

## Sermon IV.

James iii. 14.—“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not,” &c.

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It is a common evil of those who hear the gospel, that they are not delivered up to the mould and frame of religion that is holden out in it, but rather bring religion into a mould of their own invention. It was the special commendation of the Romans, that they obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine into which they were delivered, (Rom. vi. 17) that they who were once servants, or slaves of sin, had now become voluntary captives of truth, and had given themselves up to the gospel, to be modelled and fashioned by it; and if so, then certainly the most substantial points of religion would be most deeply engraven upon them. Every thing would have its own due place with us, if we were cast in the primitive mould of godliness, but when we cast godliness in a mould of our own apprehension, they cannot choose but a miserable confusion and disorder will follow in the duties of religion. For according as our fancy and inclination impose a necessity upon things, so we do pursue them, and not according to the real weight that is in them. I find the scripture laying most weight upon the most common things, placing most religion in the most obvious and known things, and for other things more remote from common capacity, I find them set far below, in the point of worth and moment, even these things that seem least. But I find that order quite perverted in the course of Christians. Some particular points that are not so obvious to every understanding, are put in the first place, and made the distinguished character of a Christian, and others again, in which true and undefiled religion doth more consist, are despised and set in a low place, because of their ceremonies. I think this apostle hath observed this confusion, and hath applied himself to remove it, by correcting the misapprehensions of Christians, and reducing

their thoughts and ways to the frame of true Christianity. Even as Christ dealt with the Pharisees, who brought in such a confusion in religion, by imposing a necessity upon ceremonies, and an indifferency upon the very substance itself, truly, I think, it may be said unto us, you tithe mint, anise, and cummin, and pass over judgment and the love of God, these things ye ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, faith and truth, and in the room of these ye have misplaced things, that are higher in God's esteem from an apprehension of their necessity. Thus by your traditions and opinions of things so remote from the kingdom of God, ye have made the unquestionable commandments of God of none effect, Matth. xv. 6. You think possibly, if this apostle was coming out to preach unto you this day, that he would certainly resolve you in many controverted points, and would bring some further light to the debates of the time. But truly I think if he knew the temper of our spirits, he would preach over this sermon to us again, "My brethren, be not many masters," &c. I suppose he would bring that old primitive light of pure and undefiled religion, the splendour of which our present ways and courses could not endure, but would be constrained to hide themselves in darkness. What would you think of such a sermon as this, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is vain?" Jam. i. 26. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man," Jam. iii. 2. This is accounted a common and trivial purpose. But believe it, sirs, the Christian practice of the most common things, hath more religion in it than the knowledge of the profoundest things, and till you learn to do what you know, it is a mockery to study to know further what to do. There is a strange stirring of mind after more light and knowledge in some particulars of the time. But I would fain know, if there be as much ardour and endeavour to practise that which we have already. To him that hath shall be given, to him that makes use of his knowledge for the honour

of God, and the good of mankind, and their edification, more shall be given, but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath, and yet really and cordially hath not, because he hath no use of it. Therefore he may by inquiry find more darkness, because his old light shall rather be put out. Do you not all know that ye should bridle your tongues, that it is a great point of that Christian victory over the world to tame and danton<sup>433</sup> that undantoned wild beast, to quench that fire brand of hell? Do ye not all know that we should be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath? And as the apostle Paul speaks on another subject, “Doth not even nature itself teach you when you have but one tongue, and two ears, that ye should hear much, and speak little?” Are not our ears open, and our tongue enclosed and shut up, to teach us to be more ready to hear than to speak? Now I say, till Christians learn to practise these things that are without all controversy, you may make it your account never to want controversy, and never to get clearness. For to what purpose should more light be revealed, when that which is revealed is to no purpose?

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But it is in vain to think to reform the tongue, till you have the heart first reformed. They say the belly hath no ears. Truly the tongue is all tongue, and has no ears to take an admonition or instruction. We must, then, with the apostle, retire into the heart, and abate from the abundance of the superfluity and naughtiness that is within; and therefore our apostle descends to the cure of pride, envy and strife in the heart, that are fountains of all that pestiferous flood which flows out of every man's mouth. “Is there any wise man among you?” &c. And indeed this is the orderly proceeding both of nature and grace. Nature begins within to probe among the superfluous and noisome humours which abound in the body, and desolate the members, and doth not think it sufficient to apply external plasters. Grace must begin within

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<sup>433</sup> [Subdue.—*Ed.*]

too, to purge the heart, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, the eye looks, and the feet walk. If there be no destroyer in the members or outward man, it is not the preserving of rules and cautions that will suffice to restrain, to abate, or to cure, but the disease must be ripped up to the bottom, the cause found within, as our apostle doth here. Hence, says he, proceed all these feverish distempers among you, your hot and passionate words, your evil speakings and reproachings, your contentions and wars about matters either civil or religious. Whence are all these? From a vain persuasion of wisdom, from a foolish imagination of some excellency in yourselves, and some inward affection to be accounted something of among men. "Who is a wise man," &c. You would be accounted wise, and so you do account yourselves, and this begets strife and envy in the heart, and predisposeth the mind to strife and contention with others. And therefore he takes the mask off, by deciphering the very nature of such a wisdom; he embowels that pretended wisdom in religion and gives it its own name, and because things are best known, and most livelily comprehended in their opposition and comparison with one another, he shows wherein true wisdom and religion consist, and sets the one against the other, that the deformity of the one and the beauty of the other may appear. We shall then speak a word of this that is supposed, and then of that which is expressed, the descriptions of true wisdom, and pretended wisdom. I conceive this interrogation, "Is there a wise man among you?" imports chiefly these two one is,—that it is the natural disease of all men to esteem themselves something, and desire to be esteemed such by others; another is,—that the misapprehension of that wherein true wisdom and excellency doth especially consist, is the ground of many miscarriages in the seeking or venting of that.

