

## S E R M O N,

SHOWING

THAT THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION IS NOT A SECT,

AND YET THAT IT IS EVERY WHERE SPOKEN AGAINST.

ACTS xxviii. 22.

—For as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

WOULD you think that such a false and invidious representation as this should ever be given of the Christian religion, that <sup>a</sup> pure religion and undefiled, which came into the world supported by the strongest evidences of truth, and recommended by the most endearing allurements of grace and goodness, the <sup>b</sup> sayings whereof are so faithful, and so well worthy of acceptance; that sacred institution which scatters the brightest rays of divine light and love that ever were darted from heaven to earth? That it is, which is here so invidiously called a *sect*, and is said to be *every where spoken against*.

It will be worth while to observe,

1. Who they were that said this, they were the chief of the Jews who were at Rome, v. 17. The Jews were looked upon (at least they looked upon themselves) as a very knowing people; the Jews at Rome (a place of learning and inquiry) thought themselves more knowing than the other Jews. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, ch. ii. 17—20. takes notice of it: *Thou art called a Jew, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will,—and art confident that thou thyself art a guide to the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, &c.* And we have reason to suppose, that the chief of the Jews there, who had the greatest advantages of education and correspondence, were the most intelligent. It might also be justly expected, that upon the first notices of the gospel, the Jews should have been of all people most ready to acquaint themselves with a religion which was so much the honour and perfection of their own; and yet, it seems, the Jews, the chief

of the Jews at Rome, knew no more of Christianity than this, that it was a *sect every where spoken against*. This we know, (say they,) and it was all they knew concerning it.

The Jews were of all other the most bitter and inveterate enemies to the Christians. While the Roman emperors tolerated them, (as they did till Nero's time,<sup>\*</sup>) the Jews with an unwaried malice persecuted them from city to city, and were the first wheel in most of the opposition that the gospel met with, when it was first preached. Now one would think they would not have been so vigorous and industrious to suppress Christianity, if they had not very well acquainted themselves with it, and known it to deserve such opposition: but it seems by this, they knew little or nothing of the religion they so much maligned, had never searched into the merits of its cause, nor weighed the proofs of its divine authority; but against all law and reason condemned it, (*δια την φημην*—*merely upon common fame*, as Justin Martyr complains;†) and follow the cry to run it down, because it was *every where spoken against*.

2. Upon what occasion they said this. They were now appointing a time to discourse with St. Paul upon the grand question in debate, Whether Jesus of Nazareth were the true Messiah or no? And they seemed willing to hear what that great man had to say in defence of the religion he preached: *We desire* (say they) *to hear of thee what thou thinkest*.—Now, one would expect that so good a cause, managed by such a skilful advocate, could not but carry the day, and be victorious, and that they would all have been brought over to the belief of Christianity; but we find, v. 24. that it proved otherwise. After all, there were those that believed not; and the text intimates the reason of their infidelity, they came to hear the word under a prejudice; they had

<sup>a</sup> Jam. i. 27.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Tim. i. 15.

\* Tertullian confidently asserts, *Primum Neronem in hanc Sectam tum maxime Roma orientem Caesariano gladio ferocisse*.—That Nero was the first who raged with the imperial sword against this sect rising at that time into general notice at Rome. *Apol. c. 5.*

† *Inquisitione et agnitione neglecta nomen detinetur, nomen expugnatur—vos sola prædamat*.—All inquiry into the merits of the case is omitted; the name only is attacked, the name only consigns to condemnation. *Tert. Ap. c. 3.*

already imbibed an ill opinion of the way, which, right or wrong, they resolved to hold fast: and though some of them, by the help of divine grace, got over this stumbling-block, (that like the Bereans were more noble than the rest, and of freer thought,) yet, many of them continued under the power of those prejudices, and were sealed up under unbelief, v. 26, 27. Thus is the power of the word in many baffled by the power of prejudice: they do not believe, because they are resolved they will not: they conclude that no good thing can 'come out of Nazareth, and will not be persuaded to come and see. Thus do they prejudge the cause, <sup>d</sup> *answering the matter before they hear it*, and it will prove *folly and shame* to them.

Now in the account they here give of their knowledge of the Christian religion, we may observe,

(1.) That they looked upon it to be a *sect*, and we will prove that to be false.

(2.) A *sect every where spoken against*, and we will grant that to be true, that it is generally spoken against, though it is most unreasonable and unjust it should be so.

(1.) The Christian religion is here called (but miscalled) a <sup>e</sup> *sect*, *αἵρεσις*—*a heresy*. *After the way which they call heresy*, (says St. Paul, Acts xxiv. 14.) *so worship I the God of my fathers*.—*The sect of the Nazarenes*; so Tertullus calls it in his opening the indictment against Paul, Acts xxiv. 5. It is called *this way*, Acts ix. 2. and *that way*, Acts xix. 9. as if it were a by-path out of the common road. The practice of serious godliness is still looked upon by many as a sect, that is, a party-business, and a piece of affected singularity in opinion and practice, tending to promote some carnal design, by creating and supporting invidious distinctions among men. This is the proper notion of a sect, and therefore the masters and maintainers of sects are justly in an ill name, as enemies to the great corporation of mankind; but there is not the least colour of reason to put this invidious and scandalous character on the Christian religion; however it may be mistaken and misrepresented, it is very far from being really a sect. There were sects of religion among the Jews; we read of the sect of the Sadducees, (Acts v. 17.) which was built on peculiar notions, such as overturned the foundation of natural religion, by denying a future state of rewards and punishments. There was also the sect of the Pharisees, (Acts xv. 5.) the *straitest sect of their religion*, (Acts xxvi. 5.) which was founded in the observance and imposition of singular rites and customs, with an affected separation from, and contempt of, all mankind. These were sects; but there is nothing of the spirit

and genius of these in the Christian religion, as it was instituted by its great author.

[1.] True Christianity establishes that which is of common concern to all mankind, and therefore is not a sect. The truths and precepts of the everlasting gospel are perfective of, and no way repugnant to, the light and law of natural religion. Is that a sect, which gives such mighty encouragements and assistances to those that in *every nation fear God, and work righteousness*? Acts x. 35. Is that a sect, which tends to nothing else but to reduce the revolted race of mankind to their ancient allegiance to their great Creator, and to renew that image of God upon man, which was his primitive rectitude and felicity? Is that a sect which proclaims God in Christ, <sup>e</sup> *reconciling the world unto himself*, and recovering it from that degenerate and deplorable state into which it was sunk? Is that a sect which publishes 'good-will towards men, and Christ the <sup>f</sup> *Lamb of God, taking away the sins of the world*? Surely, that which concurs so much with the uncorrupted and unprejudiced sentiments, and conduces much more to the true and real happiness of all mankind, cannot be thought to take its rise from such narrow opinions, and private interests, as sects owe their original to.

[2.] True Christianity has a direct tendency to the uniting of the children of men, and the gathering of them together in one,† and therefore is far from being a sect, which is supposed to lead to a division, and to sow discord among brethren. The preaching of the gospel did indeed prove the occasion of contention. Our Saviour foresaw and foretold, (Luke xii. 51—53.) that his disciples and followers would be *men of strife*, in the same sense that the prophet Jeremiah was, (Jer. xv. 10.) not men striving, but men striven with: but the gospel was by no means the cause of this contention, for it was intended to be the cure of all contention. If there be any who, under the cloak and colour of the Christian name, cause divisions, and propagate feuds and quarrels among men, let them bear their own burthen; but it is certain that the Christian religion, as far as it obtains its just power and influence upon the minds of men, will make them meek and quiet, humble and peaceable, loving and useful, condescending and forgiving, and every way easy, and acceptable, and profitable one to another. Is that a sect which was introduced with a proclamation of *peace on earth*? That which beats swords into plow-shares, and spears into pruning hooks? Or was he the author of a sect, who is the great centre of unity, and who died to break down <sup>h</sup> *partition walls*, and to *slay all enmities*, that he might <sup>i</sup> *gather together in one the children of God, that were scattered abroad*?

<sup>e</sup> John i. 46.      <sup>d</sup> Prov. xviii. 13. John vii. 51.

<sup>f</sup> *Asperis, Electio, optio*. An opinion not forced upon us by the evidences of truth, but chosen by us with some foreign design.

<sup>g</sup> 2 Cor. v. 19.

<sup>h</sup> Luke ii. 14.

<sup>i</sup> *Secta dicitur a Secundo*—It is called a sect from *secundo*—to be separated.

<sup>g</sup> John i. 29. iii. 16. 1 John ii. 2.

<sup>h</sup> Eph. ii. 14—16.

<sup>i</sup> John xi. 52.

Was he the author of a sect, who came into the world <sup>k</sup> *not to destroy men's lives, but to save them*; and who taught his followers not only to love one another, but to love their enemies, and to count every one their <sup>l</sup> *neighbour, to whom they could be any way serviceable*?

[3.] True Christianity aims at no worldly benefit or advantage, and therefore must by no means be called a sect. Those who espouse a sect, are supposed to be governed in it by their secular interest, and to aim at wealth, or honour, or the gratification of some base lust. The Pharisees proved themselves to be a sect, by their thirst after the praise of men, and their greedy devouring of widows' houses: but the professors of Christianity have not only been taught, by the law of their religion, to live above this world, and to look upon it with a holy contempt, but have been exposed by their profession to the loss and ruin of all their secular comforts and enjoyments. Are those to be accounted politic and designing sectaries, who have for Christ cheerfully <sup>m</sup> *suffered the loss of all things*? Is that a sect, which instead of preferring a man to honour, or raising him an estate, lays him open to disgrace and poverty, renders him obnoxious to fines and forfeitures, banishments and imprisonments, racks and tortures, flames and gibbets, which were the common lot of the primitive Christians. Cæsar Vaninus, a sworn enemy to the Christian religion, and one who was industrious in searching out objections against it, owned that he could find nothing in it that savoured of a carnal and worldly design: no, it has always approved itself a <sup>n</sup> *heavenly calling*, and the strictest professors of it (even their enemies themselves being judges) have had <sup>o</sup> *their conversation in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom*. Very unjustly therefore is it called a sect.

