

THE  
**VANITY**  
OF A FORMAL  
**PROFESSION OF RELIGION**  
*Considered*  
IN  
**EIGHT SERMONS.**

On Titus 1. 16.



## SERMON I\*.

Titus 1. 16.

*They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*

**S**INCE it is too obvious, that many persons are apt to satisfy themselves with the mere profession of Christianity; and to reckon that while they explicitly own the true religion they are sound christians and good protestants, without considering whether that religion carries due and suitable impressions on their hearts or not; I have therefore thought it might not be unuseful, to discourse a little from this scripture, and shew the vanity and insignificance of an empty profession, a profession which refutes and contradicts itself. To make way for what I intend from this passage of Scripture, there are a few things that it will be necessary for me to recommend to your notice.

First. That this phrase, the knowing of God, is a usual expression to signify religion in general; inasmuch as it is the primary, the most deep and fundamental thing in all religion. It is, as I remember the moralist stiles it, "The foundation of foundations." Hence, from so noted and principal a part, the denomination is put upon the whole. To know God therefore, is to own him, to acknowledge him as our God; and

\* This Sermon is without a date; but, it is very probable, it was preached on January 16, 1680.

thereupon to carry ourselves suitably towards him. In the first commandment, which establishes the relation betwixt God and us, it is intimated, that if we will have him to be our God, we must have no other gods before him. *Exod. 20. 3.* And again, one of the prophets expresses it by knowing no other god but *Him*.. "I am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt; and thou shalt know no other god but me, for there is no Saviour besides me." *Hos. 13. 4.* The import then of the expression, is to own him as *God*, in relation to ourselves; and consequently to love and fear him, to hope and delight in him, and the like. All which, result from the relation betwixt him and us: according to that well known observation and rule among the Hebrews; that "words of knowledge import life and sense; as consequent; as words of life and sense suppose knowledge antecedent."

Secondly. This phrase imports not only natural religion, but also that which is revealed. Knowing God therefore is not to be taken so abstractedly, as though it meant no more than only to entertain the notion of the Deity, and the practice of those duties that we are led to by the light of nature; but more generally whatever duty he is pleased to enjoin also by revelation. We then know and acknowledge him as *God*, with respect to his sovereignty and dominion, when we are universally observant of his will; how or by what means soever it is made known to us: whether it be by natural light, or express superadded revelation. And therefore we find this expression made use of to signify religion among the Jews, while they were a peculiar people unto God. It is said, Hezekiah, a good king, "spoke comfortably to the Levites," *to their hearts*, according to the hebrew, "who taught the good knowledge of the Lord." *2 Chron 30. 22.* That is, instructed the people in religion, according to the revelation of the mind and will of God, which was then afforded them.

Thirdly. We find this phrase expressly used to signify the Christian religion in particular. And thus the same apostle uses it in another place. "Awake to righteousness and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God, I speak this to your shame." *1 Cor. 15. 34.* As if he had said, "You do not know God, you do not demean and behave yourselves like those, who understand the principles of your own religion." And again, says the apostle, "After you have known God, why turn ye back to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" *Gal. 4. 9.* That is, Why do you follow the gnostics in mixing judaical and pagan rites with the religion of Christ?

Fourthly. We are therefore further to collect, that the apos-

tle does here, in this place, particularly intend the Christian religion. "They profess that they know God;" that is, they profess to be christians. For it is very evident he writes of such, as professed the only true religion. The teachers who seduced and corrupted them it is evident, were professed christians, though very corrupt and unsound ones: for they endeavoured to deprave others; not indeed as avowed adversaries to the Christian name, but as deceivers and gainsayers. It is true, the apostle said, they ought to be convinced; by which he implies that there were some common agreed principles among them, which might be the ground of such conviction. He calls them deceivers, who by cunning insinuations laboured to pervert the Christian doctrine, and to render it favourable to licentious and immoral practices. And therefore those, whom they had perverted, must be of the same stamp: not wholly of the Jewish religion, for that their teachers were not; but judaizing christians. They who lived so remote from Judea, cannot be thought to have entertained the principles of the Jewish religion entirely; nor so generally and in such numbers, as is here implied, for "many whole houses were subverted." Tit. 1. 11. Much less can we suppose the whole body of the people to be naturally Jews; for the apostle does manifestly describe them by the common national taint of that island, that is, as "liars, evil beasts, slow bellies," (Tit. 1. 12.) according to the character given of them by one of their own poets.\* Thus are the people described, whom the apostle speaks of, namely, the natives of Crete, who were converted from paganism to the profession of the Christian religion, with which they mingled many of the Judaical sentiments. This therefore being premised, our way is plain and clear to the things I intend to insist upon; which are especially these two—That men may profess the true religion, and yet lead very ill lives: and—That they who do so, by just interpretation, may be said to deny the religion they profess.—I propose to speak to these two observations jointly in this order.

I. I shall shew what sort of profession that must be, which can be meant in such a case.

II. What the persons who make it may be notwithstanding, in the temper of their spirits, and the course of their practice.

III. I shall shew whence it is, that men should make profession of a religion, to which the temper of their spirits, and the course of their walking are so repugnant. And

\* Epimenides.

IV. The vanity of such a profession, and how little it signifies to entitle persons to the reputation, or proper rewards of such a religion.

I. I shall shew what sort of profession that must be, which can be meant in this case, or was made by such persons as the apostle speaks of.

1. It must be understood to be, in the main, but a nominal profession. These professors indeed own the Christian name, call themselves by it; and not only do so, but also claim the privilege of being called christians by others: like those who said they were Jews, when they were not, but were of the synagogue of Satan. Rev. 2. 9. And St. Paul in the second chapter of his epistle to the Romans, speaking of these professors, uses the very same style, alluding to those who called themselves Jews, or were commonly so called by others; "Thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God," &c. but says he, in the close of that chapter, "He is not a Jew that is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, that is one inwardly—whose praise is not of men but of God." Rom. 2. 17. 29.

2. This profession could be only formal; that is, wholly made up of the external form of that religion to which they pretended. So in like manner, many now profess the Christian religion and make a shew or appearance of being religious by frequenting Christian assemblies; by owning themselves to be members of the catholic, or some protestant church: and by wearing the badge and cognizance of such and such a party. The bare having a name, is all we can suppose to be in such a profession as this. And therefore to these professors may be applied what our Lord says to the church in Sardis; "Thou hast a name that thou art alive, when thou art dead." Rev. 3. 1. And so it is, in like manner, with all others; who content themselves with making a shew of religion, and performing such external rites, as are the distinguishing badge of the several parties of the Christian world.

II. I am now to shew you what such persons may be, notwithstanding their profession, both in temper and practice; which shall be done briefly by opening the terms of the text. They may be for all that, abominable, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate; that is, in one word, inclined to all evil, and averse to all good. To these two things do these several expressions amount.

1. They are said to be *βδελυκτοι*, *abominable*, or shamefully addicted to all manner of evil. The word, in the original, denotes the heinousness of those practices, in which they allow

themselves; and is derived from a word that signifies to send forth an offensive smell. For all sentiments of right and good, are not so totally lost and obliterated among mankind, but that there are some things which even pagans would detest.

2. They are said to be also *απειθεῖς*, *disobedient*, which expression imports perseverance and obstinacy in an evil course. They will by no means, by no importunity, no arguments whatever be dissuaded from practices so unjustifiable, and detestable in their own nature. They are resolved to run on whatever it costs them; to continue in sin, and in the profession of religion at the same time, which is the greatest absurdity imaginable.

3. They are said, lastly, to be *προς παν εργον αγαθον αδοκιμοι*, *reprobate to every good work*; which signifies a disinclination to every thing that is good, to every thing that is worthy of praise. The word may be taken as it is observed, either actively or passively, and so may signify not only to be disapproved by others, but to disapprove themselves; in which latter sense we must, at present, principally understand the phrase. They disapprove all that which claims their approbation and esteem; and are disaffected to all that good, which the religion they profess would oblige them to the practice of. The expression therefore does not so much signify their omission of what is good, as their disinclination to it; but it further denotes that if they do any thing at all in religion, it is what they neither delight in, nor can endure. "Every good work" is an expression of such latitude, that it may comprehend all the works of piety, mercy, and common justice. And so it is fit we should understand it in this place. Whatever they do of this kind, their hearts are averse to it, and they bear a disaffected mind to it all. And such as are here described, persons may be found to be, notwithstanding their profession.

III. We are next to consider, whence it is, or what inducements men have to make profession of a religion, which they are resolved to contradict in the course of their lives and conversations. And many things may be considered as inducements or reasons in this case, which concur partly in all those who are mere professors; though some are of greater force than others to particular persons, whom we shall distinguish from the generality of men of this character.

1. One reason why such men join a profession of religion to a vicious life, is their unapprehensiveness, and irreverence of an invisible Lord and Judge; whom because they do not see, they stand in no awe of. Therefore it is that they are not ashamed of that incongruous and inconsistent behaviour towards him, of which they would be ashamed in their deportment towards

men. The following expression of the apostle gives us a great deal of light to this purpose, "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen; how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?" 1 John 4. 20. Wherein is implied a greater difficulty of loving God, than a Christian brother; on this account, because God is not seen. Man continually falls under our sight and view, we converse with him daily in a way that is obvious to our natural sight, while God is invisible. And as it is in the point of love, so is it in all other natural affections; for as men with greater difficulty admit the impressions of divine love into their hearts, than those of a visible object, so they do of divine fear; and for this reason, I say, because God is not seen. Men would be ashamed continually to profess to one another, what they contradict in practice. Who would not be ashamed to declare himself perpetually such a one's friend; and yet, in the mean time, take all opportunities to do him all the mischief he can? But as to their carriage to an unseen God, men are not ashamed of such an incongruity as this.

2. This inconsistent conduct proceeds from the power and malignity of sinful inclinations; more especially in things that relate to, and terminate on God. Sin has filled the world with enmity, which, it is true, works in men one against another: but more directly, and with greater virulence, against the blessed God himself; insomuch that they care not what dishonours they throw on his sacred name, nor what affronts they offer to his high authority and righteous laws. And though it must be acknowledged, the working of this enmity is great among men towards one another; yet, it is manifest, it is in general much greater towards the Almighty: for were it as common a thing to stab a man, as it is to wound the name of God and to affront his government, the world had been at an end long before this.

3. It is natural for men to have somewhat of religion, while a disaffection still remains against that which is true: whence it is that they resist, and overthrow the profession they make, by a most repugnant practice. It is manifest, as to the former, that all must be of some religion or other; and so they come to profess, as external circumstances lead them. It has been noted by heathens, that no society of men can live without religion. Divers have taken notice of it. It is a common passage of Cicero; "There is no nation so barbarous as to be without religion."\* It seems as if none such had fallen within the compass of his observation. Maximus Tyrius also tells us, that "For a man to be without any religion at all, were as

\* Tuscul Disput. Lib. 1.



monstrous and unnatural, as for an ox to be without horns, or a bird to be without wings."\* And so Plutarch in like manner observes, that "Though there be many towns and cities without coin, without government, as it happens sometimes; yet," says he, "I never heard or read in my life, of a city without a temple. And I believe it is as impossible, that there should be a society of men without religion, as to build a city without foundations."†

Hence many persons, both ancient and modern, have thought religion to be the specific difference of man, and not reason; because there are so many apparent specimens of this in beasts, that in some instances it is hard to distinguish by this only between the brutal and human nature: whereas religion is peculiar to man, wherein no other sort of creatures do participate. For it is very plain that man, by his self-reflecting power, discerns himself to be a depending creature; which necessarily prompts him to pay homage to some superior being, on whom he thinks himself dependant. And therefore, if many of the pagans have worshipped for deities, those creatures which they thought most useful to them; it was not that they supposed them to be deities in reality, but because they looked upon them as representing the Deity, in those respects, wherein it was most beneficial to them.

But now, while men are naturally addicted to profess some religion, as it comes in their way, that which they have the best opportunity to know; so at the same time they have, generally, a most rooted disaffection to sincere religion, such as should command their hearts, and govern their lives and practice. This is to be resolved in some measure into the justice and sovereignty of God. Into his justice, in not continuing to give that grace which men resist and contend against: and though it is of infinite mercy that his grace does overcome in some instances, yet that it does not in all, is to be attributed to his sovereign dominion: in which he is not to be prescribed unto, as to his dispensations to his creatures, who have made themselves obnoxious to his displeasure. He is just, where he withholds any benefit; he is sovereignly gracious where he gives that assistance and power, which shall prevail against this enmity in the hearts of men. And when persons must have something of religion, and will have only that of it which is most tolerable, and does not bear hard upon corrupt nature; no wonder then, I say, if they take up with the bare

\* Max. Tyr. Dissert. 17. Sec. 5. Edit. Davis. Lond. 1740. quarto.

† Plut adversus Colotem. See this point handled at large by the Author in his *Living Temple* Part 1 chap. 2.

name, and content themselves with the mere form of godliness. But to profess at such a rate is the most easy thing in the world.

4. This may in some cases proceed, particularly in the Christian world, from an inward conviction of the importance and excellence of religion, arising from the light of Scripture, joined with the inefficacy of it. Very plain it is, that the light by which the truth of the Christian religion is discovered to any one, carries mighty conviction of its excellence along with it. It does so to any one who views the weight and importance of the Christian religion, and considers also the evidences of it which are superadded. A religion that came with triumphant evidence and glory into the world! spoken at first by the Son of God, and confirmed by them who heard him; God bearing them witness, by signs and wonders of the Holy Ghost. Heb. 2. 3, 4. Some do consider these things, and thereupon the light is so convincing, that they cannot withstand it, nor avoid receiving this religion as divine; but then, alas! it is too faint and impotent to govern their hearts and lives. It is powerful enough to convince their judgments and consciences; but too weak to change their minds, and influence their actions. Hence it is that there is in many a profession of the true religion, with a repugnant, inconsistent practice.

5. With some others, a profession of religion may proceed from mere sinister designs. They make a profession of religion, because it suits with their interests and private views; and serves to raise and establish their reputation, and by consequence to increase their gain. They could not do so well without it in such a country, and among such a people; so that gain and godliness with them are commensurate to each other. Therefore, since a profession alone serves their turn, and answers their purpose, what need is there of any more? What need has any man of more than will answer his end? "I will have no more to do with religion, but to serve my secular interest," will such a one say, if he speaks his own sense: "I design not to be saved by religion; but to live creditably in the world, and to suit my designs with those, with whom I live." Again,

6. With others it may proceed from a regard to their ancestors, from whom a religion has been transmitted to them. This is a thing that has descended from father to son; "I must therefore be of the religion of my fathers." This shews the reason why a religion so received, be it ever so good, should be so ineffectual; and have so little command of the hearts and lives of men: for its efficacy, and the grounds for receiv

ing it, do as it were measure one another. The apostle Paul, speaking of the manner in which the Christian religion was received by the Thessalonians, says; They received it not as the word of man, but of God, which effectually worketh in them that believe. 1 Thes. 2. 13. Hence it appears plain, that where the religion of Jesus as coming from God is embraced on the authority of the divine word, and where men have their souls overawed by this apprehension, there it works effectually; but on the contrary where it is received without grounds, there it becomes ineffectual. Many are christians on the same grounds, and for the same reasons, that others are pagans, mahometans, or any thing else. And were they to give a true account of their faith, it would be this; "The religion that my forefathers were of, must be mine also." This is an argument, which, *mutatis mutandis*, serves as well to make the Mahometan religion true, as the Christian. And if it is so professed, without grounds or reasons, it is no wonder if it be without efficacy on men's lives and practice.

