common understanding of all Men, whether any of these things are unreasonable; or whether they are not rather adapted for the advancement of our Souls to their

their highest Perfection. Indeed, if we look upon every thing to be unreasonable that goes cross to our corrupt Lusts and Affections, and that any way contradicts our carnal and sensual Desires, then Christian Religion will be the most unreasonable thing in the World. But this were to become brutish, and not to discern what is really the Advantage and Perfection of Humane Minds. For the denying the Cravings of our corrupt Appetites, and the dying to our Corporeal Affections, is the enlivening that better and diviner Part of us, and the asserting our selves into our true Liberty and Freedom.

3. The third Head under which we comprehended the Doctrines of Christianity is, the Promises of great Rewards to all those that sincerely and conscientiously obey the Gospel; and severe Punishments

ments threaten'd to the Stubborn and Refractory. We shall consider both these Parts distinctly and severally: I say therefore, That God should annex Rewards to the Performance of his Commands, will appear very reasonable and becoming, if not wholly necessary.

1. In regard of the Weakness of our State and Condition. For that long Degeneracy we lay in under Sin, had through constant exercise and continuance of Time, so vitiated and weakned our best Powers and Faculties, that we could never, by our own solitary endeavours recover our selves. And though Vertue be in it self exceeding lovely and amiable, and attractive of the Hearts of all those whose Eyes are in some good measure opened to discern the Beauty of it: Yet the generality of Men have

have the Eyes of their Minds so fast closed, that the brightness and excellency of it can make no sensible Impression upon them. Therefore it is not only very becoming that Evangelical Oeconomy God has set on Foot, but necessary that there should be some further powerful encouragement made use of, than what is derived from the naked Contemplation of Vertue it self. For if Vertue alone be so charming, it will be much more, when it comes accompanied with the security of Immortal Glory. And if some Men can make such hopeful Beginnings, and overcome many Difficulties, and endure much Hardship for the Attainment of Vertue, (as many of the Poor Heathens did, meerly for Vertue's sake, without any consideration of Reward) surely there is none that can flinch or give back, when
besides

besides the Pleasure of the thing it self, there is so stupendious a Reward annexed to it. So that in this God hath both consulted the Weaknesses and Necessities of Mankind, and taken such a course as may render the Recovery of his own Nature in them to become effectual.

2. GOD hath so tempered things, that he hath left room sufficient for Ingenuity to show and exercise it self; and they that Love GOD because he hath proposed a Reward, do yet in effect do it for the transcendent excellency of his Nature. Because no Man can have a certain and assured Hope of this Reward, but it must flow from the consideration of the infinite Goodness and Benignity of GOD displayed to the World. Therefore when GOD has proposed a Reward to the Love of
Ver-

Vertue, it doth not extinguish that natural Love which the Soul retains of so excellent an Object, but heightens and inflames it. The Reward serves as a Spur to quicken and sharpen our Desire and Contention after that which we apprehend has so much Pleasure and Satisfaction in it.

3. Rewards are congruously enough annexed to the Laws and Commands of GOD, that Men might not look upon him as rigid and severe, but as a Being that truly desires their Good and Well-being. For Vertue and Holiness, and that new Nature that is required of us under the Gospel, being every way so ungrateful to Flesh and Blood, (as tending to the extirpation of all carnal Desires) if there had been no Rewards proposed, sinful and unworthy Men would have had jealous and suspicious thoughts
of

of GOD, as if he had been either Severe and Tyrannical, or that Vertue and Goodness had not been a thing of that Value and Consequence that now we see it is. But now, by proposing so great a Reward, and making such ample Promises to unfeigned Piety, it is a clear Evidence that he would have this to take effect, and that he is ready to promote it so far as may consist with the Nature of Rational Creatures.

And as for the Commination of extremest Punishments to those that forget GOD, it will appear no less reasonable upon these two Accounts :

1. To uphold the Righteous Government of GOD in the World. For in that God is an infinite Purity and Holiness, and has endued Men and Angels with such a large-Portion of this his

H

Na.

Nature, that nothing but their own perverse Wills could divest them of this happy State, it is hard to conceive that G O D could, by any better way, manifest his hatred and Detestation of all Sin and Evil, than by exposing it publicly to a deserved Punishment. For should this Pure and Holy Being never step forth in a signal and remarkable manner to Punish Wickedness and Vice, bold and daring Sinners would conclude as formerly they have done, *Psal. 50.*

21. *That God was altogether such an one as themselves:* That Sin and Evil were only Fantastick Things, and that G O D did not trouble himself with the Actions of Men. Such Thoughts as these cast the highest reproach upon G O D and his Government and Providence in the World. And therefore he is in a very great manner concerned to vin-

vindicate the Justice and Righteousness of his Proceedings, and to shew in some solemn way his Hatred and Indignation of all Iniquity. To which we may add, that the Nature of Men and Angels is so framed as must necessarily make them fit and capable Objects of G O D's distributive Justice. For there being such a *Sui Potestas*, Liberty or Freedom in reference to their own Actions, essential to them, they will unavoidably be accountable to that Divine *Nemesis*, which will never leave scourging and beating of Sin till it have driven it quite out of the World.

2. The threatening of severe Punishments is a strong Curb and Restraint to keep Men off from those Exorbitances which otherwise their corrupt Natures would lead them to, that they cannot be so wicked as they would be. For

fear and sense of Pain, have a greater force upon our Minds in this Earthly State, than the strongest and most refined Deductions of Reason. We cannot but see how weak and ineffectual those Humane Laws are, which have no Punishment annexed for the Transgressors, and by how much the greater the Penalty is, by so much the more cautious it renders the Actions of Men. Now, as no Humane Laws do directly intend Punishment, so neither do the Laws of GOD, but this severe Penalty is added as a Fence and Security, and serves to fright Men out of the Arms of their Sins, and is a powerful Bar against the wild Excursions of Flesh and Blood.

Having now so fully manifested that Christianity hath nothing unreasonable in it; whether we look upon the Frame, and make of it
in

in General, or whether we reflect upon the Doctrines contained in it, we may draw some few Inferences from hence. As,

1. That every Christian according to his Capacity ought to look upon it as his Duty to be able to give a Reason of his Faith. It is the Apostles advice, 1 Pet. 3. 15. *Be ready to give an Answer to every Man that asks you a Reason of the hope that is in you.* And again, 1 Thess. 5. 21. *Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.* For since GOD hath so far complied with our Weakness, as to suit the whole business of Religion to our Measures and Capacities, and yet made all its Commands and Doctrines to bear so grateful and pleasing a Harmony with our Rational Frame, he expects that we should be able to say more for it, than a Jew for the *Mosaical Law*, or a Turk

Turk for the *Alcoran*, or a *Pagan* for his ancient *Superstition*. And yet so supinely negligent are the greatest part of those that profess Christianity, that they can give no better Account why they are Christians, than that it is the Religion which their Forefathers lived and died in; or because it is that which by Law is established amongst them, and they have been trained up from their Infancy in such a Persuasion; which is no more than what multitudes of the greatest Hereticks have had to plead for themselves. Whereas Christian Religion bearing in its Face the evident Marks and Characters of the eternal Reason, must surely admit of a better Apology. And the great cause why we do not discern the beauty and agreeableness of it, must be attributed to our Slothfulness and Negligence, and to the
pre-

prevalency of those naughty Affections that we suffer to lead us about. For it is certain, that a Mind that is puffed up with Pride and Vain-glory, that is filled with the Thoughts of the World and Earthly Vanities, that is sunk down and drowned in bodily Pleasures, is in no fitter Disposition to make a Judgment of Religion, than a Blind Man to difference and distinguish Colours.

2. From hence we see, That God does not require us to believe without giving us good Grounds and Reasons. For God in the structure of Christianity adapting it so far to the Imbecility and Imperfection of our Nature, and taking all possible care for our Satisfaction, that we may not believe blindfold without enquiring or asking a Reason, it is a sure sign that he would have us make

use of those Faculties that he has given us. And moreover, the great Cognation there is between the Laws of Religion and the Primitive Inscriptions of our Souls, puts us out of all doubt that they are not the Effects and Results of mere Arbitrarious Will, but the Products of immutable and eternal Wisdom. Wherefore, as God has given us our bodily Eyes to secure us from harm and danger, and to direct us in the several Actions of our Lives; so has he given us our Reasons and Understandings to perform the same Offices for our Souls, that our Eyes do for our Bodies.

