
S E R M O N VI.

Dr. Thomas Manton

PROPOSITION.

The Scripture is a sufficient Rule of Christian Faith, or a Record of all necessary Christian Doctrines, without any supplement of unwritten Traditions, as containing any necessary matter of Faith, and is thus far sufficient for the decision of all Controversies.

2 Thes. 2. 15. *Therefore Brethren stand fast and hold the Traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our Epistle.*

THe Apostle after he had comforted the Thessalonians, he exhorteth them to Constancy in the Truth, whatever Temptations they had to the contrary. The Comforts he propoundeth to them were taken, 1. From their Election, ver. 13. 2ly. From their Vocation, ver. 14. His Exhortation is to Perseverance: *Therefore, Brethren, &c.*

In the words observe, 1. The Illative particle [*Therefore*] because God hath chosen you and called you, and given you such advantages against Error and Seduction.

2. The Duty inferred, *stand fast*; it is a Military word, you have the same in other places, 1 Cor. 16. 13. *Watch ye, stand ye fast, &c.* Ephes. 6. 14. *Stand therefore, having your loyns girt about with truth.* The word intimateth Perseverance.

3. The

3. The means of Perseverance, *Hold the Traditions which you have been taught, whether by word or our Epistle.*

Where observe, 1. The *Act*; 2. The *Object*.

1. The *Act*, *καταστήτε*, hold with strong hand; the word implieth a forcible holding against assaults, whether of Error or Persecution. The *Thessalonians* were assaulted in both kinds; the Heathens persecuted them, and some were gone abroad that began the *Mystery of Iniquity*, and were ready to pervert them.

2. The *Object*; which is propounded, 1. By a common and general term, the *Traditions which you have been taught*. 2. By a Distribution, *Whether by word or our Epistle.*

I. The common and general term, [*the Traditions which ye have been taught,*] there are two sorts of Traditions, *Humane* and *Divine*.

1. *Humane Traditions* are certain External Observances instituted by men, and delivered from hand to hand, from Progenitours to their Posterity; these may be either *besides* or *contrary* to the Word of God: 1. *Beside* the Word; as the Institutions of the Family of the *Rechabites*, in the observance of which from Father to Son, they were so exact and punctual, that God produceth their Example to shame the disobedience of his People, *Jer. 35. 6, 7. Jonadab the Son of Rechab our Father commanded us saying, Ye shall drink no wine, nor build houses, nor plant Vineyards, &c.* 2. *Contrary* to the Word of God; such as were those of the Pharisees, *Mat. 15. 2. Why transgress ye the Commandment of God by your Tradition?* Humane inventions in Religion are contrary to and destructive of Divine Laws.

2. *Traditions Divine* are either *Heavenly Doctrins* revealed by God, or Institutions and Ordinances appointed by him for the use of the Church. These are the Rule and Ground of our Faith, Worship and Obedience. The whole Doctrine of the Gospel is a Tradition delivered and conveyed to us by fit Messengers, such as the Apostles were; *1 Cor. 11. 2. Now I praise you Brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the Ordinances, Marg. Traditions, as I delivered them to you.* So that holding the Traditions is nothing else but Perseverance in Apostolical Doctrine.

II. The Distribution; That no cheats might be put upon them under any pretence; therefore, he saith, *Whether by word, or our Epistle*; that is, by word of mouth when present, or by Epistle when absent. And he saith, not *Epistles*, but *Epistle*; as alluding to the former wrote unto them: They were bound to yield to both alike credence and obedience; for whether in speaking or writing, the Apostolical Authority was the same. To improve this Verse for your benefit, I shall lay down several Propositions.

1. *That whatever assurance we have of Gods preserving us in the truth, yet we are bound to use diligence and caution*; for the Apostle had said, That God had chosen and called them to the belief of the truth; and yet saith, *Therefore Brethren stand fast.* First, Reason will tell us. That when we intend

intend an End we must use the Means, otherwise the bare intention and desire would suffice, and to the accomplishing of any effect, we need no more than to will it; and then the sluggard would be the wisest man in the world; who is full of Wishings and Wouldings, though his hands refuse to labour; But common experience sheweth that the End cannot be obtained without a diligent use of the means, *Prov. 13. 4. The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat*; that is, rewarded with the intended benefit.

2. The business in hand is, Whether Gods Election, Calling, or Promise doth so secure the End to us, as that we need not be so careful in the diligent use of Means. Such a notion or conceit there may be in the hearts of men, therefore let us attack it a little by these Considerations.