7. With others a profession of religion is taken up as a novelty. A veneration for antiquity has a great influence on some; while others are as fond of novelty. This was the case, it is likely, of many of those unsound christians, whom the apostle speaks of in this epistle to Titus. Christianity at this time could be but newly planted in Crete, it could be only in its infancy; and therefore many embraced it as a new thing, and were pleased with it on this account. Thus we may see, men of different tempers are swayed to the same end by contrary inducements. And we may add in the last place,

8. That nothing but custom can make the profession of religion to appear tolerable, where it is attended with a repugnant and contradictory practice. Were there but few instances of this kind, a man would not have the boldness to venture on an open course of wickedness, repugnant to the religion commonly professed where he lives, whilst he continued to make a profession of it himself. But it is very obvious to common experience, that many do emulate one another in that, which is most indecorous and unbecoming, even in that which is contrary to the common reason of all. How many gainful sorts of wickedness have ceased to be shameful now-a-days from their being common! For when the restraint of shame is taken off from the mind, it is a most easy thing then for a man to be wicked. Thus influenced by custom they justify one another in what their own sedate thoughts would condemn, if they would but allow themselves to think. And hence it is that men are able to reconcile two of the most inconsistent

things in the world ; a profession of the most pure religion with the most impure conversation.

I should have proceeded to the fourth general head of discourse, but shall conclude with one dreadful and tremendous reflection. What apparent danger are we in, of losing that religion from among us, which is more generally professed at this day ! principally because of the resistance and opposition, which is made against it, by the practices of those who profess it. For pray do but consider—What does God send his gospel among a people for ? Does he aim at any end in this, or does he not ? And can that be a wise, intelligent agent, who aims at no end ? Or can we suppose him to act wisely who aims at no proportionable and suitable end ? What then can we think the great God designed as his end, in sending the gospel into the world ; in planting it in this, or any other nation ? There are certainly fruits that he expects to receive ; and therefore we find how express the threatenings are, when these fruits are withheld. Nothing less is threatened than the taking of the kingdom of God from them, and the giving it to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. Mat. 21. 43. Oh ! the little correspondency of the hearts and spirits of men to the design of the gospel ! And what a tremendous and melancholy prospect does this afford us !

I should not be so afraid of comets and blazing stars †, nor of all the malice and subtilty of earth and hell combined together ; I should never be afraid of these things, I say, even though the subtilty of our enemies was a thousand times greater than it is, if I could but see such a love of the gospel, joined to the enjoyment of it, as to form the heart, and influence the practice. But when I find it is God's way, and express threatening, that where the truth is not loved, there to give them up to strong delusions even to believe a lie, that they might be damned, who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness, (2 Thes. 2. 10, 11, 12.) then I confess, I fear, I tremble.

I know not why we should think ourselves exempt from a danger of this kind, when we consider how generally ineffectual the gospel is among us. Alas ! why should we expect God to be indulgent towards us, in this respect, above all mankind ? What have we the gospel for, if we never intend our spirits should be formed by it ? If we have no design it should govern our lives, have not we of this nation reason to

\* N. B. The author here alludes to the famous comet which appeared in December 1680 ; and perhaps at the very time when this Sermon was preached.

fear, inasmuch as we do not conform our practice to our religion, that we shall be suffered to conform our religion to our practice? We know there is a religion, too near at hand, that will allow and square well enough with the most vicious practice imaginable. Live as loosely as you will and confess your sins to a priest, and his absolution solves all. Surely we have reason to fear lest our acting contradictory to the end and design of our religion should even lead us to embrace that sottish one of the church of Rome.

---

## SERMON II\*.

---

**I**N our last discourse we considered the various reasons and inducements, that lead many persons to make a profession of religion, even while they are contradicting it in their lives and practice. To which one more might have been added; and that is, they have a foolish thought that by the good they profess, they shall some way or other expiate the badness of their conduct. Such a hope as this, as fond as it is, too apparently obtains with a great part of the world. And this I mention, not only as a thing too evident, and considerable in itself, but as it most fitly leads to what I intend in this discourse: which is,

IV. To shew the vanity of such a profession, and by consequence the fondness and folly of such a hope as is here spoken of. And in treating on this subject I shall shew, that such a profession in persons of so immoral a character, signifies nothing either to procure them the reputation, or the rewards of the religion that they profess, or unto which they pretend; I would be understood to say, that it is of no avail to entitle them to the reputation of it amongst men, nor to any reward of it from God. These two things we shall distinctly consider.

\* Preached January 23, 1680.

1. Such a blasted, self-confuted profession as this, of which we are speaking, is of no significancy for securing the reputation of being religious amongst men. If it were indeed so far available as to secure them such a reputation, or to procure them that esteem from men, which is due to those who are in reality, what they profess themselves to be, that would be but a poor thing, and very little to their service. It is a small thing, says the apostle St. Paul, to be judged by man's judgment, 1 Cor. 4. 3. All must finally stand or fall, by the judgment of a superior Judge, whose judgment will controul and reverse all false judgments passed before. Every man must then give an account of himself to God. He is not a jew who is one outwardly, but he is a jew that is one inwardly, whose praise is not of men, but of God, Rom. 2. 28, 29. If one could never so effectually recommend one's self to man, it is "not he who commendeth himself, that is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." 2 Cor. 10. 18. And therefore I should not think this much worth insisting on, but only with design to lay the ground of an argument from the less to the greater: that if such a profession of religion cannot do that which is less, to wit, entitle one to the reputation of it amongst men; much less can it do that which is greater, that is, procure the rewards, which God has promised to the constant and sincere.

We must understand here, that by such evil practices, as can be supposed to overthrow a profession, and annul the significance of it, cannot be meant such things as are reasonable to be imputed to the infirmities which are incident to the best, and consistent with the most perfect human character: but it must be understood of open hostilities against Christ and his religion; for doubtless the words abominable, and disobedient or unpersuadable, as the word *απειθεϊς*. signifies, amount to so much. By the former is to be understood, the heinousness, and grossness of their wickedness; and by the latter, their obstinacy in an evil course. It is true, though the last expression the apostle makes use of in describing the persons whom he censures as reprobate to every good work, denotes an evil habit of mind, not always falling under human cognizance and censure; yet there is enough in the two former, besides the symptoms there may be of the latter, to shew what the men really are. A profession therefore, I say, in men of such a character, can signify nothing, even to this lower purpose, that is, to entitle them to the reputation of religion amongst men. And this will appear from being viewed in several lights.

(1.) Such a contradicted profession is not wont to do so in.

other cases. No man can take him to be a friend, who calls himself one against a continued series of actions, which manifestly import habitual hatred, enmity, and malice. No one will call him a good subject, whatever he pretends, who is at present in open hostility against his prince.

(2.) Such a profession in other cases not only gives no reputation amongst men, but brings a disgrace, and casts a reproach upon the person making pretences. When a man's actions are continued, palpable and manifest against his profession, as in this case, it brings, I say, a reproach upon him for pretending to it. And it is so far from being to his reputation that he draws upon himself the suspicion of being either false, or foolish: of being false, that he would design to deceive; of being foolish, that he could hope to succeed in such a case, or, indeed, of both these together.

(3.) A mere profession among men, in every common case, is so far from securing reputation to him who makes it, that it even sinks the reputation of the man that credits it. A very judicious person this to be so easily imposed upon! Therefore he who attempts in such a way to impose upon another, either he, upon whom he makes the attempt, will but regard him as a fool; or will be so accounted himself, because it is supposing him to be one who is capable of being so imposed upon. Which is no less than an attempt to blast the reputation of him, whom he endeavours to deceive.

(4.) A series or course of actions is always to be taken as more significant and expressive of the habitual sense and temper of a person's mind, than words can be thought to be. Words only speak a man's present sense of things, but a continued course of actions shews his habitual sense of them; and is therefore the far greater, and more considerable thing on all accounts.

If I am to form a judgment of another man, it is of more importance to know what the bent of his mind is now, than to know what it was, at this or that particular time. It is manifest that a series of actions is more significant and expressive; whether you compare words and actions together with relation to the same thing, or apply them severally to contrary things.

If you apply words and actions to one and the same thing, let it be for instance to kindness and good-will: suppose then you have for your object a very indigent and distressed person, one exposed to cold and pinched with hunger; let one say to him in this case, "Come be filled, be warmed;" pray what would that signify in comparison of giving him the things which are needful for the body, as the apostle speaks in the



same case. Jam. 2. 16. Which is the most significant expression, such fair words, or such effectual actions?

Again; Let words and actions be applied together to the same thing and to signify ill-will. An unkind word may signify but a sudden passion, and no one will infer habitual hatred from an angry word: but a course of actions may import not only unkindness, but a malicious temper of mind.

Then if we apply these two ways of expressing a man's mind, that is, words and actions, to contraries, the one to signify kindness, the other unkindness; if it be manifest that words are less significant and actions more, surely then that which has less significance in it, is never to be believed against that which has greater. Again,

(5.) No man's words are to be believed against his works. If a man should say and unsay the same things, it may be a hundred times in a day, would you give any credit at all to his words? It is impossible you should. For in any case where I am to exercise human faith, if there be much to be said for and against the thing, I must believe, according to the greater evidence, and cannot do otherwise; I necessarily must take that side in my belief on which the stronger probability lies. But in this case what shall I do? I can here take neither side: for how can a thing be greater or better than itself? I have therefore nothing to do here. I can exercise no faith; for I am not to believe a man's word against his word; when there is equal evidence on the one hand and the other. I am much less to believe his word against his actions, for that would be believing according to the less evidence. And further,

(6.) If a profession were to prevail amongst men, against a series of actions, it would take away the ground and foundations of all public human judgments. For suppose a man arraigned of murder, the business to be inquired into is, what evidence there is of malice prepense. This is the matter to be tried. For the bare taking away the life of a man, is not the crime to be punished. But the thing to be inquired into is, what evidence there is, or what inducements to believe that the thing was designed or purposely done. If against plain facts, and apparent circumstances, to the contrary a man's word should be believed, there could then be no such thing as a human judicature in the world.

(7.) Actions cannot be opposed to a mere verbal or a scenical profession, with greater absurdity, in any case whatsoever, than in the matter of religion. You can suppose no case wherein actions can be opposed to actions, and words or a profession to a course of actions with greater absurdity than in this present case. If we were to think of things manifestly absurd,

we could advance nothing that is more so. Suppose, for instance, a person upon a journey should pretend to be in his right road, and he is told he is going a quite contrary way, and one should follow him, from day to day, and still see him going wrong, though he still says he is on his journey and is going right; what can be more absurd? Now let us use our understanding and consider, whether there be not as ridiculous an absurdity in pretending to religion, against a series of actions, which have a contrary tendency. Do we not all know that religion, in the common notion of it, has a tendency to blessedness; even to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever in glory, as the end? Can there be a greater contrariety supposed in any one thing to another, than there is in a course of wickedness to the glorifying and enjoying God? Or can any man think, without as palpable absurdity as is possible in any case, that whoredom, drunkenness and debaucheries of all sorts, are means and instruments for the glorifying God, and saving a man's own soul? To say, I am a christian, is to say, I am going to God, to glorify, to enjoy him for ever. But you can suppose no case wherein contrary actions can be opposed to a profession, with more absurdity than in this.

(8.) We are expressly forbidden, in the Holy Scriptures, to treat, and behave ourselves towards christians that are only so in name and profession, in the same manner as we are obliged to act towards those that are sincere. We are even directed to turn away from those who have a form of godliness but deny the power of it. 2 Tim. 3, 5. When persons are unpersuadable and obstinate in an evil way and vicious course, and will not hear the church they are to be counted as heathens and publicans, (Matt. 18, 17.) and are not to enjoy the reputation of christians, even amongst men, according to the law and judgment of Christ himself in this very matter.

(9.) And lastly. The common profession of religion, in which they seem to bear a part, suffers by their inconsistent conduct and behaviour; and it is very unreasonable, therefore, they should gain by it. They would gain honour from the profession of Christianity, and yet bring a reproach and scandal upon it. And is it to be supposed that their profession, in such a case, should honour them? They do the greatest indignity imaginable to the worthy name which they profess; nay it is blasphemed by them, and through their means is evil spoken of by others.

But yet it may be said, as to all this; "Are we not then to call such christians as profess themselves to be such? Are we not to give them the name?" Truly controversies about names are always to little purpose. It is no great matter by what

name such persons are called. I am willing to give them all that their profession reasonably can be understood to entitle them to. They are by profession christians. But what can that signify to any man's being in reality what he does profess himself to be? I will therefore say, such a one is a professing christian; and what can they make of this? What advantage is it? They are called christians, just with the same propriety that you would call the picture of a man, a man. Though perhaps not altogether with that propriety neither; for truly a good picture is more like a man, than such persons are like real christians. It is a very bad picture indeed, that would not be more like the person it pretends to represent, than many such men are to true, sincere christians. Possibly we may call the carcass of a man, a man, when it is rotten and stinking. "Such a man (you say) lies buried there;" but you know very well that the corpse is not the person himself. And yet there is more propriety in using such language in this case; because such a one was a man, but he whom we speak of never was a christian, and God only knows whether he ever will be one!

We call such persons christians, in like manner as in a play, or theatrical representation. One we call the Grand Seigneur, and another an Emperor, according to the parts they act. In this manner, I say, we may call the persons before spoken of, christians; for they perform a part, and make a shew on the stage of the world in performing cheap and easy acts of Christianity. Or it is something like the compliments of one person to another, to whom he would pretend friendship; and under that pretence hides the greatest malice, till he can have an opportunity of shewing it with effect.

Now if such a profession as we have been speaking of, will signify so little to the purpose mentioned in the beginning of this discourse, the giving of a man the reputation of being religious among men; how much less can it signify to that higher purpose, and entitling him to a reward from God? Surely it is less possible to deceive him. And whatever advantage is gained in this world by such an empty, inconsistent profession, it is infinitely less than the final reward of God, which will be given to those, who both profess and practice religion in sincerity.

But before I proceed to this important point, suffer me to exhort you all seriously to consider of something better, than such an empty, self-confuted profession as this, to be a support to you, in such a time as we have lying before us. Surely, in a season of distress, there are no sort of persons whose case is to be lamented so much as theirs, who have nothing

for a support but only this pitiful thing, this empty, self-confuted thing, we have been speaking of. Oh! the cold comfort it will give a man's heart, when he comes to suffer affliction, to say, "I have been called a christian and a protestant; I have professed on the right side, and have gone on in the right way; but, alas! all the while have been fighting against the very design of the religion I have professed, by a contrary life and conversation!" Will this bear up the sinking heart of such a one in a season, when the guilt of his former course, through a long tract of time under the gospel, stares him all at once in the face?

Labour then to do more than barely to profess to know God; since a bare profession will signify nothing with him, and but little with men. And truly it must signify very little to yourselves, to your own comfort and consolation in an evil day; when gloominess, blackness and darkness cover all on every side. There may then possibly, if such a time should come, be room enough for consideration. Labour therefore to know God in good earnest. They that know his name, will put their trust in him. Psal. 9, 10. To have such a refuge as the eye of God in such a world as this is, what solace and satisfaction does it give the soul of a man! especially when there is nothing but darkness and terror on every hand.

To conclude, I shall only take notice to you of one passage in the book of Daniel. "And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he (the king there spoken of) corrupt by flatteries; but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits" or wonders, Dan. 11.32. These passages refer to the time, when Antiochus fell with fury upon the Jews. A great many of them, when the aspect of the times was frowning upon their religion, did then prevaricate, and do wickedly against the covenant; that is, turned from their religion and complied with his idolatry; but of such of the people as knew their God, it is said, that they should be strong and do exploits. It is a great matter to know God in such a time. He that has the knowledge of God possessing and filling his soul, will have God represented to him as *the all in all*; and this whole world will be before him, as a vain shadow, a piece of pagantry, a dream, a vision of the night. He who is invisible will be always with us, when we once come to be of the number of those who know God, in the manner we profess to do it.