It was an ancient remark, that "vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt." Empty man is wise in his own eyes, and would be so in other men's too. He hath no

reality nor solidity, but is like these light things which the wind carries away, or the waters bear above, and tosses hither and thither, yet he apprehends some solid and real worth in himself, and would impose that apprehension upon others. And truly this is a drunkenness of mind, which makes a man light and vain, to stagger to and fro. It is a giddiness of spirit, that makes him inconstant and reeling, but insensible of it. Though he be born as stupid and void of any real wisdom and excellency, as a wild ass's colt, yet he hath this madness and folly superadded to all that natural stupidity, that he seems to be wise and understanding, and truly it was a more ancient disease than Job's days. We may trace the steps of its antiquity to be from the very beginning, and there we shall find the true original of it. What was it, I pray you, did cast the angels out of heaven, down to the lowest hell, to be reserved in chains for everlasting darkness? I do not conceive what their natures so abstracted from all sensual lusts could be capable of, but this spiritual darkness and madness of self conceit, and an ambitious aspiring after more wisdom, whence did flow that malcontent and envious humour, in maligning the happiness of man. And this was the poison that Satan, the chief of these angels, did drop into man's nature, by temptations and suggestions of an imaginary wisdom and happiness, "You shall be as gods knowing good and evil." And truly this poison is so strong and pestilent, that having once entered into the body, it spreads through all the members, it infects all the posterity that were in Adam's loins. Being once distilled into the lump, it diffuses itself through the whole, such a strange contagion is it. That wretched aim at a higher wisdom, hath thrown us all down into this brutish and stupid condition, to be like wild asses colts. Yet this false and fond imagination of wisdom and excellence remains within us, which is so much the nearer madness, that now there is no apparent ground left for such a fairly.<sup>434</sup> And if one

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<sup>434</sup> [Such a wonder.—*Ed.*]

of a cubit's height should imagine himself as tall as a mountain, and accordingly labour to stretch out himself, we would seek no other sign of madness. Truly this malignant and poisonous humour is so subtle that it hath insinuated itself into all the parts and powers of the soul, and steals in without observation into all our thoughts, purposes, affections, ways, and courses. It is of so infectious and pestiferous a nature, that it defiles all that is in the man, and all that comes out of the man.

The apostle speaks of covetousness, that it “is the root of all evil.” Truly I think that comprehends many inordinate affections in it. Now, both self love and earth love arise from some false imagination of that which is not. Whether it be an imagination of some excellency in ourselves, or some worth in these worldly and earthly things, man first makes a god of it, and then worships it. Therefore covetousness is called idolatry, self idolatry and earth idolatry. We first attribute some divinity to ourselves like these people (Isa. xlv. 17) to their idols. We then fall down and worship ourselves, but we do not consider in our heart, that we are but dust. And then we ascribe some divinity to the perishing things of the world, and then worship them, but do not consider that they are earthly and perishing vanities. Thus we feed upon ashes, a deceived heart hath turned us aside, and we cannot deliver our own souls, by discovering the lie that is in our right hand. We feed partly on the element of the air, by seeking that of others that we have of ourselves, and partly upon the element of the earth, by the love of this world. And these two degenerated evils, are the root of all evils, self estimation, and creature affection.

I think this apostle in this one word “Is there any wise man among you, or any endowed with knowledge” and that word, “glory not,” strikes at the root of all the forementioned and aftermentioned evils. From whence I say doth that promptitude

and bensal<sup>435</sup> to speak, that slowness and difficulty to hear, that readiness and inclination to pride, (reproved, James i. 19, 20) proceed? Is it not from an overweening conceit of our own wisdom, that we are so swift to speak, and so slow to hear, and that we would teach others and yet be taught of none? We are so much in love with our own apprehensions, that we imagine they shall find as much esteem and affection among men, and so being like barrels full of liquor, in our own conceit, we are like to burst if we vent not, and are as incapable of taking from others as of retaining what is within. The word of God was a fire in Jeremiah's heart that would have consumed him, if he had not given it vent. Truly self love is a fire that must vent one way or other, or it would burn up all within by displeasure, and then it is the over apprehension of some excellency in ourselves, which so disposes us to anger, that makes us combustible matter, like the spirit of gunpowder, for the least spark of injury or offence, will set all in a flame. It is certainly the fond imagination of some great worth in ourselves, that is the very immediate predisposition to the apprehension of an injury. Humility cannot be affronted, it is hard to persuade of an injury. Why? Because there is no excellency to be hurt or wronged. Therefore Christ conjoins these, "meek and lowly in heart," (Matth. xi. 29,) lays poverty of spirit down as the foundation of meekness, Matth. v. 3-5. Whence is it that we accept of men's persons by judging according to the outward appearance, and are so ready to displease our brethren, especially these who are inferior to us in body, or mind, or estate? Is it not from this root, self admiration? This makes us elevate ourselves above others, and to intrude ourselves among these who are chiefest in account. Whence doth our unmercifulness and rigidity towards other men proceed, but from this fountain, that we allow so much licence and indulgence to ourselves, that we can have none to spare for others, and that we do not consider

