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THE  
**SUFFICIENCY**  
*Of a Standing REVELATION in General,*  
AND  
*Of the Scripture REVELATION in Particular.*  
BOTH  
*As to the Matter of it, and*  
*As to the Proof of it ;*  
AND  
That **NEW REVELATIONS**  
*Cannot Reasonably be Desired, and*  
*Would Probably be Unsuccessful.*

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**In Eight SERMONS,**

Preach'd in the

**CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of St. Paul, London ;**

At the LECTURE Founded by the Honourable  
**ROBERT BOYLE Esq;** in the Year MDCC.

---

By **OFSPRING BLACKALL, D.D.**

Rector of *St. Mary Aldermāry*, and Chaplain in  
Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

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L O N D O N,

Printed by *J. Leake*, for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Bishop's-Head* in *St. Paul's Church-Yard*, 1700.

THE  
SUFFICIENCY  
OF A  
Standing Revelation.

A  
SERMON

Preach'd at the  
CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of *St. Paul*,  
*January* the 1<sup>st</sup>. 1<sup>699</sup>  
700.

BEING  
The First, for the Year 1700, of the LECTURE  
Founded by the Honourable *Robert Boyle*, Esq;

By *OFSPRING BLACKALL*, Rector  
of *St. Mary Aldermary*, and Chaplain in Ordinary  
to His MAJESTY.

LONDON,

Printed by *J. Leake*, for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Bishop's-  
Head* in *St. Paul's Church-Yard*, 1700.



To the most Reverend Father in GOD,

**T H O M A S**

Lord Arch-Bishop of *Canterbury* ;

Sir HENRY ASHURST Baronet ;

Sir JOHN ROTHERAM, Serjeant at Law ;

JOHN EVELYN Senior Esquire ;

Trustees appointed by the Will of the Honourable  
*ROBERT BOYLE* Esquire.

Most Reverend and Honoured,

**I** Beg leave humbly to present you with these  
First-fruits of my Labours in that Station  
which you have been pleased to assign me for  
this Year ; Taking this Occasion both to acknow-  
ledge publickly, and with all Thankfulness the  
Honour you have done me in appointing me to this  
Work ; and likewise to give you Assurance that  
the After-fruits shall also in due Time be offered  
to you, if God shall be pleased to give them a  
Season to ripen ; And I heartily wish they may  
be better and more worth your Acceptance than I  
am sensible these are.

However, I hope the same Goodness and kind  
Opinion of me which moved you to nominate me to

*the Employment will incline you to forgive all my Failings in the Management of it.*

*And if my Labours shall be well accepted by you ; And especially , If by the Blessing of God, (who only giveth the Increase) they shall any Ways contribute toward the Promoting the pious Design of the Honourable Founder of these Lectures, of blessed Memory, I shall be very easie under the too just Charge of Insufficiency for such an Undertaking, which I make no Doubt will be cast upon me by those who will be inwardly glad that I have performed my Task no better, and will earnestly wish that the Christian Cause may never have an abler Advocate.*

*But that by your wise Choice of Persons to succeed in this Employment, they may see themselves every Year disappointed in this their Wish, is the hearty Desire of,*

Most Reverend and Honoured,

Your most obliged

and obedient Servant

Feb. 26. 1722.

OF SP. BLACKALL.

( I )

ST. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

**T**H E S E words contain some of the Discourse that passed between *Abraham* in Heaven, and a certain *rich Man* in Hell ; occasioned by a Request which he had made in the foregoing Verses, in the behalf of his *five Brethren* whom he had left alive upon Earth ; that *Abraham* would be so kind as to *send Lazarus to them, to testify to them, lest they also should come into that Place of Torment.* And the general Design of them , and indeed of the whole Parable of which they are a Part, is to assert the *Sufficiency* of those Means which God hath thought fit to use to bring Men to Repentance, particularly by granting them a *standing Revelation* of his Will ; and the probable Unsuccessfulness of any other Method that we could propose, and perhaps might think more proper for this Purpose.

And when these Words were first spoken, it was with a special Reference to the State of the *Jews*, and  
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and to that Light, and those Means of Salvation which were afforded to them, at the Time when *our Saviour* began his Preaching; when all the *standing Revelation* of God's Will, was contained in the Books of *Moses*, and in the Writings of the *Prophets*.

But since then *our Lord Jesus Christ*, the eternal Son of God, a more credible Messenger than *Lazarus* from the dead, has come himself in Person to assure us that there is a Heaven and a Hell, and to shew us the Means of attaining that, and avoiding this; and God having raised him up from the dead, after he had been crucified by the *Jews*, has given sufficient Assurance to the World of his divine Mission; And that *Jesus* did and said such things, and that he died and rose again, we have the Testimony of his *Apostles*, and others, who were Eye and Ear-witnesses thereof, and who in Confirmation of their Testimony were empowered by God to do as great Miracles as *Jesus* himself had done; And lastly, of what was done and taught by *our Saviour* and his *Apostles*, we have very credible Records still remaining, *viz.* the Books of the *New Testament*; the Authority of which is at least as well proved to us, as ever the Authority of the *Old Testament* was to the *Jews*: So that we now have plainly more and stronger Motives to Repentance, than the *Jews* before *our Saviour's* Time had; we consequently do stand in less need of new Miracles and new Revelations than they did; And therefore the Argument in the Text, as it may be applied to us who live now, is much stronger than as it was here urged by *Abraham* with Reference to the *Jews*, while they had only *Moses* and the *Prophets*.

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And thus in my Discourse upon the Words, I shall now consider it, *viz.* as if the Request made by the *rich Man* in the Behalf of his Brethren, in the two foregoing Verses, were made now in the Behalf of those to whom the Revelation of the Gospel has been given, but without Success; and as if the Answer here returned to it by *Abraham*, had been suited to the present State of things.

And from the words, thus largely understood, I shall take occasion to speak to these Three Points.

I. I shall endeavour to shew that the present *standing Revelation* of God's Will, contained in the Books of the *Old* and *New Testament* is abundantly sufficient to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets, (I add, they have also Christ, and his Apostles;) let them hear them.*

II. I shall shew that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, it is an unreasonable Request to desire more. *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.* And,

III. Lastly, I shall endeavour to shew, That in case God should condescend to gratifie Men in this unreasonable Desire (working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the dead, to assure them of a future State, and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis highly probable that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance by the Preaching and *standing Revelation* of the Gospel, would be

be perswaded by this Means. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets (nor Christ and his Apostles) neither will they be perswaded, though one rose from the dead.*

I. I shall endeavour to shew that the present *standing Revelation* of God's Will, contained in the Books of the *Old and New Testament* is abundantly *sufficient* to perswade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets, (Christ and his Apostles) let them hear them.*

And, I think, that if the *standing Revelation* which God hath made of his Will in the Holy Scriptures, can upon any account be thought *insufficient* to effect this Design, it must be upon one of these two Accounts; *viz.* Either, 1. Because no *standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for this Purpose; Or, 2. Because there are some particular Defects in that *standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scripture*, which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose as 'tis possible a *standing Revelation* might be.

1. It may be pretended that no *standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for this Purpose. I am now therefore to enquire with what Reason this can be pretended.

And in speaking to this Point, it does not lie upon me to prove that God could not reveal his Mind atress to every Man in every Age of the World, if he so pleased; for there is no question but that the same God *who in divers manners spake in times past to our Fathers by the Prophets*, could, if he pleased, speak to every one of us their Children, in such Manner as he then spake to the Prophets themselves; so that we might be all immediately taught of God as they were. But

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every thing that may be done is not expedient to be done; And whether this Method would be expedient or not, will be hereafter enquired.

Neither does it now lie upon me to prove, that this Way which God hath thought fit to take to instruct the greatest Part of the World, *viz.* by a *standing Revelation*, is the best Way, and the most like to be effectual of any that could be used. Of this I shall likewise have Occasion to speak somewhat hereafter.

But what lies upon me at present to make good, is only this, That a *standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well contrived and so well attested as to be *sufficient* to perswade Men.

And if there be any Ground for the contrary Pre- tence, I think it must be, either, 1. Because all Mat- ters necessary to be known and done by Men at all Times, cannot at once be committed to Writing: Or, 2. Because there cannot be sufficient Evidence given to satisfy a Rational Man, that any Writing that is said to be of divine Inspiration and Authority, is indeed so.

1. It may be said, That all Matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all Times, cannot be at once committed to Writing: Because every Age of the World produces new Opinions, which whether they be erroneous or not, cannot be judged by a *Criterion* that was given many Ages before these Opinions were broached: And as the World grows older in Years, it likewise improves in Wickedness, which cannot be restrained and suppressed by an old Law which was made before several Instances of those Wickednesses that are now practised were either known or thought of. And if it were not so, what need would there be of such a number of Books as are written in every Age to direct Men how to distinguish between Truth and

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Error, and what Opinions to fix upon in, that great Variety of Opinions that are offered to them? Or what need would there be of so many new Laws as are daily made in every Commonwealth to restrain the growing Extravagances of Mankind, and to keep them within due Bounds? So that if there be any Necessity at all of divine Revelation to teach Men the Belief of Truth and the Practice of Righteousness, it is necessary that there should be a new and fresh Revelation made, at least as often as any new Error is broached, or any new Piece of Villainy is practised in the World.

But to this Objection against the *Sufficiency* of a *Standing Revelation*, I suppose a full Answer will be given in these two particulars.

(1.) That there is no Arguing from the Wisdom and Power of Men, to the Wisdom and Power of God. It may be granted to be impossible for a Man to write such a Book as shall be *sufficient* to confute all the Errors that can possibly at any time afterwards spring up; Or to compile such a Body of Laws as shall be *sufficient* to prevent or punish all future Crimes; But what is impossible with Men, may be possible with God; who has a perfect Foresight of all the Errors that will ever be broached, and of all the Wickedness that will ever be practised by Men to the End of the World, To a Being of infinite Wisdom and Knowledge it may be not only possible, but very easie so to contrive a Revelation, designed by him for the Direction of future Ages, that no Addition shall ever after need to be made to it. Nay indeed,

(2.) The Thing it self, that is, That a *standing Revelation* should be thus perfect; that it should be so contrived at once, and at first, as to be *sufficient* to answer

answer all the Ends of a divine Revelation as long as the World shall last, is not very hard to be conceived.

For tho' Error be infinite, Truth, at least all Truth necessary to be believed, is finite and limited; And after a divine Revelation is once given, no more is necessary to be believed in after Ages than was at first; nor will there ever be more things necessary to be believed to the End of the World, unless God shall please to add some new Revelation to the former. And this Revelation of all necessary Truth once made, being given to Men that are endued with Reason, nothing more is, or ever will be needful for the Discovery and Confutation of all Errors that can possibly spring up in after Ages, but only a right Understanding of the Truths already delivered, and a right Use of Reason in making Inferences, and drawing Consequences therefrom. And this is all that is pretended to by the Books of Controversie that are written in every Age: The Design of them is not to declare new Truths, or to establish new Articles of Faith, but only to shew that those Opinions which they represent as false and erroneous, are either in themselves, or in their true Consequences, contrary to some Maxims that are already receiv'd as true.

And it is no less easie to conceive that a *standing Revelation* may be at once so contrived as to be for ever *sufficient* to direct Men in all Points of *Practice*; Because altho' tis possible that every Age may afford new Instances of Wickedness, yet the Law that they are all Transgressions of, may be but one. And the Rule once given is a perpetual Direction, not only what to do, but likewise what to avoid; and this, as well in those Instances of Wickedness which may be invented afterwards, as in those which were in Practice before the

Rule was made. For he that giving Direction to a Traveller in his Way, bids him *keep strait forward*, shall not need, (if he speaks to a Man of Reason) to tell him, over and above, that he must be careful to avoid all Turnings to the right hand or to the left; and much less shall he need to give him a particular Account of every Turning that he is to avoid. And tho' in Time to come there would be many more By-ways and Turnings out of the Road than there are at present, yet the same one Direction, *to keep strait forward*, will be as full and as sufficient a Direction then, as it is now.

And the Necessity that Humane Law-givers find themselves under to be every Day repealing former Laws and adding new Ones, is not caused by an absolute Impossibility of making at once such a Body of Laws as might be *sufficient* for all after Times; but arises (as I suppose) Partly from the Nature of Humane Laws; which are, for the most part, Negative and Prohibitive only; and by such a Law nothing is rendred unlawful but what is named; and to name at once every thing that is then, or may be in all after Ages needful to be prohibited, would indeed be a Work of very great Difficulty; Partly, from the Nature of that Obedience that is due to a meer Humane Law, which is only an external Obedience, and to the Letter of the Law; and that indeed must needs be a Law, or a Body of Laws of a prodigious Bulk, and very difficult to be contrived at once, which in the Letter thereof shall comprehend and give Direction concerning every Action, and every Mode of Action that are necessary to be done or forbore, in order to the preserving Justice and Peace among Men; Partly, from the little Regard that Men generally have to the good of Posterity, which makes them only careful to contrive such Orders

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ders and Constitutions, as they hope will suffice to preserve Peace in their own time, leaving it to those that come after, to take the like Care for themselves in their Times; Partly, from the Weakness and Ignorance of the wisest of Men, who not understanding exactly the Tempers of all their Subjects, cannot know certainly what Effect their Laws will have, till after they have been for some time experienced; And partly, from the unexpected Difficulty that is sometimes met with in the Execution of a Law, which may make it necessary afterwards to enforce it with a greater Penalty, or to take some further Care than at first was thought needful to see it executed.

But none of these Reasons of the Necessity of new Laws among Men are of any force to shew that it is also necessary that God should be every Day making new Declarations of his Will, and that no *Standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for all Times; For the Laws of God are positive and commanding, enjoining the truest and heartiest Love both to God and Men, and every natural and proper Expression thereof, and by consequence prohibiting every Affection of Mind, and every outward Act that is contrary thereto, whether it be expressly named or not; And the Obedience that we owe to a divine Law, is the Obedience of the Heart and of the whole inner Man, such as looks beyond the Letter to the Design and Intention of the Law, and avoids as carefully whatsoever is contrary to the Reason of the Law, as if it had been forbidden in the most express Words: And God being King for ever and ever, has the same Relation to all Men in all Ages, and cannot but be supposed to design the good Government of his Subjects in after, as well as in former Times; And he also, understanding fully the Tempers

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pers of all his Subjects, knows beforehand what Effect the Laws he gives them will have, and can never be disappointed in his Expectation; and so can never be obliged to repeal or alter any of his Laws, by an unforeseen Experience, that they are not so convenient, or so effectual as he thought they would be; And lastly, He, having all Power in his Hands, and a sovereign and uncontrollable Dominion over all, can appoint what Penalty he pleases to the Transgression of his Laws; can at any time convict Transgressors by his own unerring Knowledge only, and the Testimony of their guilty Consciences, without other Witnesses; and has it in his own single Power, without any Help of others, to execute, when-ever he will, whatever Penalty he threatens.

Thus, I think, it appears that a *standing Revelation* may be so well contrived, as to be *sufficient* for all Times; that all Matters necessary to be known and done by Men at all Times may be at once committed to Writing.

2. But Secondly, Tho' this be granted, it may be still further objected against the *Sufficiency* of a *standing Revelation*, that it can hardly be *sufficiently* attested; that there cannot be *sufficient* Evidence given to satisfy a Rational Man, that any such Writing, which is said to be of divine Inspiration and Authority, is indeed so; And that, (1.) Because there is no Way, but Eye-witness, to be *sufficiently* assured that any Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; (2.) Because there is no Way to be *sufficiently* assured, that the Author of such a Book did not design to impose upon his Readers; And (3.) Because no Man can be sure, that he himself was not deceived in his Opinion of his own Inspiration, or of a Revelation made

to him; or in the Truth of any other Matter which he has related as of his own Knowledge.

(1.) It may be said, that there is no Way but Eye-witness to be *sufficiently* assured that any Book was written by the Person that is said to be the Author of it.

But that is very strange, that there should be no other Way to be *sufficiently* assured of the Author of any Book, and yet that there are a great many Books in the World, ancient as well as modern, the Authors whereof were never in the least doubted of; who yet, I suppose, did not use to call together a Company of Men to stand by, and see them write those Books which they intended to Publish.

It seems then, that either there may be, besides Eye-witness, *sufficient* Reason to believe that a Book was written by the Person under whose Name it goes; or else that all the World has been extremely credulous in receiving an infinite Number of Books as written by such and such Authors, without *sufficient* Assurance thereof. But I believe the Truth is, There are some Men, who for Reasons best known to themselves, (but which may, some of them be easily enough guessed at) will not allow that to be *sufficient* Evidence that a Book was written by a Prophet or an Apostle, which they must and do allow to be *sufficient* Evidence in any other Case of the like Nature.

For in other Cases we make no Doubt to receive a Book as written by such an Author, if he owns himself to be the Author of it; or if it be shewn written with his own Hand; or if they that are the Publishers of it, declare that they had it from him, as his own; or that they transcribed or printed it from a Copy which they knew to be of his Hand-writing; or if it passes current in common Fame and Report to be his, and his most

most intimate friends believe it so, and he himself does not disown it, and there be none else that pretend any Claim or Title to it: Where these or most of these Circumstances do concur, we never doubt but that the Person said to be the Author of such a Book, is so indeed; unless there be some very clear Reason, grounded upon the known Incapacity of the Person to write in such a Language, in such a Style, concerning such a Subject, or the like, whereby it may be demonstrated, that (whoever was) he could not be the Author of it. The truth is, Now adays, (and I suppose the Case was much the same formerly) whoever is the true Author of any Book, finds very little Difficulty to make Men believe that the Book is his; the greatest Difficulty is for a Man to conceal himself, in case he be not willing to be known to be the Author of it.

And when once a Book is generally receiv'd as written by such a Person, (when, I say, 'tis thus receiv'd) in that Age in which it was first publish'd, and by those that were in the best Capacity to inquire and to judge who was the true Author of it; they that live in after times never think it reasonable to question the Authority thereof, unless there be, evidently, something, either in the Language, Dialect or Style; or else in the Matter of the Book, as in the Relation of some Piece of History, the References to some ancient Customs, the Citations out of other Authors, or the like; by which it may be clearly made out that the Book cannot be of such Antiquity as it pretends to, or could not be the Writing of that Person who is reported and has been commonly taken to be the Author of it.

Upon such Reasons as these, a great many Books are every Day received as written by such and such Authors;

thors; and tho' we cannot be so sure of a thing that we believe upon these Inducements, as we are of what we see with our own Eyes; yet such Reasons as these are by the general Consent of Mankind judged to be *sufficient* in a Matter of this Nature, which is hardly capable of better Proof. And for a Man to disallow in one Case that same Evidence of the Truth of a Matter of Fact, which in other Cases of the like kind he allows to be *sufficient*; for a Man to receive a Book as written by another Person, and not to receive a Book as written by a Prophet or an Apostle, when he has as much Reason to receive one as the other, and no more Reason to reject one than the other, is not Judgment, or Discretion, or reasonable Caution, but manifest Prejudice and Partiality. But,

(2.) It was further said, That tho' we might be well enough assured that a Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; there is no Way to be *sufficiently* assured that who he was the Author of it did not design to impose upon his Readers.

It seems then, there is no Way to be *sufficiently* satisfied that any Man is an honest Man, and fit to be credited; that he does not lye in every thing he says, and intend a Cheat in every thing he does. For if a Man may be believed in what he says, he may as well be believed in what he writes; And if he may be trusted in one Concern, he may be as safely trusted in another, unless good Reason can be shewed to the contrary.

But in judging of humane Nature in general, Men commonly judge of others by themselves: What they are inclined to, they think is the Inclination of Mankind; what they allow themselves in, they think others, (whatever they may pretend) make as little scruple of as they do; what they freely practice, they make no

Doubt other Men would practise as freely, on the same Occasions, and upon the same Inducements; So that when any Man is so very suspectful of the Honesty and Veracity of other Men, it gives but too just Ground to think that the Reason of his Aptness to distrust all others, is his Consciousness of his own evil Designs, and of the little Regard that he himself has to Truth in his own Assertions. And if those he has to deal with should refuse to give any Credit to any thing that he affirms, because, according to his own declared Opinion, very little Credit can reasonably be given to the Report and Affirmation of others, I do not see with what Reason he can blame them for so doing.

Not but that, after all, 'tis possible that a Man may ('tis doubtless what has been done by some) give out a Report, or write Book on purpose to deceive Mankind; But nevertheless, I say, that it ought not without very good Reason to be suspected that this is any Man's Design; and that we may have Assurance enough that a thing is not, which yet we must grant was possible to have been.— Particularly as to the Matter we are now speaking of.

First; In case the Author of any Book, or of any Report relates a Matter of Fact, of which there are not, nor well could be, any other Witnesses but himself; as if he says that he has received from God such a Revelation, with order to publish it to the World, or that he himself was an Eye or Ear-witness that such a thing was privately done or spoken by another; the Credibility of such a Report, whether written or spoken, depends, Partly, upon the Nature of the Report itself; Partly, upon the Credit of its Author; And partly, upon the Proofs that he gives of his Honesty and Veracity in that particular. And where there is a full

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Concurrence of all these, that is, When the Matter of the Report is credible in its self; when its Author is a Person of Credit; and when he gives the best Proofs that can be of his Veracity in that particular; there is no Reason to reject his Testimony, there is *sufficient* Reason to give Credit to it.

1. If the Matter of his Report be credible in its self. And if what he reports be, that he himself has receiv'd such a Revelation from God, with order to publish it to the World; I say, that this Report in the general is a credible Report; because it is very agreeable to the Goodness of God, and therefore not unlikely, that he should impart to Men, by a special Revelation, such things as are very useful for them to know, and which could not be known, or not so well; not so fully, clearly and certainly any other Way as by Revelation; and 'tis certainly not incredible, that he that has given us a Tongue to utter Words, and Skill to express thereby our Thoughts to one another, should have Power and Means to reveal and express his own Mind in such a Manner, that a Man may understand his Meaning; and 'tis likewise certainly not incredible in its self, that God, intending to declare his Will to Mankind, should make Use of the Ministry of a Man for this Purpose, and having made known his Will to one Man, give him Commission to communicate the same to others.

If therefore there be any thing incredible in the Report of a divine Revelation, it must be in the special Matter of it. But altho' the particular Matter of any such divine Revelation be such a thing as we could never have found out by natural Reason; I say, it is nevertheless credible as a Matter divinely revealed; if it implies no Contradiction; if it be not contrary to natural Reason; if it be not repugnant to a former divine

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Revelation that is well attested; and if it be a Doctrine worthy of God; that is, if in its true Consequences it has no Tendency to encourage Sin; but on the contrary, has a plain Tendency to promote the Practice of Piety, and Virtue among Men. Against such a Revelation as this there can be no just Objection made from the Matter of it; There is no Improbability that such a Thing as this should be the Subject of a divine Revelation.

Or if what he reports be, that he himself was by when such a thing was privately done or spoken by another; In this case the Matter of his Report is credible in its self, if what he says he was an Eye or Ear-witness of, be a proper Object of those senses; if it be not an impossible thing; if it does not imply a Contradiction. And in this case, the Difficulty, the Strangeness, the Uncommonness of the Thing; its being a thing that was never known to be done or said before, or which no account can be given of by Reason, or natural Causes, is no just Exception to the Truth of it. There is nothing in this kind absolutely incredible, but what is plainly impossible. But,

2. The Credibility of any Report, (supposing the Matter of it to be credible) depends, in good Measure, upon the Credit of its Author.

And then a Man may reasonably be thought an Author, or a Witness of good Credit, in Matters of his own Knowledge, when he appears, and by all his other Words and Actions shews himself to be, grave, sober, considerate, and in his right Wits; when he is a Person of unblemished Reputation; when he was never known to lye, or feign, or deceive in other Cases; when he gives no just Ground to suspect that he is an intriguing or designing Person; And lastly, when he himself

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is no Party to the Cause, has no worldly Interest carrying on in it, no Design of Honour or Profit, or other temporal Advantage, that, to appearance, can be served by his giving such Testimony; when he will be neither the better if his Report be credited, nor the worse if it be not believed. Such a Witness as this cannot reasonably be excepted against.

3. But 3dly, Even such a Report made by such a Person, is still further credible, in case he gives also the best Proofs that can be given, or that the Case will bear, of his Veracity in that Particular.

And 'tis one very good Token of a Man's own firm Perswasion of the Truth of what he says, if he gives his Testimony in a grave and serious Manner, and if he appears to have at that Time a good sense of Religion in his Mind. Upon which Account a Solemn Oath, by which God is called upon to witness the Truth of what is said, is reck'ned the greatest Assurance that ordinarily can be given of the Truth of any humane Testimony; and therefore by Evidence given upon Oath all Questions of the greatest Consequence to Men in this World are finally decided; *An Oath for Confirmation is to Men an End of all Strife.* Seeing therefore that the great Credit that is given to an Oath, is grounded upon that serious Sense of Religion which the Witness is supposed to have in his Mind, when he declares that he speaks as in the Presence of Almighty God; whenever there is good Evidence given by any Person of the same serious Sense of Religion, his Testimony, 'tho' without the Formality of an Oath, is not less credible.

Again, It is a further Token of a Man's firm Belief of what he reports or affirms, in case, the Matter of his Report being such as is naturally influential upon Practice,

Heb. 6. 16.

Practice, he himself lives and acts in all Respects agreeably thereto : And especially, if in Consequence thereof he declines making such Gain and Profit to himself as 'tis probable he would have done had he been otherwise perswaded ; and denies himself those worldly Pleasures and Sensual Gratifications which other Men not so perswaded, do freely allow themselves in ; and voluntarily undertakes such Labours, and endures such Hardships as it can hardly be supposed any Man of another Perswasion would undergo.

But the surest Token that any Man can give of his Veracity, is persisting in the Evidence he has once given to the last ; When no Promises of Wealth, Honour or Promotion can perswade him to forbear speaking the things which he has seen and heard ; when being brought before Kings and Rulers, and straitly threatened to hold his Peace, he is thereby rather the more emboldened to speak ; when being racked and tortured to retract his Evidence, he continues in the midst of the greatest Torments to witness the same thing that he did before ; And in fine, when having a certain Prospect before him of losing all that can be dear to him in this World, and even his Life its self, unless he will either go back from what he has said, or at least forbear to repeat and confirm it ; he willingly and cheerfully seals his Testimony with his Blood.

Such Assurance as this we may have of the Honesty and Veracity of a Person that witnesses a thing only of his own private Knowledge ; And this being the best we can have, he's an unreasonable Man that desires more, or says this is not sufficient.

But Secondly, in Case the Author of any Book, or of any Report, relates a Thing that was done or spoken publicly, in the Sight or Hearing of many others  
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besides himself, we may have still greater Assurance, of his Honesty and Veracity, and of the Truth of the Report its self ; And we have so, (we have, I think, the the greatest that can be,) if, after the Report is published, especially if it be a Matter of great Consequence to the World, it be not contradicted by any of those that were present ; and much rather, if they all, or a great many of them, agree in testifying the same thing ; Especially if they also are Persons of the like good Credit, and if they also give the same Proofs and Tokens of their Veracity that he did.

Such Evidence as this of the Veracity of any Author in what he writes, is beyond all reasonable Exception. And therefore when many, and especially when all these Evidences of Truth and Honesty do concur, I think we may be *sufficiently* assured that he did not design to impose upon his Readers. But,

(3.) If we may be well enough assured of the Author of any Book, and also of his Honesty ; yet, it was further objected, that this Author, whoever he was, could not be sure that he himself was not deceived, in his Opinion of his own Inspiration, or of a Revelation made to him ; Or in the Truth of any other Matter of Fact which he has related as of his own Knowledge.

But, first, If he could not be sure of his own Inspiration, or of a Revelation made to himself ; how then could any Man now a days be sure of the same, if God should vouchsafe to speak to us now, as 'tis said he did in former times to the Prophets and other inspir'd Men, by himself, or an Angel ? So that this Objection, if it be well grounded, cuts off not only all reasonable Belief of former Revelations, but likewise all reasonable Belief of any Revelation that can now be made, to our selves or others ; And 'tis to no Purpose to offer at any thing

thing to convince those of the Truth of any Revelation who are of Opinion that even the infinite Power and Wisdom of God cannot make such a Revelation of his Will to them as would be credible; such as they should reasonably judge sufficient for their Conviction.

This therefore is all that I shall say to this Part of the Objection; that if they suppose, as they seem to do, that Almighty God cannot any ways so reveal his Will to any Man, as that the Prophet himself can be assured that it is a divine Revelation; they suppose God to be of less Power and Skill than a Man is, who can utter his Mind in such a Manner to another, that the other shall have no Doubt, who it is that speaks, or what he means: But if they will but vouchsafe to grant, that God could now speak, or otherwise reveal his Will, in such Manner to us, as that we could not possibly have any Doubt, whether it was the Voice of God or an Angel or not, then I say there can be no Question but that he might speak in as plain a Manner to Men in former Times; and there is almost as little Question but that he has done so.

But many (it may be said) have pretended to Inspiration or Revelations, and, we have Reason to believe, have thought themselves inspired, when yet the Matter they have said they were inspired with, or which they have said has been revealed to them has been such as has clearly evidenced to all rational Men the Falsity of their Pretence.

True; And so likewise many Men have thought themselves at such a Place, in such a Company, hearing, seeing, speaking or doing such and such things, when yet, as it proves afterwards, they have been all the while only in a Dream: But what then? Does it follow that because a Man may think himself awake when

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he is in a Dream, he can therefore never be sure that he is awake? And as little does it follow, that because some Persons of weak or distempered Brains have thought they have had Revelations, therefore no sober and judicious Man in his right Wits, can ever be sure of a Revelation.

But suppose a Man at the first, being (as it may well be imagined he must be) in a great Surprize and Astonishment at the Strangeness and Novelty of the thing, should not be very certain of the Reality of the Revelation, should not well know whether he was awake or asleep; yet certainly the same signs which are sufficient afterwards to satisfy other Men of the Truth of his Inspiration or Revelation, must be allowed to be sufficient to satisfy himself of the same thing.

And therefore, If *Moses* (for instance) when God first spake to him in *Horeb* out of the burning Bush, Exod. 3. was in some Doubt whether he was in a Trance, or awake and in his right Mind; whether he really heard a Voice, or only dream'd so: it can't well be supposed that he continued in the same Doubt afterwards, when having at God's Command, *cast his Rod upon the Ground,* Exod. 4. 3; 4. *it became a Serpent;* and having at the same divine Command *taken it up by the Tail,* *it became a Rod again in his Hand:* And when after that, by his first putting his Hand into his Bosom it became *leprous as Snow,* and after his putting it in the second Time, *it came out like his other Flesh.* V. 6, 7.

Or if it can be imagined that he might possibly take all this to be only a Continuation of his Dream; or at least, might not in all this while be sure that it was not a Dream; it is not conceivable, however, that in all the Time that he was travelling from *Horeb* into *Egypt*, he should not ever be so thoroughly awake as to be sure that he was awake; and if he was, that he should

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not in all that Time make such Reflections upon what had passed, as either to perceive plainly that it had been only a Dream, or else to be very certain that it had not been a Dream, but a Reality.

Or if it can be conceived that his Amazement and Concern at what had happened was so great, that in all this Time he might not be so well come to himself, as to be sure that he had had a true divine Revelation; yet I think it was not possible that he should remain in the same Uncertainty, after he had been in *Egypt* for some while, and had wrought, not only those two Miracles over again in the Sight of the *Israelites*, whereby they were fully persuaded of his divine Mission; but likewise all the other great Signs and Wonders mentioned in the 7th. and following Chapters of *Exodus*, some of which the *Egyptians*, and even the *Magicians* themselves could not but acknowledge *were done by the Finger of God*.

But this, It may be it will be said, is proving one doubtful thing by another as doubtful, a Revelation by a Miracle: for it was further urged in the Objection, that no Author of any Book could be sure that he was not deceived in any other Matter that he has related as of his own Knowledge; that 'tis possible there might be Mistake in the Sign and Proof of the divine Revelation as well as in the Revelation its self; that 'tis possible that the Author of the Report (whether it was the Prophet himself, or any other Man who has reported the Miracles done by the Prophet, as Matters of his own Knowledge) did imagine he saw things which he did not see, and that he heard things which he did not hear.

But if this be supposed possible, that any Man, and much more that several Men agreeing in the same Report, the Organs of whose Senses were rightly disposed,

fed, and who by all their other Actions and Discourses appeared to be sober, and considerate, and judicious, should yet in the Day time, and in a clear Light, and when they were sure they were broad awake, be mistaken in the plainest Matters of Sense; then there is no such thing as Certainty in the World; Then they that make the Objection can be no more sure of what they themselves see and hear than other Men can be; And 'tis to no Purpose to hold an Argument with such as dare not believe their own Eyes and Ears. The only sense whereby, I think, such Men can be convinced, must be Feeling: And it will be well for them if they can carry the same Scepticism with them into the other World, and when they are compassed about with the Flames of Hell, can be able to doubt whether it be a real or a painted fire, whether they are tormented in that Flame, or not.

Leaving these therefore to be convinced in the other World, as being, I think, not capable of Conviction here; I shall content my self with having said, what, I suppose, is enough to satisfy others, That the Witness of a plain Matter of Fact may be sure of the Truth of what he witnesses; and that 'tis possible for God to speak so plainly to Men, that they may be certain they have had a divine Revelation; and that such Evidence may be given of the Veracity of an Author, and of the Authority of a Book as is *sufficient* to satisfy a reasonable Man.

And by this, and what was said before, I hope I have made it appear, that a *Standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well contrived and so well attested as to be *sufficient* to effect its Design, *viz.* to bring Men to Repentance. Whether the *Standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scripture* be *sufficient* for this Purpose, will be Matter of Enquiry in the next Discourses.

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In the mean time, what has been already said may serve to dispose us to hear without Prejudice the Arguments that may be offered to prove the *sufficiency* of the *Holy Scripture*. For,

1. If it be possible that there may be such a *Standing Revelation*, it is very probable that there is one; for from that natural Notion that we have of the Goodness of God it may be fairly argued, that he is not wanting to Men in the necessary Means of Salvation; and therefore, it being evident that there are not new Revelations made every Day, it may be reasonably concluded that the Reason is, because there is already some *Standing Revelation* of God's Will extant that is *sufficient* to direct us in the Way to Happiness. And,

2. If there be already any such *Standing Revelation* extant, it may be strongly presumed, that it is that which we have in the *Holy Scripture*; because there is no other Book, that we know of, which has such good Evidences of divine Authority and Inspiration as that has.

Let us then be prepared to inquire into the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Faith and Religion with unprejudiced Minds, with a sincere Love and Desire of Truth, and with a Resolution to hear Reason and to be convinced by it.

And above all, (which indeed is the best Preparation for Truth, and the best Security against Error) let us in the Sincerity of our Hearts, apply our selves to God for his Help and Direction; And that our Prayer may be effectual, let us be careful to approve our selves to him, by a conscientious Discharge of all those Duties of Piety, Justice, Temperance and Charity, which are clearly taught even by natural Reason; and be readily disposed to practise whatever else we shall learn to be our Duty by any farther Illumination: for if *any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God.*

Joh. 7. 17.

FINIS.



ERRATA.

IN Epist. Ded. l. 3. r. Arch-Bishop, p. 8. L 31. r. farborn, p. 13. l. 19  
r. be who, p. 14. l. 16. r. a Book.

THE  
SUFFICIENCY  
OF THE  
Scripture - Revelation,  
*As to the Matter of it.*

A  
SERMON

Preach'd at the  
CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of St. Paul,  
February the 5<sup>th</sup>. 1<sup>699</sup>/<sub>700</sub>.

BEING

The Second, for the Year 1700, of the LECTURE  
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By OFSPRING BLACKALL, Rector  
of St. Mary Aldermary, and Chaplain in Ordinary  
to His MAJESTY:

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S<sup>t</sup>. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

**T**HE first thing which I propounded to do in Discoursing on these Words, was, to endeavour to shew, that the present *Standing Revelation* of God's Will, contained in the *Books of the Old and New Testament* is abundantly *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets, (they have also Christ and his Apostles,) let them hear them.*

And if that *Standing Revelation* which God hath made to us of his Will in the *Holy Scriptures* can upon any Account be thought *insufficient* to effect this Design, it must be, I think, either, 1. Because no *Standing Revelation* can be *sufficient* for this Purpose ; Or, 2. Because there are some particular *Defects* in that Revelation which we have in the *Holy Scriptures* which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose, as 'tis possible a *Standing Revelation* might be.

I have, therefore, in a former Discourse upon these Words, endeavoured to shew in general, that a *Standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well contrived, and so well attested as to be *sufficient* for this Purpose.

I proceed now, in the second place,

2. To Consider whether that *Standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scriptures*, be such a Revelation; whether it be *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, and fully to direct them in the Way to Happiness; Or, whether there be not some particular *Defects* in this Revelation, which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose as 'tis possible a *Standing Revelation* might be.

And if there be any such *Defect* in the *Holy Scripture*, it must be either in the *Matter* of it, or in the *Proof* of it: And if it be in the *Matter* of it, it must be, either that it does not give us *sufficient Directions* what to do, or that it does not propose *sufficient Motives* to persuade Men to do what it requires.

And therefore in speaking to this Head, I shall shew, (1.) That the *Holy Scripture* gives us *sufficient Directions* what to do. (2.) That the *Motives* which the *Scripture* proposes, are *sufficient* to persuade us to do what it requires; And, (3.) That we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* which are taught by it.

(1.) I shall shew that the *Holy Scripture* gives us *sufficient Directions* what to do.

And of this there can be little Doubt among those that believe the divine Inspiration and Authority of the *Holy Scripture*; because to them its own Testimony

mony of its own *sufficiency* is a Proof thereof beyond all Exception. For, if, as the *Apostle* says, *2 Tim. 3. 16.* it be *profitable for Doctrine and for Reproof, and for Correction, and for Instruction in Righteousness*; it is plainly profitable for all the Purposes for which we can desire a divine Revelation. And, if, as he says in the next Verse, it was given to make *perfect the Man of God* (that is, the Man whose Business it is to teach and instruct others;) and *thoroughly to furnish him unto all good Works*, it cannot be *deficient* in delivering all such *Rules and Directions* as are necessary to be given by a Pastor to the People committed to his Care. And, if, as the same *Apostle* had said at the 15th. Verse of that Chapter, it be *able to make us wise unto Salvation*, we have no Reason to desire to be wiser than this excellent Book can make us. And if all this could truly be said by the *Apostle*, before the *Canon* of the *New Testament* was compleated; if it could be said by him of those *Holy Scriptures* which *Timothy* had known from a *Child*, that is, of the *Books* of the *Old Testament* only, much more may it be now said of the *Books* of both *Testaments* together.

But to speak at large of this Point, at present, would be too great a Digression from the Design of these *Lectures*, which were intended only against *Infidels*, not against any *Seet* of *Christians*; and such they pretended to be; such (because they hold the Foundation *Christ Jesus*;) they may in Charity be allow'd to be, who do chiefly differ from us in this Article, and deny the *sufficiency* of *Scripture*, only because they are resolv'd to maintain some gainful *Doctrines* and *Practices* of their own Church, which they are sensible have no Warrant from *Scripture*, and so can be maintained no other

other Way but by affirming that they have been delivered down to them by Tradition, and that unwritten Tradition is a necessary Supplement to the written Word, and of equal Authority with it.

For between us and *Infidels* who reject the *Scripture*, the *Sufficiency* of the *Scripture* as a *Rule* of Faith and Manners, is hardly Matter of Controversie: for these do not reject the *Scripture* because it teaches too little, but rather because it teaches too much: because it teaches Doctrines above their Reason, and commands such Duties as they do not like to practise; and if it taught less than it does, they would be more ready to own its divine Authority.

But nevertheless even these Men (that they may leave no Stone unturned) will be sometimes discouraging upon this Point; and altho' those *Books* of *Holy Scripture* which are now extant, and which are now generally receiv'd, do teach much more than they themselves are willing to believe and practise, yet, that they may, as much as they can, unsettle the Belief of others, do not stick to argue against the Christian Religion from this Topick, and to affirm that the *Books* of *Holy Scripture* which are now receiv'd do not contain the whole Will of God. For there were, say they, in former times, several other *Gospels*, and *Epistles*, and other *Tracts*, designed to instruct Men in the Christian Religion, which were written by the *Apostles* or other inspired Men, and which were consequently of the same Authority, in themselves; with those which are now receiv'd into the *Canon*, of which nevertheless we have nothing now left, but the Names and Titles, or some imperfect and uncertain Fragments; so that it may well be doubted, whether

whether those few *Books* which are now remaining, are sufficient to instruct us in all necessary Points of Knowledge and Practice. And of this Matter of Fact, there is, they say, some Evidence even from the *Scripture* itself: For St. *Luke*, in the Beginning of his Gospel, takes Notice, that many before him, had taken in Hand to set forth a Declaration of those things which were formerly believed among Christians; that is, had written and published Narratives of the Life, Actions, Miracles, Preaching, Death and Resurrection of our Saviour. But there are no Histories of this Kind, no *Gospels* now extant, that were written before St. *Luke's*, except only St. *Matthew's* and St. *Mark's*; and if there had been no more extant at that time, it would have been very improper, they say, for the *Evangelist* to have said, that many had written upon this Subject, when he spake only of those two. And that there was Matter enough for several such Narratives (so that tho' they were very different *Gospels*, they might nevertheless be all true) we are told by St. *John*, who wrote his Gospel the last of the Four *Evangelists*, Joh. 20. 30. Many other Signs truly did Jesus in the Presence of his Disciples, which are not written in this Book; and again, Ch. 21. Vers. 25. There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the World its self could not contain the Books that should be written.

