

A S E R M O N

On *J O H N VII. XIX.*

*Did not Moses give you the Law : And yet none of you
keepeth the Law ?*

I Have in several Discourses, according to the Measure of Divine Assistance, endeavoured to unfold unto you the vast Contents of the *Law*, and those various Duties that are summarily comprehended in those *Ten Words*, which the infinite Wisdom of God hath given us as an *Epitome* and *Abridgment* of all Morality. I well know, and am assured, that there never was, neither can there be any Treatise so exact and particular, as to drain this whole Subject : For since it comprizeth in it the *Whole Duty of Man*, in every particular Occurrence, and Action of his Life ; since the variety of Circumstances is almost infinite ; and yet these Circumstances specify our Actions, and make them morally, either good or evil. And since every *Precept* extends its Branches, so far, as to injoin every Man's Duties collaterally, which yet it doth not touch directly, and to forbid very many Sins by Consequence, which it doth not immediately prohibit ; Therefore I cannot but judge it next to an Impossibility minutely to reckon up every Sin, and every Duty methodically, to rank and dispose them every one under that particular Command to which they

they do properly appertain. The serious Contemplation of this boundless extent of the *Law*, occasioned the *Psalmist* to say, *Psal.* 119. 96. *That he had seen an end of all Perfection*: He had taken the Dimensions of all other Things, and found them such, as an inquisitive Mind might describe the whole Limits and Compass of them: *But the Commandment is exceeding broad*: Not for the Indulgence it gives; for so it is exceeding narrow. The broad Way is not the Way of God's Commandments; but that which leadeth down unto Destruction: But broad it is, in respect of its Comprehensiveness, as it reacheth to every Thought of our Souls, and every Action of our Lives, and every Circumstance of both. And therefore since the *Law of God* is of such an unmeasurable Latitude; as *Astronomers* take only the more conspicuous, and remarkable *Stars* into their Constellations, but leave innumerable others, with which the Heavens are every where thick studded; to the casual Observation of the Beholders: So I have contented my self to remark unto you those Duties, and Sins which are most eminent; and to reduce them into Order under these several Precepts, where they are either required, or forbidden, leaving innumerable others to your own private Observation.

I hope that what hath been spoken of them, hath not been as Water spilt upon the Ground, or a Sound only scattered and lost in the Air. For these Things are of infinite Concernment to us. The Knowledge and Practice of them is as much worth as Heaven and Eternal Life. And I may say unto you, as *Moses* to the *Israelites*, I have set Life and Death before you: Life, if ye will hearken and obey; but Eternal Death and Destruction, if ye refuse and rebel. Enter not any low and debasing Thoughts of the *Law*. Think not the preaching of it unworthy the Freedom of *Gospel* Times, or of *Gospel* Spirits. I know that a company of flesh Notionists, who are very willing to shake off the Yoke from their Necks; and to deliver themselves rather from

From the Conscience, than from the Power of Sin; have clamoured against this way of pressing Duty, and enforcing the Authority of the Law, as *legus Prophanus*; and have blasphemed it, as contrary to that Liberty which Christ hath purchased for us; and much beneath the spiritual Attainments of those that are made perfect in him. And I fear lest some of that corrupt Leaven may still remain in the Spirits of too many, who delight only to hear of the Riches of Free Grace, the Privileges of Saints, the All-sufficiency, and Willingness of Christ to save them; and can melt themselves away in the very Sweetness and Tenderness of their Souls under such glorious Discoveries. But if Obedience, and good Works be press'd; if we preach to them concerning *Righteousness, Temperance, and Justice*, and those Moral Duties of the Law, which respect our Deportment towards Men, as well as those which respect the Worship and Service of God; this is flat, and insipid to these nice and refined Professors, and they are ready with a scornful Pity to censure it for honest, Moral Doctrine, fit only for young Beginners, who are not as yet come from under a legal Dispensation.

Beware, my Brethren, that you do not thus vilifie and disparage the Holy Law of God. For let me tell you, this is the Rule that he hath given us to guide our Actions; and this is the Law, by which he himself will judge them: There is no other way to obtain Salvation, but only through Obedience to it. This Law is the very Gate of Heaven; and the *Two Tables*, are the two Leaves of it. We shall never enter into it, but only through these, *Rev. 21. 14. Blessed are they that do his Commandments, that they may have Right unto the Tree of Life, and may enter in through the Gates into the City.* Although our Salvation be the Purchase of Christ, and he alone hath redeem'd us from Death, and procured for us Glory and Immortality by his own most precious Blood: Yet here the Scripture affirms, that we obtain a