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<sup>435</sup> [Violent inclination.—*Ed.*]

that we ourselves stand in need of more mercy from God, and cannot endure a mixture of judgment in it? Therefore we have judgment to others without mercy, James ii. 13. And is not this self pleasing humour the fountain of that contentious plea after the pre-eminence, and censorious liberty of judging others, and usurping authority over them? James iii. 1, "My brethren, be not ye many masters." Truly this is the root of all contentions and strifes. It is this which rents all human and Christian society. This looses all the pins of concord and unity. This sets all by the ears, and makes all the wheels reel through other. The conceit of some worth beyond others, and the imagination of some pre-eminence over them, even in the best creatures—he best, and he best, that is the plea, he greatest, and he greatest, that is the controversy. As bladders puffed up with wind, they cannot be kept in little room, but every one presses another, but if the wind were out, they would compact in less room, and comply better together. The apostle implies this, when he puts every man in mind of his own failing, "in many things we offend all," and if this were considered, it would abate our security, and cool our heat and fervour, and moderate our rigour towards others. There would not be such strife about places of power and trust, if we were not swelled in our own apprehensions to some eminency. And is not this the very fountain which sends out all these bitter streams of the tongue, these evil speakings one of another, these sharp and immoderate censures of our neighbours? Truly this is it, every man accounts himself to be wiser and more religious than his brother, to have more knowledge, and so he cannot endure any difference in opinion, to have more holiness, and so he cannot bear any infirmity in practice. But the way to help this, would be to humble ourselves before God, James iv. 10. Lowliness and meekness are the ground stones of these Christian virtues which preserve Christian society, Eph. iv. 2, 3. And is not this, I pray you, the foundation of wars, strifes, contentions, and jealousies? "From whence come wars and fightings among you?" Is it not

from these imperious lusts which war in our members? Only from pride cometh contention, Prov. xiii. 10. The head spring of all envy, also issues out from pride, and this divides, in many streams and waters, all our courses and ways, with putrified and pestilent corruptions. While every man hath this opinion of himself, all is done in strife, no condescendence, no submission one to another, Phil. ii. 3. While all make themselves the centre, it cannot otherwise happen, but designs, courses, thoughts, and ways, must interfere and jar among themselves. Self-seeking puts all by the ears, as you see children among themselves, if an apple be cast to them. Any bait or advantage of the times yokes them in that childish contention, who shall have it? All come, strive, and fight about it, and it is but a few can have it, and these that get it cannot keep it long. Others will catch it from them. Now what vain things are these, which can neither be gotten, nor kept, but by strife? Oh that we could seek better things, which may be both sought and kept, without emulation or strife!

Now the other thing is, that the misapprehension of that wherein true excellence consists is the ground of many evils. "Who is a wise man?" &c. You all affect the title, and ye seek the thing, as ye suppose. But alas! ye mistake that wherein it consists. Truly there is in all men (ever since we tasted of the tree of knowledge of good and evil) a strange innate desire of knowledge, and affectation of wisdom, and desire of excellence. But since the first endeavour in paradise succeeded ill, there hath nothing gone well since. We weary ourselves to catch vanities, shadows, and lies. "How long, O ye sons of men, will ye love vanity, and follow after lies?" That divinely taught prophet could not but pity the children of men. And as Paul speaks to the Athenians of another purpose, "Him whom ye ignorantly worship, we show unto you," so he declares unto men that which they ignorantly and vainly seek elsewhere. This I assure you consists in this, that ye show out of a good conversation your works with meekness and wisdom.

All our mischief proceeds from this, that we misapprehend and mistake that which we would gladly have. And so once being in the wrong way, that cannot lead to our purposed end, the faster we run, the farther we go from it. The more we move in affection and diligence, the less we indeed promote in reality to the attaining what we seek. How greatly have we fallen! I might instance this in many things, but I shall be content with these two. There is a desire in all men after happiness, but there is a fundamental error in the imagination supposing it to consist in the enjoyment of temporal pleasure, honour, advantage, or the satisfaction of our own natural inclinations. Now this leads all mankind to a pursuit after these things. But how base a scent is it? And how vain a pursuit is it? For the faster they move in that way, the further they are from all solid and true contentment. Again, in all godly men, there is something of this rectified, and they suppose religion to be the only true wisdom, and this wisdom the only true happiness. But oftentimes there are even mistakes in that too. As many of the world call sweet bitter, and bitter sweet, because of the vitiated and corrupted palate; so the godly, being in some measure distempered, call that which is not so sweet sweetest, and that which is not so bitter, bitterest. They change the value of things, and misplace them out of that order in which God hath set them. One great mistake is this. We impose a great deal of weight and moment upon these things in religion, which are but the hay and stubble, or pins in the building, and we esteem less that wherein the foundation and substance of true religion consists. We have an over-apprehension of a profession, and an undervaluing thought of practice. We overstretch some points of knowledge, and truth of the least value;<sup>436</sup> and have less value for the fundamental statutes of the gospel, faith and love, mercy and judgment. This our Saviour reproved in the Pharisees. "I will have mercy (says God) and not sacrifice." A ceremony

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<sup>436</sup> [That is, truths of little value.—*Ed.*]

of opinion in some particulars of the time hath more necessity with us than the practice of true godliness: and this is the root of the most part of these vain janglings, strifes of words, and perverse disputings of men, whereof cometh envy, strife, malice, evil surmisings, and no edification in faith and love, which were so frequent in the primitive times, and so often hammered down by Paul. This is it, a misapprehension of the value of them. Fancy imposes a worth and necessity upon them. But Paul doth always oppose unto them true godliness (1 Tim. vi. 3, chap. iv. 7), and prescribes that as the cure, that true godliness in practice of what we know, and charity towards our brethren, may be bigger in our apprehension, and higher in our affection. Would ye then know, my brethren, wherein true religion consists, and wherein genuine Christianity stands? It is in showing out of a good conversation, our works with meekness and wisdom. I reduce it to these two words, in joining practice to knowledge, and meekness to both; and this makes our religion to shine before men, and glorify our heavenly Father.