As to this, therefore, suffer a word of caution and exhortation:

*First*, Let us take heed lest our profession of religion degenerate into any thing which may make it look like a sect. Christianity, as it was instituted by Christ, is not a sect; let not Christians then be sectaries. We make our profession of religion a sect, when we monopolize the church and its ministry and sacraments, and spend that zeal in matters of doubtful disputation which should be reserved for the weightier matters of the law; when we place our religion in <sup>p</sup> *meats and drinks*, which should be placed in <sup>q</sup> *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*; when we profess religion with a conceit of ourselves, and a contempt of others, and with any worldly design; when we sacrifice the common interests of Christ's kingdom to the particular interests of a party; and, in a word, when our profession is tainted with the <sup>r</sup> *leaven of the Pharisees*, which

is both souring and swelling; then it degenerates into a sect. Let us therefore adhere to the sure and large foundations, and be actuated by a principle of love to, and so maintain communion with, <sup>s</sup> *all that in every place, and under every denomination, call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours*. Let us be modest in our opinions, charitable and candid in our censures, self-denying in all our converse; acting always under the influence of that *wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and hypocrisy*; that by this well-doing we may <sup>t</sup> *put to silence the ignorance of those who call religion a sect*.

*Secondly*, Let us not be deterred from serious godliness, or any of the requirements of it, by the invidious name of a sect, which is put upon it. If a strict, and sober, and circumspect conversation, a conscientious government of our tongue, praying and singing psalms in our families, a religious observation of the Lord's day, a diligent attendance upon the means of grace, joining in religious societies for prayer and Christian conference, and endeavouring, in our places, the suppression of profaneness and immorality: if these, and the like, be called and counted the marks and badges of a sect, let us not be moved at it, but say as David did, (2 Sam. vi. 22.) *If this be to be vile, I will be yet more vile*. If the practice of piety be branded as a sect, it is better for us to come under the reproaches of men for following it, than under the curse of God for neglecting it. It is a <sup>u</sup> *very small thing to be judged of man's day, but he that judgeth is the Lord*: let us therefore be more afraid of being sectaries, than of being called so.

(2.) The Christian religion is here said to be *every where spoken against*. That it was spoken against, was evident enough; but that it was *every where* spoken against, was more than they could be sure of: they did not know all places, nor had they correspondence with, or intelligence from, every country; but we must not wonder if those who oppose the truth as it is in Jesus, make no conscience of transgressing the laws of truth in common conversation. But we will suppose that the acquaintance and converse of those Jews at Rome lay mostly with those who were enemies to Christianity, and spoke against it, and they therefore concluded it *every where* spoken against, because they found it spoken against in all places that they came to, or had advice from. Thus apt are we to embrace that as a general sentiment and observation, which we find received by those that we usually associate with, and so we run ourselves into mistakes, which larger and more impartial inquiries will soon rectify.

But we will take it for granted, however, that what they said was true, not because they said it,

<sup>k</sup> Luke ix. 56.  
<sup>n</sup> Heb. iii. 1.

<sup>l</sup> Luke x. 36, 37.  
<sup>o</sup> 2 Cor. i. 12.

<sup>m</sup> Phil. iii. 8.  
<sup>p</sup> Rom. xiv. 17, 18.

<sup>q</sup> Luke xii. 1.

<sup>r</sup> 1 Cor. i. 2.  
<sup>t</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

<sup>s</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 13.

but because the experience of all ages does confirm it, and concur with it: so that a little acquaintance with books and the world will prove the observation which we ground upon the text:

*Doct.* That it is, and always has been, the lot of Christ's holy religion, to be every where spoken against. Or thus:

That true Christianity has all along met with a great deal of opposition and contradiction in this world.

I purpose not to enter into a particular disquisition of that which has been, and is, spoken against religion, nor do I undertake at present to show how false and unreasonable it is; that has been done many a time by the best hands, and so effectually, that every impartial eye must needs look upon the cause of the adversaries of religion to be a baffled cause: but I shall only make some improvement of his general observation, which cannot be unseasonable in an age wherein the gates of hell seem to be making their utmost efforts against the church; and the devil, as the calumniator and false accuser, to be *more wroth than ever with the woman the church*, and to push on the war with an unusual vigour against the *remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*.

I shall therefore, I. Inquire what it is in Christianity that is spoken against. And, II. Show you why so holy and excellent a religion is spoken against; And then, III. Draw some inferences from this observation.

I. Who and what it is that is spoken against.

1. Jesus Christ, the author of our religion, is *every where spoken against*. When the First-begotten was brought into the world, old Simeon, among other great things, pronounced this concerning him, that he was a *sign which should be spoken against*, and by that means was set for the fall of many, Luke ii. 34. When he was here upon earth, he was *spoken against*. The stone which was designed to be the head of the corner, was rejected, and set at nought by the builders. It was not the least of his sufferings in the days of his flesh, that he *endured the contradiction of sinners against himself*, Heb. xii. 3. They spoke against his person, as mean and contemptible, and one that had *no form, nor comeliness*:<sup>a</sup> they spoke against his preaching, as false and deceiving, (John vii. 12.) as factious and seditious, (Luke xxiii. 2.) as senseless and ridiculous, for the Pharisees derided him for it, Luke xvi. 14. They spoke against his miracles, as done in confederacy with Beelzebub the prince of the devils, Matt. xii. 24. They spoke against his morals, charging him with blasphemy against God, profanation of the sabbath day, and all the instances of debauchery

which were usually met with in a gluttonous man, a wine-bibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners, Matt. xi. 19. They spoke against his followers, as a company of ignorant despicable people, John vii. 48, 49. Pass through all the steps and stages of his sufferings, and you will find him every where spoken against. They reproached him in all his offices; in his office of teaching, when they challenged him to tell who smote him; in his office of saving, when they challenged him to save himself as he had saved others; in his office of ruling, when they challenged him to prove himself the King of the Jews by coming down from the cross. The common people spoke against him, even they that *passed by reviled him*. The Pharisees and chief priests, the grandees of the church, were as severe as any in their reflections on him. *Princes also did sit and speak against him*. Herod and his men of war set him at nought, *εὐδυνήσας*—*made nothing of him that made all things*.

Nay, even now that he is set down at the right-hand of the Majesty on high, *far above all principalities and powers*,<sup>b</sup> (that is, both good and evil angels, so as to be no more hurt by the contradictions of the one, than he is benefited by the adorations of the other,) yet still he is spoken against. Besides the contempt cast upon him by the Jews and Mahometans, are there not with us, even with us, those who daringly speak against him? Arians and Socinians are daily speaking against him as a mere man, thinking that a robbery in him, which he thought none, to be *equal with God*. Quakers and enthusiasts speak against him as a mere name, setting up I know not what Christ within them, while they explode that Jesus that was crucified at Jerusalem. Atheists and deists speak against him as a mere cheat, accounting the religion he established a great imposture, and his gospel a jest. Profane and ignorant people speak slightly of him, as if our *beloved* were no more than *another beloved*; and some speak scornfully of him, as Julian the apostate did, that called him in disdain the *Galilean*, and the *Carpenter's Son*. Such as these are the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him: the Lord rebuke them, even the Lord that has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke them.

2. God himself, the great object of our religious regards, is *every where spoken against*. It is not only the Christian revelation that is thus attacked by virulent and blasphemous tongues, but even natural religion also. The glorious and blessed God, the great Creator and Benefactor of the universe, that does good to all, and whose *mercies are over all his works*, even he is *every where spoken against*. Some deny his being; though his existence be so necessary, so evident, that if he be not, it is impossible

<sup>a</sup> Rev. xii. 17.  
<sup>b</sup> Isa. liii. 2, 3.

<sup>a</sup> Ps. cxviii. 22.  
<sup>b</sup> Matt. xxvii. 39.

<sup>a</sup> Luke xxiii. 11.  
<sup>b</sup> Phil. ii. 6.

<sup>a</sup> Eph. i. 20, 21.  
<sup>b</sup> Cant. v. 9.

any thing else should be, yet there are fools who say in their hearts, what they dare not speak out, that there is no God, Ps. xiv. 1. And he that says there is no God, wishes there were none, and if he could help it there should be none. Others blaspheme the attributes of God, who charge the all-seeing eye with blindness, saying, *The Lord shall not see*; (Ps. xciv. 7.) that charge the eternal mind with forgetfulness, saying, *God hath forgotten*; (Ps. x. 11.) that charge the almighty arm with impotency, saying, *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?* which is there called *speaking against God*, Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20. Those speak against God that promise themselves impunity in sin, saying, *They shall not surely die*, and, *God will not require it*. And those that boldly avow their impiety and irreligion, saying to the Almighty, *Depart from us*,—Job xxi. 14, 15. Some speak meanly of God, though he is infinitely great and glorious; others speak hardly of him, though he is infinitely just and good. The name of God is spoken against by the profane using of it; so it is construed, (Ps. cxxxix. 20.) *They speak against thee wickedly, thine enemies take thy name in vain*. Can there be a greater slight put upon the eternal God, than for men to use his sacred and blessed name as a by-word, with which they give vent to their exorbitant passions, or fill up the vacancies of their other idle words? The name of God is thus abused, not only by those who utter dreadful oaths and curses, which make the ears of every good man to tingle, but by those who mention the name of God slightly and irreverently in their common conversation, in whose *mouths* he is near when he is far from their reins. To use those forms of speech which properly signify an acknowledgment and adoration of God's being, as *O God!* or *O Lord!* or an appeal to his omniscience, as *God knows*; or an invocation of his favour, as *God bless me*, or *God be merciful to me*: I say, to use these or the like expressions impertinently, and intending thereby to express only our wonder or surprise, or our passionate resentments, or any thing but that which is their proper and awful signification, is an evidence of a vain mind, that wants a due regard to that glorious and fearful name, *The Lord our God*. I see not that the profanation of the ordinance of praying is any better than the profanation of the ordinance of swearing. The serious consideration of this, I hope, will prevent much of that dishonour which is done to God, and to his holy name, by some that run not, with others, to an excess of riot.