Now if it be true, that there were several other *Books* formerly extant, but which are now lost, that were written by the *Apostles* and other inspired Men, and consequently by divine Inspiration; either these were needless when written, (and it is unreasonable to suppose that any *Book* written by divine Inspiration was needless)

needless) or else the Loss of these *Books* is a Loss to Religion; and we cannot be well assured, that those which we have now remaining do *sufficiently* instruct us in all Points of Christian Faith and Practice.

But admit the Truth of this Matter of Fact, *viz.* that *more Books* were written by the *Apostles*, or inspired Men, than are now extant, (which I will not now dispute, because I think it needless; because I think it may be granted without any Prejudice to the Christian Cause; altho' there be none, or at most but very slender Evidence of it;) nay, admit more than is upon any good Grounds alledged; *viz.* not only that several, but that every one of the *Apostles* and immediate Disciples of *Christ*, every one that had heard him Preach, and had been a Witness of his Life and Miracles and Resurrection, and had received the Miraculous Gifts of the Holy Ghost, did write a distinct *Gospel* giving an Account of some of the most remarkable Passages of our Saviour's Life which he had been a Witness of; and did likewise as he had Occasion write *Epistles* or other *Treats* for the Use and Instruction of the Christian Church; every one of all which *Books*, if they were now extant, and as well attested as the *Books* of the *New Testament* are, would be of equal Authority with them, because dictated by the same Spirit, by which all the *Apostles* were led into all Truth, and had all things that *Jesus* had spoken brought to their Remembrance; yet, I say, it would by no Means follow from hence, either that those *Books* which are now lost (if indeed there are any lost that were written by the *Apostles*) were needless when they were written; or that those which do now remain are not *sufficient*. And a very little Consideration of the State of things

as it was then, and as it is now, will make this which I have said very plain.

For the Case then was thus: The Gospel of *Christ* was to be preached to the whole World by a few Persons who had been Eye-witnesses of his Miracles, and were enabled by the Power of the Holy Ghost to confirm their Testimony of him by doing the like Miracles themselves; And that this great Work might be accomplished within the Term of their Life, it was necessary that they should quickly disperse themselves into all Parts of the World, one going this Way and another that, according as they had agreed among themselves, or were directed by the Spirit; And in this Division of Countries, every one had a large Province assigned to him, so that having much Work to do in a little Time, he could not well stay long in one Place; And upon this account it might be very proper for him after he had preached the Gospel in one City, and made a good number of Converts, and ordained Elders and established a Christian Church there, when he went thence to leave behind him in Writing the Sum of what he had before preached among them, for the Help of their Memories, for the Direction of their Pastors, and to prevent any Mis-representation that might afterwards be made of his Doctrine by ignorant or designing Men; And after he was gone from thence, he might have frequent Occasion to send them Letters, either to confirm them in their Faith, or to caution them against some Errors which he had heard were springing up among them, or to correct some Fault in their Discipline or Manners.

By this Means, I say, it might well enough be (tho' there be no Evidence that it was so) that in the first

Age of Christianity, there might be, besides occasional *Letters*, as many distinct *Gospels* as there were *Apostles*; every One writing a *Gospel* for the proper Use of those Churches which he himself had planted, and in the Language that was best known to them. And this, if it was done, might be no more than might be then necessary, when it was not so easy as it is now (since the Increase of Commerce and Navigation, and the Invention of Printing) to communicate and disperse the Books that are Published in one Country, to other Countries that are far distant. Besides, if this could have been done then, it can't well be supposed that a *Gospel* written by any *other* of the *Apostles*, who had never been in that Province or Division, and of whom they had never heard perhaps more than only his Name, should be at first of so great Authority to them, as a *Gospel* written by that very *Apostle*, by whose Ministry they had been converted, and of whose Miracles they themselves had been Witnesses.

Thus it might be; (and if it was so, it might be agreeable to the divine Wisdom and Goodness so to order it) that before those *Books* of the *New Testament* which we now have could be well dispersed, and upon good Attestation receiv'd in all Christian Countries, some particular Churches, and especially those most remote from *Judea*, should have for their present Use, *other Books* written by some *other* of the *Apostles*, containing the same *Form of sound Words*; and relating the same things concerning the Life and Doctrine of our Saviour that these do.

And that some of those many *Books* which might be written by the *Apostles* or other inspired Men  
upon

upon this Subject, should be lost, is no Marvel at all: 'tis rather a Wonder (considering the Poverty of the first Christians, and the constant Persecutions they were then under, and the many Revolutions of Government that have been in *Christendom* since that time,) that so many as we have now left could be preserved for so many Ages before Printing was found out. And those were of all the most like to be lost, which were published in rude and barbarous Countries, and which were written in some Language that was peculiar to one Nation only: And those the most easy, and consequently the most probable to be preserved, which were published in the learned Part of the World, and written in the most learned Language then in Use.

But altho' a greater Number of *inspired Books* than are now extant, might be necessary in the first Age of Christianity; before the Christian Churches, then newly planted in all Countries of the then known World, could have Communication with one another; it cannot be argued from hence that *those Books* which we have now remaining are not *sufficient* for the present Time, and for all the Time that has passed since the *other Books* were lost; But rather, it may very reasonably be presumed, that there was nothing more, for Substance, in *those Books*, which are supposed to be lost, than there is in these which are now remaining; so that the Loss of them may be no real Loss or Detriment to Religion, and those which remain and are now receiv'd in all Christian Churches, may be abundantly *sufficient* to instruct us in all Points of Christian Faith and Practice.

Luke 1. 4.

Joh. 20. 30, 31.

And there is indeed no Reason to think they are not, seeing some of those single Books which we have now, were written for this very Purpose, were designed as *Compendiums* of the whole Christian Institution: For St. Luke wrote his Gospel, that Theophilus, might know the Certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed; And if this was the Evangelist's Design, it can't be supposed but that he thought he had put into his Gospel whatever was necessary or very material: And St. John in the same Place where he acknowledges that he had omitted the Relation of many things which Jesus did, says that he had written the things contained in his Gospel, that Men might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have Life through his Name: By which it appears that he thought he himself had written enough in his Gospel to persuade Men to believe in Christ, and to direct them in the Way to eternal Life. There being therefore in those Books of the *New Testament* which we now have, several Abridgments of the whole Christian Doctrine, it cannot with any Reason be pretended, that all these Books together are not sufficient fully to instruct us therein.

Besides; The Gospel of Christ that was preached suppose, by St. Thomas in India, or by St. Simon in Africa, or by any other of the Apostles in Countries remote from Judea, or without the Bounds of the Roman Empire, was undoubtedly the very same Gospel that was preached by St. Peter, and St. Paul, or those other of the Apostles whose Books are now extant, and received by the Catholick Church; for they

they were all taught by the same Master, Christ; and were all enlightned by the same Holy Ghost: so that if any of them did, (as 'tis reported they did) write any Gospels for the present Use of those particular Churches which they had planted; tho' they might be somewhat different from any of the four Gospels which we now have, in the Expression, or perhaps in the Relation of some particular Passages of our Saviour's Life, which our Evangelists have omitted: (just as the four Gospels which we now have, do differ from one another) yet for Substance they must needs have been the same with these, and with one another, if indeed they were all true Relations of the Matters of which the Authors thereof had been Witnesses; so that if we had them all now, they could all together teach us no other Doctrines than are taught in the Books of the *New Testament*.

Nevertheless, I do not deny but that if we had more Books of this Kind than we have; that if we had all the Books that were written by the Apostles, or their immediate Successors who had been taught by them, they might be of very good Use to us, to help us to understand more readily and easily those Books which we have (as now we receive from some Portions of Holy Scripture, great Light, to help us to understand, and to put a right Interpretation upon others:) But perhaps, it was for this very Reason that the Providence of God did order no more to be written, than were written, or has suffered those to be lost that are supposed to be lost, that it might cost us some Pains and Study to understand our Religion; that so our Knowledge, as well

well as our Practice being in some Measure the Fruit of our own Industry, might be a proper Subject of Reward.

In short, That there were *more Books* in the first Age of Christianity, written by *Apostles* or other inspired Men than are now extant, or than if extant can be well proved to be of their Writing, is a Point which I believe cannot be now upon any certain Evidence either affirmed or denied: But if it be granted, I say however, there is no Reason to infer from thence, that those which we now have are not *sufficient*. For if there be a God and a Providence, and if there be any Truth in the Scriptures Declarations of the Love of God to Mankind, and that *he would have all Men to be saved, and to come to the Knowledge of the Truth*, most certainly the necessary Means of Mens Salvation is a proper Subject of the divine Care: And if so; it can't be thought but that the same good Providence which (as is now supposed) took Care for the *writing of more Books* when more might be necessary, has likewise taken Care for the *Preservation of so many of these Books* as are now *sufficient*.

Or if the Men we are now arguing with, will not grant that there is such a particular Providence of God; yet if they will but allow that God is just: that he is not a *hard Master*, expecting to reap *where he has not sown*, I think they must allow that all things necessary to our Salvation, not knowable by Reason, are taught in the *Books of Holy Scripture* which we now have, because there are no *other Books extant* which we have reason to receive and accept as divine Revelation.

Or

Or if they deny this, it will lie upon them to produce those other *Books* which we ought to receive besides these, and to give good Evidence to the World of their divine Authority. Which when they have done; or if they shall but only shew that there is *as good Reason* to receive them as these; We must own our selves to blame, if we shall not then take them also into the *Canon of Scripture*.

But till that shall be done, what hath been already said is enough to shew that the *Holy Scripture* is a compleat *Rule* both of Faith and Manners. Especially considering (as was noted before) that when-ever the *Insufficiency of Scripture* in this Respect, is urged by those who do not believe the *Scripture* (which are the Persons I have now to deal with,) it can be only for Cavilling sake: the true Reason of their Backwardness to receive it as a divine Revelation, being, not because it teaches not enough, but because it teaches more than they are willing to believe, and commands more than they are disposed to practise. For I cannot imagine that these Men do truly desire *more Duty* than is laid upon them in the *Books of Scripture* now received by the Christian Church; But what they may most reasonably be thought to desire, is, either some *better Encouragement* to undertake that difficult Task which the *Scripture* lays upon them, or some *better Evidence* that the *Scripture* is a divine Revelation.

I proceed now therefore to the second thing propounded, which was,

(2.) To

(2.) To shew that the *Motives* which the *Scripture* proposes are *sufficient* to persuade Men to do what it requires.

Now *Hopes* and *Fears* are the great Springs of Action; and the greater the Good is we hope for, or the Evil we fear, the stronger do they move and incline us to Action; And therefore how difficult soever the Undertaking be, (so it be but possible,) if the *Motives* are proportioned to the Difficulty, they must be granted to be *sufficient Inducements* to undertake it.

But that the Task or Business required of us, is possible to be done, needs not to be proved now, because it must be granted by those who say they believe they should be persuaded to do what is required, if they had *better Encouragement*; for no *Arguments* or *Motives* whatsoever can reasonably persuade a Man to undertake a thing that he believes impossible.

Supposing it therefore possible; I say that whatsoever Difficulty there really is, or we may apprehend there is, in a Christian Life; if any *Motives* that could possibly be proposed to us can be thought *sufficient* to induce us to undertake it; most evidently, those *Motives* which the *Gospel* proposes, are so; because better or greater cannot be so much as conceived or imagined; seeing both the good things which it promises to persuade us to *Virtue*, and the evil things which it threatens to deterr us from *Sin*, are, as to the *Matter* of them, the greatest that we are capable of enjoying or suffering; and consequently the most probable to raise our *Hopes*, and to excite our *Fears* to the highest Pitch.

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For the Arguments that do most strongly persuade us to any thing, are from Interest; from the Profit and Advantage we shall reap by doing it; from the Tendency it has to make us happy; and Happiness consists in being perfectly free from all Pain and Trouble and Vexation; and in the full and free Enjoyment of whatsoever is pleasing and delightful to us.

But now both these the *Gospel* gives *Assurance* of to all those that believe and obey it; that is, that they shall thereby be freed from that intolerable Pain and Misery, which the Wicked and Unbelievers shall be condemned to, and also that they shall thereby be instated in the perfectest and compleatest Happiness both of Body and Soul; In a Happiness far greater than any they do or can enjoy now; nay, in a Happiness much greater than any they can now have so much as a Conception or Idea of in their Minds. For <sup>1</sup> Cor. 2. 9. *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entred into the Heart of Man the Things that God hath prepared for them that love him.*

But there is, besides, a *remarkable Circumstance* which does much enhance the Value of any Good, and likewise much aggravate the Evil of any Pain or Misery; viz. its *Duration*: For how great soever the Good or Evil proposed to persuade us to any thing, are in themselves; yet if they be but of short Continuance, if they will soon expire and be at an End, we reckon it not worth while to be at much Pains to obtain such a short-lived Good, or to avoid such a transient Evil; But in this Respect also, the *Motives* both of Hope and of Fear which the *Gospel* proposes to us, do far surpass all those Persuatives or Inducements which

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Sin



Sin can offer: for the most we can hope to escape by the Commission of any Sin, is the Pain and Suffering of a few Weeks or Years, or a temporal Death; which last, yet, we cannot be so vain as to hope to escape clearly, for we can at most but delay it for a short Season; And on the other side, the greatest Good we can propose to our selves, or so much as hope to obtain by any Sin, is the Pleasure of a short Life: In which Hope, Men are likewise very often most sadly disappointed; their sinful Gratifications commonly bringing with them, or drawing after them, much more Trouble and Vexation even in this World, than the little Pleasure they can reap from them is sufficient to compensate for. But if it were not so; If the Pleasures of Sin were certain and sincere; yet they are but for a Moment; They can be but short, because our Life its self is but short; being (as St. James says) *a Vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*

Jam. 4. 14.

But the *Motives* of both kinds, which the Gospel proposes, have in this Respect also, (that is, in Respect of the *Duration* of the Good or Evil proposed) all the Advantage that is possible. For the Misery we shall escape, and the Blessedness we shall attain, by yielding Belief and Obedience to the Gospel, are, both of them, of *eternal and endless Duration.* A *Worm that never dieth, a Fire that never shall be quenched; Everlasting Punishment; Eternal Damnation; Everlasting Fire; Everlasting Destruction; The Blackness of Darkeness, for ever; A Lake of Fire and Brimstone, where they shall be tormented Day and Night for ever and ever; and where the smoke of their Torment ascendeth up for ever, and ever.* These are the *Evils*

Mark 9. 46, 48.

Matth. 25. 46.

Mark 3. 29.

Matth. 18. 8.

2 Theff. 1. 9.

Jude 13.

Rev. 20. 10.

14. 11.

which the Gospel threatens to Sin: And if these be not *sufficient* to deterr Men from it, what can be *sufficient*? What *Evil* can that Man be supposed to be afraid of, who is not afraid of *everlasting Burning*? A *greater Evil* cannot be threatned; and he who is not scared by this, would certainly be less scared by the Threatning of a less Evil. And on the other side, *Everlasting Life; a Crown that fadeth not away; a Kingdom that cannot be moved; an eternal Weight of Glory; Fulness of Joy in the Presence of God; and Pleasures for evermore at his right Hand*; these are the good things promised to Obedience; And could greater things be promised than these? could we our selves if we were put to desire what we would, desire more? and if the Promise of unspeakable and everlasting Blessedness, be not *sufficient* to prevail with us to undertake a Godly and Christian Life, certainly nothing can be *sufficient*. If God should make never so many Revelations of his Will to Mankind, he could not propose greater Encouragement to Obedience, than he has done already in the Gospel: And if those good things which he has promised, do not move us, 'tis not because they are not great enough to move a wife and considering Man, but because we are so bent upon Sin that we will not give way to any Considerations that might serve to restrain us from it.

In a Word; The *Gospel Motives* to Repentance and Obedience comprehend all that we can fear or hope for; so far therefore as Fears or Hopes can work upon us, there is plainly nothing wanting in that *Standing Revelation* that God has made of his Will, by *Moses and the Prophets*, and especially by *Christ and his*

*Apostles*, to make it successful, that is, to persuade Men to Repentance, if they will but hear what they say and give Credit to it.

But 'tis not, perhaps the *Infidels* will say, a *better Rule* that they Want, than the *Scripture* is, or *better Motives* to persuade them to lead their Lives according to it, than the *Scripture* proposes; but what they chiefly want, is some *better Evidence*, some greater Certainty of the *Truth* of the *Scripture*.

This therefore was what I propounded to do in the next place; *viz.* To shew that we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* which are taught by it.

But because the handling of this Point would take up too much Time, I shall chuse to deferr it; and conclude this present Discourse with an earnest Exhortation to all those that do sincerely believe the Gospel, to consider often and seriously of those *great Motives* which it proposes to persuade Men.

For tho' we live in an Age of great *Infidelity*; wherein some are bold enough to strike at the very Foundation of all Religion, and to dispute at least, if not deny the most evident and undeniable *Truths* of it; and others think they pay Respect enough to the common Reason and Judgment of Mankind, if they do but grant themselves to be *Deists*; and wherein, even among those that openly profess the Christian Religion, there is in a great many a Spice and Tincture of *Atheism* and *Infidelity*; and tho' they do not actually disbelieve the Gospel truths, yet they believe them so coldly and faintly, that their Faith may rather be called an *Inclination* to believe, than a full *Persuasion*;

*Persuasion*; I say, even in this incredulous and unbelieving Age, I am nevertheless verily persuaded, that for one Man that is ruin'd by *Infidelity*, many hundreds are ruined by *Thoughtlessness* and *Inconsideration*; that where there is one that is wicked, because he believes nothing of the *Gospel-motives*, nor that there is any such Place or State as Heaven or Hell, there are a great many that do believe these things, and yet continue in their wicked Course, because they never take any time seriously to consider what Heaven and Hell are; and that vast, that infinite difference that there is between these two States; and how much it behoves them to use all Diligence to attain that, and to avoid this.

Leaving therefore those who believe little or nothing of these things to my following Discourses, wherein I hope to prove the *Truth* of the *Gospel Revelation*, beyond all reasonable Exception; I shall now address my self to you that do believe these things, and who, every time you meet together in the Church do repeat all the Articles of the Christian Faith, and declare your Assent thereto. And what I would desire of you is; that you would frequently think of those things which you profess to believe, that you would meditate much and often thereupon, that you would seriously consider the Meaning thereof.

Particularly, That *Summary* of the *Gospel Motives* to Faith and Repentance before spoken of; that great and last Article of the Christian Creed, *The Life everlasting*; Consider what it means, and do not content your selves only with saying every Day that you do believe an *everlasting Life after this*, but meditate likewise every Day, or very frequently at least, what  
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an *everlasting Life* is, and of what *Sort and Kind* that everlasting Life will be.

Now *Life* is a state of *Sensation*; By *this* a Living Body is distinguished from a dead Carcass, that the living Body feels what is done unto it, and is affected thereby either with Pain or Pleasure; whereas a dead Carcass is not capable of either, hath no Sense or Feeling of any thing. When therefore in repeating the Creed, we declare that we believe we shall live again, after our death, the meaning is, that we shall be hereafter in such a State of *Sensation* as we are in now; that in that Life we shall be as *sensible* of Pain or Pleasure, as we are in this Life.

But then, what makes the great Difference between this Life and that, is, that *this* is *short, transient and momentary*, that if it be pleasant, it is soon over, and that if it be painful it will not last long; whereas *that*, such as it is once, such it will *ever* be; for that's the Meaning of a *Life everlasting*; 'tis a Life that will *never be ended*; A Life that will *continue to all Eternity*.

And now that we come to speak of *Eternity*, the Word has a fix'd Meaning; yet how are our Thoughts lost and bewildered when we set our selves to meditate thereupon? When we speak of a thousand, or ten thousand, or even of a Million of Years, we have some Notion of what we say; but when we come to multiply these thousands, and Millions, by ten thousands, or ten Millions, or by Millions of Millions, our Thoughts are not capacious enough to conceive, and our Mouths want Words to express that infinite Length of Time which these Numbers do comprehend; And yet all that these

Numbers

Numbers denote, is nothing in Comparison with *Eternity*.

If the whole Sea were to run out Drop by Drop, what a prodigious Length of Time would this take up? and yet in time this would be done; and they that live for ever would live to see the vast Cavens of the Ocean without one Drop of Water left in them: And which is more yet, there would be no Part of their Eternity then spent, they would then be as far from dying as they were at first.

Or if only once in ten thousand Years, one of the smallest Sands or Dusts were to be taken from the Earth, they that live for ever would live to see all this vast Bulk of the Earth by these slow and imperceptible Degrees wholly removed, not so much as a Grain or Atome of it left; Nay, and even in this prodigious, this unconceivable Length of Time, their Life would not be in the least diminished, they would have the same boundless Eternity still before them that they had, when the first Sand was taken away.

But what do I speak of these little Numbers, these Moments of Time, as they may truly be called, in Comparison with Eternity? For even all those Years in which the whole Earth might be removed, if only one single smallest Dust thereof were to be taken away once in ten thousand Years, I say, all these Years may be expressed in Figures, in a Line of a few Inches long; But if the whole Expanse of Heaven were written quite over with Figures from the Top to the Bottom, and from one Side to the other, even all these Figures, tho' set so close that there was not Room left for one more; would not denote or express *Eternity*; And when all these numberless Mil-

lions

lions of Years were spent, He that lives for ever, would be (as it were) but just then beginning to live; and his Sight and Prospect of the Time before him, would be still as boundless as ever.

Thus you see what is *eternal Life*; Or rather, you see what *it is not*; It is a Length of Time that cannot be expressed in Words, or signified by Figures, or conceived in Thought: It is a Length of Time to which all that we can have any positive Notion of, bears no Proportion.

And when we believe that we shall live *such a Life*, after this short Life is over; does it not highly behove us to think of it now; and to make the best Provision that is possible that we may be happy in it?

And this leads me to the other Branch of Meditation on this Subject, which we ought likewise frequently and seriously to dwell upon in our Minds; namely of *what Sort* and *Kind* this eternal Life will be.

And as 'tis *Life*, 'tis (as was said before) a State of *Sensation*; and as it is an *everlasting Life*, 'tis a State in which we shall for *ever* feel our selves, either in *Pain* or at *Ease*.

And if there were no more in it than this; tho' the *Pain* we shall then endure were the least of those Pains wherewith we are now afflicted, a little Pain or Aking of one Joint or Member only; Or tho' the *Pleasure* we shall then enjoy, were one of the least of those Pleasures wherewith we are now delighted; yet when we have added *Eternity* to these, what an infinite Difference is there between these two States? And how well must we needs think it worth all the Pains and Labour that we can take in this World, to secure to our selves a Portion in that better Sort of everlasting

lasting Life, in that Life in which there is no *Pain*, tho' there be but little *Pleasure*?

But still our Thoughts are short; we have not yet a just Notion of the Difference between these two States. For if we believe the *Scripture* (and I speak now to those that do believe it,) that *everlasting Pain* which the wicked will be condemned to, is not a light or gentle Pain; but the sharpest, the acutest, the most tormenting that can be endured; and that *eternal Joy* which we have a good Hope of by the Gospel, is likewise the greatest, the fullest, the completest that we are capable of; for in representing the former to us, the *Scripture* all along expresses the Torments of Hell by such Pains as are here most afflicting to us; as the Biting and Gnawing of a *Worm*, the being beaten with *Stripes*, the noysomness of *Brimstone*, and the Burning of *Fire*; And on the other side, when it would represent to us the Happiness of the Blessed, it does it by resembling the heavenly Joys, to such Pleasures as do here upon Earth most sensibly delight us, such as are the Pleasures of a spacious, rich and commodious Dwelling, of the choicest Delicacies to please the Taste, of the rarest Melody to delight the Ear, of a Crown, and a Kingdom, and an exceeding Weight of Glory, and of whatever else can gratifie or please any of our Senses.

Now tho' these Representations or Descriptions of Hell and Heaven are not perhaps to be understood literally; the *Scripture* herein speaking, not according to the Strictness of Truth, but according to our present Capacities and Apprehensions, who have now very little Notion of any Pain or Pleasure but what affects the Senses of our Body; yet thus much may most

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certainly be concluded from those Descriptions of these two States which we meet with in Scripture; that both the Torments of Hell and the Joys of Heaven, are as great as they can possibly be; far beyond any thing that we now feel or enjoy, or can have any Notion of; And, in a Word, that as the *Pain* of Hell is *endless*, so it is likewise *intolerable*, and that as the *Joy* of Heaven is *perpetual*, so it is likewise *unspeakable and full of Glory*.

And now after this short tho' very imperfect Representation of these two vastly different States of Man in that other, and everlasting Life that will begin when this is over; I think I may fairly ask again, What God could have done more, either to deter us from Sin, than to threaten Hell-torments to those that live in it, or to encourage us to Obedience, than to promise to those that continue in well doing, the unspeakable Happiness of Heaven? Certainly, if these *Motives* will not prevail upon us, no other can be proposed, that would prevail.

Nay further; Tho' I have hitherto spoken to you as to Christians, which believe the Scripture, and that there will certainly be another Life after this, even such a Life as I have been speaking of, an *everlasting Life of perfect Happiness, or extreme Misery*; yet if you have at all attended to, and are any whit affected by that Representation that I have made to you, of the *Pains of Hell*, and of the *Joys of Heaven*, and of the *Eternity* of both; I should now dare to address my self to you, even tho' I thought you believed very little of these things; and methinks I should not doubt, but that I might prevail with you, and persuade you to Repentance, by these *Gospel Motives* of Heaven and Hell.

Hell; even altho' the *Revelation* thereof were not *certain* and *undoubted*, altho' there were some *just Reason* to question the *Truth* of them.

For put the Case that it is very *uncertain* whether there will be an eternal Life or no; Nay, put the Case that it is ten to one, that it is much more probable, that there will not be any such Life after this; Yet when we consider what *Eternity* is, and what a vast *Difference* there is between living in *perfect Joy*, and in *everlasting Burning*; and when we consider withall the *Shortness* of this present Life; and how *little* we can lose in it by abstaining from Sin; and how *little* we can suffer in it, by the strictest Holiness and Virtue; even the bare *Possibility* that there will be an eternal Life, tho' we had no certain Revelation, and no other very good Assurance given us of it, would be abundantly *sufficient* to deter us from Sin, and to stir us up to well-doing. For if we live well here, and there be really an eternal Life, it will be happy for us that we have made this Preparation for it; but if there should indeed be no other Life after this, we shall be then no Losers by what we have done; we shall be then in as good a Condition, as others will be in who did not believe it, nor live in Expectation of it; And all that Trouble which the Exercise of Piety and Virtue now costs us, is not worth speaking of; it is no more than we ought in Reason and Prudence to be at, altho' at the same time we believed it to be very uncertain whether there would be any such eternal Life or no.

For this is what we call and account Wisdom in all other Cases; *viz.* to provide not only against Certainties or high Probabilities, but (when it may easily and

conveniently be done) even against *Possibilities* too. We reckon him an unwise Man for the World, who being in a good Way of getting, spends all as fast as it comes in, when he has no present Need to spend so much; and lays up nothing against old Age, when, if he lives to it, he will be past his Labour, and not in a Capacity to get enough to support himself: And yet of all those that do wisely make some Provision for old Age, not one in ten perhaps lives to it. But nevertheless the bare *Possibility* that a Man may live to old Age, and the very great Inconveniences that he will suffer, if he shall have nothing then to live upon, make it very advisable for every one of the ten, to lay up somewhat, (if he can do it) against that time; And he, of the ten, whose only Lot it will be to live to be old, is not a wiser Man for making such Provision, than the other nine are, who yet, in the Event, will be never the better for their Labour.

Put case therefore that there is the same, or even a much greater *Uncertainty* whether there will be an eternal Life after this; yet when we consider *what an eternal Life* is; when we consider, that if there be a Heaven, and we can procure our Portion to be there; we shall be happy, infinitely and unspeakably happy to eternal Ages; And that if there be a Hell, and we do not take Care to avoid it; our Lot will be extremely miserable, and we shall be *tormented Day and Night, for ever and ever, in the Lake that burns with Fire and Brimstone*: And when we consider withal, the very *little Trouble*, in Comparison, that it will cost us to attain that and to avoid this; that 'tis but the Labour of a few Years, and that the most we can suffer by it, is the Loss of a little Sensual Pleasure, for which, after this

Life

Life is over, we should be never the better; or the enduring of some little Pain or Hardship which will be soon over, and for which, if no Good should ever come of it after this Life, we shall however be then never the worse; Considering, I say, thus, the infinitely vast and wide Difference, that there is between being eternally happy and eternally miserable, 'tis enough that it is *possible*, 'tis more than enough, that 'tis *probable* that there will be such a state; and if we neglect to make Provision for it, because we are not *absolutely certain* that it will be, it is plain, that we do not act so prudently in this, as we do in other Cases: that are of infinitely less Moment and Concern to us; and that (as our Saviour says) *The Children of this World, are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light*.

Now this is the most that the professed *Atheists* or *Infidels* can pretend; They'll say perhaps, that for their own parts, they do not believe the Being of a God, or a Judgment, or a Life to come; and that they do not see any good Reason to believe these things; forasmuch as all the Proofs that are brought for them, do, in their Judgment, fall short of Demonstration; and they are resolved not to believe them, till such Proof thereof shall be offered, as they can make no Exception against; not till they shall see with their own Eyes that there is a Heaven and a Hell, or till they shall have a Messenger sent to them from thence on purpose to assure them thereof: And be it so as they say, that there is not an absolute Certainty of the Truth of these things, that we have not yet such a sure Proof of them, as ocular or mathematical Demonstration would be; yet this is the most they can say, they themselves cannot pretend that there is any Demonstration on the other side.

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They are not sure, they say, that there will be *another Life*, or that it will be *everlasting*; Well: but are they sure that there will not be such a Life? is it absurd or impossible that there should be such a Life? this I'm sure they can't say; and all that they have yet dared to say, is only that those Proofs thereof, that we rely upon, are not, in their Opinion, *sufficient*.

But suppose them as *insufficient* as they can think them; yet still, if they are not *sufficient* to prove the *Certainty*, they may be *sufficient* to prove the *Probability* of what they are brought to prove; or if not so; yet still a future Life, if it be not *certain*, nay if it be not *probable*, however may be *possible*; And if it be only *possible* that we may *live for ever*; and that we may be *eternally happy*, or *eternally miserable*; this *Possibility* alone, (considering what an infinite Difference there is between these two States,) ought in reason to put us upon taking the best Care we can, that if there be an eternal Life, we may be eternally happy in it.

But after all, our Proof of this and other great Truths of our Religion, is not so very weak and slender as these Men would represent it; It is indeed as good as the Nature of the thing will bear; and he's an unreasonable Man that requires a better Proof of any thing than it is capable of.

This therefore is what I should now in the next Place, proceed to do; *viz.* (3.) To shew, that there is *sufficient Reason* to give *Credit* to the *Scripture*, wherein these Truths are plainly taught. But this being too large a Subject to be handled now, I have already said, I would defer it to the next Oppor-

FINIS.

THE  
SUFFICIENCY  
OF THE  
Scripture-Revelation,

As to the Proof of it. PART I.

A  
SERMON

Preach'd at the  
CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of St. Paul,  
March the 4<sup>th</sup>. 1700.

BEING  
The Third, for the Year 1700, of the LECTURE  
Founded by the Honourable Robert Boyle, Esq;

By OFSPRING BLACKALL, Rector  
of St. Mary Aldermary, and Chaplain in Ordinary  
to His MAJESTY.

LONDON,  
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S<sup>t</sup>. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

**H**aving in my first Discourse on these Words endeavoured to shew in general, that a *Standing Revelation* of God's Will may be so well contrived, and so well attested as to be *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate ; I came the last time to consider whether that *Standing Revelation* which we have in the *Holy Scripture* be such a Revelation ; Or whether there be not some particular *Defects* in it, which render it not so *sufficient* for this Purpose, as 'tis possible a *Standing Revelation* might be.

And if there be any such *Defect* in the *Holy Scripture*, it must be, as I said, either in the *Matter* of it, or in the *Proof* of it ; And if in the *Matter* of it, it must be, either that it does not give *sufficient Directions* what to do ; Or that it does not propose *sufficient Motives* to persuade Men to do what it requires.

And therefore in speaking to this Head, I propounded to shew (1.) That the *Holy Scripture* gives us *sufficient*



*cient Directions* what to do. (2.) That the *Motives* which it proposes are *sufficient* to persuade us to do what it requires: And (3.) That we have *sufficient Reason* given us, to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it.

And the Two first of these I have already done. I proceed now to the Third, *viz.*

(3.) To shew that we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it; And that I shall presume to be *sufficient Reason* in this Case, which we readily accept and allow of as *sufficient* in all other Cases of the like Nature.

And I suppose it will be granted that we have *sufficient Proof* given us of the *Truth* of the Things contained in *Holy Scripture*, and of the *Authority* of it, if it can be shewn, 1. That we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of *Holy Scripture* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof. 2. That there is *sufficient Reason* to give full Credit to them in their *Relation* of those *Matters* of *Fact* which they have recorded. And 3. That if the *Matters* of *Fact* recorded in the *Scripture* are true, they are *sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and *divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught.

These things therefore I shall now endeavour to make good.

But in speaking to this Point, I shall (for Brevity's sake) confine my Discourse only to the *Books* of the *New Testament*; Partly, because *these* are the *Books* wherein our *Christian Religion* is chiefly taught; And especially

especially because I think there are none who receive the *New Testament* as of *divine Authority*, that do (or indeed can, with any Reason) reject the *Old*.

1. Then, I am to shew that we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of *Holy Scripture*, (of the *New Testament* in particular) were written by those *Persons* that are said to be the *Authors* thereof.

This indeed is a Point that it does not properly lie upon us to make any Proof of; For as a Man's *Possession* of an *Estate*, is alone a good and a *sufficient Title* to it, till a better is shewn by the *Person* that endeavours to eject him: so it is here; *These Books* are generally receiv'd as written by such and such *Persons*; *These Authors* have the *Name*, *these* have (as it were) the *Possession* of them; and that's *Title* enough, if no other could be produced, so long as no *Evidence* is offered to shew that any other *Persons* have a better *Title* to them. It lies on them therefore who *deny* that the *Books* are *theirs*, to give a *Reason* of what they say; either by alledging some special Matter out of the *Books* themselves, whereby it may be proved that they could not be of *their Writing*; or by producing some *credible* and *authentick History* testifying that they were written by some other *Persons*, and not by them. And till they can, and shall do this (which I am persuaded can never be done) we may very well refuse to produce any positive *Evidence* to affirm or prove their *Title*, their *Possession* being a good *Title* enough, till a better appears. And a *Tenant* might with as good *Reason* refuse to pay *Rent* to the *Person*, of whom he took the *Estate*, and to whom he hath ever hitherto paid *Rent*, and whose *Right* to it is not at all controverted, until he shall suffer his *Writings* to be perused and

and examined, and by them make it plainly appear that he is the *lawful* Landlord; as any Man can now refuse to give that Credit to *these Books*, as written by the *Apostles*, which has been given hitherto, and is still given by all Christians, unless he may have now a good positive Evidence of their being written by the *Apostles*, as might have been given thereof at first; and as, it may be presumed, was given before their Title to them was so universally acknowledged.

But nevertheless what a Man is not under any Obligation to do for the asserting of his Right, he may do wisely enough for his own Satisfaction. And it must needs be a Satisfaction and Pleasure to a Man, altho' his Title to his Estate be not at present controverted, if in looking over the Writings and Evidence of it, he sees plainly how it descended to him by a lineal Succession from Father to Son for many Generations past; and how it came at first to his Ancestors, by a clear and fair Purchase from the former Possessors; or by Donation from the Prince, in the Division of a vast or conquered Country; and if he also finds ancient Terriers agreeing in the same Measure, and Boundings, and exactly describing the same Estate which he now possesses; and if moreover, looking far back, he sees, that upon some Disputes or Law-suits that have formerly been concerning it, Judgment has been always given on his Side. It cannot but please him, I say, that upon such a Search into Antiquity, he finds that he is so very well provided to make out his Title, if there should ever be any Occasion for it; altho' by Reason of the long and quiet *Possession*, that he, and his Ancestors before him, time out of Mind, have had of it,

he has no just Cause to fear he shall ever meet with any Disturbance.

And so it is here: These Writings, *the Books of the New Testament*, are generally *acknowledged* to be written by the *Apostles of Christ*, and their Authority is at present uncontested; It may therefore reasonably be presumed, (especially by those who have not Parts or Learning or Leisure to examine into the Reasons of such things,) that they would not have been so universally acknowledged and revered as they are upon this Account, but upon very good Grounds; tho' what the Grounds thereof are, they have not yet inquired; Their being in *Possession* is one Reason enough to acknowledge and assert their Title. It lies upon them that *deny* these *Books* to be *theirs*, to produce satisfactory Evidence of their being forged or counterfeit; and till they shall produce some Evidence thereof that has a Shew and Appearance of Truth, we have no Reason to be staggered in our Belief by their bare, however bold and confident, Denial of their Authority; And much shall we need to give our Reasons for our receiving them as written by the *Apostles*, till our Adversaries shall offer some Reasons why we ought not to receive them as such.

But nevertheless, because we see there are some, in this incredulous Age, that shew a good Will to deny the Authority of these *Sacred Books*; and whose Interest it would be to prove them *Spurious*; and because we cannot tell what unwarrantable Practices their Inclination and Interest may put them upon; what Writings or Evidences, plausibly forged or counterfeited, they may hereafter produce: it cannot

cannot be amiss for us to inquire and see; and it cannot but be a Pleasure and Satisfaction to us (who hold our Hope of eternal Life chiefly by these Writings) to find and consider how well provided we are to detect and disprove any such Forgeries, if they should be offered, by being able to produce, in Opposition thereto, as good positive Proof that these Books are *genuine*, as such a Matter is capable of, much better than I believe can be produced for the Authority of any other Books of the like Antiquity.

And it gives us some Satisfaction in the Belief we have been bred up in, that these are the *genuine* Books of the *Authors* to whom they are ascribed, to find that they are receiv'd as such, not by a small Party of Men, not by that Church and Nation only to which we belong, but by *all Christians* dispersed in *all Parts* of the World; and likewise that they agree with us in the same Testimony, *viz.* that they were received then, as such, from their Fathers. For that these Books should be thus generally receiv'd and acknowledged, by so many different and far distant Nations, without some good Grounds, is not conceivable; because it can neither be imagined that the *Christians* of the present Age, dispersed in all Countries should combine together to say that they received these Books from their Fathers, as the *genuine* Writings of the *Apostles*, if they had not so receiv'd them; nor that their Forefathers, in any of the Ages past, should have all agreed together, to put a Cheat upon their Posterity, by delivering down to them the Books as written by the *Apostles*, when they themselves had no good Reason to believe them so, or when they knew the contrary.

It is a further Satisfaction to us, to observe and consider, that the *Authority* of these Books is as well proved as it can be, not only by oral, but also by the best *written* Tradition; The Christian Writers of all Ages, citing them (as they had Occasion) as the *genuine Writings* of the *Apostles*; And that, as well before the *Canon* of the *New Testament* was defined and declared by *Councils*, as since.

And lastly, It gives us very good Satisfaction that these Books are the *genuine Writings* of the *Persons* to whom they are ascribed, that we do not find they were ever excepted against, as *spurious* and *counterfeit*, in those times when it would have been most proper to have made the Exception; and by those *Persons* whose Cause and Interest it would have served very much to have proved them *Spurious*, if it could have been done.

For the proper *time* to have made this Exception to these Writings, was *when*, or *soon after*, they were first published; when it would have been easie to have proved them *Spurious* if they had been so; and no less easie to have brought positive Evidence of their being *Genuine*, if indeed they were *Genuine*; either by the living Testimony of the *Authors* themselves, or of others that knew their Writing; or by producing the original Copies under their own Hands; And therefore their being then received as the Writings of the *Apostles*, by those who were best able to know whose Writings they were; and their being not (for ought appears) excepted against, upon this Account, at *that time*, is a very good Argument that there was no just Ground for any such Exception.

And the most *likely Persons*, they whose Cause and Interest it would have served most, to deny that these *Books* were written by the reputed *Authors* thereof, were the Enemies of our Religion, The *Jews*, or the *Heathens*; who neither of them wanted, either Malice or Wit, to alledge any Fact that they could have justified the Truth of, in Disproof of the Christian Religion. It is therefore no small Satisfaction to us to observe, that *they* never argued against the Christian Religion from this Topic; that *they* never denied that the *Books* which the *Christians* received as written by the *Apostles* were *genuine*; Nay, that *Julian* himself, one of the subtlest, as well as of the bitterest Adversaries of the Christian Faith, did yet expressly own that the *Books* read by the *Christians*, as the Books of *Peter, Paul, Matthew, Mark* and *Luke*, were indeed theirs.

After all indeed it must be owned that we have not such Demonstration that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by the *Apostles*, as is self-evident, and cannot possibly be contradicted; for the Matter it self is not capable of such Demonstration. But we have such Demonstration of it as cannot be contradicted with any Reason; We have as good Assurance of it as we have, or can have, of any Matter of that kind; We have as good Evidence of the Truth of it, as, supposing it to be true, we could have of it; and more than this cannot be desired. We are as *morally certain* that *these Books* were written by the *Authors* to whom they are ascribed, as we are that any other ancient Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it; There being no Argument, by which it is, or

or can be proved, that any ancient Book was written by the Person who is said to be the Author of it, which does not prove the Authority of *these Books*, rather more strongly, than it does the Authority of any other Book; And there being no Argument, that is, or can be urged, against the Authority of *these Books*, which may not, with as good Reason, be urged, to disprove the Authority of any other Book of the like Antiquity; nay indeed, of all the Books in the World, ancient or modern, the Authors of which are not now living, or of whose Writing the Books ascribed to them no living Evidence can be produced.