Wherein then do ye think this mystery of wisdom which the gospel reveals consists? Not in the profound and abstracted speculations of God, or the secrets of nature,—a work about which learned men have racked their inventions, and beaten their brains to no other purpose, than the discovery of the greatness of man's ignorance. It doth not consist in the sounding of the depths of divinity, and loosing all these perplexing knots of questions, and doubts, which are moved upon the scripture, in all which men really bewray their own ignorance and misery. “The world by wisdom knew not God.” Living right is the first point of true wisdom. It costs many men great expenses to learn to know their own folly, to become fools, that they may become wise, 1 Cor. iii. 18. Man became a fool by seeking to become wiser than God made him; and that is all the result of our endeavours after wisdom since, Rom. i. 22. But here is the great instruction of Christianity, to bring man down low from the height of pre-

sumption and self-estimation, and make him see himself just as he is by nature, a fool, and a wild ass's colt. Nebuchadnezzar had much ado to learn this lesson. It cost him some years brutality to learn to know his brutishness, and when that was known his understanding returned to him.

Now this is the first and hardest point of wisdom. When it is once learned and imprinted on the heart, O what a docility is in the mind to more! What readiness to receive what follows! It makes a man a weaned child, a little simple child, tractable and flexible as Christ would have all his disciples. A man thus emptied and vacuated of self-conceit, these lines of natural pride being blotted out, the soul is as a *tabula rasa*, “an unwritten table,” to receive any impression of the law of God that he [569] pleases to put on it; and then his words are all “plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge,” Prov. viii. 9. Then I say it is not difficult to understand and to prove what is the good and acceptable will of God, Rom. xii. 2; Eph. v. 10-17. It is not up unto heaven, that thou shouldest say, who shall ascend to bring it down? Neither is it far down in the depth, that thou shouldest say, who shall descend and bring it up from hence? But it is near thee, “in thy mouth, and in thy heart,” &c. Rom. x. 6, 7, 8. “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what is required of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God,” Micah vi. 8. There is the plain sign of Christian wisdom, the abridgment of all that is taught in the school of Christ. Here is the course of moral philosophy, “The grace of God hath appeared, to teach us to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world.” And when the scholar is brought along by these degrees, he is at length laureated<sup>437</sup> in that great day of our Saviour's appearance. Then he hath the degree of glory and immortality

<sup>437</sup> [In the Scottish universities, they were said to have *laureated*, who had a decree conferred upon them, as they were “crowned with laurel leaves.” Ev. Un. Com. vol. i. p. 153. Lond. 1837.—Ed.]

conferred upon him. He is a candidate of immortality and felicity, Tit. ii. 12, 13.

We are in the Christian school like many scholars who labour to know so many things, that indeed they know nothing well; as the stomach that devours much meat, but digests little, and turns it not into food and aliment, incorporates it not into the body. We catch at many great points of truth, and we really drink in none of them; we let none sink into the heart, and turn into affection and practice. This is the grand disease of the time, a study to know many things, and no study to love what we know, or practise any thing. The Christian world is all in a flame, and the church is rent asunder by the eager pursuit and prosecution of some points of truth, and this is the clamour of all men, who will show us our light? Who will discover some new thing unto us? But in the mean time we do not prove the unquestionable acceptable will of our God; like a fastidious squeamish stomach, that loathes what it receives, and always longs for something else. Thus the evil is vented here. Who is a wise man, do ye think? Not he who knows many things, who hath still a will to controversy, who hath attained some further light than others of them; not he, brethren, but he that shows out of a good conversation, his works with meekness of wisdom, he that proves and practiseth as well as knows, the good will of God. "For hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keeps not his commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him," 1 John ii. 3, 4. This proves that knowledge is not in the head, but in the heart, and that it is not captivated and shut up in the mind, but that a man is delivered up as a captive to the truth, Rom. vi. 16.

All men complain of the want of light and knowledge, though perhaps none think they have much. But is the will of God so dark and intricate? Is it so hard to understand? Truly it is plain, "He hath showed thee what is good," he hath showed thee what to do; but that thou neglectest to do, and therefore men know

not what to do further. Do ye not all know that ye should walk soberly, righteously, and piously, and humble yourselves to walk with God, and in lowliness of mind each should esteem another better than himself? Ye should forbear and forgive one another, as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Ye should not seek great things for yourselves, especially when God is plucking up what he hath planted, and casting down what was built. Ye should mind your country above more, and live as sojourners here. Are not these words of wisdom all plain and obvious to the meanest capacity? Now, my beloved, with what face can ye seek more knowledge of God, or inquire for more light into his mind, when you do not prove that known and perfect will of his? When you do not occupy your present talent, why do ye seek more? "To him that hath shall be given." Truly it is the man that fears and obeys as far as is revealed, to whom God shows his secret, and teaches the way he should choose, Psal. xxv. 12. I know not a readier way to be resolved in doubtful things, than to study obedience in these things that are beyond all doubt. To walk in the light received, is the highway to more light. But what hope is there of any more light from the Lord, when our ways and courses, and dispositions and practices, even in our endeavours after more knowledge, cannot endure the light of that shining will of God, that is already revealed? [570] In ordering our conversation, we catch at the shadow of our points of truth, and lose the substance that was in our hands, lowliness, meekness, charity, long suffering, sobriety of mind and actions, and heavenly mindedness. All these substantial we let go, that we may get hold of some empty unedifying notions. We put out our candle that is already enlightened, that is, the knowledge of good conversation that we may seek more light, and that is the way to find darkness and delusion. Because they received not the truth in love, that they might be saved, God gave them up to strong delusions and the belief of lies, 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. There is the ground of delusions, truth received,

but not loved or obeyed, many things known, but the stamp and seal not impressed on the heart we express in the conversation. Therefore God is provoked to put out that useless light of truth and deliver that man captive to delusions, who would not deliver his soul a captive to truth. And is not this righteousness, that he who detained the known truth in unrighteousness of affection and conversation, be himself detained and incarcerated by strong delusions of mind and imagination?