## SERMON III\*.

---

2. **I** now proceed to shew, that a bare profession of religion cannot entitle any one to the rewards of it with God. And the argument is capable of being drawn, as was formerly intimated, from the less to the greater. If it cannot entitle one to a reputation amongst men, much less can it to the reward of it with God. And it will be conclusive two ways. In the first place, that the gain and advantage of the rewards of it with God, is unspeakably greater, than the reputation it can give us among men. If then it cannot entitle one to the less, it cannot to the greater. And then in the next place, that to deceive men, by such a profession, is infinitely less difficult than to deceive God. They who cannot deceive men by such a profession, joined with a practice so grossly wicked as is here expressed by the apostle, can surely much less deceive God. There is, even in the minds of men, a judgment concerning them contrary to that profession: "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, there is no fear of God before his eyes."† It speaks that language, carries that signification with it in the mind and judgment of any common observing spectator. What senti-

\* Preached February 13, 1680. † Ps. 36. 1.

timent then must it beget in the mind of God, who sees immediately, and without the intervention of any argument, beholding things just as they lie in themselves! But besides this double argument, from the less to the greater, there are several other considerations, that will evince the same thing. As,

(1.) It is the declared rule of God's righteous judgment, to deal with men finally according to their works, and not merely according to their profession; according to what they do, and not to what they pretend. It is the constant tenour of Scripture, (of which you cannot be ignorant who are wont to read your bibles) that God will in the last day, "render to every man according to his works,"\* as it is in sundry places. And in the epistles to the Asian churches, our Saviour putting on the person of a judge, thus addresses himself to the one and the other of them; "I know thy works."† Immediate cognizance is taken of them, even of those which are most latent; much more of those which are apparent and manifest, as the works we have spoken of, are. Upon this account he makes himself known to them by the description of one "who trieth the heart, and searches the reins, that he may render to every one according to their works."‡ And he is further represented as one who has "eyes as a flame of fire,"§ searching into the very things wherein it takes place. And we are told that in that very day, it is not the saying unto him, "Lord! Lord! that shall entitle any one to the kingdom of heaven; but the doing of the will of God the Father who is in heaven."§ Where our Saviour also further assures us, that those who shall make this profession, without a suitable life and conversation, will be rejected in this awful manner, "Depart from me! I know you not."||| But under what notion, or for what reason, are they thus to be abandoned? As workers of iniquity. Thus we see their evil works will cast the balance against all their pretences to that which is good.

(2.) We are further to consider, that it is an unreasonable thing to imagine, that God will give men a title, without giving them a capacity for enjoying the rewards of the blessed state. Certain it is, that mere profession qualifies no one for this happiness; therefore it is not reasonable, that it should entitle any one to it. A man is never a whit the more capable by his profession of dwelling with God, in another world; of immediately beholding with satisfaction his blessed, glorious face. To what purpose is a title, where there is no capacity? It would not consist with the wisdom of God, to divide these

\* Rom. 2. 6. † Rev. 2. 2, 9, 13, 19. ‡ Rev. 2. 23. || Rev. 2. 18. § Mat. 7. 21. ||| Ver. 23.

things, which must necessarily concur to one end, namely, to his own glory, and the person's fitness for the enjoyment of Him. Men are wont to be wiser. A title with them fails, when a capacity does. They cease to be entitled to an estate, who by a natural incapacity cannot enjoy it, as for instance, fools and lunatics. Again,

(3.) Their profession is so far from entitling them to the rewards of another world, which belong to those who are sincerely of the true religion; that, being joined with a wicked life and evil practices, it provokes God so much the more highly against them, engages the divine wrath and vindictive justice, so much the more directly to their ruin. And this on several accounts. As,

[1.] Because such a profession demonstrates, that these persons sin against so much the more light; otherwise what makes them profess at all? They who profess religion, as a great part of the world do not, certainly must be supposed to know more. We do not call them professors of the Christian religion, who were born among pagans, and always have lived as such among them. They who profess Christianity, are supposed to live (and do so for the most part) in the enlightened region; in that part of the world through which the gospel-light hath diffused itself. This is therefore a most horrid thing, for the works of darkness, and of the night, to be transacted, where the gospel has made it broad day. And if they, who have opportunity to know more than others, are after all, vicious and immoral, doth not this highly increase their wickedness? Will not this inflame the wrath of God much more against them? And if, in fact, they do know more, is not the provocation the greater? Men certainly know something of what they profess, more or less. For as there is not in the natural world, so neither is there in the moral, any such thing as pure and absolute darkness. And when light shines round a man, it makes him the more deeply guilty, that he can find nothing else to do but to commit wickedness. Light got within! What an aggravation is that of a man's iniquities, or the works of darkness! Light shines in his judgment and conscience! Divine and merciful light projects its beams from above into his very soul, where it is held in unrighteousness! This is that which wrath flames against, even the wrath of God; which "is revealed from heaven against the ungodliness and iniquity of men, who hold the truth of God in unrighteousness." Rom. 1. 18. This is most highly provoking, that where divine truth might expect to find a throne, there it should find only a prison. And therefore, what can ensue upon this, but tribulation and anguish, instead of a reward? It is to him

who knows his master's will and does it not, that many stripes do belong, Luke 12. 47. In like manner, we find the apostle James speaking, "To him that knoweth to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin," Jam. 4. 17. And our Saviour saith thus to the pharisees, "If ye were blind ye should have no sin : but now ye say you see, therefore your sin remaineth." John 9. 40, 41. What ! "are we blind also?" say the rulers. They took it for a great reproach not to be thought very discerning. But, says our Lord, "It had been well for you if you had been blind ; for since you are so knowing, your sin remains, and you are absolutely inexcusable."

[2.] It follows of consequence, that they sin with malice who can allow themselves to join wickedness with their profession ; and outface, as it were, the light of that truth, which directly teaches them otherwise. For, in the case now supposed, the interest of Christ and his religion has already, as it were, fought its way through all the outworks ; and there is now no further opposition but the fortress of the heart, the seat of love or hatred, of kind propensity and inclination to God and Christ, or of enmity and malice to them. The business now lies wholly at the door of the will. By how much the more of the will, by so much the more of enmity and malice there is in sinning. By how much the more of light, so much the more of will ; and the more profession there is, so much the more of light. In this series do these things lie. "If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there is no more sacrifice for sin." Heb. 10. 26. If you sin against this sacrifice, you are not to expect another. Your peace therefore is to be made this way, or not at all. And when a man's knowledge, as well as his profession, is against him ; and his opposition to God and the design of Christianity is resolved into nothing, but mere will ; there is not the least pretence, or the shadow of a reason left to justify his conduct. All things that could have induced me to be at all a christian, should also have induced me to be a true christian. For there can be no reason brought that a man should be a christian in profession, but the same reason will be equally conclusive that he should be one in reality, and in truth. And therefore, when reason, judgment, conscience and profession, go together and are all on one side, how miserably exposed and naked is such a person, who does not fall in cordially with God, in a way of holiness, because he will not ! It is with them as with the Jews to whom our Lord says, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." John 5. 40.

[3.] It must be the more provoking, because there is hypocrisy in this conjunction. It cannot be without hypocrisy, that



a man should lead a wicked life, and yet profess the true religion. It is very true, it looks like a very gross sort of hypocrisy, that persons should profess religion, and yet lead such lives as are visibly abominable. It is not indeed of the finer sort of hypocrisy; but by how much the grosser it is, by so much the more insolent it is. The affront is the greater, that a man should sin even in the face of heaven itself, and commit such wickedness as all the world will cry shame of, and this under the cloak of profession. Again,

[4.] There is most perfidious falsehood, and treachery in such a conduct; and therefore it must be the more provoking. For, in this case, men not only sin against law, since all sin is against law, "for where there is no law there is no transgression," (Rom. 4. 15.) but against the covenant too. They who profess to know God, as we have said again and again, profess to be christians. If such therefore lead wicked and immoral lives, they sin as well against the covenant as the law; and in their way of sinning, there is treachery both against Christ, and the God of heaven.

The covenant betwixt God and his people, who are visibly related to him, is illustrated in Scripture by the marriage contract. And those who break it, God threatens "he will judge, as they who break wedlock are judged, with fury and jealousy," Ezek. 16. 38. Now jealousy is allowed to be the most fervent of all the passions; and distinguished from common wrath and anger, even by this peculiar consideration in the object, the being thus related. And it is observable in what style he speaks afterward. Having discarded his people and cast them off, that they should be no longer related to him; "then," says he, "I will make my fury towards thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee," (ver. 42.) that is, to cease for ever. Thus we see the relation being dissolved, they are no longer the objects of jealousy. Indeed while they continue a professing people there is a visible relation, and consequently they are objects of jealousy; but when the injured party has sufficiently vindicated himself, this vindictive passion ceases; and whatever anger and resentment may remain, it is jealousy no longer. Again,

[5.] They who join a religious profession and wicked practices together most highly provoke God; because they sin with the highest indignity against God, against Christ, and the religion which they profess. And it is very plain that they do so, in as much as herein they both mock God, and misrepresent him. They mock his sovereignty, and misrepresent his holiness. It is a plain mockery to him, as he is the Ruler of the world. For men to profess to know God, to own him as their

God, and yet visibly to affront him by the most insolent wickedness ; what is this like, but putting on the purple robe, and saying, "Hail Master !" and spitting in his face at the same time ? It is in a case similar to this, namely, that a man's reaping according to what he sows, that the apostle warns christians not to deceive themselves. For says he, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked ; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," (Gal. 6. 7.) intimating that they would be greatly deceived, if they expected to reap the reward of eternal life.

Moreover, such a conduct is a horrid misrepresentation of God, particularly as to his holiness ; as if he were one who could dispense with his injunctions to men of being really holy, and sincerely good, and be satisfied instead thereof with appearances, with mere shew and pretence. A most odious representation of God, as if he were like the impure deities of the pagan world ! You see with what severity he himself speaks in a case like this ; "Take heed," says he, "lest there should be among you a man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose hearts turn away from the Lord their God—lest there be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood ; And it come to pass when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying ; I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst : The Lord will not spare him ; but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy shall smoke against that man ; and all the curses, that are written in the book, shall lie upon him ; and the Lord shall blot his name out from under heaven." Deut. 29. 18, 19, 20. Observe here the provoking thing, on which the emphasis is put. It is that a man should walk in a vain course of wickedness, and yet bless himself in his heart, and say, "I shall have peace for all this." Provoking it must be, because it is a horrid, reproachful misrepresentation of the most holy God ; as if he intended to be a patron of wickedness, or as if it were indifferent to God how men lived, or all one to him whether they were righteous or wicked. "And does the sinner indeed think so ? I will make him pay dearly for the thought ! All the peace and satisfaction that he has taken in that thought, or enjoyed in that delusive dream, shall cost him dear ! for because of this shall my jealousy smoke against him."

[6.] To join profession with such a wicked practice, is to make that very profession itself a lie ; and a lie, in this case, cannot but have high provocation in it, if you consider these things.

First. Consider it is a lie to *him* who knows it to be

so. He is an impudent liar indeed, who tells a lie to a person, whilst he himself is sensible that such person knows he lies. To come and hold forth such an appearance so flagrantly contradicted, to *one* so wise and incapable of being deceived as God is; what can be more provoking? and therefore you find that this is mentioned as the aggravating circumstance of the crime of Ananias and Sapphira; that they lied to the Holy Ghost, (Acts 5. 3.) whose eye could clearly see through every disguise. Again,

Secondly. To lie in this case must needs be very provoking, inasmuch as it carries in it an implicit denial of the omniscience of God; that is, by such a conduct I speak or do that, which is equivalent to such denial. I do indeed by my profession declare my belief, that God sees all things, and that to him nothing can be secret; but at the same time by my life and conversation, I do more strongly declare that he neither sees nor knows. And what is this but to deny God to be what he is? It is, as it were, as much as in me lies, to strike out the eye of the Deity. "Tush! He does not know, neither is there knowledge in the Most High, (Psal. 10. 11.) he forgets it or does not behold it." Strange brutishness! "He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall he not know?" Psal. 94. 10. This is to make the omniscient God like a "blind, deaf idol in a heathen temple, that hath eyes but seeth not, and ears but heareth not. Psal. 115. 4, 5. What a provocation is this! Moreover,

Thirdly. It is most repugnant to the nature of God to make this lying profession, and is therefore abominable. "To cover hatred with lying lips," says the wise man, "is abominable to the Lord. Prov. 10. 18. Even such an abomination as his very nature detests. It is against his nature to prevaricate. For though he is Almighty, yet he is pleased to have this said concerning him, again and again, in his holy word, that he cannot lie; nay it is impossible to him to do so, notwithstanding his omnipotence. It is a thing so repugnant to the true God, so contradictory to the sincerity and simplicity of the divine nature, that you can imagine nothing more hateful and provoking.

Fourthly, It is a participation of the diabolical nature to be an habitual liar in such a case as this. For we know the devil is the father of lies. "Why has Satan filled thine heart, says Peter to Ananias and Sapphira, to lie to the Holy Ghost?" Acts 5. 3. It makes a man a devil before God, when the habitual course of his profession is nothing else but a lie. And that it is a lie and ought to be so deemed by us, many passages do clearly demonstrate. "If a man say he has fellowship with

God, and walketh in darkness, he lieth and does not the truth." The man who does thus, is guilty of a lie in practice; for God is light and in him is no darkness at all. 1 John 1. 6. So that if any one professes he has fellowship with God, and yet allows himself in works of darkness, he is guilty of a practical lie. He does by his practice give the lie to his profession. The word rendered fellowship, *κοινωνία*, signifies participation and converse, but we may understand it in a greater latitude, than to signify converse with him only, since it signifies to have an interest in him, and relation to him, and is therefore of the same import with knowing God. Israel shall say "My God we know thee, but Israel hath cast off the thing that is good," Hos. 8. 2, 3. There was a laying claim to God, as if they had a part or portion in him, when there was no such thing. It was but a lie. I know the blasphemy of them who say they are jews, and are not, but do lie, Rev. 2. 9. As if our Lord had said; "I take it for a high blasphemy against me, and my name; against the religion of which I have been the Author, that such persons should pretend to be of it, or to belong to me." It is at once a scandalous lie and blasphemy itself.

Thus it appears, that they who lead such wicked, immoral lives, are so far from entitling themselves to the divine rewards by their profession, that they only expose themselves seven times more to the wrath of God, than if they had never professed at all. This effectually demonstrates, to do which was the main design of what has been hitherto said upon this subject, the vanity and folly of a mere profession of religion, without a suitable practice, let men's secret motives and views be what they will.

## SERMON IV.\*

---

**H**AVING in the foregoing discourses shewn the nature of, as well as the secret motives to, a mere profession of religion, attended with vicious practices; and also the vanity of it both with respect to God and man; I shall now by way of use draw some inferences from the whole.

1. That such as make a profession do notwithstanding their flagitious practices highly justify the religion, to which they pretend. All that has been said serves to this purpose, to let you see the excellency of religion; and to this even the very worst of men do give testimony by their profession, how inconsistent soever be their practice.

Wisdom is justified by the actions of her children, and the testimony of her very enemies. The testimony of an enemy is, of all others, the most convincing, and carries the most demonstrative evidence; because that can never be understood to come from inclination. It is a thing which deserves to be well thought of, that the very worst of men have such inward notices and sentiments of things as evidently imports, that the way they hate they cannot but in their judgment approve. Their profession is from an emanation of eternal light and truth, let into their minds and consciences. They are of such a judgment and cannot be otherwise. Light shews itself,

Preached February 20th. 1680.

and cannot but carry evidence with it. Conviction extorts profession from those, who consider the grounds upon which the truth of religion is established. So that by the way it is amazing to think, that men should hate others for practising the very things, which they themselves in their own judgment and conscience approve.

What a justification is this of religion in the sincere professors of it? One might even say it confidently to a wicked, profane, debauched christian, "Thou who hatest such and such for their strict walking, and holy conversation, they do more agree with thee, than thou dost with thyself." Thus do but take the real sentiments of the most vicious man, who is a professor of the Christian religion, and the life and conversation of the godly and virtuous man, and you will find them correspond well enough one with another. The one says in his mind, and judgment, and by his profession also, "I own it to be a very reasonable thing, that God should be loved, feared, and served above all." The other does so, and this is his practice to love and serve and fear the most high God. The one also says; "The wrath of God ought to be greatly more dreaded than the wrath of man; and that it is a matter of greater moment to please God, than all the world beside." The other actually does what the other thinks and judges he ought to do. The wicked professor, if the question be asked, will acknowledge, that it is much more considerable to him to save his soul, than to please the flesh: but the truly good man practises according to this apprehension. So that between the wicked man's notions, and the godly man's practice, there is a fair agreement; but, in the mean time, what a disagreement between the persons themselves! Thus having shewn, that persons who make a profession, do, notwithstanding their flagitious practices, highly justify the religion to which they pretend; I proceed to the next inference.

