

SELF-DEDICATION

*DISCOURSED*

IN

The Anniversary Thanksgiving

OF

A PERSON OF HONOUR

FOR

A GREAT DELIVERANCE.



TO THE  
RIGHT HONOURABLE  
JOHN, EARL OF KILDARE,

*BARON OF OPHALIA,*

FIRST OF HIS ORDER IN THE KINGDOM OF IRELAND.

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My Lord,

**I** LITTLE thought when, in so private a way, I lately offered much of the following discourse to your Lordship's ear, I should receive the command (which I am not now, so far as it proves to me a possible one, to disobey or further to dispute) of exposing it thus to the view of the world, or so much as to present it to your Lordship's own eye. It was indeed impossible to me to give an exact account of what was then discoursed, from a memory that was so treacherous, as to let slip many things that were prepared and intended to have been said that day; and that could much less (being assisted but by very imperfect memorials) recollect every thing that was said, several days after. Yet I account, upon the whole, it is much more varied by enlargement, than by diminution; whereby, I hope, it will be nothing less capable of serving the end of this enjoined publication of it. And I cannot doubt but the injunction proceeded from the same pious gratitude to the God of your life, which hath prompted, for several years past, to the observation of that domestic annual solemnity, in memory of your great preservation from so near a death.\* That the remembrance of so great a mercy might be the more deeply impressed with yourself, and improved also (so far as this means could signify for that purpose) to the instruction of many others.

Your Lordship was pleased to allow an hour to the hearing of that discourse. What was proposed to you in it, is to be the business of your life. And what is to be done continually, is once to be thoroughly done. The impression ought to be very inward, and strong, which must be so lasting as to govern a man's life. And were it as fully done as mortality can admit, it needs be more solemnly renewed at set times for that purpose. And indeed, that such a day should not pass you without a fall, nor that fall be without a hurt, and that hurt proceed unto a wound, and that wound not to be mortal, but even next to it, looks like an artifice and contrivance of Providence to shew you how near it could go without cutting through that slender thread of life, that it might endear to you its accurate superintendency over your life, that there might here be a remarkable juncture in that thread, and that whensoever such a day should revolve in the circle of your year, it might come again, and

\* By a fall from a horse, Dec. 5, 1674.

again, with a note upon it under your eye, and appear ever to you as another birth-day, or as an earlier day of resurrection.

Whereupon, my honoured Lord, the further design of that providence is to be thoroughly studied, and pondered deeply. For it shews itself to be, at once, both merciful and wise, and as upon the one account it belonged to it to design kindly to you, so, upon the other, to form its design aptly, and so as that its means and method might fitly both serve and signify its end. If therefore your Lordship shall be induced to reckon the counsel acceptable which hath been given you upon this occasion, and to think the offering yourself to God, a living sacrifice, under the endearing obligation of so great a mercy is, indeed, a reasonable service; your life by that dedication acquires a sacredness, becomes a holy, divine life. And so by one and the same means is not only renewed and prolonged in the same kind of natural life, but is also heightened and improved to a nobler and far more excellent kind. And thus, out of that umbrage only and shadow of death, which sat upon one day of your time, springs a double birth and resurrection to you. Whereby (as our apostle speaks in another place of this epistle) you come to yield yourself to God as one alive from the dead.

So your new year (which shortly after begins) will always be to you a fresh setting forth in that new and holy course of life, which shall at length (and God grant it to be, after the revolution of many fruitful years, wherein you may continue a public blessing in this wretched world) end, and be perfected in a state of life not measured by time, wherein you are to be ever with the Lord. Which will answer the design of that merciful providence towards you; and of this performance (how mean soever) of

Your Honour's most obedient,

Humble Servant,

JOHN HOWE.

## SELF-DEDICATION.

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ROM. 12. 1.

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

**T**WO things are more especially considerable in these words:—The matter of the exhortation, that we would “present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, our reasonable service.” And the pathetic form of obtestation that is used to enforce it. “I beseech you by the mercies of God.” The former I intend for the principal subject of the following discourse, and shall only make use of the other for the purpose unto which the holy apostle doth here apply it. Our business therefore must be, to shew the import of this exhortation. In the doing whereof we shall—Explain the terms wherein the text delivers it. And—Declare more distinctly the nature of the thing expressed by them.

I. We shall explain the terms which the text employs in this exhortation.

By *bodies*, we are to understand our whole-selves, expressed here (synecdochically) by the name of bodies for distinction’s sake. It having been wonted heretofore, to offer in sacrifice the bodies of beasts, the apostle lets them know they are now to offer up their own: meaning, yet, their whole man, as some of these following words do intimate; and agreeably to the plain meaning of the exhortation, (1 Cor. 6. 20.) “Glorify God in your bodies and spirits, which are his.”

*Sacrifice* is not to be understood in this place in a more restrained sense, than as it may signify whatsoever is by God’s own appointment dedicated to himself. According to the stricter notion of a sacrifice, its more noted general distinction (though the Jewish be variously distributed\*) is into propitiatory and gratulatory or eucharistical. Christianity in that

\* See Sigonius de Repub. Heb. Dr. Outr. de Sacr.

strict sense, admits but one, and that of the former sort. By which One (that of himself) our Lord hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. We ourselves, or any service of ours, are only capable of being sacrifices by way of analogy, and that chiefly to the other sort. And so all sincere Christians are "as lively stones, built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ," (1 Pet. 2. 5.) being both temple, priests, and sacrifices, all at once; as our Lord himself, in his peculiar sacrificing, also was.

In the addition of *living*, the design is carried on of speaking both by way of allusion and opposition to the ritual sacrificing. By way of allusion. For a *morticinum*, any thing *dead of itself*, the Israelites were not to eat themselves, (Deut. 14. 21.) because they were a holy people; (though they might give it to a stranger;) much more had it been detestable, as a sacrifice to God. The beast must be brought alive to the altar. Whereas then we are also to offer our bodies, a living sacrifice, so far there must be an agreement. Yet also, a difference seems not obscurely suggested. The victim brought alive to be sacrificed, was yet to be slain in sacrificing: but here, living may also signify continuing to live. You, as if he should say, may be sacrifices, and yet live on. According to the strict notion we find given of a sacrifice it is somewhat, to be in the prescribed way destroyed, and that must perish in token of their entire devotedness to God who offer it. When we offer ourselves,\* life will not be touched by it or at all impaired, but improved and ennobled highly by having a sacredness added to it. Your bodies are to be offered a sacrifice, but an unbloody one. Such as you have no cause to be startled at, it carries no dread with it, life will be still whole in you. Which shews by the way, it is not an inanimate body, without the soul. But the bodily life is but alluded to and supposed, it is a higher and more excellent one, that is meant; the spiritual, divine life, as *ch. 6. 13.* yield yourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead. And *v. 11.* shews what that being alive means, "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ." Alive by a life which means God, which aims at him, terminates in him, and is derived to you through Christ. As he also speaks, *Gal. 2. 19, 20.* I am dead to the law, that I might live to God. I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live, yet

\* Cloppenburg. Schol. Sacrific. and others.

not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

*Holy* though it be included in the word sacrifice, is not in the Greek *ἁγία*, and was therefore added without verbal tautology. And there were, however, no real one. For there is a holiness that stands in an entire rectitude of heart and life, by which we are conformed in both, to the nature and will of God, besides the relative one which redounds upon any person or thing by due dedication to him. And which former is pre-required, in the present sacrifice, that it may be, as it follows,

*Acceptable to God*, not as though thereby it became acceptable, but as that without which it is not so. Yet also holiness, in the nature of the thing, cannot but be grateful to God or well-pleasing, (as the word here used signifies, *εὐάγεστον*,) but not so as to reconcile a person to him, who was before a sinner, and hath still sin in him. But supposing the state of such a person first made and continued good, that resemblance of himself cannot but be pleasing in the eyes of God, but fundamentally and stably in and for Christ, as 1 Peter 2. 5. (before quoted.) This therefore signifies, both how ready God is to be well pleased with such a sacrifice, and also signifies the quality of the sacrifice itself, that it is apt to please.

*Reasonable service*, or *worship*, as the word signifies. This also is spoken accommodately, to the notion given before of offering ourselves, in opposition to the former victims wherein beasts were the matter of the sacrifice. Those were brute sacrifices. You are to offer reasonable ones. And it signifies our minds and understandings the seat of reason, with our wills and affections that are to be governed by it, must all be ingredient as the matter of that sacrifice; implying also the right God hath in us, whence nothing can be more reasonable than to offer ourselves to him.

