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DEFENCE

O F

PUBLIC OR SOCIAL WORSHIP;

I N A

*L E T T E R,*

ADDRESSED TO

GILBERT WAKEFIELD, B. A.

B Y

JAMES WILSON, M. A.

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L O N D O N.

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M D C C X C I I .

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*A Defence of public or social Worship;*

IN A LETTER ADDRESSED TO

GILBERT WAKEFIELD, B. A.

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STOCKPORT, JANUARY 9, 1792.

S I R,

**I** HAVE seen your Enquiry concerning public, or social Worship, and I have read it with some degree of attention. As you have given your decided negative on the expediency and propriety of such performances; the public will naturally be led to examine the arguments, by which you support your opinion. Whatever comes from a person of your abilities and reputation, will not

only claim, but command the notice of the world. —Some will view your sentiments with the steady eye of philosophy, and enquire whether these things be so : while others will turn away from them with fear, and shun them with indignation. For my own part, I feel a pleasing satisfaction, in being thus induced to consider a subject of so much importance. We have nothing to fear, but many things to hope for from enquiry. Every thing else has gained by investigation, and why should Religion be treated as an exception? We cannot wish to retain any thing but the truth ; and amidst all the conflicts of contending parties it will prevail : like a firm rock it will stand unmoved, when the tempest has subsided, and the dashing billows have retired to their appointed place.

Your arguments are principally founded upon the practice and authority of Jesus Christ, together with the conduct of his Apostles. These I shall separately examine, and shall also take notice of

any other circumstances, which may seem to be worthy of attention.

To show, that Jesus Christ rejected public, or social worship, you produce the following texts of scripture.

*And when he had sent the multitude away, he went up to a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, he was there alone\*.—Then cometh Jesus with them to a place called Gethsemane, and saith to the disciples, sit ye here, while I go, and pray yonder †.—And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed ‡.—And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed §.—And it came to pass in those days, that he went out to a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God ||.—And it came to pass, as he was alone praying ©.*

These quotations clearly prove, that Jesus was a friend to private devotion. It is reasonable to believe, that one of his piety would frequently

\* Matt. xiv. 23.    † Matt. xxvi. 36.    ‡ Luke xxii. 41.

§ Luke v. 16.    || Luke vi. 12.    © Luke ix. 18.

addresses himself to God, when there was no eye to see him, but that, which beholds all things ; and when there was no ear to hear, but that, which is open to the softest call. It is easy to conceive, that one of his contemplative turn of mind would seek for opportunities of retiring occasionally from the busy crowd. Besides he was a man of sorrows, and grief, in its deepest strains, is generally to be found in the secret abode.

But, Sir, it must be observed, that Jesus Christ was not deficient in the performance of public duty ; for he often went into the temple of God. There the people met in solemn assembly : thither they went to worship the Most High. When the evening and morning sacrifices were offered up in the temple, then incense was also presented upon the altar in the holy place. In the mean time, the people, who stood in the court between the porch and the altar, were engaged in the exercise of prayer, that together with the incense their sentiments of piety might ascend in memorial to

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the throne of God. *And it came to pass, that while Zacharias executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course; according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense, when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without, at the time of the incense\*.*

We nowhere find Jesus disapproving of these public prayers, and he was a frequent attendant in the temple himself.—Peter, and John, his beloved disciple, may be supposed to have known his will; and yet we have it on record, that they *went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer †.*

It does not appear, that any form of prayer was used in the temple at Jerusalem, or that any person was appointed to lead the devotions of the multitude; every one, as it seems, offered up his own petitions. But still their worship was public; for it was well known, that their appearing in that venerable place was professedly to pray.—Moreover, if we may form an opinion from what

\* Luke i. 8, 9, 10.      † Acts iii. 1.

is said of the prayer of the Pharisee and Publican, we shall be led to conclude, that at least some of them spoke so loud, as to be heard by those who stood near. This conclusion is much corroborated by the practice of the Jews in modern times.— You may hear them, in the synagogues, distinctly pronounce their individual prayers.