2. Whilst nominal professors justify those who are real christians, they evidently condemn themselves. Such professors as these must, of all men in the world, be the most self-condemned. "Out of thine own mouth," may it be said of them, "will I condemn thee." Luke 19. 22. And the like condemnation they may expect to hear at least out of the mouth of their Judge. "Thou knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent; Thou therefore that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?" says the apostle St. Paul, addressing himself to the Jews of this character. Rom. 2. 18.

It were a hard thing to be resolved, if we should expostulate with such persons, and demand of them; "Pray why do you

make any profession at all? what tolerable account can you give, why you profess to know God; to be of the true religion, or indeed of any religion at all?" It is true, as to some they are of the Christian religion by fate, not by choice. They are thrown upon the religion which they profess. They owe their being christians to the external circumstances of their condition. They were born in such a country, of such parents, it is the religion of the nation where they live, the religion of their ancestors, and it may be they know nothing of another. Many are christians because they cannot help it; but with others it is very plain, that their profession is the emanation of internal light; it is the genuine product of the conviction of their own consciences, that this which they profess must be the true religion. And thus surely all persons must conclude, who ever set themselves to consider seriously and impartially its evidence and internal excellence. But the greater part never do this. Whereas if any man could be brought once to consider this point, his profession would be the product of his inward light. A light perhaps too weak to govern his practice; but too strong to be expelled by force, or extinguished by his own false and delusive reasonings. They profess those things to be true, which they would be glad in their hearts were not so. And their light, though it is too weak to rule them, is not too weak to affright them. In a word, it is too strong to be mastered by any thing they themselves, or others, have to say to the contrary.

I would in this manner appeal to any such person if he hath the common understanding of a man, with reference to the great articles of his own creed. You say, you "believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." And, what! is it not most reasonable, in your own judgment and conscience, that you should do so? It may be you had rather that an article, directly opposite to this, were true. But do you think it more likely, that this world did some time or other rise up of itself, than that it was made by an almighty, wise, invisible Being? You say, you profess to "believe in his Son Jesus Christ your Lord." And is not this, if the matter be examined, far more reasonable to believe, that Jesus is the Son of God, and is in right and title your Lord; than that he was mortal, and came into the world to cheat mankind? Is it more likely that the gospel, of which he was the Author, was all a cheat? that his religion, which was sealed by so numerous and glorious miracles, and brought down to our knowledge in such unquestionable records, was an imposture? Is it likely, when he had "witnessed that good confession before Pontius Pilate," that he sealed it with his blood to deceive the world, or that he died only to mock mankind? If men would consider,

their profession would certainly be the emanation of their light, and the conviction they have of the truth of what they profess. They must however be sensible, that this profession is a standing testimony against them. Nay, though they profess they know not what, nor consider the grounds and reasons of it, yet they are self-condemned.

But why do they profess, if they do not understand? Why do they not understand what they may? They profess they know God. Either they do know him, or they know him not. If they do not, why do they profess at all? If they do know him to be God, what a soul-commanding thought should that be! "In Judah is God known, and his name is great in Israel." Psalm 76. 1. Has not Israel known God? A thing not to be imagined, that he should be ignorant of him. We have then, for the most part, the seminal principles of true religion; which only need to be reflected on, to enable us to discern how reasonable and coherent a frame that of the Christian religion is. Which when we come to apprehend it, and consider its excellent nature, the more we find it deserves to be considered; and, of consequence, professing with the more knowledge, the greater must our condemnation be, if our lives are repugnant to it. For can any man believe these two things, that there is a God who made heaven and earth, and that Jesus Christ is his own Son; and after that believe that it is more reasonable to disobey, than to obey that great God; or be subject to him, who bought us with his blood, and purchased to himself a dominion over them and all mankind? I would fain see the man, and hear what he could say for himself, who professing to believe, that there is one Creator of all things, and one Redeemer, who has procured to himself a dominion over all by his death, shall say, "I hold all this; but I will withal hold, that it is a great deal more reasonable to affront than to obey them." What man would dare to say so? Who can believe there is such a God, who, by the right of creation and redemption, claims a governing power over them; and yet imagine that it can be safe for them to live in open hostilities against so rightful a dominion and irresistible power? In a word, who can say, "I believe there is a judgment to come, but I have no need to prepare for it? It is full as safe to put all to the venture, as to prepare that it may go well with me in that day."

All these things considered, what self-condemning creatures must these professors be! especially when the secrets of all hearts must be opened, and all these latent sentiments be exposed to public view! How will men quake when they come to be expostulated with, by so high and indisputable an authority! when terrible majesty shall plead with them, in the



following manner! "Was that religion, which you professed, true, or was it false? If it was false, why did you profess it? If true, why did you not practise it? You either believed there was a God, or that there was none. If you believed the notion of a God was but a fancy, why did you worship him? But if you did believe there was a God, why did you not constantly obey and serve him?" Again, "Either you took Jesus Christ to be an impostor, or a Saviour and Lord. If you took him to be the former, why should you be called after his name? Why did you number yourselves among his deluded followers? But if you took him to be the Son of God, why did you not subject your will, your soul to that government of his, which he founded in his blood?" Oh! then, what a confounded creature must that be, who has lived under such a profession, and in such wickedness at the same time, all along! When such a one shall remember with regret that ever he was a christian, or that he ever heard of the name of Christ! When it shall be the matter of his too late wish, "O that I had been born a Scythian or Barbarian! That I had lived in a den or cave, and had never seen man; or had lived without having an opportunity of ever hearing that there was a God!"

3. We may further take notice, how little there is of shame and modesty left in the world, with reference to the behaviour of men towards God. We find, with relation to human affairs, and transactions with men, there is such a thing as shame; which, as bad as the world is, has a great power and influence over them. If it were not for this, the influence that shame and common decency have in the world, there would be no living; and it would be a great deal worse. If it were not a shame to lie openly drunk in the streets, wallowing in one's own vomit; if it were not a shame to commit filthiness in the sight of the sun; if it were not a shame to be unclean, or to be a thief; or if men in general had given over all regard to a good reputation among their fellow-creatures; the world would certainly abound with worse and more numerous monsters.

And this useful passion evidently influences men in this very matter of professing, as it restrains them from making professions that are not suitable to them. An ignorant plowman would be ashamed to profess himself a statesman; or a cobbler, a merchant. But how strange is it, that no modesty or shame have any influence in this case! That is, in the affairs and deportment of men towards God.

The matter is this. In reference to the things which they have to do one with another, men are awake and in their wits; but with relation to God, and the concerns of religion, they

are in a continual sleep and dream. And you know we do not use to reflect with regret upon the remarkable incongruities in our dreams. When therefore men, who connect together the most incoherent things in a dream, can do the like in matters of religion, it is very plain they are not in their wits. We reckon that none but such as are out of their wits ; none but such as are fit to be in chains and a dark room, would, in their restraint and under the rod, call themselves lords or dukes, and I know not what names besides, of the greatest sound. But I beseech you consider the case with attention. Is there not a greater disagreement between the spirit and character of a wicked man, and the names of a believer ; an heir of salvation, and an expectant of glory ? Is there not an unspeakable greater disagreement ? And yet here, men are not ashamed to profess at this rate ; to own a profession that imports them to be true believers, the sons of God, and heirs of heaven ; while they are abominable, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate.

4. It appears from hence, that there is as little fear of God among men, as there is of shame. "The wickedness of the wicked says in my heart the fear of God is not before his eyes." Psal. 36. 1. Whatever they fear, they do not fear the Almighty. They make no scruple of doing things which import an absolute denial of his existence. What a tremendous thought is this to a considering soul ! Methinks this should strike with consternation, even a soul made of earth. What ! does their practice amount to a denial of God ? O think what this imports ; what it is to deny his existence ! This is to throw all things into confusion. This is to ruin the creation, as much as in us lies ; and to take away the root of all things, and consequently the things themselves. Finally, this is to commit felony on myself and my own life. How ! art thou a man, if there be not a God ?

But it is the practical denial of God that we chiefly speak of ; a denial of his authority, and the rights of the divine government. Like Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice ?" Exod. 5. 2. This impious king speaks more according to the truth of the case, and consistently with himself, when he says, "I know him not." But so rooted is that power, and right of governing in the Godhead, and so necessarily does it result from the supposition of a God, and a reasonable creature in being ; that it is impossible there should be a denying of that governing power, without denying his being too. "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God ;" (psal. 14. 1.) that is, does not believe there is no God, so much as wish there were none.

However, in respect to men, fear has great influence. How

will it, for instance, restrain men from conspiring against the government! How are men afraid to say, or do any thing, that may admit of any such interpretation; or that looks like a design to subvert the government, under which they live! But how strange is it, that men have no fear in them with reference to the divine government, unto which they profess a subjection! Will any man look upon himself as a loyal subject, for speaking good words of the king? Especially when it could be proved, that he was forming designs against his person and authority. One would think a man's heart should never endure to think that he is liable to such a charge as this, with respect to God the King of kings. Thou, O wretch! art guilty of practically denying, and abandoning, the Author of thy life and being, the very Father of thy spirit, and him who gave thee breath. Thou hast marked thyself out as a common enemy to the creation of God. And how can that man expect to draw another breath, who breathes only by the favour of that God whom he denies?

5. As to the main purposes of religion, it is plainly no great matter, what religion a wicked man is of. It is all one whether he be of a false religion, or falsely of the true; except only that his case, on this latter account, is worse. As the apostle says, with respect to the Jews, "Circumcision profiteth, if a man keep the law; but if he break the law, his circumcision goes for uncircumcision." Rom. 2. 25. Thy baptism profits, if thou keepest the gospel; but if thou observest it not, thy baptism shall signify nothing. Though a man cannot be saved under any religion, yet he may perish under any one. What a poor pretence is it when one has nothing to trust to and rely upon, as the ground of his eternal hope, but only that he is an orthodox man! An orthodox son of this or that church! So far it is well. But what does it signify to be an orthodox drunkard, an orthodox swearer, an orthodox sabbath-breaker? If such would but admit one to reason soberly with them, I would ask them, "What! do you not believe, that holiness is as essential to Christianity, as truth? Do you not think that the decalogue is of as good authority, as the articles of your creed? is there not the same authority for the *agenda*, as there is for the *credenda* of a christian? Has not any man, that owns the Christian name, as great obligations to be pious, sober, and chaste; as he has to be true, or right in his principles?" There is certainly the same authority for the one as for the other. What does a man hope he shall gain, by tearing the essential parts of the Christian religion asunder, as much as in him lies; or by dividing Christianity from itself?

6. We see how weak a thing the light of an unregenerate person is, and how little reason such a one has to glory in his profession. How weak, I say, is this light ! too weak to restrain him from such gross inconsistencies as these are : as weak it must be, since it permits him to run into the most palpable absurdities ; and even suffers him to make a profession that he knows God, the great Lord and Ruler of all things, whilst he lives in a continual disobedience to him. With some, indeed, the knowledge of the true religion does signify more. We read of some that by the knowledge of God, have escaped the corruptions of the world, through lusts ; (2 Pet. 2. 20.) but with many others, you see their light is so impotent and inefficacious a thing, that it cannot withhold them from making beasts of themselves, instead of christians. And that is a doleful thing to think of, that a man should have light to no other purpose, than to damn him ! A light, which upon all other accounts is darkness, and makes his profession of religion so much the worse and more dangerous. To this purpose our blessed Saviour speaks, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !" Mat. 6. 23. The knowledge of some christians is no better than mere paganism. Whatever it is, they do the same things they would do if they had none. As to certain points indeed they are of such a belief ; but they walk and practise, as if they were of a quite contrary faith. How weak then is their light, and how deplorable is the case of such men !

Do we not see then how little they have to boast of ? Such a profession as this is can surely be a matter of no glory to them. Nor is to be accounted so, any more than we would esteem the title of lord or knight, a glory to the man who is forced to go naked or in filthy rags every day. So they walk in their nakedness, like accursed creatures ; as they are implied to be by the blessing which is pronounced on those, who keep their garments so, as that their nakedness may not appear. Rev. 16. 15. It is but a poor glory, and empty honour to be called christians on such terms !

7. We farther learn, how mysterious a piece of self-contradiction such a wicked professor is, and how unhappy his condition must necessarily be. A christian, of an unchanged heart and vicious life, has one and the same object of worship and contempt. It is a strange kind of monster that this must needs be. No eye hath ever seen any thing more monstrous ! Having the head and face of a christian, joined with the hands and heart of an atheist. So true and pertinent was the saying of a noble Italian lord, "That there is no monster in all the world, worse than a speculative atheist, except one ; and that

is the practical atheist, who is the more horrid monster of the two."

How unhappy then must such a person be! To every good work reprobate, and yet a professor! How uneasy must his life be, who must do many things, which, in substance are good works, that he may keep up the shew of religion, let them be never so much his aversion! How uneasy a life, I say, is this to go against the grain, and to do things in a continued course for which a man has no heart nor relish! To come into the assemblies of God's people when he had rather be somewhere else; and many other such like things must he do to keep up a profession. This is indeed a most grievous thing, for a man to have only an artificial religion, which proceeds from no vital principle, and perfectly disagrees to the habit of his soul, and the bent and temper of his heart. And that a man should toil at it all his days, is a sad case; especially when it is considered, that it is but for a shadow, for that which will turn to no account, or rather to a heavy one.

8. Lastly. We see hence the necessity of renewing grace. This is absolutely necessary, not only to reconcile man to God, but also to reconcile him to himself: to make the man to agree with himself; who without the grace and spirit of regeneration, neither agrees with God, nor his own soul. He fights with heaven, and his whole life is a continual fighting against himself. He practises wickedly against his profession of godliness; directly contrary to all his worship and his own prayers. Methinks therefore, this should make such a man long to feel the power of regenerating grace, that he may bring things to an agreement between God and himself. For the light which makes him profess, does not govern his practice. It is too weak, as you have seen, and insufficient for this purpose. There needs something more to change him, and to give him a right spirit; and when that is done, then all will be well. Then he can take pleasure in God, his worship and converse, and to no good work will he be reprobate any more.

But here a great *question* might arise; to wit, "What should a man do in the mean time, who has not attained, as yet, the regenerating grace of the Spirit of Christ? Is it not better (that so there may be a greater harmony of things) that he should give over professing, since he has only that in his own power? For it is in his power to give up his profession, though not to change his heart and life. Or, at least, should he not do so till there be a change, that may bring his profession and the course of his walking, to a perfect consistence and agreement with one another?" To this I answer briefly:

(1.) Whereas there must be a change in order to an agreement

between profession and practice, certainly that must be changed which is wrong. It is very evident the change ought to be where the fault is. He professes a religion which is true; the alteration then must not be there, but in his spirit and his course, which are wrong. And,

(2.) As the question supposes the laying down a profession as being in one's own power, there must and ought to be a greater regard here to moral power than natural; that is, to what I may do, rather than to what I can do. There is nothing truly possible to me, but what is lawfully possible. And so it is not in my power to go and profess a false religion, and abandon the true.

(3.) That till there be a change made it is better to give over professing and the like, is to talk impertinently; because there is no moment of time, wherein it is permitted to live in an unconverted state. Do we think it lawful for us, so much as one moment, to live in rebellion against God, and his Son Jesus Christ? And therefore,

(4.) That power we want must be sought for, and that immediately; and be prayed for with an earnestness suitable to the exigence of the case: saying, "Lord I am a monster, as true as I am a man amongst men! I shall be a lost creature, till I am changed!" Therefore do not talk of laying down your profession a moment; because you do not know but divine grace may set all right in the next: only there should be a looking up to heaven, with a continual fervent desire of it. And methinks no one, who sees cause enough to suspect his case to be bad, should go away without lifting up a craving eye to God for assistance; saying, "Lord! for that grace that may work this necessary change! That may change me from being a self-repugnant creature, and liable to thy wrath; to a happy consistency with myself, and a meetness to enjoy thy rewards, and the inheritance of the saints in light!"