*Present*, that is, dedicate, devote yourselves, set yourselves before God, as they *sistere ad altare*—*present at the altar*, the destined sacrifices, make them stand ready for immolation. You are so to make a tender of yourselves as if you would say, "Lord, here I am, wholly thine. I come to surrender myself, my whole life and being, to be entirely and always at thy disposal, and for thy use. Accept a devoted, self-resigning soul!" Thus we are brought to the thing itself. Which now,

II. In the next place (with less regard to the allusive terms)

we come more distinctly to open and explain. It is briefly but the dedicating of ourselves : or, as it is 2 Cor. 8. 5. the giving our ourselves to the Lord. So those Macedonian converts are said to have done. And there is a special notice to be taken therein of the word *first*, which puts a remarkableness upon that passage. The apostle is commending their liberal charity towards indigent necessitous Christians : and shews how their charity was begun in piety. They did not only, most freely give away their substance for the relief of such as were in want, but first they gave their ourselves to the Lord.

But that we may not misconceive the nature of this act, of giving ourselves, we must know it is not donation in the strict and proper sense, such as confers a right upon the donee, or to him to whom a thing is said to be given. We cannot be said to collate, or transfer a right to him who is before, *Dominus absolutus*; the only proprietor and *supreme Lord* of all. It is more properly but a tradition, a surrender or delivery of ourselves, upon the supposal and acknowledgment of his former right ; or the putting ourselves into his possession, for his appointed uses and services, out of which we had injuriously kept ourselves before. It is but giving him his own, (1 Chron. 29. 11.) "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." It is only a consent, and obedience to his most rightful claim, and demand of us, or a yielding ourselves to him, as it is significantly expressed in the mentioned Rom. 6. 13. Though there the word is the same with that in the text, *παρισύνημι*, or *παρισάνω*, which here we read *present*.

And now that we may more distinctly open the nature of this self-dedication, we shall shew what ought to accompany and qualify it, that we may be a suitable and grateful present to him, in evangelical acceptation, worthy of God, such as he requires and will accept.

1. It must be done with knowledge and understanding. It cannot but be an intelligent act. It is an act of religion and worship, as it is called in the text. Service we read it, which is much more general, but the word is *λατρείαν*—*worship*. It is indeed the first and fundamental act of worship. And it is required to be a rational act. Your reasonable service. Religion cannot move blindfold. And though knowledge and reason are not throughout words of the same signification and latitude ; yet the former is partly presupposed upon the latter, and partly improved by it, nor can therefore be severed from it. In the present case it is especially neces-



sary that we distinctly know and apprehend the state of things between God and us : that we understand ourselves to have been (with the rest of men) in an apostasy, and revolt from God, that we are recalled unto him, that a Mediator is appointed on purpose through whom we are to approach him, and render ourselves back unto him : that so this may be our sense in our return, “ Lord, I have here brought thee back a stray, a wandering creature, mine ownself. I have heard what the Redeemer, of thy own constituting, hath done and suffered for the reconciling and reducing of such, and, against thy known design, I can no longer withhold myself.”

2. With serious consideration. It must be a deliberate act. How many understand matters of greatest importance, which they never consider, and perish by not considering what they know ! *Consideration* is nothing else but the revolving of what we knew before : the actuating the habitual knowledge we had of things : a more distinct reviewing of our former notices belonging to any case, a recollecting and gathering them up, a comparing them together ; and, for such as appear more momentous, a repeating, and inculcating them upon ourselves, that we may be urged on to suitable action. And this, though of itself without the power and influence of the Divine Spirit, is not sufficient, yet being the means he works by, is most necessary to our becoming Christians, that is, if we speak of becoming so, not by fate or by chance, as too many only are, but by our own choice and design : which is the same thing with dedicating ourselves to God through Christ, whereof we are discoursing. For upon our having thus considered and comprehended the whole compass of the case in our thoughts, either the temper of our hearts would be such that we would hereupon dedicate ourselves or we would not ; if we would, it is because we should judge the arguments for it more weighty than the objections, which, without such pondering of both, we are not likely to apprehend, and so, for want of this consideration are never likely to become Christians at all. Or, if we would not, it is because to the more carnal temper of our hearts, the objections would outweigh. And then, if we do seem to consent, it is because what is to be objected came not in view : and so we should be Christians to no purpose. Our contract with the Redeemer were void in the making, we should only seem pleased with the terms of Christianity, because we have not digested them in our thoughts. So our act undoes itself in the very doing. It carries an implicit, virtual repentance in it, of what is done. We enter ourselves Chris-

tians, upon surprise or mistake. And if we had considered what we are, consequently, to do, what to forbear, what to forego, what to endure, would not have done it. And therefore when we do come distinctly to apprehend all this, are like actually to repent and revolt. As they John 6. who, while they understood not what it was to be a Christian, seemed very forward followers of Christ. But when they did more fully understand it, upon his telling them plainly, went back and walked no more with him. And he lets them go; as if he should say, "Mend yourselves if you can; see where you can get a better master."

3. With a determinate judgment, at length, that this ought to be done. There are two extremes in this matter. Some will not consider at all, and so not do this thing; and some will consider always, and so never do it. Stand, Shall I? Shall I? Halt between two opinions. These are both of them very vicious and faulty extremes in reference to the management even of secular affairs, both of them contrary to that prudence which should govern our actions, that is, when men will never consider what is necessary to be done, and so neglect their most important concerns; or, when they will never have done considering, which is the same thing, as if they had never taken up any thought of the matter at all. Indeed, in the present case, it is a reproach to the blessed God to consider longer, than till we have well digested the state of the case. As if it were difficult to determine the matter, between him and the devil, which were the better, or more rightful Lord! We must at last be at a point, and come to a judicious determination of the question, as those sincerely resolved Christians had done, (John 6. 68, 69.) who also express the reasons that had (before that time no doubt) determined them: "Lord, whither shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

4. With liberty of spirit, having thrown off all former bonds, and quite disengaged ourselves from other masters. As they speak, Isa. 26. 13. "Other Lords besides thee have had dominion over us, but by thee only will we make mention of thy name." For our Saviour expressly tells us, "No man can serve two masters," Mat. 6. 24. When those *Dedititii*, the people of Collatia, (Livius, l. 1.) were about the business of capitulating in order to the surrender of themselves, the question put, on the Romans' part, was, *Estne populus Collatinus in sua potestate*—*Are the Collatine people in their*

*own power?* Wherein satisfaction being given, the matter is concluded. In the present case of yielding ourselves to God, the question cannot be concerning any previous tie in point of right, or that could urge conscience. There cannot be so much as a plausible pretender against him. But there must be a liberty, in opposition to the pre-engaged inclinations and affections. And this must be the sense of the sincere soul, entreating the matter of its self-surrender, and dedication, with the great God, to be able to say to the question, Art thou under no former contrary bonds? "Lord, I am under none, I know, that ought to bind me, or that justly can, against thy former sovereign right. I had indeed suffered other bonds to take place in my heart, and the affections of my soul, but they were bonds of iniquity, which I scruple not to break, and repent that ever I made, I took myself indeed to be my own, and have lived to myself, only pleased and served and sought myself as if I were created and born for no other purpose, and if the sense of my heart had been put into words, there was insolence enough to have conceived such as these; not my tongue only, but my whole man, body and soul, all my parts and powers, my estate and name, and strength, and time, are all my own; who is Lord over me? And while I pleased myself with such an imagined liberty and self-dominion, no idol was too despicable to command my homage. I have done worse than prostrated my body to a stock, my soul hath humbled itself, and bowed down to a clod of clay. My thoughts and desires, and hopes and joys, have all stooped to so mean trifles, as wealth, or ease, or pleasure, or fame, all but so many fragments of earth, or (the less consistent) vapours sprung from it. And whereas this world is nothing else but a bundle of lusts, none of them was too base to rule me. And while I thought myself at liberty, I have been a servant to corruption. But now Lord I have through thy mercy learned to abandon and abhor myself. Thy grace appearing, hath taught me to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Thou hast overcome; enjoy thine own conquest. I am grieved for it, and repent from my soul that ever I did put thee to contend for, and conquer thine own." And so doth this self-dedication carry in it repentance from dead works, and towards God.