The providence of God is likewise *every where spoken against* by *murderers* and complainers, who quarrel with it, and find fault with the disposal of it, and, when they are *hardly bestead*, curse their King and their God. Thus is the mouth of the un-

godly set against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.<sup>1</sup>

3. The Word of God, the great rule of our religion, is *every where spoken against*. So it was when it was first preached; wherever the apostles went preaching the doctrine of Christ they met with those that spake against it, contradicting and blaspheming, Acts xiii. 45. So it is now that it is written. Atheists speak against the Scripture as not of authority; papists speak against it as dark and uncertain, further than it is expounded and supported by the authority of their church, which receives *unwritten traditions pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia*—with the same pious affection and reverence that they receive the Scriptures; nay, and, if we may judge by their practice, with much more. Thus is the word of God blasphemed by them, who call themselves *The temple of the Lord*. But if we take away revelation (as the deists do) all religion will soon be lost; and if we derogate from the Scriptures (as the papists do) all revelation is much endangered.

Those also speak against the Scriptures who profanely jest with them; and that they may the more securely rebel against scripture laws, make themselves and their idle companions merry with the scripture language: *The word of the Lord is unto them a reproach*, as the prophet complains, Jer. vi. 10. And another prophet found it so, whose serious word of the necessity of *precept upon precept* was turned into an idle song, (as Grotius understands it,) Isa. xxviii. 13. *The word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept*.—Very likely it was done by the drunkards of Ephraim, spoken of, v. 1. and it gave occasion to that caution, v. 22. *Be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong*. Profligate and debauched minds relish no wit like that which ridicules the sacred text, and exposes that to contempt; as of old the insulting Babylonians must be humoured with the *Songs of Sion*; and no cups can please Belshazzar in his drunken frolic, but the sacred<sup>1</sup> vessels of the temple. Thus industrious are the powers of darkness to vilify the Scriptures, and make them contemptible: but he that sits in heaven shall laugh at them; for in spite of all the little efforts of their impotent malice, *He will magnify the law, and make it honourable*, according to the word which he has spoken, Isa. xlii. 21.

4. The people of God, the professors of this religion, are every where spoken against. Not only those of some particular persuasion or denomination, but (without regard to that) such as have been zealous in fearing God and working righteousness, have been, in many places, very much *spoken against*. Our blessed Saviour has told his disciples what treatment of this kind they must expect, that they should be *reviled*, and have *all manner of evil said against them*

<sup>c</sup> Gen. iii. 4.  
<sup>f</sup> Deut. xxviii. 58.

<sup>d</sup> Ps. x. 13.  
<sup>g</sup> Jude 16.

<sup>e</sup> Jer. xii. 2.  
<sup>h</sup> Isa. viii. 21.

<sup>i</sup> Ps. lxxiii. 9.

\* Trident. Conc. Ses. 4.

<sup>k</sup> Ps. cxxxvii. 3.

<sup>l</sup> Dan. v. 2.

falsely, (Matt. v. 11, 12.) that they and their names should be cast out as evil, Luke vi. 22. And if they called our Master, Beelzebub, no nick-names fastened on his followers can seem strange. Mocking was an old way of persecuting the covenant seed, for thus, *he that was after the flesh, betimes persecuted them that were after the Spirit.* Compare Gen. xxi. 9. with Gal. iv. 29. God's heritage has always been as a <sup>m</sup> speckled bird, that all the birds are against, (Jer. xii. 9.) and his children for signs and for wonders in Israel, that every one has a saying to, Isa. viii. 18. Even Wisdom's children have been called and counted fools, and their life madness; the quiet in the land represented as enemies to the public peace, and those who are the greatest blessings of the age, branded as the troublers of Israel. The primitive Christians were painted \* out to the world under the blackest and most odious characters that could be, as men of the most profligate lives and consciences, and that even placed their religion in the grossest impieties and immoralities imaginable. Their enemies found it necessary for the support of the kingdom of the devil, the father of lies and slanders, *fortiter calumniari—to characterize them as the worst of men*, to whom they were resolved to give the worst and most barbarous treatment. It had not been possible to have baited them if they had not first dressed them up in the skins of wild beasts. And as then, so ever since, more or less, in all ages of the church, reproach has been entailed upon the most serious and zealous professors of Christian religion and godliness.

5. The ministers of Christ, the preachers of this religion, are with a distinguishing enmity every where spoken against. Under the Old Testament God's messengers and his prophets were generally mocked and misused, and it was Jerusalem's measure-filling sin, 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. It was one of the devices they devised against Jeremiah, *to smite him with the tongue*, because they would not, and they desired that others might not, *give heed to any of his words*, Jer. xviii. 18. Those to whom the prophet Ezekiel was a very lovely song, and with their mouths showed much love to him, yet were still *talking against him by the walls, and in the doors of their houses*, and God lets him know it, Ezek. xxxiii. 30—32. And then it is not strange if the ministers of the New Testament (in which truth shines with a stronger light) be with no less enmity spoken against by those that love darkness rather than light. The apostles, those prime ministers of state in Christ's kingdom, were so loaded with reproach, that they were made a spectacle to the world, † a spectacle of

pity to those that have either grace or good-nature, but a spectacle of scorn to those that had neither. They were trampled upon as the filth of the world; and whereas the off-scouring of any thing is bad enough, they were looked upon as the *off-scouring of all things, even unto this day*; after they had in so many instances approved themselves well, and could not but be made manifest in the consciences of their worst enemies, 1 Cor. iv. 9, 13. And it has all along been the policy of the church's enemies, by all means possible to bring the ministry into contempt, and to represent the church's Nazarites, even those that were *purser than snow, whiter than milk, and more ruddy than rubies, with a visage blacker than a coal*, so that they have not been known in the streets. I allude to that complaint, Lam. iv. 7, 8. Marvel not if the standard-bearers be most struck at.

6. The Christian religion itself has been, and still is, *every where spoken against*. The truths of it contradicted as false and groundless, the great doctrines of the mediation of Christ, and the resurrection of the dead, were ridiculed by the Athenian philosophers. The laws of it described as grievous and unreasonable, as *hard sayings*, which could not be borne by those who bid open defiance to the obligation of them, and say, *Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us*, Ps. ii. 3. The ordinances of it despised as mean, and having no form nor comeliness. Sabbaths mocked at, as of old, (Lam. i. 7. †) and the sanctification of them represented as only a cloak for idleness. Sacraments reproached, and the sacred memorial of Christ's death and sufferings, by the persecutors of the primitive Christians, represented to the world, as the bloody and † inhuman killing and eating of a child; and their love-feasts, and holy kiss, (which were then in use,) as only introductions to the most abominable uncleanness. Primitive Christianity was industriously put into an ill name; it was called emphatically "The Atheism," because it overthrew idolatry, and undermined the false gods and worship that had so long obtained. This was the outcry at Ephesus, that if Paul's doctrine took place, the *temple of the great goddess* would be despised, Acts xix. 26, 27. It was also branded as a novelty, and an upstart doctrine, because it took people off from that <sup>a</sup> vain conversation, which they had received by tradition from their fathers. It was called at Athens a <sup>o</sup> new doctrine, and industriously represented in all places as a mushroom sect, that was but of yesterday. § It was looked upon as nearly allied to Judaism, because it was so much supported by the Scriptures of the Old

<sup>m</sup> Zech. iii. 8.

\* See this at large, represented by *Cecilius* in *Minucius Felix*.

† Θεατρον ἐγασθημεν.—the theatre they played upon.

‡ —Cui septima quoque fuit lux

*Ignava.*

Who made every seventh day a day of idleness. *Juvenal.*

‡ *Dicimur sceleratissimi de Sacramento infanticidii, et pabulo inde, et post convivium incesto.*—We are charged with murdering and eating our children at the sacrament, and we are represented as incestuous, &c. *Tertull. Apol. c. 7.*

<sup>a</sup> 1 Pet. i. 18.

<sup>o</sup> Acts xvii. 18, 19.

§ See Dr. Cave's *Primitive Christianity*, lib. 1. chap. 1.

Testament, and nothing was more despicable among the Romans than the Jews and their religion. The professors of Christianity were looked upon as unlearned and ignorant men, (Acts iv. 13.) the very dregs and refuse of the people.\* Julian forbid the calling of them Christians, and would have them called nothing but Galileans, thereby to expose them to the contempt of those who are (as indeed most people are) governed more by a sound of words than by the reason of things. Thus when the devil was silenced in his oracles (as it is well known he was, upon the setting up of Christianity in the world) his mouth was opened in lies and slanders; and being forced to quit his pretensions to a deity, he appears barefaced, as a *devil*, (*διαβολος*) a *false accuser*.

The reformed religion in these latter ages has been in like manner *spoken against*. Though it maintains all that [and only that] doctrine which Christ and his apostles preached, and was before Luther there, where popery, as such, never was before or since, that is, in the Holy Scriptures; yet the professors and preachers of it have been called and counted heretics and schismatics,† and by all possible artifices exposed to the odium of the people, that *none might buy or sell*, that is, have the benefit and comfort of civil society and commerce, that *'had not the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name*.