Right unto the Tree of Life; *i. e.* to Everlasting Life, by our Obedience, and doing the Commandments of God. A Right, not indeed of Merit; but a Right of Evidence, our Obedience to the *Law* is the only sound Evidence that we can have for our Right to the Promises of the *Gospel*; and without an universal Obedience in the whole Course of our Lives, all our Joys, and Comforts, and confident Expectations of Heaven and Happiness, are but splendid Delusions, and enthusiastical Dreams, by which Men of loose Principles and Practices, seek to unite together two Things, which God hath put at an irreconcilable distance; that is to say, an unholy Life here, and an happy Life hereafter. And if to press this great Truth upon the Conscience, and to insist on the necessity of new Obedience, and Repentance from dead Works, as well as Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, be legal preaching, let mine be ever so accounted. But indeed this is so far from being a legal Doctrine, that it is one of the greatest and most precious Truths that the Gospel exhibits. To preach up Justification by the Law, as a Covenant, is legal, and makes void the Death and Merits of Jesus Christ. But to preach Obedience to the Law as a Rule, is Evangelical; and it favours as much of a New Testament-Spirit (as they phrase it) to urge the Commands of the Law, as to display the Promises of the Gospel.

There are two great Ends for which the Law was at first given; Conviction, and Reformation.

First, It was given, and ought still to be preached for the Conviction of Sinners: And it serves to convince them of Three Things.

First, Of their Guilt contracted by the Transgression of the Law. For by laying their Actions to the Rule, and comparing the Strictness and Purity of the one, with the Obliquity

guity and Defects of other, they may discern wherein they have offended, and their natural Conscience may have an Advantage to charge their Sin and Guilt upon them. Thus saith the Apostle, Rom. 3. 19, 20. *We know that what things soever the Law saith, it saith to them that are under the Law; that every Mouth might be stopped, and all the World might become guilty before God, for by the Law is the knowledge of Sin.*

Secondly, Of that Wrath and eternal Death, to which they stand exposed by reason of their Sin and Guilt. *The Soul that sinneth, it shall die, Ezek. 18. 20. And, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the Book of the Law to do them, Gal. 3. 10. And,*

Thirdly, It serves to convince us of the utter impossibility under which we lie in this our fallen and corrupt Estate, of ever obtaining justification by the Works of the Law. *Rom. 3. 20. By the Works of the Law shall no Man be justified; for by the Law is the knowledge of Sin.* For we cannot be justified by our obedience to it, since the Law demonstrates that our obedience is imperfect. Nor can we be justified by making satisfaction for our disobedience; since the same Law assures us, that the Divine Justice will accept no other satisfaction from us, but our undergoing the Penalty threatned; which is eternal Death: So that to hope for Life by satisfying and recompensing Divine Justice for our Offences, is altogether as vain and foolish, as to hope for Salvation by being damned.

Thus far the convincing work of the Law proceeds, and when it hath brought a Man to despair in himself, by shewing him his Guilt, and that Wrath to which he stands exposed, and the Remedilessness of his sad condition by any thing that he can either do or suffer, it there leaves him, in this horror of

Dark-

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Darkness, till the Spirit of God, who hath thus by the Ministry of the Law convinced him of his own Unrighteousness in himself, doth also by the Ministry of the Gospel convince him of a Righteousness out of himself, in the Lord Jesus Christ: For it is the Spirit that convinceth us of Sin, of Righteousness, and of Judgment, John 16. 8.

Secondly, Another great End of the Moral Law, is, Reformation and Obedience: That having our Rule before us, we may endeavour to conform our Actions according unto it; and be deterred by the Majesty and Authority of it, from adding Sin to Sin, and *treasuring up to our selves Wrath against the Day of Wrath*; and that by seeing our Defects, we may endeavour to amend them. Thus the Apostle tells us, Gal. 3. 19. That *the Law was added because of Transgression, i. e.* because of the exceeding proneness of our corrupted Natures to transgress, God hath given us an holy and severe Law to curb in our Lusts, to check our headstrong Desires and sensual Appetites, and to keep us within the Bounds of Duty and Obedience: For these two great Ends was the Law given; Conviction and Reformation.

And upon both these Accounts the Preaching of the Law is of absolute necessity: For,

First, Where the Law hath not wrought its convincing Work with power upon the Conscience, there the Preaching of Jesus Christ will be altogether in vain. For until a Sinner be thoroughly convinc'd of his Guilt and Misery, and his Conscience awakened by the Threats and Terrors of the Law, that he stands forfeited to the Justice of God, liable to eternal Wrath, and may every moment be swallow'd up in the Abyss of Woe & Torments, into which Thousands before him have been already plung'd, it will be impossible to persuade him seriously to embrace these Tenders of Mercy which the Gospel

Gospel holds forth unto him by Jesus Christ; he wraps himself in his own carnal Confidence and Security, and sees no need of looking out after any other Righteousness than his own; and although his own Righteousness be but filthy Rags, both imperfect and impure; yet being his own, he thinks them better than borrowed Robes. And therefore, saith our Saviour, *Matth. 9. 12. The whole need not a Physician; but they that are sick; i.e.* Those who think themselves whole and sound, although indeed they be sick unto death, they need not a Physician; *i.e.* they apprehend not their need of him; nor will they be persuaded to seek unto him. And,

Secondly, As Christ cannot be accepted where the Law doth not perform its convincing Work; so he will not save, where it doth not perform its reforming Work. Where there is no amendment of Life, there can be no forgiveness of Sins; nor true hopes of Salvation. For Christ is given us, not to save us in our Sins, but from them. *He is the Author of eternal Salvation to all those that obey him, Heb. 5. 9.*

And thus you see of what absolute necessity it is to press the Law upon the Conscience, to denounce its Terrors, to inculcate its Precepts; since the convincing Work of it prepares us for Christ, and its reforming Work for the Salvation purchased by Christ. Without the one we shall never come unto him; and without the other, we shall never come to Heaven by him.