1. Gods Decree is both of Ends and Means; for all his Purposes are executed by fit means. He that *hath chosen us to Salvation*, bringeth it about by the belief of *the Truth and Sanctification of the Spirit*, 2 Thes. 2. 13. And without Faith and Holiness no man shall see God, and escape condemnation. God had assured Paul, *That there should be no loss of any mans life among them except of the Ship*, Act. 27. 22. And yet afterward vers. 31. Paul telleth them, *Except these abide in the Ship ye cannot be saved*. How could that Assurance given to Paul from God, and Pauls Caution to the Mariners stand together? Doth the purpose of God depend upon the uncertain will and actions of men? I answer not as a cause, from whence it receiveth its force and strength, but as a means appointed also by God to the execution of his Decree; for by the same Decree God appointeth the event what he will do, and the means by which he will have it to be done; and the Lord revealing by his Word this conjunction of Ends and Means, there is a necessity of Duty lying upon man to use these Means and not to expect the End without them. God intended to save all in the Ship, and yet the Mariners must abide in the Ship; therefore what God hath joined together let no man separate: If we separate these things God doth not change his Counsel, but we pervert his order to our own destruction.

2ly. God that hath bidden us to believe his Promises, hath forbidden us to tempt his Providence, Mat. 4. 7. Now we tempt God, when we desire him to give an extraordinary proof of his care over us; when ordinary Means will serve the turn, or be useful to us.

3ly. Though the Means seem to have no connexion with the End; yet if God hath enjoined them for that End, we must use them. As in the instance of Naaman, God was resolved to cure him; but Naaman must take his prescribed way, though against his own fancy and conceit, 2 King. 5. 10. *Wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean*. Compare vers. 13. *If the Prophet had bidden thee to do some greater thing, &c.* So Joh. 13. 6, 7. Peter must submit to be washed, though he could not see the benefit of it. So Joh.

Job. 9. 6, 7. the blind man must submit to have his eyes anointed with clay, and wash in the Pool of Siloam; though the Clay seemed to put out his eyes rather than cure them; and the Pool could not wash away his blindness; but Means appointed by God must be used, whatever improbabilities are apprehended by us.

4. That when Gods Will is expressly declared concerning the Event, yet he will have the Means used; as for instance, *2 King. 20. 5, 6, 7.* God was absolutely resolved to add fifteen years more to *Hezekiahs* life, yet he must take a lump of Figs and lay it on the boil: Which plainly sheweth that no promise on Gods part, nor assurance on ours hindreth the use of Means, God will work by them, not without them.

5. In Spiritual things Assurance of the Event is an encouragement to industry, not a pretence to sloth, *1 Joh. 2. 27, 28.* *Ye shall abide in him;* and now, *Little children abide in him.* The promise of Perseverance doth encourage us to use endeavours that we may persevere, and quicken diligence rather than nourish security, or open a gap to carnal liberty, *1 Cor. 9. 26.* *I run not as one that is uncertain;* we are the more earnest, because we are assured the Means shall not be uneffectual.

2. Prop: *Our duty is to stand fast in the Faith of Christ, and profession of Godliness, whatever Temptations we have to the contrary.* [Stand fast] being a Military word, it alludeth to a Soldiers keeping his ground; and is opposed to two things, 1. *A cowardly flight;* 2. *A treacherous revolt.*

1. *A cowardly flight,* implieth our being overcome in the evil-day, by the many afflictions that befall us for the Truths sake, *Ephes. 6. 13.* *Wherefore take to you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil-day, that after you have done all things ye may stand.* Their Temptation was the many troubles and persecutions that befall them, called there the evil day. Their defence lay in the whole armor of God, which is there made of six pieces, the Girdle of Truth or Sincerity, which is a strength to us as a girdle to the loyns; the breast-plate of Righteousness, or an holy inclination and desire to perform our Duty to God in all things; and the Shield of Faith, or a stedfast adhering to the Truths of the Gospel, whether delivered in a way of command, promise or threatening; the Helmet of Hope, or a certain and delirous expectation of the promised Glory, the shoe of the preparation of the Gospel of peace, which is a headiness to endure all Encounters for Christs sake, who hath made our Peace with God; and the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God: Now if we take this armor and use it in our Conflicts, what doth it serve for? to withstand and stand; the first is the act of a Soldier, the second is the posture of a Conqueror; here is withstanding till the Field be won, and then standing when the day of evil is over. Here we make our way to heaven by conflict and conquest, and hereafter we triumph.

2. *A treacherous revolt*, or yielding to the enemy by complying with those things which are against the Interest of Christ and his Kingdom for advantage sake, 2 Tim. 4. 10. *Demas hath forsaken us and loved the present world.* Backsliders in heart are the worst sort of Apostates, such as lose their affection to God, and delight in his ways, and esteem of his glorious recompences, for a little pleasure, profit, or pomp of living; *Sell the birth-right for one morsel of meat*, Heb. 12. 15, 16. Some fail in their *understandings*, but most miscarry by the perverse inclination of their *wills*; they are carnal, worldly Hypocrites that never thoroughly mortified the fleshly mind; prize things as they are commodious to the flesh, and will save them from sufferings. The byas of such mens hearts doth easily prevail against the light of their understandings.

