

No 2

*The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion
stated and explain'd*

I N A
S E R M O N

Preached before the
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At St. PETER's in the EAST
On Sunday, Mar. 7. 1762,

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R O M. I. 20.

For the invisible Things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the Things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead.

TH E *Apostle* is here speaking of the *Gentile World*. He tells us in the foregoing Verse that *that which might be known of God was manifest in them*; and that *God had shewed it unto them*. And he here teaches us that this was not by any prior Revelation, but by the Voice of Nature. *The invisible Things of him, even his eternal Power, and Godhead, were clearly seen from the Creation of the World, being understood by the Things that are made.* ^a And, again, he asserts that *they knew God, though they glorified him not as God*: and that therefore *they are without Excuse*.

^a Ver. 21.

This Doctrine of the *Apostle* naturally leads us to the Consideration of a Question much disputed of late about the Power, Extent, and Use, of *Reason* in Matters of *Religion*. Some would make *Reason* so self-sufficient as to exclude all Necessity, or Use, of *Revelation*: while others, willing to avoid this Extreme, have carried the Matter too far the other Way, decrying all Use of Reason in *Religion*, and asserting that the *Heathen* World had no Knowledge of *God* at all, and that there is no such Thing as *Natural Religion*. The first should seem to take away all Use; and the other to destroy all Proof of *Christianity*: the one would make it a needless, the other an irrational Institution. It must indeed be own'd to be an extremely difficult Undertaking to settle the precise Bounds and Limits of *Human Reason*; and to determine exactly how far it might go in discovering the Knowledge of *God*, and the Measures of our Duty. We are well assur'd that Man from the Beginning enjoy'd the Benefit of *Revelation*, and that *God* never from his first Creation left him in the Hands of his own Counsel. How far therefore *Reason* might have went without the Assistance of *Revelation* is not easy to say. How shall we distinguish

tinguish what Men learnt by the Use of their own *Reason* from what they receiv'd by Tradition grounded on ancient *Revelation*? We cannot then pronounce *Reason* sufficient for every Thing, because with Assistance it made great and noble Discoveries: nor can we say it was sufficient for nothing, because it stood in Need of Assistance. But, as this would be a fruitless, so I apprehend it is an unnecessary Enquiry. It may be sufficient, and I hope it may be of some Use, to lay down some general Rules, which may enable us to form some tolerable Judgment in this Matter, and direct us to steer between Infidelity on the one Hand, and Enthusiasm on the other.

First then, I hope it will be universally allow'd that Man is a *Rational* Animal. This is a Point, which as the Apostle here plainly supposes, so it neither needs, nor admits of, any Proof. If any Man should dispute this Truth, by his very disputing he confesses it.

Secondly, Man, as he is a *reasonable*, so is he also a *religious* Creature. This Proposition is as evident as the former: for, whoever shall bring Arguments to prove that *Reason* is of no Use in Matters of *Religion* thereby confutes himself. This is indeed what our *Reason* was chiefly given us for, to lead

us to the Knowledge of our *Creator*. It is the noblest and best Exercise of our Understanding, and what principally distinguishes us from the Brute Beasts. Nor can we read scarce of any Nation so savage, or ignorant, but what had some Sort of *Religion*, some Notions of a *God*. The same is expressly asserted here by the Apostle. He says that *the Gentiles knew God, and understood his eternal Power and Godhead*: and that this Knowledge was obtain'd by the Observation of *the Things that are made*. He adds that *they were without Excuse*: which they could not have been, if they had had no Knowledge of *God*, no Means of discovering his Nature, and their Duty to him. The same is evident from their Writings. ^a We find them acknowledging the