5. With a plenary full bent of heart and will. As that, "I have sworn, and will perform, that I will keep thy righteous judgments," Ps. 119. 106. Or, that, "I have inclined my heart to keep thy statutes always unto the end," v. 112.

And herein doth this *self-dedication* more principally consist, namely, in a resolved willingness to yield myself, as God's own property, to be for him and not for another. Which resolvedness of will, though it may in several respects admit of several names, or be clothed with distinct notions, is but one and the same substantial act. It may be called, in respect of the *competition* which there was in the case, *choice*: or in respect of the *proposal* made to me of such a thing to be done, *consent*. But these are, abstracting from these references, the *same act*, which, in itself considered, is only a resolute volition. "I will be the Lord's." Which resolution, if one do, (whether mentally or vocally,) direct to God or Christ, then it puts on the nature of a vow; and so is fitly called devoting one's self.

It carries in it, as a thing supposed, the implanted divine life and nature, whereby we are truly said to *present ourselves living sacrifices*, as in the text, or as it is expressed in that other place, *ch. 6. 13.* "To yield ourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead; (as *v. 11.*) alive to God through Christ Jesus our Lord." Which life is not to be understood simply, but in a certain respect. For before, we were not dead simply, we were not dead, disinclined, or disaffected to every thing, but peculiarly towards God and his Christ. That way we were without any inclination, motion, tendency, or disposition. And so were dead *quoad hoc*—*as to this thing*, or in this respect: were alienated from the life of God. Now we come to live this life, and are made by his grace to incline and move towards him, of our own accord. Dead things (or destitute of life) may be moved by another, are capable of being moved violently, without, or against inclination, hither or thither. But a living creature can spontaneously move itself, as of its own accord it inclines.

And whereas there are two more noble principles, that belong to this divine life and nature, faith and love. (A great and noted pair, as may be seen in divers places of the New Testament.) These have both an ingrediency into this *self-dedication*. The nature of each of them runs into it, and may be perceived in it. And it is hereupon a mixed act, partaking an influence and tincture, as it were, from the one and the other of them.

Faith respects the promises of God, and what we are thereupon to expect from him. And so our dedicating ourselves, to God, is a self-committing. We give up ourselves to him as a trust, as the apostle's emphatical expression intimates, (*2 Tim. 1. 12.*) "I know whom I have believed, and I am

persuaded that he will keep that which I have committed unto him," *παρρησιασθησιν μου*—*my pawn or pledge, my fidei commissum* against that day. The soul flies to God as in a distress, not knowing to be safe another way. As once a people, not able to obtain tutelage on other terms, surrendered themselves to them whose help they sought, with some such expression, *Si non nostros, saltem vestros*—*If not as ours, yet at least as your own*, save, protect, and defend us. Nor, in our surrendering ourselves to God, is this any way unsuitable either to us or to him. Not to us; for we are really distressed, ready to perish; it is agreeable to the state of our case. Not to him; for it is glorious to him; a thing worthy of God to be a refuge, and sanctuary to perishing souls; and is thereupon a pleasant thing, a Godlike pleasure, suitable to a self-sufficient, and all-sufficient Being, who hath enough for himself and for all others, whom he shall have taught not to despise the riches of his goodness. He "taketh pleasure in them that fear him, and them that hope in his mercy," Ps. 147. 11. He waits that he may be gracious, and is exalted in shewing mercy, Isa. 30. 18. He lifts up himself when he does it, and waits that he may; expects the opportunity, seeks out meet and suitable objects, (as with thirst and appetite, an enterprising, valiant man is wont to do encounters, for none were ever so intent to destroy, as he is to save,) yea, makes them, prepares them for his purpose. Which he doth not, and needs not do, in point of misery, so they can enough prepare themselves; but in point of humility, sense of their necessity and unworthiness, great need, and no desert, nor disposition to supplicate. These are needful preparations, make it decorous, and comely to him to shew mercy. A God is to be sought, with humble, prostrate veneration. And such an opportunity he waits for. It is not fit for him; not great, not majestic, to throw away his mercies upon insolent and insensible wretches: for, as there it follows, he is the God of judgment, a most accurate, judicious wisdom and prudence conducts and guides all the emanations of his flowing goodness. The part of which wisdom and judgment is to nick the opportunity, to take the fit season when mercy will be most fitly placed; best attain its end; relish best; be most acceptable to them that shall receive it, and honourable to him that shews it. And therefore (as is added) "blessed are they that wait for him," that labour to be in a posture to meet him on his own terms and in his own way.

Let such as have a mind to surrender and yield themselves to him consider this. Apprehend you have undone yourselves,

and are lost. Fall before him. Lie at the foot-stool of the mercy-seat. Willingly put your mouths in the dust, if so be there may be hope. And there is hope. He seeks after you, and will not reject what he seeks, he only waited to bring you to this. It is now a fit time for him, and a good time for you. And you may now, in resigning, intrust yourselves also to him: for his express promise is your sufficient ground for it. "I will receive you, and be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters," 2 Cor. 6. 18. Understand the matter aright; your presenting, and yielding yourselves to him is not to be a desperate act. It is not casting yourselves away. You are not throwing yourself into flames, but upon tender mercies, thither you may commit yourself. The thing that is pleasing to him, and which he invites you to, (as he invites all the ends of the earth to look to him that they may be saved, Isa. 45. 22.) cannot be unsafe, or unhappy to you.

Again, love hath a great ingrediency into this self-resignation. And as it hath, so it more admits to be called dedicating, or devoting ourselves. This holy, ingenuous principle respects more the commands of God, as the other doth his promises, and eyes his interest, as the other doth our own. This dedication of ourselves, as it is influenced by it, designs the doing all for him we can, as by the other it doth the receiving all. As by the other we resign ourselves to him for safety and felicity; so we do by this for service and duty to our uttermost. And an ardent lover of God thinks this a little oblation. Myself! Alas! What am I? Too small a thing for him who is all love, and who, though he hath it in hand to transform and turn me into love too, such as so drossy, and limited a thing was capable of being made, how mean yet, and little is the subject he hath to work upon! An atom of dust! Not combustible, or apt to be wrought upon to this (to a divine and heavenly love) by any, but his flame. And now therefore but a minute spark from the element of love, that must, however, thus transformed, tend towards its own original and native seat! It shall now flame upward. And this is all the flame, in which it is universally necessary, thy sacrifice should ascend: which will refine only, not consume it. Though, that it may be offered up in other flames, is not impossible; nor will it be much regretted by you; if the case should so require, nor shall be despised by him, if he shall so state the case. To give the body to be burned, without love, goes for nothing; but if in that way, we were called to offer up our bodies, living sacrifices to God, it would (in an inferior sense) be an offering of a sweet smell-

ing savour, would even perfume heaven, and diffuse fragrant odours on earth: nor would be grudged at by that love that first made our *ἑλοκληρον*, the *whole of ourselves*, an offering to God; and whose property it is to be all things, to do all things, to bear all things, to endure all things for him, whose we wholly are. So that if he design any of us to be an *ἑλοκάνυσμα* too, a *whole burnt offering*, and will have us to glorify him in the fire, love will not retract its vow, but say, after our great Pattern, “Not my will, but thine be done:” and as he, in his peculiar case and design, (not communicable with us, though the temper of spirit should be,) “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God! A body hast thou (it now appears for this very purpose) prepared for me.”—“He loved us, and gave himself for us.” So are we, from our love of him, to give ourselves for him, and his use and service, in whatsoever kind he shall appoint and prescribe. Every true Christian is, in the preparation of his mind, a martyr; but they are few whom he actually calls to it. Our love is ordinarily to shew itself in our keeping his commandments; and with that design we are to present ourselves to him, as the resolved, ready instruments of his service and praise: as Rom. 6. 13. “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” Thus having been more large upon what was more essential in this dedication of ourselves, I shall be briefer in most of the other things belonging to it.

6. It must further be done with a concomitant acceptance of God. His covenant (which is now entered) is oftentimes summed up, “I will be your God, and you shall be my people:” and is resembled and frequently represented by the nuptial contract, in which there is mutual giving and taking. We are to resign and accept at the same time: to take him to be our God, when we yield ourselves to be his.