3. Lastly, There is no Man can despise and undervalue the Gospel, but he must be given over to a Prophane and Atheistical Spirit. For since there appears such signal Notices and characteristical
Marks

Marks of Divinity all along in the Scriptures, and that there is such a thing as Justice and Injustice, Truth and Falshood, antecedent to all Positive Laws whatever, and these Notions engraven at their first Creation upon the Souls of Men, it must necessarily argue a strange Disease and Distemper of Mind to contradict those things which are so symmetrical and agreeable with their intellectual Frame. I confess there are some who, as St. Paul speaks of the *Gentiles* or *Pagans*, *Rom. 1. 18.* do, τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὧν ἀδίκημα κατέχουσιν, unjustly detain and imprison the Truth; that whereas their natural Faculties suggest to them the Being of a God, and that this All-perfect Being can communicate his Will and Pleasure to us Mortals, yet will rather stupify, besot, and bedead the choicest Powers of their Souls, than suffer them

them to entertain a Truth so uncomplying with their carnal Lusts and Affections. And this the same Apostle expresses in another place, *2 Thess. 2. 10. By not receiving the Love of the Truth, i.e. not carrying such a pliable, ductile and sequacious Temper of Mind, as ought to receive and embrace what is so congenerous with it self. And nothing sooner throws the Soul into this forced and preternatural State wherein it loses that Criterion that should distinguish between Good and Evil, Truth and Falshood, than Sensuality, and the love of the Animal Life. For this petrefies, stiffneth, and makes the Mind so insensible and obdurate, as not to be rouzed up and awakened with the Voice of Thunder. Wherefore when Religion is made so fully unexceptionable, to deride and scoff at it as a mean, jejune,*

jeune, and contemptible Thing against all the Sence and Reason that ever Mankind was endued withal, is as horrid a piece of Impiety as any one can be guilty of; and will at last lead to the uncomfortable Chambers of eternal Destruction.

A D E.

A
DEFENCE
 OF
Revealed Religion.

SERMON IV.

ROM. I. 16.

*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel
 of Christ —*

WE have taken away
 (in what has been
 already discoursed
 from these Words) the two first
 Causes or Grounds which may in-
 duce a Man to be ashamed of any
 Matter or Doctrine propounded
 to gain belief to it. And they
 were,

were, if it were neither true nor reasonable.

3. The third is, if it be not intelligible, *i. e.* if it be not delivered in such plain and easie terms as that those to whom it is delivered may understand it. Now, as to this Particular, we shall lay down this conclusion. *That Christian Religion, so far as concerns the Salvation of Mankind, is so plain and open, that the most mean and vulgar sort may understand it.* And this we shall prove not only very reasonable that it should be so, but absolutely necessary and could not be otherwise. And that upon these Accounts.

1. Christianity was given to be the Religion of all Men, not only of Philosophers and Statesmen, but of the meanest and most unlearned Persons in the World. Now that which was designed for so universal

sal a Good and Benefit as that of the whole Race of Men, of what Rank, or Quality, or Condition soever they were, must of necessity be so contrived, that it may be understood of all. For the Will can never close with, receive, or embrace that which the Understanding has no apprehension or knowledge of. If the Apostles, when they first Preached the Gospel, had told the People such high and mysterious things as their shallow Capacities could frame no Intelligible Idea's of, they might as well have spoken in an unknown Language, and that doubtless would have done their Auditors but little good. But since the far more numerous part of the World were Persons of no great depth of Understanding, Religion ought principally to be fitted for them, and consequently must be made very easie

easie to be understood in all those things that were absolutely necessary to their Salvation, otherwise it would be of no benefit to them. Our Lord and Saviour tells St. *Paul*, *Acts* 26. 18. that he sent him to open *Mens Eyes*, that is, to inform their *Understandings*, and to turn them from *Darkness to Light*, and from the *Power of Satan unto God*. But which way should the Apostle do this? It must be by plainness of Speech, and by suiting his Arguments to the common Apprehension of them that heard him. For an Argument that a Man does not understand can no more prevail upon him, than *Sampson's Riddle* could feed the *Philistines* with Honey.

2. Christian Religion has the Nature of a Covenant, and is often called so; therefore the Terms of which it consists, ought to be so plain,

plain, as that every one concerned in it may understand them. Now a Covenant (as every one knows) is a mutual Compact or Agreement, wherein each Party obliges himself to the Performance of something: Thus in this new Covenant of the Gospel, *GOD* engages to bestow on Men many great and inestimable Blessings and Benefits, and we promise to be obedient to his Commands, and to walk up sincerely to that which he has made the Condition of our Salvation. But now, how shall we come to know either what the Blessings are which *GOD* intends to bestow upon us, or what the Duties to which we are obliged, and which are the Terms on our side to perform, unless they are plainly and perspicuously set forth to the common Understanding of Men? All the World is concerned in this Covenant,

nant, and therefore Reason tells us, that all the World must understand what it is, and embrace it, and receive a benefit by it, if it be not their own Fault. And hence we understand the meaning of those words of the Apostle, *Rom. 10. 6, 7, 8. Say not in thine Heart, who shall ascend up into Heaven, that is, to bring Christ down from above? Or who shall descend into the deep, to bring up Christ again from the Dead? For the Word is nigh thee in thy Mouth, and in thy Heart.*—

The Apostle here tells us, that there is no Reason why a Christian should imagine that GOD propounds to him such Conditions as are impossible for him to perform; (for the *ascending into Heaven*, and *descending into the Deep*, is a Proverbial Speech, and used to signify a thing extreamly hard and difficult;) For in that Christ came from

from Heaven, and rose from the Dead without any assistance or help of ours, by the sole Power and Virtue of his Divinity, it is a manifest sign that we are not tyed to Impossibilities, nor are the terms of our Salvation intricate and unintelligible: But (as it follows) *the Word is nigh thee in thy Mouth, and in thy Heart: i. e.* the way of Salvation, or the Christian Religion is plain and obvious to all Capacities to observe and Practise.

3. Every Man shall be accountable hereafter for his Obedience or Disobedience to the Laws of the Gospel; which he could not be, if they were so obscure and dark, as that he could have no Apprehension or understanding of them. If a Law were made in such ambiguous, dark, and perplexed Terms, that an ordinary Capacity

could not understand its Sence and Meaning, it were impossible to know when he obeyed, or when he transgressed: And such a Law would either be to no purpose, or else made with a design to ensnare Men; which can by no means be attributed to GOD, who is infinite Wisdom and infinite Equity. GOD sent his Son into the World to publish and declare his Will, and he having so much kindness for Men as to die for them, we may be sure would not fail in representing it so clearly, as that none should have any reason to complain that it was hid from him.

4. If Religion had been unintelligible, it would perfectly have lost its end and design, which was to recover Men from a state of Sin to a state of Righteousness. For, Can a Man be perswaded by that
which

which he does not understand? Or shall a Mystery wrapt up in thick Clouds and Darknes, on purpose that it may be unintelligible, make any one ever the wiser? The Apostle St. Paul speaking of the State of the Gospel, 2 Cor. 3. 18. uses this Expression, *We all with open face beholding as in a Glass, the Glory of the Lord, are changed into the same Image from Glory to Glory.* The full meaning of which words is this, The Gospel is not like the Law, which when *Moses* brought down from the Mount, he put a Veil upon his Face, there being abundance of Rites and Ceremonies, and Types relating to our Saviour Christ, which the common People understood nothing of: But Christianity is open and plain, having no shadows to darken and obscure, and we looking into this and seeing the Glory

of it as perfectly as we can see our Faces in a Glafs, are by little and little, and long looking upon it, changed and transformed into the same Image and Likeness. Now this is spoken in reference to the Plainness and Perspicuity of Religion, which would lose the design and purpose for which it was given, if it had been so obscure that we could have no conception or meaning of it. For can any Man in his Wits believe that he can be changed and transformed by a Contrivance or Discourse that he is wholly ignorant of? And St. John assures us, *1 Joh. 1. 5. That God is Light, and in him is no Darknes at all: i. e.* The manifestation of God's Will is plain and open, no obscurity of Shadows or Types and Figures, but easie and intelligible to all, so far as concerns their eternal Salvation. By which
it

it is very evident, that Religion in all things necessary to bring the World to everlasting Blessedness, is a thing that does not transcend the meanest Capacity.

But here I foresee there are some no inconsiderable Objections which seem to undermine and invalidate what has hitherto been discoursed, and these being removed and taken out of the way, I shall conclude this particular.

Object. 1. It may here be said, If the Gospel, *i. e.* Christian Religion be so plain and fitted to the meanest Capacity, why is it then called a Mystery? Now a Mystery is a sacred and hidden Piece of Wisdom, containing under it some great and excellent Truth, and such is the Gospel, which the Apostle calls, *Eph. 3. 4, 5. The Mystery of Christ, which in other Ages was not*
I 4 made

made known to the Sons of Men, as it is now revealed unto his Holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit. And again, *Coloss. 1. 26.* It is called the *Mystery which was hid from Ages and Generations, but now is made manifest to the Saints.* Now if (as we see the Apostle tells us) the Gospel be such a Mysterious thing, how comes it to be so plain and obvious (as we have said) to every vulgar Capacity?

In answer to this, we must consider that Christian Religion is indeed a Mystery, and it is deservedly called so by the Apostle; but yet notwithstanding, this does not hinder, but that it is plain and open in all things necessary to Salvation. We shall therefore first shew the Reasons why it is called a Mystery, and that it is very requisite it should be so, *i. e.* that there should be something hidden and

and reserved in it, that should not presently be discerned by every ositant and careless Person; and then make it appear further, that it is not difficult to be understood in those things that are absolutely necessary to every Christian's Salvation.