^a Of this many Instances might be produc'd: I shall content myself with referring only to Cicero's 2d Book *de Naturâ Deorum* — *Quid potest esse tam apertum, tamque perspicuum, cum cælum suspeximus cælestiaque contemplati sumus, quam esse aliquod Numen præstantissimæ Mentis, quo hæc regantur?* — Again — *Quòd si omnes Mundi partes ita constitutæ sunt, ut neque ad usum meliores potuerint esse, neque ad speciem pulcbriores, videamus utrum ea fortuita sint, an eo statu, in quo cohærere nullo modo potuerint, nisi sensu moderante, divinâque Providentiâ.* — And again — *Quis enim hunc Hominem dixerit, qui cum tam certos cæli motus, tam ratos astrorum ordines, tamque omnia inter se connexa & apta viderit, neget in his ullam inesse rationem, eaque casu fieri dicat, quæ quanto consilio gerantur nullo consilio assequi possumus?* &c.

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Being of a *God*, his Wisdom, Goodness, and Providence; and demonstrating them by the same Arguments, from which the Apostle says they learnt them, from *the Things that are made*, from the Beauty, Order, and Usefulness of the Works of the *Creation*.

Thirdly therefore there is such a Thing as *Natural Religion*. By *Natural Religion* we sometimes understand all Doctrines, and Duties, relating to the *Deity*, which may be prov'd and inferr'd from Principles of *Reason* in general. The Attributes of *God*, and the Duties owing to him, have been thus deduc'd by Divines from Principles of *Reason*: and such Disquisitions are not without their Use, as they serve to enforce the Practice of such Duties, and to convince us of the Reasonableness and Excellency of the *Christian Revelation*. But here by *Natural Religion* we rather mean what each particular Person might, and actually did, know of *God* by the Use of his Natural Faculties. And that some such Knowledge might be, and was, attain'd by the *Heathen World*, we have already seen.

Fourthly, all *Reveal'd Religion* is ultimately founded on *Natural*. The Doctrines indeed of *Reveal'd Religion* are not to be demonstrated, like Matters of Science, from Principles of
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of *Reason*, but to be prov'd from the Authority of the Revealer: but then this Authority must have such Attestation, as may satisfy a reasonable Enquirer. When *God* has thought fit to reveal himself immediately to particular Persons, he has commonly done it in such a Manner, as was consistent with the Use of their Natural Faculties. Nor can such inspir'd Persons communicate what they have receiv'd, or convince others that they are inspir'd, but by Means of some Proofs offer'd to their Understanding. ^a All Proofs indeed of *Revelation*, such as Miracles, Prophecy, or the like, resolve ultimately into the Veracity of *God*, and can lay no hold on him, who does not antecedently believe that *God is*, and that he is good, just, and true, and will not deceive those, who diligently seek him. There can be no Proof of any *Revelation* offered to him, who is utterly destitute of all Principles of *Natural Religion*. *God* cannot reveal himself to an Idiot, or Brute Beast, unless he first give them new Faculties. The same is still in a higher Degree applicable to all internal Marks of a *Divine Revelation*. These must

^a See *Jenkins's Reasonableness of Christianity* Vol. i. Part iv. Ch. 2. — *Christian's Faith a Rational Assent* Part ii. P. 145 &c.

be judg'd of by *Reason*, and can be judg'd of by *Reason* alone. Accordingly we find the Apostles ^a *reasoning* with the Persons they preach'd to, *perswading* both *the Jews and Greeks*, and all along supposing the Persons, to whom they address'd themselves, possess'd of the first Principles of *Natural Religion*. This might be shewn in many Instances, and particularly from ^b *St. Paul's* most sublime Discourse at *Athens*. The *Gentiles* had indeed no other Light, whereby to judge of the *Christian Revelation*: their *Reason*, however weak, or deprav'd, it may be suppos'd to be, was the only Rule they had to go by. By this they must judge both of the Nature, and Proofs, of any *Revelation* offer'd to them: or else they must have been incapable of forming any Judgment at all concerning it. If *Reason* were not thus far sufficient, I would ask what Motive they could have to quit the *Perswasion* they were bred up in? or why they should prefer *Christianity* itself to the most absurd Systems of *Heathenism*? Were Miracles sufficient to convince them? It is readily allow'd: But if we ask why? you must recur to Principles of *Natural Religion* to shew that the Proof from Miracles is con-

a *Acts* xviii. 4.

b *Acts* xvii. 22 &c.

clusive. Had they receiv'd Light from any former *Revelation*, yet, as all Memory of such *Revelation* was lost, and as they acknowledg'd no such, it could not be offer'd in Proof to them. It might enlighten their Understanding, and render them more capable of judging of the *Christian* Doctrines: but could not be distinguish'd from the Workings of their own *Reason*.

