

CHAPTER IV.

Directions about the Profession of our Religion to others.

Direct. 1. ‘UNDERSTAND first how great a duty the profession of true religion is, that you may not think as some foolish people, that every man should conceal his religion, or keep it to himself.’ Observe therefore these reasons following which require it.

1. Our tongues and bodies are made to exercise and shew forth that acknowledgment and adoration of God which is in our hearts. And as he denieth God with the heart who doth not believe in him and worship him in his heart, so he denieth God imputatively with his tongue and life, who doth not profess and honour him with his tongue and life; and so he is a practical atheist. “I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength—In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory ^b.” “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father ^c.” “One shall say, I am the Lord’s: and another shall call him by the name of Jacob: and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel ^d.”

2. The public assemblies, and worship of God, are purposely appointed by him, that in them we might make open profession of our religion. He that denieth profession, denieth the public faith and worship of the church, and de-

^a Nemo jam infamiam incutiat; nemo aliud existimet: quin nec fas est ulli de sua religione mentiri. Ex eo enim quod aliud à se coli dicit quam colit, et culturam et honorem in alterum transferendo, jam non colit quod negavit: dicimus, et palam dicimus et vobis torquentibus lacerati et cruenti vociferamur, Deum colimus per Christum: Tertul. Apolog. c. 11.

^b Isa. xlv. 23—25.

^c Phil. ii. 9—11.

^d Isa. xlv. 5.

nieth baptism and the Lord's supper, which are sacraments appointed for the solemn profession of our faith.

3. Our profession is needful to our glorifying God. Men see not our hearts, nor know whether we believe in God or not, nor what we believe of him, till they hear or see it in our profession and actions. Paul's life and death was a profession of Christ, that in his "boldness Christ might be magnified in his body^a." "Ye are the light of the world! a city that is set upon a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle to put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven^f."

4. Our profession is the means of saving others: that which is secret, is no means to profit them. They must see our good works that they may glorify God^g.

5. God hath required our open and bold profession of him, with the strictest commands, and upon the greatest penalties. "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear^h." "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvationⁱ." "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels^k."

Direct. 11. Next, 'Understand what it is in religion that you must principally profess.' It is not every lesser truth, much less every opinion of your own, in which you are confident that you are wiser than your brethren. This is the meaning of Rom. xiv. 22. "Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God." By "faith" here is not meant the substance of the Christian belief, or any one necessary article of it. But a belief of the indifferency of such things as Paul spake of, in meats and drinks. If thou know these

^a Phil. i. 20.

^f Matt. v. 14—16.

^g Phil. i. 12—14.

^h 1 Pet. v. 3.

ⁱ Rom. ix. 9, 10.

^k Mark viii. 38.

things to be lawful when thy weak brother doth not, and so thou be wiser than he, thank God for thy knowledge, and use it to thy own salvation ; but do not proudly and uncharitably contend for it, and use it uncharitably to the danger of another's soul, much less to the wrong of the church and Gospel, and the hindrance of greater truths. "Of these things put them in remembrance," (that is, of the saints' hope in God's faithfulness,) "charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but the subverting of the hearers¹." Yet "for the faith we must earnestly contend." "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strife. And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men^m."

But that which is the chiefest matter of our profession is, The being and perfections of God himself; his love to man, and power over him, and man's subjection and obligations unto God; the person, and office, and works, and benefits of our Redeemer, with all the duty that we owe to him in perfect holiness, and all the hopes that we have in him: the happiness of the saints, the odiousness of sin, and the misery of the wicked. These, and such as these are things that we are called to profess: yet so as not to deny or renounce the smallest truth.

Direct. 111. 'Understand also the manner how we must make profession of religion.' 1. There is a professing by words, and a professing by actions. 2. There is a solemn profession by God's public ordinances, and an occasional or more private profession by conference, or by our conversations. And all these ways must religion be professed.

Direct. 1v. 'Understand also the season of each sort of profession, that you omit not the season, nor do it unseasonably.' 1. Profession by baptism, Lord's supper, and church assemblies, must be done in their season, which the church guides are the conductors of. 2. Profession by an innocent, blameless, obedient life is never out of season. 3. Profession by private conference, and by occasional acts of piety, must be when opportunity inviteth us, and they are likely to attain their ends. 4. The whole frame of a believer's life should be so holy, and heavenly, and mortified, and above the world, as may amount to a serious profession that

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 14.^m Jude 2, 3. 2 Tim. ii. 23, 24.

he liveth in confident hope of the life to come, and may shew the world the difference between a worldling and an heir of heaven; between corrupted nature and true grace. The professors of godliness must be a peculiar people, zealous of good works, and adorned with them.

Direct. v. 'Take special care that your profession be sincere, and that you be yourselves as good as you profess to be. Otherwise, 1. Your profession will condemn yourselves. 2. And it will dishonour the truth which you deceitfully profess. There can scarce a greater injury befall a good cause, than to have a bad and shameful patron to defend it. "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and dost the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God. Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking of the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through youⁿ."