As a good conversation and good works should be joined to knowledge, and meekness must be the ornament of both, this meekness of wisdom is the great lesson that the wisdom of the Father came down to teach man. "Learn of me, for I am meek." And truly the meekness of that substantial wisdom of God Jesus Christ, is the exact pattern and copy, and the most powerful motive and constraint to this kindness of Christian wisdom. Our Saviour did not cry nor lift up his voice in the streets. He made little noise, nor cried with pomp, he was not rigorous, nor rigid upon sinners. Though he was oppressed and afflicted yet he opened not his mouth, being reviled he reviled not again, being cursed, he blessed. Though he could have legions of angels at his command, yet he would show rather an example of patience and meekness to his followers, than overcome his enemies. If many of us, who pretend to be his disciples, had the winds, rains, heavens, and elements at our commandment, I fear we would have burned up the world. We would presently have called for fire from heaven, to devour all whom we conceived enemies to him, or ourselves, and that under the notion of zeal. Zeal it is indeed, but such as is spoken of in the next verse. "If ye have bitter envying (the word is bitter zeal) in your hearts, glory not, nor lie against the truth." Christ's zeal was sweet zeal. It might well consume or eat him up within, but it did not devour others without. "The zeal of thy house (says he) hath eaten me up." But our zeal is like the Babylonian furnace, that burnt and consumed these that went to throw the pious children into it. At the first

approaching it gets without the chimney, and devours all around it. If the meekness or gentleness of a person who received the greatest injuries that ever any received, and to whom the greatest indignities were done, and who endured the greatest contradiction of sinners, if his calm composed temper do not soften our spirits, mitigate our sharpness, and allay our bitterness, I know not what can do it. I do not think but if any man considered how much long suffering God exercises towards him, how gentle and patient he is, after so many provocations, how Jesus Christ doth still forgive infinite numbers of infinite wrongs done to his grace, how slow he is to wrath, and easy to be entreated, surely such a man would abate much of his severity towards others, he would pursue peace with all men, and esteem little of wrongs done unto him, and not think them worthy of remembrance, he would not be easily provoked, but he would be easily pacified. In a word, he could not but exercise something of that gentleness and meekness in forbearing and forgiving, as Christ also forgave him and truly there is no ornament of a man like that of a meek and quiet spirit, 1 Pet. iii. 4. It is both comely and precious, it is of great price in God's sight. It is a spirit all composed and settled, all peace and harmony within. It is like the heavens in a clear day, all serene and beautiful, whereas an unmeek spirit is for the most part like the troubled sea, tossed with tempests, winds, and dashed with rains, even at the best, it is but troubled with itself. When there is no external provocation, it hath an inward unrest in its bosom, and casts out mire and dirt. Meekness is so beseeeming every man, that it is even humanity itself. It is the very nature of a man restored, and these brutish, wild and savage dispositions put off. Meekness is a man in the true likeness of God. But passion, and the evils which accompany it, is a man metamorphosed and transformed into the nature of a beast, and that of a wild beast too. It hath been always reckoned that anger is nothing different from madness, but in the continuance of it. It is a short madness. But what is wanting in the continuance is

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made up in the frequency. When spirits are inclined to it, there is a habitual fury and madness in such spirits. It is no wonder then, these are conjoined, meekness and wisdom, for truly they are inseparable. Meekness dwells in the bosom of wisdom. It is nothing else but wisdom, reason, and religion ruling all within, and composing all the distempered lusts and affections, but anger rests in the bosoms of fools, it cannot get rest but in a fool's bosom, for where it enters, wisdom and reason must go out, Eccles. vii. 9. "A fool's wrath is presently known," Prov. xii. 16. For if there were so much true and solid wisdom as to examine the matter first, and to consider before we suffer ourselves to be provoked, we would certainly quench anger in the very first smoking of an apprehension of a wrong. We would immediately cast it out, for there is nothing so much blinds and dimmeth the eye of our understanding, and when this gross vapour rises out of the dunghill of our lusts, nothing so much uncovers our shame and nakedness. "A prudent man covereth shame," but hastiness and bitterness takes the garment off our infirmity, and exposes us to mockery and contempt, Prov. xii. 16. There is not a greater evidence of a strong solid spirit, than this, to be able to govern this unruly passion, whereas it is taken far otherwise. Meekness is construed by some to be simplicity and weakness, and many imagine some greatness and height of spirit in the hotter natures, but truly it is far otherwise. "For he that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his own spirit, than he that takes a city." Wrath is an impotency and weakness. It hath no strength in it, but such as ye would find in madmen. But this is true magnanimity, to overcome thyself, and "overcome evil with good."

As there is nothing which is a greater evidence of wisdom, so there is nothing a better help to true wisdom than this. For a meek spirit is like a clear running fountain, that ye see the bottom of, but a passionate spirit is like a troubled fountain, the shadow of truth cannot be seen in it. A glass that is pure and cleanly,