But how could *Reason* be a Rule for the *Heathen* World to judge by, ^a whose *foolish Heart* was *darken'd*, ^b and even their *Mind* and *Conscience* *defil'd*? False Notions of the *Deity* universally prevail'd: each Man's Prejudice, each Man's Lust, became his *Reason*. What then would become of the *True Religion*, if it were to stand, or fall, by the Determination of so corrupt a Judge? — But we do not say that a *Revelation* is to be immediately condemn'd, because it does not agree with a Man's pre-conceiv'd Notions. All Men have a Power of Recollection, and may at any Time re-examine the Grounds and Reasons of any Principles, which they may have imbib'd. *The Gospel of Christ* came attested with such Credentials, as, to say the very least, demanded every Man's most serious At-

^a *Rom.* i. 21.

^b *Tit.* i. 15.

tention.

tention. It was therefore in the Power, and it was certainly the Duty, of the *Heathen* World, on the Appearance of Christianity, to re-examine their pre-conceiv'd Notions: and I humbly apprehend they had Light enough to discover the Falshood of them. The Light of Nature, though miserably clouded and obscur'd, was not yet totally extinguish'd. For instance, they might by consulting their own Breasts have discover'd that their idolatrous Worship was founded not on *Reason*, but only on Tradition. And surely a *Revelation* so attested, as *Christianity* was, ought to have over-rul'd all such Prejudices. Had indeed the *Heathen* World wanted Light to judge of the Truth of *Christianity*, their Infidelity could not have been criminal. But it was generally not the Weakness of their Understanding, but the Wickedness of their Heart, which prevented them from discerning, and acknowledging, the Truth. Accordingly, on the one Hand we find the Apostles, and other *Christian* Writers, shewing the Folly of Idolatry from Principles of *Reason*: so did *St. Paul* (as we observ'd before) in his excellent Discourse at *Athens*. And on the other Hand we find the *Scriptures* charging the Infidelity of Unbelievers, not to any Want

of sufficient Capacity, but to their sinful Lusts and Passions. — ^a *This is the Condemnation (saith our Blessed Saviour) that Light is come into the World, and Men lov'd Darkness rather than Light, because their Deeds were evil. —*
^b *If our Gospel be hid (saith St. Paul) it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them which believe not, lest the Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine unto them.*

And as the *Heathen* had no other Rule but *Reason* whereby to judge of the Truth of a Revelation, so I apprehend that we *Christians* also must by our Reason satisfy ourselves of the Truth of the *Religion*, which we profess. The first Point in *Religion* is the Existence of God, and his Attributes, *his eternal Power and Godhead*. These, as the Apostle here teaches us, and as our own *Reason* informs us, are clearly seen, and understood, from the *Creation of the World*. These are prior in Order, and Course of Proof, to any *Revelation* of God's Will: and on these, as has been already shewn, all Proofs of a *Revelation* must ultimately rest. But, as I said before, we do not proceed here, as in Matters of Science. We do not make Use of our *Reason*,