Now, besides that, the Apostle expressly affirms Christianity to be a Mystery, there are many Instances which prove it to be so. There are many Doctrines which are very obscure and difficult to be understood, such as the Divinity of our Saviour, the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity; nay, the very Resurrection of our Bodies is termed a Mystery, as containing something above common and vulgar conceits and apprehensions. And when we reflect upon the different Sentiments and Perswasions of Men about these things, it will fully

fully evince some obscurity in Religion, and that it is not every where of the same make, but has some unfathomable Depths, as well as shallows that are easie and obvious to be Forded, and understood by a mean and ordinary Capacity. For it is impossible that ever so many Divisions about the Doctrines of Religion, so many Sects of different Perswasions should have arisen, and so long troubled and vexed the Christian Church, if all things had been at first sight plain and intelligible to every one. Not to mention the many Prophecies uttered in the Holy Scriptures, which are no otherwise known but by their events and fulfilling, and till then Men make but uncertain Guesles and Conjectures about them.

And that this obscurity in some things of Religion is very becoming

ing the All-comprehensive Wisdom of G O D, appears to be very reasonable,

1. To conciliate reverence and esteem to Religion. Should G O D at once have laid open all the Pearls of the Gospel to every Carnal Eye, they would have been apt to have contemned and despised them, since it is the common guise and fashion of the World, to esteem that of little worth and value, that costs no Labour and Pains to come at: Whereas they apprehend something more than ordinary, some great matter to be contained in that which is wrapt up, and kept secret and reserved from common sight. Therefore that this great Gift of G O D might not prove despicable and contemptible, he is pleased to Veil it in a good measure, that Men might not know the worth
of

of it at once, but that the more they look into it, the more they should admire the unvaluableness and richness of it. It is recorded of some of the Kings of *Persia*, that they shewed themselves to their Subjects but once a Year, that they might be more revered and adored, when they offered themselves to the People's View. And God, that he might gain more Reverence and Estimation to this infinite Treasure wherewith he hath enriched the World, he keeps a great part of it hidden, and is not won without many Prayers and earnest Importunities, accompanied with great diligence to shew unto Men the glorious Beauty of it.

2. It is very becoming that some things in Religion should be obscure, and that there should be some high and raised Truths above the
the

the level of common Understandings, that so all Holy Persons might find matter of Delight and Satisfaction, according to their several statures and growth in Grace. Hence St. John 1 Ep. 1. 13. speaks of *Little Children, and Young Men, and Fathers* in Religion; and according to this their several growth and stature in Christ Jesus, there must likewise be a difference in the Meat or Food they are nourished withal. A Man is not contented with that which will nourish an Infant, but requires stronger Meat. Therefore St. Paul rightly distinguisheth of this, *Heb. 5. 12, 13, 14.* For when for the time ye ought to be Teachers, ye have need that one Teach you again, which be the first Principles of the Oracles of God, and are become such as have need of Milk, and not of strong Meat. For every one that useth Milk is unskilful in the Word
of

of Righteousness; for he is a Babe: But strong Meat belongs to them that are of full Age — Now, that the Gospel may be fitted for all these sorts of Persons, it is necessary that it should be furnished with such things as are plain, and which may be delivered in a Catechetical way, as things absolutely necessary to the Salvation of every one; and then that it should be stored with higher and more raised Doctrines for the gratification of them that are of full Age in Christ, who, by reason of their growth in the Divine Life, *have their Senses exercised to discern both Good and Evil.* And accordingly the Apostle, when he lays down the Characters of a Bishop, says, *1 Tim. 3. 6.* that he must not be *respuer* a Novice, *i. e.* one that only knows the first Rudiments of Religion, but is not able to pierce into the depths of it.

3. That

3. That there should be some difficulty in Religion is but reasonable to exercise Mens diligence in searching after these hidden Treasures of Wisdom. For 'tis not to the Careless, Oscitant Person, but to the Diligent and Inquisitive that God has promised an increase of Wisdom. He that would attain to Divine Knowledge must *seek her as Silver, and search after her as for hid Treasures,* as Solomon long since advised, *Prov. 2. 4.* And our blessed Saviour in a Parable, *Mat. 13. 45, 46.* *Likens the Kingdom of Heavens to a Merchant-Man, seeking goodly Pearls; who, when he had found one Pearl of great Price, he went and Sold all that he had and bought it.* All these things denote our diligent search and careful enquiry after Wisdom. Now God, that he might gratifie the innocent desires of Men after Knowledge, and like-

likewise reward their Pains and Labour in searching after it, he opens and discovers to them such Treasures as are concealed from wicked and careless Persons.

4. And lastly, It seems reasonable that there should be some choice Pieces of Wisdom and Knowledge reserved to exercise Mens Minds upon, even in the very conclusion and last Age of the World. As Nature has hid many curious Secrets and great Treasures in the Bowels of the Earth, whereby she might have something to imploy Mens Diligence upon, even to the end of the World; so GOD has covered many Pieces of excellent Wisdom in the Body of the Scriptures, that he might still have some new thing to offer, some Treasures not yet known to discover to all the Generations of Men, till the Time
come

come that they shall know as they are known.

You see now in what Sence Religion may be said to be somewhat dark and obscure, and that there are great Reasons for it. And yet notwithstanding, it is very plain and easie to the most ordinary Capacity in all things absolutely necessary to Salvation. So that he that believes the Apostles Creed, and leads a good Life according to the plain Commands of GOD in the Holy Scriptures, he does all that which is required as absolutely necessary to Salvation, and if it be not his own Fault, shall undoubtedly be saved. For whatever relates to the true and right honouring of GOD, and his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, and to the Duties of Righteousness and Justice to one another, is very clearly laid down in the sacred

Scriptures, so that there can be no mistake about it. And for those things that are difficult and transcend common Apprehensions, it is enough for a Man to believe them to be the Revelations of G O D, though he do not understand the sence and meaning of them; provided that he be faithful in the discharge of all those Duties which are suited and fitted to the Capacity of every Christian, and which none can be ignorant of. But though this be enough to save a Man, yet there is no Person that has means and opportunities of encreasing in Wisdom and Knowledge, but (if he neglect them) he shall be accountable to G O D for this his neglect. *For to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.* Therefore, if we may grow wiser in Heavenly Wisdom and Understanding, and shall

shall waste those precious Opportunities upon any thing else of lesser Moment and Concernment, this Carelesness will highly be charged upon us. No Man is to stand at a stay, but to improve himself in the Knowledge of Christ, according to the Opportunities and Ability that G O D has given him, so that no Man has any Time or Pains to Spare, though G O D have made every private Christian's Duty so clear.

Object. 2. To this that hath been said of the Plainness and Perspicuity of Religion, it may further be objected after this manner, That if it be so plain and clear in all those things that are requisite and necessary to bring a Christian to Heaven, then what need have we of Preaching?

Ans. To this *Objection* we may reply, that since this hath been made use of by our Adversaries, as an Artifice to draw off and dissettle unstable Minds from the true Religion; yet if there be any validity in it, it makes as much against them as it doth against us; there being no Sect or Party, or Religious Society whatever, but hath some Persons set apart to preside over and Minister in Religious Offices to those of the same Bond and Communion. But we shall not content our selves with this, but more fully show, That though all things necessary for the Salvation of every private Christian be fully and plainly laid down, so that there can be no mistake, yet a settled Ministry (as the case of things stands) is not only needful, but cannot be laid aside. And that for these Reasons,

1. There

1. There are many weak and doubting Consciences amongst Christians which will want Resolution; many that are troubled and cast down that will stand in need of Advice and Comfort. Now this makes one great part of the work of him that is appointed for the Conduct of Souls, *to comfort the feeble minded, and to support the weak.* And though this may be in some measure the duty of all Christians to one another, yet more especially of him who is designed and set apart to minister to the needs and necessities of Souls. Moreover, we see how vigilant and industrious the grand Enemy of Mankind is, in striving by his Agents and Instruments to subvert the Faith of such as are not well grounded, by drawing them into Schisms, Factions, and Heresies, which would be in a great mea-

K 3 sure

sure prevented, if Men would consult their spiritual Guides, whose Office it is to Teach and to Instruct them. Therefore, so long as these Needs and Necessities of Men continue, that is, of such as are weak, who will want Counsel and Advice; of such as are doubtful, who will need Resolution, so long there will be a necessity of an established Ministry. For to whom can Men better repair than to those that are set over them, whose conscientious Faithfulness may render them fit to be trusted, and whose skill and ability in Learning and Knowledge may make them able both to instruct the Ignorant and convince Gainlayers?