3. Prop. *The means of standing fast is by holding the Traditions which were taught by the holy Apostles.* Here I will prove, 1. That the Doctrine of Christianity taught by the Apostles is a Tradition. 2. That holding this Tradition by strong hand, when others would wrest it from us, is the means of our Perseverance.

1. *That the Doctrine of Christianity is a Tradition.* I prove it by two Arguments; first, Matters not evident by the *light of nature*, nor immediately revealed to us by God must be either an *Invention* or a *Tradition*; an *Invention* is something in Religion not evident by natural light, nor agreeable to sound reason, but is some cunningly *devised fable*, invented by one or more, and obtruded by various artifices upon the Belief of the World. Inventions in this kind were mans *disease*, not his *remedy*, Eccles. 7. 29. *God made man upright but they sought out many Inventions.* As when the Philosophers sat abroad upon Religion, a goodly *Chymera* it was they hatched and brought forth! Rom. 1. 21, 22. *They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened, and professing themselves to be wise they became fools.* These Inventions little became the *nature of God*. Nor were they *profitable to man*, for still the great sore of nature was unhealed which is a *fear of death*, and the righteous wrath of God, Rom. 1. 32. so that neither mans *comfort* nor *duty* was well provided for: surely the Gospel is none of this sort; not an *Invention of man*, but a *Revelation of God*; and a Revelation not made to *us in person*, but brought out of the *bosom of God* by Jesus Christ, and by him manifested to chosen witnesses, who might publish this Mystery and Secret to others. Well then, since the Gospel is not an *Invention*, it is a *Tradition*, or a delivery of the Truth upon the Testimony of one that came from God to instruct the World, or reduce it to him; not an *Invention of man*, but a Secret brought out of the bosom of God, by our Lord Jesus Christ: Therefore 'tis said, Heb. 2. 3, 4. *How shall we escape if we neglect so great Salvation; first spoken by the Lord himself, and then confirmed to us by them that heard him, the Lord bearing them*

them witnesses, &c. Christ delivered it to the Apostles, and the Apostles delivered it to others, 2 Tim. 2. 2. *Those things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.* The Apostles received the Gospel from Christ, and the Churches, and Ministers from the Apostles, and then delivered it down to others until it came to us; which is the means of our believing the Truth, and confessing the Name of Christ. This Testimony delivered and conveyed to us by the most credible Means, and which we have no reason to doubt of, is as binding as if we had heard Christ and his Apostles in person: for we have their *word* in *writing*, though we did not hear them preach and publish it with the lively voice; their Authority is the same delivered either way. And that these are their Writings, appeareth by the *constant Tradition* of the Church, and the acknowledgment of *Friends and Enemies*, who still appeal to them as a *publick authentick Record*, and as they have been attested *by the Church*, they have been owned *by God*, and blessed by him to the converting and sanctifying of many Souls, throughout all successions of Ages: And by this Tradition Christianity hath held up the head against all encounters of time, and the *persecutions* of adverse Powers have not suppressed it; nor the disputes of enemies silenced the profession of it: But from age to age it hath been received and transmitted to future Generations, though sometimes at a very dear rate. And this is binding to us though we saw not the Persons and Miracles by which they confirmed their Message, and heard not the first report. Yet the *Universal Tradition* having handed it to us is a sufficient ground of Faith; and so *we believe through their word*, and are concerned in Christs Prayers, Job. 17. 20. for with them and their Successors (as to these necessary things) Christ hath promised to be to the *end of the world*, Mat. 28. 20.

2ly. My next Argument is; Because Christian Religion must needs be a Tradition, partly because *matter of fact* is the foundation of it, and it is in it self *matter of faith*: 1. Because it is built upon *matter of fact*; that the Son of God came from God to bring us to God; that is to say, appeared in *Humane nature*, instructed the World by his *Doctrine* and *Example*, and at length *died for sinners*, confirming both in *life* and *death* the truth of *his Mission*, by such unquestionable Miracles as shewed him to be the *Son of God*, and the *Saviour of the World*. Now a Testimony, Tradition, or Report is necessary in *matters of fact*, which of necessity must be confined to some determinate *time* and *place*. It was not fit that Christ should be always working Miracles, always dying, always rising and ascending, in every place, and in the view of every man; but these things were to be once done in one place of the World, in the sight of some particular and competent Witnesses: But because the knowledg of them concerned all the rest of the World, they were by them to be attested to others; *matters of fact* can only be proved:

ved by *credible witnesses*, and this was the great Office put upon the Apostles, *Act. 1. 8. 21, 22. and Act. 2. 32. Act. 3. 15. Act. 10. 39, 40, 41. 2.* As it is *matter of Fact*; or the Doctrine built upon this *matter of Fact*. We cannot properly be said to believe a thing but upon report and testimony: I may *know* a thing by *sense* or *reason*, but I cannot *believe* it but as it is affirmed or brought to me by credible Testimony. As we are said to *see* those things which we perceive by the eye, or the sense of seeing, and to *know* those things which we receive by *reason*, or *sure demonstration*; so we are said to *believe* those things which are brought to us by *valuable testimony, tradition, and report*. As for instance if any one ask you, Do you believe the Sun shineth at Noon-day? You will answer, I do not *believe* it but *see* it: So if any one ask you, Do you believe that twice two make four, and twice three make six? You will say I do not *believe* it but *know* it, because certain and evident reason telleth me, that two is the half of four, and three of six, and every whole consisteth of two halves or moyeties: But if he should ask you, Do you believe that the Sun is bigger than the Earth? You will say *I believe it*; for though your Eye doth not discover it, nor doth an ignorant man know any certain demonstration of it; yet having the authority of learned men, who are competent judges in the case, you judg it a rash and foolish obstinacy not to believe it. Apply it now to *the mysteries of Godliness* revealed in the Gospel, they cannot be seen with the Eye, for they are invisible; nor found out and comprehended by any Humane Understanding, because they exceed the reach of mans Reason, and depend upon *the love* and arbitrary will of God, *Joh. 3. 16.* Yet you believe them, because God hath revealed them to the *Prophets* and *Apostles*; and God being Truth and Wisdom it self, cannot deceive, or be deceived; and therefore you believe them with the certainty of Divine Faith, and do no more doubt of them than you do of those things which you see with your eyes, and know and understand by a sure Demonstration. The sense of seeing may be deceived, and Humane Reason may err; but 'tis impossible God should deceive or be deceived. It often-times falleth out that men do prefer the authority and report of a man whom they judg to be wise and good before their own sense and reason; as for instance, that man who by his eye judgeth the Sun to be less than the Earth, yet doth not obstinately stand in his opinion, when he heareth a knowing and skilful Philosopher assert the contrary; *Now if we receive the witness of men the witness of God is greater,* 1 Joh. 5. 9. And this Testimony of God is brought to us by his authorized Messengers as the *ground of Faith*; and what is that but Tradition. We believe in God by hearing of him, and we *hear by a Preacher*, Rom. 10. 14. Ordinary Preachers *declare* his mind to us, but the Extraordinary *confirm* it; the common Preachers give us *notice*, but *Christ* and his *Apostles* give us *assurance*; and by their Testimony and Tradition our Faith is *ultimately resolved* into the *Veracity* of God.

2ly. That holding this Tradition is the great means of standing fast in the Faith of Christ, and the Confession of his Name. For in the Word of God delivered by Christ and his Apostles, there is *sure direction* to walk by; and *sure promises* to build upon. For whatever they made known of Christ was *not a fable*, but a *certain truth*; for they had the testimony of Sense, 2 Pet. 1. 16, 17. 1 Job. 1. 1, 2, 3, 4. and so could plead both the *authority of his command*, and the *certainity of his Promise*, and that with *uncontroulable evidence*; and without this Revelation there can be neither *Faith* nor *Obedience*, nor *sure expectation* of Happiness. For we cannot *trust* God for what he hath not promised, nor *obey* God in what he hath not commanded; nor in our difficulties and distresses *expect* happiness from him without his warrant and assurance. But by this Doctrine delivered to us we have all that belongeth to *Faith*, *Obedience* and *Happiness*; and beyond that the Creature can desire no more. 1. There can be no Faith till we have a sure Testimony of Gods Revelation; for *Faith is a believing such things as God hath revealed, because he hath revealed them*. 'Tis not Faith but *fancy*, to believe such things as God hath never revealed; nor is it *Trust* and a *regular Confidence* to think, that he will certainly give us what he hath never promised; this were to lay us open to all manner of delusion: And therefore we are never upon sure and stable ground, but by sticking to *such a Tradition* as may justly intitle it self to God. 2. Nor *Obedience*; for Obedience is a *doing what God hath commanded because he hath commanded it*. The fundamental reason of Obedience is the sight of *Gods will*, 1 Thes. 4. 3. 1 Thes. 5. 18. 1 Pet. 2. 15. To do what God never commanded, or not to do it upon that account but for other reasons is not Obedience; and in difficult cases the Soul can never be held to its duty, till we are perswaded that so is Gods Will concerning us. Now to know his Will concerning us, we are often bidden to *search the Scriptures*; but never bidden to consult with the Church to know what *unwritten Traditions* she hath in her keeping to instruct us in our Duty. 3. No *certain expectation of Happiness*. We are never safe till we know by what Rule Christ will *judg us*, that is, *reward or punish* men at the last day: Now he will judg us according to the Gospel; Rom. 2. 16. 1 Thes. 1. 8. Obey the Gospel, and you have a perfect Rule to guide you to Happiness; but if you neglect *this great Salvation*, or be unfaithful in the profession of it, this Word condemneth you, and God will ratifie the sentence of it.