^a *Job. iii. 19.*

^b *2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.*

as a Principle; whereby we may discover, or prove, the Truth of the Doctrines reveal'd; but as an Instrument, whereby we may judge of the Authenticity of the *Revelation*. Nor do we prove the Truth of *Christianity* by philosophical Arguments, but by *the Power of God*, by the Evidence of Miracles and Prophecy. But then this Evidence must be tried at the Bar of *Reason*. By *Reason* must we distinguish true Miracles from false Pretensions to Miracles, Doctrines worthy of *God* from such as are utterly unworthy of him: and the Force of the Argument drawn from Miracles must (as we have seen) be judg'd of, and supported by *Reason*. To deny this is in Effect to give up the Truth of our *Religion*, and set it on a Level with the grossest Imposture. For what more can be said against any Imposture, than either that it has no Proof, or such as cannot stand the Test of sober *Reason*,

And, if it is necessary to consult our *Reason*, in Order to satisfy ourselves of the Truth of those Things, which we have learned, much more so must it be, if we should attempt to convince, or confute, Unbelievers. For this can be done only by appealing to Principles common to both, that is, to the Principles of *Reason*,

son, and Natural Religion. And surely, if we have not followed cunningly devis'd Fables, this may be attempted with good Hopes of Success. If our *Religion* is true, it's Truth is capable of being prov'd. If we are fully assur'd of the Certainty of our most holy Faith, we need not fear that it should suffer any Prejudice from a rational Enquiry.

It were indeed to be wish'd that we had less Occasion to enter into the Proofs of our *Religion*, or defend it against the Objections of Unbelievers: and that Pastors and Teachers had no other Business, but to enforce the Practice of Piety, and Virtue, by their Doctrine, and Example. Much more ought we to lament the Disputes, and Divisions, among ourselves. We should rejoice to see all Controversies at an End, all Divisions heal'd, and all *Christians perfectly join'd together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment.* But, as long as there are *cunning and crafty Men, who lie in wait to deceive,* so long will it be necessary to warn Men of their *Slights,* and guard against their Devices. We could wish we were at Liberty to employ both Hands in building the Walls of *Jerusalem:* a but since there are Enemies, who are *conspiring all of*

^a See *Neb. iv. 7 &c.*

them together to come, and to fight against Jerusalem, we find it necessary, not only to make our Prayer unto our God, but to set a Watch against them Day and Night, to work in the Work with one Hand, and with the other to hold a Weapon. They, who would disarm us, either are in League with our Enemies, or know not what they say. ^a Since therefore unruly and vain Talkers, and Deceivers, abound, it is necessary that the Ministers of Christ should be able by sound Doctrine, both to exhort, and to convince the Gainsayers: at least to stop their Mouths with just Reasoning, and sound Speech that cannot be condemn'd. And this is more especially the Business of those, whose Leisure, Opportunities, and Abilities, qualify them to detect their Fallacies, and expose their Ignorance.

Fifthly, If it should be ask'd whether Reason is of any Use, and of what Use it is, to those who enjoy the Benefit of Revelation, I answer that, with Regard to Doctrines reveal'd, we are not to expect, or enquire after, any other Proof of them. The Authority of the Revealer is sufficient: and to this we ought to submit, even against Probability. If indeed the Subject be such, as we have a clear and

^a Tit. i. 9, 10.

adequate Comprehension of, and there be any thing in a pretended *Revelation*, which evidently contradicts any clear Principle of *Reason*, this would be a sufficient Objection against such *Revelation*. But this Question we here suppose already decided, and the Person convinc'd, after a rational and full Enquiry, of the Authenticity of the *Revelation*. And in this Case we ought to submit our own Opinions to the Authority of the Revealer. — a *Revelation* (says a great Master of Reason) where God has been pleas'd to give it, must carry it against the probable Conjectures of Reason, because the Mind, not being certain of the Truth of that it does not evidently know, but only yielding to the Probability that appears in it, is bound to give up its Assent to such a Testimony, which, it is satisfied, comes from one, who cannot err, and will not deceive. — Much more in Things, of which we have no clear Comprehension, and can form no competent Judgment, ought we to be determined by *Revelation*. This is in this Case our only Guide: these are Things above our *Reason*, and purely Matters of *Faith*.

a *Lock's Essay on Human Understanding*. B. iv. Ch. 18. Sect. 8.