But, Sir, this does not seem to be so becoming, as that regularity which is required in our public devotions, and is not on that account fit for our imitation. The Jews occasionally offer up individual prayers in the synagogues, as their brethren of old did, at the hour of incense, in any situation which they thought proper, when they had not an opportunity or inclination to go up into the temple.

Another argument in favour of public or social worship, may be drawn from Christ's attendance in the synagogues. It is reasonable to suppose, that he joined in the services which were there performed; and if it shall appear, that any part

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of them consisted of public prayer, we shall then have a convincing proof, that social worship met with his approbation. We are told, that he taught, and that he preached, in the synagogues; but it must be acknowledged, that the scriptures do not inform us, in positive terms, that he prayed in them. But let it be remembered, that the whole is often meant to be expressed by one of its parts; therefore, if we find, that public prayers were offered up in the synagogues, we shall have reason to conclude, that Jesus Christ joined in that social worship.

The members of the Church of England tell us, that they went to Church to say their prayers, tho' they also were present during the other public appointments of the place. The members of the Church of Scotland say, that such a person preached to them, while at the same time they mean, that he also performed the other parts of the public service; for there it is not customary for one to go through the devotional part, and



for another to preach. The Catholics are said to attend Mass, though it is meant, that they likewise join in the other appointed performances of their Church. In the same manner, it may have only been said of Christ, that he taught and preached in the synagogues; though he also went thither to pray.

The importance of the law of Moses rendered the reading and expounding of it so essential, that the whole services of the synagogue might be spoken of under the expression of reading the law, and teaching, or preaching its precepts. The knowledge of it was highly necessary for the well being of the nation.

For sometime before the Babylonish captivity, the Jews were peculiarly prone to idolatry, and this has, with justice, been ascribed to their ignorance of the law, which, in its leading injunction, required them not to forsake the God of their fathers. By a concurrence of disastrous events, and by the gradual progress of corruption, there

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were few copies of the law to be found in the land, and of course it must have been little known, or understood. In those days of darkness, they bowed themselves down before idols, and did wickedly in the sight of the Lord.

When they were repairing the temple in the reign of the good king Josiah, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law in the house of the Lord: and Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan the scribe, and Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes\*. These circumstances clearly show, that the law was little known, either to the priest, the scribe, or the king. Josiah found, that they had lost the knowledge of their duty, and that they had departed from the path of true wisdom. He exerted himself to avert the evils, in which the sins of the people had involved them; but he had not the happiness of completely effecting his purpose. They were become the servants of idols,

\* ii. Kings, xxii. 8, 10, 11.

their dignity was brought low, their minds were enslaved, and at length they were led captives to Babylon.

Being sensible of their past errors, and having smarted under the lash of their iniquity, they took care, after their return from the Babylonish captivity, to have synagogues erected, in which the law was regularly read and explained. In progress of time, the works of the prophets were added to the law, and these, in conjunction with their other public instructions, had such a powerful effect upon their minds, that they never again forsook the service of the living God.

If such was the happy influence of reading and illustrating the law and the prophets, we cannot be surpris'd to find, that the duties of the synagogue are represented by these important services.

Social prayer seems to me to be one of the most interesting performances of religion, and among the Jews it must also have been of great importance. But from the peculiar situation in

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which they were placed, an attention to the law seemed to claim their most distinguished regard. To keep them from idolatry, was to preserve them in the love and in the fear of God ; but to permit a deviation from this path, was to pave the way for an influx of vanity and crimes.

Upon the authority of Dr. Prideaux\*, I will venture to affirm, *that public and social worship constituted a part of the Jewish service in the synagogue.*

“ The service to be performed in these synagogue assemblies were prayers, reading the scriptures, and preaching and expounding upon them.

“ For their prayers they have liturgies, in which are all the prescribed forms of their synagogue worship. These at first were very few, but since, they are increased unto a very large bulk, which makes their synagogue service very long and tedious ; and the rubric, by which they re-

\* Connection of the history of the Old and New Testament, part first, page 168.—Dublin edition, folio.

gulate it, is very perplexed and intricate, and incumbered with many rites and ceremonious observances.

“ The most solemn part of their prayers, are those which they call *Shemoneh Eshreh*\* i. e. the eighteen prayers. These, they say, were composed and instituted by Ezra, and the great synagogue; and, to them Rabbi Gamaliel, a little before the destruction of Jerufalem, added the nineteenth.