For what is there that can be said to disprove, or to render suspected the Authority of these Books, but only that there is a *Possibility* that Things may not be as we believe them to be? It *may be*, (the *Atheist*, or *Infidel* will say) that these Books were not written by the Persons under whose Names we receive them, but by some others; It *may be*, (he'll say, for Instance :) that there never was such a Man as *Matthew the Publican*, afterwards an *Apostle of Christ*; Or if there was, yet, it *may be*, that the *Gospel* that goes under his Name was not of his Writing, but is a Book of a much later Date; It *may be*, that it was written by some crafty Priest, no longer ago than the last Age; And that he and some others in Confederacy with him at the same Time that they forged this *Gospel* in the *Greek Tongue*, did likewise make and contrive all those *Translations* of it into several Languages that are now extant, some of which pretend to very great Antiquity, and which are all made with such an Appearance

pearance of Truth, and with such Congruity to the several Times in which they are said to be made, that none of the Learned Men of the present Age have been able to discover the Fraud; And, It may be also, that when they forged the *Gospel* it self, they forged likewise all the *other Books*, that are pretended to be written by several Historians and Divines, in divers Languages, and in several Ages of the World for Sixteen Hundred Years past, in which this *Gospel* is either testified to be written by *St. Matthew*, or is cited or commented upon as his; And it may be likewise that at the same Time, that they trumped up all these Books in one Countrey, they had their Confederates and Correspondents that did the same in all the other Countries where they are now found; not only exposing them to *publick Sale* as Books of ancient Date and venerable Antiquity, but likewise slyly conveying an infinite Number of written and printed Copies of the same into all *Libraries*, both publick and private, unknown to the Keepers and Owners thereof; And it may be that all these things were done so *secretly*, that none of the Confederacy did ever confess, nor any besides ever discover the Cheat; And it may be that all the rest of the World was so much *asleep* at that time, as to have no Suspicion of what was done, nor any Sense of that great Alteration that had been made in the World by these Books; nor any Remembrance, afterwards, when they awoke and found themselves *Christians*, that they had been of some other Religion before, when they were first taken with that *Lethargick Fit*.

But if these things *may be*, what is there of this kind that *may not be*? If the World be so much mistaken in this Matter, it may be as much mistaken in any other Matter of the like Nature. And then, It may be, that there never was such a Man as *Homer*, or *Virgil*, or *Cæsar*, or *Cicero*, or *Plutarch*, or any other of those Persons, as whose Writings we now receive the Books that go under their Names; but that all the Books pretended to be written by those Authors, and likewise all the Books of later Date, whereby the Authority of those former Books is attested, were in like Manner contrived, and made and dispersed, by such another Gang of crafty and designing Knaves, who took a Pleasure in abusing the rest of the World, or hoped to make a Gain to themselves thereby.

Nay then (for why should we stop here?) It may be, that not only the *Laws* of our Religion, but the *Laws* of our Civil State too, are all forged and counterfeit; It may be, that once upon a Time, The Keeper of the *Publick Records*, having by much and long Observation attained to good Skill in the ancient Ways of Writing for many Ages backward, and being a compleat Master of his Pen, and having also gotten an Art to make a fresh Writing seem just as old as he had a Mind it should be thought to be, did compose, and deposit in their proper Places, those *Original Acts* of Parliament which are now taken to be the *Laws* of some of our former *Kings*; and that to confirm and establish his Fraud, he procured some other Persons at the same Time to Write or Print, and to convey into

into all *Shops* and *Libraries*, several Books of *Reports* and *Pleadings*, wherein these counterfeit *Acts* were cited and referred to; and it may be that while as this was doing, none else had their Eyes open to see it, nor had ever after the least Suspicion of what was done; Or if they had, yet that they were so well pleased with the Cheat, (which they thought would be a good Means of preserving Peace and Justice in the Nation) as to be willing it should pass to Posterity undiscovered. These *May be's* are I am sure every whit as possible and as likely as the other.

Either therefore let those Men who upon this Account doubt of the Authority of the *Books* of the *New Testament*; Or who would make others doubt of it, only by suggesting that it is a thing possible in Nature, that they may be all forged and counterfeit, (let them, I say, either) entertain and suggest the same Doubt concerning all other ancient Books, of the Antiquity and Authority of which there is not greater Evidence than there is of these; And then they will render themselves so justly ridiculous to the World that there will be no Need to expose their Folly; for then they must call in Question the Authority of all Books and the Truth of all History: Or else let them fairly own that the true Reason of their making a Doubt concerning *these Books* rather than concerning *others*, is because they do not relish the Matter of them; because they find it easier to resist that strong Evidence that is given of the Authority of *these Books* than they do to govern their Lives according to those strict Rules of Holiness and Purity that are therein prescribed,

scribed, and to bring their Wills to the Obedience of Faith. And if they will but own this, (which I believe is the Truth) their Prejudice and Partiality will be so evident to all, that it may be reasonably hoped their impious Suggestions will do but little Harm in the World; and that few Men of any Sense or Reason will be so fool-hardy as to venture their Souls and run the Hazard of a miserable Eternity, upon so many, and such very improbable (I had almost said, such impossible) *may be's* as must be supposed to have been, if indeed these Books are forged and counterfeit, if indeed they were not written by those Persons whom they are commonly ascribed to.

But yielding this Point (may the *Atheist* or *Infidel* farther say) viz. that the *Gospel* called *St. Matthew's* was written by *St. Matthew*, and that of *St. Mark* by *St. Mark*, and the *Rest* of the *Books* which are ascribed to any other certain *Authors*, by those *Persons* to whom they are severally ascribed; yet the Authority of the whole *New Testament* will not, by this Concession, be sufficiently established. For of *some Books* of the *New Testament* the *Authors* are not known, of *others* they are doubted; *Some Parts* of this Book that are now received have been rejected in ancient Times, and *others* not universally receiv'd. And besides, 'tis certain that in the early Times of Christianity there were several *Counterfeit Gospels* and *Epistles*, some of which may possibly have slipped into the *Canon* unawares. And lastly, If it be granted that *all* the *Books* of the *New Testament* were originally written by the *Apostles* or other *Inspired Men*, yet however the

the Books that we now have are but *Copies*, in which many *Alterations* may have been made by *disigning Men*, or *careless Transcribers*.

These Objections (or Cavils rather, for such I am sure they would be accounted in any other Case) against the Authority of these Sacred Books have been urged by some Men both anciently and lately; But they have been also so well and fully answered by those learned Persons that have written in Defence of the *Canon*, that I once thought to have taken no Notice of them, and I believe had not done it, but that I considered on the other Hand, that when an old Objection that has been answered an Hundred times is urged afresh, a great many may take it for a new one, and if it be not quickly answered, may be apt to think it unanswerable; so that in this Case it may be better to repeat the same Answer (if it be a good one) that has been often formerly made to it, than to say nothing. And besides, in this degenerate Age, in which any wild or Atheistical Discourse passes for Wit, it may be the Hap of some Persons, who have not much Mind or Leisure or Opportunity to read Books, to hear these things in Conversation, and not knowing readily what Answers to make to them, to be somewhat staggered in their Belief thereby; Especially if they be such whose loose and licentious Way of Living makes them easie to receive, without Examination any Objections that may give them Ease or Encouragement in Sin.

For these Reasons therefore I thought it would not be amiss, (especially because it is a Matter properly

properly belonging to the Subject I am now upon, and because I have some time left for it) to mention, as briefly as may be, the Answers that have been usually given to these Objections.

And, 1. Whereas 'tis said, that of *some* of the Books of the *New Testament* the Authors Names are *not* certainly known (as namely of the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews*) and that of others, the *Authors* have been doubted, (particularly, of the *second* and *third Epistles* of *St. John*.) To this it hath been answered,

1. That the Credit and Authority of a Book depends many times much more upon the good Assurance that we have of the *time* when it was written, and of the *Character* of the Person that wrote it, than upon the certain Knowledge of his *Name*. It is therefore a Matter of no great Consequence whether the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews* was written by *St. Paul* himself (as is commonly, and upon very probable Grounds, believed;) Or (as some have conjectured) by *St. Luke* his constant Companion; Or (as others) by *St. Clemens* his *Fellow-labourer* Phil. 4. 3. whose *Name* was in the *Book of Life*; Or (as others) by *St. Barnabas* his Assistant in Preaching the Gospel, and who is dignified by *St. Luke* with the Title of an *Apostle*. And so, neither is it very material whether the *Epistles* called the *second* and *third Epistles* of *St. John*, and commonly believed to be written by the same Person that wrote the first, were indeed written by *St. John* the *Apostle* and *Evangelist*, or (as some have thought) by another *John*, who was made *Bishop* of the *Jewish Christians* at *Ephesus*, by him; For it is sufficient that the

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Writers of these Books, (which soever they were of the Persons before-mentioned) were of good Ability and Integrity, and well instructed in that Doctrine and Religion which they wrote about; And of this besides the Testimony of the Ancients, there is good Evidence enough in the Writings themselves.

2. In Answer to this, and to all other Objections of this sort, against these, or any other Books, or Chapters, or Paragraphs of the New Testament, it hath been farther truly said, that there is nothing singular in these Books, that there is no Doctrine of Christianity taught in any Part of the New Testament of the Author or Authority of which there hath ever been any Doubt in the Church, which is not taught in some other undoubted and uncontroverted Part of the same Book. So that if they were granted that those Parts of the New Testament, of which there has been formerly any Doubt were still of uncertain Authority, our Christianity would suffer no real Loss thereby; Only giving us in these controverted Places we should sometimes want a good Help to enable us to understand readily those other uncontroverted Places of the New Testament wherein the same Doctrines are (but perhaps more briefly or obscurely) delivered.

2. Whereas 'tis said that some Parts of the New Testament have been rejected in ancient Times; This is granted. But then it hath been shewn, that, considering by whom they have been rejected, and under what Notion and for what Reasons they were rejected, this Objection is of no force to invalidate the Authority even of those Parts of the New Testament which have been so rejected, and much

of the rest of the Book which has been allowed by all.

Thus, some Portions of the New Testament have been rejected by Hereticks, because they contradicted their private and singular Notions; Some by Judaizing Christians, as the Two first Chapters of St. Matthew, because they were not found in that Hebrew Copy of that Gospel which they used; and all the Epistles of St. Paul were likewise rejected by the same Persons; but not, as not written by St. Paul, but only because they were written by him, whom they looked upon as an Enemy to their Nation, because he levelled them with other Nations, and was too averse to that Religion which had been introduced by Moses, which they continued so wedded to, even after their embracing Christianity, that they could not but suspect him to be a false Apostle who had so plainly taught the Abrogation thereof. And for the like Reasons some other Parts of the New Testament have been likewise rejected by some few Men; that is, not because they wanted the same attestation which the other Parts of it had, or because it appeared by credible History that they were heretick and schismatical, but only because they contradicted too plainly some Notions which their former Prejudices and Education had made them fond of. So that this Argument against the Authority of the New Testament, taken from the Rejection of some Parts of it, by some particular Men or Sects, is manifestly of no strength, unless there was some good Reason for their rejecting them; And that there was good Reason for it, has not yet been shewn, but the contrary has been shewn very plainly by the ancient Writers



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2. Whereas 'tis said that *some Parts of the New Testament* have been *rejected* in ancient Times; This is granted. But then it hath been shewn, that, considering by *whom* they have been rejected, and under what *Notion* and for what *Reasons* they were rejected, this Objection is of no force to invalidate the Authority even of those *Parts* of the *New Testament* which have been so rejected, and much

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of the Church, in several Books, (written by them in Confutation of those Sects and Heresies) which are still extant.

And 3. Whereas it is further said, that *some Books* which are now receiv'd as *Parts* of the *New Testament*, were not *universally* receiv'd in the most early Times, when their Authority (if they were authentick) might have been asserted upon more certain Grounds than it can be now; *viz.* the *Epistle* to the *Hebrews*, the *Epistle* of *St. James*, the *2d.* of *St. Peter*, the *2d.* and *3d.* of *St. John*, the *Epistle* of *St. Jude*, and the *Book* of the *Revelation*: This is likewise granted. But in Answer to it, it is said;

1. That there is good Evidence from Antiquity, that these *controverted Books*, were receiv'd in the most early Times, by those who had the best Opportunity of satisfying themselves of the Authority and Authority thereof, *viz.* by those to whom they were sent, and in general by the whole *Great Church*.

2. That it is no Wonder, that *these Books* (being written either to Christians dispersed, and consequently only published by giving out Copies thereof to some, to be communicated, as there was Opportunity, to others; or else to private Persons, living perhaps at a great Distance from the Places from which they were sent) were not so easie to be attested, and upon that Account were not at first so generally receiv'd, as the others were, which were either written to particular Churches, to which the Authors Hand and the Messengers that brought them were well known, or which were first published and receiv'd in the same Places where they were written. And,

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3. That even *those Churches* which did for some time *doubt* of the Authority of *these Books*, were persuaded at last to receive them as the *Authentick Writings* of the *Apostles*, or other Inspired Men. If therefore it be supposed, that while they doubted of *these Books*, they had *Reason* for their Doubt; that is, that they did it, because they were not as yet fully satisfied that they were *Apostolical Writings*, (which the Objectors, I believe, will readily enough grant) it may be very reasonably presumed, that they had afterwards *greater Reason* to lay aside their Doubt; and that when they did receive them, it was, because there had been then lately such Evidence and Attestation given of their being written by the *Apostles* or other Inspired Men as they had not heard of before, such as they could not then, with any Reason, contradict or gainsay; For ordinarily a less Reason will persuade a Man to take up an Opinion at first, than will persuade him to go back from an Opinion (how weakly soever grounded) which he has before embraced and defended. So that this Objection is so far from lessening, that it rather strengthens the Proof we have of the Authority even of *these once controverted Books*; And it is, besides, a very good corroborating Evidence of the Authority of *all the other Books* of the *New Testament*. For the Backwardness of some Churches to receive *these controverted Books* at first, (when they had nothing to object to the Matter of them) makes it evident, that the Christians of the first Ages were not so very easie and credulous as some have represented them; that they did not so very greedily swallow any Book for divine Revelation that contained a great many Miracles, mixed with a few good Morals,

Morals, without making due Enquiry concerning the Author and Authority thereof. But on the contrary, their being so hard to be persuaded to receive these controverted Books for some time, while they wanted, as they thought, sufficient Attestation, (altho' the Doctrine of them was in all Points agreeable to the Doctrine of the other Books which they had before received; their being so hard, I say, to receive these Books) of the Authority of which there nevertheless really was such Evidence, as they themselves, after having well weighed and considered it, declared themselves satisfied with, gives very good Ground to believe, that they had from the Beginning, such Evidence as was without Exception of the Authority of *all those other Books* (that is, of much the greatest Part) of the *New Testament*, which were never controverted, which were from the first, and with universal Consent receiv'd by all Christian Churches; For if there had not been very undeniable Evidence of *their* being the *genuine* Writings of the *Apostles*, or other inspired Men, there would certainly have been the same Doubt and Controversie concerning them, that there once was concerning these.

But, 4. It hath been further objected, that in the early Times of Christianity, there were several *counterfeit Gospels* and *Epistles*, which passed among some for the *Writings* of the *Apostles*; and that 'tis possible some of them may have slipped into the *Canon*, unawares to the *first Christians*, who, by all the Accounts of those Times, were more remarkable for their *Honesty* and *Simplicity* and *Zeal*, than for their extraordinary *Parts* and *Learning*.

But

But this Objection, (granting the Matter of Fact alledg'd in it to be true) is so far from *lessening*, that it rather *adds* to that *reasonable Assurance* that we have, that *all* the *Books of the Canon* are true and *genuine*. For there is nothing so apt to put Men upon using *Caution*, as a great Probability of being cheated if they be not cautious. Thus, when the Coin is generally good, and there is very little base or counterfeit Money stirring, Men commonly take it by *Tale*, without examining the *Weight* and *Purity* of every *Piece*; and so may more easily have a single Piece of lighter Weight or baser Metal put upon them without discerning it: But if the *Coin* be much corrupted, they look more *narrowly* upon every *single Piece* of Money that they take, and if there be the least Cause to suspect it, make Trial of it by the *Scale* or *Touchstone*, before they accept it as good. If therefore there were in the early Times of Christianity, many *counterfeit Pieces* given out, and perhaps receiv'd by some, as written by the *Apostles*, and which were, some of them, *discovered* to be *spurious*; (and there is not greater Evidence from Antiquity, that there were any such *spurious Writings*, than there is that the *Spuriousness* of some of them was soon *discern'd*;) this could not but put the Christians of those Times upon examining more strictly, what Evidence and Attestation there was that those other Books were true and genuine which had been generally receiv'd as such. So that the *more* there were of these *spurious* and *counterfeit Books*, so much the *more* assured and confident we may reasonably be, that none but such as were *undoubtedly true* and *authentick* and very *well attested*, were admitted into the *Canon*; And, of  
the

the two, it is much more probable, that they did, for Want of *clear Attestation*, refuse to admit some that had been written by the *Apostles*, than that they did, without *sufficient Attestation*, admit any that were not.

And that the Christians of those early Times (who had the best Means and Opportunities of satisfying themselves whether any Book, given out as written by an *Apostle*, was so or not) wanted not Skill to discern between a *true* and a *spurious* Writing; (as is maliciously suggested by some Men) is abundantly evident, from those *Monuments* of the excellent Parts and Learning of some of the first Converts to Christianity, which are still extant in their Books; and from the Testimony that is therein given to the like good Ability of several others, who were famous in their Generation, for their Preaching and Writings, and for their stoutly maintaining the Truths of Christianity both against *Infidels* and *Hereticks*, but whose Books are now unhappily lost.

But 5. and lastly; It was further said; That that it be granted that *all* the Books of the *New Testament* that are now receiv'd, were *originally* written by the *Apostles* or other inspired Men, yet those which are now have are but *Copies*; in which, by so many *Transcriptions* thereof as must have been in about 1400 Years, many *Alterations* may have happened, thro' the *Ignorance*, or *Over-sight*, or *evil Design* of the *Transcribers*; And that several *Changes* have been made, undeniably plain, by the *various Readings* that have been observed in comparing the best *Manuscript Copies*, that are now, or have been extant since Printing began; So that we cannot be sure whether any particular

particular *Passages* once found in *those Books*, are the very *Words* of an *Apostle*, or of some ignorant or careless *Scribe*. But to this it hath been answered;

1. That so far as this Objection is of any Force, it invalidates the Credit of all History, and of all other Books of ancient Date, as well as of the *New Testament*; Nay, indeed of all other Books, much more than of this; for the *faithfully Transcribing* whereof, it may reasonably be presumed, there was formerly, greater Care taken, (as there is now for the *correctly Printing*) than there ordinarily was of other Books, that were of less Consequence.

2. That tho' it be certain that some *Hereticks* have attempted to *corrupt* the Text of the *New Testament* in some Places, and have made Changes in some *few Copies* thereof; it is almost as certain that their Attempts of this kind neither have nor ever could amount to a Corruption of all the Copies thereof that are generally in Mens Hands; In which there is even to this Day an admirable *Agreement* in all Matters of Moment. And from that general Agreement that always was in *all* the Copies of this Book, (except those *few* that were sometimes corrupted by *Hereticks*, to serve a Turn) their Attempts of this kind have been always rendred *successless*; and those false *Doctrines*, that were justified only by their own false Copies of this Book, solidly confuted.

3. It is further answered, that not only there is no Evidence that there has been, but that 'tis morally impossible that there should be a *general Depravation* of the *Copies* of *this Book*, either designedly, or by Chance, in any Place of great Consequence either Point of History or Doctrine. For when was it possible

possible that this Corruption should be? Was it in the Copies that were given out, in the Days of the *Apostles*, and while they were living? This can't well be supposed; Or if it had been done then, it can't be thought but that the *Authors* of these Books, being *living*, would have taken Care to have had such false Copies of their Books suppressed, or well corrected; or at least have given publick Notice, in order to their Correction, of those Faults that had been committed in the transcribing, which did either obscure or spoil their sense.

Was it then in the Times immediately after the *Apostles* were dead? But neither could this be; for by this time an infinite Number of true Copies had been made and dispersed in all Parts of the Christian Church; And besides the *Autographs* of the Books themselves were then probably, all in being; For *Tertullian* who lived in the Third Century, witnesses that some of them were extant and to be seen even in his Time; So that by comparing of the *new false Copies* with the *ancient true ones*, or with the *Originals* themselves then extant, the Fraud would have been quickly discovered, or the Mistake easily rectified.

Was it then in the Times after this, when the *Originals* were lost or worn out? This was still less possible. For by this Time not only a greater Number of true Copies thereof, in the *Original Greek*, were dispersed and in the Hands of all Christians; but several *Translations* thereof had been likewise made into other Languages; several *Commentaries* had been written thereupon, and the most *material Passages* thereof had been, occasionally, cited by the Christian Writers of those or the foregoing Times.

And the further we go on downwards, 'twas still (for such Reasons as have been given already) more impossible that the Copies of this Book should be generally corrupted in any Place or Matter of *Moment*; as well as more likely that there should be every Day an Increase of such *small and literal Mistakes*, as could hardly be avoided by the greatest Care and Faithfulness. And these are the *Various Readings* before spoken of; Concerning which, and in Answer to the before-mentioned Objection, so far as it is grounded upon them, it is farther said—

4. In the fourth Place; That *they* are no other than such as are to be met with in Comparing the Manuscripts of all other Books; That these *various Readings* (if they be compared together with Judgment) are more like to lead us to understand the true Meaning of the Writers, than to endanger our mistaking their Sense; it being very probable that when there are several Readings, one of them is the right, and easier by their Help, to rectifie the Mistakes that may have been made in some Copies, than it would have been, if all Copies had agreed in the same Mistake. And lastly, that it is, hardly in any Place of which there are such *various Readings*, very material which is the true Reading; there being no Point that is of the *Substance* either of the History or Doctrine of Christianity, that is grounded upon any *Text*, of which there are, in different Copies, *various Readings*, but which may be proved by some *other Texts*, in the Reading whereof all Copies do agree.

5. And Lastly, In Answer to this Objection, that the *Text* of the *New Testament* is depraved and corrupted, and consequently of uncertain Authority, it is farther said;

said; That supposing these Books to be written by the *Apostles*, and by *divine Direction* and *Inspiration*, (which must be supposed, or at least, for Argument sake, be allow'd by those that make this Objection; Or else the Objection is trifling) it is by no Means credible that the same *Goodness* of God which took Care for the Writing, has not likewise taken Care for the *preserving* of these Books, so free (at least) from *Corruption*, that they may be *sufficient* to answer the Ends for which they were written; that is, fully to instruct Men in all Points of Christian Faith and Practice, to make them *wise unto Salvation*, and *thoroughly to furnish them unto all good Works*.

And now from all that hath been said I hope it appears, that we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by those *Persons* whose *Names* they bear, or to whom they are ascribed, viz. by the *Apostles* of *Christ*, or other inspired Men; Which was the first thing I was to make good.

Whether there be *sufficient Reason* to give them Credit in the *Matters of Fact* which they have related; and whether the *Doctrine* of the *Gospel* be well proved by the *History* of it, shall (God willing) be hereafter enquired.

In the mean Time (supposing their Testimony to be credible) what has been said upon this first Head may serve to shew, in some Measure, the *Unreasonableness* of those Men, who are not satisfied with the *Scripture Revelation*.

For I believe there are few that have heard anything of the *Manner* of the first Preaching of the *Gospel*, but who think, that they that lived in those Times, and heard the *Apostles themselves*, had *sufficient Reason* to receive

receive their Testimony; And this (perhaps they'll say) is what they could wish for themselves; viz. That they might have heard the *Apostles themselves*; or that they might now have as good and sure Grounds of Faith as those had who were converted to Christianity by the Preaching of the *Apostles*; which if they had, they make no Doubt but they should be, *not only almost, but altogether such*, as the *Primitive Christians* were, both in Belief and Practice.

But if they are not *such* now, 'tis much to be doubted whether they would have been *such*, if they had lived then. For by what has been now said it appears, that the *Books* of the *New Testament*, being (as we have very good Reason to believe they were) written by the *Apostles* themselves, are *their Words*; *their Sermons*; that therein the *Apostles* themselves *being dead, do yet truly speak* to us, the very same things, tho' not just in the same Manner, that they spake before while they were living; and that their *Testimony* written, if indeed it be *theirs*, (which I have shewn there is no Cause to doubt of) is as credible as their *living Testimony* was.

For in Matters of common *Testimony* we make little Difference between *Speech* and *Writing*; If a Man whom we dare trust sends us a *Letter*, and therein relates such and such things, as heard or seen by himself, or as well attested to him by unexceptionable Witnesses, we give as full Credit to his *Letter* as we should do to his *Words*.

So that in Truth, our Case, who live now, is not very different from theirs who lived in the *Apostles* Days, and heard them *saying* those same Things, which we now read in their *Books*; and if we think those inexcusable who did not receive their Testimony when given

given by *Word of Mouth*, we can't in good Reason hold our selves excused, if we receive not the same Testimony of the same Persons given *under their Hands*.

In one Respect indeed, it must be granted, that they had the Advantage of *us*; viz. because they might be *surer* that they heard an *Apostle speak*, than the Nature of the Thing will admit we should be, that we read the *Words* of an *Apostle, written*; But we are sure enough of this; We have as good *moral Certainty* of it, as we can have of any thing, that is not capable of any other than a *moral Certainty*: And if the *Words* that we read in the *New Testament* are the *Words* of the *Apostles of Christ*, we have, in some Respects, the Advantage of *those* who lived in those early Times; for we have the concurrent Testimony of *several* of the *Apostles, written*; whereas hardly any in those times, (when a few Persons were to bear Witness to all the World) could have more than the Testimony of one *single Apostle* only, by *Word of Mouth*; and *many* Witnesses are more credible than *one*; And besides, there being *several* Witnesses, their Testimony if it be false, may be more easily proved so, by their *Disagreement* with one another, than the Testimony of one *single* Witness could be; And lastly, a *Writing* which we may *review*, and *read over* as often as we will, and which we may take what time we please to consider of, may be more thoroughly understood, and better digested, than a *Sermon* or *Discourse* only *once spoken* can well be.

But if it be granted that the *Faith* of the first Converts to Christianity, which came by *Hearing* of the *Apostles*, might be built upon more *certain* and *infallible*

*lible* Grounds, than ours, that comes only by *Reading*, is; (And some Reasons may perhaps be given hereafter, why 'twas fit it should be so) it is enough, however, to render our Infidelity inexcusable, if the *Grounds of Faith* that we now have, are very *rational*, if they are a *sufficient* Support for such a *Faith* as will enable us to *please God*, and to *overcome the World*.

And this may be farther said for our Comfort, and to make us easie and satisfied with those Grounds and Reasons of Faith which are afforded to us by the *written* Testimony of the *Apostles* in the *Books* of the *New Testament*; that as there is *more Certainty* in that *Belief*, (if it may be called *Belief*) which is *grounded* upon *Demonstration*, or *infallible Evidence*; so there is *more Praise* and *Vertue* in that *good Disposition* of Mind, which makes us rest satisfied with *such Grounds of Faith*, as tho' not absolutely and infallibly certain, yet cannot, with any good Reason, be *denied* or *excepted against*; According to that Saying of our Saviour to *St. Thomas*, in a like Case, with which I shall conclude; *Joh. 20. 29. Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed; blessed are they, (that is, they are more blessed, their Faith is more excellent and praise-worthy, and so will intitle them to a greater Reward) who have not seen, and yet have believed.*

Which Blessedness, that we may all attain, God of his great Mercy and Goodness grant, for the sake of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, &c.

FINIS.



*Books Printed for Walter Kettilby at the Bishop's-Head in St. Paul's Church-Yard.*

**A** Sermon Preach'd before the Honourable the House of Commons at St. *Margaret's Westminster*, January the 30th. 1698.

The Sufficiency of a Standing Revelation; A Sermon Preached at the Cathedral Church of St. *Paul's*, Jan. 1st. 1700. being the First for the Year 1700. of the Lecture Founded by the Honourable *Robert Boyle*, Esq;

The Sufficiency of the Scripture Revelation, as to the Matter of it. Being the Second for the Year 1700. of the Lecture Founded by the Honourable *Robert Boyle*, Esq; These Three by *Ofspring Blackall*, Rector of St. *Mary Aldermary*, and Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

A Persuasive to Prayer; A Sermon Preach'd before the King at St. *James's*.

A Sermon Preach'd before the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament Assembled in the Abby Church at *Westminster*, Jan. 30th.

Fifteen Sermons Preached on several Occasions; the Last of which was never before Printed. These Three by the most Reverend Father in God, *John Lord Arch-Bishop of York*, Primate of *England*, and Metropolitan.

The Faith and Practice of a Church of *England* Man.

A False Faith not Justified by Care for the Poor; Provd in a Sermon Preach'd at St. *Paul's* Church.

Mysteries in Religion Vindicated, or the Filiation Deity and Satisfaction of our Saviour asserted against *Socinians* and others; with Occasional Reflections on several late Pamphlets. These Two by *Luke Milbourn*, a Presbyter of the Church of *England*.

Two Sermons of Mr. *Young's*, about Nature and Grace, Preach'd at *Whitehall*.

THE  
SUFFICIENCY  
OF THE  
Scripture-Revelation,

As to the Proof of it. PART II.

TWO  
SERMONS

Preach'd at the  
CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of St. *Paul*,  
*April 1<sup>st</sup>* and *May 6<sup>th</sup>* 1700.

BEING  
The Fourth and Fifth, for the Year 1700,  
of the LECTURE Founded by the Honourable  
*Robert Boyle*, Esq;

By *OFSPRING BLACKALL*, Rector  
of St. *Mary Aldermary*, and Chaplain in Ordinary  
to His MAJESTY.

LONDON,  
Printed by *J. Leake*, for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Bishop's*  
*Head* in St. *Paul's Church-Yard*, 1700.



St. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

THE Point I entred upon the Proof of the last time was this,  
(3.) That we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *Holy Scripture*, and consequently of all the *Doctrines* that are taught by it.

And for the Proof of this, having, for Brevity sake, confined my Discourse upon it to the *Books* of the *New Testament* only, (the rather because the Authority of that being granted, the Authority of the *Old Testament* cannot reasonably be questioned) I propounded to shew,  
1. That we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof. 2. That there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to them in their *Relations* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded. And, 3. That if the *Matters of Fact* related in the *New Testament* are true, they are *sufficient*

Proofs of the *Truth* and *Divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught.

And I hope enough was said the last time, to shew that we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof. What I am next to do, is,

2. To shew that there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to these *Authors* in their *Relations* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded.

And I hope none of you that hear me (whom I presume to be all *Christians*) will take Offence at it, if now, while I am arguing this Point, I sometimes speak of the *Holy Evangelists* with the same Freedom that might be used in speaking concerning any other *Authors*, and if I sometimes Plead for no more Credit to be given to *them* in their *Relations* than is fit and reasonable to be given to any other *Historian* that was naturally as well furnished and qualified to write a true *History* as they were, and whose *Fidelity* and *Veracity* is as well attested and confirmed other Ways as theirs was. For you will consider, I hope, that my Business is now with *Infidels*, with whom we can argue only upon the Principles of common Reason: And tho' we who are *Christians* already, do believe, as one of the first Principles of our Religion, that these *Sacred Writers* were *divinely* and *supernaturally assisted* in their Work, and that upon that Account they deserve much greater Credit in what they have written than other *Historians* do; yet this is what those who are yet *Infidels* will not allow; And in Disputation nothing is to be presumed on one side but what will be readily allowed by the other Party. So  
that

that the *divine Inspiration* of the *Evangelical Writers* and the *supernatural Assistance* which we believe they had in their Writing cannot as yet be regularly insisted upon as an Argument to gain them Credit; But it is what will easily be granted afterwards, when the *Truth* of their *History* shall be well established upon other Grounds; (as I hope it will be in the following Discourse) and 'tis what may then serve to procure a *religious* Respect and Reverence to these *Sacred Writings*, and to engage us to receive them *not as the Word of Men, but (as they are in Truth) as the Word of God.*

But this one thing nevertheless I suppose I may presume, *viz.* that if the *Books* of the *New Testament* (the *Historical Parts* of it in particular) were written by those *Authors* to whom they are ascribed (which has been already proved) the *Matters of Fact* recorded by the *Evangelists* in *Writing* are the *same* which they and the other *Apostles* testified by *Word of Mouth* in their *Preaching*; For it cannot, I think, with any Reason, be suspected that their *Preaching* and *Writings* were *disagreeable* to each other, because such Disagreement would, most certainly, have utterly destroyed the Credit of them both.

And this being supposed, I hope, it will clearly appear that there is abundantly *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to these *Writings*, if these following things be considered; (1.) If we consider the *Nature, Conditions* and *Circumstances* of the *Matters* that are recorded in the *Historical Books* of the *New Testament*, and of the *History* its self. (2.) If we consider the good *Capacity* that the *Authors* thereof were in to *know* the *Truth* of the things they have related. (3.) If we consider.

consider the strong *Obligations* they were under to write nothing but the *Truth*, according to the best of their Knowledge or Information. (4.) If we consider the good *Evidences* that we have of their *Honesty* and *Faithfulness*. And (5.) Lastly, If we consider the *Confirmation* that was given to the *Truth* of their History by *God himself*.

1. I say the *Evangelical History* will appear to be highly credible, if (without any *Regard* as yet had to the *Ability* and *Integrity* of its *Authors*) we only consider the *Nature*, *Conditions* and *Circumstances* of the *Matters* therein recorded, and of the *History* its self. Concerning which there are two things especially that may be observed, 1. That the *Matters* recorded by the *Evangelical Writers* are *such* as might be *certainly known*. And 2. That they are *such*, and in *such* manner related by the *Evangelists*, that if their History of them had been *false*, it could *never* have gained *Credit* in the *World*.

1. First; I say the *Matters* recorded by the *Evangelical Writers* are *such* as might be *certainly known*. I mean, either by the *Historians* themselves, or by those from whom they had their *Information*. For,

1. They are, for the most part, plain *Matters* of *Sense*, which those who were present at them could have no *doubt* of without *Distrusting* their own *Faculties* of *Hearing* or *Seeing*; and which those who testified them might be as *certain* of the *Truth* of, as we can be of any thing that we *hear* with our *own Ears*, or *see* with our *own Eyes*. For, thus, whether our *Saviour* gave out himself to be the *Messias* foretold by the *Prophets*; whether he said that he was the *Son* of *God*; and whether he uttered those other *Speeches* which

which the *Evangelists* have recorded as spoken by him, could not but be *certainly known* by the *People* who often heard him; and especially by his *Apostles* who constantly attended him.

And so likewise whether he *did* those many *wonderful Works* which the *Evangelists* have recorded of him could not but be *known* by those that were *present* with him; They might be *certain* either that he *did* them, or that he did *not* do them. Thus for instance, it might be *certainly known* to those that first affirmed that he gave *Sight* to the *Blind*, whether those *Persons* had been once *blind*, and whether afterwards they saw; and to those that testified that he gave *Strength* to the *Cripples*, whether the *Men* whom they said he wrought this *Cure* upon, had been *Lame* or *disabled* in their *Feet*, *Hands*, or *Body* before, and whether afterwards they walked and had *Strength* like other *Men*; and to those that testified that he raised the *Dead*, whether the *Persons* said to have been raised by him, had been truly *dead*, and whether afterwards they lived.

But above all, his own *Resurrection* (which the present *Season* as well as the *Wonderfulness* and *Importance* of the thing obliges us to have a special regard to) was a thing that might be most *certainly known* to those that pretended to be *Witnesses* of it; they might be *certain* whether he had been once *dead*, and whether he shewed himself *alive* after his *Passion* by many *infallible Proofs*, and was *seen* of them *forty Days*. Of *this* they might be rather *more certain* than of any other of his *Miracles*, because it was a thing not to be judged of by *one sense* only (as some of the rest were) but by almost *all* their *Senses*; for by their *Sight*

This Sermon  
was Preached  
on the Monday  
in Easter Week.

*Sight* they might be assured that it was he himself whom for more than three Years before they had been well acquainted with, whom they then saw with their Eyes; and by their *Hearing*, that it was his own *Voice* and not a Stranger's, that *Voice* which they had often heard, and which they well knew, that they spake to them; and by their *Touch*, that it was a real *Body* which they saw and heard, and not an airy *Apparition*; not a *meer Voice*: and also that it was that very *same Body*, which they had seen before hanging upon, and which they had taken down dead from the Cross, when they were permitted (as they say they were) to handle and feel him, to put their Fingers into the Print of the Nails, and to thrust their Hands into the Gash that had been made in his Side by the Spear that pierced his Heart.

Luke 24. 39.

Joh. 20. 27.

And of the *other Matters* recorded by the *Evangelists*, but not as *Matters* of their own Knowledge, those from whom they had their Information might have the *same Certainty* which they had of these things. For his *Mother* could not but know whether she had conceived him without Knowledge of a Man; and whether his Birth had been foretold her by an Angel. And she, and her *Relations*, and the whole *Neighbourhood* might have a *certain Knowledge* of the Time, Place, and all other *Circumstances* of his Birth as they are related in the Gospels.

They that testified such plain *Matters* of *Sense* as most of those are, which are recorded in the *Evangelical History*, could not but know either that the things which they testified were true, or that they themselves were egregious *Liar*s when they testified them to have been so.

2. As

2. As the *Matters* recorded in the *Evangelical History* are chiefly *Matters* of *sense*; of which, as such, the greatest *Certainty* and *Assurance* may be had; and in which any single *Witness* thereof may be very confident that he is not mistaken; so it may be also observ'd, that most of them are related as *Matters* done in the *Sight*, *Hearing*, or *Presence* of a *great many*; which *Circumstance* adds very much to that *Certainty* which any single *Witness* of such *Matters* may receive by his own *Senses* only.

For tho' it be a common Saying, that *Seeing is Believing*, and we ordinarily desire no greater *Assurance* of the *Truth* of any *Matter* of *Sense*, than our own *Sense* and *Perception* of it; it is nevertheless no unusual thing for a *Man* when he is relating somewhat that happen'd that was very extraordinary and surprizing, to say, that tho' he saw it himself, he could hardly believe his own *Eyes*. And this might well enough have been the *Case* of any one of the *Witnesses* of any of our *Lord's Miracles*, (and especially of his *Resurrection* the most wonderful of all his *Miracles*, and which gave *Confirmation* to all the rest;) for tho' they were plain *Matters* of *sense*, yet they were withal so very *strange* and *astonishing*, that if any *Man* had seen them *alone*, he might probably have had some *Distrust* even of his own *Senses*, or he might afterwards have been ready to doubt whether he had been well awake or in a *Dream*. But a *Man* cannot so reasonably suspect that his own *Senses* do deceive him, when he perceives that the thing appears to *all* others that are present, just as it does to him; nor can he afterwards so easily fancy that he was in a *Dream*, when

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he finds that *all* the rest that were there have the same Notion and Remembrance of the thing that he himself has. So that by this *Additional Evidence*, he mean by the *Agreement* that a Man finds there is between his own senses and other Mens, he becomes *more certain* and *confident* of the Truth of the things he sees, than he would have been by his *own Eyesight* only.

2. Secondly; The other thing which I said might be noted concerning the *Matters* Recorded in the *Evangelical History*, is, That they are *such*, and in *such manner* related by the *Evangelists*; that if their History of them had been *false*, it could never have gained *Credit* in the World.

And this may in part appear from what has been said already; For as there is nothing that can be more certainly known and attested than a plain *Matter of Sense* at which *several* are present; so there is nothing more liable to be *contradicted* and *easy* to be disproved than *such a Matter* is, in case it was not done as 'tis reported to have been.

But there are several other things that are here proper to be considered; for,

1. It may be considered that the *Gospel History* comprehends a very *great number* of Relations of such *Matters of Fact* and *Sense*; Considering therefore how very easy it was to disprove *every one* of them if it had been *false*; 'tis, most evidently, morally impossible that a History *stuffed* with nothing else but *Lyes* and *Forgeries* of this sort, (as they may suppose the *Evangelical History* to be, who will not allow it to be a true History) should ever have obtained any *Credit*. And most of the things recorded

by the *Evangelists*, being related by them as *Matters of their own Knowledge*; if the *Falsity* of only one single Relation had been made appear, the *Credit* of the *whole History* would have been thereby *destroyed*.

2. It may be also considered that all these things are related in the *Gospel History* as done in that *same Country* in which the History thereof was first published; and that a Country but of *small Extent*, not above two hundred Miles in length at the most, and not half so much in breadth; and yet not all in the same part of it, but some in *one* place, some in *another*; and those usually the most *considerable* Towns and *Cities of Judea* and *Galilee*. And *by this*, their History of these things, if it had been *false*, was still more easy and liable to be disproved; there being very few of those to whom these *Matters* were first related that needed to have gone many Miles from some to have enquired into the Truth of some or other of them. And if any Man had found the *Apostles* false in their Report of any *Matter* that was said to have been done in his own Neighbourhood, he would hardly have gone farther for more satisfaction; he would readily have concluded without further Examination, that being found *False Witnesses* in *one* thing, they were not fit to be believed in any thing.