Here then there is no Room for *Reason* as a Principle, but still, as an Instrument, it may, and must be, admitted. By this we must judge of the Sense of *Scripture*: not indeed from the Reason of the Thing, but by the same Rules whereby we judge of the Sense of other Authors, by considering the Context, the Design of the Writer, other parallel Passages, and the like. Again, Doctrines may be plainly prov'd from *Scripture*, which are not in express Words contain'd therein. Such Consequences must be drawn, and judg'd of, by the Use of our *Reason*. And so also Duties are usually prescrib'd in general Terms. But to adapt these to particular Cases, to adjust seemingly contrary Obligations, and to determine what may be our Duty in each particular Circumstance, which may occur, is a Work, which, as it is certainly necessary, so it requires no small Judgment, and Skill. Lastly, to defend the true Sense of *Scripture*, to rescue it from Misrepresentations, to answer the Objections, or clear up the Difficulties, which weak, or wicked, Men may suggest, is what those at least, who are ordained to be Teachers of the Word, ought to be able to do, and what cannot be done without competent Learning and Judgment.

Sixthly and Lastly, Though we have no other Rule but *Reason* whereby to judge of *Revelation*,^a yet it does not follow from hence that *Reason* is the Standard of Truth, or a *sufficient Guide in Matters of Religion*, at least not in the Sense, in which this Proposition is usually taken. For though *Reason* was the only Rule the *Gentile World* had to go by, and by which alone they could judge of the Authority of *Revelation*, it might notwithstanding this be very weak, and very depriv'd. They might be, and actually were, in the Condition of Persons, born indeed with Eyes,^b but *sitting in Darknes, and the Shadow of Death*; retaining only a Capacity of being enlighten'd by *the Day-spring from on high*. And this is the very State of the Case, as it is here represented by *St. Paul*. He supposes the *Gentiles* capable of discovering *the invisible Things of God from the Creation of the World*: but at the same Time represents them as in a most deplorable State of Ignorance, and Corruption,^c *vain in their Imaginations*, having *their foolish Heart darken'd*,^d *given over to a reprobate Mind*.^e And he recom-

a See my Sermon on 2 Cor. iii. 5.

b Luk. i. 78, 79.

c v. 21.

d v. 28.

e v. 7, 16.

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mends to them *the Gospel of Christ*, as the Fountain of *Grace and Peace*, *the Power of God unto Salvation*.

It would lead me into too large a Field of Discourse, should I attempt to set forth the Usefulness, and Expediency, of the *Christian Revelation*. This has been often done by much abler Hands: it may be sufficient to offer a few Hints.

First then, I would ask those, who delight to magnify the Power of *Human Reason*, what they mean by *Reason*. By *Reason* they must mean, if they mean any thing to the Purpose, *the Faculty, which God hath given to each Man of discovering and judging of, Truth*. But this is only a *Faculty*. God hath not originally implanted in any Man actual Knowledge, but only the Power and Capacity of obtaining it. These Powers must be call'd forth to Act, and Habit, by Use and Exercise, by Instruction and Education. Where these are wanting, these Powers will lie dormant: where our *Reason* receives a wrong Bias from erroneous Guides, and evil Customs, it will only serve to confirm us in Ignorance, and Error. Will you say then that the Child needs no Education, because

^a *Human Reason is able to discover every conceivable Duty?* or that the Savage wants no Instruction, because ^b *the Tables of the Natural Law are hung up in the Works of God, and are obvious to the Sight of all Men?* If not, why may not *Revelation* be equally useful, expedient, and necessary? If one Man may teach another, why must *God* alone stand excluded from the Power, or Possibility, of instructing, or enlightening, his own Creatures? *Education* supposes *Natural Parts*; and *Revelation* presupposes some *Natural Religion*: both of them suppose these *Faculties* not self-sufficient, but capable of Improvement, and standing in need of Assistance.