Nay, even among some that profess the Christian and reformed religion, the practice of serious godliness is very much *spoken against*. The power of religion is not only disliked and denied, but contradicted and condemned, by those who rest in the form. They that call the evil good, will call the good evil;‡ and it is not strange if they, who abandon themselves to work all uncleanness with greediness, speak ill of such as *run not with them to the same excess of riot, 'where the wicked walk on every side,' he that departeth from evil, maketh himself a prey.* The old enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is still working, and the old game every day played over again. § *The truth as it is in Jesus*, and the *truth which is according to godliness*, will be contradicted by those that *lie in wait to deceive*. Bigots on all sides will have something to say against catholic charity and moderation: they that are *servent in spirit, serving the Lord*, and *forward to every good work*, must expect to be evil spoken of by such as affect a lukewarmness and indifferency in religion: nor can those who *walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise*, escape the lash of their tongues who live at large, and walk loosely, and at all adventures, as the *fools in Israel*.

II. I come now, in the second place, to inquire

what is the reason that so holy and excellent a religion as Christianity is, meets with such hard usage, and is thus spoken against, *every where spoken against*. When we hear such an outcry as this made against Christianity, it is natural for us to inquire, as Pilate did, when such a clamour was raised against its author, *Why, what evil hath it done?* Truly we may say concerning it, as Pilate did concerning him, *We find no fault in it*. Which of all its opposers convinces it of sin or error? It invades no man's right, breaks in upon no man's property, is no disturbance of the peace, no enemy to the welfare of families and societies, is no prejudice at all to the interests of states and princes, but to all these highly beneficial and advantageous: why then is it thus accused, condemned, and spoken against? We will endeavour to find out the true reason of it, though it is impossible to assign a justifiable reason for that which is most unreasonable.

1. The adversaries of religion speak against it because they do not know it. Sound knowledge has not a greater enemy in the world than ignorance. Our Lord Jesus was therefore despised and hated by the world, because the world knew him not, John i. 10. If they had known the dignity of his person, the excellency of his doctrine, and the gracious design and purpose of his coming into the world, certainly they *would not have crucified the Lord of glory*, 1 Cor. ii. 8. ¶ They that did it, did it through ignorance, and knew not what they did. Thus they who say to the Almighty, *'Depart from us*, could not say so if they did not at the same time studiously decline the knowledge of his ways. No man will speak against religion and the power of it, that has either seriously weighed the proofs and evidences of it, or impartially tried the comfort and benefit of it. ¶ If they knew this gift, this inestimable gift of God, instead of speaking against it, they would covet it earnestly as the best gift. "He that looks at a distance upon men dancing, would think them to be mad;" (it was Peter Martyr's comparison, in a sermon which had so good an influence upon the conversion of the Marquis of Vico;) "but let him come nearer them, and observe the regularity and harmony of all their motions and postures, and he will not only admire their order, but find in himself an inclination to join with them. So he that contents himself with a distant and transient view of the practice of piety, will perhaps take up hard thoughts of it; but a better acquaintance will rectify the mistake." When the spouse in the Canticles had given a description of her beloved to the daughters of Jerusalem, the same, who before had scornfully asked, *'What is thy beloved more than another*

\* Greg Nazian. *Invect. in Julian. Orat. 1. p.* (mih) 42.

† *Lollards from lolium-larus*: so my Lord Coke from Mr. Fox.

‡ Rev. xlii. 17.

§ Isa. v. 20.

¶ 1 Pet. iv. 3, 4.

¶ Psalm xli. 8.

¶ Isa. lix. 15.

¶ Eph. iv. 21. compared with Tit. i. 1.

¶ Acts iii. 15, 17. Luke xxiii. 34.

¶ Job xxi. 14.

¶ John iv. 10.

¶ Cant. v. 9. vi. 1.

beloved? now as seriously inquire, *Whither is thy beloved gone, that we may seek him with thee?* The people of God are called his <sup>b</sup> *hidden ones*, and their life is a <sup>c</sup> *hidden life*, their <sup>d</sup> *way above*; and therefore it is that the world speaks evil of them, because it *knows them not*, 1 John iii. 1. They who *speaking evil of these dignities, speak evil of those things which they know not*, as the apostle speaks, Jude 8, 10. How unjust then and unreasonable is the enmity and malice of the adversaries of religion, to condemn what they never inquired <sup>e</sup> into, and to load that with the vilest reproaches, which, for ought they know, merits the highest encomiums! And how excellent then are the ways of God, which none speak ill of but those that are unacquainted with them! while those that know them, witness to the goodness of them, and *Wisdom is justified of her children*, Matt. xi. 19.

2. They speak against it, because they do not like it; and we know that ill-will never speaks well. Though they have little acquaintance with religion, yet they know this concerning it in general, that it is not agreeable <sup>f</sup> with the way of their hearts, which they are resolved to walk in, nor with the course of this world, which is the chart and compass they steer by, and from which they take their measures. They know this, that it lays a restraint on their appetites and passions, and consists much in the mortifying their beloved lusts and corruptions; and therefore they have a secret antipathy to it: <sup>g</sup> *the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, is so against all who bear the image of God*. Christ has bid his disciples to expect the hatred of the world, and not to marvel at it, John xv. 18, &c. They who hate to be themselves reformed, will never love those that are reformed: *out of the abundance therefore of the heart, and the malignity that is there, it is no marvel if the mouth speak*; where the root of bitterness is, it will bear gall and wormwood. The daring sinner, that *stretches out his hand against God*, finds it too short to *reach him*; but, *'say they, with our tongue we will prevail, our lips are our own*. The beast that made war with heaven, in the apocalyptic vision, though he had ten horns, and those crowned, yet is not described doing mischief with them, but *opening his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven*, Rev. xiii. 5, 6. The poison of the serpent's seed is under their tongue, Rom. iii. 13.

3. They speak against religion because it speaks against them. They who have fellowship with the

unfruitful works of darkness, hate the light which discovers them: nor do any curse the rising sun, but those who are scorched by it. Why were the Pharisees so exasperated against our Saviour, <sup>h</sup> but because he spake his parables against them, and laid them open in their own colours? Why did the world hate him who so loved the world, <sup>i</sup> but because he *testified of it that its works are evil*? Why had Joseph's brethren such a spleen against him, but <sup>j</sup> because he was a witness against them, and brought to his father their evil report? Why did Ahab hate Micaiah, and call Elijah his enemy, <sup>k</sup> but because they were the faithful reprovers of his wickedness, and *never prophesied good concerning him, but evil*? Why did the inhabitants of the earth rejoice when the witnesses were slain, <sup>l</sup> but because those two prophets, by their plain and powerful preaching, *tormented them that dwelt upon the earth*?

The everlasting gospel is a testimony, either to us to convince us, or against us to condemn us; and then, no wonder if those speak against it, who hate to be convinced by it, and dread to be condemned by it. <sup>m</sup> The prophet complains of those that laid *snarves for him that reproveth in the gate*; and why is it that faithful ministers are so much hated, but because their <sup>n</sup> business is to show people their transgressions? If they would flatter sinners that flatter themselves in a sinful way, and cry peace to them to whom the God of heaven does not speak peace, they might avoid a great deal of reproach and censure; but they dare not do it. They are not to make a new law and gospel, but to preach that which is made; they have their rule in that caution given to the prophet, (Jer. xv. 19.) *Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them*. The hearts and lives of men must be brought to comply with the word of God; the word of God can never be made to comply with the humours and fancies of men. Ministers, as they would not for the world make the way to heaven any straiter or narrower than Christ has made it; so they dare not make it any broader or easier, nor offer life and salvation on any other terms than the gospel has already settled. If they aim at <sup>o</sup> pleasing men, they cannot approve themselves the servants of Christ; and therefore are they so much spoken against. And the same is the reason why the most strict and serious Christians are so much spoken against, because their piety and devotion, their justice and sobriety, their zeal and charity, are standing reproofs to the wicked world,

<sup>b</sup> Psal. lxxxiii. 3. <sup>c</sup> Col. iii. 3. <sup>d</sup> Prov. xv. 24. <sup>e</sup> Psal. x. 5.

<sup>f</sup> *Quid iniquius quam ut oderint homines quod ignorant? Tunc enim meretur, quando cognoscitur an mereatur.*—What is more unjust than for men to hate what they are ignorant of? First, let the merits of a cause be known, and then let sentence be pronounced. *Tertul. Apol. c. 1.*

<sup>g</sup> *Aute nos incipiunt odisse quam nosse, ne cognitos aut imitari possint, aut damnare non possint.*—They commence their hatred before they commence their acquaintance, lest, should they commence an

acquaintance with us, they should either be constrained to imitate us, or, at best, forbear condemnation. *Min. Fel. p. (michi) 30.*

<sup>h</sup> Rom. viii. 7. <sup>i</sup> 1 John iii. 13. <sup>f</sup> Psal. xii. 4. <sup>g</sup> Matt. xxi. 45.

<sup>j</sup> John vii. 7. <sup>k</sup> Gen. xxxvii. 2. <sup>l</sup> 1 Kings xxii. 8. xxi. 20.

<sup>m</sup> Rev. xi. 10.

<sup>n</sup> Isa. xxix. 21. and lviii. 1.

<sup>o</sup> *Naturale est et odisse quem times; et quem metueris, insultare si possis.*—It is natural for us to hate, and if possible, to injure, the person whom we fear. *Min. Fel.*

<sup>p</sup> Gal. i. 10.



and condemn it,\* as the faith and holy fear of Noah condemned the infidelity and security of the old world. The Sodomites were vexed at Lot's godly conversation, as much as he was at their filthy conversation. † Wherefore does the *blood-thirsty* hate and revile the *upright*, while the *just seek his soul*? but for the same reason for which Cain hated Abel, ‡ because *his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous*.

III. Now, for the application of this doctrine,

Let us see what good use we may make of this observation concerning the wickedness of the wicked, in speaking so much against religion and godliness, and what is our duty in reference hereunto.