And, to conclude, what obligation to thankfulness and praise lies upon those, whom the grace of God has brought matters to a blessed agreement with themselves! So that their continual profession is the product of a new nature; and their habitual temper and practice ever harmonious and consistent with it. Oh what a blessed case is this!

## SERMON V.\*

---

**WE** have, in the foregoing discourses, already shewn in the general, that men may profess the true religion, and yet lead very wicked lives; be “abominable, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate:” and of consequence, that they who do so, may be said by just interpretation to deny the religion they profess.

From these two propositions connected together, we have shewn, what sort of profession is here meant; what the persons who make it, may be notwithstanding as to their moral character; moreover, whence it is that any man should make a profession of religion, when the temper of his spirit, and the whole course of his practice are sorepugnant to it; and finally, the folly and vanity of all this have been largely shewn, both with respect to God and men: inasmuch as, by this means, men do not acquire the reputation of being what they would be thought to be, that is religious; nor have any share in the divine rewards of religion, in the future state. To all which have been subjoined several important inferences and useful reflections. But there is yet further use to be made, partly for the detection and conviction of such as do vainly profess; and partly for direction, that we ourselves may not do so. If it

\* Preached March 27, 1681.

then be asked, "What sort of persons are they, who may be understood to overthrow their profession, and to make it a mere nullity, or of no significance?" I answer; that though there are indeed sundry sorts of professors, who may be said so to do, yet all are reducible to these two general heads.

I. Such as do profess the true religion, but so falsified and corrupted, as that the very object of their profession is strangely altered from itself. They profess what, originally, was the true religion; but as they profess it, it is not true. Or else,

II. Such as do profess what is actually, even still the true religion, but do it very untruly; that is, are not sincere in that profession.

I. The first sort of persons in the Christian world, who may be said to overthrow their profession, and to make it a mere nullity, are those who profess the true religion, but greatly falsified and adulterated: that is, they profess what, originally, was the true religion; but as they profess it, it is not true.

Now, though this class is capable of sundry subdivisions, yet since our part of Christendom is generally divided into those who are of the Roman communion, and those who protest against it, I shall only speak of them; that is, of those who call themselves catholics: and not of all them neither; but only of such, as do practically hold such principles, superadded to pure Christianity, as must necessarily make it another religion. I mean, when they hold such principles practically, as corrupt the true, simple Christian religion, or the genuine gospel of Christ, as it was delivered by him and his apostles. For indeed amongst those who are members of the church of Rome, not only charity, but justice obliges us to distinguish thus far: that, as it is possible for a man to hold very good principles, which have no good influence upon his spirit and practice; so it is possible also, that men may in speculation hold some very bad principles, which have not that poisonous influence on their spirit and practice, to which they naturally tend. And therefore, if what is the substance of the Christian religion be found in them, notwithstanding many corrupt additions and gross falsehoods; if by the special favour and grace of God the true Christian principles only, become impressive on them, and the false corruptive ones not so, which are of human invention; these are an exempt sort of persons, whom I have nothing to do with in the present case.

But because I must be within those limits, which it is fit the text should prescribe to me, I shall only treat upon one principle, which is practial, as we have reason to apprehend, with multitudes of that communion: and which the very terms of the text do lead us to take notice of. "They profess to know



God, but in works they deny him." So, in like manner, those, whom I allude to of the church of Rome, profess to know God. But what God is it? Who, or what is that God which they practically own? Is it not another than the true and living God, whom they practically acknowledge as such? It is well if it be not so, with the generality of that way and persuasion! I mean that very God, of whom you have a description given by St. Paul, in his second epistle to the Thessalonians: namely, "the man of sin, the son of perdition: who exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." They do profess indeed to know the living and true God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: but the God whom they practically own, serve and obey, is this same God that is here referred to by the apostle. Their god is a man, and that man a monster of men. In respect of pride and malice, more a devil than a man. In respect of sensuality and impurity, more a beast than a man; as you know he is so called in the Holy Scriptures.

This is actually the God, who is practically acknowledged as such by too great a number of professing christians in the world. The principle therefore I now insist upon, is the ascribing a divinity to that creature, whether it be one single person, or a succession of persons, or a community according to some. This principle so far as it is practical, and governs their religion, makes it quite another thing than what it truly and really is in its original purity. And though it be very true, they will tell you, that they only intend or mean an underdeity, or a vicarious sort of godhead, which they place in this creature; and so think to salve the matter by alleging, that they do not idolize nor deify him; I therefore desire the following things may be considered.

1. That if it should be said, it is only a vicegerency which they ascribe to this same god of theirs, yet if their hearts terminate on him whom they call vicegerent, and their religion is carried no higher, this is to deify him as much as in them lies. What does it signify to acknowledge in speculation one superior to him, while in a practical sense their minds and hearts, and the sum of their religion, do centre and terminate here? As to multitudes of those who call themselves catholics, they trust in no higher object than the pope. All their reliance for pardon and salvation is ultimately on him, and all their obedience and subjection terminates on him. To call him therefore vicegerent only, when he is practically made the ultimate object of their religion, does not salve the matter at all.

2. I say further and inquire, Where is their charter for this vicegerency? If they call him God's vicegerent, who has nothing to shew for it, and so accordingly place a religious trust in him, what does it signify to say, that the respect and honour they pay to him is as to God's vicegerent? If a man should pretend to be for the king, while he really rebels against him, will that pretence be any excuse for me, if I fall in with them who are under this leader? There wants so much as a colourable pretence for this vicegerency. It would make some blush, others laugh to hear the allegations they bring for it. How weak are some! how ridiculous are others! how remote, absurd, and insignificant are they all indeed taken together! That passage, for instance, the words of our Lord to Peter upon his remarkable confession of his Messiahship is much insisted upon: to wit, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Matt. 16. 18. 19. But how this should signify any thing to the popedom, I cannot conceive. What a strange fetch must it be to imagine any thing in such a passage to this purpose! No more power was given to him than what was given to the rest of the apostles. For to all the apostles as well as Peter, Christ gave the power of the keys, as it is called, as appears from that parallel passage in the gospel of John; where we are told, that Christ after his resurrection "breathed upon his disciples, and said unto them all, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them: and whose soever sins ye retain they are retained." John 20. 23. Which is the same thing with saying to all the apostles, "I give unto *you* the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and what you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matt. 16. 19. That is, you acting according to the rules I left you, what you do on earth of this nature, shall be ratified in heaven too. But how impertinently is this drawn and appropriated to Rome! There is not the least mention of the grant of this power being confined to Peter, as bishop of Rome; and his successors as such. Nor is it to be imagined, what colour there should be of any reasoning from thence to this purpose, for it no more appears, that Peter was ever a settled, residing bishop at Rome, than that Paul was; who, it is most apparent, had a settled residence there. No such thing is recorded of Peter in the Holy Scriptures; and as to what is said in history on this matter, is variously disputed this way and that; though indeed it need not to be so, because it can signify nothing to the purpose. Those who say Peter was there as well as Paul, do also say, that they both suffered

martyrdom in the same year. Besides, if there were a primacy to be settled where Peter did reside, it should rather have been at Jerusalem; where it is certain he had his residence for some time, and where it is more likely he presided, than at Rome. And because it is said to Peter only, "Feed my sheep!" are we to conclude from thence, that he must be the universal bishop? Is not this charge to be considered as given to the rest of the apostles, as well as to Peter? and not only so, but to all the ministers of the gospel? So idle and trifling are these pretences to primacy for Peter, as bishop of Rome, and his successors as such!

3. They do, at least many of them, very frequently ascribe to this same god of theirs more than vicegerency, and what indeed is inconsistent with that state and character. They do it professedly; and if hereupon they do it practically, as we have great reason to apprehend multitudes may, then it is most certain that this false God of theirs, is the only object of their religion. Upon this point, because it is so much to my purpose, I shall largely insist. In the

(1.) Place, it is very apparent, that they give to this fictitious god of theirs, the titles that do peculiarly belong to the great God and his Christ. Nothing is more ordinary and common with them, than to call the pope by the titles of *beatissime* and *sanctissime Pater!* The *most blessed and most holy Father*; and other titles they are not afraid to apply to him, which the holy Scriptures give to God and his Son. A person speaking of one of the popes says, "His name is Wonderful;" assuming that which is spoken of Christ in Isaiah, Isa. 9. 6. and applying it unto him. They call him also, in express terms, the *head* of the church, the *husband* of the church, the *foundation* of the church; titles peculiarly belonging unto Christ. One says, "He is the *head, excluso Christo*;" that is, *Christ being excluded*, and without any consideration of him. "He is (saith he) the *achme*; the supreme, and *chief* of the church, *Summum caput ecclesie*, succeeding in the room of Christ; and all power is translated from Christ to him." Not derived, but transferred; as if it were removed from Christ, or as if he ceased from his primacy over the church, and transferred it himself to this vicarious God. For this they think a modest name, and that the power is lodged in him, so as to reside in Christ no longer. And hereupon, though they do speculatively own a superior head of the church, yet practically they own no higher, when this notion obtains among them. Here their religion stops. Here it seems to terminate, and to go no higher. For how little suspicion do they discover, that those sins are yet unpardoned,

which the pope pardons ! Or how little dread appears among them, of having his judgment reversed by a superior judgment ! And so they speak of this headship, which they attribute to the pope over the church, and represent it in the same manner in which it is attributed unto Christ ; that is, they say the influence of life is communicated by him to the church ; and represent it as flowing from this fictitious head of theirs. But

(2.) Such scriptures also, as speak of the dignity, power, and greatness of Christ, they do most familiarly apply to the pope ; some ridiculously, and others impiously, even to blasphemy itself. That passage in the eighth psalm, is an instance ; “Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour, and hast made him to have dominion over the works of thy hands.” This passage which the apostle applies to Christ, they apply to the pope. And it is not to be imagined with what absurdity they do minutely apply the several following particulars to his holiness. As where it is said, Thou hast given him to have dominion over the fowls of the air, by that they would have the gentiles understood ; by the oxen, they understand the jews ; by the beasts of the field, the pagans ; and by the sheep, the generality of christians ; and finally, by the fish of the sea, or whatsoever passeth through the paths thereof, which are also said to be put under his feet, they understand purgatory. So ridiculous that nothing can be more so !

But in other of their applications they are most horribly blasphemous. They have not scrupled to apply to him such passages as these ; “I will make him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth.” Psal 89. 27. Yea, and even this also, “From his fulness we have all received grace for grace,” (John 1. 16.) which some of their writers have, in express terms, applied to the pope.

(3.) Which is yet more particular, they ascribe unto him infallibility, as to all matters of faith ; which is a peculiar attribute of the Deity, as such. “He cannot err,” says one expressly concerning the pope ; “he cannot be deceived. It must be conceived concerning him that he knows all things.” Another expresses himself thus ; “He has all things in the chest, the cabinet of his own breast. He is unto all the world a living law, that cannot err ; and in which there is no obliquity :” and the like.

How very likely is it, that where this notion is prevailing, practice itself should go no higher than this notion ? How likely is it that the faith of multitudes, on this account, must terminate on this supposed infallible creature ? And so, what

comes all that religion to, which hath, as to that part of it that consists in believing, only a man for its final object, and so is made purely a human thing ?

Hereupon they resolve all the validity of the Scriptures themselves into the authority of the pope, or the church, which is much the same thing. One says, that from the church or bishop of Rome the whole book of sacred Scripture draws all its strength. And another to the same purpose, that the sacred Scripture draws all its force from the authority of the bishop or church of Rome. Finally, another is so bold as to say very profanely, that the Scriptures have no more authority than Æsop's fables, but as they derive it from the church. So that it is very plain they place Deity upon this same creature, and idol of their own making, inasmuch as they ascribe to him infallibility in all things ; which is one of the peculiar attributes of the supreme God.

(4.) They ascribe to this god, the power of forgiving sins. That none can forgive sins but God is an acknowledged principle. But this power they give to this god of theirs. One of themselves preferred to the pope such an application as this ; "Thou lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on me ! Thou lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace !" This was actually said to, and received by one of their popes. And it has been expressly taught of the papal power, with respect to this very matter ; that whereas any ordinary bishop may remit temporal punishment, the pope has power to remit eternal : and that he has more power, as to this point, than Christ hath as man. "For, (say they) Christ as man, did only procure pardon ; but the pope as a god, does give it." Again,

(5.) They attribute unto him a power of dispensing with the very law of nature. I might instance in several things that belong to each table of the decalogue. For example, they place a power in their pope to dispense with the most solemn oaths. And one positively says, "He can make perjury righteousness, if it be for any valuable purpose ; for the service of his, or the catholic cause." They say again ; "that he can dispense with any of the books of the Old Testament, because he is greater than the penmen thereof." As if they had written in their own name, or as if he could not be greater than they, in any sense, but in his wealth and wickedness.

(6.) They ascribe to the pope, what indeed he has been wont to assume to himself, a power to alter or add to the gospel. Not only to take off the obligations of the law of nature, but to mould too, as he pleases, the law of grace. A certain writer expressly says ; that in respect to this or that particular,

case, He can give another sense to the gospel. And another tells us in plain words, that he can not only interpret the gospel, but add to it. And we find that really the popes have done so. For do not they damn to hell, against the sum and the main tenour of the gospel, many good christians, merely because they will not play the idolater, nor give religious homage to this great idol the pope? And do they not profess to give a title to heaven to many a vile wretch, as wicked as any can be supposed to be? And merely on this account, because they are subject to that usurped power. What is this but to make another gospel? Christ says, "He that believes in *me* shall have eternal life." But they say, at least in their practice, "If you do not believe in the pope too, you shall not have eternal life." And whereas Christ says, "He that believeth not, shall never see the face of God;" they say, "Be he never so unholy, if he trusts in the pope, he shall be saved." And what does all this amount to, but the setting up a created thing, as the final object of religion? Is not this to dispense with all the fundamental laws of nature, and to invade the gospel of Christ? Well may it be said that this vain mortal has set up himself above all that is called God, or worshipped as God. 2 Thes. 2. 4.

Now let men profess to know the true God as long as they will, yet if they will make another god, they take away the unity which is most essential to the divine nature, and contrary to the first commandment, which runs thus; Thou shalt have no other God before *me*. Either they do this in speculation, or, which is in reality the same thing, in practice. Their faith and obedience terminate on this god. For all their professing to know God who is the Most High and Supreme above all, they at least practically deny him.

And thus far I have thought proper to insist on sundry accounts, though I may not suppose any to hear me whom this does directly concern.

[1.] That so we may all of us, who call ourselves protestants, have a deep sense on our hearts of the great mercy of God, in distinguishing our case. And

[2.] That we may be duly sensible of his mercy in preserving us from such a church, as he has hitherto done: and from such men, whose principles not only allow, but oblige them to fill the world with slaughters and blood, if there be but the least dissension from their party and interest; or if people are not entirely devoted to their way.

[3.] That we may all of us understand, what a noble cause we have to struggle for against this party of men, in this difficult time in which we live; and may see what reason we have to

“contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints,” (Jude 3.) and as it was given to them. And finally, to add no more ;

[4.] That, if ever it should be our lot to suffer by such hands, we may understand, how glorious a cause we have to suffer in ; and how much better it is to suffer by such men, than to be of them. Men ! whose religion instructs them in all impiety and vice ; and who are much worse by the influence thereof, than they would have been by mere nature. So that any impartial unconcerned person who shall consider the case, view it in every light, and take a survey of the scheme or model of their practical principles, cannot but say, “If this be Christianity, let me be an honest pagan !”