Besides, if we were to allow that *Reason* had been originally sufficient to lead Men to the Knowledge of their Duty, yet, when Corruption, and Idolatry, had overspread the Face of the World, the Case would be very much alter'd. The same *Faculties*, which by the Use of common Helps might have discover'd *the invisible things of God*, yet, destitute of all Assistance, or misled by blind Guides, popular Prejudices, and prevailing Errors, might stand in Need of a *Divine Revelation to guide*

^a Lord *Bolingbroke's* Philosophical Works. Vol. v. P. 543.

^b *Ib.* P. 153.

them into the Way of Peace. And that the whole World was thus become *vain in their Imaginations* we have not only the Authority of the Apostle, but the Attestation of all History, ^a and the Confession of their wisest Philosophers.

^b *Secondly*, I would ask these Advocates for the *Sufficiency of Human Reason*, whether they speak of *Human Reason* as subsisting in the whole Species, or in each particular Individual. If we were to allow that some of the wisest among the *Heathen* might attain a competent Knowledge of *God*, and their own Duty, yet surely it must be confess'd that the Generality of Mankind were in a most de-

^a The words of *Cicero* are very remarkable — *Natura parvulos nobis dedit igniculos, quos celeriter malis moribus, opinionibusque depravatis, sic restringimus, ut nusquam Naturæ Lumen appareat. Sunt enim ingeniis nostris semina innata virtutum, quæ si adolescere liceret, ipsa nos ad beatam vitam Natura perduceret. Nunc autem simul atque editi in lucem, & suscepti sumus, in omni continuè pravitate, & in summâ opinionum perversitate versamur, ut pœne cum lacte nutricis errorem suxisse videamur. Cùm verò parentibus redditi, demùm magistris traditi, tùm ità variis imbuimur erroribus, ut vanitati veritas, & opinioni confirmatæ Natura ipsa cedat. — Accedit eòdem quasi maximus quidam magister populus, atque omnis undique ad vitia consentiens multitudo: tùm planè inficimur opinionum pravitate, à Naturâque desciscimus.* Tusc. Quæst. Lib. iii. S. 1.

^b See my Sermon on 2 Cor. iii. 5.

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plorable State of Ignorance and Error. Not to insist then on the Errors, Divisions, and Uncertainties, among the Philosophers themselves, let us suppose that these, or at least some of them, had worthy Notions of *God*, yet to how few was this Knowledge confin'd? None but Men of Parts and Learning, of Study and liberal Education, were able to understand, or profit by, their Doctrines. They themselves generally had the Vulgar in great Contempt; they purposely wrapt up their Notions in dark and mysterious Expressions; they chose to confine their Instructions to those of their own School only; ^a and are said to have had two Sorts of Doctrines, one for the Vulgar, another for their own Disciples. Notwithstanding therefore many fine Sayings, and noble Sentiments of some *Heathen* Authors, yet it is most notorious that the Bulk of Mankind were in the Condition describ'd by the Apostle, — ^b *having the Understanding darken'd, being alienated from the Life of God, through the Ignorance that was in them, because of the Blindness of their Heart.* Gross Superstition and abominable Idolatry, had over-run the whole *Heathen* World: and

^a *Clem. Alex. Strom. L. v. P. 575. Ed. Par.*

^b *Eph. iv. 18.*

their very Religion consisted of the most ridiculous, impure, and inhuman Rites. But the *Christian* Religion is peculiarly adapted for the Salvation of all Mankind. ^a *The Gospel is preached to the Poor* : and all possible Provision, which the Nature of the Thing will admit of, is made for the Instruction of the meanest, and most illiterate, *Christian*. This then is an End worthy of the Interposition of ^b *the Father of Mercies*, ^c *the God of the Spirits of all Flesh*, ^d *who would have all Men to be sav'd, and to come to the Knowledge of the Truth*.