1. Let us admire the patience and forbearance of the God of heaven, in that he bears so much and so long with those who thus speak against him and his holy religion. The affront hereby given him is very great, and (we would think) intolerable; even hard speeches, that reflect upon an infinite majesty, have in them a kind of infinite malignity. He hears and knows all that which is said against him, and against his truth and ways, and as a jealous God resents it. He has always power in his hands to punish the proudest of his enemies; nor would their immediate ruin be any loss to him: and yet, † sentence against these evil words and works is not executed speedily. Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and wonder, O earth! that these wretches who rebel against the beams of such light and glory, who spurn at the bowels of such love and grace, are not immediately made the visible monuments of divine wrath and vengeance; and, like Sodom and Gomorrah, set forth for an example! That the blasphemers and scoffers of these last days are not instantly struck dumb, struck dead. That he, who has so much said against him, does himself keep silence, and does not answer all these reproaches and contradictions (as he easily could) in thunder and lightning. Though his silence and forbearance are turned to his reproach, even by those that have the benefit of it, who, therefore, think him altogether such an one as themselves, and take occasion from his patience to question his faithfulness, and challenge his justice, saying, † *Where is the promise of his coming?* Yet he bears, and his patience is stretched out even to long-suffering, because he is † *not willing that any should perish*, nor that any means should be left untried, to prevent their perishing. Therefore he bears with sinners, because this is the day of his patience, and of their probation. The † *wrath of God is revealed from heaven in the word of God*, that we might be awed by faith more than in present providences, which would be an awe to

silence. But there is a day coming, a dreadful day, when our † *God shall come*, and shall no longer keep silence; a day foretold in the early ages of the world, by † Enoch, the seventh from Adam; when judgment shall be executed upon ungodly sinners, for all their hard speeches, which day he will not anticipate, for *he knows it is coming*, Ps. xxxvii. 13. It is agreeable to the regular course of justice, that all judgments be adjourned to the judgment-day, and all executions deferred till execution-day; and, therefore, now he condescends to reason with those that speak against him, for their conviction, as he does by the prophet, (Ezek. xviii. 25, &c.) where he fairly debates the case with those who said, *The way of the Lord is not equal*; that every mouth may be stopped with an unanswerable argument before it be stopped with an irreversible sentence, and those who have spoken against him, may be sent † *speechless* to hell. He keeps silence now, because, when he does speak, he will be justified. When our Lord Jesus was here upon earth, with what an invincible patience did he endure the contradiction of sinners! When so many ill things were witnessed against him, he was silent to admiration, † answered not a word to all their unjust calumnies and accusations; but at the same time he *bound them over* to the judgment of the great day, by that awful declaration, (Matt. xxvi. 64.) *Hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of the power*;—<sup>2</sup> and still he *bears* with us in expectation of that same day. He does not take vengeance presently, because he has an eternity before him for the doing of it.

And, by the way, we may infer hence, that those, who would be like their heavenly Father, must bear reproach and contradiction patiently. When any thing is said against us, reflecting ever so little disparagement upon us, or our families, our resentments of it are very sensible, and we are apt to take it improperly; nay, and to say we *do well to be angry*, for it is not a thing to be endured. Not to be endured? O think how much God bears with the contempt and reproach cast upon his great name, and that will surely qualify our resentments of any indignity done to our little names! Who are we, that we must not be spoken against? or what are our sayings, that they must not be contradicted? Such affronts as these we should learn to bear, as David did when Shimei cursed him, † *So let him curse*; and as the Son of David did when his enemies reviled him, *blessing them that curse us*, and *praying for them that thus persecute us*, that we may be the *children of our Father who is in heaven*. God adjourns his vindication to the great day, and then

o Heb. xi. 7.

r Eccl. viii. 11.

u Rom. i. 18.

p Prov. xxix. 10.

s 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

v Ps. l. 3.

q 1 John iii. 12.

t 2 Pet. iii. 9.

w Jude 14, 15.

x Matt. xxii. 12. Matt. xxvi. 63.

y Heb. x. 13.

z John xix. 9.

aa 2 Sam. xvi. 10.

surely we may adjourn ours to that day, as St. Paul does his, 1 Cor. iv. 5.

2. Let us acknowledge the power of divine grace, in keeping up the Christian religion in the world, notwithstanding the universal contradiction and opposition it has met with. One would think, that a way thus spoken against every where, should have been long ere this lost and ruined, and the Christian name cut off, to be no more in remembrance; <sup>b</sup> which its adversaries have so industriously endeavoured: <sup>c</sup> if it had been of men, it had certainly come to nought quickly, though they had let it alone; but being of God, it was to admiration victorious over all opposition. A sect, a cheat, could never have supported itself against so much contradiction; no human power or policy could have kept it up, nor any thing less than an almighty arm. The continuance of the Christian religion in the world to this <sup>d</sup> day, is a standing miracle for the conviction of its adversaries, and the confirmation of the faith of those that adhere to it. When we consider what a mighty force was raised by the powers of darkness against Christianity, when it was in its infancy; how many they were who spoke against it, learned men, great men; books were written, laws were made, against it; those that spoke for it, how few were they! and how mean and despicable! the foolish things of the world, and the weak; <sup>e</sup> and, yet, we see the word of God mightily growing and prevailing: must we not needs say, *This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?* The several false religions of the heathens, with their various superstitions and idolatries, though they gave very little opposition one to another, but agreed together well enough; yet having no foundation in truth, they all withered away, and dwindled to nothing: and after the mighty sway they had borne, and all means possible were used to support them, at length their day came to fall, their oracles were silenced, their altars were deserted, and the gods themselves were famished, (Zeph. ii. 11.) and perished from the earth; according to that prediction, Jer. x. 11. which is put into the mouths of the captive Jews, to retort upon their insulting enemies, and for that purpose is originally in the Chaldee dialect. We may ask triumphantly, not only, <sup>f</sup> *Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Henah, and Ivah,* those obscure and petty deities? But where are the gods of Babylon and Egypt, Greece and Rome? the illustrious names of Saturn and Jupiter, Juno and Diana? Where are the gods which our British and Saxon ancestors worshipped, before they received the light of the glorious gospel? Are they not all forgotten, as dead men out of mind, and

their names written in the dust? But Christ's holy religion, though for some ages it was utterly destitute of all secular supports and advantages, and was assaulted on all hands by the most vigorous attacks of its daring and most implacable enemies; yet it has strangely weathered its point, and is in being; and, thanks be to God, in some places in a flourishing state to this day; its cause is an opposed, but never a baffled, cause. Let us turn aside now, and see this great sight, a bush burning, and yet not consumed; and say, the Lord is in it of a truth; come and see the Captain of our salvation riding forth in the chariot of the everlasting gospel, <sup>g</sup> with his crown upon his head, and his bow in his hand, *conquering, and to conquer.*—That which was every where spoken against Christianity, was like the viper which fastened upon St. Paul's hand; <sup>h</sup> it gave people occasion to think very ill concerning it, and to look for its speedy fall; as the barbarous people concerning him, whom they concluded to be a murderer, and expected that he should have swollen, or fallen down dead. But it has in all ages shaken those venomous beasts into the fire, and taken no harm, and so has proved its own divine original. Let us herein acknowledge the wisdom and power of our Lord Jesus, who has so firmly built his church <sup>i</sup> upon a rock, that the gates of hell, that is, all its powers, and policies, and numbers, could never prevail against it. Mahomet, though he industriously adapted his religion to the sensual appetites of men, whose reason only, and not their lusts, <sup>†</sup> could object against it; yet he obtained no strength nor interest at all, till by a thousand artifices he had got the power of the sword, and with it forbad any, upon pain of death, to speak against him or his doctrine; charging his first followers, who were to propagate his religion, if they met with any that objected against it, not to dispute with them, but to *kill* them immediately: by which means that grand imposture, in a little time, got some footing in the world, and by the same barbarous and inhuman methods it has been supported now above a thousand years. And in like manner that great enemy of the church, represented in St. John's vision, maintains his interest, by causing that *as many as would not worship the image of the beast, should be killed,* Rev. xiii. 15. Thus are errors and false religions propagated; strip them of these supports, and they fall to the ground of course: but, on the contrary, the Christian religion was planted and preserved not only without, but against, secular force, recommended and upheld by its own intrinsic truth and excellency, and that divine power which accompanied it. The preachers and professors of it *every where spoken against,* and

<sup>b</sup> Ps. lxxxiii. 3, 4.

<sup>c</sup> Acts v. 38.

<sup>\*</sup> See this excellently enlarged upon by the learned Grotius, *de V. R. C. l. 2.*

<sup>d</sup> Acts xix. 20.

<sup>e</sup> 2 Kings xviii. 34.

<sup>f</sup> Exod. iii. 3, 4.

<sup>g</sup> Rev. vi. 2.

<sup>h</sup> Acts xxviii. 3.

<sup>i</sup> Matt. xvi. 18.

<sup>†</sup> See the learned Dr. Humphrey Prideaux's excellent *History of the Life of Mahomet.*

yet every where getting ground, and strangely victorious, merely by the word of their testimony, and by not loving their lives unto the death. *Thus is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ.*

3. Let us greatly lament the folly and wickedness of those who speak against Christ and his holy religion, and if we can do any thing, have compassion upon them, and help to undeceive them, and rectify their mistakes. Surely this is one of the abominations committed among us, for which we should be found among those that *sigh and cry*, (Ezek. ix. 4.) one of those instances of the pride of sinners for which our souls should *weep in secret*, Jer. xiii. 17. This is that reproach of the solemn assembly which is such a burthen to all good men, Zeph. iii. 18. Our ears should tingle, and our hearts tremble, to hear the reproach and contempt cast upon Christ and his religion, or to hear of it; and looking upon ourselves as nearly concerned in sacred things, we should be sensibly touched with the profanation of them.