3. It may be moreover considered, that the *Gospel History* was written and published in a *few years* after the things therein Recorded are said to be done. 'Tis not certain indeed in what Year precisely the *Gospels* were written; But if they are but allowed to be the genuine Writings of the reputed Authors;

(which I hope has been already sufficiently proved) 'tis certain they were all, (even the latest of them that of St. *John*) written before the Memory of the Things therein recorded could be worn out; nay we further suppose (as I think we may do very reasonably) that the Things recorded by the *Evangelists* are the *same* which they and the other *Apostles* and Disciples of our Lord testified by word of Mouth in their Preaching, we may truly enough say that the *History* of the *Gospel* was begun to be published on that *same Day* on which the *Apostles* began to preach, viz. on the *Day of Pentecost*, ten Days after our Lord's *Ascension*; and that it was fully published in a very short time after. So that most of the things recorded in the *Gospels* are things that had been done or happened in the compass of less than *four Years* before the *History* thereof was first published, for it was not so long from our Lord's *Baptism* to his *Ascension*; and the earliest things of all that are therein recorded (which are but few, and make but a small part of the *History*) viz. the Birth of St. *John Baptist*, and of our *Lord*, and the things that happened about the *Time*, were things done not above thirty five Years before at the most.

And the *History* of the *Acts of the Apostles* (which because it ends with St. *Paul's* imprisonment at *Rome* we may reasonably think was published about the *Time*) comprehends a *History* of some very remarkable things, the very *first* and earliest whereof had been done thirty Years before.

And this Consideration affords another very probable Argument of the *Truth* of the *Evangelical History*; because by this it still further appears how

very easie it would have been to have disproved it if it had been false; for it being an *History* of things done so very *late*, it must needs be that several of those into whose Hands it first came, must have *certain Knowledge* whether some of the things therein related had been so or not; And they who had not this *Knowledge*, might easily have had *certain Information*, (from others, I mean, besides the *Apostles* and Disciples of our Lord) whether the Relations therein contained were true or false.— Especially if it be considered further, in the *4th Place*.

4. That the Facts related in the *Evangelical History* are commonly related with all the *Circumstances* that were needful or proper to be noted in order to the rendering an Enquiry into the truth of them exceeding easie to such as had any distrust thereof. For in the Account which the *Evangelists* give us of our Saviour's *Speeches*, they commonly tell us not only his Words, but likewise *when, where, to whom, and upon what Occasion* they were spoken; and in the Account that they give of his *Miracles*, they usually note the *Places* where they were done, and very often the *Names, or Characters* at least, of the *Persons* they were wrought upon, and sometimes they mention also who were by and Witnesses thereof, and what *Discourse* concerning him was thereby occasioned; And in relating the things that were done or happened before our Saviour's *Baptism*, about the *Time* of his Birth, they carefully note the *Time, the Place, and other Circumstances*, whereby their *Readers* were (as it were) *challenged* to make Enquiry, and desired not to take things only upon *their Credit*; and were also directed readily *whither to go, and to whom* to apply themselves.

The same may be observed in the Acts of the Apostles.

themselves to obtain the fullest satisfaction whether the things they reported were so or not. And if all the Circumstances of every particular Story which they relate are not always so punctually set down, the Omission thereof sometimes is not of much Consideration, because it was so very easie by enquiring into the Truth of those many other Stories which are related with all Circumstances for any Person to be satisfied whether their History in general deserv'd Credit or not; And whoever had found any one Story falsly reported by them, would hardly have troubled himself, (at least not for his own satisfaction) to have examined further into the Truth of the rest.

5. It may be further consider'd that most of the things recorded by the *Evangelists* are related by them as things that were done very publickly, as things that were well known to a great many. For very few in Comparison of those *Discourses* of our Lord that are recorded by the *Evangelists* were address'd in private to his *Apostles* only, but most of them were spoken in publick; his set Sermons commonly to great multitudes gathered together on a *Mountain*, on the *Sea-shore*, or in a *Synagogue*; and the rest more commonly in *Places of Resort*, in populous Towns or Cities, in *Jerusalem* or the *Temple*, when many were by to hear what he said. And his *Miracles* were done for the most part in the best Inhabited Cities of *Judea* and *Galilee*; or in other *Places*, yet in the open Day-light, and commonly when there was a great croud of People about him; Or if at any time the Miracle its self was done privately, in an *House*, or a *Chamber*, the *Effect* of the Miracle was usually very visible, and such as could not but be taken notice of by

by a great many. And even of those few things which were spoken or done by him most privately, there was no want of Witnesses; there being (except very rarely) no fewer than twelve in constant Attendance upon him, and several others besides that *Companied with them all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them.* Acts 1. 21.

And this Circumstance of the *Facts* recorded by the *Evangelists*, as it made them capable of better and more certain Attestation, being true; so it contributed no less towards the rendring it easie to disprove that Relation which they had given of them, if it had been false. For when a Man witnesses a thing of his own private Knowledge there may be no way to invalidate his Testimony, but either by shewing that the thing which he testifies was not possible, or by offering some just Exception to the Credit of the Witness; But when neither of these can be done (and they cannot always be done altho' the thing testified be false) yet in case the Matter was done publickly, it is the easiest thing in the World to convict a false Witness by the *contrary Testimony* of several others that were present and as capable of knowing the Truth of the thing as himself; or by the *Clashing* of the *Witnesses* among themselves. Nothing therefore could have been more easie than to have disprov'd the *Evangelical History* in almost every particular of it, if it had not been true.

For most of our Saviour's Speeches and Miracles are related as spoken and done in the Presence not of his Disciples only, but of a great many others that happened to be by, by *Chance*, or that followed him, not for any Liking that they had to his Person or Doctrine,

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Doctrine, but only out of *Curiosity*, or for the Sake of the *Loaves*; and very often they were done before such as came on purpose to watch what he said and did, with a Design to lay hold on any Occasion that was offer'd to represent him to the People as an *Impostor*. Can it be suppos'd then that these were ignorant whether the Relation which the *Apostles* and *Evangelists* gave of these Matters was true or false? Or can it be imagin'd that they would all have held their Peace? that not one, of those many that could have done it, would have opened his Mouth to have convicted the *Apostles* of Falsity, if they had either in Word or Writing related any one of these things otherwise than it had indeed been transacted? And if in any one of these things, of which the *Apostles* pretended they had personal Knowledge, they had been found *false Witnesses*, their *Credit* would have been ruin'd for ever.

Nay if they had been found false in their Report of any of those *other Matters* which they have left upon Record, of which they had not a personal Knowledge; tho' this indeed wou'd not have been such a Proof of their Dishonesty (for any Man may very innocently be misinform'd) it wou'd however have been such a plain Argument of their *foolish Credulity*, as would have *destroy'd* their *Credit* no less than if they had been found in a known Lye. For these also were Matters of the same *publick Nature*; nay indeed they were rather more *publick* than the other; they were so very publick that any Man with very small Trouble might have been fully satisfied whether they were so or not.

For thus, they tell us that our *Lord* was of the *Seed of David*; (and it was a Matter of the greatest Consequence to the Christian Religion that he should be known to be so;) How very easie was it at that time, when the *Genealogies* of all the *Jewish Families*, and of the *Family* of *David* more especially, were kept with the greatest Carefulness and Exactness for them to know this? And how very easie was it, for any one that doubted it, to have inspected the publick Registers, and seen whether it was so or not?

They tell us also several *Circumstances* of our *Lord's* Luke 2. 1. &c. *Birth*, and several *Accidents* that happened about that time; They tell us, for instance, that *Joseph* being of the *House* and *Lineage* of *David*, was forced with *Mary* his Wife, at a very inconvenient time for her, being *great with Child*, to take a long Journey of about an hundred Miles, from *Nazareth* in *Galilee*, where their Habitation then was, to *Bethlehem* in *Judea*, the *City* of *David*, that so their Names might be enrolled with the rest of the *Family* of *David*, when *Augustus Cæsar* had ordered a general Enrolment of the whole *Jewish Nation*; they tell us that then and there *Jesus* was born; that at the time of his Birth Mat. 2. 1. &c. certain *Wise Men* out of the *East*, conducted by a *Star*, came to *Judea* in Quest of the *Messias*; that they informed *Herod* of the Design of their coming; that they were directed by the *Council* of the *Chief Priests* and *Scribes* to look for him in *Bethlehem*; that *Herod* disappointed of the Design he had to kill this new-born *King* of the *Jews*, by their not returning back to him according to his Appointment, sent forth, and, that he might make sure work of it, *slew all the Children* in *Bethlehem* that were under two years old; and several

several other things they tell us of the like kind, easie to be known if true, and no less easie to be disproved if false; for whether there had been such a \* *Ἀπογέση*. \* *Taxing* or Enrolment of the *whole Nation* of the *Jews* according to their *Families*, by the Order of the Emperor, could not but be *well known* to all the *Jews*; And the People of *Nazareth* could not but *know* when *Joseph* went from thence, and whither he went, and upon what Occasion, and how long it was before he returned; and the *People* at *Jerusalem* could not but long remember the Story of the *Wise Men*, at whose coming *Herod* and the whole City with him was so much *troubled*; and if there had been no such thing, would readily have contradicted the Apostle's Relation of it; And the *Mothers* at *Bethlehem* which survived the Loss of their dear Children, could never after while they lived forget that *general Mourning* there had once been amongst them, nor the Occasion of it. If therefore these and such like things related by the *Evangelists* as things *publickly* done, and much talked of, and of which (as they say) the Rumour was spread far and near, had not been so as they are related, their *whole History* would have been thereby so much *disparaged*, that no part of it would ever have had much Credit.

'Tis true indeed there are some things related by the *Evangelists* that were not altogether so *publick* as those I have before mentioned, for there are some things, of which (according to the Account that is given of them in the *Evangelical History*) none but the *Disciples* of Christ were Witnesses; such in particular was the *Resurrection* of our Lord, which we at this time commemorate; and which is for that Reason

son most proper to be now instanced in. Of *this* then I say (as well as of some few other things) it must be granted, that it was a Fact that could directly be witnessed only by his own *Friends*, by his *Apostles* and *Disciples*; for so *St. Peter* observes, speaking of this Matter, *Acts* x. 40, 41. *Him God raised up the third Day, and shewed him openly, not to all the People, but to Witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the Dead.* But nevertheless, considering how long, and how often, he is reported to have appeared to them, and the many *Circumstances* that are noted concerning his *several Apparitions*, and the great Number of those whom he is said to have appeared to, (for *St. Paul* affirms that besides his frequent Apparitions to his Apostles, *he was seen at once by a* <sup>1 Cor. 15. 6.</sup> *above five hundred Brethren*) their Testimony in this Matter, if it had been false, was very near as easie and liable to be disproved, as in any of the Matters before spoken of. For it is very hard for so much as *two Men* that are hired, or agree together to give in a false Evidence, to be so well instructed in the Evidence they are to give, or to concert the Matter so well between themselves, but that upon a *separate Examination* their Falsity may easily be detected by their *Disagreement* in some considerable Circumstances of the Matter they bear Witness to; How very much easier then would it have been to have done thus, in a Matter clothed with such great *variety* of Circumstances, and that was testified by *so many*, by *Twelve*, by *Seventy*, by *above five hundred Persons*.

Or if it can be supposed, that they might have all so fully agreed beforehand, in what Manner and with what Circumstances to tell this Story, that it might not be possible to catch them in a *Contradiction*; yet the thing it self was of that Nature, that the false Evidence they had given concerning it (if it had been false) might easily have been shewn other ways, for what they testified was that that *same Jesus* whom the *Jews* had Crucified, and whom they had seen laid into the Sepulchre was risen again, and had been seen alive three Days after his Passion by several of his Disciples; Had this therefore been false, how very easie would it have been for the *Jews* to have disproved their Evidence of it, by only going to the Sepulchre, and taking out thence his *dead Body*, and exposing it for some time to *publick view*? And thither doubtless they did go, and with this Design; but the Body they could not find, and yet they had taken all the Caution that was possible to prevent its being conveyed away, having obtain'd from *Pilate* a Guard of Soldiers on purpose to keep watch over it for three Days. This therefore is a strong Confirmation of the Truth of the *Apostle's* Testimony concerning our Lord's *Resurrection*, that it being such as might with the greatest Ease in the World have been disproved if it had been false; the *Jews* had nothing to say against it, nothing to oppose to it, but only that very ill contrived, that self-contradicting Evidence of the Watchmen; who said that *while they were asleep*, that is, when all their senses were bound up, and when they were not in a Capacity of knowing any thing that was done, *the Disciples came and stole the Body away*. But if they saw the Body remov'd (in which

Mat. 27. 62.

Mat. 28. 13.

Case only they could be good Witnesses of it) they were not, as they said they were, *asleep* when the thing was done; Or if indeed they were *asleep*, when it was removed, they could not be positive *how* it was removed, they could not say he was *not risen* from the Dead.

6. Another thing that may be consider'd in order to shew how very improbable, or rather how impossible it was that the *Gospel History* should ever have gained Credit in the World if it had been false, is this; that as it was a History of such Matters and was so contrived that it might with the greatest Ease have been disproved, so the Matters therein related were in *themselves*, and especially in their *Consequences*, such as must needs have engaged a great many to make the *strictest Examination* that was possible into the Truth of them; and if they had discovered any thing of Falseness therein, to make known their Discovery to the World.

For the whole *Doctrine of Christianity* was grounded upon the Truth of the *Evangelical History*; This disprov'd would have destroy'd *that*, and *this* being admitted, there was no way to put a stop to the spreading of *that*; And the certain *Consequence* of receiving the Christian Religion in the World, was the Abolishing of all the other Forms of Religion that were then any where receiv'd or establish'd; even of *that* which had been introduc'd by *Moses* amongst the *Jews*, by the Appointment of God himself, as well as of the several sorts of *Paganism* and *Idolatry* that were receiv'd in other Countries. Now when any Religion, be it true or false, is the *establish'd Religion* of a Country, there must needs be a great many engaged

Acts 19:24, &amp;c.

gaged by the strongest Worldly Interest to support and maintain it. For it was not only at *Ephesus* that a great number of *Craftsmen* got their *Wealth* by making *Silver Shrines* for *Diana*, but in every other Country the *Living* of a considerable Number depended upon the *Religion* that was therein receiv'd; which being destroy'd, and their *Trade* or *Profession* thereby at an End, they must of necessity be hard put to it to get Bread by taking up some new Employment. And besides, there is nothing that all *Men*, of what Trade or Profession soever they are, are generally so zealous and concern'd about, nothing that they are so afraid of any Change or Innovation in, as *Religion*; *This*, be it well or weakly grounded, yet if it be that Form of Religion that they have receiv'd from their Fathers, and been bred up in from their Childhood, they will not easily let go.

So that I said too little, when I said before that a great many must needs have been engaged to let themselves to discover the Falsity of the *Evangelical History*; for this was in truth the common Concern of all *Mankind*, except only of those few Persons who had been instructed by our Saviour, and believed him to be the *Christ*; All others, whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*, Rich or Poor, Learned or Ignorant, Priests or People, were engaged either by *Interest*, or *Prejudice*, or *Conscience*, or upon some other Account to convict the *Apostles* of Falshood in their Relation of the Matters contain'd in the *Evangelical History*; and if any Falshood had been therein, it is impossible, (considering how obvious it must needs lie to Discovery, and how many were at Work to find it out) that they could

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could have failed of their Aim; And if any one had made the Discovery, it can't be imagin'd he would have been long before he had imparted to others a Piece of News so very welcome as that would have been to the Generality of Mankind; or that such a Discovery of the Falsity of the *Gospel History*, in any one particular, once made and publish'd should ever after have been stifled or suppress'd; because the same Reasons that put them at first upon making the Discovery, were of the same Force afterwards to engage them to preserve the Memory of any Discovery of that kind that had been made.

And therefore I add, in the last Place; And 'tis that which gives Weight and Strength to all that has been said before upon this Subject, and fully compleats that Argument which I am now upon for the Proof of the Truth of the *Gospel History*.

7. That notwithstanding the easiness of the Disproof of this History if it had been false, and the incessant Endeavours of the Adversaries of Christianity, to find out some Falshood therein, (to do which they were not only prompted by their own Interest and Inclination, but also frequently and boldly challenged by the *Christians* themselves, as may be seen in the ancient *Apologies* for the Christian Faith) it is nevertheless a *History* of very good Credit now (cavilled at perhaps, but not denied, not pretended to be disproved either by *Jews* or *Mahometans*, or any other sort of *Infidels*) and that it has been of the like good Credit for many Hundred Years past, even ever since the first Publication of it; and that 'tis not so much *contradicted* in any Point, by any other *Historians* that living in or near the Time of its Writing, was in

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in a Capacity to contradict it upon good Grounds; viz. upon either certain Knowledge of his own, or very credible Information from others that any Matter therein had been falsely related.

True, perhaps the *Infidels* will say, There is indeed no History of competent Antiquity now extant, by which the *Gospel History* can be disproved; but that there has been no such History cannot with certainty be affirmed. This therefore (say they) is our Unhappiness, that tho' we have a good Cause we are destitute of Means to support it; and are in the Condition that the *Israelites* are said to have been in in the Days of *Saul*, when they had War with the *Philistins*; It came to pass in the Day of Battel there was neither Sword nor Spear found in the hand of any of the People. But what was the Reason of this? Why, the *Philistins* had disarmed them; they had taken away the Weapons they had before, and would not permit more to be made. And this, say the *Infidels*, is exactly our Case; In the War we have now with the *Christians* we are forc'd to fight without Sword or Spear. And tho' for other good Reasons we are confident the *Gospel History* is false, and are resolved never to believe it, and make no doubt but that in former times it has been oppos'd and contradicted; yet in this the *Christians* have been too hard and too cunning for us; that while they have kept their own Weapons they have slyly taken away ours; for they have been careful to preserve the ancient Books that were written by those of their own Party in Defence of their Superstition, but the Books of their *Adversaries* they have been as careful to suppress and destroy; And they have had such good success in it, that of all the

1 Sam. 13. 22.

Ver. 19.

Books or Discourses of the ancient Champions of Judaism, Paganism or Deism (*Trypho, Celsus, Porphyry, Julian,* and other great Names) not much is now remaining besides Fragments (and those perhaps imperfectly or falsely cited) to be picked up out of the Books of those who have written Answers to them, who, we may well presume, took notice only of those Passages therein which they thought were easiest to be answer'd. But this is no unusual thing, for the powerful and prevailing Party to stifle that Evidence which they know not how to disprove, and to suppress those Books which they cannot answer. And this, say they, we take for a good Argument that there was something very considerable in these Books, and not easily to be answer'd, because otherwise the *Christians* of former times would have been more willing that they should be preserv'd and transmitted to after times, that so Posterity upon a fair Hearing of all that had been said on both sides, might be able to pass a right Judgment upon the Case, and either to chuse or to reject the Profession of Christianity, with Prudence and Discretion.

This is what has been sometimes suggested by the Enemies of our Religion; and indeed I know not what else can well be said to invalidate that Proof of the *Gospel History* which I am now upon. But what under ground there is for this Suggestion, and how very little the Christian Cause is affected by it, a few words will suffice to show.

For, 1. Whereas 'tis said, that tho' indeed there are no Histories now in being whereby the *Gospel History* can be disproved, 'tis possible however there may have formerly been several Narratives extant

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that were perfectly contradictory to it, and those too perhaps better attested and confirmed than the *Gospel History* was; To this I answer; That tis never allow'd to be a good Proof that a thing is, to say that 'tis possible it might be. And besides, if this surmise or suggestion of a thing barely possible be a good Objection against the *Gospel History*, it is as much an Objection against all other ancient Histories; If for this Reason the *Gospel History* be not credible, no other History is so; for there is no ancient History in the World now extant, which we can be sure was never contradicted by some other, as ancient History, that is not extant.

But, 2. As there is no Evidence that the *Gospel History* was contradicted when it was first published, that is, when, if it had been false, it might most easily have been disprov'd; so there is on the other Side, as good Evidence as such a Matter is capable of, that it never was thus contradicted or disprov'd; Because if the Facts recorded in the *Evangelical History* had been then denied or disprov'd by any competent and credible Witnesses, 'tis impossible that the Christian Doctrine, which was grounded upon and chiefly established by these Facts, should ever have spread so fast as by the Confession of all Parties it did, from the time that it began to be preached by the *Apostles*. Nothing but the strong Evidence that there was of the Truth of the *Gospel History* (and strong Evidence cannot be accounted, if there was stronger and better Evidence on the other side) could have supported the Profession of Christianity, (when it had nothing to recommend it self by but its Purity and Truth) against that violent Opposition which it met with every where in the World.

And, 3. Whereas 'tis further suggested, that the Loss of those ancient Books which are supposed to have been written to disprove the *Gospel History*, is owing to the Power and Subtlety of the *Christians* of those early times, who thought it best to *stifle* that Evidence which they could not gainsay or refute; this Suggestion is manifestly as groundless as 'tis malicious.

For many Books of all sorts and of all sides, have perished by Accident, or been worn out by Time, without any formal Design of any Party or Persons to suppress and destroy them; And I see no Reason why these Books written in contradiction to the *Gospel History* (if indeed any such were ever written) may not have perished one of these ways as well as many other Books have done.

Or if a Reason must needs be given why some Books (and why these in particular) have been lost, while others of the same or greater Antiquity have been preserv'd; I think the little Value that Men generally had for those Books that are lost, is the best Reason that can be given why they were suffered to perish; and that the most probable Cause of Mens having so little value for them, was because the Matter of them was so evidently false, or the Reasoning of them so manifestly weak and fallacious, that no Man thought it worth his while to be at the Pains or Charge of getting them transcribed.

Or if the Men we are now arguing with will not allow this to be a good Account of the Loss of such very valuable Books as they think these *Anti-Gospel Histories* were, let them find out a better; But I'm sure that that before suggested by them, viz. that it was

by *Design*; the first *Christians* purposely *abolishing* and *destroying* all *Testimonies* and *Records* that made against them, is a much worse Account of it, and infinitely more improbable than that which I have given.

For it must be supposed either that these *Anti-Gospel Histories* were written very *early*, as soon almost as the *Gospel History* was published by the *Preaching* or *Writing* of the *Apostles*, or else in *after Times*; And if they were *destroyed* by the *Christians*, this must have been done, either *soon after* they were written, or else after they had been for *some time* receiv'd and allow'd as true Histories by the *Adversaries* of the Christian Faith.

Now if it be suppos'd that these Books were not written till a *good while after* the *Apostles* had preach'd, and the *Evangelists* written the *Gospel*; they were written *too late* to be of sufficient Authority to weaken the Credit of the *Gospel-History*: For how could those that were not *born* when the things recorded in the *Gospel* were said to be done, pretend to contradict the *Testimony* of those who were *living* at that time, and who testified either that they saw them with their *own Eyes*, or that they receiv'd that Account of them which they publish'd from very *credible Persons*, who said they had been *Eye witnesses* thereof?

But if it be supposed that these Books were written *sooner*, even as soon almost as the *Evangelists* wrote, or the *Apostles* began to publish, by their *Preaching*, the *Gospel History*; then I say 'tis impossible they should be *suppress'd* and *destroy'd* by the *Christians*, either *then*, or *afterwards*.

Not *then*; for tho' we grant that Christianity

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from the very first *Preaching* of it, made a very swift Progress in the World; and from a Beginning no bigger than a Grain of Mustard-seed, grew up quickly to be a goodly Tree, shadowing many Nations under the Branches of it; yet it did not *spring up* like a *Mush-room* in a *Night*; it did not *grow* to this *Bigness* all at once. And what were the *Christians* in the weak and infant state of the Church, but an Handful of Men in Comparison with their numberless Opposers, and those too without *Wealth*, without *Power*, of no *Interest* or *Esteem* in the World; that they should undertake to *corrupt* or *stifle* the *Evidence* that was given against them, which was *supported* by the *Secular Power*, and gladly receiv'd and *embrac'd* by all *other Men* but themselves? What were they, that they should be able to *recall* in all the *Books* that had been written against them, and to *suppress* and *destroy* them at their pleasure; and that too so *fully* and *effectually*, as that with the *Books* themselves which they destroy'd, all *Memory* of them should likewise *perish*? A powerful and prevailing Party, with the Government on its side, may indeed do much in this kind, and yet hardly so much as this; But they that believe the *Christians* to have been such a *powerful* and *prevailing Party early enough* to hinder the spreading and dispersing of any Books that were written against them, believe without any Ground or Warrant from History, a more unaccountable and incredible thing than any that is recorded in the *Gospel*.

But if this could not be done then, it might perhaps be done *afterwards*; For in progress of Time 'tis certain (it may be said) that the *Christians* did come to be of very great *Power* and *Interest*, and able to bear.

bear down all their *Opposers*; and 'tis likely enough that *then* they might set themselves to *destroy* all those Monuments of Antiquity whereby their *fabulous Gospels* had been contradicted and disprov'd; And 'tis not incredible that they should so far succeed in their Attempt as to leave no means to Posterity to discern how weak and sandy a Foundation their Religion was built upon.

But this Supposition (taking it altogether) involves a greater Difficulty, and supposes a greater Miracle than the former did. For whatever the *Christian* might attempt to do, or whatever they might be able to do, after they had attained to such great Power, and were become the most numerous and prevailing Party; 'tis utterly incredible that they ever could have attained to such great Power, that they ever could have become the most numerous and prevailing Party, if indeed the *Gospel History* had almost from the very Beginning, been opposed and contradicted by other Histories that were more credible than the *Gospel History* was.

For it must be, and is granted by all, that at the first Preaching of Christianity all worldly Power and Interest were on the other side, and engaged most strongly to hinder the Growth and spreading of it. Now when *Truth* is on one side, and *Power* and *Interest* on the other, 'tis not impossible that *Truth* may at last prevail against *Interest*, and bring the *Power* also to be of its side; But if *Truth* (I mean that which hath most Appearance of Truth, I say if *Truth*) and *Power* and *Interest* are all on the same side from the Beginning (as, it must be allowed, they were, by those who say that the *Gospel History* was quickly prov'd

false by other Histories written and publish'd about the same time) than I say it is utterly impossible that an *Imposture* quickly discover'd to be an *Imposture*, and which serv'd no worldly Interest, should ever have so gained ground as Christianity did, against that apparent *Truth* and mighty *Power* and *Interest* that were on the other side. So that whatever Progress Christianity might have made for a short time at first, by reason of the Boldness and Confidence of its first Preachers, it must needs be that immediately from and after the Time that the *Anti-Gospel Histories* (of better Credit and Authority than the *Gospel History* was) were publish'd, it must have declined much faster than it had before increased; and in a very few Years have so dwindled to nothing, that 'tis like in the Age in which we live there would hardly have been so much as any Remembrance of it left.

And now, if nothing more could be said upon this Subject (for I have not time at present to take into Consideration the *other Proofs* before hinted at of the *Truth* of the *Gospel-History*) I think what has been said already is enough to shew that there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to the *Evangelical Writers*, in their *Relations* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded; This I'm sure of, that upon much less Evidence and Assurance of *Truth* than we have in this, we generally give *Credit* to other Histories.

For we believe other *Historians* in their *Relation* of such *Matters* as they could not have so *certain Knowledge* or so *good Assurance* of as the *Evangelical Writers* might have of those plain *Matters of Fact* and *Sense* which they have related in their *History*.

And again, we believe other *Historians* giving an Account



Account of things which they do not pretend to have had a *personal Knowledge* of; which were done in *Countries* far *distant* from them; and in *Times* long *before* them; which their *Readers* had no *Means* to enquire into the *Truth* of; which were done in *secret*, or when but *few* were by; and which if they were *falsly* related, none were *engaged* by any *Worldly* Interest to be at much *Pains* to *disprove*.

And lastly, If *two Historians* of the same *Antiquity* give different or contradictory *Accounts* of the same *Matter*, we do not for that *Reason* alone presently *reject* either of them; but we enquire which of them was in the *best Capacity* to know the *Truth*, and which of them is the least *liable* to the *suspicion* of *falshood*, and which *Story* is the most *probably related*, and to the *Belief* of *that* we encline.

If therefore there be any *Man* that thinks there is any *truth* in *History*, and who does give *Credit* to other *Histories*, (and I believe there is no *Man* but does so) and yet will not be persuaded to allow that the *Gospel History* is very *credible*, (which contains a *Relation* only of such *Matters* of *Sense* as it was morally impossible there should be any *Cheat* or *Deceit* in; and in which if there had been any *Deceit* or *Mistake* it was morally impossible that it should not be *discover'd* and *disprov'd*; and which, yet, neither is now nor ever was *contradicted* by any *History* of competent *Antiquity* and good *Credit*;) I think we may very well conclude, that 'tis not *Reason* or *Judgment*; but *Prejudice*, or *Interest*, or the *Love* of some *Vice* or *Lust* that makes him an *Infidel*.

The End of the Fourth Sermon.

THE

## Fifth Sermon.

St. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

THE Subject I was upon in my last Discourse on these Words, and which I left unfinished, was to shew, That there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to the *Authors* of the *Historical Books* of the *New Testament* in their *Relations* of those *Matters* of *Fact* which they have recorded.

For the Proof of which I proposed these following things to be considered; (1) The *Nature*, *Conditions* and *Circumstances* of the *Matters* they have recorded, and of the *History* its self. (2) The good *Capacity*

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Account of things which they do not pretend to have had a *personal Knowledge* of; which were done in *Countries* far *distant* from them; and in *Times* long *before* them; which their *Readers* had no *Means* to enquire into the Truth of; which were done in *secret*, or when but *few* were by; and which if they were falsely related, none were *engaged* by any *Worldly Interest* to be at much *Pains* to *disprove*.

And lastly, If *two Historians* of the same *Antiquity* give different or contradictory *Accounts* of the same *Matter*, we do not for that *Reason* alone presently *reject* either of them; but we enquire which of them was in the *best Capacity* to know the Truth, and which of them is the least *liable* to the *suspicion* of *falsehood*, and which *Story* is the most *probably related*, and to the *Belief* of *that* we encline.

If therefore there be any *Man* that thinks there is any truth in *History*, and who does give *Credit* to other *Histories*, (and I believe there is no *Man* but does so) and yet will not be persuaded to allow that the *Gospel History* is very *credible*, (which contains a *Relation* only of such *Matters* of *Sense* as it was morally impossible there should be any *Cheat* or *Deceit* in; and in which if there had been any *Deceit* or *Mistake* it was morally impossible that it should not be *discover'd* and *disprov'd*; and which, yet, neither is now nor ever was *contradicted* by any *History* of competent *Antiquity* and good *Credit*;) I think we may very well conclude, that 'tis not *Reason* or *Judgment*; but *Prejudice*, or *Interest*, or the *Love* of some *Vice* or *Lust* that makes him an *Infernal*.

*The End of the Fourth Sermon.*

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they were in to *know* the Truth of the Things they have related. (3) The strong *Obligations* they were under to *write* nothing but the *Truth* according to the best of their Knowledge or Information. (4) The good *Evidences* that we have of their *Honesty* and *Faithfulness*. And (5) Lastly, The *Confirmation* that was given to the *Truth* of their History by *God himself*.

The last Discourse was spent in the Consideration of the first of these things. I proceed now to the Second, *viz.*

(2.) The good *Capacity* that the Writers of the *Evangelical History* were in to *know* the Truth of those things which they have related.

Now the Matters of *History* which are related in the *Epistles* are but few, and those, for the most part, such as had been done by, or had happened to, either the Persons that wrote them, or the Churches or Persons to whom they were written; so that of these we shall not need to say any thing.

For the Bulk or Body of the *Evangelical History* is contain'd in the *Four Gospels*, and in the *Acts of the Apostles*; And of the *Authors* of these Books there is no Controversie in the Christian Church; And if they were written by the *reputed Authors*, a few Words will suffice to shew that *they* were in a very good *Capacity* to *know* the Truth of the Things they have recorded, much better than most other ancient Historians, whose Relations, nevertheless, are generally thought worthy of Credit.

For *St. Matthew* and *St. John* two of the four *Evangelists* were of the number of those *Twelve* who were in constant Attendance upon our Lord, from the  
Time

Time that he first began to preach and to make Disciples, until he was taken up into Heaven; so that they were themselves *Eye* or *Ear-Witnesses* of most of the Things which they have recorded.

Of *St. Mark* and *St. Luke* indeed the same cannot be said; neither is it certain that they were of the Number of the Seventy Disciples, (tho' that be affirmed by some of the Ancients:) But this I think is agreed to by all; that *St. Mark* was for some part of his Life a constant Companion of *St. Peter*, who was not only one of the *Twelve*, but, most probably, the *First* that was call'd to be an Apostle, and who was also one of the *three* with whom our Lord was most intimate and familiar (for we often read, that *Peter*, Matt. 17. 4. and *James* and *John* were singled from the rest to be Witnesses of some of the most private Transactions of his Life;) And it was generally believed in the Ancient Church, that *St. Peter* was more truly the Author of the *Gospel* called *St. Mark's* than *St. Mark* himself; 26, 37. Mark 5. 37. He being only the *Scribe* or *Amanuensis*, and *St. Peter* the Person that *dictated* the things written by him; whence also this *Gospel* is by some of the Ancients filed *the Gospel of St. Peter*. And of this there seem to be some Tokens even in the History its self; particularly in that Relation that is therein given of *St. Peter's Denial* of his Master, and of his *Repentance* for it; for his *Denial* is there told with some more Circumstances than in the other *Gospels*, (such as the Person himself chiefly concerned was best able to know and might best remember;) And the Account that is given of his *Repentance*, is by this Author expressed more modestly (as it best became a Person to speak who spake of himself) than it is by the other

*Evangelists*; for St. Matthew and St. Luke say that he wept bitterly; but St. Mark (or rather St. Peter himself dictating those Words) only says, that *when he thought thereon he wept*.

It is likewise agreed on all Hands that St. Luke, if not one of the Seventy Disciples (which, 'tis most probable he was not) was, however a very early Convert to Christianity; that he conversed frequently with the *Apostles* and immediate Disciples of our Lord, and was a constant Companion of St. Paul, for a good while, in his Preaching and Travels; so that of almost all the Things which he relates in his *History* of the *Acts of the Apostles* he might be, and of much the greatest part of them, 'tis most probable, and of some, 'tis certain, he was an *Eye* or *Ear-Witness*.

So then, There are *three* of the *five* Historical Books of the *New Testament* that were written by those who were present at most of the things which they have related, (*viz.* the *Gospels* of St. Matthew and St. John, and the *Acts of the Apostles*;) and another of them tho' it bears the Name of St. Mark the Person by whom it was penned, yet if it was (as has been generally believ'd) dictated by St. Peter, may be added to that number, and be likewise reckon'd the Testimony of One who was an *Eye Witness* of the things he has related.

In this Respect therefore the *Gospel History* is manifestly as credible as 'tis possible any History should be; for no Historian can record any thing upon better Assurance of its Truth than the Evidence of his own Senses.

But

But the *Gospel* of St. Luke, it must be granted, is not of this sort; He himself does not pretend that the Matters by him recorded were of his own Knowledge; he only says, *He had perfect understanding of them* Luke 1. 2, 3. *from the very first, from those who from the Beginning were Eye-witnesses and Ministers of the Word.* And of some few Matters recorded by the other *Evangelists*, the same must likewise be granted (particularly of the things that were done before they were called to be *Apostles*; of these things I say, it must be granted) that 'tis most probable they were not Matters of their own Knowledge, that they recorded them only upon credible Information from others; But when 'tis consider'd on the other hand, that there are very few things related by St. Luke which are not to be found in some of the other *Gospels*, his *Testimony* that he had perfect Information of the things he has recorded from *several* Eye-witnesses, adds a Degree of credibility even to the other *Gospels*, and is a good corroborating Evidence of their Truth; And all the Matters recorded by him, or the other *Evangelists* only upon Information of others, must be granted to be more credible than the Matter of most other ancient Histories of good Credit is, if we reflect upon what was said in the former Discourse concerning the *Nature* and *Circumstances* of the things recorded; particularly, that they were such things as might be most *certainly known*, and were capable of the *best attestation*; and that they were things done in the *same Age*, and in the *same Country* in which they lived who have written the *History* thereof.

And what hath been said is, I hope, *sufficient* to shew the good Capacity the *Authors* of the *Historical* Parts

Parts of the *New Testament* were in to know the Truth of the Things they have recorded; most of them being such as 'tis probable three of the *Evangelists* (as Two of them, without all Dispute) were *Eye witnesses* of, and the rest such as they might have certain Information of from several Persons then alive, and well able to witness the same.

Of the *Ability* then of these Authors to write a true History of these Matters, I think, there can be no reasonable Doubt; And that there is as little Reason to doubt of their *Honesty* and *Faithfulness*, will in part appear; if we consider in the third place,

(3) The strong *Obligations* they were under to write nothing but the *Truth*, according to the best of their Knowledge or Information.

Now the *Obligations* that Men are under to speak or write Truth may be reduc'd to two Heads, *Honour* and *Conscience*; By both which the *Evangelical Writers* were more strongly oblig'd to Truth in their Relations than commonly other Historians are.

1. One *Obligation* that lies on all Men to speak or write nothing but what is true, is *Honour*. For there is nothing that is generally accounted more base or dishonourable than to tell a Lye; there is nothing that by those who stand most upon their Honour is thought more reflecting and disparaging, and more necessary to be resent'd as an high Affront than to have the Lye given them. What therefore is generally thought to be a great Reproach it may reasonably be presumed (unless the contrary appears) a Man will be careful to avoid by not giving any just Occasion to have it cast upon him.

And

And this is one Ground of that great Credit that is generally given to ancient Histories; 'tis presum'd (unless there be evident cause to think otherwise) that the Authors of them were Men of so much *Honour*, and that they had such a sense of the Reproach and Discredit that it would be to them to be found out in a Lye, as made them careful not to record any thing as a certain Truth, but what they had good Knowledge or Information of.

But that this *Obligation* to Truth was stronger on the Authors of the *Evangelical History*, than on most other Historians is abundantly evident from what was noted the last time concerning the Nature and Conditions of the things by them related, and of their History of them.

For the Matter of most other ancient Histories is such that the Historians might report many things untruly or upon slight Information, and yet be pretty well assur'd that they should not be reputed Liars; because the Matters recorded by them being things either done in some *Places* a good way off, or in some *time* long before, or in the Presence of but *few* Persons, they might know that none of those into whose Hands their Histories would fall would be in a Capacity to contradict them tho' they were false; Or they might reasonably suppose that their Readers would rather acquiesce in their Report, than travel so far or take so much Pains as they must have done to disprove it; especially if it was a Matter of no great Consequence to their Readers whether their Report was true or false.

But in the *Gospel History* the Case was quite otherwise, and the Historians themselves could not but know

know that it was so. For there were a great many concern'd to find out some Falſity in it, and there were a great many that would have taken any pains to have done it; and yet the Matters related by the *Evangelists*, and their Manner of relating them were ſuch, that their History, if it had been falſe in any particular, might have been diſprov'd with the greateſt eaſe, without being at any Pains to do it; becauſe moſt of thoſe into whoſe Hands it firſt came, would either have known it to be falſe, or would readily have been told that it was ſo, by abundance of Perſons that could of their own Knowledge have contradicted it. So that if it be ſuppoſed that the *Evangelists* had any Regard at all to their own Reputation, it can't be imagin'd either that they did record any thing contrary to their Knowledge, or that in Matters that were not of their own Knowledge they neglected to get the beſt Information and Intelligence that could be had; becauſe if they had done either of theſe, they could not have been ſo vain as to hope to eſcape being Censur'd as the moſt notorious and ſhameleſs Liars that ever wrote. But,

2. The ſtrongeſt *Obligation* that lies on all Men to ſpeak or write nothing but the Truth, is *Conſcience*; And the ſenſe that all Men are ſuppoſed to have of the natural Turpitude of a Lye, is the chief ground of that very great Credit that we give to humane Teſtimony in Caſes of the greateſt Concern and Conſequence.

But this *Obligation* to Truth was likewiſe ſtronger on the Authors of the *Evangelical History* than on moſt other Hiſtorians; 'twas indeed ſo very ſtrong, that nothing leſs than an evident Proof of their Falſity can juſtifie the entertaining ſo much as a ſuſpicion of it.

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For to ſpeak and write the Truth was what they were obliged to, not only by the Law of Nature to which all Men are alike ſubject, but alſo by the Rules of that Religion which they had been bred up in, (by which they had been expreſly forbidden to *lye one to another*, and by which they had been taught that a *Falſe Witneſs that ſpeaketh Lyes is an Abomination to the Lord.*) and eſpecially by the ſtrict Command of him whom they had lately taken for their Maſter, and whoſe Laws and Religion they were to preach and propagate in the World, by which they were obliged, and under the ſevereſt Penalty, no leſs than Eternal Damnation, to *put away all Lying, and to ſpeak every Man the Truth to his Neighbour.*

Lev. 19. 11.  
Pro. 6. 16, 19.Eph. 4. 25.  
Rev. 21. 8.

The *Subject Matter* of their Relation did alſo lay upon them the ſtrongeſt *Obligation* to have a ſtrict Regard to Truth in every thing that they wrote. For if it be a Sin to ſpeak an Untruth in any *common Matter*, it is manifeſtly a greater Sin to do it in *grave and ſerious Things*, when Truth is moſt expected; and eſpecially in *Matters of Religion*, where in a Lye is moſt unbecoming; And if it be a Sin to utter a Slander, or to tell a Lye of a *Man*, it is evidently a Sin of a more heinous Nature, to report an Untruth concerning *God*, and to utter a Falſhood in the *Name of God*; And if to lead Men into any *Miſtake* by a falſe Relation be a Practice not to be juſtified, altho' the Miſtake they are led into be of no hurtful Conſequence either to themſelves or to the World, it is evidently a great Aggravation of the Lye if Men are thereby deceived in a Caſe of the *neareſt and deareſt* Concern to them, if they are led thereby into an Error that may prove *fatal* to them.