“ It is certain these prayers are very ancient; for mention is made of them in the *Mishna* †, as old settled forms; and no doubt is to be made, but they were used in our Saviour’s time, at least most of them, if not all the eighteen; and consequently, that he joined in them with the rest of the Jews whenever he went into their synagogues, as he always did every sabbath day.”

\* Maimonidas in Tephillah.

† Berachoth, cap. 4, § 3.

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The following passages are translated from some of their stated forms\*.—*Be thou merciful to us, O our father, for we have sinned: pardon us, O our king, for we have transgressed against thee: for thou art God, good and ready to pardon. Blessed art thou, O Lord, most gracious, who multipliest thy mercies in the forgiveness of sins.*

*Look, we beseech thee, upon our afflictions. Be thou on our side in all contentions.*

*Heal us, O Lord our God, and we shall be healed: save us, and we shall be saved; for thou art our praise. Bring unto us sound health, and a perfect remedy for all our infirmities, and for all our griefs, and for all our wounds.*

*Bless us, O Lord, in every work of our hands, and bless unto us the seasons of the year, and give us the dew and the rain.—*

“ The address in the Lord's prayer, *our father*, and not *my father*, may seem” you say, “ to imply a society of worshippers uniting in the petitions of that formulary of devotion. But this argument will appear of no weight, if we reflect, that the

\* See Prideaux as before.

capital precept of Christianity is universal benevolence.—How then can a professor of this disinterested comprehensive system,—offer up even his private devotions, but as one amongst many children, in the father of the family of the universe. This worshipper—will habitually cry out, not *my father*, but *our father!* not *my God*, but *our God!*"\*

Every person of true worth, must be pleased with benevolence and universal good-will; and, when thinking of himself as allied to the human race, would not hesitate to say in his private devotions *our father*. But among us this is not a common mode of address; and it does not seem to have been so among the Jews.

When David prayed by himself, he said *I*, and not *we*.—*Be merciful unto me, O Lord, for I cry unto thee daily. Rejoice the soul of thy servant; for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul*†.

\* Pages 25, and 26.

† Psalm lxxxvi. 3, 4.

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*O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee; let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry, for my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave\*.*

We find some of the prayers in the book of Psalms running in the plural number; but it appears, that most, if not all of these, were meant to be repeated, or sung, in the assembly of the people; and therefore may be produced as an additional argument in support of public worship.

Jesus Christ, who was an example of benevolence, did not in his private prayers say *we* nor *us*; but *I* and *me*. *My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will——†.*

From these considerations, and from the nature of language itself, it is rather wonderful, that the prayers in the Jewish liturgies are not generally expressed in the singular number, if they were composed for private, and not for social devotion. Though the Lord's prayer may, with propriety,

\* Psalm lxxxviii. 1, 2, 3. † Matthew xxvi. 39.



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be used by an individual ; yet, it is highly probable, that it was meant also to be used in social worship, by the disciples and followers of Jesus.

Our Lord seems to have been well acquainted with the prayers of the synagogue, for it is said, that the form which he recommended to his disciples; was chiefly compiled from them. It has been observed\*, “ that this prayer is taken out of the Jewish liturgies, in which we wholly find it, except only these words, *as we forgive those, who have transgressed against us. Our father, which art in heaven,* is in their Seder Tephilloth, or form of prayers. *Let thy great name be sanctified, and thy kingdom reign,*” is “ in their form of Kaddish. *Let thy memory be glorified in heaven above, and in the earth beneath,*” is “ in the Seder Tephilloth. *Forgive us our sins,*” is “ in the sixth of their eighteen daily prayers. *Deliver us not to the hand of temptations, and deliver us from the evil figment,*” is “ in that and the book Mufar.

\* Dr. Whitby's comment. on the 9th verse of the 6th chapter of Matthew.

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*For thine is the power, and the kingdom for ever and ever, is, saith Drufius, their usual doxology."*

We have seen, that the Jews worshiped, in a public and social manner, in their synagogues; but we have no intimation of their doing so, when they met in the fields, or in private houses; and this may account for our Lord's not praying with the multitudes\*, who followed him, nor with the disciples on various occasions.