To affect us herewith, let us consider,

(1.) The great dishonour hereby done to our God in the world. They that reflect upon his truths and ways, his word and ordinances, reflect upon him, he that touches these, touches the apple of his eye; if, therefore, we have any love to God, or concern for his honour, and have cordially espoused the interests of his kingdom, what is an affront to him, will surely be a grief to us. It cannot but be a very melancholy thought to every sensible soul, that the God who made the world, is made so light of in the world; that he who does so much good to the children of men, has so little honour from them, nay, and has so much dishonour done him by them every day, *and his name continually blasphemed*; that the Lord Jesus, who so loved the world, is so much hated and despised by the world. <sup>m</sup> The reproaches of them who thus reproach our Master, if we be his faithful servants, we should feel as falling upon us. <sup>n</sup> And if he take what is said and done against his people, as said and done against himself, much more reason have they to find themselves aggrieved in that which is said and done against him. If we pray heartily that God's name may be hallowed, as we should do every day, we should grieve heartily that his name is dishonoured, as we see it is every day. And our resentments of the reproach cast upon God and religion, we should make an humble and pious remonstrance of before God in prayer, as king Hezekiah spread Rabshakeh's blasphemous letter before the Lord, with that tender and affectionate request, *Lord, bow down thine ear and hear: Open, Lord, thine eyes and see*, 2 Kings xix. 16. How pathetically does Joshua plead, (*ch.*

vii. 9.) *What wilt thou do unto thy great name? And with what a concern does the psalmist, in the name of the church, insist upon this, Ps. lxxiv. 10. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? And, v. 18. Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed thy name. And how earnestly does he beg, v. 22. Arise, O God, plead thine own cause. Thus should the honour of God and religion lie nearer our hearts than any other concern whatsoever.*

(2.) Consider the miserable condition of those who presumptuously speak against God and religion. Though they may do it with an air of assurance, as if they were in no hazard, yet he that rolls this stone, it will certainly return upon him sooner or later. They that speak against religion speak against their own heads, <sup>o</sup> and their own tongues will at last fall upon them. We have reason to bewail their madness, and to pity and pray for them, for they know not what they do. Miserable souls! How will they be deceived at last, when they shall find that *God is not mocked!* And that while they were studying to put contempt on religion, they were but preparing eternal shame and confusion for themselves! The Lord is a jealous God, and will not hold them guiltless that thus profane his name: their wit, and learning, and figure in the world, may imbolden them in their sin, and bear them up a while in an open defiance of all that is sacred, but nothing can prevent their utter ruin, except a serious and sincere repentance; which is an unsaying, with shame and self-loathing, of all that which they have proudly spoken against God and godliness. They that pervert the right ways of the Lord, will certainly *fall therein*; <sup>p</sup> and they that wrest the Scriptures, do it to their own destruction. Religion's motto is, *Nemo me impune lacessit.—He who injures me, injures himself.* <sup>q</sup> It is dangerous playing with edge-tools. <sup>r</sup> Jerusalem will certainly be a burthensome stone to all people that burthen themselves with it. They that spurn at the rock of Salvation, will not only be unable to remove it, but will find it <sup>s</sup> a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. And we find those who ridiculed the word of the Lord, *broken, and snared, and taken.* Let all those, therefore, that mourn in Sion, weep over those that will not weep for themselves; and look with pity and compassion upon those who look upon them with scorn and contempt.

(3.) Consider the mischief that is hereby done to the souls of others. They who thus err, their error remains not with themselves, but this poisonous and malignant breath infects others. Words spoken against religion <sup>t</sup> eat as doth a canker; and they who speak them, seldom perish alone in their iniquity, for <sup>u</sup> many follow their pernicious ways. Unwary

<sup>k</sup> Rev. xii. 10, 11.    <sup>l</sup> Isa. lii. 5.    <sup>m</sup> Ps. lxxiv. 9.  
<sup>n</sup> Matt. xxv. 43.    <sup>o</sup> Ps. lxxiv. 8.    <sup>p</sup> Gal. vi. 7.    <sup>q</sup> Hos. xiv. 9.

<sup>r</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 16.    <sup>s</sup> Zech. xii. 3.    <sup>t</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 8.  
<sup>u</sup> Isa. xxviii. 12.    <sup>v</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 17.    <sup>w</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 2.

souls are easily beguiled, and brought to conceive rooted prejudices against that which they hear every where spoken against; and few have consideration and resolution enough, to maintain a good opinion of that which they who set up for wits make it their business to cry down. \*Sergius Paulus was a prudent man, and yet St. Paul saw him in danger of being turned away from the faith, by the subtle suggestions of Elymas the sorcerer, which therefore the apostle resented with more than ordinary keenness. It is sad to think how many young people, who, perhaps, were well educated and hopeful, when they go abroad into the world, by conversing with those who lie in wait to deceive, have their minds insensibly vitiated and debauched,\*and, perhaps, they are made seven times more the children of hell than those that first seduced them. Under pretence of free thought and fashionable conversation, and a generous disdain of preciseness and singularity, atheistical principles are imbibed, the restraints of conscience shaken off, brutish lusts not only indulged, but pleaded for, and serious godliness and devotion looked on with contempt; and thus the heart is impregably fortified for Satan against Christ and his gospel, *wrath is treasured up against the day of wrath*, and those who might have been the blessing, prove the plague, of their age; which is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation, to all who wish well to the souls of men, and to those, especially, who are desirous of the welfare of the rising generation.

4. Let us take heed that none of us do at any time, directly or indirectly, speak against the ways of religion and godliness, or make a confederacy with those that do so. †Submit to divine instructions, given with a strong hand, not to walk in the way of those people who speak ill of religion. Take heed of embracing any notions which secretly tend to derogate from the authority of the Holy Scriptures, or to diminish the honour of religion in the soul; or of accustoming yourselves to such expressions as treat not sacred things with that awful regard which is due to them. Those were never reckoned wise men who would rather lose a friend than a jest; much less are they to be accounted so, who will rather lose the favour of their God. How can it be expected, that those, who in their common converse make themselves merry with serious things, should at any time be serious in them, or experience the influence and comfort of them? It is not likely that those who make the word of God the subject of their jests, should ever make it the guide of their way, or find it the spring of their joys. Let us not choose to associate with those who have light thoughts of religion, and are ready upon all occasions to speak against it. It is not without good reason, that

among the many words with which St. Peter exhorted his new converts, this only is recorded, *save yourselves from this untoward generation*, Acts ii. 40. \*Those that listen to the *counsel of the ungodly*, and *stand in the way of sinners*, as willing to walk with them, will come at length (if almighty grace prevent not) to *sit in the seat of the scornful*. Let us therefore abide by that which Job and Eliphaz, even in the heat of dispute, were agreed on, that *the counsel of the wicked shall be far from us*; which protestation we have, Job xxi. 16. and xxii. 18. It is dangerous making friendship with those who have an enmity to serious godliness, lest we learn their way, and get a snare to our souls.

There are two common pretences, and seemingly plausible ones, under which those who speak against religion shelter themselves; but they are neither of them justifiable.

(1.) They pretend that it is only for argument sake that they object against religion, and pick quarrels with it, and (so little esteem they have of the thing called sincerity) they will not be thought to mean as they say. And are the great principles of religion become such moot points, such matters of doubtful disputation, that it is indifferent which side of the question a man takes, and upon which he may argue, *pro* or *con*—*for* or *against*, at his pleasure? That grave and weighty \*saying of a learned heathen is enough to silence this pretence, *Mala enim et impia consuetudo est, contra Deos disputandi, sive ex animo id sit, sive simulate*—*It is an evil thing to talk against religion, whether a man means as he says or no*, or (in the language of our age) whether he speak seriously, or only banter. Julian the apostate, who, before he threw off his disguise, frequently argued against Christianity, pretended it was only for disputation sake. But *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*, and whence can such evil things come, but from an evil treasure there?

(2.) They pretend that it is not religion that they ridicule and expose to contempt, but some particular forms and modes of religious worship which they do not like. And this is one ill effect of the unhappy divisions among Christians, that while one side has laboured to make the other contemptible, religion in general has suffered on all sides. To reprove what we think amiss with prudence and meekness, is well; but to reproach and make a jest of that which our fellow-Christians look upon as sacred, and make a part of their religion, cannot be to any good purpose at all. To scoff at the mistakes or weaknesses of our brethren, is the way to provoke and harden them, but not to convince and reform them. They who think to justify this way of ridiculing those that differ from them, by the instance of Elijah's jeering the priests of Baal, perhaps

\* Acts xlii. 7—10.

† Isa. viii. 11, 12.

\* Ps. i. 1.

\* Cic. de Nat. Deor. lib. 2. ad fin.

\* *know not what manner of spirit they are of*, no more than those disciples did who would have their intemperate heats countenanced by the example of that great prophet.

5. Let us, who profess the Christian religion, be very cautious that we do not give occasion to any to speak against it. If there are those, in all places, who are industrious to cast reproaches upon religion, then we have need to walk circumspectly, and to look well to our goings, that those who watch for our halting may have no occasion given them to blaspheme. It is certain, that though in religion there is nothing which may be justly spoken against; yet among those who profess it, there is too often found that which deserves to be taxed, and which cannot pass without just and severe reflections.—*Pudet hæc opprobria nobis—These reproaches are a disgrace to us.*—Are there not those within the pale of the church, through whom the name of God and his doctrine are blasphemed,<sup>b</sup> and *by reason of whom the way of truth is evil spoken of?* Are there not those who wear Christ's livery, but are a \* scandal to his family,<sup>c</sup> spots in the love-feasts, and a standing reproach to that worthy name by which they are called? Now though it is certainly very unjust and unfair to impute the faults of professors to the religion they profess, and to reproach Christianity because there are those that are called Christians who expose themselves to reproach; yet it is, without question, the sin of those who give men occasion to do so. This was the condemnation in David's case, and entailed the sword upon his house, though the sin was pardoned, by which he had *given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*, 2 Sam. xii. 14. Let us therefore double our diligence and care, to give no offence either to Jew or Gentile; that religion, which has so often been wounded in the house of her friends, may never be wounded through our misconduct.