That which I chiefly design for the present, is, to treat of the convincing Work of the Law, and that in each of its Three Branches; *Conviction of Guilt, Conviction of Wickedness, and Conviction of the utter Impossibility we lie under to deliver our selves from it by our own Righteousness.*

I shall

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I shall now treat of the First : To which purpose I have chosen this Portion of Scripture, *John 7. 19. Did not Moses give you the Law ? And yet none of you keepeth the Law.* In which Words we have an Expostulation, and an Accusation.

In the Expostulation we may take notice of Three Things.

First, That this Law of which our Saviour speaks, was the whole Systeme of Divine Precepts, both concerning Ceremonial Rites, Judicial Processes, and Moral Duties : For the *Jews* from *Moses's* Hands received Instructions for all their Observances, Gifts, Offerings, Washings, and other Typical Parts of Worship; and for all their Suits and Controversies between Man and Man, which was the common and standing Law of their Nation; and lastly, for all Moral and Natural Duties, respecting either God or Man. But this last being the chief part of the Law of *Moses*, is here likewise chiefly meant and intended. *Yet none of you keepeth the Law; i. e.* None of you observeth to do according to the Commands of the Moral Law. For our Saviour frequently bears them witness that they were very punctual observers of the Ceremonial and Judicial Laws; but condemns them for neglecting *the weightier Matters of the Moral Law; Judgment, Mercy, and Faith*, Matth. 23.

Secondly, Whereas it is said, That *the Law was given unto them, i. e.* to the *Jews*; it must be understood, That the Ceremonial and Judicial Law was given unto them both immediately and only; but the Moral Law was given to them indeed immediately, but not only. No other People on Earth were necessarily obliged to the observation of the Ceremonial Law, much less of the Judicial, but the *Jews* alone. Yea, and (as I have before observed,) Profelytes of other Nations were admitted to the hopes of Salvation, without binding them to any other Observances, besides the keeping of

of the seven Precepts of Noah; To renounce Idols, to worship the true God, to commit no Murder, nor Uncleanneſs, nor Theft, to execute Juſtice, and to abſtain from Blood. But the Moral Law, although it was given to them immediately, yet not only to them; but its Obligation is as univerſal as humane Nature it ſelf; for indeed it is the very Law of Nature, and right Reason reduced into Precepts; and therefore although *Moses* gave this Law unto them as the Miniſter and Mediator of the old Covenant; yet it is likewiſe given to us by God, as the Cauſe and Author of our Nature, and the Commands of it are as obligatory unto us, as them; ſo that as our Saviour ſaith to the Jews, *Did not Moses give you the Law?* I may ſay to you, *Did not God give you the Law?* and yet none of you keepeth the Law.

Thirdly, Whereas it is ſaid, that *Moses* gave them the Law, we muſt here note,

First, That *Moses* gave it only Miniſterially; but God Primarily and Authoritatively: And therefore, *Gal. 3. 19.* It is ſaid, that *the Law was given by the hand of a Mediator*, And *Moses* is commended for being faithful in all God's Houſe, as a Servant, *Heb. 3. 5.* As one who received Commands from the great Lord and Maſter of it, and delivered them to his Fellow-Servants.

Secondly, That although the Law were given by *Moses*; yet as to the Moral Part of it, and ſome of the Ceremonial, it was owped in the Church of God long before his Miniſtry. As for ſome Parts of the Ceremonial Law, we read frequently of Sacrifices and Circumciſion in uſe among the Patriarchs, many Ages before *Moses's* Time; and ſo ſaith our Saviour, *John 7. 22.* *Moses gave unto you the Circumciſion; not becauſe it is of Moses, but of the Fathers.* And for the Moral Law, all the Duties of it were incumbent up-

on Mankind from the very first Creation of the World, long before the promulgation of the Law from Mount Sinai. Murther was forbidden, and known to be a Sin, before the Lord proclaimed, *Thou shalt not kill.* Yea, and countless Anger, and bloody revengeful Purposes; as appears, Gen. 4. 5. 6. Fornication was then also accounted a Sin worthy of Death; as appeareth, Gen. 38. 24. The outward Worship and Service of God in Solemn and Publick Assemblies, was then known to be a Duty; as appears, Gen. 4. 26. So that the Church of God never was, never shall be without this Law, both written upon their hearts, and likewise preach'd unto them publicly by the Ministry of the Church: For so Noah is said to be a Preacher of Righteousness to the Old World, 2. Pet. 2. 5. Yet,