Thirdly, If we should be so complaisant as to allow, what is notoriously false, that all Men were of themselves able to discover a perfect Rule of Duty, yet we might reasonably ask what Motives they had to follow it. The Philosophers could never clearly make out upon what Principles originally, and for what End ultimately, *Virtue* was to be chosen. Endless were their Disputes, and great Variety of Opinions was there about the *Summum Bonum*, what was *the Chief Good*, or final *Happiness* of *Man*. Some of the best and wisest of them held that *Virtue* was *self-suffi-*

^a *Luk. vii. 22.*

^b *2 Cor. i. 3.*

^c *Num. xvi. 22.*

^d *1 Tim. ii. 4.*

cient to *it's own Happiness*: but, if in *this Life* only we have *Hope*, Experience will shew the Falseness of this Conceit. A future State of Rewards and Punishments seems indeed to have been set forth in the Ceremonies, and Mysteries, of *Paganism*: but then, as this Doctrine was evidently deriv'd from Tradition, so it was so adulterated, and obscur'd, by Fables and Fictions, as must very much take off from the Influence it ought to have upon the Hearts and Lives of Men. Among the Philosophers many denied any future State: ^a the wisest and best of them, though they assert the *Immortality of the Soul*, and bring good Proofs of it, yet often speak of it with so much Doubt and Diffidence, that some have question'd whether they really believ'd it, or no. But Thanks be to God, ^b who *bath brought Life and Immortality to Light through the Gospel*. This important Article of Religion

^a Νεφέλις γυνώσκω, cum lego, assentior: cum posui librum, et mecum ipse de immortalitate animorum caepi cogitare, assensio omnis illa elabitur. Cicero Tusc. Quaest. Lib. I. — Νῦν δὲ εὖ ἴστε ὅτι θεὸς παρὰ ἀνάγκης τε ἐλπίζω ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἀγαθὸς, καὶ τοῦτο μὲν ὅσα ἄνθρωποι ἀνθρώποις ἀκούουσιν. Platonis Phaedon. Sect. 8. — Αἰεὶ δὲ ἡδὴ ἄρα ἀπίστευται, ἔργα μὲν ἀποθανουμένων, ὑμῖν δὲ β.ω.σ.υ.λ.ύ.ο.ι.ς. ὅποτέροι δὲ ἡμῶν ἐργασίαι ἐπὶ ἀμεινον πρᾶγμα, ἀδήλων παρὰ πλὴν ἢ τῷ Θεῷ. Ed. Apolog. Sect. S. 33.

^b 2 Tim. i. 10.

is most plainly taught, ^a and full *Assurance* of it is given unto all Men by Christ, and his Apostles. And accordingly we find *Christians* of all Denominations unanimously agreeing in it. So that now by the clear Knowledge of this great Point the Practice of universal Righteousness is established on a sure Foundation, and we have the greatest Reason, and the highest Motive, to be ^b *steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord.*

Lastly, If we should farther allow that both the Precepts, and Sanctions, of the *Law of Nature*, were perfectly discoverable by every Man, yet what will become of those, who have disobey'd these Precepts, and despis'd these Sanctions? When Man has *transgress'd the Laws* of his Maker, *chang'd the Ordinance*, and *broken the everlasting Covenant*, where will he reconcile himself to God? Will not these Precepts, and Sanctions, which should have secur'd his Obedience, rise up in Judgment against him? and the very suppos'd *Sufficiency of the Law of Nature* condemn him? ^c Will not *the Commandment*, which

^a *Acts* xvii. 31.

^b *I Cor.* xv. 58.