renders the image lively, but if it be besmeared with dust, you can see nothing, so is a composed mild spirit apt to discern the truth without prejudice. And indeed it is the meek whom God engages to teach his ways, Psal. xxv. 8, 9. He that receives with meekness the ingrafted word, is in the readiest capacity to receive more. When the superfluity of naughtiness is cast out, and all the faculties of the soul composed to quietness and calmness, then his voice will best be heard, and himself readiest to receive it. Our affection keeps a continual hurry within the tumultuous noise of our disordered lusts, that are always raging and controlling the voice of God, so that we cannot hear his teaching. A passionate temper of spirit is very indocile. There are so many loud sounds of prejudices within, that the truth cannot be heard. But a meek spirit hath all quietness and silence, as Cornelius and his house had waiting for the mind of the Lord. And such he delights to converse with most, and reveal most unto, for it gets readiest entertainment. Let me tell you, beloved in the Lord, you disoblige the Lord (if I may speak so) and hinder him to reveal any more of his mind to you, ye disengage him to teach you his way in those dark and untrodden paths, because ye do not study this meekness in the wisdom and knowledge ye have already, nor his meekness and moderation in seeking further knowledge. And it is no wonder he be provoked by it, to choose your delusions, because it is certainly these graces of meekness, charity, patience, gentleness, long suffering, humbleness of mind, and such like, which go always in a chain together. These are an ornament of grace upon the head, and a crown of glory, and that chain about the neck, Solomon mentions, Prov. iv. 9. Now when you cast off your crown of glory, your noblest ornament, your chain of dignity, should he give such precious pearls to swine? When you trample under foot the greater commandments of mercy, judgment, sobriety, humility, meekness, and charity, should he reveal lesser commandments, or discover his will in lesser matters? Consider the manner of expression here, "Let him show

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forth out of a good conversation,” &c. Truly it is good works with meekness of wisdom, it is a good conversation, with a true profession, that shows forth a Christian, and shows him most before men. “Let your light (says Christ) so shine before men.” What is the shining beauty of Christian light? It is the works of piety, charity, equity, and sobriety. These glorify the Father, and beautify all his children. You may easily conceive what that is, that chiefly commends religion to the ignorant world. Is it not the meekness of Christian wisdom? Is it not this harmless simplicity, that divine-like candour, that shines in every true Christian? Will rigidity, severity, passion, blood, violence, persecution, and such like, ever conciliate the hearts of men? Have such persons any beauty, any light in them, except a scorching consuming light? The light of a good Christian is like the light of the sun, of a sweet, gentle, and refreshing nature, conveying influence to all, doing good to the household of faith. Peter will tell you what that is, that will most engage the hearts of the world, to a reverend esteem of true religion, 1 Pet. ii. 12. It is a conversation honest, and void of offence, giving to every one their own due, honouring all men, loving the brotherhood, not using our liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, and not overstretching it, to the loosing of other natural or civil bands. When men see Christianity making us do that really and cheerfully, which even nature itself teacheth all to do that makes the light of it shining and beautiful. Are not these higher mysteries of faith, than some conceive? It is not other points of truth and profession, that are either above natural reason, or seem something opposite to it, that can engage natural beholders, and far less the prosecution of a temporal worldly interest of the people of God, to the destruction of all opposite to it, at least to the diminishing of all other men's gain and advantage, the engrossing of all earthly privileges into the hands of saints. That is such a thing that never entered into the heart of the shining lights of the primitive times. O how doth the stream of their exhortations run cross to this notion! I am sure

there is nothing in its own nature, such a stumbling block to the world or represents religion so odious and abominable to other men, as when it stands in the way, and intercepts all these natural immunities or privileges of life, or estate. This makes natural men to hate it, even at a distance, and become irreconcilable enemies unto it. Since it will not let them live by it, they are engaged not to let it live by them. I wish indeed all the places of power and trust in every nation, were in the hands of godly men, not so much for the interest of the godly as for the public interest, because men fearing God, and hating covetousness, can only rule justly and comfortably. But to monopolize all power and trust to such a particular judgment and way (as it is now given out) is truly, I think, inhuman and unchristian. These deserve not power and trust who would seek it, and engross it wholly to themselves.<sup>438</sup> But there is another thing which savours greatly of the flesh, at least of that spirit which Christ reproved in his disciples, to take away men's lives, liberty, and livelihood given by their Creator, upon every foot of opposition and enmity to our way and interest. Is this to love our enemies, blessing them that curse us, or praying for them that despitefully use us, or persecute us? Let us remember we are Christians, and this is the rule of Christianity, that stops even the mouth of adversaries. But some still find an evasion for this. They will say they are God's enemies, and not my particular enemies only. But I pray you were not the enemies of Christians in these days more properly enemies to Christ than now? For they had nothing then to persecute them for, but the very profession of that name. And truly I confess in our days we make more particular enemies, by particular injuries and disoblancements, than either our profession or practice of religion make. But to put it out of

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<sup>438</sup> [These are the generous sentiments of an enlightened Christian. They would lead us to infer that the author's views, as a Protester, had been modified somewhat before he died or that he had never taken such high ground, as some others on this score.—*Ed.*]

all doubt, we learn that they are persecutors, and do all manner of evil against us, for Christ's name sake. I have said this because I know nothing that more darkeneth and obscures religion nor such worldly and temporal interests, so eagerly pursued, and nothing makes it more to shine among men, than a good conversation with meekness of wisdom.

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## Sermon V.

James iii. 14.—“But if ye have bitter envying,” &c.

The cunning of Satan, and the deceitfulness of our own hearts, are such that when a grosser temptation will not prevail with conscience in some measure enlightened, then they transform themselves into angels of light, and deal more subtilly with us. And there is no greater subtilty of Satan, nor no stronger self deceit, than this, to palliate and cover vices with the shadow of virtue, and to present corruptions under the similitude of graces. It is common unto all temptations to sin, to have a hook under their bait, to be masked over with some pleasure or advantage or credit. But when such earthly and carnal pretences do not insinuate strongly unto a believing heart that has discovered the vanity of all that which is in the world, so dare not venture upon sin for all the pleasures which attend it, then he winds about and tarries and changes his likeness unto light, conscience, and duty, presents many works of darkness and corruption under the notion of duty and honesty, according as he finds the temper of a man's spirit to be. I can give no instance more pregnant, and even common, than this which is given here, viz., contentions and strivings among brethren, bitter envying, maligning and cursing one another, which are very manifest works of the flesh, and works of darkness, fitter for the night than the day, and for the time of ignorance, nor the time after the clear light hath shined. Now if Satan were about to persuade a church or a Christian of this, how do ye think he would go about it? Would he present some carnal advantage to be gained by it, some more profit or preferment from it? May be that might be very taking with some more unconscientious self seeking spirits, and I fear it be too much taken with many. But sure it will not relish with every man. It will not entice him that hath the fear of God, and the love of Jesus stirring within him. Therefore he must seek about, and find