4. Prop. *That whilst the Apostles were in being, there were two ways of delivering the Truth, and that is by word of mouth and writing*. So in the Text, *Whether by word, or our Epistle*. The Apostles went up and down and preached Christ every-where; that needeth no proof, unless you would have me to produce the whole Book of the *Acts of the Apostles*: But they did not *preach* only but *write*, and both by the instinct of the

the holy Spirit, who guided their *Journies*, and moved them to *write Epistles*: For being often absent from Churches newly planted, and Heresies arising, or some Contentions, which could not be avoided among weak Christians, God over-ruled these *Occasions* for the profit of the Church in after-Ages. Upon one occasion or another they saw a necessity to write *ἀνάγκη ἔχον*, *Jude 3*. *It was needful for me to write unto you*. As in the Old Testament God himself delivered the *Law* with great Majesty and terrour, and afterward caused the same to be written in Tables of Stone for the constant use of his People. And the Prophets first *uttered* their Prophecies, and then *wrote* them: So the Apostles first *preached* Evangelical Doctrine, and then consigned it to *writing* for the use of all Ages. And though all things delivered by them were not delivered in *one Sermon*, or *one Epistle*; yet by degrees the Canon of the New Testament was constituted and made perfect by the Writings of the *Evangelists* and *Apostles*.

5. Prop: *That now when they are long since gone to God, and we cannot receive from them the Doctrine of Life by word of mouth, we must stick to the Scriptures or written word.* 1. Because we are taught to do so by Christ and his Apostles. Christ always appealeth to the Writings of the Old Testament, both against Traditions, which he condemneth, *Mat. 15. 2.* and against pretended Revelations, *Luk. 16. 31*. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be perswaded to repent, if one should come from the dead.* And the Apostles still have recourse to this proof, *Act. 26. 22*. *Witnessing no other things than the Prophets and Moses did say should come to pass:* And when they pleaded they were eye and ear-witnesses, and so their Testimony was valuable; yet they say ye have *βεβαιότερον λόγον*, *a surer word of Prophecie whereunto ye shall do well to take heed*, *2 Pet. 1. 19*. Now how can we do better than to imitate these great Examples? 2. Because these things were written for our sakes, *1 Joh. 1. 4*. *These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.* The Apostles being to leave the World, did know the slipperiness of mans memory, and the danger of corrupting Christian Doctrine, if there were not a sure Authentick Record left; Therefore they wrote, and so fully, that nothing is wanting to compleat our joy and happiness. 3. Because the Scriptures are perfect. The perfection of Scripture is known by its end, and intended use; which is to give us a knowledg of those things which concern our Faith, Duty and Happiness. 1. Our Faith in Christ. If there be enough written for that end, we need not un-written Traditions to compleat our Rule: Now St. John telleth us he might have written more things, *But these things are written that ye might believe in the Son of God, and have life through his name*, *Joh. 20. 30, 31*. Certainly nothing is wanting to beget a Faith in Christ; the Object is sufficiently propounded, the Warrant or Claim is laid down in the New Covenant, and the Encouragements to believe are clear and strong.

strong. What would men have more? so that here is a perfect Rule, perfect in its kind, and for its proper use. 2. For our Duty; that is sufficiently provided for. The Apostle telleth us, That *the Grace of God*, take it *Objectively* for the Grace of the Gospel, or *Subjectively* for Grace in our hearts, *teacheth us*: if you mean *Objective Grace*, it *prescribeth, directeth*; if of *Subjective Grace*, it *perswadeth* and *exciteth* what to do, *to live soberly, righteously, godly, in the present world*, Tit. 2. 12. There are all the Branches of Mans Duty enumerated: *Sobriety* relateth to self-government; *Righteously* to our carriage towards our Neighbour; *Godly* to our commerce and communion with God. Now in the Word of God what is there wanting, that belongeth either to Worship, or Justice, or personal Holiness? therefore certainly we need no other Rule; for it layeth down whatsoever Men are bound to do in all Ages and Places of the World, and in whatsoever circumstances God shall put them: And so it is fit to be the Law of the *Universal King* and *Law-giver*; yea it is so perfect, that whatever other way is set up, it presently dasheth against those notions that we have or should have of God and his Service, and Worship; or it *infringeth* or *perverteth* the liberty and nature of man. 3. For our Happiness; that Doctrine and Institution, which is able to make us *wise unto Salvation*, is enough for us, but so the holy Scriptures are said to do, 2 Tim. 3. 15. *Thou hast known the holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto Salvation, through the faith which is in Christ Jesus.* Nay afterward, vers. 17. *The man of God is by them made perfect, and thoroughly furnished to every good work.*