If we inquire (as we are concerned to do) what it is that gives occasion of reflection upon religion, we shall find that the imprudence of those that profess it gives some occasion, but their immoralities much more.

(1.) The imprudence of Christians often turns to the reproach of Christianity. There may be such over-doing, even in well-doing, as may prove undoing. When more stress is laid than ought to be upon some instances of religion, to the exclusion of others, and the exercises of devotion are either mistimed, or misplaced, or misproportioned, religion is hereby misrepresented, or looked upon to disadvantage. Rash and indiscreet zeal may give occasion to those who seek occasion to speak against all religious

zeal. Therefore <sup>d</sup> *walk in wisdom toward them that are without*. Religion is a most sweet, and pleasant, and amiable thing: let not us, by our indiscretion, make it a task to ourselves, and a terror to others. The more the children of God <sup>e</sup> are children of wisdom, the more they justify it, and its ways. Christian prudence is very much the beauty and strength of Christian piety. Though it will secure the welfare of our own souls if we walk in our integrity, yet it is necessary, for the preserving the credit of our profession, that we walk in wisdom, that <sup>f</sup> *wisdom of the prudent which is to understand his way, that <sup>g</sup> wisdom which is profitable to direct.* <sup>h</sup> *And if any man lack this wisdom, let him ask it of God, who gives liberally, and upbraids us not with our folly.* Pray with David, (Ps. xxvii. 11.) *Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies.* (Hebr. because of mine observers.) Our enemies are our observers, and will be ready to reproach our way, for the sake of the false steps we take in it; and therefore we have need to ponder the path of our feet, and let discretion guide and govern our zeal.

(2.) The immoralities of those who profess Christianity turn much more to the reproach of that holy religion, when those who are called Christians are griping and covetous, and greedy of the world; when they are false and deceitful, and unjust in their dealings, sour and morose, and unnatural to their relations, turbulent and inquiet in societies; when they are froward and passionate, proud and haughty, hard-hearted and oppressive, loose and intemperate; when they are found guilty of lying and cheating, drunkenness or uncleanness; when it appears that they keep up some secret haunts of sin, under the cloak and covert of a specious profession; when they who profess the Christian faith, indulge themselves in those things that are contrary to the light and law even of natural religion: this is that which opens the mouths of the adversaries to speak reproachfully of that religion, the profession of which is made to consist with such vile practices, which cannot possibly consist with the power of it. This makes people ready to say, as that Mahometan prince did, when the Christians had broken their league with him, "O Jesus! are these thy Christians?" Or, as the complaint was upon another occasion, *Aut hoc non evangelium, aut hi non evangelium—Either this is not gospel, or these are not to be called professors of the gospel.* <sup>i</sup> *If ministers give offence in any thing, not they only, but their ministry, will be blamed.* Nay, if servants, and Christians of the lowest rank and figure, be unfaithful and disobedient to the government they are under, the <sup>k</sup> *name of*

<sup>a</sup> Luke ix. 55.

<sup>b</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 2.

\* The foulest reproaches of the primitive Christians took rise from the vile practices of the Gnostics, and other Pseudo-christians. Of which, *Vid. Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. 4. c. 7.*

<sup>c</sup> Jude 12.

<sup>d</sup> Luke vii. 35.

<sup>e</sup> Eccl. x. 10.

<sup>f</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 3.

<sup>g</sup> Col. iv. 5.

<sup>h</sup> Prov. xiv. 8.

<sup>i</sup> Jam. i. 5.

<sup>k</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 1.

God, and his doctrine, is likely to be blasphemed. Let us, therefore, who profess relation to the eternal God, and dependence upon the blessed Jesus, and a regard to the Holy Scriptures, as we value the reputation of our religion, *'walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.* Let us order our conversation so, in every thing, that we may *'adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.* While we are called by so good a name, let us not dare to do an evil thing. The disciples of Christ are as a *'city upon a hill,* and have many eyes upon them, and therefore have need to behave themselves with a great deal of caution, and to *'abstain from all appearance of evil.* Let us not do any thing that is unjust, or unbecoming us, nor allow ourselves in that which we know the gospel we profess does by no means allow of, lest we be to answer another day for all the reproach of religion which we have occasioned. How light soever we may make of this now, we shall find that it will greatly inflame the reckoning shortly, when God will assert the honour of his own name, and will be glorified upon those by whom he was not glorified. In consideration of this, let us see to it, that we *'have our conversation honest among the adversaries of our religion,* that they who speak against us as evil-doers, may, by our good works which they shall behold, be brought to glorify God, and to entertain good thoughts of religion; or at least, *'that we may with well doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.* Our religion, I am sure, is an honour to us; let not us then be a dishonour to it.

6. If there be those every where that speak against religion and godliness, let us then as we have opportunity be ready to speak for it. Every Christian should be both a witness and an advocate for his religion, and the rather because it is so much opposed and contradicted: next to our care not to be a shame to the gospel, should be our resolution not to be ashamed of the gospel: you are subpoenaed by the King of kings to appear for him in the world; *'Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord,* Isa. xliii. 10. Do not betray this cause then by declining your testimony, how much soever you may be brow-beaten and confronted. Say with a holy boldness, as Elihu, (Job xxxvi. 2.) *'Suffer me a little, and I will show you that I have yet to speak on God's behalf.* You hear what is daringly said against God, how his holy name is trampled upon and abused, his truths contradicted, his word and ordinances vilified, and have you never a word to say for him? Is our Lord Jesus appearing for us in heaven, pleading our cause there, pleading it with his own blood, and shall not we be ready to appear for him on earth, and plead his cause, though it were with the hazard of our blood? As it is then a time to keep silence, when

we ourselves are spoken against, *'I as a deaf man heard not;* so it is then *'a time to speak* when God is spoken against, and the honour of our religion lies at stake: at such a time we must take heed, lest by a cowardly silence we wrong so just a cause, as if we were either ashamed or afraid to own it. Wisdom's children should take all occasions to justify wisdom, and vindicate her from the aspersions that are cast upon her. Read the doom of him that is ashamed of Christ and of his words in this adulterous generation, (Mark viii. 38.) *'Of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father.* Not confessing Christ when we are called to it, is in effect denying him, and disowning relationship to him; and they who do so, except they repent as Peter did, will shortly be denied and disowned by him. If we should, with an *'angry countenance at least, drive away a backbiting tongue* that reproaches our brother, much more a blasphemous tongue that reproaches our Maker. Should we hear a near relation, or a dear friend, (in whose reputation it is natural for us to reckon ourselves sharers,) spoken against and slandered, we would readily appear in his vindication; and have we no resentments of the contempt and contumely cast on religion? Can we sit by contentedly to hear God and Christ, and the Scripture and serious godliness, reflected on, and have we nothing to say in their behalf? Common equity obliges us to be the patrons of a just, but wronged, cause. And that we may not think ourselves discharged from this duty, by our inability to defend the truths and ways of God, and so make our ignorance and unskilfulness in the word of righteousness an excuse for our cowardice and want of zeal, we ought to take pains to furnish ourselves with a clear and distinct knowledge of the *'certainty of those things wherein we have been instructed.* We must labour to understand not only the truths and principles, but the grounds and evidences, of our religion, that we may be able to *'give an answer (απολογίαν, an apology) to every man that asks us a reason of the hope that is in us.* How industrious are the profane wits of the age to find out something to say against religion! and should not that quicken us to provide ourselves with the *'armour of righteousness both on the right hand and on the left,* aiming at the *'riches of the full assurance of understanding?* And if we do (as there is occasion) with humility and sincerity, and from a principle of zeal for God and his honour, appear in defence of religion and its injured cause, we may doubtless take encouragement from that promise, (Matt. x. 19.) *'It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.* God will own those that own him, and will not fail to furnish his faithful advocates with needful

1 Col. i. 10.                    m Tit. ii. 10.                    n Matt. v. 14.  
 • Thea. v. 22.                    p 1 Pet. ii. 12.                    q 1 Pet. ii. 15.  
 r Pa xxxviii. 13.                    s Eccl. iii. 7.

t Luke xii. 9.                    2 Tim. ii. 10.                    v Prov. xxv. 23.  
 w Luke i. 4.                    x 1 Pet. iii. 15.  
 y 2 Cor. vi. 7.                    z Col. ii. 3.

instructions, and many times ordains such *strength out of the mouth of babes and sucklings*, as strangely *stills the enemy and avenger*.

7. Let none of us ever think the worse of the way of religion and godliness for its being *every where spoken against*, nor be frightened hereby from walking in that way. The contempt cast on the practice of piety, is with many an invincible objection against it; their good impressions, good purposes, and good overtures, are hereby crushed and brought to nothing: they have that within them which tells them, that the way of sobriety and serious godliness is a very good way, and they sometimes hear that word behind them saying, *This is the way, walk ye in it*; but they have those *about them* that tell them otherwise, and thus the convictions of conscience are overruled and baffled by the censures and reproaches of men, whose praise they covet *more than the praise of God*.

But to take off the force of this objection, let us consider these four things:

(1.) Consider who they are that speak against religion and godliness. Not only they who are mortal men, whom the *moth shall eat up like a garment*; *men that shall die*, and the *sons of men, which shall be made as grass*, all whose thoughts will shortly perish with them, and therefore why should we *fear their reproach, or be afraid of their revilings*? Not only they who are fallible men, who may be mistaken, and whose judgment is by no means decisive; nor such as will bear us out: shall we put what men say in the scale against what God says? *Let God be true, and every man a liar*. We must not be judged hereafter, and therefore should not be ruled now, by the sentiments and opinions of men. Those who speak against religion are also for the most part bad men, men of unsettled heads, debauched consciences, and profligate lives. It is the fool, and none but he, that says in his heart, *There is no God*. The scoffers of the last days are men that walk after their own lusts, whose carnal fleshly interest retains them on that side. David was abused by the abjects, (Ps. xxxv. 15.) and the Christians at Thessalonica, by *certain lewd fellows of the baser sort*, Acts xvii. 5. Such as those are the men that make a mock at religion; and shall we be swayed and influenced in the greatest concerns of our immortal souls by such men as these? Shall those have the government of us, that have so little government of themselves? Shall the cavils and vain scoffs of those, who know not what it is to be serious, carry the day against the deliberate sentiments of all wise and good men, who have with one consent subscribed to the equity and goodness of religion's ways? If we choose such as these

for our leaders, surely the *blind lead the blind*; and we know the consequence.