7. With an explicit reference to the Lord Christ. We are to dedicate ourselves, after the tenor of a covenant whereof he is the Mediator. God doth not upon other terms treat with sinners. You are not to offer at such a thing as dedicating yourselves to him, but in the way and upon the terms upon which you are to be accepted. The divine pleasure is declared and known, how great a one He must be in all the transactions of God with men; yea, and towards the whole creation, Eph. 1. 6—10. “He hath made us accepted in the beloved: in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness

of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he had purposed in himself: that, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him." We must take heed how we neglect or overlook Him who is by divine appointment so high in power, and with whom we have so great a concern.

8. With deep humility and abasement of ourselves, in conjunction with a profound reverence and veneration of the Divine Majesty. There ought to be the lowliest self-abasement, such as that good man expresses, Ezra 9. 6. (varied to one's own case,) "O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for mine iniquities are increased over mine head, and my trespass is grown up unto the heavens." And indeed this is naturally consequent upon what was last said, of the regard that ought to be had in this matter to the Mediator; for surely that very constitution is in itself a humbling thing to us; and we cannot apply ourselves to God suitably to it, but with a self-abasing sense of our own state and case. Our coming and tendering ourselves to God in a Mediator, is in its very nature a humiliation, and carries with it a tacit confession, that in ourselves we have nothing, deserve nothing, are nothing, are worse than nothing; and that only this constitution of his could justify our offering ourselves to him, with any hope of acceptance; or make it less than an insolent presumption, for sinners to approach him, and expect to be received into his presence and service. It is not for such as we, to behave ourselves towards him as if we either had not offended, or were capable of expiating our own offence. Yea, and if there had been nothing of delinquency in the case; yet great humility becomes such applications to him, and that in conjunction with the profoundest reverence and veneration of him; for our very business in this *self-dedication*, is *worship*, as the word in the text hath been noted to signify. And it is the first and most principal part of all the worship we owe to him, (as was noted from 2 Cor. 8. 5.) fundamental to all the rest. We must have before our eyes the awful majesty and glorious greatness of God; which Scripture often speaks of, as *one notion* of his *holiness*, and which we are to have principal reference unto in all the solemn homage we pay to him; as sacrifices (Outr. de Sac.) are well observed to have been offered to him



so considered. And therefore, by this consideration, their suitableness to him is to be measured, as he doth himself insist, Mal. 1. 14. "Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen."

9. With great joy and gladness of heart. It ought to be accompanied with the highest gusts and relishes of pleasure, both from the apprehensive congruity of the thing, and the expectation we have of acceptance. The thing itself should be pleasant to us. We are to do it as tasting our own act, as they did, 1 Chron. 29. 9. "The people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly." The self-devoting person should be able to utter this as his sense, "Glad am I, that I am any thing, that I have a being, a soul, a reasonable intelligent being, capable of becoming a sacrifice to him." And that there is hope of being accepted: how great a joy is that? The apostle makes so great a thing of it, that he speaks (2 Cor. 5. 8, 9.) as if he cared not whether he was in the body, or out of the body, so he might be accepted. Nuptials (that resemble, as hath been said, this transaction between God and the soul, wherein there is mutual giving and accepting) are wont to be seasons of great festivity and gladness. The great God himself rejoices in this closure, with such a joy, (Isa. 62. 5. As a bridegroom rejoiceth over his bride, so will thy God rejoice over thee,) and shall not we? How infinitely more amiable and delectable is the object of *our* choice than *his*! when *we* are to rejoice in the supreme and most perfect excellency; *He*, in what is clothed over (if he did not superinduce another clothing) with most loathsome deformity.

10. With an ingenuous candour and simplicity, with that sincerity which is to be as the salt of our sacrifice: (Mark 9.) without latent reserves, or a hidden meaning, disagreeing to his; which were both unjust and vain. Unjust; for we may not deceive any. And vain; for we cannot deceive him. The case admits not of restrictions, it must be done absolutely, without any limitation or reserve. You have heard this *self-dedication* is, in part, an act of love. And what limit can be set to a love, whose object is infinite? A natural limit it is true, as it is the love of a creature, it cannot but have; but a chosen one it ought never to have, as if we had loved enough. You know what kind of love is (and cannot but be) due to the all-comprehending God. With all thy heart, soul, mind, and might,

&c. So without exception, that Maimonides,\* reciting those words, adds, *etiamsi tollat animam tuam*. The stream of thy love to him must not be diverted, or alter its course, *though he would take away thy very life, or soul*.

II. With the concomitant surrender to him of all that we have. For they that, by their own act and acknowledgment, are not themselves their own, but devoted, must also acknowledge they are owners of nothing else. In that mentioned form of surrender in Livy, when Egerius, on the Romans' part, had inquired, † *Are you the ambassadors sent by the people of Collatia that you may yield up yourselves and the Collatine people?* and it was answered, *We are*: and it was again asked, *Are the Collatine people in their own power?* and answered, *They are*: it is further inquired, *Do you deliver up yourselves, the people of Collatia, your city, your fields, your water, your bounds, your temples, your utensils, all things that are yours, both divine and human, into mine, and the people of Rome's power?* They say, *We deliver up all*. And he answers, *So I receive you*. So do they who deliver up themselves to God, much more, all that they called their's. God indeed is the only Proprietor, men are but usufructuaries. They have the use of what his providence allots them; He reserves to himself the property; and limits the use so far, as that all are to be accountable to him for all they possess; and are to use nothing they have, but as under him and for him, as also they are to do themselves. Therefore as they are required to "glorify him with their bodies and spirits, which are his," so they are to "honour him with their substance," upon the same reason. But few effectually apprehend his right in their persons; which as we are therefore to recognise in this dedication of ourselves to him, so we are, in a like general sense, to devote to him all that we enjoy in the world. That is, as all are not to devote themselves specially to serve him in a sacred office, but all are obliged to devote themselves to his service in the general; so, though all are not required to devote their estates to this or that particular pious use, they are obliged to use them wholly for his glory in the general, and for the service of his interest in the world. We are obliged

\* De fund. legis. p. 64.

† Estisne vos legati oratoresque missi à populo Collatino, ut vos populumque Collatinum dederitis? Sumus.—Deditisne vos, populum Collatinum, urben, agros, aquam, terminos, delubra, utensilia divina, humanaque omnia, in meam populique Romani ditionem? Dedimus. At ego recipio Liv. ubi prius.

neither to withhold from him, nor mispend, these his mercies; but must "live righteously," (wherein charity is comprehended,) "soberly, and godly" in it; decline no opportunities that shall occur to us (within the compass of our own sphere and station) of doing him (though never so costly and hazardous) service; must forsake all and follow him, when our duty, and our continued possessions of this world's goods, come to be inconsistent; must submit patiently to our lot, when that falls out to be our case, or to any providence by which we are bereaved of our worldly comforts, with that temper of mind, as to be able cheerfully to say, "The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

It is indeed the greatest absurdity imaginable, that they who are not masters of themselves, should think it permitted them, to use what comes to their hands, as they list; for the service of their own lusts, and the gratifying of a rebel flesh, that hath rejected the government of their own reason, and of all divine laws at once: or that he who hath so absolute a right in them, should not have that right in what he hath committed to them, as to prescribe rules to them, by which to use and employ it. At the same time, and in the same sense, wherein we make a dedition of ourselves, we do the same thing as to all that we have. Even according to common, human estimate, according to what interest men have in others, or power over them, they have a correspondent interest in what they possess. They that *absolutely surrender themselves* to the power of another, leave not themselves capable of proper dominion as to any thing. Therefore says the civil law, *Non licet deditiis testamenta facere*—*Those who have surrendered themselves, are not allowed to dispose of their own property.* They were so under several notions, it is true; but they that were strictly so, *had not power to make a will*, as having nothing to dispose of. No man has certainly a power to dispose of any thing (and when they surrender themselves by their own act and deed to God, they acknowledge so much) otherwise than as divine rules direct or permit. They have a right in what is duly their's, against the counter-claim of man, but none, sure, against the claim and all-disposing power of God; whether signified by his law or by his providence. Therefore with this temper of mind should this *self-dedication* be made: "Lord, I here lay myself, and all that belongs to me, most entirely at thy feet. All things are of thee:" (as they are brought in saying, who make that willing, joyful offering, 1 Chron. 29.)

“What I have in the world is more thine, than mine. I desire neither to use nor possess any thing, but by thy leave and for thy sake.”