^c *Rom.* vii. 10.

was ordained to Life, be found to be unto Death? But we shall be told, I suppose, that *God* is merciful, and placable; and that, if by Repentance we remove the Cause of his Displeasure, that Displeasure must cease. But will a Crime, which is censurable in the Act, cease to be so, when it is past? Can we hope to discharge an old Debt only by forbearing to incur new ones? or to atone for our past Disobedience merely by not continuing to heap up fresh Provocations? It is natural for Men, who have sinn'd, to stand in Fear of Punishment: nor can *Reason* alone give them any certain Assurance of Pardon. And this has always been the general Sense of Mankind. All the *Religions*, which have ever prevail'd in the World, have prescrib'd Rites calculated to avert the Wrath of *God*: and Gifts, and Sacrifices, have been every where offer'd for this Purpose. But, supposing we should allow all that is contended for, and more than can be prov'd. *God*, they tell us, is merciful, and placable, ready to receive all who repent. Be it then so: and will not this very Mercy, which moves him to accept Repentance, incline him also to declare his Acceptance of it? We know that Mankind were actually in great Doubt, and Perplexity,

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on this very Subject: and might it not reasonably be hop'd that a good *God* would interpose, to free them from these Doubts, and Perplexities? and *to deliver them, who, through Fear of his Displeasure were all their Lifetime subject to Bondage?* And what is the *Gospel*, but a Declaration of *God's* Mercy, and Readiness to receive Sinners on Repentance, attended only with such Circumstances, as are at the same Time consistent with *God's* Holiness and Justice; as most powerfully set forth his Detestation of Sin, and tend most effectually to deter Men from future Transgressions. This seems indeed to be the great Difference between the *Religion of Nature*, and that of *Christ*: the one considers Men, as in a perfect State; the other considers them, as what they are, *Sinners*. And all the peculiar Doctrines, and Precepts, of Christianity are relative to this great Point, *the Ministry of Reconciliation*. This is therefore a *Revelation*, which the State of Mankind plainly requir'd: and which *Reason* itself taught Men to expect.

Let us therefore receive these *glad Tidings of Salvation* with Joy and Thankfulness: and let us cheerfully conform our Lives to the excellent Precepts of our most holy *Religion*.

gion. The Necessity of *Good Works* is on all Hands acknowledged. This is the *End* of the *Commandment*, the Sum and Substance both of the *Law of Nature*, and of that of *Christ*. This every *Way*, whether in *Pretence*, or in *Truth*, is *prohib'd*, both by those, who speak most highly, and most fightingly, of *Human Reason*. They, who would magnify the Sufficiency of the *Law of Nature*, pretend to do it for this Reason, because all *Moral Duty* may be deriv'd from it: and they, who will allow no such Thing as *Natural Duty*, with a just and laudable Zeal will denounce *Infidels* ought to be a *peculiar People*, authors of *good Works*. Nay, we shall scarce meet with any *Libertine* so hardy, as so boldly to deny all *Moral Obligations*. The very *Professors* of *Men* own the Truth of these Principles, which in *Works* they deny: and though they hate the *Light*, yet cannot wholly shut their Eyes against the Force of it. ^a Let every one therefore, who *nometh the Name of Christ*, depart from *Iniquity*. Let us by the Purity and Holiness of our Lives exemplify the distinguishing Excellency of our Religion: let us approve ourselves ^b a *holy Nation, a peculiar*

^a 2 Tim. ii. 19.

^b 1 Pet. ii. 9.

People; and thereby shew forth the Praises of him, who hath call'd us out of Darkness into his marvellous Light. ^b For it had been better for us not to have known the Way of Righteousness, than, after we have known it, to turn from the holy Commandment deliver'd unto us. If the Gentiles were without Excuse, because, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, ^b how much more inexcusable must we be, if we do the same Things, after so much fuller Assurance that the Judgment of God is according to Truth against them, which commit such Things? For, as the Apostle here argues, God will render to every Man according to his Deeds: to them, who by patient Continuance in Well-doing seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality; eternal Life: but unto them, that are contentious, and do not obey the Truth, but obey Unrighteousness; Indignation and Wrath; Tribulation and Anguish upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil, of the Gentile, and much more of the Christian. For there is no Respect of Persons with God.

a 2 Pet. ii. 21.

b Rom. ii. 1 &c.

F I N I S.