2. We cannot but see how easily Men are drawn into Sin, and how prone they are naturally to Vice, notwithstanding the constant Admonitions, and frequent In-

structi-

structions given them, and that great care that is taken to keep them out of the Snares of the Devil; and we cannot but take notice, how little all this prevails upon them, and that yet Sin and Evil is too apt to get ground and make advances. What then can we imagine would be the event and consequence, if all these things were laid aside? If they are hardly now kept in the due fear and reverence of GOD by the most faithful and strong Exhortations to Piety and Vertue, there can nothing else be expected but that a Deluge of Wickedness should overflow the World, when these Banks that stopped it are broken down, and all restraints removed, and Men left only to the guidance of their unruly Lusts and Passions. This must necessarily be the State of Things, if there were no settled

K 4

Mini-

Ministry among us ; and therefore the continuance of it is not only highly beneficial, but there seems a pressing necessity for it, though our Duty be so plain, and all things absolutely required to particular Mens Salvation be so clear and manifest.

Object. 3. It may yet further be objected, If the necessary things of Religion be so plain, how come Men to walk so contrary to it? And why has it so little effect in the World? One would think that those stupendious Promises of the Forgiveness of our Sins, of the assistance of God's Spirit, and of everlasting Joys in the Kingdom of Heaven, should be enough to quicken Mens Diligence, to enliven their dull and heavy Minds, and put them upon earnest Resolutions and Endeavours to walk constantly in

in those Paths that lead to so desirable a Happiness. By what means then comes it to pass, that the World is no fuller of true and sincere Christians?

Answer. It is true indeed, and must be confess'd with all sadness of Heart, that notwithstanding our Duty is so clear and manifest, and that the Summ of Religion (like the Prophet's Vision, *Hab.* 2. 2.) is written in such legible Characters that he that runs may read it, yet it hath not had that due effect upon the Hearts and Lives of Men as it ought to have. And although the unsuccessfulness of Religion may be resolved into many and different Causes, yet I shall only instance in some which are most obvious and frequent: As,

1. Because Men place their Religion in Opinions and Sects, in Words and Notions, more than in the

the everlasting Rules of Righteousness, Charity, Goodness and Truth. It cannot but be matter of Sorrow to every sober and serious Christian to see the Catholick Church rent into so many Pieces and Divisions ; one crying (as of old) I am of *Paul* ; and another, I am of *Apollos* ; and a third of *Cephas*, as if a Christian were not Baptized into Christ Jesus, but into some particular Person, whose Dictates and Perswasions he most of all affected to follow. Every one almost locking up the Gates of Heaven with the Key of his own private Opinion, and excluding all them that cannot compromise with his Judgment and Perswasion. And thus they build up again that Partition-Wall between *Jew* and *Gentile*, which, at the Death of Christ was rent asunder, to intimate to us,
That

That in the Christian Religion (as the Apostle shows, *Col. 3. 11.*) there should be *neither Greek nor Jew, Circumcision nor Uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, Bond nor Free ; but Christ should be all and in all.* That is, there should be no more distinction of Parties, but all should be of the same Mind, professing the same Christian Faith, and owning the same common Saviour, and should be so united and incorporated together, as to become as it were one Mystical Christ.

Religion lies not in the Brain, neither is it this or that Opinion that will bring a Man to the Haven of his desired Happiness, without the constant Practice of all Christian Vertues, and the indispensable Duties of the Gospel of Christ. Great Knowledge, without the inward Life and Power of Religion, is but like the fruitless
Fig.

Fig-Tree, that sent forth nothing but broad Leaves, and renders a Man so much the more miserable, by how much the more *he knew his Masters Will and did it not.* Happy were it for the World, if every Mans Knowledge would blossom into Practice, and bring forth Fruits answerable to that Holy and Pure Religion he lives under. There is no knowledge in Christianity that will do a Man any good unless it be in order to Practice; and he only is truly Wise who makes this use of his Knowledge, that he may become the better Christian. *Though I speak with the Tongue of Men and Angels, and have not Charity (says St. Paul, 1 Cor. 13. 1.) I am become but as sounding Brass or a tinkling Cymbal.* And if a Man had all the Wisdom of the World epitomiz'd and contain'd within his own Breast, yet if he made use of this

this for Ostentation, or to gain a Party, and not for the purifying his Heart, and enlarging the Kingdom of God in his Soul, his Religion would be but an empty noise, and he would find this building which he has raised upon the Sands too weak to hold out against the Storms of Troubles and Afflictions. *The Wisdom which is from above (as St. James informs us, Chap. 3. 17.) is first Pure, then Peaceable, gentle and easie to be Intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality and without Hypocrisie.* And again, *Chap. 1. 27. Pure Religion, and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the World.* Now, when Men shall neglect these plain and indispensable Duties of Christianity, and take up with some self-chosen Opinions, that

that contribute nothing to the true honouring of God, or the edifying of our Fellow Christians, it is no wonder that Religion does not gain ground and thrive in the World.

2. Another Reason why Religion prevails so little upon Mens Hearts is, because they live too much upon Sense. We are more affected with the present Objects of our Senses, than with the things that are invisible, and at a distance from us, and are only Objects of our Faith. Whereas Christianity, when firmly seated in us, and the Power of it displayed upon our Souls, would teach us to *Walk by Faith, and not by Sight*, 2 Cor. 5. 7. And accordingly, if we did make the infinite Rewards of Immortality but present to our Minds, and did as firmly believe them, as we do what we see, and hear, and handle,

handle, it is impossible but that we should be equally affected with them, and they would have as strong a Faith upon us. The sure Promise of Immortal Glory would as strongly move and put us upon Action, as any worldly and sensible Good, if the Belief were equal. And if we acted agreeably to the Constitution of our own Natures, the Reasons and Arguments suggested to us by our Rational Faculties, ought as forcibly and powerfully to persuade us as those which are urged upon us by our Senses. But while we speak doubtfully, and believe waveringly and uncertainly, the Felicities and Joys of the other World, make little or no Impression upon us. And this doubtless is one great Reason that Religion has so little effect upon our Minds. Suppose we saw our Lord and Saviour coming in the Clouds,

Clouds, attended with Thousands of mighty Angels to judge the World, which, with the Glory and Brightness of their Heavenly Bodies, should cause a Light, surpassing that of the Sun; How strangely would such a sight as this affect us! Surely, it is nothing but our Earthliness, and the dwelling of our Minds so much upon Sense that we are so little affected with the thoughts of it now; since that which will certainly come to pass, ought to be looked upon as just now present.

3. Lastly, to the foregoing Particulars we may add, as one no mean Cause why the Gospel prevails so little upon Men, viz. the want of that which the Apostle St. Jude speaks of, *ver. 20. The building up one another in our most Holy Faith.* As God renews and regenerates our Natures by his Holy

Holy Spirit, so it is the Duty of all Christians to be workers together with him, and to edifie and strengthen one another, and help to carry on to perfection that work which God has begun in their Souls. In *Rom. 15. 2, 3.* the Apostle charges this Duty upon every Christian, *Let every one of you please his Neighbour for his good to Edification, i. e.* Let every Man subject his own ends and desires to the spiritual Good of other Men, viz. to the confirming and building them up in the Christian Faith. And to bind this Exhortation yet faster upon the Consciences of Men, the Apostle makes use of the Example of Christ, in the next words, *For even Christ pleased not himself, i. e.* Christ had no respects for himself, no ends of his own to consult, but as if he had wholly forgotten himself, he

L

de

devoted himself perfectly to the promoting of his Father's Glory. The whole number of Christians that believe in Jesus are one Body: Now as the Members of the Body have the same care one of another, so ought every Man to be very tender of the Good of his Fellow-Christian. If a Man be a true and unfeigned Christian, he will not walk solitary and alone in his way to Heaven, but will strive to draw as many to accompany him as he can, in so pleasant and gainful a Journey. He will always be instructing those that are ignorant, comforting the weak-hearted, and strengthening those that are wavering and unsettled. And where these things are wanting, and every one lives as a Stranger to another, it cannot be expected that the Gospel should draw off Men from Sin so successfully, and with
so

so much Triumph, as it would if Men would lay aside their little Self-ends, and be of more universal and publick Spirits, and employ their Wit and Diligence in doing good to one another.

The sum and conclusion of the whole matter is this: Since Christian Religion was intended not merely for Wise-Men, and such as were of great Reach and Understanding, but for the poorest and weakest Person, it is in all things necessary to Salvation made plain and easie. And that God might gratifie our innocent search after Knowledge, he has hid many precious Treasures of Wisdom in the Scriptures, as a Reward of our Piety and Diligence. And therefore, where any thing is delivered so obscurely, that with our best diligence we cannot attain to the true sense and meaning of it, it is

a sure sign that whatever sence GOD intended, yet he did not make that absolutely necessary to the Salvation of all Men. For if he had, he would have laid it down in plain, and not in intricate and ambiguous Terms. In the mean time, we must all consider that it is our Duty to pray unto GOD (as the Apostle St. Paul for his Disciples the *Colossians*, Chap. 1. 9, 10.) and to desire that we may be filled with the knowledge of his Will in all Wisdom and spiritual Understanding; That we may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good Work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. And let us remember that as GOD has distributed the measures of his Gifts and Graces to every one, accordingly shall their account be at the last day. He that cannot read the Bible, and has fewer opportunities

tunities of knowledge, his account shall not be so great as his that can Read, and has leisure and time to inform himself. And he that has skill and knowledge to understand the Scriptures, shall yet be more severely treated, if he do not make use of this, both for his own and his Neighbour's Good.