12. With befitting circumstantial solemnity; that is, it ought to be direct, express, and explicit; not to be huddled up in tacit, mute intimations only. We should not content ourselves that it be no more than implied, in what we do otherwise, and run on with it as a thing that must be supposed, and taken for granted, never actually performed and done. It is very true indeed, that a continued, uniform course and series of agreeable actions, a holy life and practice, carry a great deal more of significancy with them, than only having once said, without this *conceptis verbis*—*form of words*, “Lord, I will be thine.” Practice, whether it be good or bad, more fully speaks our sense, and expresses our hearts, than bare words spoken at some particular time, can do, for they at the most speak but our present sense at that time, and perhaps do not always that; but a course of practice shews the habitual posture and steady bent of our spirits. Nor do I think that a formal, explicit transaction, in this matter, whether vocal or mental, with circumstantial solemnity, is essential to a man’s being a Christian, or a holy man. A fixed inclination and bent of heart towards God, followed (as it will be) with a course of practice becoming them that are his, will no doubt conclude a man’s state to be safe and good God-ward; as one may, on the other hand, be the devil’s servant all his days, without having made a formal covenant with him. But yet, though so explicit and solemn a transaction of this matter be not essential to our Christianity, (as what is said to belong only to the solemnity of any thing, is therein implied not to be of the essence of it,) yet it may be a great duty for all that, and I doubt it not to be so.

And it may here be worth the while, to insist a little; that if this indeed be a duty, it may obtain more in our practice, than perhaps it doth. Some, through mere inadvertency, may not have considered it; others, that have, may possibly think it less needful, because they reckon it was formerly done for them. They were born of Christian parents, who dedicated them to God from their birth; and they were, with solemnity, presented to him in their baptism. What need we then do over again a thing already done? Let us reason this matter therefore a while, and consider whether, notwithstanding any such allegation, our personal dedicating ourselves to

God in Christ be not still reasonable and necessary to be performed by ourselves also, as our own solemn act and deed? It were indeed much to be wished that our baptismal dedication to God were more minded and thought on than it commonly is; when with such sacred solemnity we were devoted to the triune Deity, and those great and awful names were named upon us, the name of the Father, the name of the Son, and the name of the Holy Ghost. Baptisms are, it is to be feared, too often in the Christian world turned into a mere pageantry, and the matter scarce ever thought on more, when the shew is over; and very probably because this great succedaneous duty is so unpractised among Christians.

(1.) And let it be considered, Are there no like cases? Do we not know, that though all the infants in a kingdom are born subjects, yet when they arrive to a certain age they are obliged, being called, to take the oath of allegiance, and each one to come under personal obligation to their prince? And do we owe less to the God that made us, and the Lord that bought us with his blood?

Again, Though all the sons of Israelites were in their infancy dedicated to God by the then appointed rite for that purpose, yet how frequent were their solemn, personal recognitions of his covenant; their avouching themselves to be his people, as he also avouched himself to be their God: which we see Deut. 26. and in many other places. It is remote from me to intend the pressing of a covenant that contains any disputable or doubtful matters, or any other than the substance of our baptismal covenant itself, consisting of the known essentials of our Christianity, all summed up in taking God in Christ for our God, and resigning ourselves to him to be inviolably his: no more is meant than that this may be done as our own reasonable service and worship; as our intelligent, deliberate, judicious act and choice.

(2.) And consider further, to this purpose, the great importance of the thing itself, compared with the lesser concerns wherein we use to deal most explicitly. Is it fit that a man's religion should be less the matter of his solemn choice, than his inferior concerns? that when he chooses his dwelling, his calling, his servant, or master, he should seem thrown upon his God and his religion by chance? and that least should appear of caution, care, and punctual dealing, in our very greatest concernment? How great a day in a man's life doth he count his marriage-day! How accurate are men wont to be, in all the preparations and previous settlements that are to be made in

order to it ! And since the great God is pleased to be so very particular with us, in proposing the model and contents of his covenant, the promises and precepts which make his part and ours in it ; how attentive should we be to his proposals, and how express in our consent ! especially, when we consider his admirable condescension in it, that he is pleased (and disdains not) to capitulate with the work of his hands, to article with dust and ashes. Is it reasonable we should be slight and superficial in a treaty with that great Lord of heaven and earth, or scarce ever purposely apply and set ourselves to mind him in it at all ?

(3.) Moreover it is *your own* concernment, and therefore ought to be transacted *by yourself*. So far as there is any equity in that rule, *Quod tangit omnes debet ab omnibus tractare*—*What concerns all should be transacted by all*, it resolves into this, and supposes it, *Quod tangit meipsum debet tractare a meipso*—*That which concerns myself should be transacted by myself*.

Again, your being devoted by parents, no more excuses from solemn, personal, self-devoting, than their doing other acts of religion for you, excuses you from doing them for yourselves. They have prayed for you, are you therefore never to pray for yourselves ? They have lamented your sin, are you never therefore to lament your own ?

(4.) Consider further, Scripture warns us not to lay too much stress upon parental privilege, or place too much confidence in it, which it supposes men over apt to do, Mat. 3. 7—9. Abraham's seed may be a generation of vipers. John 8. 37, 44. I know you are Abraham's seed, yet he finds them another father.

(5.) Consider moreover, the renewing work of God's grace and Spirit upon souls, consists in sanctifying their natural faculties, their understandings, consciences, wills, affections. And what are these sanctified for, but to be used and exercised ? And to what more noble purpose ? If there be that holy impress upon the soul, that inclines all the powers of it God-ward, what serves it for, but to prompt and lead it on to the correspondent acts ? to apprehend and eye God, to admit a conviction of duty, and particularly, how I owe myself to him ; to choose, love, fear, and serve him ; and what doth all this import less, than an entire *self-resignation* to him ? So that the genuine tendency of the holy new nature is in nothing so directly answered and satisfied as in this. And it ought to be considered, that the faculties of our reasonable souls have a

natural improvement and perfection, as well as a gracious. And for their highest and noblest acts, it is fit they should be used in their highest perfection. It is possible, that in the children of religious parents, there may be some pious inclinations betimes; and the sooner they thereupon choose the God of their fathers, the better, that is, if you compare doing it and not doing it, it is better done, than not done. But because this is a thing that cannot be too often done, nor too well; the more mature your understanding is, the better it will be done, the grace of God concurring. Our Lord himself increased in wisdom, &c.

(6.) Moreover, let it be seriously thought on (what it is dreadful to think) the occasion you will give, if you decline this surrendering yourselves, to have your *neglect* taken for a *refusal*. It is impossible, when you once understand the case, you can be in an indifferency about it. You must either take, or leave.

(7.) Nor can it be denied but personal self-devoting, one way or other, (more or less solemn,) is most necessary to the continuing serious Christianity in the world. Without it, our religion were but *res unius utatis*—*the business of an age*: for how unlikely were it, and absurd to suppose, that a man should seriously devote his child to God, that never devoted himself? And if that were done never so seriously, must one be a Christian always, only by the Christianity of another, not his own? Some way or other then, a man must devote himself to God in Christ, or be, at length, no Christian. And since he must, the nature of the thing speaks, that the more solemn and express it is, the better, and more suitable to a transaction with so great a Majesty.

And hath not common reason taught the world to fix a *transitus*, and settle some time or other, wherein persons should be reckoned to have past out of their state of infancy or minority, into the state of manhood or an adult state; wherein, though before, they could not legally transact affairs for themselves, yet afterwards they could? This time, by the constitutions of several nations, and for several purposes, hath been diversely fixed. But they were not to be looked upon as children always. Some time they come to write man. Is it reasonable one should be a child, and a minor in the things of God and religion, all his days? always in nonage? Sometime they must be men in understanding, (1 Cor. 14. 20.) and have their senses exercised to discern between good and evil, Heb. 5. 14.