some false prophet, that may come out in the name of the Lord, and disguise himself, and by such means he will do it. Let a point of truth or conscience come in debate, let a notion of religion, and one far off from an interest in Christ be in the business, and then he can take advantage to make a man overreach himself in it. He will present the truth as a thing of so great weight and consequence, that he must contend for it, and empty all his wit and power and parts for it. This good intention being established, he raises up men's passions under a notion of zeal, and these be promoted under that pretence for such an end. Whatsoever mean may be sought, profitable for that end, all is chosen and followed without discretion or knowledge of what is good or evil. It is apprehended that the good principle of conscience, of duty, and the good intention, may justify all. And by that means he hath persuaded the churches of Christ, and the Christian world, unto more rigidity, severity, cruelty, strife, contention, blood, violence, and such works of darkness, than readily have been found in the times of ignorance. Is Christendom a field of blood, rather than any other part of the world? Truly this is the reproach of Christianity. By this, God's name is daily blasphemed. Here our apostle sets himself to unmask this angel of light, and to decipher him in his own proper nature and notion. He takes off the vizard of religion and wisdom, and lets you see the very image of hell under it. "But if ye have bitter envying and strife, glory not." Ye glory as if ye had the truth, you glory in your zeal for it, you boast that ye are the wise men, the religious men, and so you take liberty upon the account of envy, to malign, despise, and contend with others. Glory not, if you cherish such strifes and contentions, to the breach of Christian peace and concord. You are liars against the truth, which you profess. Do not think these proceed from true zeal, nay, nay, it is but bitter envy, and bitter zeal. Do not flatter yourselves with an apprehension of wisdom, or knowledge, or religion. That is wisdom indeed, but mark of what nature. It is earthy, sensual, and devilish. And

indeed, that is a foolish wisdom, to say no worse of it.

You see, then, what need we have of the exhortation of the apostle (Eph. vi. 11), “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” Truly we may stand against his darts, and violent open thrusts at our conscience; when we,<sup>439</sup> being ignorant of his devices, and not acquainted with his depths (2 Cor. ii. 11, Rev. ii. 24) will not be able to stand against his ways. For we have a great and subtile party to wrestle with, principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places, or heavenly things (as some render the word). He exercises much wickedness, spiritual invisible wickedness in heavenly and religious things, in which it is hard to wrestle, unless we be endowed with faith, knowledge, and righteousness, and shod with the gospel of peace, the peaceable gospel reducing our spirits to a peaceable temper. I conceive there is nothing the world hath been more abused with, than the notion of zeal, justice, and such like, and there is nothing wherein a Christian is more ready to deceive himself than this. Therefore I conceive the Holy Ghost has undeceived us in this, and hath of purpose used the word zeal as often in a bad sense as in a good one, and usually chooses to express envy and malice by it, though another word might suit as well, and be more proper. So here bitter zeal, ζηλος φρενος, is reckoned among the works of the flesh, Gal. v. 20. And we are exhorted to walk honestly as in the day, not in strife and envy, or zeal. And therefore the apostle rebukes sharply the Corinthians: “Are ye not carnal, and walk as men, whereas there is among you envying, or zeal, and strife,” 1 Cor. iii. 3. Zeal is a vehemency of affection in any earnest pursuit, or opposition of a thing, and to make it good, it must not only be fixed upon a commendable and good object, but must run in the right channel, between the banks of moderation, charity, and sobriety. If it overflows these, certainly that excess

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<sup>439</sup> [Or, *while we, on the other hand.*—Ed.]

proceeds not simply and purely from the love of God, or the truth, but from some latent corruption or lust in our members, which takes occasion to swell up with it. I find in scripture the true zeal of God hath much self denial in it. It is not exercised so much concerning a man's own matters, as concerning the matters that are purely and merely concerning God's glory. It is the most flexible, condescending, and forbearing thing in those things that relate to ourselves and our own interests. Thus Moses is commended as the meekest man, when Aaron and Miriam raise sedition against him, Num. xii. 3. He had not affections to be commoved upon that account. But how much is he stirred and provoked upon the apprehension of the manifest dishonour of God, by the people's idolatry? How many are lions in their own cause, and in God's as simple and blunt as lambs? And how much will our spirits be commoved when our own interest lies in the business, and hath some conjunction with God's interest, but if these are parted, our fervour abates, and our heat cools? I lay down this, then, as the fundamental principle of true zeal, it is like charity that seeketh not its own things.

But to make the nature of it clear, I give you three characters of it, verity, charity and impartiality. I say it hath truth in it, a good thing for the object, and knowledge of that good thing in the subject, for the principle of it: "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing," Gal. iv. 18. Zeal is an evil thing, hath something of the impatient and restless nature of the devil in it. There is nothing we should be more deliberate and circumspect in, than what to employ or bestow our affections upon. We should have a certain persuasion of the unquestionable goodness of that which we are ardent and vehement to obtain, else the more ardour and vehemency, the more wickedness is in it. The Jews had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, and that is a blind impetuous self will. For if a man take a

race at his full speed in the dark, he cannot but catch a fall.<sup>440</sup> The eager and hot pursuits of men are founded upon some gross misapprehensions.