Thirdly, It is said to be given by Moses, because of the more solemn and conspicuous Delivery of it at Mount Sinai; when God especially magnified him, by calling him up into the Mount, conversing with him Forty Days; writing with his own Finger the Ten Commandments, or two Tables of Stone, and delivering them into his hands to exhibit unto the People. Now because of this solemn Promulgation of the Law by the Means and Ministry of Moses, our Saviour tells the Jews, that it was given them by him. And this is all that I shall consider in the Exposition; *Did not Moses give you the Law?*

That which I principally intend to insist on is the Accusation, *And yet none of you keepeth the Law.* An Accusation that may truly be laid not only against the Jews, but against all the World. Never any of the Sons of Men, from the very first Creation of the World, unto this day, excepting him only who was the Son of God, as well as the Son of Man, and whom it became to fulfil all Righteousness ever did; or can perfectly and exactly fulfil all that the Law of God requires.

And

And to this the Scriptures give abundant Testimony Rom. 3. 23. *All have sinned, and come short of the Glory of God.* Jam. 3. 2. *In many things we offend all.* And the Prophet confesseth the corruption of our Natures, and the imperfection of our best Performances, *Isa. 64. 6, We are all as an unclean thing, and all our Righteousnesses are as filthy Rags.* Solomon challengeth the best and holiest upon this Point. *Prov. 20. 9. Who can say, I have made mine Heart clean, I am pure from my Sin?* Many other Places may be alledged to the same purpose; as, *1 John 1. 8. If we say that we have no Sin, we deceive our selves, and the Truth is not in us.* And, *vers. 10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a Liar.* And all these Exhortations which we find in Scripture to confess our Sins, to repent of them, to watch and strive against them, do all clearly beat down the insolent Pride of those who except themselves out of the number of Transgressors and Offenders. And is it not very strange, that after so many express Testimonies of Scripture, than which nothing can be more plain and positive, notwithstanding that every day and hour might administer abundant Conviction to them; yet there should be a generation of Men so impudently vain-glorious, as to boast of an absolute Perfection in this Life? And yet this is the Doctrine of the Papists, That a Man may all his Life-time eschew every Mortal Sin, and do all that the Law of God requires of him. And not only so; but as if God's Laws were not a Rule strict enough for them to walk by, they hold, he may do much more than he is oblig'd unto, and supererrogate, and merit for others who fall short of Perfection; and lay the Arms of his good Works into the common Stocks and Treasury of the Church to be granted out to others that want them. And although they affirm, That a Justified Person is still liable to commit Venial Sins; yet they make these Venial Sins to be of so slight a Nature, that

Conc. Trid.
Sess. 6. c. 11.

Bellar. de
amif. Grat.
l. 1. c. 3.
Nos doce-
mus com-
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cata que
dam ex
natura
sua non
indignum
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hominem
amicitia
Dei, &
Mortis e-
terne re-
um.

they are not repugnant to Grace, interrupt not our Friendship with God; deserve not eternal Punishments, require neither Confession nor Repentance, and are of so harmleß a Nature, that he that dieth in them, may yet notwithstanding be saved. Certainly these be strange kind of Sins, that do not offend God, nor deserve Punishment, nor need Repentance; and if a Man live free from all these, I think he may readily conclude that he may live free from all Sin; for as they described these Venial Sins, they can be none. Yea, some of them grant that by the special Grace of God, a Man may live free from the Taint, not only of Mortal, but of Venial Sins too; and so attain to a spotleß Perfection. And this proud Conceit of Perfection is not only entertained by *Papists*, but by a sort of Frantick People amongst us, who yet exclaim against all others, as *Popish* and *Antichristian*; but perceive not whose Craft hath taught them both that and many other *Popish* Doctrines; as, *Justification by Works*, the *Insufficiency of the Scriptures*, and *Infallibility seated in any humane Breast*: Certainly the Hand of *Joab* is in all this. Concerning these, I shall say no more, but what the Wise Man observed of such a Race of confident Self-Justiciaries in his Days, *Prov. 30. 12. There is a Generation that are pure in their own Eyes, and yet are not washed from their Filchiness*.

But what! Are then the Laws of God impossible to be fulfilled? Is it not our Imputation to the Equiry and Wisdom of God, that he should command that which we are not able to perform?

I Answer. *First*, The Laws of God are in themselves possible as well as just; and there is nothing which he now requires of us, which he did not endow us with strength in our Creation to perform.

Secondly,

Secondly, In this our fallen and corrupted Estate our perfect Obedience is become impossible; not because the Law is more strict and rigorous; but because we are grown weaker and more averse.

Thirdly, It is no Injustice in God to require what is impossible for us to perform, when that Impossibility riseth from our own default. It is not God, but our selves who have made the observation of his Laws impossible. And although we have wasted our Stock, and are become Bankrupts, yet he may righteously exact from us the Debt of Obedience which we owe him.