In a word : When their doctrines lead them to such things as cruel murders, injurious treacheries, and the most horrid perjuries ; when their principles rase the foundations of all human society ; or tend to make it dissolve, so as that no man knows how to trust another ; when mankind must even disband on these terms, and live in cells or dens apart by themselves, (for there can be no commerce one with another, if these principles generally obtain in the world)—I say, if this be the case, it is surely better to suffer by such men, than to be of their party. Especially if we consider how these things must needs engage heaven against them, and that divine vengeance must fall at length upon them who have profaned such a name, and so horribly pretended to Christianity, on purpose as it were to make it odious to the heathen world. “If the Christian religion,” may pagans say, “be such as these men represent it, what a strange God is their God, that will oblige them, who profess his religion, to be false, bloody, and cruel ; and all for the serving a secular interest and end !”

It is easy to apprehend the mischievous tendency of such practical principles of theirs, and how much paganism is better than their religion. How much better indeed it were to have no religion ; because, in this case, there is a coincidence of the most vicious inclinations with wicked principles. Now think what strength is added to a vicious inclination, when a principle falls in with it that shall justify it. Mere pagans do, many times it is true, transgress the law of nature ; but as the apostle tells us, it is with their consciences accusing them, (Rom. 2. 15.) or with regret. But now, when the dictates of judgment and conscience concur with men’s vicious inclinations, this is worse than it is with the heathens.

A heathen may possibly be guilty of perjury himself, but his conscience remonstrates against it, and on his own principles he is self-condemned. But when there shall be a princi-

ple which suggests to a man that it is lawful to sin, and not only so but that it is his duty to perjure himself, with how strong a stream must the current of wickedness run in the world!

And certainly at such a time as ours is, and indeed in future ages, it is to be feared, there will be this reason why such a case should be represented to the world as it is; that we may know what we have to oppose, and what it is we have to stand by in such an opposition; whether in doing or suffering, or whether with success in this world, or no. Upon these accounts I have thought it proper to insist thus far on this sort of persons, who profess the Christian religion, but corrupt and falsify it; partly speculatively, partly practically; professing to know God, while, in another sense, and more effectually a great deal, they deny the God whom they profess to own, and acknowledge.



## SERMON VI\*.

---

**I**N our former discourse we proposed to inquire, what sort of persons they are, who may be said to overthrow their profession; and to make it a mere nullity, or of no significance. Namely,

I. Such as profess the true religion, but so falsified and corrupted, as that the very object of their profession is strangely altered from itself. They profess what, originally, was the true religion; but, as they profess it, it is not true. These we have already considered.

II. I proceed now to consider the second sort of men, that were spoken of: namely, such as profess that which is most true, to wit the Christian religion in its purity; but do it most untruly, and are altogether insincere in that profession.

And, in order to this, I shall confine myself to these two heads that lie in the text, which I have doctrinally opened in a former discourse. That is, as I have already shewn, they may very truly be said to deny Him in works, whom they profess to know and acknowledge as the true God: who have, in the first place, an habitual propension to abominable wickedness; or in the next place, an habitual aversion to whatsoever is good.

1. They may be truly said to deny God in their works, though they profess to know him, who have an habitual pro-

pension to habitual wickedness. There are indeed two expressions of the apostle, that are here alluded to; namely *abominable* and *disobedient*. The former of which, as we have shewn before,\* speaks the wickedness to which such are prone; and the latter, the obstinacy of that propensity. Which is plainly signified by the word rendered *disobedient*; which we may render more emphatically *untractableness*, such as by no persuasions can be withdrawn from a wicked course.

I doubt not but there are many such persons, who because they are not of that sort which we have spoken of in the preceding discourse, but account themselves very good protestants; and are resolved, for ought they know, to continue such as long as they live, therefore conclude they are on very good terms with God. Whether there are not many who go under this honourable name, unto whom this character too much agrees, of being obstinate in a course of wickedness, you yourselves, with too much clearness may judge. However I hope, that your acquaintance does not lie with such persons, so as to have much occasion to observe their way and course; I hope, I say, it is not generally so with you. But who is there, whom common fame and common cry can suffer to be ignorant of the wickedness that lurks, yea that rages, under the very name of protestantism? Unless a man would shut himself up in a den or a cell, he cannot help knowing that there is a great deal of wickedness amongst us, which ought to go under the title of abominable: wickedness! which even protestants obstinately persist in. The horrid oaths, execrations, and blasphemies, which the tavern resound with, and of which the streets are not innocent;—the debaucheries of all sorts;—who can keep himself from knowing there are such things done and practised among those, who are concerned to maintain the name and reputation of being protestants, and value themselves upon it?

And yet it must be said, that though such wickedness be abominable, yet it is too little abominated. Those who are not themselves, it may be, guilty of such vices, are drawn into a participation of the guilt of others, in some measure, by not resenting, by not taking to heart, and by not mourning over the wickedness of the times in which they live. A way of partaking with other men's sins that is but too real, and too little thought of!

And it is well, if some do not partake of the guilt of others farther than this, that would not be thought to countenance or

\* See Page 450.

approve their wicked practices ; who yet, when they are in company with them, bear a part therein. Particularly to mention one instance, in drinking confusion to such or such a party, and the like ; as if it were the pouring in of liquor, and not the pouring out of prayer, that is the way to engage the Almighty God to be on their side. And whither does all this tend ? What seems to be the meaning and import of it but this ? That men do, as it were, set themselves to tempt or defy the justice and vengeance of heaven ! To try whether God can yet find a way to turn our houses into flaming beacons, and lay this city again in a ruinous waste ! Or to try what further stores there are yet in the armoury of God ; what furniture in his quiver, and whether he hath any more arrows to spend upon us or no ! For, to go no further than this city, I would very fain know, who that has had the opportunity to observe and take notice, can say that London is so much better now, than it was before the fire, that we have no reason to fear a repetition of any such judgment as that, or the pestilence which immediately preceded it ? Unless we will think that all things fall out by chance, or casually, or by the designs of men ; or that a just and holy God has no hand in the government of the world, and the ordering and disposing of events, which fall out in it. That calamity which brought this glorious city into dust, did not spring out of it ; neither does affliction come from thence, though it may bring us thither.

And will men think, that the name of protestant will be a protection from such severities, and awful judgments hereafter ? Why then was it not so before ? Do we imagine that Almighty God is so taken with names ; or that they are a matter of so high account with him ? Can we suppose that he will less resent, or be more patient of, affronts and contempt from a protestant ; than from a papist, or pagan ? Will not wickedness be the same thing in both ?

But perhaps some may be ready to say ; "All this is very right ; but we have more than the name of being protestants : we perform many duties that do belong to that religion." And perhaps one sort of protestants may glory and make their boast that for their parts, they are diligent in their attendance on public worship ; and devout in bearing a part in the solemnity thereof, but especially in the prayers of the church : they are very punctual in the observance of it ; missing in no point of ceremony ; keep exactly to all the modish and fashionable rites ; have their responses at their fingers ends, and the like. Another sort, it may be, boast otherwise and on different grounds ; who, thinking that this is not so sure a way, choose rather another kind of worship, which they fancy to be purer : and with great

zeal and diligence hear the preachers, that are in most vogue amongst them, and yet it may be all the while are not the better men. So prone are persons of vicious inclinations to be any thing, rather than true christians! To put on any shape, or pass under any denomination in the world, rather than admit of that one thing, called serious living Christianity!

But if we might but reason the matter here a little, I would observe, that be your denomination what it will under that general one of protestants; be the thing you profess, objectively, never so good; can you really think that such a profession of true principles, or the being of such and such a denomination, can in God's balance preponderate, and outweigh gross and abominable wickedness? Can those things singly considered, which are in themselves so light, entitle us to a greater share of the divine favour, than the people of Israel could expect? Concerning whom we find, that when they were become "a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquities, a seed of evil doers," and who upon their being "smitten more, did still revolt more and more." Isa. 1. 4. Yet although the case was thus with them, they thought to expiate all this, and to make God some great recompence and amends by their sacrifices. Wherefore these were brought upon the altar one upon another, and mighty punctual they were in observing their new moons and solemn assemblies. When the case, I say, stood thus, How does God accept the recompence? Why thus, "Bring no more," says he, "your vain oblations, your incense is an abomination to me, and your new moons and solemn assemblies: My soul hates them, I am weary to bear them." Ver. 13. 14. And to the same purpose we find it largely spoken throughout the fiftieth psalm. And how could we possibly think it should be otherwise, if we understand at all the nature of God, or the genius and design of true religion? Which, if it serve for any purpose at all, must serve for this; "to refine men's spirits, to govern their lives, to fit them for walking with God in this world, and to prepare them for the next." What serves religion for, if not for this purpose? And of what service is their religion, which is frustrated of its main design and end? Indeed, for men to take up religion for other inferior purposes, is most grossly to debase it. It is true it should serve other purposes as secondary, and subordinate to that which is the ultimate design of it; if it was only to keep up the decorum of things. But when it is made to serve inferior purposes, as if they were primary; when it is only taken up as a badge of distinction between one party of men and another, under pretence of which men are only designing to promote the

interest of a party; this frustrates its end and ultimate design. It is very true, God is pleased to twist, as it were, the interest of religion with that of a civil nature. But when this is made the chief design of the other, it is to turn it into vain idolatry; and, in effect, to disannul religion; inasmuch as all things, of moral consideration, are ever specified from the object and end.

It concerns us then to consider, how little it can avail any of us to bear such a name as we have been speaking of, if in the mean time there be a life and practice that is manifestly flagitious, and contrary in its general stream and current to the rules and design of the religion to which we pretend. Why should we think ourselves more considerable to God, or more favoured by him, than his ancient people were, namely the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? who, notwithstanding any privileges on that account, are said upon their apostacy unto wickedness to be, as the children of the Ethiopians to him; (Amos 9. 7.) that vile accursed race, the posterity of Cush, who descended from an accursed Ham.

Indeed there is little reason why their religion should at all advantage them, who do themselves most reproachfully expose and dishonour their profession. In the account of God it will be all one, protestant or no protestant, so long as men indulge to a vain wicked life. As "in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth any thing but a new creature;" (Gal. 6. 15.) so we may say, out of Christ this availeth nothing. Trojan or Tyrian will be all one, if wickedness rule and reign in the heart and life of the man. For thus the apostle Paul argues; it makes no difference in the point of acceptance with God, under the gospel dispensation, whether a man be a Jew or "Greek, Barbarian or Scythian," and the like, since "Christ is all and in all." Col. 3. 11. In which passage he may possibly refer to a Scythian, who, having an inclination to learning, betook himself to Athens, to study the principles of philosophy that were taught there. But meeting one day with a person, that very insolently upbraided him on the account of his country, he gave him this smart repartee; "True indeed it is, my country is a reproach to me; but you, for your part, are a reproach to your country." So we may say of these professors; that though their religion is no reproach to them, yet they are a shame and reproach to their religion. It is sad indeed, that so great a part of the world should lie under so gross and corrupt a religion as that is of the church of Rome, which is a brand of infamy on its professors; but it is a far worse case when men, by their vicious immoral practices, are a reproach to a better religion, as we protestants es-

teem ours to be ; which conduct God will severely punish, without doubt, another day. If Christian protestants behave as ill as vicious papists or pagans, while they carry a better name, it is likely God will distinguish them hereafter, just as they have here distinguished themselves ; that is, they shall lie under the name of protestants in hell, as others do under that of papists. If our great Redeemer and Lord command us to reckon a disorderly christian, who is obstinate in his wickedness, as a heathen and a publican ; (Mat. 18. 17.) pray what do you think, he will account of them himself in the great day ? Will he have us more strictly righteous, or equitable, than he himself intends to be ?

It may perhaps here be said upon all this, “It is very true ; it cannot but be acknowledged, when men make such a profession, and are of so bad lives, they greatly dishonour their religion, and unquestionably expose themselves to greater degrees of divine vengeance than others. Yet is it not hard to judge so ill of the case, as to say, these men deny their God ? They do indeed what must be owned to be very bad ; but surely some gentler thing should be said of it, than that they deny the God whom they profess to know.”

In answer to this, I would ask such persons the following question ; to wit, Must we or you teach God how to speak ? And does not the text say expressly, that this is a denying of God ? We have before shewn, in the former part, how much more significant an habitual denial of him in practice is, than a transient one in speculation, or in so many words. However, let us consider, and see if there be not, in this case, a plain denial of the great God. These two things I imagine will evince it. For, it is plain he is denied in the attributes ; and in the relations that are appropriate and peculiar to him, as God.

(1.) God is denied in his attributes which are peculiar to his nature. As for instance, his *omniscience*. For do not such men, as we here allude to, plainly say ; “How does God see ? or is there knowledge in the Most High ?” Psalm 73. 11. Does not their practice say it ? Is it not the language of their lives ? And does not that speak the sense of their hearts ? How can that man be said to own an omniscient God, who is gradually transforming himself into a beast ? Or to believe that his jealous eye is looking on, while he obstinately persists in his sinful courses ?

There is also a manifest denial of his *wisdom*. This is the attribute which magnifies itself in the frame of nature, and the contrivance of all the laws and constitutions of his government.

Wisdom is the great and principal endowment of a legislator. But, though God has established certain rules to guide and govern us by, and to which it is our duty to square our lives; yet says the wicked debauched wretch, "My appetite dictates to me more wisely than so." And thus the wisdom of the flesh is preferred to that which is divine. God says it is wisest and best for men to be governed, and to steer their course by such and such strict rules; that it is best for them to be sober, temperate, chaste, just, and the like. No, say they, to consult inclination and carnal appetite is a far wiser course, than to follow him; and this is a thing fit to be confronted to the divine wisdom! Further,

They deny his *Power*, both as it signifies might and authority. As it signifies authority, they carry the matter as if he had no right to rule or direct them. As it signifies might, they behave as if he were not able to revenge himself on them. Moreover,

They deny his *Truth*. He has declared that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven, (1 Cor 6. 9, 10.) but they seem confident they shall.

There is also in their practice and conduct a manifest denial of his *Holiness*. "Be ye holy (says the Almighty) for I am holy." 1 Pet. 1. 16. But their behaviour implies as much as if they said both, that they will not be holy; and that God himself is not so; whilst they imagine to themselves, that he approves the unholy course they take. And,

There is a denial of his *Justice*, his vindictive justice. It is plainly saying as it were, that he will not judge the world; that he will not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, but will deal alike with all. Yea, and which is no paradox, though it seems one, their conduct implies also a denial,

Lastly, of his *Mercy* and *Goodness* too. But you will perhaps say, that seems strange; for it is divine mercy on which these men do peculiarly rely. God will be merciful when all is done. But can they be said to trust in his mercy, when they do not truly rely on his word? That which they trust in is nothing but a mere phantom, an imagination of their own hearts; and so it is trusting to themselves, and not to God. They have no other trust but that of fools, that is, trusting to their own hearts; to what the fancy suggests, or the imagination can create. For if they did hope in the divine mercy in reality, they who had such a hope would purify themselves as God is pure. That would break their hearts, and mollify their temper, so as that they would have but little disposition to be stout against God.

Whilst, therefore, men thus deny these great attributes of

the divine nature, may they not be said to deny God himself? For pray what kind of notion should we have of God, if these were set aside? What a horrid idea would that be of an untrue, unholy, unwise, unjust Deity?

(2.) God is also denied by persons of this character, with respect to the great relations in which he stands to all his reasonable creatures. I do not mean those special relations which he bears to his own peculiar people; but those wherein he stands to all in common, who are universally the work of his hands, and as the Psalmist expresses it, the sheep of his pasture. Psalm 100. 3. Which relations are principally these following, to wit, those which result from his creation of us; his propriety in us; his dominion over us; and his continual beneficence towards us. But

Do they own him as their Creator, or themselves to be his offspring, who thus bend themselves against the great parent of all?

Do they own him as their Proprietor, or themselves as his property? The ox indeed knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib, (Isa. 1. 3.) but they know not theirs, saying; "We are our own, who is Lord over us?" This is at least the sense, and meaning of the conduct of these men. Further,

Do they own him to be their Ruler, or do they truly call themselves his subjects, when their life is a continued rebellion? Or finally,

Do they own him for their Benefactor? But how can they be said to acknowledge, that it is he from whom all their good comes, when they live to themselves, and not to him? It is very plain therefore they deny God in all these relations as well as in his attributes.