You say, "the object of the Jews in their assemblies, seems to be merely to recite the scriptures in the way of praise and thanksgiving‡, and to sing hymns, after the custom of the first Christians, mentioned by Pliny in his epistles, in honour of the Supreme Being," and, you might have added, after the manner of Christ himself||.

\* See Mr. Wakefield's enquiry, p. 8, 9, and 10.

‡ Who does not remember, that, upon the late happy recovery of our King, a sublime and almost inimitable prayer was composed for the use of the synagogues? This is a pretty clear proof, that they go farther in their public services than you seem willing to allow.

|| Matthew xxvi. 30.

You allow the propriety of offering public praise and thanksgiving to God:—but thanksgiving is a part of that exercise, which is denominated prayer\* ; and how can it be more decent or expedient, when it is recited from the scriptures, or sung by way of hymn, than when it is addressed to the Most High, in the form of social prayer.

When speaking of solitary prayer in the synagogue, you say †, “such a mode of prayer must always of necessity carry an appearance of ostentation with it. And more notoriously must this effect take place in the devotions of social worshippers.” But I will ask you, Sir, whether there be a greater appearance of ostentation in celebrating the praises of Jehovah, and thanking him publicly for his mercies—which you allow to be proper ‡,

\* Under the word prayer are comprehended—adoration of the Deity ; thanksgiving for his goodness ; trust in his providence ; and petitions for his mercy and assistance. Perhaps these might, with more propriety, be called devotional addresses than prayers : but the use of language is to convey ideas ; and the meaning of the term prayer, is sufficiently understood. † page 17. ‡ page 35.

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or in appearing before him with humility in the assemblies of the people, and praying for the supply of our wants ?

The truth is, that in order to make your scheme consistent, you must forbid us to join in any public engagement, which could imply adoration of the Supreme Being, an acknowledgment of his preserving power, gratitude for his kindness, or a request for future blessings. How far this conduct would be dutiful, or amiable, may be left to the decision of the world. As for Jesus Christ, he has left us an example of public gratitude, for in the presence of his disciples, he thanked God for his kindness. *As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and said, take, eat. And he took the cup, and gave THANKS, and gave it to them, saying, drink ye all of it\**.

“ My ideas” you add †, “ do not at all interfere with expressions of *praise*, and *gratitude*, in any circumstances, when the occasion may call them forth.”

\* Matthew xxvi. 26, 27.

† Page 33.

Then you do allow the propriety of praise and gratitude ; and, if you do, it must be obvious, that every person is to judge for himself what “ occasion may call them forth,” and where they are to be expressed. To me it seems expedient, to take frequent public opportunities of impressing our minds with a becoming sense of God, and the dispensations of his providence.

But you subjoin, “ what has this to do with *social worship at church, or chapel?*” You do not absolutely deny, that the scriptures afford instances of a few individuals collectively addressing themselves to the Deity, and you would allow this to be done “ when the occasion may call” for it ; but you would, in no case, have it performed “ in a crowded congregation” \*.

Worship, Sir, is the duty of us all ; and, if it is proper in a small, but public assembly, it must be so in one which is large—provided regularity and decorum be observed. A solemn exercise of re-

\* Page 33.

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ligion, which equally concerns the whole human race, is widely different from some of the common affairs of life, which are fit for the knowledge of a few ; but which ought not to be exposed to the public eye.

Jesus Christ reprov'd some persons in his time for ostentatious worship ; but it was not for a respectful performance of public devotion ; it was for hypocritical conduct—*they love, said he, to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men*\*.

Our Lord also condemn'd *vain repetitions* §, and blamed those, who *for a pretence* † made long prayers. Of these and other improprieties you loudly complain ; and I assure you, Sir, that I am not an advocate for any thing burthensome, or improper. But certainly you do not mean to insinuate, that whatever is abused ought to be destroyed. Were you thus to enter into judgment, what could stand before you? Let us be assiduous

\* Matthew vi. 5.    § Matthew vi. 7.    † Matthew xxiii. 14.

in rectifying that which is amiss ; but in rejecting what is improper, let us beware, lest we part with any thing essential.—While we prune the tree, let us not injure the trunk ; while we trim the lamp, let us not extinguish the flame.