Yea, and there is far greater reason we should personally

and solemnly transact this great affair with God, than any concern we have with men. For, among men we may have a right by natural descent, or by valuable considerations, to what we enjoy, which may be clear and little liable to question: from God we have no right, but by his favour and vouchsafement. You are his children, if ever you come to be so, but by adoption. And human adoption has been wont to be completed by a solemnity; the person to adopt, being publicly asked (in that sort of adoption which was also called arrogation) *utrum eum quem adoptaturus esset, justum sibi filium esse vellet*—whether he would have this person to be as his own very son? And again; *ille qui adoptabatur—utrum id fieri pateretur*—he that was to be adopted, whether he was contented it should be so?\*

Nor again is there that disinclination towards men, as towards God, or that proneness to revolt from settled agreements, with the one, as with the other. Whereas love sums up all the duty of both the tables; or which we owe both to God and man; it is evident that, in our present lapsed state, our love to God is more impaired, than to man. Indeed this latter seems only diminished, the other is destroyed, and hath, by nature, no place in us; grace only restores it. Where it is in some measure restored, we find it more difficult to exercise love towards God, than man; which the apostle's reasoning implies, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" 1 John 4. 20. Who sees not that sensuality hath buried the rational world! Unregenerate man is said to be in the flesh, not as being only lodged in it, as all are alike, but governed by it, under its power: as the holy apostle is said to have been in the Spirit on the Lord's day, Rev. 1. To be in the flesh is expounded by being and walking after it, Rom. 8. Hence men only love and savour the things within this sensible sphere. They that are after the flesh, do savour only the things of the flesh. Where the regenerate, divine life is implanted, it doth *male habitare*—is ill lodged, in conjunction with a strong remaining sensual inclination: so that where the soul is somewhat raised by it, out of that mire and dirt, there is a continual decidency, a proneness to relapse, and sink back into it. Impressions therefore of an invisible Ruler and Lord (as of all unseen things) are very evanid; soon, in a great degree worn off; especially where they were but in making, and not yet

\* Cal. Lex. Jurid.



thoroughly inwrought into the temper of the soul. Hence is that instability in the covenant of God. We are not so afraid before, nor ashamed afterwards, of breaking engagements with him, as with men, whom we are often to look in the face, and converse with every day.

Therefore there is the more need here of the strictest ties, and most solemn obligations, that we can lay upon ourselves. How apprehensive doth that holy, excellent governor, Joshua, (Josh. 24.) seem of this, when he was shortly to leave the people under his conduct! And what urgent means doth he use, to bring them to the most express, solemn dedication of themselves to God, that was possible; first representing the reasonableness and equity of the thing, from the many endearing wonders of mercy (as here the apostle beseeches these Romans by the mercies of God) which he recounts from the beginning, to the 14th verse of that 24th chapter: then, thereupon exhorting them to "fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity," &c. in that 14th verse, telling them, withal, if they should all resolve otherwise to a man, what his own resolution was, (v. 15.) "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord;" taking also their express answer, which they give, v. 16—18. But fearing they did not enough consider the matter, he, as it were, puts them back (esteeming himself to have gotten an advantage upon them) that they might come on again with the more vigour and force. "Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is a holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the Lord: and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good," v. 19, 20. Hereupon, according to his expectation and design, they reinforce their vow, "Nay, but we will serve the Lord." And upon this, he closes with them, and takes fast hold of them, "Ye are witnesses" (saith he) "against yourselves, that ye have chosen the Lord to serve him." And they say, "We are witnesses," v. 22. He exhorts them afresh, and they engage over again, v. 23, 24. Thus a covenant is made with them, v. 25. After all this, a record is taken of the whole transaction; it is booked down, (v. 26.) and a monumental stone set up, to preserve the memory of this great transaction. And the good man tells them, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it

hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us : it shall therefore be a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God." So he dismisses them, and lets them go every one to his inheritance.

Nor is it to be neglected that Isa. 44. 5. (which is generally agreed to refer to the times of the gospel) it is so expressly set down, "One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." In the rendering of which words, "*subscribe with the hand*," the versions vary. Some read, *inscribe in their hands*, the Lord's name; counting it an allusion to the ancient custom, as to servants and soldiers, that they were to carry, stamped upon the palm of their hands, the name of their master or general. The Syriac read to the same sense as we—shall give an hand writing to be the Lord's. That the thing be done, and with great seriousness, distinctness, and solemnity, is no doubt highly reasonable and necessary; about the particular manner I prescribe not.

Nor can I imagine what any man can have to object, but the backwardness of his own heart to any intercourse or conversation with the invisible God: which is but an argument of the miserable condition of depraved mankind; and none, that the thing is not to be done. For, that backwardness must proceed from some deeper reason than that God is invisible: a reason, that should not only convince, but amaze us, and even overwhelm our souls in sorrow and lamentation, to think what state the nature and spirit of man are brought into! For is not the devil invisible too? And what wretch is there so silly and ignorant, but can by the urgency of discontent, envy, and an appetite of revenge, find a way to fall into a league with him? Is this, that God is less conversable with men? less willing to be found of them that seek Him? No surely, \*but that men have less mind and inclination to seek Him! And is this a posture and temper of spirit towards the God that made us, (the continual spring of our life and being!) in which it is fit for us to tolerate ourselves? Shall not the necessity of this thing, and of our own case, (not capable of remedy while we withhold ourselves from God,) overcome all the imagined difficulty in applying ourselves to Him?

Use. And upon the whole, if we agree the thing itself to be necessary, it cannot be doubted, but it will appear to be

\* Read considerately, Heb. 11. 6.

of common concernment to us all; and that every one must apprehend it is necessary to me, and to me, whether we have done it already, or not done it. If we have not, it cannot be done too soon; if we have, it cannot be done too often. And it may now be done, by private, silent ejaculation, the convinced, persuaded heart saying within itself, "Lord, I consent to be wholly thine, I here resign and devote myself absolutely and entirely to thee." None of you know what may be in the heart of another, to this purpose, even at this time. Why then should not every one fear to be the only person of those who now hear, that disagrees to it? If any find his heart to reluctate and draw back, it is fit such a one should consider, "I do not know but this self-devoting disposition and resolution is the common sense of all the rest, even of all that are now present but mine." And who would not dread to be the only one in an assembly, that shall refuse God! or refuse himself to him! For, let such a one think, "What particular reason can I have to exclude myself from such a consenting chorus? Why should I spoil the harmony, and give a disagreeing vote? Why should any man be more willing to be dutiful and happy than I? to be just to God, or have him good to me? Why should any one be more willing to be saved than I; and to make one hereafter, in the glorious, innumerable, joyful assembly of devoted angels and saints, that pay an eternal, gladsome homage to the throne of the celestial King?" But if any find their hearts inclining, let what is now begun, be more fully completed in the closet; and let those walls (as Joshua's stone) hear, and bear witness!

Lest any should not consent, and that all may consent more freely, and more largely; I shall in a few words shew—what should induce to it,—and what it should induce to.

1. What should induce to it? You have divers sorts of inducements.

(1.) Such as may be taken from necessity: For what else can you do with yourself? You cannot be happy without it, for who should make you so but God? and how shall he, while you hold off yourselves from him? You cannot but be miserable, not only as not having engaged him to you, but as having engaged him against you.

(2.) Such as may be taken from equity. You are his right. He hath a natural right in you as he is your Maker, the Author of your being: and an acquired right as you were bought by his Son, who hath redeemed us to God, (Rev. 5. 9.) and who died, rose again, and revived, that he might be Lord of

the living and the dead, here, to rule, hereafter, to judge us. Both which he can do whether we will or no : but it is not to be thought he will save us against our wills. His method is, whom he saves, first to overcome, that is, to make them "willing in the day of his power." And dare we, who "live, move, and have our being in him," refuse to be, live, and move to him ? or "deny the Lord who bought us ?"

(3.) And again, Such as may be taken from ingenuity, or that should work upon it, namely, (what we are besought by, in the text,) "the mercies of God." How manifold are they ! But they are the mercies of the gospel especially, mentioned in the foregoing chapter, which are thus referred unto in the beginning of this, the transferring what the Jews forfeited and lost, by their unbelief, unto us Gentiles ; that "mystery" (as this apostle elsewhere calls it, Eph. 3. 4—6.) "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit ; That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the gospel : " (In reference whereto he so admiringly cries out a little above the text, (*ch.* 11. 33.) ὡς βάθος, "O the depth both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !") the mercies of which it is said, Isa. 55. 1—3. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me : hear, and your soul shall live ; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Which free and sure mercies are heightened, as to us, by the same both endearing and awful circumstance, that these mercies are offered to us, namely, in conjunction with the setting before our eyes the monitory, tremendous example of a forsaken nation that rejected them, intimated *v.* 5. "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not ; and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee : " a case whereof our apostle says, in the foregoing chapter, (*Rom.* 10. 20.) Isaiah was very bold ; when, speaking of it in another place, (*Isa.* 65. 1.) he uses these words, "I am sought of them that asked not for me : I am found of them that sought me not : I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not

called by my name." He was bold in it indeed, to mention such a thing to a people, unto whom a jealous gloriation in the peculiarity of their privileged state, their being without partners or rivals, for so long a time, in their relation and nearness to God, was grown so natural: and who took it so impatiently, when our Saviour did but intimate the same thing to them by parables, (Mat. 21. 33—46.) as that they sought immediately to lay hands on him for that very reason. So unaccountable a perverseness of humour reigned with them, that they envied to others, what they despised themselves.