Now let us consider what it is to own God in an absolute, while he is disowned in a relative sense. To say he is a God, but shall not be a God to me, what does this amount to but a denial of him? He must be acknowledged in the general relation first, before we can have any ground to hope that he stands in those of a special nature to us, in which he is related to his peculiar people. If a man should own his prince after that rate, that is, only under an absolute notion, as a great king, as he would the grand signior or cham of Tartary; but at the same time should avow he should be no king to him; would that profession, think you, justify a man, who should oppose or rebel against his rightful prince?

Thus far then you see as to the first character, That they who are obstinate in a course of wickedness, whatsoever they



profess, do most apparently in their works deny God. I shall touch but briefly on the

2. In which I proposed to prove the same point, from their habitual aversion to that which is good; or a general disaffection to every good work; which is the next characteristic of this sort of persons, according to St. Paul's account.

There are those in the world who are apt to think well of their own case, because they are not of this last-mentioned sort. They for their parts practise no such impieties, as many others do; none can say they are murderers, adulterers, false-dealers, and the like; and therefore they reckon their case good: just as if it should be thought impossible a man should die of any distemper but the plague. Or as if in a battle, a soldier should employ his whole care to protect his head, and not expect a stab or a bullet in his heart. So little is it considered what is so obvious to the common reason of a man!

Good comes only by the concurrence of all things, which are requisite thereunto; and evil, by any failure of one of those things. It may therefore be said of such persons, "Ye are not, it may be, guilty of such and such evils, but what good do you do? from what temper of mind? from what principle? or with what disposition do you do it?" To such I address myself and suppose, that many have this to say for themselves, that they pray; they hear God's word; they give alms; and the like. "Do you so? It is well. But with what disposition do you engage in all these duties? Is it not with an averse disinclined heart? or is it not from some corrupt root and principle or other?" The case is very forlorn indeed when men do make their boasts of the fruits, and cannot so much as shew the tree! As there cannot be a good and holy principle without its connatural effects, so nor can there be right effects if they proceed not from their proper principle. There are none capable of good works, but those that are created in Christ Jesus thereunto; without this, men perform religious duties without heart or soul. To illustrate this matter let it be considered, how much the hearts of men are engaged in the works of some profitable calling, or pleasing recreation; and on the other hand, how little their hearts are in prayer, in any duties in which they are to converse with God. And how can persons think to please God in those duties, in which they take no pleasure themselves? If you are not pleased with them, how do you think he should?

But it may here be said, "What! does every one deny God in his works, who feels an indisposition in himself to those which are good? Or who does good works, though many times it may be with an indisposed heart?" I answer; Is it not easy

to understand the difference between the indisposition of the sick and lame, and that of the dead? Is there no difference between those, who have weak imperfect grace, and those who have none? I shall briefly point out to you some things to this purpose, which are very obvious.

(1.) The indispositions of one sort are only gradual, but of the other they are total. There is in one no taste, or disposition for any thing that is good: in the other, though there be a great indisposition in the general, yet there is withal some desire after God; some inclination and tendency to that which is good. So as that they may be capable of saying, as the apostle St. Paul represents the case, "The good that I would do, I do not;" Rom. 7. 19. I have a mind to it, though the bent of my mind is not so strong as it should be.

(2.) The indispositions of the one are constant and habitual, of the other only intermitted. That is, the indisposition of a wicked unregenerate heart is continued, and at all times alike; but the indispositions of a soul, which is in the main pious and good, are only by intervals. They are not always alike indisposed. There is an alteration in this case, but none in the other, so long as that spiritual death remains upon them. In a word, all good persons experience, that they have sometimes a greater relish for their duty and the service of God, than they have at other times. Besides,

(3.) The indispositions of the carnal and vicious are unobserved and unlamented; but it is not so with those of the other character. Their indispositions to that which is good are reflected on with sorrow; taken notice of with regret; and very much bemoaned, in these pathetic words, "Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this death!" Rom. 7. 24. Do the dead reflect? do they lament that they are dead?—But the sick lament that they are sick, and the pained that they are in pain; and each are sensible of their respective calamities.

(4.) And lastly, good christians strive against their indispositions in the expectation of remedy and redress; but there is no such thing in the other. The indispositions of those who are regenerate, are matter not only of their present complaint, but horror. It is not so with those of the opposite character. These like their state well enough, and are contented with the present situation of their immortal souls. Their hearts are disaffected towards God; they are far from him, and they choose to be so. But the people of God in whom the Spirit of grace, or the divine life doth obtain, are aiming to be nearer and nearer to him; and to have whatever disinclines their hearts to religion, or keeps them at a distance from him, effectually removed. Upon the whole, they may find difficulty

in their course. But is there no difference between breathing with difficulty, and having no breath? While therefore those who profess to know God, but in works deny him, are really far from God; those who have the divine life in them as a prevailing principle, do breathe for the liberty of the sons of God, and to be brought into that state, where they shall love, and serve, and obey the ever blessed God perfectly, and eternally.

---

## SERMON VII.\*

---

**I** NOW proceed, by way of further use and improvement of this subject, to lay down some rules and directions, that may be of service to all who desire to be of a different spirit, or character, from those we have been considering; and would not have this ever justly said of them, that while they profess to know God yet in works they deny him. And surely if it be considered how incongruous, how odious, how pernicious and destructive a thing this is; nothing can be apprehended of greater concernment to us, than effectually to endeavour, that we may not have this character resting upon us. That you may not, consider seriously, I pray, and observe such directions as these.

1. Once bring the matter to this point, that the profession you make may be the effect of your solemn deliberate choice. There is too much reason to recommend this rule to the generality of christians, amongst whom, it is very apparent, there are too many, whose profession is rather the effect of chance, or fate; or any thing they are thrown into, by the concurrence of some external circumstances in their condition; than of a serious deliberate choice. How many are there who profess themselves christians, as we observed before, merely because it is the religion of their country! or was that of their ances-

Preached April .7th. 1681.

tors ! or is established by the laws under which they live ! So that it would be very inconvenient for them ; too hazardous it may be, or at least scandalous, to make a contrary profession. Now it highly concerns us once to come to this, that the religion we are of be what we have chosen, and that we profess it upon mature deliberation. We are nothing in religion till we come to this. But,

It may here be said, "What then ! are we to begin again ? We have been christians long, it is a profession we have long sustained, and do so to this day." To which I reply, that all is yet to begin, wherein we are still short and defective. We read concerning the people of Israel, that when Moses had brought them to a more explicit owning of God and said ; "You have this day avouched the Lord for your God, and he has avouched you for his people : " it is added, with reference to this same thing and time also, "Thou art this day become a holy people unto the Lord thy God." Deut. 26. 17, 18, 19. What did they but then become his people ? Not so, for they were esteemed as such before by Jehovah the God of Israel ; but they became so more explicitly, and by a direct act of their own, wherein they did as it were interchange obligations with the Almighty. And several years after when Joshua, towards the close of his life and government, was upon that solemn treaty with them, which you find in the 24. chapter, he again puts all to their choice, saying, "Choose you this day whom you will serve ;" (Josh. 24. 15.) submitting the matter again to their judgment and election. What ! were they then to choose what religion to be of ? No, they were to renew their choice, and to do the thing with great solemnity and seriousness, and in a distinct manner over again. And if it has not been done seriously and deliberately hitherto by you, let it be done now once for all ; for till then, you cannot so much as say you have a religion of your own. And surely if a man would call any thing his own, it would be his religion. Your religion is otherwise but the religion of your country, or of the party to which you belong. It is not truly your own. No man would be contented merely because he lives in an opulent country, while he himself has no estate in it ; or account himself rich, only because he lives in a rich nation. What should be so much mine, as my religion ? But this can never be mine till I undertake to profess it, on a solemn and well weighed choice, after having considered and balanced all things, so as to be able to say ; "This profession I take upon me as best, most excellent, most comfortable as well as most glorious."

2. Endeavour to know God in good earnest. Know him indeed, and you are then in no danger of the charge, which the

apostle brings against false professors. You have been formerly told, that this phrase of professing to know God, is not to be restrained and limited unto the bare speculative knowledge of him, abstractly considered. But though it is not to be thus limited, yet it must include this as the leading, initial thing to all the rest. It is an expression for religion in general, and is sometimes put for the whole of it; and therefore it cannot be supposed to leave out that, which is the fundamental and leading principle of all, from whence the denomination is taken, and put upon the whole.

If you consider the object of this knowledge, it is not God abstractly considered. If you consider the nature of it, it is not barely notional knowledge that is sufficient; nor, as we have already shewn, the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, according to that divine revelation, which is contained in the New Testament: which phrase is used in Scripture to signify the Christian religion, before the revelation of which, the Gentiles are represented as not knowing God. Gal. 4. 8. What! did they not own a Deity before? No doubt they had some knowledge of a Supreme Eternal Being, as the heathens had in common, (Rom. 1. 19, 20, 21.) and yet their state of heathenism is said to be a state wherein they did not know God. They did not know God so as to be acquainted with the true method of worshipping, conversing with, and enjoying of him, which is discovered to us only in the gospel. The world, says the apostle, through wisdom knew not God. 1 Cor. 1. 21. It is spoken plainly of the more refined pagans, who go under the name of Gentiles. And had not they the knowledge of the Deity? No doubt they had; for it is elsewhere said, they did know him but not glorify him as God. Rom. 1. 21. The meaning is, that they did not know him through Christ as Mediator. And it was through their wisdom that they did not so know him, when they might have done it; because the doctrine of a crucified Christ, to them appeared a very foolish thing, which by no means gratified that wisdom to which they highly pretended. They knew not God, that is, they were not christians.

With respect to the nature of this knowledge, it is of a vital, efficacious, transformative quality, which alone is worthy of the name. Such is the knowledge which our Lord speaks of. "This is life eternal to know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." John 17. 3. It is such a knowledge, as by which the soul is caught into a union with the blessed object of it. He has given us an understanding that we may know him that is true; and we are in him, even in his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. "This is the true God and eternal life," 1 John

5. 20. It is a knowledge that blasts and withers sin at the very root, and so efficaciously transforms the soul into the image of God's own holiness. "He that sinneth, hath not seen God nor known him," 3 John 11. The same word there rendered *seen* signifies *known*; Ye have not heard his voice nor seen his shape, John 5. 37. You have never had a true notion of God yet truly inwrought into your souls. "Awake to righteousness and sin not! I speak it to your shame, some have not the knowledge of God." 1 Cor. 15. 34. Labour then thus to know God in earnest, by such a kind of knowledge as shall influence the practice, and in the event bring about and accomplish the blessed union betwixt him and you.

3. Ponder well on the dignity and sacredness of this profession. Oh what a mighty thing is this! that whereas the world has been lost in the ignorance of God, through many successive ages, we should take upon us to profess to know him. It is too big a word for the mouth of a profane and irreligious world. That description of Balaam which he gives of himself, is grand and very solemn; "The man whose eyes are opened, that heard the word of God, that knew the knowledge of the Most High, and saw the vision of the Almighty." Num. 24. 3, 4, 15, 16. And yet the knowledge he alludes to, and which this prophet seems to glory in, was only such as he derived from the spirit of prophecy, and not the spirit of saving, holy illumination. However it was a great thing to come out of such a profane mouth as that of Balaam, when he came to curse the armies of Israel.

Let us then consider, I pray, what we say and do, when we take upon us to profess to know God. As I intimated before, it is an appropriative knowledge that is here pretended to. To know him is to acknowledge him as our God, as his knowing us is to acknowledge and own us as his people. This was the pretence of Israel, but connected with horrid contempt of him as we learn from the prophets. To know God then is, I say, to acknowledge him as our Lord; our Owner, our Proprietor, to whom we belong upon a peculiar account. And consider what that account is, and under what notion we must own him to be our Lord; namely, as we are his property, and his peculiar treasure. For so are all those who are his people, by virtue of the relation which results from their mutual contract and agreement. I entered into covenant with thee, says the Almighty to the Jews, and thou becamest mine. Ezek. 16. 8. And again, "You shall be to me a peculiar treasure before all people, for all the earth is mine." Exod. 19. 5. They who are his people he reckons them as his crown and his diadem, Isa. 62. 3. Who, says God, shall be mine in the day that I make

up my jewels. Mal. 3. 17. Those therefore who know God, and are known of him, are as the jewels of his crown, the jewels which adorn his diadem. And who would be so insolent, as to presume to place there a lump of dirt, or a clod of filthy clay? It is then very awful to think what professing to know God does import, if we only reflect on the dignity and sacredness of this profession.

4. Look upon your profession as an obligation upon you to a correspondent practice. Every profession is so understood among men; and what an ignominy were it for a man, to wear the name when there were none of the thing to which the name corresponds! Do we look upon professing to know God only as an idle profession? as a thing which no business goes along with, nor is attended with any suitable employment? Theology was well described by him, who reckoned it was not mere knowing for knowing sake, but was the doctrine of living unto God. Moreover,

5. Comprehend as distinctly as you can in your own thoughts, the sum of that duty unto which this profession does oblige you. Learn and encompass in your own mind, the whole circle of all those duties; which a professing to know God does engage you to. Run through the *Encyclopædia*, or the whole system of practical religion; to wit, the duties, to the practice of which you are obliged by virtue of your profession, both internal and external. Duties towards God the Father, and his Son, your Creator and Redeemer; such as agree with your acknowledgment of the mystery of God and of Christ, Col. 2. 2. Yea, and not only such, but also duties towards man too; which religion ought to influence, and wherein we are to be governed by our knowledge of God.

6. Labour thoroughly to understand the grounds on which you take upon you the obligation to every Christian duty. It is very plain that the *agenda* of religion, that is, the things to be performed by us, are grounded upon the *credenda*, or things to be believed. "I believe so and so, and therefore conceive myself as obliged to do so and so. And the common foundation of both I must reckon to be the divine authority, revealing certain principles and truths as necessary to be believed; and enjoining certain duties as consequences from thence, and equally necessary to be done." Thus go to the bottom and ground of the religion you profess, and then you have it in its original, and truly divine. But if we look upon our religion as merely human, handed down from father to son, and the like, no wonder then if we trifle with it; but no man would be adventurous, with relation to what he apprehended to be divine. Therefore is men's religion usually weak, impotent and ineffec-



tual ; and has not its proper influence in commanding the heart, and governing the life, because the divine original of it is not apprehended. My own things, I am ready to think, may be used as I please, but I may not do so with those which are divine. In a word,

When once the authority of God is apprehended, particularly of his truth in revealing such and such things, and of his power in commanding others, with what weight do they come in upon the spirit of a man ! What a pressing question was that of our Lord to the Jews ! “The baptism of John,” his solemn manner of initiating men into religion, “whence was it ? from heaven or of men ?” Matt. 21. 25. They were sensible of the pungency of this question, and were afraid to answer him. They knew not what to say, and could not but confess themselves guilty of a profane neglect, if they owned it to be of divine original. The image that was apprehended to fall down from Jupiter, what a sacred esteem and veneration had those heathens for it, who worshipped that idol ! because the priests had deluded them with such an idle fancy. So the Christian religion becomes an operative lively thing, when the divinity of it once comes to be understood, and really believed. “We think ourselves bound,” says the apostle, to the Thessalonians, “to give thanks to God for you without ceasing, that when ye received the word of truth from us, ye received it not as the word of man, but as the word of God, which effectually works in all them that believe.” 1. Thes. 2. 13.