L 3

A D E-

A
DEFENCE
 OF
Revealed Religion.

SERMON V.

ROM. I. 16.

*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel
 of Christ —*

HAVING dispatched the three
 first Causes of Shame,
 we come now to remove
 and take away the fourth and last,
 and to shew the great *Usefulness*
 of Christian Religion to the World.
 The usefulness therefore of any
 thing consists in the serviceableness

L 4 of

of it for that end to which it was designed. Now this very Apostle assures us, *1 Tim. 4. 8. that Godliness is profitable to all things, having the Promise of the Life that now is, and that which is to come*; that is to say, Christianity is serviceable, useful, and conducing to promote the Happiness of Mankind, both in respect of this present Life, and that which is to come. First then, we shall consider the Usefulness of Christ's Religion, in order to the Felicity of the next World, and shew how excellently well suited it is to the attaining of that. Which the Apostle seems to intimate in the Words of the Text, when he calls it the *Power of God unto Salvation to every one that believes*. Had Christian Religion designed the instructing of Men in the knowledge of Nature, giving them a true System of the Heavens, and declaring the

the Natures and Properties of all Things in this our Earthly Globe; it would indeed have filled the Mind of Man with abundance of Pleasure and Delight, but had mightily fallen short of that universal Usefulness that now it hath.

The great End therefore which GOD intended by the Gospel, was the Advancement of true Godliness, the pulling down and destroying the Kingdom of Sin and Satan, and the erecting and setting up the Kingdom of Light and Grace in the Hearts and Minds of Men. And that this was the purpose of GOD cannot be unknown to any who considers the great Excellency and Perfection of the Commands of Christianity, and what a high measure of Purity and Sanctity they aim at; namely, the entire Purification of the Soul from all manner of Terrestrial De-

Defilements and Pollutions, and the raising up in it a Divine and Heavenly Nature, which being that State wherein we were at first created, and into which we are recovered by the gentle Influences and Illapses of the Divine Spirit upon us, there is begotten in our Souls a daily Tendency upwards, and a restless endeavour to free themselves from that Preternatural Load that hangs about them, and this effort of theirs receiving fresh Strength and Supplies from above, never ceases till it have wrought them to such a high Pitch as through the Benignity and Power of him who is *the beginning of the Creation of God*, they may be translated into the Peaceful Mansions of everlasting Glory.

We shall consider then the exquisite suitableness and serviceableness of the Gospel, for the extirpation

pation of all Sin and Vice, and putting Men in possession of a Holy and Divine Nature, which surely is the most advantageous Happiness the Soul of Man is capable of. And if Religion be furnished with such Powers and Assistances as will, against all Opposition whatever, attain this great End, then its usefulness to the World will be evidently discovered, and no Man will have any reason to be ashamed of it.

Now, that this End may be attained,

1. GOD is pleased to promise us the Assistance of his holy and blessed Spirit. For we being so sunk into this Earthly State, that we are wholly carried away with its Affections and Lusts, could never by our own single effort and solitary endeavours bring ourselves back to the Participation of that

that Holy and Divine Life we fell from. Therefore GOD, out of his infinite Love and Compassion, and upon the Intercession of our Lord and Saviour, has vouchsafed us the aid of his blessed Spirit, to regenerate our Natures, and to form in us such a strong and active Principle of Holiness as should steadily carry our Wills to a perfect compliance and obedience to his Holy Will. That we should not shelter our selves in a formal outside Sanctity, but attain to that New-birth, wherein all the Power of Sin is perfectly vanquished and subdued; and no Life stirring but that which flows from and partakes of GOD's Spirit. And we having such a Potent Assistance, it must needs enliven and encourage us to put forth all our Strength in mortifying our Sins and Corruptions; being assured that

that through the mighty energy of this Divine Spirit, we shall become Victorious over all our Enemies. And that though we have old Rebellious Giants within us, powerful Lusts like the Sons of *Anak*, yet this Almighty Spirit (if we be not treacherous and false to his Inspirations) is able, and certainly will bring us into the promised Land. And that we have no greater success in the Mortification of our Sins proceeds not from the want of the supply of GOD's Spirit, but from our own Carelessness and Falseness. When he calls to us to awake and arise from the Dead, from that dull and stupid condition we lie in under our Sins, we resist his Influence, and shut our Eyes against that Light that shines in upon us, and fall again to our old slumbering and drowziness.

But

But if we would collect the Powers and Faculties of our Souls together, and go against our strongest Vices and our habitual and customary Sins with hearty and sincere Resolutions of destroying them, this Spirit would never be wanting to us, but we should find wonders wrought in our own Souls. We should find the dry and parched Soil, that barren Wilderness wherein no Plant of sincere Piety and Righteousness has of a long time prospered, to become a Plantation of G O D, and filled with all Divine Graces and Vertues. For certainly G O D has not afforded us this Help to gratifie our Idleness or Vanity, but to actuate our Diligence, and to enliven our faint and drooping Spirits. That we may not conceit our selves to be under an invincible Infirmary and Imbecility
and

and that we shall never be able to free our selves from the Tyranny of the Body of Sin, but to go on with Courage, and rest assured, that *when the Enemy comes in like a Flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a Standard against him.*

This must of necessity bring a wonderful comfort to a Man under his strongest Temptations, and in his sorest Conflicts with Sin and Vice to be assured not only that he shall not be left alone and forsaken, but that this eternal Spirit shall co-operate with him, and strengthen and perfect him in the inner Man, till he have brought him unto Glory. And because the Promise of the Holy Spirit is one of the great Props and Encouragements of a Christian Travelling through the Wilderness of this World, therefore it is, in plain Words, and without a Parable,
de-

declared by our blessed Saviour, *John 14. 15, 16, 17. If ye love me, keep my Commandments; And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever: Even the Spirit of Truth, whom the World cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knows him; but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

2. A second powerful Motive for the begetting a Divine Life and Nature in Men (which is the ultimate end of Christian Religion) is the consideration of the stupendious love of GOD in sending Jesus Christ for the Redemption of the World. This our Lord himself signified to us, *John 3. 16. So God loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting Life. GOD is a Being of infinite Love and Goodness,*

ness, that as he made all things to be happy according to their several Natures, so his compassionate Eyes could not behold them for ever lost and involved in an inextricable Ruine (though through their own Fault) and not provide them some means of recovery. The Psalmist says, (*Psal. 145. 9.*) *that the tender Mercies of God are over all his Works:* And if Compassion and Mercy be essential Attributes of GOD (as doubtless they are) then there is a mighty suitableness and agreeableness between a poor and undone Creature and Pity and Compassion. Whereby we are assured that it is alone the infinite Love, Mercy, and Compassion of GOD that moved him to rescue the World from perishing for ever. And that this might more deeply affect our Hearts, and more powerfully draw us off from our Sins,

M

his

his All-comprehensive Wisdom so contrived it, that his only begotten Son should take our Nature upon him, and be the Saviour and Redeemer of all his lost Brethren. What a strong Argument now is this to reclaim the most stubborn Offender? Had we but common Gratitude it would certainly move us to make our returns of Love and Affection in some degree answerable to so infinite a Kindness. And when we shall consider further that all this Provision was only upon our Account, and that GOD was not in the least bettered or made more happy by our Salvation; this will turn it into Admiration, that GOD should take such pains, and compass such strange Designs, and all for his Enemies that wilfully departed and revolted from him.

3. There

3. There is another cogent Argument to promote the grand design of the Gospel, and that is a serious Meditation upon the Crucifixion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful Privilege granted to Men that they should be received into favour after their heinous Rebellion against GOD. But when we consider that this Privilege was not bought or procured for them by such mean and contemptible things as Silver and Gold (for which yet we know that things of greatest Worth, pertaining to this Life may be had) but by the *precious Blood of Jesus Christ, that immaculate Lamb*, as the Apostle speaks, 1 Pet. 1. 18, 19. this makes it still more wonderful. For the greatness of the Price by which any Privilege or Liberty is purchased for any Man, 'tis a higher engage-

M 2 ment

ment upon him to improve this Benefit to the utmost, as well for his behoof who has made the Purchase for him, as for his own. And what Treasure is there in Heaven and Earth more valuable than the precious Blood of the Son of God? And yet he willingly offered this for the World, that he might disengage Men from their Sins, and perswade them to follow Holiness, which should be for their eternal Benefit and Advantage. To illustrate this by a familiar Similitude, suppose some dear Friend should part with his Life to redeem another from some certain danger which otherwise would ruine him, and should only Condition with him to perform some easie Commands, which yet should tend to his unspeakable Good and Advantage: Could such a Man slight so great a Love, or ever think himself

self too punctual in observing those light Injunctions which his dying Friend had laid upon him? Surely, if it were but for his own Gain and Profit he would never disregard them. The case is the same with us; Jesus Christ, who took our Flesh and Blood upon him, parted with his own Life to Redeem us from an inevitable Danger which would have undone us for ever: And in recompence of this great Love, he desires us only to make our selves Happy by taking upon us his easie Yoke and light Burthen: And can we be so ungrateful as to slight him for it, and forget his Commands? What Bands or Cords can tie Souls nearer together than that Love which is stronger than Death? Or what Words make deeper Impressions upon the Hearts of Men than those that are spoken by their dying

M 3 Friends?