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to all Eternity; And lastly, If it be a very great Sin, only *once* to speak an Untruth that may be prejudicial to *one* Man, it is plainly the greatest and the most unpardonable Sin of this kind to *record* an Untruth, with a Design thereby to deceive to their Everlasting Destruction *all* the Men that shall ever be born into the World in all future Ages.

If therefore the *Gospel History* be false, there was manifestly such a *Complication* of most horrid *Wickedness* in the Publishers and Compilers of it, as it is not fair to suppose even *one* single Man would be guilty of; and much less can it be reasonably supposed that *several* Men (*viz.* not only the *Four Evangelists*, but *all* the other *Apostles* who preached the same things that they wrote) did consent to the reporting of so *many*, and such *notorious* and *hurtful* Untruths.

But this, it may be it will be said, is not a direct proof that the *Evangelists* were true and faithful in their Relations, but only a *probable ground* of presuming that they were so. And I grant it is no more, But nevertheless, I think, if nothing more could be offered, this alone wou'd be sufficient to render their Testimony highly credible, so long as nothing is alleged on the other side to disprove it; And in all other Cases we allow it to be so. For by the Testimony of Persons of whose Truth we have no other Assurance but such a *probable Presumption*, all Questions and Controversies of the greatest Concern, relating to the Lives and Estates of Men, are in this World finally decided; every Man that bears Witness in any such Case being, by the common Judgment of Mankind, taken and accepted as a good Witness,

ness, unless the contrary appears; And by the Testimony of two or three such Witnesses we all consent that *every Matter* should be *established*.

But then I add further, that besides this *reasonable Presumption* of the Truth of the *Witnesses* of the *Gospel History*, (which is all that we ordinarily have, or do desire in other Cases) there is a good *positive* Proof of their Truth as can be required. And this was the next Thing propos'd to be consider'd, *viz.*

(4) The good *Evidences* that we have of their Honesty and Faithfulness.

And here it may be noted (for tho' it be a thing that we lay no great stress upon in this Case, yet I think 'tis not to be omitted, because 'tis one of the best Evidences that we can have of the Faithfulness of any Historian whose personal Character is unknown to us) that the Authors of the *Evangelical History* seem to have related all Matters with the greatest *Impartiality*; that they seem as *free* in telling the things that were, or might be accounted *disgraceful* to their Master or themselves, as in telling those things that were most *glorious* and *reputable*. For thus, in their History of the Life of *Christ*, as they tell us the wonderfulness of his Birth, the many Miracles that he wrought, the Testimony that was given him by the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon him, and by the Voice of God, his Glorious Resurrection from the Dead and Ascension into Heaven; so they stick not to tell us also the *Meanness* of his Parentage, the *Obscurity* of his Birth, his *poor* and *low* Condition in the World, the *Affronts* that were given him, the *Contempt* he was had in, and the shameful *Death* he was put to. And of themselves, They have left it upon

Record to all Posterity, that they were of the *meanest* Extraction, and bred up to very *poor* or *scandalous* Employments, that they were *Fisher-Men, Tent-Makers, Publicans*; they own that they were *ignorant* and *unlearned* Men; they tell their own *Childish Mistakes* about the Nature of the Kingdom of the *Messiah*; they mention their own *foolish* and *ambitious Contentions* with one another about worldly Greatness; they confess their own *Baseness* and *Cowardice* in forsaking their Master when in Danger, after the most solemn Profession of Friendship, and repeated Assurances of Stedfastness and Fidelity. St. Peter's Denial of Christ is a thing noted by all the *Evangelists*, and by St. Peter himself (if the Gospel of St. Mark be accounted *his*) is told with its *worst* Circumstances; and St. Paul freely owns that before his Conversion to Christianity he was a *Blasphemer, a Persecutor, and injurious, and the chief of Sinners*. Now their Recording such things as these concerning their Master and themselves, as it is an Evidence of their *Impartiality*, is consequently a good Argument of the Truth of their History; for had they allowed themselves a Liberty of varying from the Truth in any particular, it cannot be imagin'd but that they would at least have concealed their own Frailties and Infirmities; it can't be suppos'd they would have furnished their Adversaries with Matter wherewith to reproach them.

But 'tis possible that an Historian who means to deceive his Readers in some Matter of greater Moment, may purposely insert some few such Passages as these, thereby to gain himself an easier Belief in other Things, and to cover his wicked Design. 'Tis therefore

therefore another and a better Evidence of the Truth of the *Gospel History*, that the *Evangelists* and other Witnesses of the Facts recorded in the Gospels, were Persons not liable to any just suspicion of Unfaithfulness in their Relations; because whatever they had been before, they were then in all other Respects Persons of a very *good Character*. *Ye are Witnesses* (says the Apostle) *and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved our selves among you*. They that could not be charged with any *other Crimes* were not justly to be suspected guilty of *Forgery* and *Lying*. And we have abundant Reason to believe that they were in all other Respects unblameable, because there is no Evidence that they were ever charged at all, (either truly or falsely) even by their greatest Enemies, with any other Fault but only too *great Zeal* and *Industry* in propagating their Religion. And 'tis no Wonder that this should be thought a Fault by those who were of another Religion; or that by the Powers that then were, who endeavoured with all their might to suppress the Growth of Christianity, the *Apostles* who were so zealous to spread it should be looked upon as *disaffected* to their *Government*, and *Movers of Sedition*; But however, this, if it had been a Fault, was not such a Crime as could justly have render'd their *Honesty* suspected, but on the contrary, it was rather a very good Argument that however they might possibly be mistaken, yet they did believe themselves; 'tis a fair Proof that they thought they had good Evidence of the things they testified, and that they reckoned themselves under a strict Obligation to testify the same.

For



For 'tis plain (and that's another good Argument of their Veracity) that they could have no *Worldly End* or *Design* either in the Framing or Publishing of those Stories which they related; so that if they were *Fables* which they told, they were far from being *cunningly devised Fables*, because, as the World then was, they could not be so vain as to hope to raise themselves either to *Honour* or *Wealth* by preaching a *Crucified Messiah*, to the *Jews* a *Stumbling Block*, and to the *Greeks*, *Foolishness*. Now 'tis not to be supposed that any Man will frame or report a *Lye* for *nothing*; Whoever knowingly deceives another, must be supposed to intend some Advantage to himself thereby; And therefore if there be no Untruth appearing in the Relation, and no Gain or other Advantage that the Reporter can be supposed to make to himself by it, it may very reasonably be presumed that the Report is true. But so far was this, if it was a *Lye*, from being a profitable and advantageous *Lye* to the Forgers and Reporters of it, that on the contrary it was, and they could not but readily foresee that it would be very *prejudicial* to their *Worldly Interests*, exposing them to all sorts of Persecutions from all sorts of Men; For both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and every Sect and Party of every other Religion, however hating one another with a mortal Hatred, readily joyned together to persecute the *Christians*, and those above all others who were the *Witnesses* of Christianity, the *Ringleaders* (as they called them) of the *Self* of the *Nazareens*.

This therefore may be reckon'd another Evidence of their Truth; (and as 'tis a stronger Evidence of Truth than any that has been yet mentioned, so 'tis such

such an one as I believe no History in the World has, but that of the Gospel) *viz.* That no *Threats* or *Punishments* could move the *Witnesses* of those things that are recorded in the *Evangelical History* so much as to *desist* from giving fresh Testimony to the Truth of the Things which they had once related. For this seems to have been all that was ever required or expected from them; not that they should retract the Testimony they had given, but only that they should *not speak or teach any more in the Name of Jesus*; And upon this Condition alone any of them might have expected both a Pardon for what they had done before, and likewise all fitting Favour and Encouragement. But this was what they all refused to do, giving no other Reason of their Refusal but this, that they were very sure of the Truth of the things they had spoken, and that there was a necessity laid upon them to preach the Gospel. *Whether, say they, it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.* And the more they were threatned to hold their Peace, so much the more boldly did they speak, not only *filling Jerusalem with their Doctrine*, but likewise spreading the same in all the World. And tho' they knew that *in every City where they came Bonds and Afflictions did abide there*; *None of these things moved them, neither did they count their Lives dear unto themselves, so that they might finish their Course with Joy, and the Miraculous which they had receiv'd of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God.*

And if these Proofs and Evidences already mentioned of the Truth and Faithfulness of the *Apostles* and:

Acts 4. 18.

5. 45.

Acts 4. 19, 20.

Acts 20. 23, 24.

and *Evangelists* are not thought sufficient to gain them Credit, what is there that would be sufficient? for more Evidence, or better Proof cannot reasonably be desired, so good is very rarely to be met with, or expected; And indeed I think there is but only one stronger Proof thereof that can ever possibly be given by *Men*; And that is when a Witness lays down his *Life* to confirm the Testimony he has given; for if when a Man has witnessed any thing, and is questioned for it, and threatned with *Death* if he persists in it, he still continues boldly to testify the same thing; and especially if when upon the *Rack* or on the *Cross*, in the midst of the *sharpest Torments*, and even at the Hour of his *Death*, he justifies the Truth of his former Testimony, he certainly gives the *best Assurance* that 'tis possible for any Man to give of his Honesty and Truth; And if any humane Testimony be credible, this is certainly so in the highest Degree.

That therefore our Belief of the Gospel might be built upon the surest grounds, it pleased the Divine Wisdom so to Order it that all those who were the first Witnesses thereof to the World, should give likewise this best possible Proof of their Veracity. For of all the *Apostles* and *Evangelists* of the manner of whose Death there is any Memory preserved either by History or Tradition, St. *John* is the only Person that did not seal the Testimony he had given with his Blood. And that he did not suffer *Martyrdom* as well as the Rest was not occasioned by his *forbearing* to repeat the Testimony he had before given, and much less by his *Retracting* it, but was merely an Act of Divine and *Miraculous Providence*, whereby

whereby tho' he was put into a *Cauldron of Boiling Oyl*, his Life was preserv'd; so that in Truth, considering the Hazard he ran of his Life, which could not have been saved but by a Miracle, he may very well be accounted a *Martyr* for the Testimony of *Jesus*, no less than the other *Apostles*; altho' he did not actually *expire* under his Sufferings as they did.

Now if it be supposed that a Man, especially one who stands much upon his Credit, may be willing, after he has told a Lye, to suffer a great Deal rather than own himself a Liar; (tho' I think it cannot reasonably be supposed, either, that any Man would suffer so many other great Evils as the *Apostles* did, only upon a Point of *Honour*; or that the *Apostles* did stand so much upon their *Honour*) yet when it is brought to this, that a Man who has told a Lye must either *retract* it, or *die* for it, and that he may in all Probability save his Life by retracting it; it is not to be supposed that any Man will be a *Martyr* for a *known Falshood*; for it is a very true Saying, and to which there is hardly any Exception, tho' it was spoken by the Father of Lyes, that *Skin for Skin, yea all that a Man hath he will give for his Life*; 'Tis not credible therefore that so much as *one* Man should be found so foolish as to sacrifice his Life to a known Lye, and that too an *unprofitable* Lye, to himself, to his Family, and to all the World; and this only to save his *Reputation*; It is much less credible that so many Men, *viz. all* the *Apostles* and *Evangelists*, and most if not all the rest of our Lord's immediate Disciples should be guilty of such prodigious and unheard of Folly; and it is least of all credible that among so many as there were that bore Witness

Job 2. 4.

of the Facts recorded in the *Evangelical History*, not so much as *one* Man should be found that was *honest* and *wiser* than the rest; not *one* that could be persuaded to give Glory to God by the Confession of his Fault, and satisfaction to the World by a publick owning of the Cheat he had been engaged in; not *one* that would chuse to undergo the Disgrace of a Lyar rather than the shameful Death of a Malefactor.

These are in short the *Evidences* we have of the *Honesty* and *Faithfulness* of the *Evangelical Historians*, those Evidences I mean which they themselves have given thereof; and they are plainly as good as could be desired, they are the best that could be given by Men.

And putting together all that hath been said on this and the foregoing Heads, now, and in my last Discourse, for the Proof of the Truth of the *Evangelical History*, I think we may truly and confidently affirm, that altho' we consider it only as a meer *humane History*, we have much greater Reason to give Credit to it than to any History in the World besides.

1 Joh. 5. 9. But if we receive the witness of Men, (and who is there that does not?) the Witness of God is greater; And therefore in Order to shew further that there is sufficient Reason to give full Credit to the *Evangelical Historians* in their Relations of those Matters of Fact which they have recorded, I proposed to be considered, in the Fifth and last Place,

(5) The Confirmation that was given to the Truth of their History, by God himself. For what St. Paul says of his own, was likewise true of the Speech and Preaching of all the other Apostles; viz. That it was

in Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power; that the Faith of their Hearers should not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God. And so St. Luke says; Acts 4. 33. With great Power gave the Apostles Witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. For at the same Time that they Witnessed the Miracles of their Master, they gave Assurance to Men of the Truth of their Testimony by doing the like Miracles themselves, healing the Sick, casting out Devils, raising the Dead, &c. just as Jesus himself had done. And at the same time that, pursuant to their Commission, they preached the Gospel to Men of all Nations and Languages, they plainly demonstrated, both that they had such a Commission from God, and that it was the Truth of God which they preached, by speaking to every Man of every Nation in his own Tongue.

Thus, as the Author to the Hebrews says, God did bear them Witness both with Signs and Wonders, and with divers Miracles and Gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will. And he might well say, that God did hereby bear them Witness, because that Power wherewith they were endued was so evidently from on high, that none that saw their Works, and considered withall the Purity and Excellence of the Doctrine of Christianity that was thereby establish'd, could have any reasonable Doubt whether they were done by the Power of God or no. We know, said Nicodemus to our Saviour, that thou art a Teacher sent from God, for no Man can do the Miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. But the same Works that Jesus did, did his Disciples also, after he had sent down the Promise of his Father upon them,

on the Day of *Pentecost*; yea and greater Works than those did they do; so that whoever beheld their Works, might (so far as Miracles are Evidences of a Divine Power) be rather more certain that God was with them, than *Nicodemus* could be, that he was with our Lord himself. For tho' their other Miracles, that were of the same sort with those which our Saviour had done, were such Proofs of Divine Assistance as could not, with any Reason be gain'd; yet, I think it may truly be affirm'd, that the Gift of *Tongues*, which was peculiar to them, and wherein they did (as we may say) excell even our Lord himself, was more convincing than any of them; For he that saw one of their other Miracles might possibly entertain some little Doubt whether the Effect that appeared to him to be Miraculous might not yet be done by some secret Power of Natural Causes that was unknown to him; But we all know the Power of Nature so well, that we are sure, the Knowledge of a Language cannot possibly be attained Naturally, even by a Person of the quickest Parts and faithfullest Memory, but in so much time, at the least, as it will necessarily take up to be told by Tutors, or to learn from *Lexicons*, what every particular word of the Language to be learnt, is by the People of that Language designed to signify; because Words have not a Natural Relation to the Notions or Things thereby expressed, but are meer arbitrary Signs thereof. So that whoever knew the Education of the *Apostles*, and that they were before altogether ignorant and unlearned, and yet saw them every one, on a sudden, on the Day of *Pentecost*, able to speak readily in all the Languages of all the Nations under Heaven, from whence

whence had come some of the *Jews* that were present at *Jerusalem* at that time, could have no possible Doubt of their Supernatural Assistance; They that heard them speak with *Tongues*, which they had never learned, could not but conclude that it was the Spirit that gave them this Utterance, because nothing else could give it; So that this was not only (as their other Miracles were) a Proof of *Inspiration*, but likewise an Instance and Example of it; It was a Proof of an inward and invisible Inspiration, by an Inspiration that was (as I may say) outward and visible; by an Inspiration that was discernible even by the Bodily Senes of all those that were present.

But be it so, perhaps the *Infidels* will say, that they that saw the *Miracles* which the *Apostles* are reported to have done in the Name of *Christ*, had Reason enough to believe their Testimony concerning him, and as well that which they have left in Writing, as that which they gave by word of Mouth; Yet what's this to us that live now? For we neither saw the *Miracles* that they wrought, nor heard them speaking with *Tongues*; neither have we any Assurance that they ever did either the one or the other but only from themselves. They indeed tell us that they did a great many wonderful things (such as we are willing enough to grant could not be done but by the Power of God) in Confirmation of their Testimony concerning *Jesus*; But we see no more Reason to believe this their Testimony concerning themselves, than there is to believe their other Testimony concerning him; so that this cannot in reason be reckoned a Proof or Confirmation of that; Nay, rather, we think they are less credible Witnesses in their own Case than they were

were in his. So that to us the *History* of the *New Testament* (granting it to be written by the *Apostles*) is of no more Authority than *their* Writing it (considered only with respect to their Natural and Moral Capacities and Qualifications) could give to it; Because that *Seal of Miracles* which is said to have been affixed thereto by *God*, is now, by length of Time quite worn off; or at least the Impression thereof is now so defaced, that we cannot distinguish *whose Seal* it was, or whether it was a *true Seal* or a *counterfeit* one; And that this *Seal* was ever affixed to their Testimony, is testified only by those same Witnesses, whose the Testimony its self was.

To this Objection therefore (which, it must be confessed, has some Appearance of Weight and Reason in it) I answer,

1. By denying the Ground it is built upon, *viz.* That the Testimony of the *Apostles themselves* is the only Proof we have of the *Miracles* which they wrought for the Confirmation of their Testimony concerning *Jesus*. For besides the Testimony of the *Apostles*, in their *Epistles*, and in the *Acts*, Witnessing their own *Miracles*, we have likewise the Testimony of all the other *Christian Writers*, whose Books are preserved, that lived in or near the *Apostle's* Times, Witnessing the same Thing; And this Testimony, not only given as it were in secret, in order to the making *Profelytes* of such as they found to be easie and credulous; but in the most *publick manner*, in those *Apologies* for the *Christian Faith* which they presented to *Magistrates*, and published to the whole *World*; in which, for Proof that these *Miracles* had been wrought by the *Apostles*, they appeal to all the *Histories* and

Records

Records of the *Apostle's* Times then extant; in which, they challenge any that could do it; to contradict their Testimony; in which, they testify that the same *Miraculous Power* did still continue in the *Christian Church*, and was sometimes exerted, often enough, and openly enough to prove its being, tho' not so frequently as it had been by the *Apostles* themselves, when there was more need of shewing it, *viz.* at their first Preaching of the Gospel.

Now these things, if they had not been true, the first *Christians*, in the Circumstances they were then in, would not have dared to affirm; and if they had been false, they might easily have been disproved, and they would most certainly have been at least boldly denied and contradicted by the profess'd Adversaries of the *Christian Faith*. But they did not deny or contradict, they did not offer to disprove the Report that was then generally believed of the *Miracles* that had been done by the *Apostles*. Nay so far were they from this, that there is good Evidence from Antiquity still remaining, that several even of those who took upon them to oppose the *Christian Doctrine* did yet expressly own that great and mighty Works had indeed been done by the Hands of the *Apostles*, as well as of their Master; But then they had been done, they said, (and that was all they could say in the Case) by *Magick Art*, by the *Help* of the *Devil*; just as the *Jews* had said before of our Saviour, *Mat. 12. 24. This Fellow doth not cast out Devils, but by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils.*

I shall not stay now to shew how groundless as well as malicious this Suggestion was with reference both to our Lord's Miracles and to theirs, because I suppose

I shall

I shall have a better Occasion to do it hereafter in my next Discourse; 'tis enough for my present purpose, if the Matter of Fact only be granted, viz. that the *Apostles* did do many *Miracles* in the Name of *Christ*, and to confirm their Testimony concerning him; And that they did so cannot I say, be reasonably doubted, because 'tis witnessed not only by *themselves*, but by all the *Christian Writers* of those or the succeeding times, and is not denied, nay is granted even by their *Adversaries* and *Opposers*. But,

2. If we had not so good Proof of the *Miracles* done by the *Apostles*, if there were no Witnesses thereof but themselves, I say however that their Testimony alone would be very credible; Nay indeed the thing testified by them must, I think, necessarily have been acknowledged by us, altho' there had been no History or Record at all of it transmitted to our Times. I do not mean that without the Light of History we could have known that they did just those very *Miracles* which are recorded, but I say that without this we might have known in general that they did do *Miracles*, or that they were assisted by a *Supernatural Power*; (This, I say, we might have been sure of) by the *permanent Effects* of such a *Power*, continuing after their Times, and testified by all *Historians*, *Heathen* as well as *Christian*, of all Ages ever since; and which are even still extant and visible.

For that a great Part of the World is now *Christian* we see and know, and that it has been so for many Ages past we are as sure as we are that there have been any Ages past before our own; And looking back to see when and how it came to be so, we learn, by the concurrent Testimony of all History, *Jewish*, *Pagan*,  
and

and *Christian*, that *Christianity* had its Beginning in *Judea*, just at that Time in which the Sacred History places it; And by the same concurrent Testimony of all History we learn that in a very short time, in less than forty Years after, it was Preached in all the Provinces of the *Roman Empire*, and in all other Countries of the World that were then known, and of which we have any History left; and that wherever it was Preached it made a very swift Progress, insomuch that in a few Years the number of *Christians* became very considerable and bare a great Proportion to the People of all other Religions; For it was not much above threecore Years after the *Apostles* had dispersed themselves in order to preach the Gospel to the *Gentiles*, when *Pliny* Proconsul of *Bithynia*, wrote that *Epistle* to the Emperor *Trajan*, wherein giving an Account of the *Christians*: then under a severe Persecution for their Religion by the Emperor's Order, he tells him that there was a great number of Men obnoxious to *Sufferings* upon that Account; that many of all Ages, of all Orders and Degrees and of both Sexes were every Day called in Question for it; that the Contagion of that Superstition (as he calls it) had spread its self not only in great Cities, but also in Towns and Country Villages, insomuch that the Temples of the Heathen Gods, had for some Time before been in a manner desolate, and their Worship and Sacrifices intermitted.

Now this is certain that there can be no Effect without a Cause of sufficient Power to produce it; And it was evidently impossible that *Christianity* should make so swift a Progress, and prevail so much in the World, as it did, in so short a time, only by Natural Means. For without good Skill in the Lan-

guages of the several Nations wherein the Apostles were to preach the Gospel, it had been in vain for them to have gone about to Convert all Nations; Or if they had attempted it, 'tis impossible it should have been with success; And how can it be conceived possible that *twelve grown Men*, who before understood not a word of any but their own Mother Tongue, and that perhaps not well, who had never been bred up to *Study*, and who were then past the proper *Age* of learning Languages, should yet be able in so short a time to become perfect Masters of all the *Languages* then in use in the World, so as to speak them readily and fluently, as if every one had been their own Native Tongue? and that after this, they should have time enough still left to go and preach the Gospel in all Countries? So that the speedy Conversion to Christianity of such a great number of Men in all Parts of the World by their Ministry, is a direct proof of that *Gift of Tongues* wherewith we believe they were endued; And whoever can believe that they had *this Gift*, which was peculiar and extraordinary, and such as had never been heard of in the World before, may, I think, more easily believe all the other *Miracles* that they are reported to have done, which were not near so wonderful, which were such as had been done by other Prophets in former Times.

But suppose this Story of the *Gift of Tongues* to be false, and that indeed the *Apostles* were Men of such ready *Natural Parts* as to be able to learn all the *Languages* which they could have any use of in as few Days as it would have taken other Men Years to do it in; or else that they had in truth been bred up to the *Study* of *Languages* from their Childhood, and

only

only concealed their Knowledge thereof until that famous Day of *Pentecost*, that so then it might be taken to be Miraculous; Yet what could *twelve Men* furnished with this excellent Skill, do by their own *Natural Power* only, towards the Conversion of the World to Christianity in so short a time?

For 'tis to be consider'd that the Religion which they were to preach in the World was the most contrary that could be to the Carnal Lusts and Passions of Men; that it promis'd no Worldly Greatness, no Increase of Riches, no Enjoyment of Sensual Pleasures; but on the contrary taught all those that embrac'd it, to be mortified to all these Things, and not to set their Affections on any thing here below.

'Tis to be consider'd also, that it propos'd to Man's Belief such Doctrines as to the carnal Minds of Men could not but appear foolish or incredible; As that the Eternal Son of God did for our sakes become Man, and take on him the Form of a Servant, that in that Form he submitted to be scornfully used, cruelly scourged, and at last barbarously Crucified as a vile Malefactor by his own Creatures; that this same *Jesus* was afterwards declared to be the Son of God with Power by the Resurrection from the Dead, that he was taken up into Heaven, seated at the right Hand of the Father, had all Power in Heaven and Earth committed to him, was ordered to be Worshipped and adored by all Men with the same Honour where-with they honour the Father, and was appointed by God to be the Judge of the quick and dead, &c.

'Tis to be consider'd likewise, that it was a Religion perfectly destructive of all other Forms of Religion then receiv'd or establish'd in the World; and

upon that Account only must needs meet with the strongest Prejudices; all the Men it was preached to being before from their Childhood bred up, and already fixed in another way.

And lastly, 'tis to be consider'd further, that the *Facts* upon which this Religion was grounded, that is, by which the Divine Mission of the Lord *Jesus* was proved, *viz.* his *Miraculous Works*, were such as being above the known Power of Natural Causes were not like to be easily credited. That he healed the Sick, that he gave Sight to the Blind, Hearing to the Deaf, Speech to the Dumb, Feet to the Lame, and Strength to the Cripples; that he did cast out Devils; that he rais'd the Dead, and all these only with a Word's speaking; that he fed sometimes great Multitudes of four or five Thousand with only so much Bread and Fish as to Appearance was not sufficient for twenty Men; and that after they were all satisfied, there was more in Bulk left in Fragments than there had been before in whole Provision; That he walked on the Water as on dry Land; That he had the Winds and Seas obedient to his Command; And above all, that he Rais'd himself to Life after he had been three Days Dead; These and such like were strange Stories to be told to Men in order to persuade them to take upon them a new Religion.

What then, I say, could *twelve Men*, tho' never so well furnished naturally with Parts and Learning and all other Endowments proper to qualify them for such a Work, do towards the persuading the World to embrace Christianity? Suppose they had gone (not as they did, one into this Country another into that; often singly, seldom more than two in Company; but) *all together*

in a Body into some one Country remote from *Judea*, and there with *concurrent Testimony* born Witness of the Things they had seen and heard; yet who would have believ'd their Report? The Report of Strangers coming from a far Country, and of whose Honesty and Truth they could have no Assurance but only from themselves vouching for one another? Who would have given Credit to a Relation of such incredible Stories, told with a Design to introduce a Religion that was unknown to their Fathers? and such a ridiculous Religion too, as this, at the first Proposal, wou'd probably appear; *viz.* the Worshipping as God, a Man, who by their own Confession, was rejected and set at naught, and at last Crucified as a wicked Malefactor by his own Countrymen.

Or if it can be supposed that the *Apostles*, by the Boldness of their Speech and the *enticing Words of Man's Wisdom*, might after some time have prevailed upon some few to become Profelytes to their Religion; yet the multitude of their Disciples could not have been very great, before the *Government* of the Country would have taken the Alarm, and have called in Question these *Setters forth of new Gods*, these *Movers of Sedition among the People*, as they would certainly have been accounted, and as, in fact, the *Apostles* were accounted in every place where they came. And this would quickly have put a stop to a growing Sect; They that liked the Religion well enough before, because it was new, would quickly have left off to like it when they saw it would be dangerous to profess it; 'tis not likely their Followers would have continued to stick to them, when they perceiv'd the Government and the whole Nation in general engaged on the



the other side, and resolv'd by all means possible to extirpate the Belief they had entertained; and when they saw their Preachers Imprisoned and Scourged, tortur'd and put to Death, they would quickly have deserted the Service of a *Master*, who, they would then readily think, was not of Power to *save* either *himself* from the *Cross*, or his *Disciples* from Suffering. And after this, had the *Residue* of the *Apostles*, who might possibly have escap'd Martyrdom in this Country, gone into another, there they must have expected the like Reception and Usage, and not better in a third; and so in a few Years their Lives would have spun out in doing nothing, and their Religion would have perish'd with themselves.

And if their united Testimony would have had so little Credit, much less can it be suppos'd that the *single Witness* of *One Apostle* only could ever have gain'd any Credit at all; And yet unless the Testimony of some single Witnesses had been believ'd, 'tis impossible there should have been, in so short a time, so great a Conversion of Men to Christianity in all parts of the World, by the Preaching of so few Men.

So that whoever believes that Christianity could make so swift and so great a Progress as 'tis certain by all History it did, only by the *Preaching* of the *Apostles* without any *Miraculous Gifts* or *Supernatural Assistance*, wants not Faith enough to be a Christian, if he had but a Will to it; for he believes already a much greater Miracle than any that is recorded in the *Evangelical Story*.

And now by all that hath been said, in this and the last Discourse, I hope it appears that there is *sufficient Reason* to give full Credit to the *Authors* of the *Historical*

*rical Books* of the *New Testament* in their Relations of those Matters of Fact which they have recorded. This I'm sure I may say, that there is not so good Reason to give Credit to any History in the World besides, of the same Antiquity; And that a History so well confirm'd as this is cannot reasonably be reject'd, nor indeed any ways be discredit'd, but either by some other *more credible History* contradicting it, or by some *intrinsic Evidence* of Falshood.

But better or *more credible History* contradicting it, I have already observ'd, there is not, nor indeed is there any History contradicting it that is of sufficient Antiquity to disprove it. Nay there are many very considerable things of those recorded in the *Gospel-History* that are occasionally mentioned by other Historians of those or the succeeding Times, who had no Design thereby to do any Service to Christianity; as namely that there was such a Man as *John the Baptist*, that he was a Person of great Piety and Austerity, and a Preacher of Righteousness, and that he was put to Death by *Herod*: That there was also a Man named *Jesus*, who call'd himself and was own'd by many to be the *Christ*, that he did many wonderful things, and was at last Crucified by the *Jews*: The Names of some other Persons likewise spoken of in the *Gospel-History* are mention'd under the same Character in some other Histories, as *Pilate*, *Felix*, *Festus*, *Caiphas*, *Agrippa*, &c. In other Histories also we find notice taken of the Cruelty of *Herod* in slaying the Infants at *Bethlehem*, and among them (as 'tis thought) his own Son; which made *Augustus*, when the Story was told him, to say, that it was better to be *Herod's Swine* than his Son; and likewise of

of that remarkable Eclipse of the Sun, when the Moon was at the full, which the *Evangelists* say happen'd at the time of our Saviour's Passion; and of that violent Earthquake that was at the same time, and lastly, of the prodigious Increase of Christianity in all Parts of the *Roman Empire*, soon after its first Publication.

And if upon this Occasion it should be said that the Facts recorded in the *Evangelical History* and the Events that follow'd thereupon were so very wonderful and remarkable, that if they had been true they must in all probability have been more taken notice of than they are in other Histories; I answer, that supposing them to be true, it could not be reasonably expected that more mention should have been made of them by other Historians than there really is; because they were plainly foreign to their purpose, or else such Stories as tho' they had heard of them they did not believe, having perhaps never taken any pains to examine into the Truth of them. For what was it to the Purpose of an Author that was writing the Life of one of the *Roman Emperors*, or the History of some famous War, or giving an Account of the Affairs of the Civil State, to make a large Digression concerning a *Religious Sect* begun in *Judea* by a Person that was despised in his own Country, and carried on and continued by mean and contemptible Persons who made no Figure in the World? Or how could it be expected that an Historian who was not himself a *Christian* should yet give a large Account of the Miracles of our Saviour and his *Apostles*, and other Facts upon which our Religion is grounded; which had he believ'd (as he must be supposed to have done, if he had deliver'd them to Posterity as Truths) he must have

have been a *Christian*? 'Tis enough in all Reason, and as much as could be expected in this Case (supposing these Facts to be true) that they are not by any *Historians* that were of another Religion, contradicted or attempted to be disprov'd; more than this would have been too much. And should we now in some ancient Manuscript History new brought to Light, and bearing the Name of some *Jewish* or *Heathen* Author, find a large and formal Account of any of those Facts relating to the Christian Religion that are recorded in the Gospel; this would give very just ground to suspect, that the whole History (whatever other Appearance it had of Truth) was forged and counterfeit, or at least that those Passages speaking honourably of the Christian Religion or the Author of it, were knavishly foisted into the Book by some *Christian Transcriber*. For this is indeed the best Argument that is brought to discredit some Passages of this kind that are now to be found in some *Heathen* or *Jewish* Historians, and particularly in *Josephus*, viz. that they say more than was proper or likely to be said by *Heathens* or *Jews*; that if those Passages are genuine, and the Authors had believed what they themselves wrote, they must have been *Christians*.

Now this I'm sure is not fair Dealing, that the Paucity and slenderness of those corroborating Testimonies to the Truth of the *Christian History* that are to be met with in other Historians, and that the Multitude and Fulness of such Testimonies, should both be urged as Arguments against Christianity. And therefore when they are both urged (as they are and have been by our Adversaries) we may reasonably conclude that the Truth is in the Mean; and that there are indeed

no more, nor no fewer Testimonies of this kind to be met with in other Writers, and that they are not either more or less to the Purpose, than (supposing the *Christian History* to be true) might fairly be expected.

It only remains then that we enquire whether there be in the *Gospel History*, any *intrinsic Evidences* of Falseness. And 'tis pretended by the Adversaries of our Religion, that there are many such; For there are, they say, some things related in the *Gospel History*, that are altogether *incredible*; and there is, they say, oftentimes great *Difference*, in the several Relations of the same Story, by the several *Evangelists*; And not only so, but there are, they say, besides, in their several Histories compared together, some flat *Contradictions* and *Repugnancies*.

I intended therefore at the End of this Discourse, if I had had time for it, to have spoken largely upon this Subject; But because I have not, must refer you to those Books that have been written on purpose to give an Account of the difficult Texts of Scripture, and to reconcile those that are seemingly repugnant; Or for want of such Books to any good Commentary on the Bible, in which you will hardly fail to meet with Satisfaction in any Difficulty of this kind, if you read it with a Mind disposed to receive satisfaction. And I shall conclude this Discourse with only observing in General,

1. That the pretended *Impossibilities* that are said to be related in the Sacred History, are only *Difficulties*; They are indeed Events above and beyond the known Power and common Course of Nature, but they are such as are easily Credible when they are ascribed, as they must be, to the Almighty power of God.

2. That

2. That the *Differences* that may sometimes be observ'd in the several Relations of the same Story by the several *Evangelists*, is very inconsiderable; consisting only in this, That one perhaps relates the Story in a different Order of things than another does; Or that One tells it briefly, another more at large; Or One with a few, another with more Circumstances; Or that some Circumstances are mentioned by each of them which the other had omitted. So that this Observation is so far from being a just Objection against the Truth of the History, that it is rather a Proof and Confirmation of it; For 'tis an Argument that the *Evangelists* did not confer together in the Writing of their Histories, and that they did not Copy or Transcribe from one another; but that every one of them reported the Story he wrote in such manner as he himself remembered it to have been, and with such Circumstances as he himself took most notice of. And,

3. As to the *Repugnancies* and *Inconsistencies* that are said to be in the *Evangelical History*; These we absolutely deny. I have not time now to consider, or attempt to reconcile all the Places that are pretended to be contradictory to each other, but those Passages which seem most liable to this Exception, are, I think, the Relation of *Judas's* Death, and the Account of our Saviour's *Genealogy*.

But as to the first, There is plainly no *Impossibility*, no *Contradiction* in it, if we should say that after he had hanged himself, as St. *Matthew* says, he did fall down, and his *Bowels gush'd out*, as St. *Luke* affirms; Or it may be that he did not hang himself, but only was \*choaked or suffocated\* by the violence of his Grief, and that the same Passion by which he was strangled made him also fall down headlong and burst assunder in the midst so that all his Bowels gush'd out. And as to the other, when 'tis remembered that by the *Jewish Law* the next of Kin was to raise up Seed to his near Relation that died without Issue, by Marrying his Widow, and that the First-born of the Woman after such second Marriage was reputed in *Law* the Son, as well as he was the *Heir*, of the *Deceased*; so that consequently the

Mat. 27. 5.  
Acts 1. 18.

Deut. 25. 5.

the same Person might be the *Legal Son* of one Man, and the *Natural Son* of another Man; tho' it may be difficult, perhaps impossible for us, at this Distance of Time, to say with certainty which of the two different Lines by which our Saviour's Pedigree is deduced from *David* is the *Legal*, and which the *Natural* Line; it is very easie nevertheless to believe that one is the *Legal* and that the other is the *Natural* Line; and if so, there is plainly no Contradiction between the two *Evangelists*, altho' *St. Matthew* makes our Saviour to be descended from *Solomon*, and *St. Luke* from *Nathay*, altho' *St. Matthew* says that *Joseph* the Husband of the Blessed Virgin was the Son of *Jacob*, and *St. Luke* that he was the Son of *Heli*.

Mat. 1. 16.

Lu'e 3. 23.

And now the Truth of the *Gospel History* being, as I hope, by what hath been said sufficiently established, I should proceed to shew, That if the Matters of Fact related in the *New-Testament* are true, they are *Sufficient Proofs* of the Truth and *Divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein Taught; But I am sensible that I have trespassed too much upon your Patience already, and so shall reserve this for the Subject of my next Discourse.



FINIS.

ERRATA.

IN Sermon III. Page 25. Line 1. for once, read now, for these, read these.

## ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Three remaining *Lectures* for this Year are to be at *St. Paul's*, on the first *Mondays* in *September*, *October*, and *November*. But the first *Munday* in *September* being the *Fifth Day* for the *Fire of London*, when there will be, in the *Morning*, a Sermon, suitable to that Occasion, Preached before the *Lord Mayor*, *Aldermen*, and *Companies* of the *City*; *Mr. Boyle's Lecture* on that Day, is Order'd to be Preached in the *Afternoon*.

THE  
SUFFICIENCY  
OF THE  
Scripture-Revelation,  
As to the Proof of it. PART III.

A  
SERMON

Preach'd at the  
CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of *St. Paul*,  
*September 2d. 1700.*

BEING  
The Sixth, for the Year 1700, of the LECTURE  
Founded by the Honourable *Robert Boyle*, Esq;

By *OFSPRING BLACKALL*, D.D.  
Rector of *St. Mary Aldermary*, and Chaplain in  
Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

LONDON,  
Printed by *J. Leake*, for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Bishop's-Head* in *St. Paul's Church-Yard*, 1700.

S<sup>c</sup> L U K E XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead , they will repent.*

*And he said unto him , If they hear not Moses and the Prophets , neither will they be persuaded , though one rose from the dead.*

**I**N Order to shew that we have *sufficient Reason* given us to convince us of the Truth and Authority of the *New-Testament*; and of all the Doctrines that are taught by it, I have formerly propounded to shew, 1. That we have *sufficient Reason* to believe that the *Books* of the *New-Testament* were written by those *Persons* who are said to be the *Authors* thereof; 2. That there is *sufficient Reason* to give full *Credit* to them in their *Relation* of those *Matters of Fact* which they have recorded; And, 3. That if the *Matters of Fact* therein recorded are true, they are *sufficient Proofs* of the *Truth* and *Divine Authority* of all the *Doctrines* that are therein taught. And the two first of these *Points* I have, I hope, already made good.

I proceed now to the third; *viz.*

3. To shew, That the *Doctrine* of the *Gospel* is well grounded upon the *History* of it; That if the *Matters of Fact* recorded in the *New-Testament* are true,

they are sufficient Proofs of the Truth and Divine Authority of all the Doctrines that are therein taught.

And here, by the Doctrines of the Gospel, I understand both the Articles of Faith which it proposes to our Belief, and the Rules which it prescribes to our Practice. Many of the former of which are themselves Parts of the Gospel History, as the Incarnation, Life, Sufferings, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of our Saviour; and the rest, of both sorts, are taught in the New Testament, either by our Saviour himself, or by his Apostles.

And I suppose it will be readily granted that all their Doctrines are true, and also of divine Authority, if it shall appear that they were commissioned and sent by God to instruct the World; for *he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God*, Joh. iii. 34.

The single Point therefore to be consider'd at this time, is, whether there be sufficient Evidence from the Matters of Fact recorded in the History of the New Testament, that our Saviour and his Apostles were commissioned and sent by God to instruct the World.

And first, Whether there be sufficient Evidence from thence that our Saviour himself was a Teacher sent from God.

Now that he said he was sent from God, is a Matter of Fact, and a part of the Gospel History, Joh. xii. 49. *I have not spoken of my self, but the Father which sent me, he gave me a Commandment what I should say, and what I should speak.*

And that he said that he was the Messiah which had been foretold by the Prophets, is likewise Matter of Fact, and a Part of the same History, Joh. iv. 25, 26. *The Woman of Samaria saith unto him, I*

See Joh. 4. 37.  
38. 8. 38. 14.  
30, 24.

know

know that Messias cometh which is called Christ; when he is come, he will tell us all things; Jesus saith unto him, I that speak unto thee, am HE. Mat. 16. 16, 17.  
Mar. 9. 41.  
Luke 24. 46.  
Joh. 9. 47.

The Question therefore is, whether from the things which are recorded of him by the Evangelists, there be sufficient Ground to believe the Truth of either or both these Pretences; I say of either or both of them, because either of them is a sufficient Reason to receive his Doctrine as True and Divine. For which cause therefore I shall not, in speaking to this Subject, distinguish between the Evidences which the Gospel-History affords of his being a Prophet, and those which it affords of his being the Messiah, but shall propose them promiscuously as they come to mind.