If the Scriptures do thoroughly direct Men to know God in Christ, and save their own Souls, why should we look any further? Now they do not only furnish every private Christian with this knowledg; but the *man of God*, who is to instruct others, he needeth look no further, but is furnished out of the Scripture with all things necessary to discharge his Office. Therefore here we fix and rest, we have a sufficient Rule, and a full Record of all necessary Christian Doctrines.

Use 1. The Use of all is; Let us not seek another Rule than the Word of God. Papists cry up Unwritten Traditions to be received with *equal respect* and *reverence*, as we receive the holy Scriptures; but you Brethren, *stand fast*, holding the Apostolical Tradition: you cannot have it by word of mouth from them now; therefore you must stick to what is written, or else you cannot preserve your selves from the frauds and impostures of Antichrist. These Apostolical Writings have been received in all ages and times of the Church from the beginning; and *all Disputes* among Christians have been tried by them: None were allowed good or sincere Christians who doubted of the truth of them. But because we have to do with a People that will sacrifice all to the honour and interest of their Church; and knowing they are not able to stand before the light of Scriptures, have to the no little prejudice

dice of the Christian Cause done all that they can to weaken the *Authority, Sufficiency and Perspicuity* of them, that we might have no Religion without the Testimony and Recommendation of their Church; therefore I shall resume the matter and declare it afresh.

1. Mankind lying in darkness, and in the shadow of death, it was necessary that one way or another God should reveal his mind to them, that we may know what belongeth to our *Duty and Happiness*, for our *chief good and last end*. Being altered by sin, we strangely mistake things, and put *light* for *darkness*, and *darkness* for *light*, *good* for *evil*, and *evil* for *good*; weighing all things in the ballance of the flesh which we seek to please. We confound both the *names* and *natures* of things, and wander in a maze of a thousand perplexities; therefore God in pity to Mankind hath given us a sure direction in his Word, *which is a Lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths*, Psal. 119. 105. Mark the words of *Light* and *Lamp*; the use of a *Lamp* is by night, and in the day we have the *Light* of the Sun; whether it be *day* or *night* with us, here we are taught how to carry our selves. Mark again the words of *Path* and *Feet*, the one signifieth our *way* and general course, the other all our *particular actions*; so far as Religion is concerned in them, we have directions in the Word about them. Besides Mans condition is such that he needeth a *Supernatural Remedy* by a Redeemer, which depending upon the meer Love and free Grace of God cannot be found out by *Natural light* left to us; for that only can judg of things necessary, but not of such things as depend upon the meer pleasure of God: Therefore a Divine Revelation there must be.

2. Since it is necessary that God should some way or another reveal his mind to his People; it must be done by *Oracles, Visions, Dreams*, or by *extraordinary Messengers*, who by word of mouth might convey it to us; or else by *writing*, and by *ordinary teachers*, whose *lips may preserve knowledge* in the Church. The former ways might suffice, while God saw fit to reveal but a few Truths, and such as did not burden the Memory; and men were long-lived and of great simplicity, and the Church was confined within a small compass of ground, and not liable to so many miseries and changes as now in the latter ages: But when once God had spoken to us by his Son, these extraordinary ways ceased, Heb. 1. 1, 2. *God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last times spoken unto us by his Son*. As formerly God did speak *πολυτρόπως*, in divers manners, that is to say, by Visions, Oracles, Dreams, &c. so *πολυμερῶς*, at sundry times, by several steps & degrees he acquainted the World with the Truths necessary for man to know; delivering them out by *portions*, not all together at once, till he came *who had the spirit without measure*. Joh. 3. 34. the Prophets to whom God revealed himself before by Visions, Oracles, Dreams, or the Coming of the Spirit upon them had the Spirit *ἐκ μέτρης*, by measure, to fit them for some *particular errand* or message, on which God

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sent them. But when God sent his Son out of his bosom to reveal the whole Doctrine of Faith at *once*, and to declare his Fathers Will with *full authority* and *power*, he fixed and closed up the Rule of Faith. So 'twas not fit that after him there should come any *Extraordinary Nuntio's* and *Embassadours* from Heaven, or any other should be owned as *Infallible Messengers*; but such as he immediately sent abroad in the World to Disciple the Nations: Therefore all former extraordinary Ways ceased, and we are left to the ordinary Rule stated by Christ.