Friends? It is not possible for the Heart of Man to conceive a more effectual way to expell Sin and Wickedness, and more conducing to the furthering of Goodness and Holiness than the consideration of the Death of Christ.

For that the Son of GOD who had no Sins of his own to satisfie for, should descend from Heaven and submit himself to the Weakness, Frailty, and Drudgery of our Mortal State, and endure such deep Agonies of Spirit as forced him to sweat drops of Blood, and after suffer an inglorious and painful Death upon the Cross, and this merely upon our Account, and out of a mighty sense of Compassion for our Misery, is so astonishing a Love as must needs thaw our icy Hearts, and dissolve them into Tears, and a ready Conformity to his Will. How can any Man go
on

on and continue in Sin, when he considers that his Saviour came for this only end into the World, that he might destroy the Works of Sin and Satan, and present all Men a glorious Church to GOD, without Spot or Wrinkle!

Whatever Sin therefore it be that assaults thy Soul, present unto it thy dying Saviour, who, with his outstretched Arms on the Cross, sues for admittance into thy strongest Affections. Art thou insnared with Pride? How canst thou look upon thy self without watry Eyes, when thou beholdest the Son of GOD born a helpless Infant of a poor Virgin, subject to all the Hardships and sinless Infirmities of our Nature, and at last breathing out his innocent Soul on the Cross for his bitter Enemies? Art thou Covetous and too desirous of worldly Enjoyments? then re-

M 4 member

member *Judas*, and consider what a heinous and bloody Act his Covetousness betrayed him to, even the delivering up his harmless Lord and Master to the malicious and implacable *Jews*. And whoever sets his Heart upon the World, he does with *Judas* sell his Saviour. Thus you may see of what great usefulness this one Consideration of the Death of Christ is, to the Mortification of all our Sins. And this the Gospel every where holds forth to the same purpose, that we should express his Death on the Cross in our Souls, by our dying unto Sin, and Crucifying all our corrupt Lusts and Affections.

4. Another powerful means by which Men are drawn off from their Sins, and engaged in Holiness, is the Example of our Holy Lord and Master. Whose Life and Actions were therefore carefully written

written by his Disciples, that Men might learn of him and follow his Steps. And that we may more clearly discover wherein we are to imitate and follow the example of our Lord and Saviour, we must distinguish between those Actions which our Lord did as a publick Person, invested with Authority from Heaven; As likewise those Actions of his which he did to confirm his Mission; we must distinguish these (I say) from those wherein he is set as an Example for us to imitate.

1. Therefore we are not called to imitate Christ in those Actions which he performed as a publick Person. For there were many things which he did that related wholly to his Office, as he was the Messiah, the great Representative of Mankind, who took upon him and came down from Heaven to re-

reconcile the World to God. Thus he gave new Laws of Life to Men, and forgave Sins by his own Power and Authority, and laid down his Life as a publick Victim and Sacrifice for the World. To these we may add his Fasting forty Days and forty Nights ; His leading a single Life, and refusing all Earthly Honour and Dignity. And hitherto likewise we may refer that Action of Zeal wherewith our Lord was possessed for the Honour of God, and in behalf of the despised Gentiles against a corrupt Generation, who only pretended, but had really nothing of true Zeal, or the Honour of God in them ; when (as St. Matthew relates it, Chap. 21. 12.) *He went into the Temple of God, and cast out all them that Sold and Bought in the Temple, and overthrew the Tables of the Money-Changers, and the Seats of them that sold Doves.*

2. Nor

2. Nor are we called to follow and imitate Christ in those Actions which he did to testify the Truth of his Mission, that he came from God, and acted by his sole Authority. Such were all his miraculous Works ; His giving Sight to the Blind, Speech to the Dumb, and hearing to the Deaf. His commanding the Winds and Waves of the Sea, which instantly obeyed him. His multiplying Bread, according to his own Pleasure, so that a few Loaves should be sufficient to satisfy some Thousands of Eaters. His curing all bodily Diseases and Distempers, and shewing his Power over Evil Spirits, which, upon his sole Command and Word, were forced to leave those Bodies they had vexed and tormented. But above all, his raising the Dead to Life, shewing that he had a Power not only here, but in the Regions of separate Souls likewise. Now

Now in neither of these are we called to imitate our Lord and Saviour. But though we are not enjoined to follow him in these, yet are they not therefore thrown away or recorded to no purpose. We may make a good use of every one of these Actions of our Saviour, though we lie under no necessity to imitate him in them; nay, it were a presumption in us so to do.

When we read that he fasted Forty days, we may learn that the further we withdraw our Minds from bodily Lusts and Affections, we are in a greater Forwardness and better Disposition to converse with God. When we hear that our Saviour Christ stedfastly declined all Earthly Dignities and Honours: It shews us what a light esteem God puts upon these things in comparison of the participation of his Nature in true Goodness and Right-

Righteousness. And so of all our Lord's Miraculous Actions, which were as so many Credentials and Seals from Heaven, that attested and verified his Commission and the Authority by which he acted. There is something still that we may draw for our encouragement and support in that holy and unblameable Life, which he came to propagate in the World.

When we find him by a Miracle redressing the Infirmities of Mankind, and easing them of their Sorrows, by curing their bodily Distempers; Does not this teach us to be of a Compassionate Temper to sympathize with others in their Miseries, and, as far as we are able, to lend our assisting hand to free them from them: When we behold our Lord casting out Devils, does it not assure us that he has Power over the dark Kingdom? and

and that if we will submit to his Gracious Laws, he will at last *bruise Satan under our Feet*? When we see him by his Commanding and All-powerful Word, raising the Dead, it cannot but beget in us a strong Faith and Trust in him, that though we die, and our places know us no more, yet his Power, *which is able to subdue all things unto it self*, can and will recover us again to Life, and at last *swallow up Death in Victory*. Thus it is plain, that though we are not called to imitate our Saviour in those Actions wherein he stood as a Publick Person, nor in those which he performed, chiefly to show that he came from G O D; yet there is a great and a good use to be made of every one of them recorded in the Gospel.

But that which more nearly concerns us is, that there are certain Things wherein the Example of Christ

Christ is proposed as a fair Copy for our Imitation, and to which we ought to conform our selves. And these are all those things wherein he came to exhibit to Mankind a most perfect and compleat draught of a Divine Life and Nature, and which it is the Design of G O D in the Gospel to make us Partakers of. As namely, a firm and unshaken Faith in the Goodness and Power of G O D, that he is both able and willing to reduce and bring us back to himself, and that nothing shall fail of all the Good that he hath promised. Moreover, we are enjoined to follow our blessed Redeemer in the Purity and Sanctity of his Life, by keeping our selves unspotted from the World and the Flesh. And then that we imitate him in his wonderful and exemplary Humility, who being, as the Apostle speaks,

speaks, *Phil.* 2. 6, 7. *ὃν μορφῇ θεῷ*, clothed with Celestial Light and Glory, and possessed of all the Happiness of those Immortal Regions, yet emptied himself and took upon him *μορφὴν δούλου* the form of a Servant, or *ὁμοιωμα* and *ἡμῶς ἀνθρώπου* the likeness and fashion of Man; that is, he came into these Earthly Regions, took upon him a Humane Body, and was made a Man who is really *δούλος φθορᾶς* a Servant of Corruption in this Terrestrial State. And lastly, We are to follow the Example of our Lord and Saviour in an universal and un-self-interested Love, who was not contented to be happy alone, but died to recover the rest of his strayed Brethren. Here is the fair Image and Resemblance of that Divine Life our Lord Jesus came to propagate upon Earth, and to which we ought all to be conformed according to that

ex-

excellent Pattern that he has laid before us.

5. To the intent that the things which pertain to Life and Godliness may be vigorously pursued, and all Sin and Vice discountenanced and banished, the great and last Day of Judgment is made known to us. When the fixt and determinate Time is come wherein God thinks fit to put an end to the Generations of Men, and all sorts of Animals by the Conflagration of this Terrestrial Globe, then shall Jesus Christ visibly descend from Heaven with the sound of a Trumpet, and the voice of an Arch-angel accompanied with innumerable Bands and Squadrons of the Heavenly Militia, and every individual Person that has lived in the World since *Adam* to that very time, shall visibly appear before him. And as the

N

Angels

Angels rescued Lot from that particular Burning of *Sodom*, and the rest of the Cities of the Plain, so these officious Spirits shall be employed by their great Prince and Head, Christ Jesus, *to gather his Elect from the four Winds, from one end of Heaven to the other*, and save them from this universal Burning that shall at once seize upon this lower World. For then, by the mighty Power and Word of him that created all things, the subterraneous Treasures of Fire shall be opened, which meeting with those fierce and penetrating Fires wherewith the whole Vault of Heaven is inflam'd, with their joint and united force will melt and dissolve all Terrestrial Mixtures and Combinations, and compleat that Sulphureous Lake and external Hell which was of old prepared for the Devil and his Angels. By all
which

which we see the mighty efficacy of the Gospel, and what powerful means it is furnished withal to reclaim Men from their Sins, and fit them for an eternal Happiness in another World.