Fourthly, Although a perfect and consummate Obedience be now impossible; yet an inchoate and sincere Obedience is possible through the Assistance of Divine Grace. And certainly that Law which commands absolute Perfection from us, requires us to endeavour after the highest degree that is attainable. So that these Commands which exceed our present power, and are neither vain, nor unjust. For they engage us to exert our strength to the utmost, whereby we shall certainly attain unto a far greater perfection in our Obedience, than if we were enjoined that which were easie, or meerly possible to perform; and such is the disingenuity of our Temper, that as much as the Law were relaxed of its severity, so much proportionably we also should remit of our Industry: And therefore since our Sloth will take Allowances to it self, it is far more expedient for us that God hath commanded from us things beyond the Sphere of our present Ability, than if he had commanded what was within it. For I much doubt, whether if God did not command us to do more than we can, we should do as much as we do.

But you will say, To require more than is possible for us to perform, may rather seem a discouragement, than an excitement.

citement to our Endeavours. For what Natural Man will attempt that which he knows to be impossible?

To this I answer, *First*, That there is a twofold Impossibility: One that consists in the Nature of the Thing propounded unto us; another, that consists only in an eminent and superlative degree of it. The first sort of Impossibility, which consists in the Nature of the Thing it self, doth utterly forbid all Attempts and Endeavours. Never any wise Man attempted to climb up into the Sun, or to metamorphose himself into an Angel; because the Thing it self in all considerable degrees of it, is impossible. But where the Impossibility consists only in some eminent degree, and yet every degree that is attainable by us, hath Excellency enough in it self to invite and engage our Endeavours, there the Impossibility of the highest degree is no discouragement to a wise and rational Man, from attempting to do his utmost. So it is in this case; many degrees of Holiness and Obedience are attainable by us, and every degree that we can attain unto, is infinitely worth our pains and labour; and therefore though absolute perfection in it be impossible, yet this can be no discouragement from using our utmost Endeavours. The more we strive after it, the more we shall still attain; and what we do attain is an abundant Recompence of our Industry, and carries in it so much Excellency as will quicken and excite us unto farther Improvements. And certainly whilst we endeavour toward unattainable Perfection, we shall attain unto much more, than if we set our Mark shorter; as he that aims at a Star, is likely to shoot much higher than he that aims only at a Turf.

Secondly, As we must distinguish of Impossibility, so likewise of Perfection, which is either Legal, or Evangelical.

First,

First, There is a Legal Perfection, to which Two Things are necessarily required.

- 1st. Freedom from Original Sin; That there be no Taint derived down upon our Natures, no Corruption inherent in us, that should incline us unto Evil: For where Original Sin is, there Legal Righteousness and Perfection cannot possibly be; for even this Sin is a violation of the Law.
- 2^{dy}. There must be a perfect and exact actual fulfilling of all the Laws of God, without failing in the least Circumstance or least Title of Observation: For Legal Perfection cannot possibly consist with the least Guilt.

Secondly, There is an Evangelical Perfection; which is a State, though not of Innocency, yet of such a personal Righteousness and Holiness as shall be accepted and rewarded by God. Now this Evangelical Perfection consists in Three Things:

- 1st. In true and sincere Repentance for our past Offences, begging Pardon at God's Hands, and endeavouring to abstain from the Commission of the like for the future.
- 2^{dy}. In a true and lively Faith; whereby we rely upon the Merits and Satisfaction of Christ alone for the Remission of our Sins.
- 3^{ly}. In a true and sincere Obedience, endeavouring to live more holily, and to walk more strictly and perfectly before God, according to the Rules he hath prescribed us in his holy Laws. And this consists both in the Mortification of the corrupt and sinful Desires of the Flesh; and in the daily quickning and renewing of the Spirit, whereby we grow in Grace, and make farther progress in Christianity; when we

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do all this in the Truth and Sincerity of our Souls, we are said to be perfect with an Evangelical, or Gospel-perfection; and this indeed is all the inherent Perfection and Righteousness that is attainable by us in this Life. Thus it is that the Saints are in Scripture termed Righteous. So *Noah* is called *righteous*; Gen. 7. 1. And *Abraham* pleads with God for the *righteous* in *Sodom*, Gen. 18. 23, 24. And *Zachary* and *Elizabeth* have this Testimony, That *they were both righteous, walking in all the Commandments of God blameless*, Luke 1. 6. Thus we have the Ways of Holiness called *Ways of Righteousness*, Psal. 23. 2. And the Works of Holiness, *Works of Righteousness*, [Psal. 133. 2. Isa. 64. 2, &c.] This Evangelical Perfection is attainable in this Life, and indeed is attained by every sincere and upright Christian.

But for a Legal Perfection, it neither is, nor can be attained in this Life. And that upon Two Accounts.

First, Because of the infinite Exactness and Holiness of the Law, it is not attained.

Secondly, Because of the Corruption of our Natures, it cannot be attained.