Secondly, There must not only be a goodness supposed in the object, but some correspondence between the worth and weight of that goodness and the measure of our desires and affections, else there wants that conformity between the soul and truth which makes a true zeal of God. I mean this, the soul's most vehement desires should be employed about the chiefest good, and our zeal move in relation to things unquestionably good, and not about things of small moment, or of little edification. This is the apostolic rule, that not only we consider that there be some truth in the thing, but that we especially take notice, if there be so much truth and goodness as requires such a measure of vehemency and affection. Therefore in lesser things we should have lesser commotion, and in greater things greater, suitable to them. Otherwise the Pharisees who exercised their zeal about trifles, and neglected the weightier matters of the law, (Matt. xxiii. 23.) would not have been reprov'd by Christ. And indeed this is the zeal to which we are redeemed by Christ. Tit. ii. 14. Be ye zealous of good works, of works that are unquestionably good, such as piety, equity, and sobriety. There is nothing more incongruous than to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel, to spend the vital spirits upon things of small concernment to our own or others' edification, and to have nothing to spare for the weightier matters of true godliness. It is as if a man should strike a feather or the air with all his might: He must needs wrest his arms. Even so, to strike with the spiritual sword of our affections, with such vehemency, at the lighter and emptier matters of religion, cannot choose but to disjoint the spirit, and put it out of course, as there is a falsehood in that zeal that is so vehement about a light matter, though it have some good in

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<sup>440</sup> [See note, page 168.—*Ed.*]

it. For there is no suitable proportion between the worth of the thing and the vehemency of the spirit. Imagination acts in both. In the one it supposes a goodness, and it follows it, and in the other, it imposes a necessity and a worth far beyond that which really is, and so raises up the spirit to that height of necessity and worth that hath no being but in a man's imagination. I think there is no particular that the apostle doth so much caveat. For I find in 1 Tim. i. 4 he takes off such endless matters that minister questioning rather than godly edifying, and gives us a better subject to employ our zeal upon, ver 5, the great end and sum of all religion, love to God and man, proceeding from a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned, from which we must needs swerve, when we turn aside to such empty and vain janglings, ver 6. For truly we have but narrow and limited spirits, and it must needs follow, when we give them very much to one thing, that they cannot attend another thing seriously, as Christ declares, (Matt. vi. 24.) "no man can serve two masters," &c. And therefore there is much need of Christian wisdom to single out and choose the most proper and necessary object. For as much as we give other things that have not so much connexion with that, we take from it as much; and the apostle counsels us, (1 Tim. iv. 7.) rather to exercise ourselves unto true godliness, and to the most substantial things in it, rather than vain things, and opposition of science, chap vi. 3-5, 20. There he opposes the wholesome words of Christ, and the doctrine that is according to godliness, unto questions, and strifes of words, whereof comes envy, railings, evil-surmisings, and perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds. And it is very observable that he is pressing the duties of believing servants towards their masters, whether believers or infidels, that the name of God be not blasphemed, nor the gospel evil spoken of. For there is nothing so much exposes it to misconstruction, as when it is stretched and abused unto the prejudice of natural and civil duties, and doubtless there would be many doubts and questions about it in these days, some

contending for worldly pre-eminence over the Pagans, and some for the levelling of all Christians. But, says he, “If any man teach otherwise,” or contend about this, “he is proud, knowing nothing,” &c. He hath forsaken the substance of true godliness, which consists in good works shining before men, and disabuses the notion of Christian liberty to the dishonour of Christ, and hath supposed gain, a worldly carnal interest of the godly, to be piety, and so pursues that fancy of his own. He renews this in the Second Epistle, (chap. ii. 14-16.) showing that these strifes about words, albeit they seem to be upon grounds of conscience at the beginning, yet they increase unto more ungodliness, ver. 23. And unto Titus he gives the same charge very solemnly, (Tit. iii. 8, 9.) “I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who believe in God should be careful to maintain good works. But avoid foolish and unlearned questions,” &c. For “this is a faithful saying.” But again,

Thirdly, Zeal must have charity with it, and this all the scriptures cited prove. It must be so tempered with love, that it vents not to the breach of Christian peace and concord. Charity envieth not, or is not zealous. When zeal wants charity, it is not zeal but envy. And hence it is that there are so frequent and fervent exhortations to avoid such questions as may gender strifes, and contentions, and malice. Now certainly there was some truth in them, and something of conscience also in them. Yet he dissuades entirely the prosecution of them to the rigour, as men are apt to do, but wills us rather to have faith in ourselves. And truly I think the questions that did then engender strifes, and rent the church, were as much if not more momentous nor the most part of these about which we bite and devour one another,—the questions of the law, the circumcision, and eating of things sacrificed to idols, of things indifferent, lawful, or not lawful. Yet all these he would have subordinated unto the higher end of the commandment, charity, 1 Tim. i. 4, 5. And when he exhorts the Corinthians to be zealous for spiritual gifts, he would yet have

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them excel in these things which edify the church, 1 Cor. xiv. 1-12. "Covet earnestly the best gifts," says he, and yet he shows them a more excellent way, and that is charity, (1 Cor. xiii. 1.) to do all these things for the good and edification of the church, rather than of our own opinion, 1 Cor. xii. 3; chap. xiv. 12. I find where the word zeal is taken in a bad sense it hath these works of darkness attending it, wrath, strife, malice, &c. Gal. v. 20; 1 Cor. iii. 3; Rom. xiii. 13. It is accompanied with such a hellish crowd of noisome lusts. Let me add a differential character of it. It is uncharitable, contentious, and malicious. It can do nothing, condescend to nothing, and is conversant about nothing, but what pleases our own humour, for the peace and unity of the church. It is a self-willed impetuous thing, like a torrent that carries all down before it. But truly right zeal runs calmly and constantly within the banks; it will rather consume its own bowels within with grief, than devour others without.