N 2

A D E.

A
DEFENCE
 OF
Revealed Religion.

SERMON VI.

ROM. I. 16.

*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel
 of Christ —*

THE usefulness and serviceableness of the Christian Doctrine for the promoting the Immortal Happiness of Men having been fully shown in the preceeding Discourse, and likewise the suitableness, strength and efficacy of the Arguments

N 3 ments

ments contained in it to that end and Purpose, we shall now, as a Conclusion of all, show, that Christianity is highly conducing to the Happiness of Mankind, in reference to this Life, and that there cannot be a better way for any Person to live happily in this World, than by a due and sincere Observation of the Laws and Commands of Christ Jesus.

And that this may appear easie and natural, we need but take an Inventory of all those good things that this our Earthly State is capable of, and we shall find that the due observance of Christ's Commands is the most proper means both for their Acquisition and Continuance.

The Blessings then of this Life, are such as either relate to the publick, or such as concern every particular Man's Person: The publick Blessings are,

1. *Peace.*

1. *Peace.* Let us see now how excellently well Religion provides for this; Our blessed Saviour, the Prince of Peace, came to unite and cement all Christians into one Body, to heal the Distempers of Mankind, and to make all the jarring Principles of the World chime together. And if Men were conformed to his Example, and put in practice his Commands, there would be no occasion of Disturbances, no Animosities or Contentions, but an universal Calm would overspread the Earth, and this World would shine out into a perfect Heaven. *From whence come Wars and Fightings among you?* says the Apostle, *James 4. 1.* From whence is it all the Troubles and Confusions of the World flow? *Come they not of your Lusts that War in your Members?* And Solomon assures us, *Prov. 13. 10.* that it is

N 4

only

only by Pride Contention comes. Here is the source of all the Miseries that Mankind now groans under. For when Mens Lusts and Passions become exorbitant, they raise unequal and convulsive Motions in the Body Politick, as the undue Fermentation of the Humours in the natural Body often produces dangerous effects. It is Mens unbridled Appetites (which Religion came to correct) that makes them murmur and repine against the present Settlement of the Nation, though the greatest Blessings that we can hope for here, both for our selves and our Posterity are the most likely to be derived from hence.

These unruly and fretting Passions of Pride, Envy and Malice are the Causes that disturb Mens own Quiet, and that of the Society wherein they live, and makes them like those Disconsolate Spirits we
read

read of in the Gospel, continually wandring up and down *seeking rest but finding none.* But if they would strive to suppress the Boilings and irregular Fermentations of their Spirits, and endeavour to turn them into Calmness and Meekness; if they would give that Honour and Deference to their present Governors that Christ's Law Commands; and bear a hearty Love and Benignity to all their Fellow Creatures, it is impossible but that a lasting Peace and Concord should ensue upon such fit and duly qualified Preparations. They would then see that our present establishment, which Divine Providence hath so miraculously brought about, is not only for our own, but the universal Good and Happiness of all *Europe.*

2. Another Publick Blessing is Plenty; which cannot be more desirable

firable, than it is ascertain'd and secur'd by the Laws of Christianity. For what can more contribute to a general Plenty, than that every Man be industrious in his proper Calling? The Christian Doctrine enjoyns Diligence, which, like a provident Governess, sollicitates and excites the torpid and languishing Members of our Earthly Frame, to a careful discharge of the several Offices of Humane Life.

Religion is a thing that retrenches the unruly Appetites of Men, and cuts off those superfluous Expences which Luxury and Debauchery make them obnoxious to. And this it does by teaching Temperance and Frugality, and by shewing Men a nobler and more profitable way of converting their Abundance by Charity to the Necessitous and Indigent, which is indeed a true imitation of that
divine

divine and overflowing Goodness which the whole Creation, in their several Measures and Capacities, tastes of.

3. A third Publick Blessing is, Safety and Security from *Danger*. Which Religion hath so far an influence upon, that it tells us, it is only the true fear of GOD *that can make us dwell in safety*; And, *That no Evil shall happen to the Just, but the Wicked shall be filled with Mischief.* Psal. 4. 8. Prov. 12. 21. Again, *Righteousness exalteth a Nation, but Sin is the Reproach of any People.* Prov. 14. 34. When Men once become Treacherous to their GOD, they seldom prove true to his Vicegerent here below. And if they had walked up sincerely to the Prescriptions of Christianity, the Fears of a Foreign Invasion had been needless. It is want of Religion that makes Men betray their Native Country, correspond with
its

its Enemies, and puts them upon such courses as the braver and more generous Heathens looked upon as Wretched and Ignoble. For surely those Persons who can let themselves loose to unhinge an established Government, to weaken and undermine a Prince, who, upon juster Accounts, Merits to be called *Deliciæ humani generis*, than that Noble Roman Emperor; whatever pretences they may make to Christianity, will find it the hardest thing in the World to prove they have any Religion at all.

Where a People are truly Religious, submissive to their lawful Governours and Charitably affected towards one another, there the invisible Ministers of God's Providence are engaged in their Protection and Defence; and those Chariots and Horses of Fire are as ready now to preserve true Goodness,

ness, as heretofore to secure the Prophet *Elisha* from the Attempts of the Syrian Army. 'Tis only when a Nation grows deplorably Wicked, that their Guardian Providence is withdrawn, and those kind and officious Spirits, say, as of old of *Babylon*, *For sake her and let us go.*

By this it appears that Religion and Vertue are abundantly serviceable for the obtaining Publick and General Blessings: Now, for those that relate to every particular Man's Person, they are either the Blessings of the Soul or Body, or of both. Those of the Soul are,

1. Joy and Contentment of Mind; when the Soul enjoys it self in a perpetual Calm, and is not ruffled and discomposed with boisterous Passions. I do not mean that our Passions should be eradicated by a Stoical Apathy, for that

that were to deprive the Soul of the choicest Furniture which God and Nature has bountifully conferred upon it, and to turn Men into some other Species of Being than what they are; Desire being the Feet and Wings of the Mind in its vigorous contention after Vertue, and Hope and Gladness the Arms that embrace so great a Good: But that when the Affections are kept within their due Bounds and Limits, and all subjected to the *Imperium* and Command of the first mover, *Divine Love*, the Soul sustains and keeps it self so firm and compacted by that inward Power and Strength, that the most violent Storm of external Accidents cannot shake or disettle that Satisfaction and Contentment it reaps from the exercise of Vertue.

And

And indeed this is such an inestimable and solid Treasure, as is justly to be preferred before the choicest Gratifications of the bodily Life. All worldly Joy is flashy and dilute, and carries with it much of an Earthly Composition; But that satisfaction of Mind that arises from a sense of well-doing, is substantial and immoveable, and can neither be destroyed by Time, nor damp'd and choak'd by the most Calamitous Circumstances of Humane Life. Who are there in the World that live so pleasantly and contentedly, as they that are truly Religious? Whose Minds are free from all distrustful Fears and Jealousies, believing themselves secure under the Royal Mantle of Heavens Care and Providence, and who can look back upon their past Lives without any sense of Terror and Guilt. So that

that if our Hearts and Consciences condemn us not for Sin and Vice, they will set us above all those anxious Fears and Sollicitude that render a Man's Life uncomfortable.

On the other side it is certain, that every Vice fatally draws after it a Chain of Misery and Affliction, and he that makes a Trade of Sin cannot but look upon himself as a Person always obliged to Punishment. And this creates a perpetual distrust and misgiving of Mind, affording him nothing to support his Patience under here, nor any hope of bettering his Condition hereafter. But besides these disquieting Fears and Terrors, the constant Attendants of Vice, which produce restless Days, and sleepless and uneasy Nights; those Evil and wicked Affections to which Men in this Life are enslaved, have a very Evil Influence upon their Souls in the

the other World. For whatever it be that the Mind of Man pursues as its ultimate Good and Felicity, those Passionate Desires and Emigrations of Spirit after it, follow him even into the next Life. The Covetous Person who spins out his Life in a golden Thread, hath his Appetite and Hunger keenly edg'd in the next World, after the Idol which he ador'd in this. And the Lascivious Man burns with those Flames his Debauched Soul had kindled here below. And because the future State denies the acting of those Vices in such Circumstances as here upon Earth, it rends the perplexed Mind with a perpetual Thirst after that which she can never enjoy. So little hope is there of solid Contentment and Satisfaction in any thing but sincere Vertue.