And here I shall consider, First, The Credibility of our Saviour's own Testimony concerning himself; and Secondly, The Confirmation that was given to this Testimony by God; grounding all that shall be said on both these Heads, upon the Gospel-History; the Truth of which I now take for granted, as being, I hope, already sufficiently prov'd.

First then, I shall consider the Credibility of our Saviour's own Testimony concerning himself, when he said that he was sent by God, and that he was the Christ the Son of God.

And I know 'tis commonly said that a Man is not to be believed in his own Case. And this very thing was objected to our Saviour by the Jews, Joh. viii. 13. *Thou bearest Record of thy self, thy Record is not true.* But this Saying is not without Exception.

When indeed what a Man witnesses is for his own Benefit, his Testimony, if it be single, may reasonably be rejected; especially, if any Proof be made that at other times he hath told a Lye; or done any other

other ill thing for his Advantage; But otherwise a Man's Testimony concerning himself may be credible; nay in some cases it may be more credible than another Man's; because he may sometimes be surer of what he says concerning himself than another Man could be. And therefore our Saviour, who in *Job. v. 31.* allows of the Reasonableness of that Saying; *If I bear witness of myself my Witness is not true;* yet when this very thing was afterwards objected to him by the Pharisees, in the Place before-cited, makes answer in the following words; *Tho' I bear Record of myself, yet my Record is true, for I know whence I came, &c.*

Joh. 8. 14.

And that the Testimony of our Lord concerning his own divine Mission was such as we might rationally give Credit to, tho' we had no other Evidence of it, will, I suppose, sufficiently appear, if these following things be consider'd.

1. That his whole Life (according to the Account that is given of it by the *Evangelists*, which we now build upon, as true) was in all Respects spotless and unblameable; *He did no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth;* He was a Lamb without blemish and without spot. And this he himself urges as a Reason why his Testimony ought to be credited; *Job. viii. 46. Which of you convinceth me of Sin? and if I say the Truth why do ye not believe me?* And a very good Reason it was; for it could not justly be suspected, that a Person of whom no other ill thing could be said, was yet indeed in the whole Course of his Life guilty of a Crime of the greatest Magnitude, viz. of Lying in the Name of God; of saying, that the Lord had sent him, when indeed the Lord had not sent him, nor spoken by him.

2. It

2. It may be also consider'd, that this Testimony of our Lord, tho' it was concerning himself, yet was not for himself; I mean it was not for his own worldly Advantage. And this Consideration he himself likewise offers to the Jews, as an Argument of the Truth of his Testimony, *Job. vii. 18. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own Glory; but he that seeketh his Glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.* Had the Doctrine of our Lord, which he pretended was what God had commanded him to teach, been contriv'd to advance the Worldly Honour and Greatness of himself or his Followers, this would have been a just Prejudice against it, and a reasonable Ground of suspecting that he spake of himself; but when it was evident to all that heard his Discourses, (and is no less so to us that read them) that he sought not his own Glory in any thing, but the Glory of him that sent him, and that his whole Doctrine tended to advance the Honour of God, and to promote the Practice of Piety and Virtue in the World; this rendred his Testimony very credible, when he said he was sent by God to teach it to the World; for when a Doctrine is plainly worthy of God, and according to Godliness, it may reasonably be presumed that God is the Author of it.

1 Tim. 6. 30

3. It may be further consider'd, that this Testimony of our Lord concerning himself was so far from being to his own Benefit, that it was as much as any thing could possibly be to his Worldly Disadvantage, exposing him to the Envy and Malice of the Jews, and to the Jealousie of the Romans, and to all the cruel Sufferings which he endured from both of them. And certainly a Man's Testimony concerning himself may be allow'd to be credible if it be against his

his own Interest, if he himself be a great Loser or Sufferer by what he Testifies; for it can't be imagin'd what else but only the Evidence of Truth, and an Obligation to declare it, should ever induce a Man to say such things concerning himself, as will procure his own mischief.

And I know not what can be said to avoid the Force of this Argument for the Truth of our Saviour's Testimony that he was sent from God, and that he was the *Messiah*, unless it be that he was disappointed in his Expectation; and that he hoped to make himself Rich and Great in the World by these Glorious Pretences, tho' in the Event it prov'd otherwise. But the *Gospel-History* furnishes us with a very clear and full Answer to this Objection in those many *Predictions* of our *Lord* therein recorded concerning his own Sufferings; whereby it clearly appears, that the Sufferings which befel him for giving this Testimony concerning himself did not happen to him *unexpectedly*, but that he knew long before all that afterwards came to pass. And therefore I say again, that no Reason can be imagin'd why he should say that he was sent from God, but only because he knew it was true, and had receiv'd a Command from his Father to declare this Truth to the World. Especially if it be consider'd further —

4. Lastly, That he continu'd to testify the same at his *Death* which he had done before in his Life, giving thereby the best Assurance that a Man can give of the Truth of his Testimony. For the main Matter of his Accusation to *Pilate* was that he had given out himself to be the *Messiah*, and the *Messiah* was (according to the Expectation of the *Jews*) to be a great Temporal King; had our Lord therefore but denied this

Mat. 16. 31.  
20. 17.

this Charge, had he but granted that he was not the *Messiah*, he might have saved his Life. But this he would not do; he disowned indeed the *false Notion* that the *Jews* had of the *Messiah*; *my Kingdom*, says he, *is not of this World*; But that he was a *King*, and that he was the *Messiah* he boldly owned, as well when the Question was put to him by the *Roman Governor*, who had Power of Life and Death, as when it had been put to him before by the *High-Priest*. This therefore is a strong Confirmation of the Truth of this Testimony of our *Lord*; and is alone sufficient to make it credible, that he *witnessed* the same good *Confession* before *Pontius Pilate*, which he had done before his own Nation, and Sealed his Witness with his Blood. For 'tis not to be supposed that any Man tells a known Lye for nothing; and it was plainly then too late for him, to hope for any good to himself in this World by persisting in this Testimony; (his only Hope had been in retracting it) and 'tis not credible that any Man should be so foolish as to expect to better himself in the other World, by dying with a Lye in his mouth.

Thus, I hope, it appears that the *Testimony* of our *Lord* concerning his own *divine Mission*, was credible in it self; so that we might rationally believe, that he came from God, and that he was *Christ* the *Son of God*, altho' we had only his own Word for it.

But we have more than his own Word for it; *I am not alone*, says he, *Joh. viii. 16*, &c. *but I and the Father that sent me*. It is also written in your *Law*, that the *Testimony of two Men is true*; *I am one that bear Witness of my self, and the Father that sent me beareth Witness of me*. And this was the other thing I propos'd to consider, in order to shew the good Reason

John 18. 26.  
Mat. 27. 11.  
Joh. 18. 37.  
Mar. 26. 63, 64.  
Mar. 14. 61, 62.

1 Tim. 6. 13.



son that we have to believe that our Saviour was sent from God, and that he was the Messiah; viz.

Secondly, The Confirmation that was given to this Testimony of our Lord, by God himself. And this was given several ways.

1. God bare him Witness by the Testimony of ancient Prophets; And to this our Saviour frequently appeals, *Job. v. 39. Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have Eternal Life, and they are they which testify of me;* And again, *v. 46. Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me.*

2Pet. 1. 18, 19.

And this St. Peter (comparing it with that Voice from Heaven testifying him to be the Son of God, of which he himself had been an Ear-witness) calls a more sure word of Prophecy. And indeed it was as certain an Evidence of his divine Mission as could be desir'd.

For it was a Matter of the greatest Concern to the World, to discern the promis'd Messiah, that so they might know in whom to Believe, and from whom to expect Salvation: And to this End God was pleas'd, by the mouth of all his holy Prophets since the World began, to give several Marks and Characters of the Messiah, by which he might be certainly known, and readily distinguish'd from all Impostors; for they foretold exactly the Time of his Coming, his Pedigree, and the Place of his Birth, the manner of his Life, the Things he was to do, the Sufferings he was to undergo, and all the remarkable Accidents that were to befall him in this World; all which Predictions were punctually fulfill'd in the Person of our blessed Saviour, as must be granted by every one that allows the truth of the Gospel-History. And this is an undeniable Proof that he was the Messiah; for it is manifestly inconsistent with the Wisdom of God, when he

he meant to give Marks and Characters by which the Messiah might be certainly known, to give only such as might belong to another Person no less than to him; and it is no less inconsistent with his Goodness that his Providence should ever permit that all the Marks and Characters of the true Messiah should meet together in an Impostor; because by this, Mankind must have lain under an inevitable Necessity of being cheated in a Matter of the greatest Consequence to their Eternal Salvation.

But the ancient Prophecies of Christ were many of them, in Types or Figurative Expressions, not readily to be understood 'till they were accomplish'd, nor then very easie to be applied by every one to the Person of the true Messiah without the Help of a Teacher. *How can I understand what I read* (said the Eunuch, Acts 8. 31. even when he was reading one of the plainest Prophecies of Christ that is in the Old Testament) *except some man should guide me?* And therefore God was pleas'd to give a yet more certain and distinct Knowledge of him to the Men of that Generation in which he appear'd; And this he did—

2. By the Testimony of John the Baptist, who was a burning and a shining Light, and did not, as the former Prophets had done, only lay down Marks and Characters, by the wise Application whereof Men might discern the Messiah when they saw him; but pointed to him, as it were with his Finger, as he stood before their Eyes, so that the simplest among them could not but know whom he meant; *Behold, says he, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the Sin of the World. This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a Man which is preferred before me.* Joh. 1. 29, 30.

And to this Testimony of John our Saviour himself frequently appealed, as to a Testimony that was full to the purpose and could not be denied; *Ye sent unto John*, says he, *and he bare witness unto the Truth*, *Mat. 21. 23. &c.* *Job. v. 32.* And when the Chief Priests and Elders questioned him about his Authority, he perfectly confuted them by only asking them whether the *Baptism of John was from Heaven or of Men*; for that John was a Prophet, altho' he did no Miracles, was so evident to all by the wonderful manner of his Birth, and the miraculous Circumstances that attended it, that they could not; and he was also so generally receiv'd and accepted among the People as a Prophet, that they dared not deny it: *If, they say, we shall say of Men, all the People will stone us, for they be persuaded that John was a Prophet*; and yet had they granted this, which they could not deny, they had answer'd their own Question, and seen clearly by what Authority our Saviour acted and taught; for no Testimony of his divine Mission could be plainer and clearer than that of John was; and it was a thing granted by the Jews, that *he is a Prophet without all doubt and needs no farther Trial, unto whom another Prophet bears Witness.*

3. Another way by which God gave Witness to our Saviour, that he was sent by him, and that he was the Messiah, was by a Voice from Heaven; which Testimony was given him three times.

Mat. 3. 16, 17. Mar. 1. 10, 11. Luke 3. 22. First, at his Baptism, when being come up out of the water, the Heavens opened, and the Spirit like a Dove descended upon him, and there came a Voice from Heaven, saying, *Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* And of this Voice 'tis highly probable St. John Baptist was an Ear-witness; for 'tis said expressly,

expressly, that he saw the Spirit descending like a Dove from Heaven, and abiding on him, and that was at the same time that the Voice was utter'd. *John 1. 32.*

A Second time was at his Transfiguration on the Mount, when the Glory of God appearing in a Cloud, as it had anciently us'd to do, there came a Voice out of the Cloud which said, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.* And at the uttering of this Voice, three of his Apostles were present, two of which have witnessed the same to us under their own Hands. *Ex. 24. 15. &c.* *Mar. 17. 5.* *Mar. 9. 7.* *Luke 9. 35.* *2 Pet. 1. 17.* *John 1. 14.* *1 John 5. 7.*

A Third time was after the raising of Lazarus, when were present not only his Apostles who constantly accompanied him, but several others both Jews and Greeks. And this Voice was so loud as to be heard by all that were present, tho' not by all so distinctly and articulately, as it was by some, who, as 'tis probable, were nearer than the rest; which was the occasion of that Difference that was among the People concerning it; *some saying that it Thundered, and others, that an Angel spake to him.* To doubt therefore of his divine Mission whom God thus testified to by Voices from Heaven, is to make God himself a Liar, as the Apostle speaks, *because we receive not the Record that he gave of his Son.* *Joh. 12. 20, 28.* *Ver. 29.* *1 Joh. 5. 10.*

4. Another way by which God gave Witness to the divine Mission of our Saviour was by enduing him with the Gift of Prophecy, or foretelling things to come. Several Instances of which we meet with in the Gospel-History; for he foretold very often his own Sufferings and Death, with all the remarkable Circumstances thereof; He said that he should be betray'd by one of his own Disciples, when none of them suspected that there was a false Brother among them; *Mat. 16. 21.* *20. 17. &c.* *Mar. 9. 31. 10. 33.* *Mat. 26. 21.* *John 6. 70.*

Mat. 26. 34. them, and the Traytor himself knew not yet the falseness of his own Heart; He told *Peter* but a few Hours before, that he should deny him thrice; when He at the same time was very confident of his own strength, and declar'd himself resolv'd to die rather than deny him once; He told the rest of the Disciples that they would all forsake him, when they every one profess'd themselves resolv'd to suffer with him, rather than leave him; He signified before by what Death he should die, and who should be instrumental therein; He assured his Disciples that after three Days he would rise again, and appointed them a Place in *Galilee*, where they should all see him; He Prophesied that notwithstanding the Contempt he was had in, and the greater Contempt that his ignominious Death would bring upon him, his Religion should by *their* means (a Company of poor illiterate Fishermen) be preached with good success in all Parts of the World; He foretold likewise the utter Destruction of *Jerusalem* and the Temple, before that Generation passed away, and the Dispersion of the *Jews* into all Nations: And several other things, which it would take up too much time now to mention, he foretold should be just in that manner in which they afterwards came to pass.

Mat. 24. 14.  
3. 19.

Mat. 24.  
Mar. 13.  
Luk. 21.

Concerning which it may be noted, that some of his Prophecies were fulfilled soon after they were spoken, the punctual Accomplishment whereof, was to those that both heard them spoken and saw them fulfilled, an evident Proof of his Prophetical Spirit, and a just Ground of expecting the Accomplishment of all his other Prophecies in their Season; and that others were not to be fulfilled 'till a good while after, the Accomplishment whereof at the time foretold, and long

long after the Predictions thereof had been recorded by the *Evangelists*, was a good Evidence to those that lived then, and is also to us that live now, and either read the Accomplishment thereof in History, or see the same with our own Eyes, that he was endued with a Divine Spirit; and likewise takes away all reasonable Ground of a Suspicion which we might otherwise have had, that in those Instances wherein both the Prophecy and the Accomplishment of it are related by the same Authors, the Prophecies were forged after the Events were come to pass.

Now if this be true (and it is certainly true, if the *Gospel-History* be so) that our *Saviour* did foretell many things which afterwards happened, and those very casual and contingent things, depending upon the free will of Men, this was an evident token that he had a divine Spirit; for none can certainly foretell such things but *God* only, or those whom he enlightens with his Spirit; And therefore the Prophet *Isaiab* made this Challenge to the *Idols* of the *Heathens*, *Isa. 41. 23. Shew the things that shall be hereafter, that we may know that ye are Gods.*

And if to this it should be objected that future Events have been sometimes foretold, by such as have not been true Prophets of God, nor enlightened by his Spirit, as by *Diviners*, *Astrologers* and *South-Sayers*, and by the *Oracles* of the *Heathens*; this may be granted without any weakening of the Argument I am now upon for the Proof of our *Saviour's* divine Mission.

For there may be some future Events unforeseen by us, and yet depending so intirely upon the Course of Natural Causes, that unless hindred by a *Miracle*, they will as certainly come to pass as the Sun will rise to-morrow;

morrow; And these, the *Devil*, who understands much better than we do the Power and Course of Nature, may foresee and consequently foretell; and When such a thing is foretold, we, who understand very little of Nature, may think it a Prophecy, whereas in truth there is no more of a Prophetic Spirit in the *Devil* when he foretells such things, than there is in a skilful *Astronomer*, when he Calculates and foretells to a Minute for several Ages to come, the Motions and Eclipses of the Sun, Moon, and Planets.

And even in future *Contingencies*, 'tis no wonder that the Events have sometimes verified the Predictions of the *Devil* and his *Prophets*; for this also may well enough be accounted for, without allowing that any Being hath a certain Foreknowledge of future Contingencies but God only, if we do but suppose, as we may very reasonably do, that the *Devil* hath a perfecter Knowledge than we can have, of the Counsels, Intrigues and Interests of Men, that he understands their Tempers and Inclinations, that he hath lived a great while, and made very exact observations, that he hath had a long Experience of things, and hath also a notable sagacity much beyond what is in any Man; for so even a wise observing and experienc'd Man, may without a Spirit of Prophecy, see much further before him than Men commonly do, and may foretell, by a Guess that shall rarely fail, a great many things which a less thinking and experienc'd Man would never have thought of; And when the thing happens that was foretold, it may be past the Skill of others to judge, whether it was foretold by a Sagacious Guess, or by a certain Foreknowledge of what would be.

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And that the Predictions of *Diviners*, and the *Oracles* of the *Heathens* concerning future *Contingencies*, have been no more than only probable *Conjectures* (unless when they have been borrowed from divine Prophecies, as they may have often been) is evident by their uncertain Accomplishment; Some things indeed have happened as they have been foretold, but others have not so happened; and because the *Devil* could not always certainly tell what the Events of those things would be which he was Consulted with about, he commonly gave out his *Oracles* in *ambiguous Expressions*, that so, whatever happen'd he might be thought to have foretold it. And when the Predictions of any Person pretending to Prophecy, have fail'd in some Instances, tho' in others they have been accomplish'd, this is a certain Argument that he did not Prophesie by a divine Spirit; according to what is said, *Deut. xviii. 21, 22. If thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a Prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the Prophet hath spoken it presumptuously.* In which words it seems to be implied (tho' it be not expressly said) that if the thing foretold did come to pass, and especially that if of many things which the Prophet had foretold, and which could not be fore-known by the greatest Skill in Natural Causes, (such as are the Actions of a free Agent) not one thing fail'd, but his words were made good by the Event in every particular, they might then depend upon it that he was a true Prophet; except only in one Case mentioned in *Deut. 13. viz.* When he made use of that Credit which the Accomplishment of his Predictions had

*Deut. 13. 1, 2, 3.*

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gain'd him, to draw Men from the Worship of the true and only God, to the Worship of Idols. And accordingly 'tis observ'd in 1 Sam. iii. 19, 20. that because the Lord did let none of Samuel's words fall to the Ground, all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that he was established to be a Prophet of the Lord.

The before-named Exception having therefore no Place in our Saviour, for his Doctrine was, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God; and him only shalt thou serve;* and there being not one of those many Predictions that he gave forth (tho' several of them were concerning the most casual Events that could be) which has not been in its due time fulfilled, we may safely conclude that he was a true Prophet of God; and consequently, that he ought to be hearkned to in every thing that he said.

5. Another Testimony that was given by God to the divine Mission of our Saviour, was by the Power of working Miracles, more and greater Miracles than ever had been done before since the beginning of the World, the Relation of which makes up a great Part of the Gospel-History.

And to these our Saviour himself frequently appeals, as to a most evident Proof that he was sent by God, and that he was the Son of God; *Job. v. 36. The Works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me.*

And indeed what better Evidence can be desired that a Person speaking in the Name of God is sent by him, than to see him do the Works of God, that is, such Works as cannot be done but by the Power of God? And that our Saviour's Miracles were such, cannot, I think, be doubted by those who believe they are truly

truly related in the Gospel; which it is now supposed they are.

And if to this it be said, that the first Opposers of Christianity both Jews and Gentiles, who either saw the Miracles of our Saviour, or had such good Assurance thereof from Eye-Witnesses, or Credible History, that they could not deny them, yet were not thereby convinc'd that he was a Prophet of God, but rather thought that he did all his mighty Works by *Magick Art*, and by the *Help of the Devil*; I answer,

1. That 'tis a thing which we cannot be sure of; that the true Reason why any of those who saw our Saviour's Miracles, or were persuaded of the Truth of them, did yet refuse to receive him as a Prophet sent from God, was because they were not convinc'd that his Miracles were done by a divine Power; for Men do not always act according to their Judgments; for we read of some of the Chief Rulers in *Job. xiii. 42.* that they *believed on him*, that is, they were convinc'd in their Judgments, by the mighty Works that he did, that he was the Person he pretended to be, *but they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the Synagogue; for they loved the Praise of Men more than the Praise of God.* And therefore I think it most probable, that they who attributed those Miracles of his which they could not deny, to the working of the Devil, did not, nay could not believe what they said, but only said it, because they were resolv'd never to receive a Doctrine (whatever Evidence was given of the Truth of it) that was so contrary as our Saviour's was, to their Prejudices, Lusts, and Worldly Interests; and they could not tell what else to say to justify themselves to the World. But,

Mat. 4. 10.

Mat. 11. 4, 5.  
Joh. 10. 25,  
37, 38. 14. 11.  
15. 24.

2. If their Blasphemy in ascribing our Saviour's Miracles to the power of the *Devil*, was not merely malicious, 'twas, however, most evidently groundless. For,

(1.) Tho' the *Devil* be without doubt of much greater Power than we are, and, understanding better than we do the Force of Natural Causes, can do many things which to the Eyes of Men may appear Miraculous, because it may be past their Skill to give an Account of them by Natural Causes; there is no reason however to believe that he can do a true Miracle; that is, that he can ever alter the Course of Nature, or produce any Effect but by the Means of Natural Causes, working in such a manner, and by such Laws and Rules as *God* hath appointed: And therefore the *Apostle* calls those strange Appearances which are done by the working of *Satan*, *Lying Wonders*.

But they were not *Lying Wonders* which were done by our *Saviour*; they did not only seem to be done, but were done, and they were Miracles not only in appearance but in truth, being many of them such Effects as were evidently above and beyond the Power of Nature, and therefore such as could not be done but by a Power Superiour to Nature, that is, by *God's*.

For who, but he only who at first brought all things out of nothing, could with five Loaves, and two small Fishes, satisfy the Hunger of more than five thousand Persons, leaving a Remainder of more than twice the number of Baskets full of Fragments, that there had been of Loaves at the first? Or who could restore to Life a dead Carcass that began to putrefie, but he only who first form'd it out of the Dust of the Ground? Who could call back the departed Soul,

Soul, and fix it to its former Residence, but he only into whose Hands it was returned, and who first breathed into our Bodies these Immortal Spirits?

And as to some other of his Works which may be thought to be such as might be produc'd by the working of Nature only, the manner in which they were done, plainly shews that they also were done by a Power Superior to Nature; for thus, a Sick Man may be restor'd to perfect Health, in time, and by degrees, by the use of proper Medicines, and such a Cure we reckon Natural; But those were plainly Super-natural Cures which were wrought, as our *Saviour's* for the most part were, without the use of any Medicines, only by a Word speaking, and many times at a great distance; and by which those who had been long Sick or Infirm, or Cripples, were restor'd to perfect Health and Strength in an instant of time. To suppose therefore that the *Devil* can thus at his Will alter the Course of Nature, is to attribute to him such a Power as is peculiar to the *God of Nature*, who only doth great Wonders. But

(2.) If the Miracles of our *Saviour* had been only such as we might reasonably think did not exceed the *Devil's* Power to do, yet that they were not wrought by his Help, and consequently that they were done by the Power of *God*, is abundantly evident from the Design of them; which was to establish a Doctrine the most contrary that could be to the *Devil's* Interest. For to this Purpose the *Son of God* was manifested that he might destroy the works of the *Devil*; and he did it, by preaching to Men to turn from the vanities of Idols to the worship and service of the Living God, who made Heaven and Earth; and by teaching them to deny Ungodliness and Worldly Lusts, and to live Soberly, Righteously and Godly in this present World.

Pl. 72. 18.  
136. 4.

AG. 14. 15.  
Tit. 2. 12.

Now

2 Thes. 2. 9.)

Mat. 14.  
Mark 6.  
Luke 9.  
John 6.

Luk. 7. 11, &c.  
Joh. 11. 39, &c.

Now the *Devil* is certainly as subtle as he is powerful, and therefore if he has indeed any power to alter the course of Nature and to do a real Miracle, he would not, however, we may be sure, make use of this Power against himself, he would not thereby assist another to destroy his own Kingdom. And by this Argument our *Saviour* himself clearly confuted this Calumny, in *Mat. xii. 25*. When the *Pharisees* had said that he cast out Devils by *Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils*; he answer'd, *Every Kingdom divided against it self is brought to Desolation—and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his Kingdom stand? And*

(3.) Lastly, As it is not credible that the *Devil* has such power; or if he has, and was let alone to himself, that he would make use of this power to destroy his own Kingdom; so neither is it credible that *Almighty God*, who has all power in his Hands, and can controul and limit the workings of the *Devil* and all created Beings as he pleases, would ever permit the *Devil* to out-do himself in such wonderful Operations; so that more and greater Miracles should be done by an *Impostor*, than ever had been done before by any *true Prophet*; which yet is manifestly the Case, if indeed our *Saviour* was an *Impostor*.

He suffer'd indeed *Jannes* and *Jambres* to withstand his Servants *Moses* and *Aaron* for some time, and to do, or seem to do some wonderful Works like to theirs; for *Aaron* cast his Rod upon the Ground and it became a *Serpent*, and so did they: And *Aaron* stretched out his Hand over the Waters, and the *Frogs* came up and covered the Land; and the *Magicians* did so with their *Incantments*, and brought up *Frogs* upon the Land of *Egypt*. But tho' he suffer'd the *Magicians* thus to

contend

contend with his *Prophets*,—the Victory was clearly on his *Prophet's* side; for *Aaron's Rod* swallowed up their *Rods*; and when the *Magicians* endeavour'd by their *Incantments* to bring forth *Lice*, as *Aaron* had done, they could not; but were forced to own before *Pharaoh* that it was the *Finger of God*; and from that time forward strove no more for Victory.

And thus it may be consistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of God, at any time, in order prove his *People*, and to know whether they love the Lord with all their Heart, to suffer the Sign or Wonder foretold by an *Inticer* to *Idolatry* to come to pass; and to distinguish his *Elect* from *Reprobates*, to permit false *Christs* and false *Prophets*, to shew great Signs and Wonders; and in just Judgment upon such as will not receive the love of the Truth that they may be saved; to let them alone to be deceived by that wicked one, whose Coming is after the working of Satan, with all Power, and Signs and Lying Wonders, and with all Deceivableness of Unrighteousness in them that perish. But it cannot, I think be reconciled to these Attributes of God, that he should permit greater Wonders, and more clear and undoubted Miracles to be done by a false Prophet, than ever were done by any true Prophet; because this would be too great a Trial for Humane Nature; such Signs and Wonders would be sufficient to deceive even those that enquire after Truth with the greatest sincerity of Heart. And I cannot conceive it consistent with the Goodness of God, to permit that such as are of honest Minds, and sincere Lovers of Truth, should, after a fair Examination of the Proofs on both sides, have greater reason to embrace Error than Truth; which yet they plainly have in case the Miracles done by false Prophets

phets be more and greater than have been done by any true Prophet, unless the Falseness of the Doctrines which they would thereby establish be more evident than the Truth of their Miracles. So that upon the whole, I think we may well conclude this Head, with those Words of *Nicodemus* to our Saviour, Joh. iii. 2. *We know* (we are assured of it, we have no Reason to doubt of it) *that thou art a Teacher come from God, for no Man can do these Miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

6. Another way by which God himself bare Witness to the Truth of our Saviour's Testimony, was by *Raising* him from the dead. To this great Miracle he himself often referred those that had any doubt of the Truth of his other Miracles, as what could not but be satisfactory to all that were capable of receiving Satisfaction. And this was the chief Subject of the *Apostle's* Sermons, the main Proof that they insisted upon to convince Men that *Jesus* was the *Christ*: And they seem to have no doubt upon them, that if they could but persuade Men of the Truth of his Resurrection, they would readily own that he was the *Christ*, and without further scruple receive every thing that he had taught them in the name of God as a divine Truth. *By this*, say they, *God has given Assurance unto all Men, that he has ordained him to be the Judge of the World: By this*, say they, *he was declared to be the Son of God with Power; because it was a thing evident to all, that no Power less than God's could raise the dead.*

When therefore this was done, (and it was done if the *Gospel-History* be true) this was a plain Seal set by God himself to our Saviour's Testimony; a Seal not possible to be Counterfeited, and wherein the Divine Power

Joh. 2. 19.  
Mat. 12. 40.  
16. 4.

Acts 2. 24. 32.  
3. 15. 4. 10.  
10. 40. 13. 30.

Acts 17. 30.

Rom. 1. 4.

Power is so clearly and deeply engraven, that whoever looks attently upon it, must be satisfied whose Seal it is. So that to grant the Resurrection of our Saviour, and yet to doubt whether he was the Person he gave out himself to be, is to doubt of the Truth of God himself; for granting our Saviour's Resurrection, it can't be supposed that he was an Impostor, without supposing that God himself did consent to the Imposture, and work the most evident Miracle that ever was done, on purpose to persuade Men to believe a Lye.

I shall mention at present but one way more whereby God was pleas'd to confirm our Saviour's Testimony of himself; And that was—

7. By the *Witness* of the *Holy-Ghost*, which witness was given to him at his *Baptism*, when the *Holy-Ghost* descended in a visible manner as a Dove and rested on him. It was also given to him during the whole Course of his *Ministry*; for the *Holy-Ghost* not only descended, but abode upon him; and therefore *St. Peter*, speaking of him, says that God anointed him with the *Holy-Ghost*, and with Power. *Acts. 10. 38. 39.*

But that *Witness* of the *Holy-Ghost* which I now chiefly design, was that which was given to him after his Ascension into Heaven, and was an evident Token that all power in Heaven and Earth was then committed to him; I mean those *Gifts* of the *Holy-Ghost* which he shew'd down on his *Apostles* on the *Day of Pentecost*; when being met together, there came suddenly a sound from Heaven as of a rushing mighty Wind, which filled all the House where they were sitting, and there appeared unto them *Cloven Tongues* like as of Fire, which sat upon each of them; whereupon they were all filled with the *Holy-Ghost*, and began to speak with other Tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. *Acts 2. 1. 4.*

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And this Testimony of the Holy Ghost our Saviour promis'd before should be given to him; *Joh. xv. 26.* When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me; And the Testimony indeed was very plain and full; for by this it clearly appear'd that all his former Miracles had been true, and had been wrought by a divine Power, when even after he had left this World, he was still able to make good this Promise to his Disciples, and to empower them to do greater Works in his Name, than he himself had done while he was living upon Earth; This was a clear Demonstration that he was the beloved Son of the Father, and was, as St. Peter says, *exalted at God's right hand*, when he did shed forth that wonderful power upon his Apostles, of which all that then dwelt in Jerusalem, or had come thither from all parts of the World to Worship, were Eye and Ear-Witnesses.

And this Testimony of the Holy Ghost was given to our Saviour, not at that time only, not one Day and no more, but was continu'd to be given to him all the time of the Apostle's Preaching, (who were also enabled to communicate to others by laying on of Hands, the same Miraculous Gifts of the Holy Ghost which they themselves had receiv'd) until they had finish'd their Ministry, and planted Christian Churches in all the Countries of the then-known World.

Thus I have briefly mention'd the great Evidence that the Gospel History affords of the Truth of our Saviour's Testimony of himself; the Matters of Fact I have taken for granted, as being parts of the Gospel History; the Truth of which has been, I hope, already sufficiently prov'd; and the Evidence it self is

so clear and full, that I thought it needless to open it in more Words than I have done; for that the Testimony which God did by all these ways give to our Saviour, is a rational Inducement to believe the Truth of what he said concerning himself, is what I think, can't be doubted by those that allow themselves any time to consider things.

This I'm sure I may say, that if this strong Evidence that the Gospel History affords of our Saviour's divine Mission be not sufficient to prove it, there never yet has been sufficient Evidence of the Truth of any divine Revelation; I had almost said, not ever can be, but that I know it is not for us to say, what Infinite Power and Wisdom can do.

But as some Jews in our Saviour's time said, when *Joh. 7. 31.* Christ cometh, will he do more Miracles than these which this Man hath done? So I may ask, and I believe it will be very difficult to make answer to it, when Christ cometh (if indeed he be not already come, if indeed that Jesus on whom we believe be not he) how shall we do to know him? What greater Assurance can he give us that he is the Christ, than Jesus hath given? What better Reason can we ever have to believe any Messenger that shall be sent from God, than we have to believe our Saviour?

For we have as much Reason (supposing the Gospel History to be true) to believe him to be sent from God, as we have to believe any thing; we are as secure that we are not deceiv'd in him, as we are that we are not deceiv'd in the plainest Matters of sense. For the best, the only security that we have that our senses do not deceive us, and that every thing in the World is not quite otherwise than it appears to us to be, is the Goodness of God; and this same security we have that

Act. 2. 33.

Act. 2. 39. 8.  
17. 10. 44. 19.  
6.

we are not deceiv'd in our Saviour's divine Mission. Nay we are more secure of this than we are of that; because it is more plainly inconsistent with the Goodness of God, to deceive us in a Matter on which our everlasting Welfare depends, than in Matters only of this Life, which are the chief things for which our bodily Senses are of use to us: And if indeed we are deceiv'd in our Saviour, it must be said that God himself has deceiv'd us, having given us all the Reason imaginable to believe him to be, as he said he was, the Son of God.

And now having been so large in shewing the Evidence that there is from the Matters of Fact recorded in the History of the New Testament, that our Saviour himself was a Teacher sent from God, I shall not need to spend much time in shewing that his Apostles were likewise Commission'd by God to instruct the World; and consequently that we ought also to receive all the Doctrines taught by them (whether in their Epistles, or in their Discourses, interwoven by St. Luke with his History of their Acts) as true and divine; for—

1. There is plainly no Reason why we should not receive them as such; because they are the very same that our Saviour taught, and no other. Some Points of Christian Doctrine are indeed more largely explain'd and handled by the Apostles in their Epistles, than they are in those Discourses of our Saviour that are recorded by the Evangelists; but between the Doctrines taught by our Lord himself, and those taught by the Apostles, there is such a perfect Harmony and Agreement, that if we had only their own Word for it, that they spake and wrote by the Inspiration of the Spirit, we might securely believe them; for tho' one Man may, without Inspiration, say the same thing

which

which another before him has spoken by Inspiration; yet if the second says that he also is inspir'd, there can be no Hurt, tho' there may be a Mistake in believing him; seeing whether the Man was inspir'd or no, 'tis certain that the Doctrine was. But,

2. If there be any Doctrines taught by the Apostles, which we do not see were taught before by our Saviour, I say there is however from the History of the Gospel, Evidence enough of their divine Mission also; so that we may very securely take upon their Credit, as true and divine, any Doctrine which they have instructed us in. For,

(1.) That they were sent by our Saviour, is past all Dispute, if the Gospel History be true; *Joh. xx. 21. As my Father hath sent me, so send I you*; and again, *Mat. xxviii. 19, 20. Go ye and disciple all Nations, Baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*. And that he had Authority to grant them such a Commission, he shews in the words before; *All Power is given unto me in Heaven and in Earth; Go ye therefore and teach all Nations, &c.* And,

(2.) That they were taught by God, and enlighten'd by his Holy Spirit, is what can't be doubted, if we believe the power of our Saviour, and the Truth of the Gospel; for before our Lord went from them, *be* Joh. 20. 22. *breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: And to what Purposes the Holy-Ghost was to be given them, he had told them before; The Comforter which is the Holy Ghost whom the Father will send in my Name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your Remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you. And, when he, the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you* Joh. 14. 26. 16. 13. 14.

into

into all Truth; being thus therefore taught by the Spirit of Truth, our Saviour might well say as he does, *Luke x. 16. He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.* And,

(3.) Lastly; We have all the reason in the World to receive them as Messengers from God, and to believe that all that they have taught is the Will of God, because they had the same Attestation of God to the truth of their Doctrine, that our Saviour himself had to his. I do not mean that God did bear them Witness all those ways by which he bare witness to our Saviour, for that could not be; but he bare witness to them all those ways by which it was proper for him to do it, and by which he had born witness to any former Prophets.

For he bare witness to them that they were sent by him, by the Testimony of our Saviour, as he had done to our Saviour by the Testimony of John: And if the Testimony of a Prophet was credible concerning our Saviour, much more is the Testimony of the Son of God highly credible concerning a Messenger sent by him.

He bare witness to them also by enduing them with the Gift of Prophecy; for when the Spirit of Truth is come, says our Saviour, *he will shew you things to come.*

And lastly, he bare witness to them, by that which is the most plain and sensible proof of a divine Mission, viz. By the Power of Miracles, and manifold Gifts of the Holy Ghost. *The Lord worked with them, and confirmed their word with Signs following,* says St. Mark. And, with great Power, says St. Luke, gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

And

And the greater part of the History of the Acts of the Apostles is spent in relating the wonderful Works that they did, by the Name of Jesus, and the Power of the Holy Ghost, in confirmation of the Truth of their Doctrine.

But St. Paul (perhaps it will be said) of whose Writings are most of the Epistles, was not one of them, nor called by our Saviour to be an Apostle as they were, nor so much as an Eye and Ear-witness of our Lord's Miracles and Doctrine; what Reason then have we to receive his Writings as Portions of Holy Scripture?

I answer, as good, tho' not in every particular just the same that we have to receive the Writings of the other Apostles as such.

For he was Converted, and Ordain'd to be an Apostle, in a more wonderful manner than they were; as you may see in Acts 9.

And as our Lord himself gave witness to their Divine Mission, so he did also to his; Acts ix. 15. *He is says our Lord, a chosen Vessel unto me, to bear my Name before the Gentiles, and Kings, and the Children of Israel.*

To him also as well as to them, the Spirit fore-shew'd things to come; several Proofs of which we may observe in the History of the Acts, and in his Epistles.

And Lastly; His Speech and his Preaching was, as theirs, in Demonstration of the Spirit, and of Power. In him all the Signs of an Apostle were seen, no less than in them, viz. Signs and Wonders, and mighty Deeds. And of him, with Barnabas in Company, it is that St. Luke speaks, when he says, that the Lord gave Testimony to the word of his Grace, and granted

Acts 20. 22, 25.

27. 10, 22.

2 Th. 2. 3, 6.

1 Tim. 4. 1, 6.

2 Tim. 3. 1, 6.

1 Cor. 2. 4.

2 Cor. 12. 12.

Acts 14. 3.

Joh. 13. 22.  
20, 21.

Joh. 16. 13.

Mar. 26. 20.

Act. 4. 33.

*Signs and Wonders to be done by their Hands.* And the latter part of the *History* of the *Acts*, from the 10th Chapter to the End, contains little else but an account of *St. Paul's* Preaching, and of the *Miracles* that were done by the Power of *God* to confirm the Truth of his Doctrine; So that if we believe the *Gospel-History*, we can no more doubt of his divine Mission and Inspiration than we can of theirs; we must conclude, that if they were *Apostles*, so was he; that if they were *Ministers of Christ*, so was he too; forasmuch as in nothing he was behind the very chiefest *Apostles*; so that consequently we have as much Reason to believe his Writings to be Inspired, as we have theirs.

2 Cor. 11. 23.  
2 Cor. 11. 5.  
2 Cor. 12. 11.

And now by all that hath been said, I hope, I have fully made good the Point I was to prove; viz. That if the Matters of Fact recorded in the New Testament are true, they are sufficient Proofs of the Truth and divine Authority of all the Doctrines that are therein taught, whether by *Christ* himself, or by his *Apostles*. For if it be true that they were sent by *God* to instruct the World, and to declare the Will of *God* to Mankind; (and that they were, is sufficiently prov'd by their *Credential Letters*, which we have now perus'd and examin'd) we can no more doubt the truth of those things which they, as the *Messengers* and *Ambassadors of God* have deliver'd to us in his Name, than if we had heard *God* himself uttering the same by a *Voice* from *Heaven*. So that I cannot but persuade my self that the *Proofs* which have been offer'd in the foregoing Discourse of the Truth of all the Doctrines that are taught in the *New Testament*, are sufficient to convince any Rational and Considering Man of the Truth of any Doctrine, the Falsity whereof is not *Notorious* and *Self-evident*.

And

And therefore this, I think, is the only thing that can with any shew of Reason be pretended by any Person to justify his, not receiving the Gospel as a divine Revelation, viz. That the Matter of it, in some Particulars, is such as will not admit of any Proof at all; because no Arguments can make a thing credible, which in it self is incredible. And such, it may be pretended, some of the Christian Doctrines are which are taught in the *New Testament*; and especially the Doctrine of the *Trinity*.

And that this Doctrine is clearly taught in the *New Testament*, we freely grant. But why should it be deem'd incredible? Does it imply a Contradiction? Can they that except against it, or against the *Gospel-Revelation* upon the Account of it, shew that it is impossible it should be true? Can they demonstrate that it is impossible for an Infinite and Eternal Being to beget a Son in his own Likeness, the brightness, of his *Heb. 1. 3.* Glory, and the express Image of his Person? Or can they shew it to be impossible that there should be a third Person proceeding from both these?

No, perhaps they'll say; But that these three should be one, as the Scripture teaches, that, they think, exceeds all the Measures of Belief; that, they can't but think a manifest Contradiction.