First, The Law of God is infinitely Spiritual, and obligeth us not only to the performance of the external Duties of Obedience; but requires also the absolute perfection of the inward Dispositions; not only that our Love of God be sincere and cordial; but that it must be intense and perfect to the highest degree. Thus, *Deut. 6. 5. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Might.* The Law and Covenant of Works exact a Perfection of degrees in our Love and Obedience, as well as of Parts: it must not only be sincere, but complete; it not only tries our Obedience, by the touch-stone, but weighs it in the Balance, and gives us no Grains of Allowance.

lowance. Now, is there any Man upon Earth that so loves God, or obeys him, that it is not possible he should love him more, or obey him better? Do not some Christians exceed others in their Grace and Holiness? And might not all exceed themselves if they would? The Law gives no allowance for any Failings. And therefore if thou canst love God more, and serve him better than thou dost, thou art not a Fulfiller of the Law, but a Transgressor of it. Hence St. Austin in his Confessions, hath a pious Meditation, *Woe to our commendable Life, if thou Lord setting thy Mercy aside, shouldst examine it according to the strict Rules of Justice and the Law.*

Secondly, Because of the Corruption of our Natures, this legal Perfection cannot be attained in this Life: For we are totally depraved in every Power and Faculty of our Souls; and every Imagination of the Thoughts of our Hearts is only evil continually. Our Understandings are darkened with the thick Mists of Ignorance and Error: Our Wills are perverted, and stand at a professed contradiction to the Holy Will of God: Our Affections are become impure and sensual; our Hearts hard and insensible; our Consciences seared and stupid; and our carnal Minds are Enmity against God: *For they neither are subject to the Law of God, nor can indeed be.* As the Apostle speaks, *Rom. 8. 7.* Now where there is this Corruption of Nature, how can there possibly be Perfection of Life? For who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. And although this Corruption be healed by regenerating Grace, yet is it healed but in part. In the very best, the Flesh will lusteth against the Spirit, and the Law of the Members warreth against the Law of the Mind, so that they cannot do the things which they would, as the Apostle sadly complains, *Rom. 7.* Yet let me add this too That if Corruption were perfectly rooted out of the Heart of any, and such an extraordinary measure of sanctifying Grace conferred upon them,

as might inable them to perform whatsoever the Law of God required, and that to the last degree of intense Love and Zeal; yet would not this their perfect Obedience amount unto a legal Righteousness. The Reason is; because the Law of Works being given to Man in his pure and upright Estate, when he had a connatural Power of his own to obey it, requires Obedience to be performed only by his own Strength, and allows not the Auxiliaries of Divine and Supernatural Grace to inable him. If therefore we should grant, (which yet we deny,) that through some extraordinary Assistance vouchsafed to some particular Man, he should perfectly fulfil the whole Law; yet this actual Obedience, because it proceeds not from Original Righteousness, and the Rectitude of his Nature wherewith he was at first endowed, would not at all avail him to the obtaining of Justification, according to the Terms of the Covenant of Works. For God requires not only Payment of the Debt of Obedience, which we owe unto him; but also that this Payment be made out of the Stock of those Abilities, which he bestowed upon our Nature in our first Creation. Now although it should be possible for any Man to pay off the Debts of Nature, with the Treasures of Grace received from Christ; yet this would not satisfy the Obligation of the Law; since in the first Covenant it was agreed between God and Man, that Payment should be made out of another Stock; viz. the Power and Free Will of uncorrupted Nature.

We are therefore under a two-fold Impossibility of being justified by the Law.

First, Because our Obedience can never in this Life attain absolute Perfection; but still there will be Faults and Flaws in it from the mixture of that Corruption, which still in part remains in the best and holiest, who therefore ought daily to pray, not out of a feigned, and complemental Humility,

lity, but a true and deep Sense of their Necessity : *Forgive us our Trespases.*

Secondly, Because although our Obedience could be perfect ; yet perfect Obedience without Original Righteousness, will not amount unto a legal Righteousness.

And thus I have done with the Doctrinal part of these Words, and shewn you the Impotency we all lie under of a perfect and exact Obedience to the Law.

First, Then let this serve to abase the Pride, and stain the Glory of all Flesh. Search into thy self, O Man : Consider, what art thou, but a Mass of Sin, Rottenness and Corruption ? Reflect back upon the whole Course of thy Life. How hast thou spent those Years, which the Patience and long Suffering of God hath lent thee ? Hast thou not lived in open defiance with the great God of Heaven, and a continual Violation of those Laws, which his Authority hath imposed upon thee ? Suffer thy Conscience to awake, and bring in its Accompts, : And though it should be like the unjust Steward, and set down fifty for an hundred, and small Sins for great ; yet even according to this Computation, thou shalt find thy self desperately indebted to the Justice of God. Read over the black Catalogue of thy Sins, and see with Astonishment and Horror how much thou owest.