The Samaritans had their temple on Mount Gerizim, and the Jews said, *that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.* When a woman of Samaria mentioned this difference of opinion to Jesus, he replied, *believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither on this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the father in spirit and in truth : for the father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit : and they who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth\*.*

You say, this leads to “ *the Abolition of all temple worship—that is, of all public devotion*” †. To me, it suggests a very different interpretation ; and seems to imply, that it is of no importance where men

\* John iv. 20, 21, 23, 24.

† Page 19.

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offer up their prayers, provided they do it in sincerity of heart. The truth of this observation will be more and more apparent, as the light of reason increases, and the darkness of superstition is dispelled. Well might Christ say, *the hour cometh, and now, in some measure, is, when the true worshippers shall worship the father in spirit and in truth\**.—By the gospel men are taught, that Jehovah is not the God of the Jew only, but of the Gentile; that he does not dwell only at Jerufalem, or on Mount Gerizim, but that all nature is his temple, all space his abode, and that he is every where present to hear the prayers of his people.

John tells us, that in holy vision he saw *no temple †* in heaven.—The pure and elevated nature of those who dwell in that blessed place, together with the more illustrious displays of Jehovah's power and excellence, may be sufficient to arrest their attention, and tune their hearts to the loftiest strains; but it is not so with us: we dwell

\* John iv. 23.

† Revel. xxi. 22.



in tabernacles of clay, and have need of various means to assist us in our devotions.—Public worship has been frequently found to be powerful over the straying, but serious mind.—It ought to be remembered, that the same apostle represents some of the heavenly inhabitants as engaged in worshipping God.—*The four and twenty elders fall down before him, who sat on the throne, and worship him, who liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne\**.

As eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God hath prepared for those who love him, it may be replied, that John could not be supposed to know the employment of those in heaven. But this objection is so far from overturning what I want to establish, that it strengthens my argument.—If John only spoke in prophetic vision, and yet described the blessed above as joining in devotion, it shews, that he had been accustomed to public worship on earth; for we must form our ideas of those things which we have not seen, from those with which we are acquainted.

\* Revelation iv. 10.

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Let us now turn our attention to the practice of the apostles and the immediate followers of Jesus. Here we may begin with observing, that they prayed in a social manner, when they were about to elect a companion instead of Judas. I cannot agree with you in saying, that “It is no absurd supposition, and one abundantly defensible from other writers, that the *evangelical* historian means only to state the *general sentiments* of the apostles at that time, and the *purport* of the prayer, which they *individually* presented to the Almighty”\*. The passage, in its obvious tendency, seems to me clearly to show, that they offered up an united prayer.—*And they prayed, and said, thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may partake of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell †.*

But you say, “Will an address to the Supreme Being, at so extraordinary a juncture, of *half a minute long*, be deemed by any man an adequate

\* Page 33. † Acts i. 24, 25.

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authority for the establishment of *social prayer*, perpetually recurring on no *particular urgency* of occasion, and *long* enough to tire the most unrelenting patience?"\* The length or shortness of the prayer, has nothing to do in the present consideration; it will be enough, if it be proved, that the apostles joined in social worship. But the following record shows, that they offered up a joint prayer more than *half a minute long*.—*They went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James, the son of Alpheus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas, the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren†.*

Is it not here evidently shown, that their worship, on this occasion, was *social*, and that they persevered in it for some time? *These all CONTINUED with one accord in prayer*; and it is added, in *supplication*, which evinces, that in their devotions, they

\* Page 32.

† Acts i. 13, 14.

did not confine themselves to thanksgiving and singing “*hymns*”<sup>\*</sup>.

Many other texts of scripture might be produced to support the opinion, that the immediate followers of Jesus Christ performed public and social prayer, but I shall confine myself to a few ; as they, together with what have already been advanced, seem to be sufficient for the proof of that which is intended.—*Peter was kept in prison ; but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him*<sup>†</sup>.—*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer*<sup>‡</sup>.—*Peter came to the house of Mary ; where many were gathered together, praying*<sup>§</sup>.