But why so? Do the *Christians* hold, or does the Scripture say, that they are three and one in the same respect? does it say that the one God is three Gods; or that those three whom it speaks of as three distinct Persons, ascribing personal Acts to each of them, are nevertheless but one single Person? No, it only tells us in general that these three are One. But how they are Three, or how they are One; wherein consists their Distinction, and wherein their Unity, it says not, at least

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Pal. 131. 1.

least not very plainly. And I think in the safest Court in such high Matters, in Matters so much too high for us, not to exercise our selves, nor to pretend to be Wiser above what is written.

If therefore there be no Contradiction in the Doctrine of a *Trinity in Unity*; (as there is not unless we say that God is *One* and *Three* in the *same* Respect) that's enough; that's all that needs to be said upon this Occasion. For tho' we may (as indeed we must) allow it to be an *incomprehensible* Mystery, there is no Reason to Cavil at the *Gospel-Revelation*, or to deny it to be a true divine Revelation upon this Account.

For we live in a World of *Mysteries*; we must believe *Mysteries* in abundance whether we will or no; I mean, there are some Truths so very plain even to our Reason that we can't doubt of them, and yet so very high and *Mysterious*, that we can no more fathom them than we can the *Doctrine of the Trinity*.

For thus, that *Matter is not Eternal*, we are as sure almost as we are of any thing, for *Matter* could not exist of it self; and yet how *Matter* should be made out of *nothing*, is as incomprehensible by us, as tis how the *One* undivided *Godhead* does personally subsist in the *Father, Son* and *Holy-Ghost*.

And thus again, that *God is Eternal* we are certain by Reason; (for by *God* we mean the first Cause of all, and he who was first could have none before him) and yet that any thing should exist without a Cause of its Existence is unaccountable; and if we were not sure that it must be so, we should be ready to say that it was impossible, and a manifest Contradiction that it should be so.

Thus, I say, we are led by the Light of Reason only to a firm belief of some Truths, which yet we can

give

give no Account of by our Reason; and I think, 'tis very hard that we will not receive an incomprehensible Doctrine, upon the Credit of a very plain and well attested Divine Revelation, as well as we do and must do the same upon the Evidence of Natural Reason.

Especially considering the Subject of this incomprehensible Doctrine, which is the *Essence* or *Substance* of *God*, who is an *Infinite* Being and so must needs be *incomprehensible* by our *finite* Understandings; by our Understandings, I say, which are so very shallow, that I believe I may truly say, we understand not the *Essence* or *Substance* of any thing. For we understand not what is the *Essence* or *Substance* of *Matter* or *Body*, tho' it be a thing that all our Senses are continually exercised about; all that we know of it, is some *Properties* or *Accidents* thereof; that it is something (but what we know not) that has *Figure* and *Dimensions*, that is hard, soft, fix'd, fluid or the like. And we understand no more, but rather less, what the *Essence* or *Substance* of our *Soul* is; all that we know of it, is, that 'tis something that *thinks*, and because it thinks we know it must be *something*; and because none of those *Properties* which we observe in *Matter*, have any Relation at all to *Thought*, we conclude that the *thinking Soul* is an *immaterial Something*; tho' what is *immaterial* cannot be explain'd by us, unless we could say what is *material*.

Seeing therefore (as the Wise Hebrew speaks) we do Wild. 9. 16. hardly guess aright at things that are upon Earth, and with Labour do find out the things that are before us; is it any wonder that we cannot search out, and fully know and comprehend the things that are in Heaven? If we are not able to understand even our own *Essence*, and how by an ineffable Union of Spirit with Matter,

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Job 11. 7.

the whole together becomes one, that any Wonder, that by all our Searching we cannot find out God, that we cannot find out the Almighty, nor a Perfection?

And what hath been thus briefly said, is, I hope, sufficient to shew that a Divine Revelation cannot reasonably be excepted against or refused, only upon the Account of some Mysterious, and Incomprehensible Doctrines that are therein contain'd. And if not, then, I hope, what was said before is enough to satisfy any considering Man, that the Gospel is a true Divine Revelation.

Jan. 1. 21, 22.

To Conclude all therefore; having *Christ and his Apostles* continually Preaching to us in the Books of the *New Testament*, Let us (as the Text lays) *hear them*; Let us Reverence these Sacred Writings as the Oracles of God, and receive with Meekness the engraved Word, which is able to save our Souls. But let us be Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only, deceiving our own selves. For (as the Apostle argues, *Heb. 11. 3, &c.*) If the word spoken by Angels was steadfast, and every Transgression and Disobedience receiv'd a just Recompence of Rewards; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirm'd unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness both with Signs and Wonders, and with divers Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will?



FINIS.

ERRATA.

In Sermon IV. and V. page 14. line 23. for more read most; p. 47. line 14. for they r. he. l. 27. for there r. there. In Sermon VI. p. 5. l. 3. for her r. her.

No Reason to desire

NEW REVELATIONS;

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## SERMON

Preach'd at the

CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of St. Paul,  
October 7th. 1700.

BEING

The Seventh, for the Year 1700, of the LECTURE  
Founded by the Honourable Robert Boyle, Esq;By OFSPRING BLACKALL, D.D.  
Rector of St. Mary Aldermary, and Chaplain in  
Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

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St. LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets ; let them bear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they bear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

**W**HEN I first began to Discourse on these Words; I propos'd to speak to these three Points.

I. To shew that the present *Standing Revelation* of God's Will, contain'd in the *Books of the Old and New Testament*, is abundantly *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. *They have Moses and the Prophets; (I add, they have also Christ and his Apostles;)* let them bear them.

II. To shew that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, it is an *unreasonable Request to desire more.* *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*  
And,

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III. Lastly



III. Lastly, To shew that in case God should condescend to gratifie Men in this unreasonable Desire, (working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the dead, to assure them of a future State, and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis highly *probable* that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance, by the Preaching and Standing Revelation of the Gospel, would be *persuaded* by this means. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets (nor Christ and his Apostles) neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

The first of these has been the subject of several former Discourses; the second I design to speak to at this time; *viz.*

II. To shew that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, as I have shewn we have, in that *Standing Revelation* of God's Will which is contained in the *Holy Scripture*, it is an *unreasonable Request to desire more.* *Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

And the *Unreasonableness* of the Request which the *Rich Man* here makes in the behalf of his Brethren; *viz.* That God would be pleased to send one from the dead to preach to them; or in general, how *unreasonable* it is for men now a-days to *desire*, or *look for* more means of Conversion, or Motives to Repentance, than God has been pleased to afford us in the *Standing Revelation* of the Gospel, will appear, if we consider these following things.

1. That

I. That the Principles of Faith and the Motives to Repentance which we have already, being well grounded upon *Matters of Fact*, which have been *once* already *sufficiently* prov'd and attested, 'tis altogether *needless* that any fresh or further Proof should be given of them; and 'tis what we never think reasonable to desire in other the like Cases.

That when God requires us to believe or do any thing, and sends a special Messenger to acquaint us with his Will, he should grant to this Messenger such *Testimonials*, as are sufficient to satisfy reasonable Men that he is no Impostor, but a Teacher sent from God, is indeed a thing that may fairly be expected. And if God should not do thus, we should be excusable in not hearkning to such a Messenger, because we could not know whether he was a true or a false Prophet; and God does not require, neither indeed is it reasonable that we should believe every Pretender to Revelation. And the clearest Proof of any Man's being sent from God to teach us any thing, being a Power of doing such Miracles and Mighty Works, as are manifestly above the skill and strength of a Man to do, it was therefore highly requisite, and what might reasonably be look'd for, that God should grant such a Power as this to all those whom he has ever inspired with new Light, and Commission'd to make any new Revelation of his Will to Mankind. And this he has always done.

He gave this Power to *Moses* in a large measure, because the Matters that Men were to trust him for, were *many*, and very *considerable*.

He gave it also to *some* of the *ucceeding Prophets*, but in a less measure, because their *Business*, for the most



most part, was only to Interpret, or to press the Observation of the Law of *Moses*, which had been sufficiently prov'd before.

And he gave it in the largest measure of all to our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*; because the Revelation made by them was of *Truths* very *mysterious*, some of them above the Reach and Comprehension of Humane Reason; It was also a Revelation, in a manner wholly *new*, even to the *Jews* themselves, and much more to the *Gentiles*. And besides, it was a Revelation in many Points, to appearance, *contrary* to a former Divine Revelation; inasmuch as it ordered the Abolition of many things which had been before enjoyed by divine Authority; *viz.* all the Ritual and Ceremonial Law of *Moses*. And therefore to gain Credit to their Testimony, that they were inspired and sent by God to teach such things, it was very requisite that they should produce more, and more plain and undeniable *Testimonials* of their divine Mission, than *Moses* himself had done. And such Testimonials they had, such they did produce, working more Miracles, and those as I may say, more wonderful and Miraculous, than *Moses* and all the *Prophets* together had wrought before.

But when these Testimonials had been *once* fairly produced, and examined, and by all reasonable Men allowed to be true and sufficient; and when *Christ* and his *Apostles* had made and published all that Revelation which they were Commissioned to make; And when to prevent all misunderstandings of it, or mistakes concerning it, they had committed it all to *Writing*; and the Men that lived in those times, and were capable of enquiring into the Truth of it, were well

assured

assured that the *Books* said to be written by the *Apostles* and *Evangelists*, were indeed *theirs*, and contain'd in substance all the same things, and no other, which they had before declared by word of Mouth, and confirmed by Miracles; After this, I say, when the Divinity of the Revelation was thus *once*, at the first Publishing of it, so fully confirmed, there was no need that it should be proved any more, and all other Proof thereof would have been *superfluous*; because the whole Matter, both Doctrine and Proof, being *once* faithfully recorded, and those Records well attested, there could afterwards be no reasonable Cause to call it again in Question. So that the Reason of working Miracles being then ceased, it was reasonable that the Power of working Miracles should cease too; at least till such time as God should think fit, to make some Alteration in, or Addition to his former Revelations; (which we have good Reason to think he will never do) or 'till he should please to undertake the Conversion of those Nations to the Christian Faith, to whom the Knowledge of the former Miracles that had been wrought for its Confirmation could not be so well communicated by credible History as it is to us.

For (as was hinted before) *Credible History* is all the Proof and Evidence that we ever think *reasonable* to require in *other* Cases of the like Nature.

As for instance; When a new Law is made concerning any Matter; it is requisite, according to the Custom of our Country, that it should pass both *Houses of Parliament*, and that the *King* should ratify and confirm it; and that afterwards it should be some way so published and promulged, that all the Subjects that

that are then alive should have sufficient Assurance given them that such a Law is made. But after this Law has been once so passed, and ratified and promulged, it is passed and ratified and promulged for ever; and no Man is so unreasonable as to expect that every *Parliament* that is called afterwards, should read and pass over again all the Laws that have been made before their Time; or that every *King* that succeeds to the Throne should afresh ratifie and publish all the Laws that were made by all his *Predecessors*. But all the Proof that we ever require of the Authority of any ancient Law, is a true Copy of it, and a good History or Record of its being made at such a time, by such a King, confirmed by the Tradition of all the intermediate Ages to our Time, which have allowed of its Authority, by citing it as a Law of the Land, by Pleading from it, and by giving Judgment according to it.

And he who will not allow of the same Proof and Evidence of the Authority of the Christian Institution so many hundred years ago established, but would needs have new Miracles and new Revelations to confirm the former, is every whit as unreasonable as that *Criminal* would be, who being Indicted upon some *Ancient Statute*, should refuse to plead to his Indictment, upon Pretence that he knew not whether there was any such Law or not; it being made (if ever it was made) long before his Time, and there being none now alive that were present at the making of it. Shew him the Law in the *Statute-Book*; why, how does he know, he'd say, but that the Printers had a mind to put a Cheat upon the Nation, by Printing a Law of their own making, as a Law made

by some of our ancient Kings; nay shew him the *Original Record*, still he'd say, There have been abundance of Forgeries in the World, and how does he know but that this is one? The Record he'd own perhaps, looks like an Ancient Deed, and has all the Marks of such Antiquity as it pretends to; but after all, 'tis possible it may be, and therefore he cannot be sure it is not a Forgery; and 'till he is assured of this, he will not plead to an Indictment that is grounded upon it. But if the *King* and *Parliament* that now are, will be pleased to declare that this is a good Law, and if he himself may be allowed to be by when they shall declare it; or if at least two or three Witnesses that he can trust shall testify upon Oath, that they were present when it was passed into a Law, then he will allow it to be a good Law; and after that, will be content to suffer the Punishment of it, if he shall ever again be a Transgressor.

Now what Man is there that would think this a reasonable Demand? Or what *Judge* or *Court* would ever allow of such a Plea? And yet, as unreasonable as it is, it is just the same with theirs, who, pretending to be more wise and cautious than their Neighbours, will not allow of the same sort of Proof (tho' indeed much better in its kind) of the Truth of the Christian Religion; but tho' we have as *Authentick Histories* as any are in the World, (such Histories as the greatest Adversaries of Christianity have not been able to say any thing to invalidate the Truth of) which declare that *Christ* and his *Apostles* taught such and such Doctrines, and wrought such and such Miracles to confirm the Truth of their Doctrine; yet will not believe that the Doctrine of Christianity is true

and Divine, unless they may have special Messengers sent to them to declare a-fresh all the same things which the *Apostles* once did; and those endued with a Power of working in their sight and presence the same Miracles over again, that are said to have been formerly done by *Christ* and his *Apostles*, to confirm the Testimony that they gave.

2. The *Unreasonableness* of that Request which the *Rich Man* here makes in the Behalf of his Brethren, viz. That God would make a new Revelation for their particular Conversion; or, in general, The *Unreasonableness* of our now desiring fresh Revelations; new Miracles or Apparitions of Men from the dead, to confirm the Truth of those things which are already sufficiently proved to us by the *Standing Revelation* of the *Gospel*, will further appear, if we consider; That to us who live now in *Christian Countries*, other Grounds of Faith or stronger Motives to Repentance than we have already in the *Standing Revelation* of the *Gospel* might be *inconsistent* with the *Excellency of Faith*, might *destroy* the *Virtue of Believing*, and might be too great a *Force and Constraint* upon us, such as would in a manner take away our *Liberty of Choice*.

For there is no Virtue at all in Believing what we see; there is no Praise or Thanks at all due for doing what we are driven or forced to do; and for us, who have already abundantly sufficient Grounds to believe and embrace *Christianity*, to have fresh Miracles wrought every day before our own eyes (such Miracles as we could not possibly doubt the Truth of) to confirm those Doctrines which are already sufficiently confirmed, would not be to persuade us; but to force

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us to be *Christians*; so that then the State we are now in would not be, as God designed it should be, a State of *Trial*; for the *Trial of Wisdom* is, when there are some Reasons on both sides; and he is the *Wise Man* who in that Case gives Judgment on that side on which the Reasons are strongest.

But against what I have now said perhaps it may be objected, That the Evidence which we desire of the Truth of Religion is *no more* than we are told; has been *already* given to some Men; particularly to those who lived in our *Saviour's* and his *Apostle's* times, and we can't see why it would be *more* inconsistent with the Nature of Faith and Religion *now* than it was *then*, or how it would *more* destroy our *Freedom* than it did *theirs*, or how it would be a *greater Force* upon our *Choice* than it was upon *theirs*, to have the very same Evidence of the Truth of the *Christian Religion* which they had.

But in answer to this, it may be consider'd; that as they then had some Evidence of the Truth of the *Christian Religion* which we have not, so we now have some Evidence thereof which they had not: They indeed saw with their own Eyes *some* of the Miracles that were wrought for the Confirmation of *Christianity*; but they had not, as we now have, a credible History or Record of a very *great number* of Miracles that were wrought for that purpose. And therefore (without considering at present which of these Evidences of the Truth of the *Facts* upon which our Religion is grounded, is the most convincing) thus much is plain; That if we, who have already very good Reason to believe them upon the Credit of a well attested History, were also admitted to be *Eye-Witnes-*

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ses of some fresh Miracles, such as we are told were then wrought, *both* these Evidences together would be stronger and more irresistible, than *either* of them *alone*; So that consequently, if *we* who have already *one* of these Evidences, were allowed to have the *other* also, *we* should have *more* Evidence in the whole than *they* had, our Choice consequently would not be so free as theirs was, it would not be so much in the Power of our Wills to be *Infidels*, as it was in theirs.

True, perhaps you'll say, we should indeed in that Case have more Evidence than they had, but that is not the thing we desire; all that we could wish for, is, the very *same* Evidence that they had; and upon that Condition we could be well contented to want the Historical Evidence which we have and they had not; for we can't but think, that the Evidence that *they* had is much stronger than *ours*, and that *they* had much greater Reason to be *Christians* than we have. For 1. The *Apostles* of *Christ* who (as 'tis said) both *saw* his Miracles, and were *enabled* by the Power of the *Holy Ghost* to do the like themselves, had plainly *greater* Reason to believe, than even *those* had who heard from their mouths the Testimony that they gave concerning our Lord, and saw the Miracles that were done by their Hands in Confirmation of their Testimony. And 2. *They* who saw with their *own Eyes* the Miracles that the *Apostles* wrought had more Reason to believe, than *those* had to whom they were only *Reported* by Eye Witnesses, and therefore much rather than we have who receive this Report only by a *History* that was written many hundred years ago. Now this is all that we desire, *viz.* To

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be upon the *same Level* with those who lived in the Primitive Times, and to have as *much Reason* to be Christians as they had; and we can't see why this Request should be thought *unreasonable*; we do not understand why there would not be then as much Freedom, and consequently as great Virtue in our Believing upon such strong Evidence as there was in theirs.

In Answer to this therefore I shall consider distinctly the two Cases before-mentioned, and compare the same with ours.

(1.) I shall consider the Case of the *Apostles*, who both *saw* our Lord's Miracles, and were *enabled* by the Power of the *Holy Ghost* to do the like themselves.

And that *they* had a *surer* Ground of Faith than any since, or than any besides themselves ever had; I believe must be granted; but then 'tis to be considered on the other side.

1. That the *Apostles* were but *few* in number, only *twelve* Persons, or if we should reckon in to the number, as in this respect, equal to the *Apostles*, all those that were called by our Saviour himself to be his *Disciples*, and who were very much, tho' not so constantly in his Company as the *Apostles* were, we read but of *seventy* of them; or if we add to these all those that were *convinced* by our Saviours Miracles that he was the *Christ*, and that owned themselves his *Disciples* while he was upon Earth, 'tis probable that all these together were no more than *five hundred*; *viz.* those *five hundred Brethren*, to whom when met together in *Galilee*, our Lord shewed himself alive after his Passion.

Luke 10. 1.

1 Cor. 15. 6.

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2. It may be also considered; that *their Case* was extraordinary and peculiar, and that this Advantage of greater Evidence (as we reckon it) which they had above all others was no more than was necessary to qualify them for that *special Office* which they, and none but they were to be employed in; which was to bear Witness to the Men of that Generation by word of mouth, and to all future Ages by their written Testimony; of the Doctrines and Miracles of our Saviour; for no Man is a proper Witness of any matter of Fact, but only he who was an *Eye Witness* thereof.

3. It may be further considered, that as they had a more clear and unexceptionable Evidence of the Truth of Christianity, than any besides ever had, so they had also a *greater Burden* laid upon them, than any Christians since have had; and it might be no more than necessary that the Grounds of their Faith should be as much surer and stronger than those on which other Men's Faith is built, as their *Duty* was larger and more difficult than other Men's Duty is. For a weaker Foundation is as well able to support a low Building, placed in a Bottom, and well sheltered from Storms, as a much stronger is to bear a high built Tower, situated on the top of an Hill, or by the Sea shore, and continually exposed to violent Winds and Tempests.

And this was the Condition of the *Apostles* in Comparison with ours. We have indeed several Temptations to resist by the Power of our most holy Faith, but then they are only *such Temptations as are common to Men*, and for the overcoming whereof a Faith grounded only upon good *Historical Evidence* is sufficient;

cient; for by the Power of such a Faith a great many in all Ages have happily overcome them; But the *Apostles* had Difficulties and Temptations of another sort to contend with; they wrestled not only against *Flesh and Blood*, but against *Principalities*, against *Powers*, against the Rulers of the Darkness of this World, against *Spiritual Wickedness in high Places*. It was their Business to go in an untrodden Path, to break the Ice and to make plain the way for all that were to follow; and our Work (very easy in comparison with theirs) is only to follow in that Way, which they have made plain and smooth, to that Kingdom of Heaven, into which they could not enter but through manifold Tribulations.

That the *Apostles* therefore had stronger and more convincing Proofs of the Truth of the Christian Religion than we have, and such as they could not so easily resist, as we may those which are afforded to us, may be granted; and yet it may be unreasonable for us to desire the same, unless we were to be put to the same Trials of our Faith that they were; which in a Christian Country can hardly be.

And indeed as desirous as we seem to be of having such Evidence of the Truth of our Religion as we are told the *Apostles* had, I believe there are very few of us but had rather be contented with less Evidence, than have so much as the *Apostles* had with its appendant Burden; which was to travel all the World over, even unto the most rude and barbarous Countries to plant Christianity; expecting wherever they came Bonds and Afflictions, meeting every where with the most violent opposition and roughest Usage; encountering every where the greatest Dangers, and

sure

sure at last to be made a bloody Sacrifice to the Malice and Fury of their Persecutors. How much St. Paul alone endured (and 'tis like the Sufferings of the other Apostles were not much less) you may see in 2 Cor. xi. 23, &c. and yet he was not then come to the end of his Sufferings; *In Labours abundant, in Stripes above measure, in Prisons frequent, in Deaths oft; Of the Jews five times received I forty Stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with Rods, once was I Stoned, thrice I suffered Shipwrack, a Night and a Day I have been in the Deep; in Journeyings often, in Perils of Waters, in Perils of Robbers, in Perils by mine own Countrymen, in Perils by the Heathen, in Perils in the City, in Perils in the Wilderness, in Perils in the Sea, in Perils among false Brethren; In Weariness and Painfulness, in Watchings often, in Hunger and Thirst, in Fastings often, in Cold and Nakedness; Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the Care of all the Churches.* And therefore he might well say, as he does, 1 Cor. iv. 9, &c. *I think that God hath set forth us the Apostles last, as it were appointed to Death; for we are made a Spectacle to the World, and to Angels, and to Men; we are Fools for Christ's sake—we are weak—we are despised; even unto this very hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling Place; and labour working with our Hands, being reviled—persecuted—defamed; we are made as the Filth of the World, and are the Off-scouring of all things unto this Day.* It was therefore plainly necessary that a Faith which was to undergo these severe Trials, should be built upon the surest Grounds; but for us, and to enable us to overcome the World, a Faith that

that is founded upon less certain Evidence may be as sufficient.

(2.) The Second Case before-mentioned was of those who heard with their own Ears the Testimony which the Apostles gave concerning our Lord; and saw with their own Eyes the wonderful Works that they did in Confirmation of their Testimony. We could wish at least that we had such strong Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion as they had; and if we had, we see not why there would not be as much Choice, and consequently as much Virtue in our believing as there was in theirs.

But here it may be considered,

1. That it was the Lot but of very few, even of those that lived in the Apostles times; except of the Jews that dwelt in Judea, to hear the Apostles themselves, or to see with their own Eyes the Miracles that they wrought; and even of these there were but few that had the opportunity of seeing many of their mighty Works; so that all things considered the Evidence that we have of the Truth of our Religion, if it be not fully equal to, is very little inferior to that which they had; for it being (as has been formerly shewn) morally impossible that the Gospel History which is now in our Hands should be forged or spurious, or corrupted and altered, what can be thought to be wanting in the Clearness of the Evidence that we have (being given in Writing and not by word of Mouth) is made up by the Fulness and Abundance of it; we having in the Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists, several Witnesses testifying the same Miracles, and every one of them Witnessing more Miracles, than any except those who were constant

stant Attendants upon our *Lord*, or Companions of the *Apostles* were in a Capacity to witness. But,

2. Granting it to be true, that in the *Apostle's* times those to whom the Gospel was preached, had generally clearer and stronger Evidence of the Truth of Christianity than we have now; yet I say, even that Evidence of Sense which they had was not more apt or like to convince and persuade them, than the Proof which we now have, tho' in it self it be less, is to convince and persuade us.

For when Men have already taken up an Opinion, (no matter upon what Grounds) or when by their Worldly Interest they are engaged to be of such an Opinion, it can't be expected that the same Reasons, I mean Reasons of the same strength in themselves, should be sufficient to persuade them to alter their Opinion, which would have sufficed to have fix'd and establish'd them in their former Notions.

And this is plainly the Difference between those Times and ours; for when the Revelation of the Gospel was first made by *Christ* and his *Apostles*, all, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were most strongly prejudiced against it, each of them having been bred up in a Persuasion that their own way of Worship was right, and the *Jews* in particular having had good Assurance that their Law given by *Moses*, (to which the Doctrine of Christianity seem'd very opposite) had been of Divine Institution. But however, when a Man has been bred up in the Belief of any thing, and has believ'd it a good while, he takes it for granted that he had reason to believe it, whether he had so or not; so that the Prejudice against Christianity was as powerful, tho' not altogether so just, in the

*Gentiles,*

*Gentiles*, whose Religion was merely fabulous, as in the *Jews*, whose Law was indeed of Divine Institution.

And besides, (which was an Impediment alike common both to the *Jews* and *Gentiles*) they could not either of them then embrace and profess the Christian Religion without apparently hazarding the Loss of all things that were dear to them in this World. And how very apt a strong Worldly Interest is to blind Mens Eyes and to byass their Judgments, is what we cannot but daily observe in all other Cases.

But our Case now is quite otherwise; our Prejudices and our Interest are both for Christianity; for we suck'd it in with our Mothers Milk, and we found it the establish'd Religion of the Country where we were Born; for which Reasons we believed it, or at least were strongly inclin'd to believe it, before we knew or had heard of any other Reasons; so that to us, who are already inclin'd on this side; to us, who to be sure, are not prejudic'd against it; to us, whose Interest leads us to continue in the Religion we were first bred in, such Proof as we always accept and allow of in other Cases of the like Nature, is Proof strong enough. And therefore much rather when we have, as indeed we have, a stronger and more uncontrold Tradition for the Truth of the Gospel-History, than of any History in the World besides, we shall be inconsistent with our selves, if we do not allow it to be sufficient.

So that upon the whole Matter, considering the Prejudices both from Education and Interest which they lay under who lived in those Times when the Gospel was first reveal'd and preach'd; even their own Eye-sight of some of those Miracles that were then wrought to confirm it, was not more persuasive than

than is that good Assurance that we now have by credible and undoubted Records that such Miracles were then wrought. The Proof they had, consider'd in it self, was indeed stronger than ours; but considering our different Circumstances, that Proof was not more apt or likely to convince them, than that which we have given us is to convince and persuade us. And if we had now the very same Proof and Demonstration of the Miracles wrought for the Confirmation of our Christian Religion, viz. The Evidence of our own Senses; this, which was but sufficient to them, might to us be such a Proof as would be, in a manner, a Force upon us; such clear Demonstration meeting with no strong Prejudice or considerable Interest on the other side, might be enough to overpower us, so that we could not be *Infidels* if we would, and then there would be no Virtue in Believing.

3. The Unreasonableness of desiring more Proof of the Truth of Religion than God has been pleas'd to afford us by the Standing Revelation of the Gospel, and particularly of desiring that God would be pleas'd to work new Miracles for our particular satisfaction, or for the Conviction of some of our Friends that are not persuaded by the Gospel-Revelation, will further appear, if we consider the equal Right that all other Men have to desire the same, and the many Inconveniencies and Absurdities that would follow, in case all Men should be gratified in this Desire.

For as to the first of these, viz. The equal Right that all other Men have to desire the same; What Reason can I pretend for my Infidelity, which another Man may not also as well plead for his? Have not

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I as good Proof of the Truth of Religion as my Neighbour has? Have not I as free Recourse to the Holy Scriptures as he? and the same Evidence of the Truth and Divine Inspiration of them that he has? And are we not also in all other Respects alike? Being Born in the same Country, and having had the same Education, and consequently being probable to have the same Inclinations towards, or the same Prejudices against, or Aversion to the Christian Faith? And if so, what Reason can I plead for any extraordinary or peculiar Favour? For is not he God's Creature as well as I? And hath not God the same Tenderness and Regard for him that he hath for me, and consequently the same Desire of his Welfare, that I can suppose he hath of mine? Why then should not God grant him this same Request whether in the Behalf of himself or his Friend, as well as I can expect he should grant it me? In a word, Why may not every Man desire the same as well as I? And why should not God grant it to all that desire it, as well as to any one?

But now if God should do this, see what Inconveniencies and Absurdities would follow thereupon?

One sort of Men would not believe, unless they might see Apparitions; If one went unto them from the dead, they would repent. And so for their sakes the World must be filled with Ghosts; the Dead must never be at Rest in their Graves, and the Souls in Bliss who once rejoyced in the thought of being for ever got clear out of a troublesome World, must be content (to gratifie these Men) to leave their Place in Abraham's Bosome, and to be deprived of the Beatifical Vision,



Vision, and the unspeakable Joys of Heaven, as long and as often as any of these unreasonable Men are pleased to desire it.

But another sort of Men it may be there are, that would not like this kind of Proof; A *transient* Apparition of a Ghost they'd look upon perhaps as a thing too liable to Cheat and Imposture; they'd therefore desire some more *plain* and *sensible* and *permanent* Miracles than this; some such Miracles as those were which our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* wrought; and if they could but see *such*, they make no doubt but they should be convinced: And so for their sakes, and for their Conviction, half the Men that are born into the World, must be born Lame or Blind, that so they may be afterwards Cured by Miracle, for the satisfaction of these Men: And a great many must be possessed with Devils, and be grievously torn and tortured by them, that these Men may have the Pleasure of seeing with their own Eyes the Evil Spirits cast forth; and of observing how much more calm and sober the Men are after the Devil is gone out, than they were before.

But even these Miracles, 'tis like, would not satisfy all; but some it may be, would be apt to suspect that there might be some Trick or Collusion in them, and that what they saw, was done only by a *Confederacy* between the *Physician* and the *Patient*, to amuse and deceive the Beholders; and therefore, what they, it may be, would desire for their particular satisfaction, would be, to see a dead Man raised to Life again after he had been dead several Days, and began to stink; and such a Miracle as this they are sure would convince them. And so  
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for their sakes a great many Men must die two or three times over, or much oftner; because perhaps every time before they have been dead a Week, some other Person that was not present before, may have a desire to see with his own Eyes the same Experiment tried over again.

But even this Miracle also would perhaps be excepted against by some, and nothing less would satisfy them than the very *same* Evidence which the *Apostles* themselves had, who conversed with our *Saviour* for some years together, and heard all his wife *Discourses*, and saw all his *Miracles* and mighty Works, and were present with him when he expired on the Cross, and assisted at the laying his dead Body into the Sepulchre, and within three Days after saw him alive again, touched and handled him, eat and drank with him; and after they had thus, several times, by the Space of forty Days, been, by *many* *Infallible Proofs*, assured of the Reality of his Resurrection, saw him visibly taken up in his Body into Heaven.

They that had this, they grant, had very good Proof and Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion; and had they but been of this happy Number, they are sure they should not only have believed, but also willingly have suffered as much as the *Apostles* themselves did for Bearing their Testimony to the Truth of those things which they had seen and heard.

And what now must be done for the Satisfaction of these Men? For *these* have as much Right to a full Satisfaction as any *others*; and by the same Reason

son that others do expect to be gratified in what they desire, these may do so too.

And therefore in order to their Satisfaction, it is necessary that our Saviour should be Born into the World in every Age of it, or indeed much oftner; and that in every Country at least, if not in every Town and Village he should live and Preach and do Miracles, and be Crucified and Rise again; for that these things have been once done, they can't, they say, believe only upon the Testimony of other Men who say they did see them; And therefore by the same Reason, if they themselves should see them, other Men that should come after, or live in other Countries, would have as little Cause to believe their Testimony.

So that for the full satisfaction of all such Doubting Men as these our Saviour must have suffered often since the Beginning of the World, and must continue to do so very frequently as long as the World shall last, because with some Men, nothing but seeing is Believing.

But that this should be, is what I presume none besides themselves can think it reasonable either for Men to ask, or for God to grant.

4. Lastly, The Unreasonableness of desiring any further or additional Proof of the Truth of Religion, besides what is already afforded us in the Standing Revelation of the Holy Scripture, will farther appear by considering our own Interest in being convinced and persuaded of the Truth of Religion by such Arguments and Motives as are in themselves sufficient for that purpose, altho' they be not so very strong and forcible as we could wish they were.

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And this Argument I shall handle in the way of Reproof, (and a just and seasonable Reproof I think it) to such bold and presuming Persons as I have been now speaking of, who will needs stand upon their Terms with Almighty God, and will not be persuaded to Believe and Repent, but just by such Reasons and such Motives as they themselves shall be pleased to require. Tell not us, say they, of Messes and the Prophets, and of things that were done a great while ago, we know not when; We'll have fresh Revelations, and new Miracles, or Messengers from the Dead, or else we will not Believe and Repent; that we are resolv'd on.

Very well; Then I say you may, if you will, continue still in your Unbelief and Impenitence; Nevertheless I would advise you, before you fully determine to persist in this Resolution, to take a little time to consider seriously, whose Interest and Concern it is, either that you should Believe, or that you should not Believe; consider who it is that will be a Gainer or a Sufferer, either by the One, or by the Other. For let me tell you, if there be really a Heaven and a Hell, and a Judgment, and a Life to come, 'tis not your not believing them that will make them not to be; and if these things are true, 'tis your own Life and Soul that is at Stake; and if you are resolv'd to lose both unless you may be Saved your own way, you your selves will be the greatest, nay you your selves will be the only Sufferers.

And this is a Consideration that affects the Case very much, and makes it very unreasonable to insist upon having such satisfaction in this Case, as in

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some other Cases might, not so very unreasonably, be desired.

For if any Man tells me a Story which it is for *his Interest* I should believe, it is *his Concern* to give me such Assurance of it as I shall require, even altho' less than I require would be in all Reason sufficient; And therefore if I will not believe one or two Witnesses, tho' it may be unreasonable in me not to believe them, yet it is *his Business*, and what it behoves *him* to do, to produce, if it be possible, ten or twenty Witnesses, or as many more as I shall ask for; And if one sort of Proof, tho' in it self it be never so good, will not satisfy me, it is *his part*, and what *he* ought in Reason to do, if he be able, to bring other Proofs of it; and so to go on multiplying his Witnesses and his Proofs, 'till such time as I shall declare my self fully satisfied; And the Reason is, because the Loss or Inconvenience will be *his*, and *only his*, in Case he cannot convince me of the Truth of his Relation.

But now on the other side, if the Story which he tells me be true, and it be for *my Interest* and *Advantage* only, not at all for *his* that I should believe it to be true; If, I say, *he* will be neither a *Gainer* nor a *Loser*, whether I believe his Report, or whether I do not believe it; then, if he gives me such Evidence of the Truth of it, as is *sufficient* to convince a *Man of Reason*, he has done *enough*; he has done all that belonged to him as a Friend to do. And if after this I make it my Business to *cavil* at and to *except* against his Evidence, and go about to *prescribe* to him what sort of Proof he should give me of the Truth of what he relates; declaring withal that less or other Proof than just that which I require shall never satisfy

satisfie me; he may justly reject my Suit as unreasonable, and condemn me for a Fool, that will not see *my own Interest*, nor know when a Friend has done enough.

And this is exactly our Case.

God has sent his Son to us with the Promise of Eternal Life, and has given us *sufficient Assurance* of his Divine Mission, and thereby of the Truth of that Revelation which he made. Now if we will believe this, well, and good, the *Profit* will be all *our own*; we shall save our *own Souls* alive; But God will receive no Advantage to himself by our Believing; his perfect Happiness being not capable of any Increase. But if we will not Believe this Testimony that God has given of his Son, if we except against his Witnesses, and cavil at his Evidence, and will not Believe but just upon that very sort of Proof which we our selves are pleas'd to pitch upon; why then, we may e'en take our own Course, we may be Unbelievers still; but 'tis *we* only that shall suffer by our Unbelief; the Infinite and Essential Happiness of God, being as little capable of Diminution, as of Advancement. And, as if we Believe and Repent, God will be Glorified in our Salvation, so, if we will not Believe and Repent, he will be no less glorified in our Destruction.

Seeing therefore whether you Believe or whether you do not Believe, God will be neither a Gainer nor a Loser; but the *Profit* or the *Damage* will be all your *own*; it is plainly your *Interest* as well as your *Duty* to give Credit to such Evidence, as really and in it self is Credible (and such, I hope I have already shewn that to be which is given us of the Truth of Christianity)

stianity) and not to set your selves to cavil at it, and to study Exceptions to it; not to take upon you to prescribe to God Almighty, and boldly to tell him what sort of Evidence he must give you, or else you will not be satisfied.

Do not then stand in your own Light; do not bring Destruction upon your selves when you may avoid it; but give Ear to what *Moses* and the *Prophets* and *Christ* and his *Apostles* speak to you in the *Holy Scriptures*; and hear them without Prejudice, with a Mind ready to hearken to Reason, and resolved to be persuaded by it; and then what they will say to you will be abundantly sufficient to satisfy you; for they say as much in this Case (or more) as by the common Voice and Reason of all Mankind is judged to be sufficient in all other Cases, of the like Nature.

But if you are resolved not to be persuaded so long as there is any Possibility of Doubt or Scruple left; if you are resolv'd not to Believe unless you may have just that very Evidence given you that you your selves are pleas'd to require; if you will boldly and arrogantly take upon you to teach God, (as if he knew it not) what Evidence he ought to give Men of the Truth of Religion; and are resolved to find or make Exceptions against any other; Look you to it; For if God has done enough already, he is under no manner of Obligation to do more; more, did I say; Nay he needed not to have done so much; for it was meer Grace and Favour in God that he has done so much as he has done; that he has made us any Promises at all, and given us any Assurance of the Truth of them. And therefore for what he has done we ought

ought to be thankful, and not to find fault with him that he has done no more. Such Impudence and Sauciness as this (for I can call it by no better a Name) from a Man to his Maker, from a mean inconsiderable Creature, to the Great Lord of Heaven and Earth, is I'm sure no proper Qualification to merit extraordinary and peculiar Favours. For as our Saviour says to some in a like Case, to some who formerly made the like unreasonable Demand that you now do, It is an Evil and Adulterous Generation that seeketh after a Sign, and therefore there shall no Sign be given. Matth. 12. 39.  
Verily I say unto you, there shall no Sign be given to this Generation. Mark 8. 12.

Let us then be content with that assurance which God has given us of the Truth of Religion; for greater than this we shall not have till it be too late. Let us thankfully accept of, and readily comply with this, and not expect or wait for more; for God will not gratifie us in our unreasonable Desire. He is resolved to deal with us as with Men, to incline, not to determine our Choice; to persuade, not to force us to be Happy. And having already given us the Standing Revelation of the Gospel, which is sufficient both to instruct and convince us, and having prov'd the truth of this sufficiently to us, he will not be making new Revelations, or sending more Prophets Divinely inspir'd, or working fresh Miracles every Day. He has done enough already to satisfy our sober Judgments; and he will not do every thing that we can think of to gratifie our wild and extravagant Fancies.

And there is the less Reason that he should do so, because if the Ordinary Means which he uses for our Conversion

Conversion do not succeed, the Fault lies wholly in us. And therefore 'tis highly probable (so certain that it need not be tried) that any other means proper for God to use to reclaim us, would be alike unsuccessful. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the Dead.*

This is the *last Reply* that *Abraham* makes to the *Rich Man's Request*; and it was the third of those three Points which I at first propounded to speak to; but which I must reserve for the Subject of my next Discourse.

**FINIS.**

## NEW REVELATIONS

*Would probably be*

# UNSUCCESSFUL:

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# SERMON

Preach'd at the

CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of *St. Paul,*  
*November 4th. 1700.*

BEING

The Eighth, for the Year 1700, of the LECTURE  
Founded by the Honourable *Robert Boyle, Esq;*

By *OFSPRING BLACKALL, D.D.*  
Rector of *St. Mary Aldermary,* and Chaplain in  
Ordinary to His MAJESTY.

L O N D O N,

Printed by *J. Leake,* for *Walter Kettilby,* at the *Bishop's-Head* in *St. Paul's Church-Yard,* 1700.

S<sup>t</sup> LUKE XVI. 29, 30, 31.

*Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

*And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

*And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

**I**N Discourfing on these Words, I have already done these two Things.

I. I have shewn that the present *Standing Revelation* of God's Will in the *Holy Scripture* is abundantly *sufficient* to persuade Men to Repentance, if they are not unreasonably blind and obstinate. This is intimated in the first Verse of the Text; *They have Moses and the Prophets; (Christ and his Apostles) let them hear them.* And,

II. I have likewise shewn, that having already such good Grounds of Faith, such full Directions for Practice, and such strong Motives to Repentance, it is *unreasonable* to desire more. This was what the *Rich Man* had done at the 27th. and 28th. Verses; and which he still continues to do in the 2d Verse of the Text, even after *Abraham* had told him that the

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*Standing Revelation* of God's Will in the Holy Scripture was sufficient; *Nay, Father Abraham, but if we went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

He says it positively, *they will repent*; He speaks it as a thing that no Doubt could be made of. In Answer to which therefore *Abraham* tells him in the last Verse of the Text, that that which he thought so very certain, was not so much as probable: *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

And this was the third Point I propounded to speak to in discoursing on these Words; *viz.*

III. To shew, that in Case God should condescend to gratifie Men in this unreasonable Desire, (working every Day new Miracles before their Eyes, or sending their deceased Friends to them from the Dead, to assure them of a Future State, and to warn them to prepare for it) 'tis highly probable that very few or none of those who do not believe, and are not brought to Repentance by the Preaching and Standing Revelation of the Gospel, would be persuaded by this means. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, (I add, nor Christ and his Apostles) neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

And the Truth of this will, I suppose, sufficiently appear if these following things be considered.