3. Being left to the ordinary Rule it was necessary it should be taught not only by word of mouth, but committed to writing; for Christ is ascended into Heaven, and the Apostles do not live for ever: And we have no men now that are immediately and divinely inspired; and ordinary Pastors and Teachers cannot make new Articles of Faith, but do only build on the *Apostles foundation*, 1 Cor. 3. 10. or that *divinely inspired Doctrine* which they delivered to the Church. Yea, that Doctrine cannot well be preserved from *oblivion* and *corruption* without Writing, therefore God accounted this the safest way. Those things that are only delivered by word of mouth, or from hand to hand, may easily be *changed*, *corrupted*, or *utterly lost*. Certainly if you consider mans *slowness*, *treachery*, *levity*, and the many *vile affections* which may easily induce him to *extinguish* or *corrupt* the Truth which is contrary to them; you will see that it is necessary that there should be a sure *Authentick Record*, by which Truth and Error might be tried and distinguished. Yea, that the Church which is dispersed throughout the World might have *truth at hand*, and *particular Believers* have this Doctrine ever by them for their *comfort* and *use*; it being the property of a blessed man to *delight in the Law of God*, and to *exercise himself therein day and night*, Psal. 1. 2. In short, while the Apostles were living 'twas good to take the Tradition from *their mouth*; but now they are dead, we take it from *their Writings*. Surely if God saw some Writing necessary when those extraordinary ways (we spake of before) were in use, and the Church of the Old Testament was in a much quieter state than the Church of the New. I say, if some Writing were necessary then, it is more necessary now; for the Christian Church is more exposed to dreadful storms of *persecution*, the *deceits of Hereticks* of all sorts, especially to the *frauds of Antichrist*, which we are forewarned of in this Chapter; and are detected and discovered by their contrariety to the *written word*.

4. This Truth being written, it is both a *safe* and a *full Rule* for us to walk by; it is a *safe Rule* because it is written by the *Apostles and Evangelists*, *holy men moved by the Holy Ghost*. The Apostles did not lose their Infallibility when they committed what they preached to Writing; the same Spirit that assisted them in delivering the Doctrine by word of mouth, assisted them also when they delivered it by writing: and it is a *full and sufficient Rule*, because it containeth all things which are necessary for Men to *believe* and do in order to eternal life. Let them name
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let them name what is necessary beyond what is *recommended* there, or may be *deduced* from thence: yea it doth contain not only *all the Essential* but also the *Integral* parts of the Christian Religion; and therefore nothing can be any part of our Religion which is not there. The direction of old was, *Isa. 8. 20. To the Law and to the Testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* Every thing was then tried by *Moses and the Prophets*, and every thing must be now tried by *the Prophets and Apostles*, which is our foundation of *Faith, Worship, and Obedience*, *Eph. 2. 20.*

5. That which we blame in *the Papists* is, That they cry up a *private, unproved, unwritten Tradition* of their own, as of *equal Authority* with this *safe and full Rule* which is contained in the *Written Word* of God. Their crime and fault may be considered partly with respect to the *Object and Matter*, That these Traditions are not *indifferent Customs*, but *Essential Points*, necessary to *Faith and Christian Practice*; and so though a Christian be never so thorough and sound in his Obedience to the Word of God, and true to *the Baptismal Covenant*, yet if he submiteth not to these *Unwritten Traditions*, he wants some Point necessary to *Faith and Practice*, and so to *Life Eternal*; which is contrary to *Mark 16. 16. He that believeth and is Baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned: And Joh. 17. 3. This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent: Partly as to the Subject*, as they make their *own faction* to be the *only keepers* of these things, and that nothing is to be owned as *Apostolical Tradition*, but what is delivered as such by their Authority; which is to leave the Church to the Tyranny and Usurpation of a *corrupt Faction*, to declare for *Apostolical Tradition* any thing which serveth their *Ends and Interests*, and for which no *true Historical evidence* is produced. Now the unjust and fraudulent Practices which they have used to promote this Usurpation over the Churches of Christ, render them of all men most unfit to be trusted in this kind; partly with respect to *the manner*, they will have these things to be received *Pari reverentia & piæ affectu*; With the same reverence and pious affection with which we receive the holy Scriptures; and so *mans post* is set by Gods, and *unproved Traditions* equalled with *Doctrins of Faith*: their *opinion* is bad enough, but their *practice* is worse, for there they shew they value these things more than the Scriptures; as Superstition always aboundeth in its own things. Did ever any of their Doctors say the same things of Traditions which they take the boldness to say of Scripture? Did they ever call them *Pen and Inkhorn, or Parchment Divinity, a Nose of Wax, a dumb Rule, an obscure and ambiguous Doctrine*: These *Blasphemies* they vent boldly against the Scripture, but did they ever speak thus of Traditions? and again their common People are a thousand times better instructed in their Traditions than in the *Doctrine of Salvation*; they skill more of *Lent, and Ember-weeks, &c.* than they truly understand