Direct. vi. 'Let not your profession be so much of your own sincerity, as of God and his excellencies: boast not of yourselves, but of God and Christ, and the promise, and the hope of true believers; and do it to God's praise, and not for your own.' Be sure that in all your profession of religion, you be seeking honour to God, and not unto yourselves. And then in this manner he that doubteth of his own sincerity, yet may and must make profession of Christ and true religion: when you cannot proclaim the uprightness of your own hearts, you may boldly proclaim the excellencies of religion, and the happiness of saints.

Direct. vii. 'Live upon God alone, and trust his all-sufficiency, and abhor that pusillanimity and baseness of spirit which maketh men afraid or ashamed openly to own the truth.' Remember the example of your Lord, who before Pontius Pilate, "witnessed a good confession^o," who came "for this end into the world, to bear witness to the truth^p." Fear not the face of man, whose breath is in his nostrils, and is perishing even while he is threatening^q. If you be-

ⁿ Rom. ii. 3. 13—25.

^o 1 Tim. vi. 13.

^p John xviii. 37.

^q The Arians under Valens, and the Vandals still silenced the orthodox preachers and forbade their meetings, and yet the people adhered to their pastors and kept the meetings, while they could. *Sæpius prohibitum est ut sacerdotes estri conventus minime celebrarent, nec sua seditione animas subverterent Christianas. Præcept. Hunner. in Victore Uticens. p. 414.*

lieve not that heaven will satisfy for all that by scorns or cruelties thou sufferest from sinners, thou hast not indeed the hope of a believer. And no wonder if thou profess not that which thou believest not: but if thou believe that God is God, and Christ is Christ, and heaven is heaven, and the Gospel is true, thou hast enough in thy belief to secure thee against all the scorns and cruelties of man, and to tell thee that Christ will bear thy charges, in all that thou sufferest for his sake. O what abundance are secretly convinced of the truth, and their consciences bear witness to the wisdom of the saints, and a holy life; and yet they dare not openly own and stand to the truth which they are convinced of for fear of being mocked by the tongues of the profane, or for fear of losing their places and preferments! O wretch, dost thou not tremble when thou art ashamed of Christ, to think of the day when he will be ashamed of thee? Then when he comes in glory none will be ashamed of him! Then where is the tongue that mocked him and his servants? Who then will deride his holy ways? Then that will be the greatest glory, which thou art now ashamed of. Canst thou believe that day, and yet hide thy profession, through cowardly fear or shame of man? Is man so great, and is Christ no greater in thine eyes than so? If he be not more regardable than man, believe not in him: if he be, regard him more; and let not a worm be preferred before thy Saviour.

Direct. VIII. 'If any doubt arise, whether thou shouldst now make profession of the truth, (as in the presence of scorners, or when required by magistrates or others, &c.) let not the advice or interest of the flesh have any hand at all in the resolving of the case; but let it be wholly determined as the interest of Christ requireth.' Spare thyself when the interest of Christ requireth it; not for thyself, but for him. But when his interest is most promoted by thy suffering, rejoice that thou art any way capable of serving him.

Direct. IX. 'Though sometimes a particular profession of the faith may be unseasonable, yet you must never make any profession of the contrary, either by words or actions.' Truth may be sometimes silenced, but a lie may never be professed or approved.

Direct. x. 'If any that profess Christianity reproach you for the profession of holiness and diligence, convince them that they hypocritically profess the same, and that holiness is essential to Christianity:' open their baptismal covenant to them, and the Lord's prayer in which they daily pray that God's will may be done on earth even as it is in heaven, which is more strictly than the best of us can reach. The difference between them and you is but this, whether we should be Christians hypocritically in jest, or in good earnest.

CHAPTER V.

Directions about Vows and Particular Covenants with God.

Tit. 1. Directions for the Right Making such Vows and Covenants.

Direct. 1. 'UNDERSTAND the nature of a vow, and the use to which it is appointed.'

A vow is a promise made to God. 1. It is not a bare assertion or negation. 2. It is not a mere pollicitation, or expression of the purpose or resolution of the mind: for he that saith or meaneth no more than, 'I am purposed or resolved to do this,' may upon sufficient reason do the contrary: for he may change his mind and resolution, without any untruth or injury to any. 3. It is not a mere devoting of a thing to God for the present by actual resignation. For the present actual delivery of a thing to sacred uses is no promise for the future: though we usually join them both together, yet 'devovere' may be separated from 'vovere.' 4. It must be therefore a promise, which is, a voluntary obliging one's self to another 'de futuro' for some good. 5. It is therefore implied that it be the act of a rational creature, and of one that in that act hath some competent use of reason, and not of a fool, or idiot, or madman, or a child that hath not reason for such an act, no nor of a brain-sick, or melancholy person, who (though he be 'cætera sanus') is either delirant in that business, or is irresistibly borne down and necessitated by his disease to vow against the sober,