First, Art thou not conscious to thy self of any presumptuous Sins committed against thy Knowledge, the Checks and Exclamations of thy Conscience, against thy natural Light and Reason with a deliberate and resolved Wilfulness ? When thou hast seen all the Curses and Threatnings of the Law stand ready bent against thee, and Hell-fire flashing in thy very Face ; when Conscience hath commanded thee in the Name of the great God to forbear, and denounced

A Sermon on John 7. 19.

against thee Wrath and Death if thou dar'st commit it; hast thou not then fallen upon thy Conscience, violently stopp'd its Mouth, yea wounded and stabbed it, and may not the Blood and Scars of it testify against thee? Yea to add Measure to this; hast thou not frequently relapsed into the Commission of these presumptuous and daring Sins, and repeated them against thy Vows, and Protestations, and Prayers, and seeming Repentance, and so ripping open the Wounds of thy Conscience again, before they were well closed, and making them bleed afresh? Who of us all can acquit our selves of Sins against Knowledge, and Conscience, that have ever had any Knowledge or Conscience?

Secondly, The Sins of Ignorance, which you have committed are altogether numberless. The Soul naturally is a dark and confused Chaos; and until the Light of the glorious Truth shine into it, Sin and Duty lie undistinguished; and in the blindness of our Minds, we oftentimes take the one for the other. We many Times transgress the Law, because we know it not; and many times transgress it, when we intend to observe it. We heed not our own Actions; but let them pass from us without Consideration or Reflection; and truly the greatest part of our Lives is thus huddled up, without pondering what we do; and we are equally ignorant and careless, whether we do well or ill. And in such neglected Actions, the far greater part must needs be sinful: For when we heed not the Rule, it is hard for us not to transgress it. And therefore saith the Psalmist, *Psal. 19. 12. Who can understand his Errors? Cleanse thou me from secret Faults.* Add to this,

Thirdly, All thy Sins of Infirmary, and Weakness, Sins to which thou art betrayed contrary to thy Purpose and Resolutions, by the sudden Surprise of a Temptation, Sins, which although they may not be wilful and presumptuous,

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yet they may be very gross and scandalous, as was St. Peter's Denial of his Master. Cast in also,

Fourthly, All the Swarms of thy secret Sins, thy vain Thoughts, and sinful Desires; Sins which though the World can take no Cognizance of them, yet are visible, and conspicuous to the Eyes of the All-seeing God. He sees a sinful Object lying in the Embraces of thy Affections; and if there be but the least hovering of thy Heart, the least fluttering of thy Thoughts towards Vanity, he remarks it, and writes it down in his Debt-Book, although perhaps thy Conscience may omit it; and, oh, how vast a Summ these alone amount unto! Thy Thoughts run as swift as Time, and click as fast as the Moments. And such a giddy, feathery, unconstant Thing is the Mind of Man, that we cannot dwell long upon any one Thought; but whilst we are pursuing one, Ten thousand others arise: Our Thoughts are like those numberless Motes that play in a Sun-beam; they flit up and down in our Minds without any certain Scope or Design. We cannot turn our selves fast enough to them; nor can we think what we think. But God knoweth them all; and for such infinite multitudes of Thoughts, he sets down so many Sins; and yet besides all these, art thou not conscious to thy self.

Fifthly, Of the Omission of many Holy Duties, which thou oughtest to have performed in the several Times and Seasons when God called for them. Canst thou not call to Mind, that thou hast often restrained Prayer from God, or Charity from Men; that thou hast not served him, nor helped them, when thou mightest have done it? Hast thou not neglected the Ordinances of Jesus Christ, his Word and Sacraments, upon small or fought Occasions, or else foolish and groundless Prejudices. Endless it would be to recount all the Omissions we are guilty of; which, certainly

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are many more than our Duties, and yet perhaps far more numerous.

Sixthly, all thy Miscarriages in those Duties which thou hast performed, the Dulness of thy Affections, the Vagranancies of thy Thoughts, thy Hypocrisie and Formality, all thy base and By-Ends, which like dead Flies, corrupt the most precious Ointment, are all Sins, and God's Law censures and condemns them for such.

Now, O Sinner, having such a Load of Guilt upon thy Soul, how darest thou look the holy and just God in the Face? Consider, O Wretch, what a Life is this which thou hast led, that in all the Millions of Thoughts and Actions thou hast employed thy self about, the far greater part should be Sins for the Matter of them, and all the rest sinful for the Manner. Can thy Conscience lie lulled asleep when all those Troops and Armies of *Philistines* be upon thee? Awake yet at length, O stupid Soul! rouse thy self, and consider the woful and desperate Estate in which thou art; Wonder no longer at others, that they complain and mourn, and go heavily under the burthen of their Sins, and the pangs and smart of their Convictions: Muse not that there should be some few who with horror cry out they are undone and ruined, eternally undone. Alas, wert thou but once shaken out of thy Lethargy, couldst thou but look about thee, and seriously view and ponder the infinite multitude, and the Nature of thy Sins, nothing but the strong Consolations of God could keep thee from running up and down distracted with the Terrours of the Lord, and with the utmost horror and despair, crying out, Thou art damn'd, damn'd already. But the Truth is, Men are dead in Trespasses and Sins; those Sins which are the Cause of their Misery, keep them from feeling it. But believe it, you must be convinced of your Sins either here, or hereafter. Conscience will
revive