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the Doctrine of *Mans misery and remedy*: And call you this *equal reverence and pious affection* to the *Scriptures and Traditions*? Partly because they would never give us a *perfect Catalogue* of Unwritten Traditions necessary to be observed by all Christians; it may be lest they should amaze the People with the multitude of them, or else that the People may not know how many of their Doctrins are destitute of Scripture-proof, and so they plainly be discovered to be imposers on the belief of the Christian World.

6. Though we blame this in Papists, yet we reject not *all Tradition*:

1. Because Scripture it self is a Tradition, as we proved before, and is conveyed to us by the most *credible means*, which we have no reason to doubt of; the Scriptures of the *Old Testament* were preserved by the *Jews*, to whom were committed the Oracles of God, *Rom. 3. 2.* And *Protestants* receive all the Books which they admitted into their *Canon*. And for the Books of the *New Testament* the Christian Church hath received them as the Writings of those whose Names they bear, and by the *constant Universal Tradition* of the Church they are transmitted to us; and we have no more reason to doubt of them, than we do of Statutes and Laws made by Kings and Parliaments, who lived long before we had a being. Yea, we may be much more confident, as the matter is of greater weight and consequence, and these Writings have the *signature* and stamp of Gods Spirit on them, and have been blessed by God to the converting and sanctifying of many Souls; and have been delivered down to us by a succession of Believers unto this very day: and by them Christianity hath been preserved in the World notwithstanding the wickedness of it; and hath held up head against all the encounters of time. The persecutions of adverse Powers, have not suppressed it, nor the disputes of Enemies silenced the Profession of it; but still from age to age Gods Truth is received and transmitted to Posterity.

2. Because the proof of Christianity depending upon matter of Fact, chiefly Christs rising from the dead, it can only be proved by a Testimony, which in so extraordinary a case must be made valuable and authorized to the World by the Miracles accompanying it. Now the notice of these things is brought to us by Tradition, which being unquestionable, giveth us as good ground of Faith as it did to them that lived in the Apostles time, and heard their Doctrine, and saw their Miracles. Gods wonderful works were never intended for the benefit of that Age only in which they were done, but for the benefit also of those that should hear of them by any credible means whatsoever, *Psal. 145. 4. Joel 1. 3. Psal. 78. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.* These things were told them *that they might set their hope in God, &c.*

3. Because there are some Doctrins drawn by just consequence from Scripture, but are the more confirmed to us when they are backed with *constant Church-usage and practice*; as Baptism of Infants, Lords-day, Singing of Psalms in our Publick Worship, &c.

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4. Because there are certain words which are not found in Scripture indeed, yet agreeable thereunto, and are very useful to discover the frauds of Hereticks, as *Trinity, Divine Providence, Consubstantial Procession of the Holy Ghost, Satisfaction, &c.*

5. We reject not all Church-History, or the Records of ancient Writers concerning the Providences of God in their days, in owning the Gospel, which make much for our instruction in manners, and are helps to encourage us to put our trust in God.

6. There are *certain Usages and innocent Customs, or Circumstances* common or sacred, and other actions, which we despise not but acknowledge and receive as far as their own variable nature and condition requireth, not rejecting them because anciently practised; nor regarding them when the general Law of Edification requireth the omission of them. But that which we detest is, That the Traditions of Men should be made equal in Dignity and Authority with the express Revelation of God: Yea, that manifest Corruptions and Usurpations as making *Rome the Mistress of other Churches*; and superinducing the Pope *as the Head of the Universal visible Church, and the Vicar of Christ without his leave and appointment*; and such-like other Points should be obtruded upon the World as Apostolical Traditions, and to be received with like Religious reverence as we do Articles of Faith set down in Scripture: This is that we cannot sufficiently abhor as apparently false and destructive to Christianity.

The Propositions drawn out of the Text in this Sermon are these.

1. Whatever assurance we have of Gods preserving us in the Truth, yet we are bound to use diligence and caution.

2. Our diligence and caution is to be employed about this, that we may stand fast in the Faith of Christ, and the profession and practice of Godliness.

3. That the means of standing fast in the Faith of Christ, and the profession and practice of Godliness is by holding the Traditions which were taught by the Holy Apostles.

4. That while the Apostles were in being there were two ways of delivering the Truth by word of mouth, and Writing.

5. That now when they are long since gone to God, and we cannot receive from them the Doctrine of life by word of mouth; We must stick to the Scriptures or Written Word.