I am convinced from the foregoing observations, that we are justified in the performance of public and social worship, both by the example of Jesus Christ, and his apostles.—And now, Sir, I shall remind you of a promise, which you voluntarily made, when you threw down the

<sup>\*</sup> Page 35.    <sup>†</sup> Acts xii. 5.    <sup>‡</sup> Acts ii. 42.    <sup>§</sup> Acts xii. 12.

gauntlet—leaving it to your own consideration, and the decision of our impartial readers, whether the arguments which I have adduced, call upon you to fulfil it—“ Give me but one single positive proof of the existence of *social worship* among Christ and his apostles, and I retire with shame from the field of contest, and resign the victory” \*.

We are professedly the disciples of Jesus, and ought to obey the precepts of his wisdom ; but he has left no command behind, which requires us to avoid worshipping in public. Respecting the externals of religion, he has left us at perfect liberty to choose for ourselves. We ought always to mark the difference between the means and the end.— It is by neglecting this distinction, that we condemn others for differing from us in sentiments of religion. It has been by not attending to this important consideration, that the sword of perfection has been wielded, and that the benevolent spirit of Christianity has at any time been cruel

\* Page 13.

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and unmerciful. The end of religion is good conduct and happiness; but the means to be employed for promoting this, must be left to our own discretion, and the influence of those circumstances in which we are placed. The apostles seem to have encouraged the same ideas; for they departed from many of the Jewish ceremonies, which we do not find to have been rejected by Jesus; and they joined in social worship, in other places than the synagogues—though it does not appear to have been authorized by the practice of their Lord. Nothing could make that right, which is wrong in its nature; and nothing could make that sinful, which is beneficial in its tendency. If public and social worship be useful to society, it must be the command of heaven, and no positive injunction could warrant us to destroy it.

The Sabbath returning at stated intervals, gives a joyous opportunity of rest to him who is weary: it contributes to his health, as it leads him to clean-

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liness and change of raiment : it promotes virtue, as it encourages contemplation : it gives him an opportunity of going to the house of God, where he may reap many advantages from public devotion.

But you are not an enemy to the assembling of ourselves together in public ; for you say, “ Our *sabbaths* also shall be kept ; but not with the *leavæ* of hypocritical formalities, and the parade of misguided superstition, in praying for *calamities*, and in deprecating  *blessings*” \*.—Why do you consider these improprieties as inseparably connected with public worship? I shall not attempt to point out any prevailing mode, as the most complete exception to this general condemnation ; but I venture to affirm, that social worship may be performed in a decent, respectful, and beneficial way.

It is natural for us to address ourselves to God, in prosperity, or in adversity. To whom ought we to give thanks, but to him, who is our best

\* Pages 39 and 40.

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friend? To whom should we look for comfort, but to him, who is able and willing to bestow it?—Prayer reminds us of our dependance on heaven, and teaches us humility; it leads us to the love of God, and the love of man. Our requests are not intended to inform the Deity of our wants, for he knows them well; they are not to move his compassion, for mercy has been his name for ever;—but they are meant to operate on our own minds; to make us walk worthy of the blessings which we crave; and to induce us to seek them in those paths, where he has appointed them to be found.

You admit of secret prayer, and it is certainly well adapted for personal supplications, and individual thanksgivings; but public worship has many peculiar advantages, and is better calculated for discharging our duty concerning the things which belong to us as members of society.

How decent and how wise is it to return joint thanks for the blessings which have descended upon us in common! In the house of God, the



rich and the poor meet together, and they are reminded, that Jehovah is the father of them all. When they address him, as his children, they are taught to consider one another as brethren: when they recollect, that they are all subject to temptations, and that they are travelling together through a changeable world, they are instructed to exercise sympathy, and all the benevolent affections.—When these pleasing and profitable considerations have expanded the powers of their minds, and elevated their devotion, they are apt to say, *this is none other but the house of God, verily this is the gate of heaven\**.

To conclude; how much soever we may differ in opinion—may we always agree in whatever is good, excellent, and worthy of praise.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

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\* Gen. xxviii. 17.