revive in you, if not here, yet in Hell: Nay, it is now writing down your Sins against you, and drawing up the Bill of your Indictment; but as some use such Juices, that what they write shall not be legible till held to the Fire, so do many Men's Consciences write down their Sins; which, although they cannot perhaps read them now, yet they shall read the long and black Scroll of them, when they hold it against the Flames of Hell. And how sad will it be then to know that you are Sinners, when you shall likewise know that you are eternally damn'd for your Sins? When your Consciences, which are now peaceable and gentle, shall then on a sudden rave and shriek, and fly in your Faces, and begin then (but then alas too late) to terrify and affright you, when there is no hope, nor possibility of Remedy. Be persuaded therefore now to recognize your Sins, while there is yet hope. The Day of Grace is not yet set upon you; Mercy and Pardon are yet offered to you; and those Sins which you are convinced of by the Strictness of the Law, you may, if you will seek it by true Repentance, obtain Remission of through the Grace and Mercy of the Gospel.

Secondly, Are all Transgressors of the Law? Then here see a woful Shipwreck of the Hopes and Confidences of all Self-Justificaries. Hence learn, that an honest, quiet, Civil Life, free from the gross and scandalous Pollution of the World, is no sufficient Plea for Heaven; yet this alone is that which the Generality of the ignorant sort especially, rely upon. Their Lives are harmless, their Dealings just and upright; none can complain they are wrong'd by them; and therefore certainly if God will save any, they must be of the Number. I heartily wish, that in these Words I could have persuaded you; but truly I doubt that the most of you are not yet come so far as Morality, nor have attained to the Honesty of those who yet shall fall short of Heaven. But suppose you could really plead this; yet this Plea is invalid: For,

For, is there nothing that you know by your selves, either relating to God or Man, wherein you have offended? Had you never so much as a Thought in you that slip'd awry? Have you never utter'd a Word that so much as lis'd contrary to the holy Law of God? Did you never do any one Action which Purity and Innocence it self might not own? Have your Lives in every point been as strict and holy as the Law of God commands them to be? If thou darest to affirm this, thou makest not thy self the more innocent thereby; but the more unpardonable; and art a senseless stupid Wretch, for thinking thy self pure and clean; or if upon a narrower Search thou findest some Miscarriages by thy self, remember thou art yet but at the Threshold of thy Heart; enter farther into thy self, and thou shalt discover yet greater Abominations. However, could it be supposed that thou art guilty but of one Sin, and that one the least that ever was committed; yet this one Sin makes thee a Transgressor of the Law, and the Guilt of it can never be expiated by any thing which thou canst either do or suffer; but eternal Death and Wrath must be thy Portion, unless the Blood of Jesus Christ purge thee from it.

Thirdly. See then what absolute need we all stand in of Jesus Christ. Not only those amongst us whose Lives have been openly gross and scandalous; but even those also who are the most circumspect and careful in their Walkings. Though they do not wallow, and roll themselves in the common pollutions of the World; yet it is not possible, but that in so dirty a Road they must be bespattered, and their Garments spotted with the Flesh. Absolute Perfection is a State rather to be wish'd for, than enjoy'd in this Life; the utmost we can here attain unto, is, not to commit presumptuous Sins, nor to allow our selves in any, when through Infirmary we do commit them. But none of our Sins, whether of Presumption, or of Weakness; whether of Ignorance,

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or against Knowledge ; whether the Sins of our Thoughts, or of our Actions, can be pardoned without the Blood of God, and the Sufferings of our Almighty Saviour. It is the same precious Blood that satisfied God's Justice for the Adultery and Murther of *David*, the Incest of *Lot*, the Perjury of *Peter*, that must satisfy it likewise for thy vain and foolish Thoughts, and rash and idle Words, if ever thou art saved. For *without Blood there is no Remission*, Heb. 9. 22. And *without Remission there can be no Salvation*, Acts 22. 18. And indeed this is one of the great and main Ends of giving the Law, that the Necessity, and All-sufficiency of Christ to save us, may be rendered the more conspicuous. Thus saith the Apostle, *Rom. 10. 4. Christ is the End of the Law for Righteousness, to every one that believeth.* The Law was given us, not that we should seek Justification by observance of it ; but finding it impossible to be justified by fulfilling of it, we should thereby be driven unto Christ's Righteousness, who hath both fulfilled it in himself, and satisfied for our transgressing it : And therefore saith the same Apostle, *Gal. 3. 24. The Law was our Schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by Faith.* To this end was it promulgated, that seeing the Multiplicity and Strictness of its Commands, the rigour & utter insupportableness of its threatnings, and being withal sensibly convinced of our own Weakness and impotency to fulfil the Commands enjoined, and thereupon, of our liableness to undergo the Penalty threatened, we might thereby be frightened and terrified, and as it were, by a School-master, whipt unto Christ, to find that Righteousness in him that may answer all the Demands of the Law ; which in our selves we could not find. And whilst we make this use of the Law, we bring it to be subservient to the Gospel.