2. Communion with G O D is another Blessing of the Soul. But this is so peculiar to Vertue and Religion, that a wicked Man, while he continues so, can never have the least taste or vital relish of it. There is a kind of natural sympathy and harmony running through the World, whereby things of a like nature incline to and are attractive of one another. Now, where there is no agreeableness or suitableness of Nature, there can be no firm Union or Society. And it is as impossible for a Vicious Man to have any Communion with G O D, as it is for the Elements to change their Natures, or Darknes and Light to combine, and lovingly shake hands together. And whatever our Modern Spiritualists and Enthusiasts may talk of their being Godded with G O D, and Christned with Christ (to whom

whom it may justly be replied in the words of Plotinus long ago to the Gnosticks, that *ἀνὲν ἀρετῆς θεὸς ὄνομα μόνον* without Vertue and real Goodness, G O D is but a Name, an empty and dry sound) yet certainly there is a very intimate Communion between G O D and the Soul of every Good Man, when the Soul converses with him, *ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ ἐπαφῇ*, by a quiet and secret feeling of the Vertue, Sweetness, and Power of his Goodness, as the fore-named Philosopher expresses it. And describing further this actual Conjunction of the Soul with God, he saith, That G O D and the Soul doth, as it were, *κέντρον κέντρον συνάπτει* join Centres, and Centres do wholly swallow up one another, so that this Philosopher seems to aim at an Union even more than touch. But whatever Idea these high and raised Expressions may imprint

O 2 upon

upon our Minds, yet doubtless their full sence is comprehended in that of St. *John*, 1 *Ep.* 4. 16. *God is Love; and he that dwelleth in Love, dwelleth in God, and God in him, i. e.* there is an intimate Communication between GOD and he, that is throughly Baptiz'd into the Spirit of Divine Love, and GOD imparts himself to such an one in this Life, so far as he is capable of receiving the Communications of his infinite Fulness. Which is the highest Privilege of Created Nature.

3. A good use of our Faculties, as the Understanding, Memory and Will. When the Understanding is pure and clear, and capable of Differencing and Discerning the best Things, and the Will obedient to that Light presented to it, and the Memory like a Faithful Steward, Treasures up those choice and useful Truths committed to its

Trust.

Trust. Now, true Goodness is of such a Nature, as that it purifies and refines these Faculties of the Mind; which, on the contrary, are infinitely weakned and disordered by Sensuality and immoderate Desires after the Bodily Life. There is nothing casts so fatal a Damp upon the choicest Powers of the Soul, as a deep Immersion in sensual Pleasures. So that though in this Life *we see but in a Glass* (as the Apostle phrases it) and that *darkly*, yet such is our Infelicity that the gross Streams and Suffusions that arise by the enormous agitation of the Corporeal Life, so fully and besmear the Glass of our Understandings, that the pure Image of the Divinity, and the bright face of Truth cannot sincerely be seen and discerned in it. And hence it is clear and evident, that the Mind is never so

O 3 health-

healthful and sprightly, as when it is carried in a steady and even course of Vertue.

Let us now consider the Blessings of the Body, which are *Health and Freedom from Pain*. And what tends more to the Advancement of these than Temperance, Chastity and Sobriety? For the Mind being thoroughly purged and freed from the pressure of earthly Vices and extravagant Lusts, derives a healing Influence even upon the Body it self, and adds a Briskness and Vivacity to our Terrestrial Frame. But when the Soul is sower'd with Hatred, pined with Envy, and daily fretted with those corroding Cares a Covetous Humour infects it withal, the Body participates of the Infirmities of the Mind, and often betrays its own ill Constitution by a Meagre Look, and a pale and dejected

jected Countenance. Is not the voluptuous Person frequently pressed into the Grave by an unequal Load of Meats and Drinks? And does not the lascivious Man groan under the Miseries contracted from a Lustful Bed? Nay, many times the innocent Posterity rue the Faults and Sins of their Ancestors, and the Rottenness and Diseases of the Parents, procured by their insatiable and ungovernable Appetites are equally transmitted together with their Inheritances to their Children.

Only Vertue that's kind and beneficial to us, by forbidding us all those things which would destroy our Natures; And if we would hearken to its gentle Whispers, it not only shows us, how by a natural efficacy it would preserve our Health, and free us from Pain, by accustoming us to

Ecclef. 8. 1

a discreet Moderation of our sensual Passions and Desires, but it bestows a benign Pulchritude and Serenity that is easily discerned in the external Visage and Countenance. And perhaps *Solomon* might allude to some such thing as this, when he tells us that *Wisdom makes the face to shine*, intimating, That the Practice of Holiness and Vertue fills the Soul with such a cheerful Light and Vigour as diffuses those lovely Beams which become visible in the very Face. As the Emperour *Antoninus* observed, *That a good, single-hearted and benign Person discovers these beautiful Qualifications in his Eyes, neither is it possible for him to hide them.*

Thus much for the Advantages which accrue to the Body from Religion: The Blessings which belong joyntly both to the Soul and Body are,

1. A

1. A good Name and Reputation. There is in the Mind of Man a natural Desire of perpetuating his Name and Memory; and in all his Actions of Moment he makes to himself little Emblems and faint Representations of Immortality. From hence springs the Care of Posterity, and here lies the Ground of those costly Monuments erected by the Ancients, viz. That they might immortalize their Names. But these are poor and petty things, and the effects of a mean and abject Mind to place our Fame and Reputation in any of those external Things which the injury of Time may obliterate and deface. A good Name and Reputation are only the Productions of true and sincere Vertue, and by how much the more Noble and Expansive this is, by so much the more glorious a Me-

Memory does it transmit of us to succeeding Generations. This alone will make the remembrance of us like a precious Oynment, which will yield a pleasant Fragrancy and Perfume, when we are gone into the other World.

2. A competency of Means and Estate. It is true, a flourishing Condition is not always the Lot of the best Christian, but rather considering the restless endeavours of Vice to promote it self, we must expect through many Tribulations to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. And if the sincerely Religious Person do not flow with Earthly abundance, yet he is better satisfied to die Poor, than to become Rich by the Spoils of Widows and Orphans, by the Arts and Intrigues of Fraud, Deceit, and Circumvention of others, which are the usual Methods of grow-

growing Rich in the World. However, it remains equally firm that the Good, Honest, Frugal and Diligent Person is in the surest way to prosper; and that he that pursues nothing as his ultimate end, but the true Love of God and Virtue, is invisibly made successful in his outward Circumstances, by a favourable and kind Providence.

By this Deduction of Particulars it is evident how much Religion contributes to our Happiness in this Life; And from what has been said, we see the great Worth and Excellency of true Christianity, whose salutary Influences and effects we experience both in this Life and the other. As for Vice, it is of such a pitiful and crazy Nature, that it cannot stand upon its own Legs, but is forced to use the shadow and countenance of Ver-

Vertue for its support. No Man dares to own or make a Profession of Vice for it self, but evermore covers it with some Sanctimonious Colour and Disguise. Judge then, what Worth or Value can there be in that which is not able to uphold it self, but is betrayed by its very Weakness? Let not then our ungovernable Appetites deprive us of that Happiness which is entailed upon a Vertuous Life. This will stand by us and support us in all Estates. 'Tis the Grace and Glory of our Youth to be found Vertuous and Good, and 'twill be the comfort of our old Age, when we have passed our days, and need no Repentance. Vertue makes the best Provision for the Happiness of Man in this Life : For if we would enjoy a long and prosperous Life here, there is no surer way to it than through the Paths
of

of Holiness; *length of Days are in her Right-hand, and in her Left-hand Riches and Honour.* Would we transact our Lives in Tranquility and Pleasure? There is no Peace so lasting, no Pleasure so pure, as that which springs from an honest Heart, *The ways of Religion are ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace.*

Indeed, if we are only in Love with sensual Pleasures, and make it our whole business to pursue the satisfaction of Brutes, we can never attain to any grateful and affecting relish of Holiness. Because Vertue is a thing that cannot be seen with Corporeal Eyes, nor can the true discriminating sense of it be discerned by the outward Taste. But there is an inward sense which is only awakened by the constant and serious Acts of Religion, that gives a true repre-

representation of Vertue, and affects the Mind with the solid Pleasures of Religion. Holiness is of a permanent and stable Nature, whose comfortable influence is most discernible in the worst state of things, and never leaves nor forsakes a Man in the Agonies of Death it self. But alas, what are all bodily Delights with which the Lives of Men are so much taken up? How frail and evanid! How fleeting and uncertain! And how void of all true Satisfaction and Content! What remains then, but that we seriously put in practice all the Acts of unfeigned Piety and Religion? Which if we have any Care of our best Interest we are strictly obliged to. For whether we consider Christianity as to its usefulness to the next Life, or its Serviceableness to this, in both these Cases the Profit and Advantage

vantage of it evidently appears.

And now having finished what I have to say upon this Text, I shall conclude with this, That Christianity is so fram'd in all its Parts, that no Man has any the least shadow of Reason to be ashamed of it.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our Learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by Patience and Comfort of thy Holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed Hope of everlasting Life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

F I N I S.