But on the other hand, nothing ought more highly to recommend those mercies to us, or more engage us to accept them with gratitude, and improve them with a cautious fear of committing a like forfeiture, than to have them brought to our hands, redeemed from the contempt of the former despisers of them; and that, so terribly, vindicated upon them at the same time; as it also still continues to be. That the natural branches of the olive should be torn off, and we inserted: that there should be such an instance given us of the severity and goodness of God, *ch. 11.* (To them that fell, severity; but to us, goodness, if we continue in his goodness, to warn us that, otherwise, we may expect to be cut off too! and that we might apprehend, if he spared not the natural branches, he was as little likely to spare us!) that when he came to his own and they received him not, he should make so free an offer to us, that if we would yet receive him (which if we do, we are, as hath been said, to yield up and dedicate ourselves to him at the same time) we should have the privilege to be owned for the sons of God! what should so oblige us to compliance with him, and make us with an ingenuous trembling fall before him, and (crying to him, My Lord and my God) resign ourselves wholly to his power and pleasure?

And even his mercies more abstractly considered ought to have that power upon us. Were we not lost? Are we not rescued from a necessity of perishing, and being lost for ever, in the most costly way? costly, to our Redeemer, but to us, without cost. Is it a small thing, that he offers himself to us as he doth when he demands us, and requires that we offer ourselves to him: that he, in whom is all the fulness of God, having first offered himself for us, doth now offer himself also to us: that he hath treated us, hitherto, with such indulgence, waited on us with so long patience, sustained us by so large bounty? And now upon all, when it might be thought we should be communing with our own hearts, discoursing the matter with our-

selves, "What shall we render?" that he should say to us so shortly and compendiously, *Render yourselves*. Is that too much? Are we too inconsiderable to be his, or his mercies too inconsiderable to oblige us to be so? the mercies that flow so freely from him, for he is the Father of mercies: the mercies that are so suitable to us, pardon to the guilty, light to them that dwell in darkness, life to the dead, a rich portion and all-sufficient fulness for the poor, indigent, and necessitous: the mercies that we are encouraged to expect as well as what we enjoy: the great good laid up in store! the mercies of eternity to be added to those of time: the mercies of both worlds, meeting upon us! that here, we are to keep ourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life! (Jude 21.) that, looking for that blessed hope, our life may here, in the mean time, be transacted with him, that we may abide in the secret of his presence, and dwelling in love, may dwell in God who is love; till the season come, when we shall be able more fully to understand his love, and return our own!

Nor are the favours of his providence to be thought little of in the time of our earthly pilgrimage. And now, if all this do effectually induce us to dedicate ourselves,

2. We are next to consider what our having done it, ought further to induce us unto.

In the general, it ought to be an inducement to us (as we may well apprehend) to behave ourselves answerably to such a state, as we are hereby brought into, if we now first dedicated ourselves to him, and are confirmed in, by our iterations of it. For he takes no pleasure in fools, therefore having vowed ourselves to him, to serve, and live to him, let us pay what we have vowed. Better it had been not to vow, than to vow and not pay; and instead of the reasonable sacrifice he required of us, to give him only the sacrifice of fools. We are, upon special terms, and for special ends, peculiar to the most high God. They that are thus his, are "a royal priesthood, He hath made us kings and priests." Rev. 1. 6. Both those offices and dignities have sometime met in the same person. And to God and his Father, that is, for him. Not that both those offices do terminate upon God, or that the work of both is to be performed towards him, but our Lord Jesus, it being the design of his Father we should be brought into that high and honourable station, hath effected it, in compliance with his design, and hath served his pleasure and purpose in it. He hath done it to, that is, for him. So that, to God

and his Father may be referred to Christ's action, in making us kings and priests, not to ours, being made such. Yet the one of these refers to God immediately, the other to ourselves. Holy and good men are kings in reference to themselves, in respect of their self-dominion into which they are now restored, having been, as all unregenerate persons are, slaves to vile and carnal affections and inclinations. The minds of the regenerate are made spiritual, and now with them the refined, rectified, spiritual mind, is enthroned; lifted up into its proper authority over all sensual inclinations, appetitions, lusts and passions. A glorious empire! founded in conquest, and managed afterwards, when the victory is complete, (and in the mean time, in some degree, while "judgment is in bringing forth unto victory,") by a steady, sedate government in most perfect tranquillity and peace.

But they are priests in reference to God; the business of their office, as such, terminates upon him; for him they worship and serve. Worship is either social, external and circumstantial, that of worshipping societies, considered according to its exterior part, wherein one is appointed by special office to do the part of a priest for the rest; (in this sense all are not priests;) or else it is solitary, internal, substantial and spiritual, wherein they either worship alone, and apart by themselves, or being in conjunction with others, yet their own spirits within them work directly, and aspire upwards to God. And as to this more noble part of their worship, every holy man is his own priest.

And this is the double dignity of every holy, devoted soul. They are thus kings, and priests; govern themselves, and serve God. While they govern, they serve: exercise authority over themselves, with most submissive veneration of God: crowned, and enthroned; but always in a readiness to cast down their crowns at the footstool of the supreme, celestial throne. Into this state they come by *self-dedication*. And now surely, it is not for such to demean themselves at a vulgar rate. They are of the *ἐκκλησία πρωτόκων*—*the church of the first-born written in heaven*; (Heb. 12. 23.) that is, the church of the first-born ones; that is, all composed and made up of such; (as that expression signifies;) first-born, in a true (though not the most eminent) sense, being sons by the first, that is, the prime and more excellent sort of birth, in respect whereof they are said to be begotten again (James 1. 18.) by the word of truth, that they should be a kind of first-fruits of the creatures of God. And this twofold dignity is the privilege of their birthright,

as anciently it was. Are you devoted to God? Have you dedicated yourselves? Hereby you are arrived to this dignity. For in the above-mentioned place (Heb. 12.) it is said, "Ye are come;" you are actually, already, adjoined to that church, and are the real present members of that holy community. For you are related and united to him of whom the family of heaven and earth is named; (Eph. 3.) are of the household, and the sons of God, his, under that peculiar notion, when you have dedicated yourselves to him. You cannot but apprehend there are peculiarities of behaviour in your after-conduct and management of yourselves that belong to you, and must answer and correspond to your being, in this sense, his. Some particulars whereof I shall briefly mention.

(1.) You should each of you often reflect upon it, and be-think yourself what you have done, and whose you now are. "I am the devoted one of the most high God." It was one of the precepts given by a Pagan (Épict.) to his disciples, "Think with yourself, upon all occasions, I am a philosopher." What a world of sin and trouble might that thought, often renewed, prevent, "I am a Christian, one devoted to God in Christ." Your having done this thing, should clothe your mind with new apprehensions, both of God and yourselves: that he is not now a stranger to you, but your God, that you are not unrelated to him, but his. "I was an enemy, now am reconciled. I was a common, profane thing, now holiness to the Lord." It is strange to think how one act doth sometimes habit and tincture a man's mind; whether in the kind of good or evil. To have committed an act of murder! What a horrid complexion of mind did Cain bear with him hereupon. To have dedicated one's self to God, if seriously and duly done; would it have less power to possess one with a holy, calm, peaceful temper of mind?

(2.) You should, hereupon, charge yourself with all suitable duty towards him; for you have given yourself to him to serve him; that is your very business. You are his, and are to do his work, not your own, otherwise than as it falls in with his, and is his. You are to discharge yourself of all unsuitable cares; for will not he take care of his own, who hath put so ill a note upon them that do not? He that provideth not for his own, (his domestics,) those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel? Will you think, he can be like such a one? Who, if not the children of a prince, should live free from care?

You should most deeply concern yourself about his con-



cernments, without any apprehension or fear that he will neglect those that are most truly yours: and are not to be indifferent how his interest thrives, or is depressed in the world; is increased, or diminished. They that are his, should let his affairs engross their cares and thoughts.