1. That we can't have better or stronger Motives to Obedience and a Holy Life than are already offered in the Holy Scripture to persuade us. 2. That the Proof and Evidence already given us of the Truth of Religion is such as cannot be fairly excepted against, and that there is no Proof thereof that could be offered,

offered, but what is liable to Cavils and unreasonable Exceptions. 3. That if God should gratifie all Men in this Request, the Abundance and Commonness of the Miracles that must then be wrought would go near to destroy the Efficacy and Persuasiveness thereof. And, Lastly, That it is Matter of Fact, and Experience that new Miracles have been generally unsuccessful upon those who have not hearkned to nor been convinced by a Standing Revelation of God's Will.

1. I say, we can't possibly have, as to the Matter of them, stronger Motives to Obedience and a Holy Life, than those which are already offered in the Holy Scripture to persuade us. For there we have *Life and Death set before us, Blessing and Cursing*; on one Hand, *the Promise of this Life and of that which is to come*; and on the other Hand all the Evils that we can justly dread, the wrath of him who is a consuming Fire; who often punishes Transgressors with remarkable Judgments in this Life, and has threatned to all impenitent Sinners Eternal Torments in the next.

Now if a new Revelation was to be made, and we our selves were to contrive the Matter of it, what stronger Motives than these could we think of? Or if one should come from the dead to Preach to us, if Lazarus were sent on purpose to persuade us, what could he offer more towards it? Could he give us Assurance of any thing better or more desirable than of God's Readiness to forgive us upon our Repentance, and of compleat and perfect Happiness both of Body and Soul to all Eternity if we do Repent? Or could he threaten any thing more like to deter us from Sin than intolerable and everlasting Misery? If not, to what

what Purpose should he be sent to us? Or indeed to what Purpose should there be any *new Revelation* at all? For these things are already promised and threatened clearly enough in the *Holy Scripture*; *Life and Immortality* are already fully brought to Light by the *Gospel*; And if the Hope of Eternal Life and Happiness, and if the Dread of Everlasting and Intolerable Torments will not persuade us, nothing certainly will or can persuade us.

All that, I think, could in any new Revelation be added to that Encouragement that is already given us in Scripture to Virtue and Godliness, or to that Discouragement that is therein given as to Vice and Wickedness, would be an Assurance that there should be always as remarkable a *Difference* made, by the *Providence of God*, between good and bad Men, in *this World*, as we are told in Scripture there will be, by his *righteous Judgment*, in *that* which is to *come*. And a good Assurance given us of this by some new Revelation, confirmed by our own constant Observation that it was always well with the Righteous and ill with the Wicked in this World, we may think perhaps would do much more towards the Reformation of Mankind, than only those Promises and Threatnings of future Happiness or Misery that we meet with in the Scripture have done, or are ever like to do.

And this indeed might be. But then 'tis to be considered that a new Revelation to this Effect would be inconsistent with the Nature of Religion, and would frustrate the Design of God in sending us into this World, which was to prove and try us, to see whether we love the Lord with all our Heart; whether

we can believe him for those things which we do not see; and whether we are so wise as to prefer a greater future Good before a less that is present, a Blessed and Glorious Immortality after this Life, before the Pleasures of Sin which are but for a Season. For if the Reward of Virtue and the Punishment of Vice were always visible and present, there would be no Room left for Faith in God, which is a firm Belief of the Truth of his Promises and Threatnings, tho' we do not see a present Performance of them; *Faith* (as Heb. 11. 1. the *Apostle* defines it) is the Substance, or (a) constant Expectation of things hoped for; the Evidence, or (b) Conviction of things not seen. And if all the good things both of this Life and of the next were the certain Portion of Virtue, and all the evil things that can be suffered both in this World and in the other were the certain and never-failing Consequence of Sin, there would be no room left for a virtuous and wise Choice; nay indeed there would be hardly Matter for Choice at all; for it can't be conceiv'd that a Creature that has Understanding and a Power of chusing and refusing, should knowingly chuse all Misery rather than all Happiness. Such a Revelation as this being therefore so evidently inconsistent with the Nature of Faith and Religion, and with the Design of God in sending us into this World, can't be expected. And I say that, bating this, there can be nothing added to the Matter of the Scripture Revelation. From whence therefore it plainly follows, that such as are not persuaded by the Gospel Motives to Repentance, are not capable of being persuaded by any such Motives as, consistently with the Nature of Faith and Religion and Vertue, could be offered to them; And



it can't be supposed that any true divine Revelation should ever offer any Motives to persuade us that are not such.

But it may be said perhaps, that tho' better or stronger Motives to Repentance cannot be offered by any new Revelation, than are offered already in Holy Scripture, yet we might by a new Revelation, have *better Assurance* given us of the Truth of the Gospel Motives; and that if we had, 'tis very like they would be then more prevailing than they now are.

And this likewise I believe must be granted. But then 'tis to be considered, that the Nature of Faith and Religion, and of that State of Trial which we are now in, requires that there should be a reasonable Boundary set to the clearness of that Evidence that is given to Men of the Truth of those Motives whereby they are to be persuaded, as well as to the Force and Strength of the Motives themselves; Because (as I noted in my last Discourse) such very clear and strong Evidence of the Truth of Religion as leaves no Room for a possibility of Doubting, would destroy our Freedom of Choice, and, with it, the Virtue and Excellency of Believing; for 'tis not Faith to believe what we see and feel; and 'tis no Commendation to a Man to be good and Virtuous, if his Virtue be not the Fruit of a wise Judgment and a free Choice; which it would not be if his Judgment was over-born by irrefragable Demonstration. And if that farther Proof and Evidence that is desired of the Truth of Religion, be no other than such as will leave us a Freedom of Choice and a Possibility of Doubting, then I say 'tis not likely it should be more convincing to us than that which we have already in the Standing Revelation

tion of Holy Scripture. For it may be considered further in the second Place.

2. That the *Proof* and *Evidence* already given us of the Truth of Religion is such as cannot *fairly* be *excepted against*; and that there is no *Proof* thereof that could be given us, (unless it be such as is not resistible, and consequently such as is not fit for God to give us, while we are here in a State of Trial) but what is *liable* to *foolish Cavils* and *unreasonable Exceptions*; so that consequently the same *Temper* and *Disposition* of Mind, and the same *unwillingness* to believe which now disposes Men to *Infidelity*, and prompts them to make *Exceptions* to the present Grounds of the Christian Faith, would work the same Effect in case other Proof and Evidence were given of the Truth of it.

I say, *first*, That the *Proof* and *Evidence* already given us of the Truth of the Christian Religion is such as cannot *fairly* be *excepted against*.

To shew this has been the Design of several former Discourses. And therefore to what has been said I shall only adde, that if the Exceptions that are made to the Evidence already given us of the Truth of the Christian Religion were fair and reasonable, they would be allowed by Mankind to be so in other Cases of the like Nature; which yet they are not. Nay if they who make these Exceptions in the Case of Religion did themselves think that they were just and reasonable, they ought to make the same in all other Cases, that are equally liable to the same Exceptions; and in all other such Cases they ought to live and act as if they had the same Doubts and Scruples upon them, which they say they have in the Case of Religion; But we see the quite contrary every Day we live.

For

Serm. III, IV,  
V, VI.

For that same *Infidel* who will not allow of the *Testimony* which was given to our *Saviour* by his *Apostles*, tho' they gave the best Assurance that it was possible for Men to give both of their Knowledge of what they testified, and of their Honesty in relating it; yet readily allows that in all other Cases the *Testimony* of two or three Credible Persons should be received, without any collateral Evidence of the Truth of their Testimony; and thinks it reasonable that all Disputes and Controversies among Men concerning their Civil Rights, their Estates, nay and their Lives too, should be thereby determined. And he that questions whether the *Books* of the *New Testament* were written by the *reputed Authors*, yet makes no Question but that *other Books*, of as ancient or older Date, and of the Authority of which there is not half so much Traditional Evidence, were written by those *Persons* to whom they are ascribed; and he would think those very unreasonable Men, who, when he was arguing any Point of Learning with them upon the Authority of *Virgil*, or *Cicero*, or *Seneca*, should refuse to admit his Argument till he had first undeniably and demonstratively proved that the *Books* were written by *Virgil*, or that the other Pieces that have been allowed in all Ages ever since to have been written by *Cicero* or *Seneca*, were not falsely Fathered upon those Authors. The *Infidel* who doubts of the Truth of the *Gospel-History*, at the same time has no Doubt at all of the Truth of *other Histories*, as ancient, and much more possible to be false, and of the Truth of which there is not the hundredth part of that Evidence that there is of the Truth of this. And he that pretends to be uncertain whether there ever was

such a Man as *Jesus of Nazareth*; and whether he said and did the things Recorded of him by the *Evangelists*, and whether by the Preaching of his *Apostles* he did spread his Spiritual Empire over all the Countries of the World; (An Empire which is still kept up in most of the Countries over which it was first extended, and of which there are evident *Marks* and *Memorials* still remaining even in those Countries that have since revolted from it;) He, I say, that doubts of these things altho' witnessed by the *Writings* of those who were *Eye-Witnesses* thereof, yet makes no Doubt but that there was such a Man as *Alexander the Great*, who lived above three Hundred years before, and that he translated the Empire of the World from *Persia* to *Greece*; and he also gives full Credit to the other things which he finds related of him, by *Curtius*, *Plutarch* and *Arrian*, altho' none of these Authors were *Eye-Witnesses* of his Wars and Greatness, but either Copied what they wrote from former Histories, or took it up from Report; and altho' there are perhaps no *Remains* of that Empire now left in the World. And if he was but as sure of a good Estate, as that the History of *Alexander's Expedition and Conquests* is in the main a true History, he would not, I believe, give the Hundreth Part of its Value to ascertain his Title to it.

Those therefore are manifestly unreasonable Exceptions to the Proofs of Christianity which no Man will allow, which even those that make them in this Case do not think reasonable to make, in other Cases of the like Nature; so that it is not at all likely that any Person that is not convinced by these Proofs, should be convinced if more were given.

For (as I farther noted) there is no *Proof* that could be given us of the Truth of the Christian Religion, (unless it be such as is not refutable; and consequently not fit for God to give us, while we are here in a State of Trial) but what is *liable to foolish Cavils and unreasonable Exceptions.*

This I think is so self-Evident, that nothing plainer or more undeniable can be said to prove it. For tho' the Demonstration of the Truth of Religion were as plain as Demonstrations in the *Mathematicks*, yet even these may be cavild at by such as will allow of no *Postulats*, nor grant the Truth of the clearest *Axioms*. Nay there have been *Scepticks* in the plainest *Matters of Sense*, and some have denied *Motion* at the same time that their own Tongues were moving to deny it.

Not that I think the Demonstration of the Truth of Religion is as clear as any Proposition in *Euclid*, or as the shining of the Sun at Noon, (for that can't be) and I have already given Reasons why, if it might, it should not be so) but it is as clear as such a Matter is capable to be. And I dare be bold to say that there is no other Proof of Religion fit to be offered, or reasonably to be desired, to which a *Sceptick* might not make as just and plausible Exceptions as he can to the Standing Proofs of Christianity. For one single *Miracle* done in his own Presence would be nothing so convincing as the many *Miracles* wrought by Christ; and his *Apostles* were, of some or other of which there were more than ten thousand Witnesses; And if we can suppose that so many were deceived in plain Matters of Sense, he may much rather suppose that he, a single Man, may be imposed upon. And an *Appear-*

ance of a deceased Friend would be a Matter wherein any one Man might be more probably Cheated, or be more easily persuaded that he was Cheated, than the *Apostles* could be in the Resurrection of our Lord, when he was seen by them very frequently, and sometimes by a great Company of them together, by the space of forty Days; And a single *Miracle* that is over as soon as done, could not make such a deep and lasting Impression upon a Man's Mind, as that constant Power of working Miracles, and especially the *Gift of Tongues*, which lasted a whole Life, must needs do upon the *Apostles* and those that lived in their time, who were either Partakers of these Gifts themselves, or constant Witnesses thereof in others.

In short, whatever Miracles we can desire may be wrought for our Conviction; either they must be seen by us with our own Eyes, or else they must be received by Testimony from others.

And tho' they should be seen by us with our own Eyes, yet so long as 'tis against our Inclination, or inconsistent with that Love which we bear to the World or to our Sins, to believe that they are true Miracles, we should easily be apt to fancy that they were only melancholy Delusions, or Tricks put upon us by Designing Men, which our first Fright or Amazement hindered us from discovering the Fraud of; and so they would probably have no effect at all upon us longer than till our Fright or Amazement was well worn off.

But if we should only have an Account of them by Testimony from others, they would be yet less likely to persuade us, because there can be no Testimony

concerning any such Matters of Fact more clear and unexceptionable than that which we have already of the Truth of our Saviour's and his Apostles Miracles; so that if we believe not this, we should hardly believe any other Testimony, because we can scarcely have so good Assurance of any Man's Truth as we have of the Sincerity and Veracity of all those who are the present Witnesses to our Religion; and we can hardly be surer that we hear any Man-whom we know, speaking to us, than we are that we hear the *Apostles* speaking to us in the *Books* of the *New Testament*.

And therefore I think it plainly follows (as I farther noted) that the same *Temper* and *Disposition* of *Mind*, and the same *Unwillingness* to believe the Truths of the Gospel, which now dispose Men to Infidelity, and prompt them to study and make Exceptions to the Proofs already given us of the Christian Faith, would work the same Effect if other Proof and Evidence were given of it, and that Men would then quickly make as good Exceptions to that, as they do now to these. For from what has been said, I think 'tis plain that if Men do not see the Truth when 'tis placed in so clear a Light as 'tis in already, the Reason must be because they wilfully shut their Eyes, or else are so blinded by a Love of this World, or of their sinful Lusts, that if the Light were ten times brighter than it is, they would see no more than they do now. And it would be to as little Purpose, in order to the Conviction of such perverse and obstinate Men, to add any more or stronger Proofs of the Truth of Religion, as it would be to light up abundance of Torches to a Man that is quite blind.

For this is indeed the true Cause why Men will not hear *Moses* and the *Prophets*, why they will not believe *Christ* and his *Apostles*, testifying the certainty of a future State and other Truths of Religion; 'tis not, I say, because there is any just Exception to their Testimony, but because they do not like the Matter of it, and so are resolved not to believe. They love their Sins so well that they can upon no Account be persuaded to part with them, and being so resolved, it is an easie thing to cavil at any Motives or Arguments that are urged to persuade them to it; Seeing they will not see, and hearing they will not hear nor understand; and to Men so obstinately resolved against Conviction, no Proof can be convincing enough.

And this is the sad effect of Love to Sin; it Viciates the Judgments of Men, so that they can't distinguish between things that differ most vastly; it darkens their Understanding, so that the plainest Proposition or the clearest Consequence in the World, if it be against the Interest of Sin, seems dark and obscure to them; and it renders their Minds so averse to Religion, that they can't with any Patience so much as hear the Arguments that are offered to prove it; And be a Reason never so good, 'tis not to be hoped it should be convincing to a Man who will not hear it, or who will not allow himself calmly to consider it.

From all that hath been said therefore upon this Head, it plainly appears, That the proper Cure of Infidelity is not the Addition of more Proof of the Truth of Religion, but a right Preparation and Disposition of Mind to consider well the Proof thereof that

is offered; which is sufficient to convince and persuade all those that have a Love of Truth, and a Will disposed to Virtue. The Causes of Infidelity must be first removed, and then the Cure of it will be easy, by those Means which God has provided and directed us to use, and there will be no need of his Working Miracles for Men's Conviction; But 'till the Causes of it are removed, 'tis hardly to be Cured even by a Miracle.

But it will be said perhaps that tho' fresh Revelations and new Miracles might not be sufficient to convince all, they might however convince some; because there are several Degrees in the Perverstness and Obstinacy of Men; Some indeed there may be whom no such Proof of Religion as is fit to be given us in this State of Trial would persuade, whose Case therefore must be given over as desperate; but then there are others, who (as King Agrippa was) are almost persuaded to be Christians; and when the Scales are already near even, a small weight put into the lightest will make it overbalance the other; so that it may reasonably be hoped that some small Addition to the Proof of Religion (no more than might be made to it without destroying either our Freedom of Choice or the Excellency of Faith and Virtue) would prevail with these *Half Christians*.

And perhaps it might; But God is wiser than we are, and knows better than we what is fit for him to do towards the Conversion of Men. We ought therefore to conclude that he does all that is fit to be done, tho' we do not see but that he might do more.

But this, it may be, will not be taken for an Answer, but will rather be thought a way of avoiding a Difficulty

Acts 26. 28.

Difficulty too hard to be accounted for. And therefore I say further, (and it was the third thing which I proposed to be considered,)

3. That if God should gratifie all Men in this Request, working new Miracles every Day for the Conviction of particular Persons; (and, as I have formerly *Sermon VII.* noted, there is no Reason in the World, why any one Man should be gratified in this Request rather than others, when they have all equal Reason and equal Right to desire it; should God, I say, gratifie all Men in this Request) the *Abundance* of the *Miracles* that must then be wrought, would be so far from adding to the Proof of Christianity, that it would rather *lessen* or *weaken* that Proof of it which we have already; because Miracles (the properest Proof of a Publick Divine Revelation) would not be then so convincing as they are now.

For that which most of all affects Men in a Miracle is the *Unusualness* of it; because it is such a thing as was never or but rarely before ever seen or heard of; As the *Blind Man* that had been Cured by our *Saviour* well observes, *Joh. 9. 12.* *Since the Beginning of the World hath it not been heard, that any Man hath opened the Eyes of one that was born Blind.* Had it been a common thing it would have been no Miracle; I mean it would not have appeared so, it would not have been thought so by Men. For that which makes Men wonder even at a true Miracle is not so much because it is such an Operation as they cannot give a fair account of by Natural Causes; for this they can't do, (I'm confident I may say they have not yet done it) of many of the Works and Productions of Nature; But they therefore conclude such a thing not

not to be a Natural Operation, because it is not usual, because it is such a thing as was never before known to be done: And if the same thing which now, for this Reason, we should account a Miracle was done every Day, the *Virtuosi* would presently set themselves to invent, and would quickly fancy they had found out some Natural Solution of it; And I believe there are not many Miracles that have been done which they might not after long Study be able to give as clear and probable an Account of by Natural Causes, as they have done of *Gravity*, of *Fire*, of the *Loadstone*, of *Vision*, of the *Production of Vegetables*, of the *Generation of Animals*, and of many other things which yet are doubtless the Works and Effects of Natural Causes.

So that I say the most probable Consequence of having Miracles so very common as they must be if they were wrought for the Conviction of particular Men, would be this, that they would cease to serve for that Purpose for which Miracles were designed; because being common they would be disregarded, or would quickly be looked upon to be the Effect of Natural Causes only; There would not be wanting those that would offer to give an Account how they were done; and all those would be despised by the Scorners of Religion, as too much addicted to Superstition; who rather than attribute the greatest Miracle to a Supernatural Power, would not acquiesce in that Solution (how silly soever) that was given of it by meer *Matter* and *Motion*.

And in particular, I question not but that if it was a common thing for dead Men, after they had lain in their Graves for some time, to come forth again and  
 they

show themselves alive to their Friends, this wonderful Effect would be attributed by a great many to some *Vital Principle* in the Body; which only Slept for a while (as it does in Corn or other Seeds while they are kept dry and above Ground) but afterwards, when the Body was buried a while, was excited by some Natural Virtue that was in the Earth to exert it self, and so by its *Plastick Power* formed the Body into the same shape it was in before.

This I say would in all probability be the Effect that the greatest Miracles would have in the World, if they were very common; They'd only serve to set the Philosophers Wits to work to invent *new Forms of Matter*, and *new Laws of Motion* by which to solve them; and any Solution of them, tho' never so improbable, tho' only by *Occult Qualities*, would serve turn, and be thought better than to recur to an Almighty Power. The Consequence of which would be, that this which we desire as an additional Proof of Christianity, would in effect *destroy* one of the best Proofs of it that we have already. But,

4. Lastly, If it be supposed that Miracles would still be thought Miracles notwithstanding their Commonness, yet *Abraham* might well deliver it as a General Truth, to which there are none or very few Exceptions; that he who is not wrought upon by a Standing Revelation of God's Will, would not be persuaded by an extraordinary Message or a new Miracle; because it is *Matter of Fact* and *Experience* that this last Method has been generally unsuccessful upon those who have not hearkned to nor been convinced by a Standing Revelation.

For this was the very Case of the Jews in our Saviour's time; the Parable was literally fulfilled in them. For as they would not believe *Moses* and the *Prophets* testifying of our *Saviour*, so neither did they any more believe our *Saviour* himself when he came down to them from Heaven in the Power of God; And as they did not believe him while he *lived* amongst them, and went about Preaching and doing Miracles, so neither did they believe him a jot more after he came again to them from the *dead*. Never were there such Signs and Miracles wrought for Mens Conviction, and yet never was there such a number of obstinate Infidels as then. Very few even of those who were Eye-witnesses of our Saviour's Miracles were the better for them, but many were a great deal worse, wilfully blaspheming that Spirit by which he wrought them, and attributing those Operations to the Help of the *Devil* which they were convinced in their own Judgments were done by the Power of God. The opening the Eyes of the *Blind*, did but make those that saw the Miracle more blind than they were before; And when once a *dead Lazarus* did come forth out of his Grave and appear to them, (which was the very thing that the *Rich Man* here desires in the behalf of his Brethren, as being in his Judgment the most powerful, and so like to be the most effectual method to reclaim them; when I say this was done by our Saviour in the presence of a great number, so that the Truth of the Miracle could not be doubted, and was not denied by any of them) all the Effect that it had upon those obstinate and incredulous Men, was only that it made them enter presently (sooner perhaps than otherwise they would have done) into a close

Joh. 9. 39. 11.  
47- 12. 10.

Consultation

Consultation to put to death both *Jesus* and *Lazarus* too.

Some Examples indeed, it must be granted, there are on the other side; For we are told in *Acts xi. 41.* of a great number about three thousand that believed upon the first Preaching of *St. Peter*, and sight of that great Miracle, the Gift of *Tongues*, wherewith the *Apostles* were endued.

But then it may be considered, that it was not the Miracle that convinced them, I mean not that alone; for many that were then present, and heard the *Apo-* Verse 12  
*stles* speaking with *Tongues*, were so far from being persuaded thereby, that they most falsely blasphemed that, as they had done all our Saviour's Miracles before, attributing the fruit of that most evident Power of the Holy Ghost to *new Wine*. And it may be further noted that those who were persuaded by it, were such as before they saw the Miracle were in a good Disposition to embrace that pure Religion that is taught in the Gospel, or else that Miracle would not have persuaded them; for the Persons convinced thereby were not of the *Pharisees* or *unbelieving Jews* that had rejected our Saviour before, but they were *Devout Per-* Verse 5  
*sons, Jews* or *Proselytes*, who had come at that Feast of *Pentecost*, from other Parts of the World to *Jerusalem* to Worship, and who had probably never heard of our Saviour before more than by uncertain Report; but being well read in *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and giving good heed to them, were Converted, more by the manifest Accomplishment of all the ancient Prophecies concerning the *Messias*, in the Person of our Saviour, than by the sight of that great Miracle.

This therefore being Matter of Fact and Experience, what has been done and come to pass already, that new Miracles have been generally unsuccessful upon such as have not regarded a Standing Revelation of God's Will, we may reasonably infer that 'tis highly probable if not certain, that the same Experiment tried over again would have no better success.

The Summ of all therefore is this; such as are (as St. Luke says they were who were Converted by the Preaching and Miracles of the *Apostles*) \* *Predisposed or fitted for Eternal Life*; that is, such as are modest and teachable, who hear without prejudice, and judge without Partiality, and have no Interest of Sin or the World that stands in competition with their Desire to obtain everlasting Happiness; such as enquire out the Truth with the same Indifference that a Traveller does his Way, who has no Inclination to one Way more than to another, but only desires to be directed right, and is resolved to take that way which he is persuaded is the right, tho' it should not prove so very clean and smooth and pleasant as he hoped it would; (such, I say, as are of this honest and docible mind) will be persuaded by a good Reason, especially if it be as good as the Matter is capable of, tho' it falls short of Demonstration; and if there be Reason or appearance of Reason on both sides, they will judge on that side on which the Reasons seem most weighty; and for the Conviction of such as these, the Standing Revelation of the Gospel, being so well proved as it is, is abundantly sufficient; so that such shall not need new Miracles or new Revelations. And on the other side, such as only do need them, that is such as being of perverse Minds, and stubborn Wills, and devoted to

Sin,

Sin, will not hearken to *Moses* and the *Prophets*, nor to *Christ* and his *Apostles* speaking in the *Scripture*, would very probably receive no Benefit from new Miracles or new Revelations. For nothing will serve to convince those who will not be convinced at all; no Arguments can be sufficient to persuade a Man to that which he is strongly prejudiced and fully resolved against; And this being the Case of all those who do not hear *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles* preaching to them in the *Holy Scripture*, or are not persuaded by them, we may well conclude with *Abraham* in the Text, that any other means that might be used to reclaim them would most probably prove as ineffectual as this has been, and that they would not be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.

And now having shewn that the present Standing Revelation of God's Will in the *Holy Scripture* is sufficient to convince and persuade Men; having also shewn that more Proof and Evidence than we have of the Truth of our Religion cannot reasonably be desired. And having likewise shewn that any other Proof or Evidence thereof would probably be ineffectual upon those who will not hear *Moses* and the *Prophets* and *Christ* and his *Apostles* preaching to them in the *Holy Scripture*; I have finished all that I proposed to do in discoursing on these Words.

I shall conclude all with an useful Exhortation; first to *Infidels*, who will not by all that has been said be persuaded to admit this divine Revelation; and secondly to *Christians* who do receive it.

1. To you who are yet *Infidels*, (if there are any such here, as I hope there are not; or if these Discourses

Afts 13. 46.  
\* Τεταγμένους  
εἰς ζῶσαν δι-  
δασκαλίαν.



courses shall happen to fall into the Hands of any such) I beg leave to address my self in a few words.

And I would desire you, in the first Place, to prepare and dispose your Minds to hear gravely and without prejudice the Reasons that are offered to prove the Truth of Christianity, by considering seriously the great Importance of Religion, if it be true. And if you do but consider this, you will quickly see that it is well worth your while to be at some pains to satisfy your selves fully whether Religion be true or not. For if Religion be true (and you can't be sure it is not, till you have well examined the Grounds and Proofs of it) you have a great Concern at stake; and in a Matter of such Moment it becomes not a Wise Man to be determined by a Jest or a Quibble. And if you seriously consider the great Importance of Religion, you will likewise readily see, that of the two you had much better be mistaken in believing the Truth of Religion, tho' it be false, than in disbelieving it, if indeed it be true; so that consequently if it can ever be reasonable for a Wise Man to be under a Prejudice, it would be most reasonable that you should be prejudiced on the side of Religion. You will also then see, that if in any Case it be Wisdom to be over-credulous, that is, to believe beyond the strength of the Evidence, it is so in the Case of Religion; because the greatest Damage you can suffer by Over-credulity, in case Religion be all a Cheat, is infinitely less than will be the Consequence of unreasonable Infidelity, if indeed Religion be true.

Next, I would desire you to examine your selves seriously, whether in your Enquiries into the Grounds and Reasons of Religion, you have not hitherto had

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some Biass upon your Minds; whether at the same time that you have set your selves to consider of the Proofs of the Christian Religion, you have not secretly wished that you might not find them satisfactory to your Reason. And if so, I desire you to examine further, what was the Cause of this; whether it was not some worldly Pleasure or Profit which you foresaw you should be debarr'd from in case you should happen to be convinced of the Truth of the Christian Religion. And if it was, I hope that some serious Consideration of the great Importance of Religion, which I before advised in order to the removing unreasonable Prejudices, will also suffice to satisfy you how unworthy of any Love or Regard any Worldly Pleasure or Profit is in Comparison with that Eternal Happiness which is promised in the Gospel; so that consequently when you are enquiring into the Grounds and Reasons of our Hope of that Eternal Life, all other Thoughts ought to be laid aside, and you ought to have no Eye at all to any thing else; because to a Man who must be unspeakably happy or miserable to all Eternity (which is the Case of all of us, if indeed Religion be true) 'tis not a matter worth thinking of, whether his Worldly State and Condition will be rendered better or worse by his endeavouring to secure to himself a blessed Portion in the other World.

And if by these Considerations your Minds shall be freed from Prejudices and from all Biass of Worldly Interest, I would, after this, desire you to take a fresh view into your Consideration what has been offered in the foregoing Discourses for the Proof of the Christian Religion, and the much more that has been better said by others upon the same Argument; for there can be no

Hurt.

Hurt in considering these things over and over again, altho' after all, you should remain as unsatisfied as you are now. But I can't but hope, I can't but think that if you do consider without Prejudice or Partiality the Reasons that have been offered to prove the Truth of Christianity, you must needs be convinced thereby.

However, if the Reasons that are or may be offered for the Proof of it should not be sufficient perfectly to cure your Infidelity and to make you become Zealous Christians; they may be, and they certainly are, sufficient to satisfy you that the Christians have some Reason for their Belief; even the same at least (if not better) that you your selves are swayed by in all other Cases; and consequently that they are not such very easie and credulous Fools as you perhaps have hitherto taken them to be. I'm confident you must grant that if the Reasons of our Religion are not demonstrative, they are at least probable; and that if our Religion be not true, it has at least a fair shew and Appearance of Truth.

And if you will but only allow this, 'tis then a Reasonable Request, and what I would next desire of you; not to make a Boast of your Unbelief; not to ridicule our holy Religion; not to make it your Business to proselyte Men to Atheism and Infidelity.

1. Not to make a Boast of your Unbelief; For indeed you have no Religion, yet what Interest can you have in telling the World so? Nay is there any thing that you could do, more to your own Prejudice? For tho' you are not under the Direction and Influence of any Religious Principles, yet so long as you appear to have some Religion you will be employed and trusted as other Men are; Men will believe you to be Honourable

'till they shall find to the contrary; and in the mean time you will have an Opportunity of raising your selves to Wealth and Honour. But when once the World shall come to know that you are Men of no Principles, that you are under no Restraints of Conscience, that you will do whatever you can safely do for your own Advantage; that is, whatever you can do without danger of a Prison, a Pillory or a Gibbet; (and they will have Reason to think all this of you, when you your selves shall tell them that you are of no Religion;) Who, do you think, will employ you? Who, do you think, will trust you? So that the only way you will then have to make your Fortunes, will be by open Force and Violence; and in that you will meet with such opposition from all the World, as will quickly work your Ruine.

But you think, it may be, that 'tis a mean and ungenerous thing to disown your Principles, or rather your no Principles; that it is beneath a Man to seem to be what he is not; and to put on a face of Religion when he has none, how profitable soever his Hypocrisy might be to him.

Very well; Then you may (if you are willing to suffer the Inconvenience of it) freely own your selves to be of no Religion; but at the same time you should do well to consider that the greatest part of the World is against you; that not only the Ignorant and illiterate, but the Wise, the Gravest, the most Learned and the most Noble Persons have generally been Men of Religion; or at least, (which is all we can judge by) have outwardly professed themselves persuaded of the Truth of it, and have expressed the greatest Zeal and Concern for it. And therefore

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2. Tho'

2. Tho' you do believe nothing of it your selves, and scorn to conceal your Unbelief, you may however be civil to our Religion; for 'tis but good Manners to treat with some Respect that which those with whom you converse account Sacred. Besides, whether Religion be true or false, the Subject of it is grave, and therefore ought to be handled with a decent Reverence. Do not then shew such ill Breeding as to make that the Subject of your *Sport* and *Raillery*, which all besides your selves account the most serious thing in the World. Be not guilty of so much Indecency as to discourse of any Matter in a manner so unfuitable to the Nature of it. But if you will needs be attacking our Religion, compose your selves first to Gravity and Seriousness; and let it be seen by your way of Treating us, that your Design is manly and generous, only to undeceive and disabuse us, not to make Sport with us. *Produce your Cause* (as the Prophet speaks) and *bring forth your strong Reasons*; by them it may be, if you propound them seriously, you may convince us that we are in a mistake; but we are now in too grave an Humour to be wrought upon by a *Jest*; and how strong soever your Objections against Religion are, by a light and trifling way of expressing them, you will make them lose all their Force. But indeed—

3. To what purpose is it for you to make it your Business, any ways, or by any Arguments, to endeavour to *proselyte* Men to *Atheism* and *Infidelity*. For whether our Religion be true or false, it is *best* for you, as well as for all the World besides, that it should be generally believed; and that Men should think themselves obliged to live according to the Rules and Precepts of it. You can't, surely, be so unacquainted

Isa. 41. 21.

acquainted with the World, if you have lived any time in it, or read any thing of History, but that you must needs know that before the Principles of *Atheism* and *Deism* prevail'd so much as they have done of late Years, there was a great deal more Truth and Justice and Honesty and fair Dealing in the World than there is now. So that if you should succeed in your Endeavour, if you should be able either to reason or to laugh Religion quite out of the World, the most probable, nay the most certain Consequence of it would be, that when the *Godly Man ceased*, the *faithful* would also *fall from among the Children of Men*; that then they would *speak Vanity every one with his Neighbour, with flattering Lips and with a double Heart* would they *speak*; That then *Strength* would be the *Law of Justice*, and that which is *feeble* would be *found nothing worth*. If therefore you have (as you think perhaps you have) found out the *Cheat of Religion*; 'tis your best Prudence, however, to keep your Discovery to your selves. Delight your selves as much as you will with the Contemplation of your own Happiness above other Men, in that you are now freed from the Terrors of Conscience and the Fears of another World, by means of that notable Discovery which you have made of the Vanity of Religion; please your selves as much as you will with thinking that you are not now as others are, tied to speak truth when 'tis to your disadvantage, to suffer any thing in this World for Conscience sake, or to be just and honest in your Dealings, when you can get considerably by Fraud and Oppression, and can order the Matter so secretly as to be safe from Discovery, and consequently from all Shame and Punishment from Men: But be the Advantage which you have gained

Ps. 12. 1, 2.

Wisd. 2. 11.

gained to your selves by discovering the Cheat of Religion never so great, yet the greater it is, and the greater you think it, so much the more cautious you ought to be not to make known to others what you have so happily discovered; for when once others shall come to know as much as you think you do, *viz.* That all Religion is a Cheat, all your Advantage above them will cease; they will then be all upon the same Terms with you; they will then be all as much at Liberty to defraud, oppress or otherwise injure you, as you are now to defraud oppress or injure them. You ought not therefore in Prudence, to try to convince them of their Mistake; tho' you were sure it was a Mistake; for why should you make it your Business to cut in funder those Cords of Religion, by which they are now tied up from doing you mischief?

In a word; either Religion is *true* and *well grounded*, or it is *not*; and which soever it be, it is better both for *them* that do believe the Truth of it, and for *you* also, that they should continue in the Belief of it; why then should you be at Pains only to do mischief?

For put Case, *first*, that Religion is *vain* and *groundless*, it must be confessed however that it is of some *present Advantage* to *them* that do *believe* it; because it serves to bear them up under the unavoidable Pains and Troubles and Misery of this Mortal Life with the comfortable Hope of a blessed Immortality; and it will be no Disadvantage to them hereafter; for when they are dead, if indeed there be no Life after this, they will be as if they had never been, they will not be then in a Capacity of grieving for their Disappointment. And it is also for *your present Advantage*, that they that are mistaken in believing the Truth of Religion,

gion, should *continue* in their Mistake; because it makes them better to you in every Relation than they would otherwise be, more Just and Merciful Governours, more Loyal and Obedient Subjects, more Loving Parents, more Dutiful Children, more Gentle Masters, more Faithful Servants, and more Just, Honest and Loving Neighbours; why then should you be at any Pains to Cure that Mistake (if it be a Mistake) which does *them* no harm, but rather good; and which is likewise so profitable for *you*? Especially when you can't be so vain as to expect to merit Heaven (if indeed there be no Heaven) by your *Zeal* for the *Truth* of *Atheism*.

But if indeed Religion be true; (and you can't be sure it is not, how deficient soever you may think our Proofs of it are) as I shall not need to say that it will be better for *them* that *believe* it, that they should persist in their Belief of it; so I shall not need to say much to shew that it will, in the Event, be better for *you*, that you should not endeavour to *pervert* them; for, certainly, if there be a Hell, they will be condemned to the hottest place in it, who not only withdrew themselves from their Subjection to Almighty God, and would not suffer him to reign over them; but made it also their Business to *corrupt* others, to form a Party against Heaven, and to raise an Universal Rebellion against God.

These things, and more to the like Purpose I would say to the *Atheists*, if I thought they were here to hear me. And I should not be without Hope, that altho' what was said before in the foregoing Discourses was not sufficient to cure their *Infidelity*, what has been now said might serve to convince them that it is the wisest

wisest Course to keep their *Infidelity* to themselves; that how little soever they believe of the Truth of Religion, it is not *Prudence* to tell the World that they are Men of no Principles, and consequently not fit to be employed or trusted; that 'tis not *good Manners* to make a Jest of Serious and Sacred things, and to affront the common Reason and Judgment of Mankind; and that 'tis not for their *Interest* to endeavour to bring other Men over to their side, because if none had more Religion than themselves, they could not be near so safe and secure in their Rights and Possessions, and in their Lives (the only things they value) as they now are.

But I do not think there are any here present concern'd in this Part of my Discourse, and therefore shall lengthen it no further. *I am persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany Salvation; For your Presence here, in the House of God, and in the Assembly of Christians, makes it reasonable to believe, that you are already convinced, not only of the Being and Providence of God, but likewise of the Truth of the Christian Religion and of the Divine Inspiration and Authority of the Holy Scriptures.*

2. To you therefore who are *Christians* I shall now turn my Discourse. *And I beseech you, Brethren, suffer the word of Exhortation; it is only this.*

Since you have *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and *Christ* and his *Apostles*, and *believe* that they are *Messengers* sent to you from *God* to instruct you in his Will; receive the Truth and the Law at their Mouths; mind what they say, and be careful to follow their Directions in all things.

For

For even *we* who have the *Scriptures*, the *lively Oracles of God*, may perish for want of Knowledge as well as they that have them not, unless we make that Use of them which they were given for; unless we are diligent in reading them, and careful to practise what they teach. For the *Rich Man* spoken of in this *Parable* had the *Scriptures*, but his meer having them did not keep him from *Hell*. And his *five surviving Brethren* had likewise the *Scriptures*, and yet were then in a fair way of following their Brother to that *Place of Torment*. *They had Moses and the Prophets but they did not hear them.*

And this also may be our Case, who have not only *these*, but also *Christ* and his *Apostles* Preaching to us; if we do not *hear* them; for what Advantage can it be to us to have good Instructors, if we will not mind what they say; if we stop our ears to all their Counsels and Reproofs? No Man was ever made a Scholar only by having a good Library in his Possession: No Man ever learnt any Art or Science, tho' it was never so well taught in any Book, only by keeping the Book in his Chamber, or carrying it about in his Pocket. And as little shall we be the wiser only by having the Holy Scriptures, tho' (as the Apostle says) they are able to make us wise unto Salvation, if we do not read <sup>2 Tim. 3. 15.</sup> and study them with an honest Design to furnish our selves from thence with a stock of useful Knowledge, and with a firm Resolution to lead our Lives according to the Directions which they give us.

Nay so far shall we be from receiving any Advantage only by our having the Holy Scriptures given us, and free Liberty allowed us to look into them; (a Privilege we of this Nation have above most of our Neighbors)

that

that if we do not read and study them, it will be much the worse for us; our Condemnation will be the greater, and our Destruction so much the more certain. For the Case of those who offend thro' Ignorance, when their Ignorance is unaffected, is very pitiable; and tho' we can't certainly say how God will deal with those who had no clear Revelation of his Will made to them; this we may be sure of, that God, who is a merciful God, will deal mercifully with them. If I had not come and spoken unto them, says our Saviour, if they had not had Sin. But the Case will be quite otherwise with those, who knew their Master's will and did not do it; They, as our Saviour says, shall be beaten with many Stripes. And it will be all one if they did not know it, if their Ignorance of it was occasioned by their own fault, in neglecting those Means of Knowledge which God has afforded them; And much rather, if their ignorance of their Duty was affected and chosen, that they might Sin with less disturbance of Mind; for our Saviour's Judgment in this Case is very plain (and 'tis his Judgment by which we must stand or fall to all Eternity) *Joh. iii. 19. This is the Condemnation that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkness rather than Light, because their Deeds were Evil.*

Having therefore Moses and the Prophet, and also Christ and his Apostles, continually Preaching to us in the Books of Holy Scripture, let us hear them; This is both our Duty, and our Interest.

And that our Study of the Scripture may be with good success, and we may thereby be thoroughly furnished unto all good Work; Let us Pray as we are taught by our Church in a most excellent Collect suited to the Subject I have been Discourfing of.

*Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our Learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by Patience and Comfort of thy Holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast our Blessed Hope of everlasting Life which thou hast given us by our Jesus Christ. Amen.*



P I N I S.

ERRATA. Page 55. line 10. for some, read same.

THE  
Blessedness of the Poor in Spirit.

A  
S E R M O N  
Preach'd before the  
Q U E E N  
A T

St. James's, Nov. 17. 1706.

By OFSPRING BLACKALL, D.D.  
Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

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