(2.) Consider how trifling and frivolous that is which is commonly said against religion and godliness. The devil made his first fatal assault upon mankind by lies and slanders, suggesting hard thoughts of God, and promising impunity in sin; and by the same wretched methods he still supports and carries on his interest in the world. They who speak against religion, make lies their refuge, and under falsehood they hide themselves. All those bold and daring things which are spoken against religion, are either groundless and unproved calumnies, or very unjust and unfair representations. Hence the enemies of religion are said to be *absurd and unreasonable men*; men who, while they cry up the oracles of reason, rebel against all the light and laws of it. Put all that together which is spoken against godliness, and weigh it in the balances of right reason, and you will write *Tekel* upon it, *weighed in the balances and found wanting*. And, as if an overruling Providence had forced the scoffers of these last days to confess their own infatuation, some of those who have been most sharp in their invectives against religion, have been no less free in their satires against reason itself, as if they were resolved to answer the character of Solomon's fool, whose *wisdom fails him* so far, that *he saith to every one that he is a fool*.

(3.) Consider how much is to be said for religion, notwithstanding it is *every where spoken against*. Religion has reason on its side, its cause is a good cause; and it is the right way, whoever speaks against it. "It is no disparagement" (as that excellent pen expresses it) "to be laughed at, but to deserve to be so." You have heard religion reproached, but did you ever find that it deserved to be so? Nay, on the contrary, have you not found that it very well deserves your best affections and services? Inquire of those who have made trial of it, consult the experiences of others: *Call now, if there be any that will answer thee, and to which of the saints wilt thou turn?* *Ask thy father, and he will show thee; thine elders, and they will tell thee, that the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, that is understanding*. They will tell thee, *that religion's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*, and that all the wealth and pleasure in this world is not worth one hour's communion with God in Jesus Christ. They will tell thee, that there are no truths so certain and weighty as divine truths, and that no statutes and judgments are so righteous as the divine law, which is holy, just, and good. They will tell thee, that real holiness and sancti-

a Ps. viii. 2.      b Isa. xxx. 21.      c Isa. li. 7, 8, 12.  
d 2 Thess. iii. 2.      e Eccl. x. 3.

f Archbp. Tillotson's Sermon on 2 Pet. ii. 3.

g Job v. 1.  
h Job xxviii. 28.

i Deut. xxxii. 7.  
k Prov. iii. 17.

fication is the perfection of the human nature, as well as the participation of the divine nature; that a firm belief of the principles of religion is the greatest improvement of our intellectual powers, a strict adherence to its rules our surest guide in all our ways, and a cheerful dependence upon its promises, the fountain of better joys, and the foundation of better hopes, than any we can be furnished with in the things of sense and time. They will tell thee, that a life of serious godliness is incomparably the most sublime and honourable, the most sweet and comfortable, life a man can live in this world; and that nothing does more answer the end of our creation, better befriend societies, or conduce more to our true interest in both worlds, than that holy religion which is *every where spoken against*.

(4.) Consider that the cause of religion and godliness, however it be spoken against and opposed, will infallibly be the prevailing cause at last. We are sensible of a mighty struggle in the world between the *seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent*; Michael and his angels on the one side, and the dragon and his angels on the other. Many there are who speak against religion, and are very vigorous in opposing it, and some, though but a few, who are speaking for it, contending for the faith, and striving against sin. Now it is desirable to know which of these contesting interests will be victorious; and we may be assured that the cause of God and religion will certainly carry the day. Contradicted truths will be effectually cleared and vindicated; despised holiness will be honoured; mistakes rectified; reproaches rolled away; and every thing set in a true light. <sup>1</sup> *Then you shall return and discern* between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, which now it is not always easy to do. The day of the Lord is said to be in the *valley of decision*, (Joel iii. 14.) because then and there will this great cause be decided, which has been so long depending; and a definitive sentence given, from which there will be no appeal, and against which there will be no exception. <sup>2</sup> *Our God will then come, and will not keep silence*: whoever now speaks against religion, he will then speak for it, and will undoubtedly be <sup>3</sup> *justified when he speaks, and clear when he judgeth*. Particular parties and interests, as such, will wither and come to nothing, but catholic Christianity, that is, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, in expectation of the blessed hope; this is good, and the goodness of it being founded on the unchangeable will of the Eternal Mind, it is eternally good, and no doubt will be eternally glorious, whatever is said against it. This, this is that gold and silver, and those precious stones, which will stand the test of the fire that shall *try every man's work*, (1 Cor. iii.

12, 13.) and will be <sup>4</sup> *found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ*.

Assure yourselves (Christians) there is a <sup>5</sup> *day of recompence for the controversy of Sion* coming, and it is at hand; <sup>6</sup> *Behold, the Judge standeth before the door*. Then vice and wickedness, which now appear so daring, so threatening, will be effectually and irrecoverably crushed; and such a fatal and incurable blow given to the serpent's head, that he shall never hiss, shall never spit his venom, any more: then shall the *upright have the dominion*, (Ps. xlix. 14.) and all the faithful soldiers of the Lord Jesus shall be called to <sup>7</sup> *set their feet upon the necks of principalities and powers*. Then atheists and blasphemers, the debauchees and profane scoffers of the age, will have their mouths stopped with an irresistible conviction; will have all their vile calumnies visibly confuted, their hearts filled with unspeakable horror, and their faces with everlasting shame: their refuge of lies will then be swept away, and <sup>8</sup> *rocks and mountains* called upon in vain to shelter them: <sup>9</sup> then shall the *righteous*, who are now trampled upon and despised, *shine as the sun in the firmament of their Father*. Wisdom and her children shall be first justified, and then glorified, before all the world: and they who through grace have <sup>10</sup> *gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image*, shall solace themselves, and praise their Redeemer with everlasting songs of triumph. The dust that is now unjustly thrown upon them, will not only be wiped off, but will add to their glory, <sup>11</sup> and every reproach for the testimony of Jesus, will be a pearl in their crown. The righteous Judge of heaven and earth <sup>12</sup> *will shortly render to every man according to his work*: *To them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality* in the other world, and (in pursuit of that) patiently bear disgrace and contempt in this, to them he will render *eternal life*, which will make them as happy as they can desire, far more happy than they can conceive. But to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but contradict it, and rebel against the light and laws of it, being resolved to obey unrighteousness, to them he will render, with a just and almighty hand, indignation and wrath; the effect of which will be such tribulation and anguish to the soul, as will make them feel eternally, what now they will not be persuaded to believe, that <sup>13</sup> *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*; for never any hardened their hearts against him and prospered. Brethren, <sup>14</sup> *these are the true sayings of God*, on the certainty of which we may venture our immortal souls.

They who speak and act so much against religion, design to run it down, and extirpate it, that the <sup>15</sup> *name of it may be no more in remembrance*; and

<sup>1</sup> Mal. iii. 18.    <sup>2</sup> Ps. l. 3.    <sup>3</sup> Ps. li. 4.    <sup>4</sup> 1 Pet. i. 7.  
<sup>5</sup> Isa. xxxiv. 8.    <sup>6</sup> Jam. v. 9.    <sup>7</sup> Josh. x. 24.    <sup>8</sup> Rev. vi. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. iii. 43.    <sup>10</sup> Rev. xv. 2.    <sup>11</sup> Matt. x. 11, 12.    <sup>12</sup> Rom. ii. 6-8.  
<sup>13</sup> Heb. x. 31.    <sup>14</sup> Rev. xix. 9.    <sup>15</sup> Ps. lxxxiii. 4.



perhaps you hear them sometimes boast of their success herein; if they can but handsomely (as they think) ridicule the sacred text, or banter any of the divine mysteries, or hector over a good man, they are ready to triumph, as if they had run down religion. Run down religion! In the name of my great Master, I defy all the powers of hell and earth to run it down: \* they may sooner run down the flowing tide, or the sun when he goes forth in his strength, than run down the least of the dictates of eternal truth, not one<sup>a</sup> iota or tittle of which shall fall to the ground. Dagon will certainly fall before the Ark of the Lord; <sup>b</sup> and the rod of Aaron will swallow up the rods of the magicians. Do they talk of running down religion, and the Scriptures, and the ordinances of Christ? <sup>c</sup> *The virgin, the daughter of Sion, hath despised them, and laughed them to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at*

*them; and has therefore put them to shame, because God hath despised them, as it is said, Ps. liii. 5. <sup>d</sup> He that sits in the heavens enjoying himself, and <sup>e</sup> rides upon the heavens for the help of his people, derides their attempts against the kingdom of his Son, as vain and fruitless. The Lord shall laugh at them, for he sees that his day is coming. They have their day now, it is their hour and the power of darkness; but God will have his day shortly, and a glorious day it will be, when our Lord Jesus shall appear in all the power and grandeur of the upper world, to the everlasting terror and confusion of all his adversaries, and the everlasting joy and honour of all his faithful servants and soldiers: with the believing hopes and prospects of which day, let all those who heartily espouse and plead religion's righteous cause, comfort themselves and one another.*

\* *Magna est veritas et prevalebit*—Great is the truth, and it will prevail.

<sup>a</sup> Matt. v. 18.

<sup>b</sup> Exod. vii. 12.

<sup>c</sup> Isa. xxxvii. 22.

<sup>d</sup> Ps. ii. 4.

<sup>e</sup> Deut. xxxiii. 26.