7. Settle it in your minds as an important truth, that the design of that religion of which you are professors, that is, of the whole Christian institution and frame of things, is to have a people distinguished by peculiar excellencies from all other men, who are not of that profession. They must be supposed to be very slight readers and considerers of the Bible, who have not seen this to have been God’s design ever since he made the world. “You shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation,” (Exod. 19. 6.) says the Almighty to Israel, whose whole business was as it were religion, worship and immediate attendance on God ; being “a royal priesthood,” (1 Pet. 2. 9.) as the apostle paraphrases that expression. “Our Lord gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.” Tit. 2. 14. And therefore he thus expostulates with his disciples, “If you do only so and so, what do you do more than others ?” Matt. 5. 47. Do you think I would have a people among men, professing my religion and belonging unto me, who shall be only as other men are, in whom there is nothing of peculiar excellence to be found ? And therefore the apostle

exhorts the christians of Thessalonica, to aim at superior piety and virtue, saying, "Let us not sleep as do others;" for, as it follows, "God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thes. 5. 6. What! to live in the same drowsy security as others do, or as if you were still under the dominion of the same spirit of slumber, or as if the same death had prevailed over you which has spread itself over the rest of the world, what an incongruous thing is this! It is true, God has found no difference among men, but he has made a very great one, which arises from the dispensations of his grace, rather than from nature; being determined to have a people peculiarly distinguished by their excellent spirit and eminent piety and goodness. And this is the meaning and intent of this profession of the Christian religion. Therefore,

8. Never rest upon that bare level, which it is possible some may come up unto, that are not of this profession. Some do not profess to know God in Christ at all, as jews and pagans for instance. What the traditional religion of the former, and the mere natural religion of the latter will carry them to, do not think that enough for you. As to the former, our Saviour expressly tells his disciples, and all that will be his followers, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 5. 20. And yet they were the strictest sect of the Jews, as St. Paul intimates when he declares, that he had this, as well as other things to glory in, if that was of any consequence, that he himself was a pharisee; but yet, says he, "what I thought a gain to me when I was of that religion, I reckon loss for Christ and the excellency of his knowledge, that I might know him," (Phil. 3. 5-12.) and so attain, with him, the resurrection from the dead.

You must then be able to outgo the strictest of those whom the Judaical religion had formed. For it is very apparent that when the time was come, in which Christ intended his religion should take place, after having made sufficient discovery of himself to the world, then did the Spirit of grace retire from the religion of the Jews, as being no longer of any force. And though there had been many of that religion who feared God before, yet now that the Christian institution was established, there was no ground to expect that the Spirit should breathe through that of Moses. And therefore our Lord tells them plainly, "If you believe not that I am He, that is, the Messiah and the Son of God, ye shall die in your sins." John 8. 24. And accordingly the apostle appeals to the christians, at that time, in the following manner; "Did you receive the Spirit by

the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith ? that is, the gospel". Gal. 3. 2. In short, that religion which carries you in a course of holy practice, no higher than Judaism in effect, is certainly much short of the design of our Lord, and what your profession of Christianity supposes. But how much more may this be affirmed, if professors among us proceed no further, than the natural religion of the heathen world will carry them ? Who, notwithstanding their profession to know God in Christ, yet go no higher than they in point of justice and truth, temperance and sobriety, and in a contempt of this world, as well as value and care of their better part, even their immortal souls: concerning which some heathens speak strangely. "I wonder," says one, "that whereas man consists of a soul and body, that there should be so much care taken about the latter, and the care of the soul be neglected by most, as a hated thing." And several of them have left us various discourses, concerning the greater mischief and malignity that there are in the diseases of the mind, than in those of the body, or the outward man. Maximus Tyrius has a large dissertation on this very subject,\* and several others of them have wrote to the like purpose. Some of them also have expressed their reverence to God in a surprising manner. "I so live (says one) as always under God's eye, and as apprehending he is ever prying into, and looking upon me." And how pleasant expectations and forethoughts have they had of a future felicity! It is really admirable to think in what transports some of them have been, in the expectations they had of a happy state for good and virtuous men. Now when paganism does outdo us in these respects, can we be said to answer our profession of Christianity, in which we have such an amiable discovery of God in Christ ; and when also we have life and immortality brought to light by the gospel, shining by clear and direct beams. To have christians therefore basely creeping upon the face of this earth, and rolling themselves in the dust, so as some pagans would be ashamed to do ! to see them wallowing in the impurities of sensual wickedness, which would have been a reproach to many of them ! This is surely not to answer our profession.

9. Lastly; inasmuch as it is not the best institution in the world that will do our business, without a living religion implanted in us, never rest nor be satisfied without that. And whereas there are two things intimated in the text, to be opposed to true religion and sincere profession, that is, a propensity to evil, and an aversion to good ; an indulgence in such a

\* Dissert. 13. Edit. Davis. Lond. 1740. quarto.

course of life as is indeed abominable, with a mind reprobate to every good work; know then, there must be accordingly a twofold power of religion, which must be implanted, to counterwork those two; to wit, a sin-mortifying power, and a quickening power. The former of which takes away the inclination to evil, and the latter an aversion to good.

There are sundry other particulars which I should mention, but have not time; only take this one thing with you, that it is never well till the operation of religion be from nature; that is, from our participation of the divine nature, which thus exerts and puts forth itself.

---

## SERMON VIII.\*

---

**I**N the conclusion of the preceding discourse it was observed, that whereas it is not the best institution in the world that can do us any service, without an internal vital principle of religion within us, therefore we should never rest till we find that prevailing in ourselves. Now in order to the obtaining this divine principle so necessary to our eternal welfare, it will be of service to lay down the following directions, in subordination to that last mentioned. Particularly,

1. That wherever this is the real state of the case, that is to say, whoever have not this internal power, this vital principle of religion, let them own it, and tell their souls the real truth of the matter. The principle here spoken of is an implanted power, enabling a person to do good with promptitude, facility and delight. Now if such a principle as this is wanting in any, let them own it, for it is a discernible thing; and consequently where it is in fact discerned, it is fit and requisite that it should be ingenuously owned, or that persons should acknowledge this to be the real truth of the case.

\* Preached April 24, 1681.

I have said that it is a discernible thing. Indeed what reason can be given why it should be otherwise? How can it be imagined that persons should not perceive whether they have such a principle, or power within them, or not? What! is there so small a difference between life and death, that it cannot be perceived? nay that it cannot be perceived by one's self? There is in men however another kind of life, which makes them capable of discussing this point; to wit, the principles of rational nature, by which I am capable of self-reflection; and of debating also this very question, whether I have any further superadded principle or not. And when I hear there is really such a principle that ought to exist in the mind, my duty is to deal closely with myself, and inquire whether I, myself, have ever felt any such thing. The question is not, whether I have any sort of life or power in the general; but have I this life, this power, this which terminates on God? Do I find a living principle within my soul which carries it to God, and makes it tend to him? The apostle Paul bids the christians at Rome to "reckon themselves to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord;" (Rom. 6. 11.) and certainly no man ought to judge falsely in his own case. There is a certain divine power which goes along with true religion; as is supposed in that passage of Scripture mentioned before, speaking of persons who had "the form of religion but denied the power thereof." 2 Tim. 3. 5. And again, says the apostle, "God hath given to us the Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." 2 Tim. 1. 7. And wheresoever this power, or principle is, it is a kind of natural power; that is, belonging to that new and divine nature; which is in all them that belong to God; in all that are born and begotten of him according to the very design of the gospel itself. For the gospel is appointed for this purpose, to work this divine frame in the souls of men. "The exceeding great and precious promises thereof are given us, that by them we might partake of the divine nature;" (2 Pet. 1. 4.) of a certain divine and godly nature, as those words may be read. The operations of nature though they are silent, yet they are strong and powerful. There is no greater difficulty in the world than to withstand the course of nature. Now whether such a power is working in ourselves, is the point to be considered. Let me then ask my soul, "Do I find myself powerfully withheld from evil, as a thing against my nature? Do I find myself powerfully engaged to that which is good, as if it was connatural to me? most agreeable to my nature? Who is there that cannot tell what his nature is for and against? Do such and such acts flow from me, as the acts of nature do; from their proper and

congenial principles? Had I ever such a kind of new nature, withholding me from evil, as a thing I hate; and carrying me to what is good, as a thing I love? There are a sort of living men, in respect of the life of God and religion; and there are a sort of men, who are dead: shall I be always ignorant to which party I belong? What an absurdity were it, if one should always be in doubt what sort of creature he is! that he does not know whether to call himself a man or a brute! what an absurdity, I say, is this! But certainly it is a much more important question, and of greater concernment, to have it decided whether we are the offspring of God or the devil. Whence then am I inspirited? is it from above, or is it from beneath?" It is indeed most shameful to think that such multitudes of persons, that go under the name of christians, should be contented to live all their days, like an amphibious sort of creatures, that they cannot tell themselves what sort of beings they are. Certainly he would be looked upon as a great wonder among men, who should be always ignorant of his own name; that is, not know the name which rightfully belongs to him. So in like manner it is wonderful if persons who are destitute of the divine principle, which makes men real christians, do not discern this to be the case. But where it is in fact discerned, it must be freely owned by all, who desire to obtain it.

2. If you apprehend this to be the case that you have not this principle, acknowledge it however to be a real thing; and that some persons have it, though you have it not. It is too common, when the clearness and force of the matter constrain an acknowledgment, that such a divine power does exist in the souls of men, for persons to satisfy themselves with this, that they are but as other men are; and to reckon theirs to be no worse, than that which is the common case of mankind. All that lies without their compass, or above and beyond their own perceptions, they take to be mere fancy and fiction; and every body is a hypocrite, or an enthusiast, that pretends to more than they find in themselves. But for what reason is all this? Or why must the experience of any such person be thought the standard of reality? that is, that nothing can be real but what they experience to be so, or exceeds the limits of their own perceptions. What! Is it not apparent to every man, that there are far more considerable realities which we know not, than those, which we do know? and is there no danger of coming under the character of speaking evil of those things which we know nothing of, which some were stigmatized with by the apostle Jude with so much severity? And I would fain have such consider themselves, what expressions they find scattered up and down in the Holy Scriptures, of such a real thing as lively

affections towards God, and a principle of living religion. Particularly I would recommend to their consideration such passages as these. "The Lord is my portion, the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage. Psal. 16. 5, 6. As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee O God!" Psal. 42. 1, 2. And again, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." Psal. 73. 25, 26. When you meet with such expressions as these, I would ask you; Do you believe that the persons who used them were hypocrites or enthusiasts? that there was nothing in all this but fiction? And when on one hand, we compare the internal living religion, suitable to the import of these devout expressions, with a mere external profession, joined with disobedience, and abominable practices, on the other hand; I would fain know which of these two does best agree with the gospel? which is most agreeable to the sacred records, in which these and other such like passages are to be found? And if you believe that there was really such a thing as a living religion in such persons as we are speaking of in ancient times, I would fain know why you, or any one else should have such a bad opinion of the world as to think it is quite banished now from amongst us. For, to what end should the gospel be continued in the world, if not to accomplish its own design? which is to work such a realizing apprehension of divine things in the minds of men, as to influence their practice and behaviour. Or does any one think, that religion is so altered in its nature and essence, as that what was religion in former ages, is not so now? Have we then, since those times, had a new way and method of attaining felicity prescribed to us? have we any later gospel of divine authority, that teaches us that mere formalities will serve the turn? Where is that gospel to be found?

3. Being then convinced of the reality of such a divine principle, endeavour to understand and seriously consider the necessity of it. Consider it as a thing that does not serve barely for convenience and ornament, but to answer the most absolute necessity of our souls, and the exigence of your own case.

4 Apprehend also the impossibility of attaining it your own selves; I mean this inward principle and power of religion; or by any unassisted endeavours of your own. For I pray consider, would you have a religion that should be your own, or God's creature? A religion indeed that shall be of my own forming and contrivance, I can easily make myself accord to; but why should I ever hope that this should serve my turn, or do the



work? or why should I think against plain experience and my Bible, that the most excellent part of religion should be within the compass of my own power to effect, and produce? Let us think how it is with us in other cases. It is you know within the compass of human power to shape a statue, or paint in colours the picture of a man; but when the artist has done all this, can he infuse a soul into that statue, or make that picture fit to reason and discourse? No: when he has done his utmost, it will be only a mere piece of ingenious contrivance, that looks specious to the eye, but has in itself nothing of sense, life, or motion; can do nothing like what it imitates, for still something within will be necessary. So in like manner I can externally shape myself like a christian, but can I infuse the divine life into this external form? can I make myself to live, choose and delight, love and joy in God, as a christian? It is therefore good for us to know the bounds of our own power; what it can, and what it cannot do in this regard. And hereupon to prevent an objection, I add another direction: to wit,

5. Seek this principle and divine power where it is to be had, even of him who alone can give it. For it may be said perhaps, "If it be not within my compass to help myself, what have I to do but to sit still?" The case itself tells you what you must do. If you cannot help yourself in that which is absolutely necessary to your welfare, you are to go to God, from whom this assistance is to be had by fervent prayer. It is the common dictate of nature to all mankind, when once they apprehend a distress, to fly to heaven for help. Finally,

6. Use all the other means of obtaining this power, which are appointed for this purpose, designedly with a view to this great and important end. To read the Holy Scriptures, to hear sermons, to meditate upon what we read and hear, to confer with living christians, such as evidently appear to have the power of religion, are the means I speak of; but we must regard them only as means, otherwise they may be used long, and the end of all be never brought about. It is one thing how other creatures attain their end, and how a reasonable creature reaches his. An arrow reaches its mark, without considering whither it goes; but do you think a reasonable being is to attain his end so? No; his duty is to take that course, and use those means that lead to his end, designedly, and on purpose to secure it. As for instance: there are many that join in the ordinance of Christian worship; but if I put the inquiry to myself, What do I do this for? and cannot answer, "I use such and such means on purpose for such ends, that I may have my soul furnished with internal religion, or the life of God;" I may

call these the means of grace, but it is plain I do not understand the end thereof; nor use the means designedly for the attainment of this end. When a man finds his soul empty, and destitute of the power of godliness, or the internal living principle of religion, though he does the things which God hath appointed to be means for begetting such a principle, yet it is plain he never uses them as the means to this end. But if you purposely design, by attending upon God's solemn worship, to get this vital and internal principle of real piety, this may come to something in time; and in this way you are to wait, which is of divine appointment, till the desired end is effectually obtained. For always remember this; you are bound to God, but he is not bound to you. And now for the enforcement of all this, I shall add two or three motives, and so conclude.

(1.) If you come not to this, whatever you do, with relation to matters of a religious nature, you do under a force. There are many things it may be, you abstain from, or practise; but it is all owing to a force put upon you, if this divine principle is wanting; which must needs make religion an uncomfortable service.

(2.) Religion is nothing in itself, when it is nothing else but mere profession. Alas! how inconsiderable a thing is it? a mere shew! a vain shadow! And what can be expected from what has no more of substance in it, than such an empty profession? It will be of no avail. We read that, "Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk and they see his shame." Rev. 16. 15. Truly such a profession that has no bottom, nothing internal to correspond to it, is a garment that will not be kept; you will lose it; it will be blown away from you in an evil time; it is too short while you have it, and very soon you will cease to have it, when a time of difficulty comes which you have reason to expect.

(3.) And lastly; to go on with such a profession without ever looking after the power of godliness, will not only come to nothing, but will most highly provoke Almighty God. For I pray consider, professing religion is assuming to yourselves the name of God; therefore to profess vainly, is to profane his sacred name. And do we not know, that the God whose name we assume is a jealous God? and that he will not hold them guiltless that take his name in vain? Oh, how dreadful will the controversy be about this in the day of final account! But really there is reason to believe, that God has a controversy to manage with the Christian world before that day come: partly with those who corrupt, and deprave the whole frame of the Christian institution itself; and partly with those, who contradict the very design of it, in their lives and practice. And,

Oh! when God shall come to plead with such in this manner, “Why have you profaned such a divine religion as this? Why have you made the religion of Jesus seem to the world an impotent or ignominious thing? inasmuch, as you have formed it, it has made men no better than Turkism, or Paganism would have done!” how, I say, will this be answered in the great day? And in like manner, when God comes to plead his own cause against a hypocritical generation, who contented themselves with external forms and shadows, though they never so openly contradicted all that they pretended to in their behaviour; how will they be able to answer for themselves, or to justify their conduct!

Now that this may not be the case of any of us, God of his infinite mercy grant for the sake of our Blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be given and ascribed all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

END OF THE FIFTH VOLUME.