You should abandon all suspicious, hard thoughts of him. When in the habitual heat of your spirits you desire to please him, it is most injurious to him, to think he will abandon, and give you up to perish, or become your enemy. It is observable what care was taken among the Romans, *Ne quid deditiis hostile illatum sit*—that no hostility might be used towards them that had surrendered themselves. Can men excel God in praise-worthy things? You can think nothing of God more contrary to his gospel, or his nature, than to surmise he will destroy one that hath surrendered to and bears a loyal mind towards him. And what a reproach do you cast upon him, when you give others occasion to say, “His own, they that have devoted themselves to him, dare not trust him?” You are taught to say, “I am thine, save me;” not to suspect he will ruin you. They do strangely misshape religion, considering in how great part it consists in trusting God, and living a life of faith, that frame to themselves a religion made up of distrusts, doubts, and fears.

You should dread to alienate yourselves from him, which (as sacrilege is one of the most detestable of all sins, a robbing of God) is the most detestable sacrilege. You are to reserve yourselves entirely for him. Every one that is godly he hath set apart for himself, Ps. 4.

Yea, and you are not only to reserve, but to your uttermost, to improve and better yourselves for him daily: to aspire to an excellency, in some measure, suitable to your relation: “to walk worthy of God, who hath called you to his kingdom and glory,” (1 Thess. 2. 12.) remembering you are here to glorify him, and hereafter to be glorified with him. And who is there of us that finds not himself under sufficient obligation, by the mercies of God, unto all this? or to whom he may not say, in a far more eminent sense, than the apostle speaks it to Philemon, “Thou owest even thyself also unto me?” Shall we refuse to give God what we owe? or can we think it fit, itself, “we should be no otherwise his, than (as one well says) fields, woods, and mountains, and brute beasts?” And I may add, can it be comfortable to us, that he should have no other interest in us than he hath in devils? Is there no difference in the case of reasonable creatures and unreasonable? their’s who profess devoted-

ness to him, and their's who are his professed enemies? The one sort, through natural incapacity, cannot, by consent, be his, and the other, through an invincible malignity, never will. Are there no mercies (conferred or offered) that do peculiarly oblige us more? Let us be more frequent and serious in recounting our mercies, and set ourselves on purpose to enter into the memory of God's great goodness, that we may thence, from time to time, urge upon ourselves this great and comprehensive duty. And at this time, being here together on purpose, let us consider and reflect afresh upon that eminent mercy which you are wont to commemorate in the yearly return of this day.

And that I may, more particularly, direct my speech the same way, that the voice of that memorable providence is especially directed; you are, my Lord, to be more peculiarly besought by the mercies of God, that you would this day dedicate yourself to him. I do therefore beseech you, by the many endearing mercies which God hath so plentifully conferred upon you, by the mercies of your noble extraction and birth, by the mercies of your very ingenious and pious education, by the mercies of your family, which God hath made to descend to you from your honourable progenitors; (which, as they are capable of being improved, may be very valuable mercies;) by the blood and tender mercies of your blessed and glorious Redeemer, who offered up himself a Sacrifice to God for you, that you would now present yourself to God, a holy, living sacrifice, which is your reasonable service. I add, by the signal mercy which hath made this a memorable day to you, and by which you come, thus long, to enjoy the advantages of all your other mercies. How came it to pass that this day comes not to be remembered by your noble relatives, as a black and a gloomy day, the day of the extinction of the present light and lustre of your family, and of quenching their coal which was left? You had a great Preserver, who we hope delivered you because he delighted in you. Your life was precious in his sight. Your breath was in his hand; he preserved and renewed it to you, when you were ready to breathe your last. And we hope he will vouchsafe you that greater deliverance, not to let you fall under the charge which was once exhibited against a great man, (Dan. 5. 23.) "The God in whose hands thy breath is—hast thou not glorified?" and make you rather capable of adopting those words, (Ps. 42. 8.) "Yet the Lord will command his loving kindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." Your acknowledgments

are not to be limited to one day in the year; but from day to day his loving kindness, and your prayer and praise, are to compose your *ὡραὶ καὶ νύκτες*, *day and night*; the one, to shew you, the other, to be unto you your morning and evening exercise. Let this be your resolution, "Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever;" (Ps. 145. 2.) or that, (Ps. 104. 33.) "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise unto my God while I have my being."

Yet your more solemn acknowledgments are justly pitched upon this day. God hath noted it for you, and made it a great day in your time. You have now enjoyed a *septennium*, *seven years* of mercies. And we all hope you will enjoy many more, which may all be called the posterity of that day's mercy. It was the parent of them all; so pregnant and productive a mercy was that of this day. You do owe it to the mercy of this day, that you have yet a life to devote to the great Lord of heaven and earth, and to employ in the world for him: and would you think of any less noble sacrifice?

Æschines the philosopher, out of his admiration of Socrates, when divers presented him with other gifts, made a tender to him of himself. Less was thought an insufficient acknowledgment, of the worth and favours of a man! Can any thing less be thought worthy of a God? I doubt not you intend, my Lord, a life of service to the God of your life. You would not, I presume, design to serve him under any other notion, than as his. By dedicating yourself to him, you become so in the peculiar sense. It is our part in the covenant which must be between God and us. "I entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine," Ezek. 16. 8. This is the ground of a settled relation, which we are to bear towards him, as his servants. It is possible I may do an occasional service for one whose servant I am not; but it were mean that a great person should only be served by the servants of another lord. To be served but precariously, and as it were upon courtesy only, true greatness would disdain; as if his quality did not admit to have servants of his own.

Nor can it be thought a serious Christian (in howsoever dignifying circumstances) should reckon himself too great to be his servant, when even a heathen (Seneca) pronounces, *Deo servire est regnare*—*to serve God is to reign*. A religious nobleman of France (Monsieur de Renty, whose affection I commend more than this external expression of it) tells us he made a deed of gift of himself to God, signing it with his own

blood. He was much a greater man, that so often speaks in that style, *Thy servant*, that it is plain he took pleasure in it, and counted it his highest glory. "Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear," Ps. 119. 38. "Thy servant, thy servant, O Lord, the son of thy handmaid;" (alluding to the law by which the children of bond-servants were servants by birth;) "thou hast broken my bonds;" (Ps. 116.) hast released me from worse bonds, that I might not only be patient, but glad to be under thine.

Nor was he a mean prince\* in his time, who at length abandoning the pleasures and splendour of his own court, (whereof many like examples might be given,) retired and assumed the name of *Christodulus—A servant of Christ*, accounting the glory of that name did outshine, not only that of his other illustrious titles, but of the imperial diadem too. There are very few in the world, whom the too common atheism can give temptation unto to think religion an ignominy, and to count it a reproach to be the devoted servant of the most high God; but have it at hand to answer themselves, even by human (not to speak of the higher angelical) instances, that he hath been served by greater than we.

You are, my Lord, shortly to enter upon the more public stage of the world. You will enter with great advantages of hereditary honour, fortune, friends; with the greater advantage of (I hope) a well cultivated mind, and (what is yet greater) of a piously inclined heart: but you will also enter with disadvantages too. It is a slippery stage; it is a divided time, wherein there is interest against interest, party against party. To have seriously and with a pious obstinacy dedicated yourself to God, will both direct and fortify you.

I know no party in which nothing is amiss. Nor will that measure, let you think it advisable, to be of any, further than to unite with what there is of real, true godliness among them all. Neither is there any surer rule or measure for your direction, than this; to take the course and way which are most agreeable to a state of devotedness to God. Reduce all things else, hither. Wheresoever you believe, in your conscience, there is a sincere design for the interest and glory of God, the honour or safety of your prince, the real good and welfare of your country, there you are to fall in, and adhere. And the first of these comprehends the rest. You

\* Cantacuzenus, whose life also, among many other remarkable things, was once strangely preserved in the fall of his horse.

will not be the less inclined, but much the more, to give Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, for your giving God the things that are God's. And that is (as hath been said) principally and in the first place yourself; and then all that is yours to be used according to his holy rules, and for him whose you are.

And what can be to you the ground of a higher fortitude? Can they be unsafe that have devoted themselves to God? Dedicate yourself, and you become a sanctuary (as well as a sacrifice) inviolably safe in what part, and in what respects, it is considerable to be so. And who can think themselves unsafe, being, with persevering fidelity, sacred to God; that understand who he is, and consider his power and dominion over both worlds, the present, and that which is to come; so as that he can punish and reward in both, as men prove false or faithful to him. The triumphs of wickedness are short, in this world. In how glorious triumphs will religion and devotedness to God end in the other!

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