

GODS^S CALL

T O

His People

To Turn unto Him;

Together with

His PROMISE to Turn unto them.

Opened and Applied in

II. SERMONS

At two Publick Fasting-dayes appointed by Authority.

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Church of Christ at *Boston* in *New-England*.

Published at the desire of sundry Friends.

CAMBRIDGE:

Printed by S. G. and M. J. for *John Usher* of *Boston*,

M D C L X I X.



G O D S C A L L
T O
H I S P E O P L E
To turn unto Him;

Together with His Promise to turn unto them.

Z E C H. I. 3.

Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts.

THe time when this Propheſie was given forth by *Zechariah* at the commandment of God, you may ſee in the firſt Verſe of this Chapter; it was in the eighth Moneth, in the ſecond year of *Darius*. In the time of the reign of *Abaſuerus* and *Artaxerxes*, the work of building the Temple was hindred, untill the ſecond year of *Darius* King of *Persia*, *Ezra* 4.24. But *Darius*, in the beginning of his reign, finding in the Records *Cyrus* his Decree for the building of the Temple at *Jerusalem*, ſtrictly commanded that Work ſhould proceed, and that none ſhould hinder the *Jews* therein; and that their Enemies ſhould aſſiſt them, and give them all neceſſary expences out of the Kings Tribute beyond the River, &c. under a dreadful penalty, as may be ſeen

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in the sixth Chapter of *Ezra*. The event was, that the *Elders of the Jews* builded, and prospered therein through the prophesyings of the Prophets *Haggai* and *Zechariah*, *Ezra* 6.14. and the Work was finished in the sixth year of *Darius*, Ver. 15.

The unbelieving *Jews* in Christs time said, *Fourty and six years was this Temple in building, and wilt thou rear it in three dayes?* *Joh. 2. 20.* For *Araxerxes*, surnamed *Long-hand*, reigned fourty, or one and fourty years; in the beginning of his reign the Work ceased, by his Decree against it, till the second year of *Darius*, who succeeded him, and it was finished in the sixth year of his reign. Christ spake of the Temple of his Body, *Joh. 2. 21.* and therefore their discourse of the material Temple at *Jerusalem*, was impertinent. Yet from the History of those times, two things may be noted:

1. That God sometimes suffers the Enemies of true Religion to prevail, for the hinderance of the building of Gods House for a long time.

2. That in such Times God discovereth in his own people a sinful remiiness to neglect the publick service of God, and to be too intent upon their own private concernments, and to satisfie themselves with such a pretence as this; We cannot help it, the Adversaries are many and potent, and the King of *Persia* is against the Work; therefore we will leave the publick work till better times, and will minde our own houses and domestick affairs. But God was displeas'd with them, and shewed it by smiting them in their private advantages by the Fruits of the Earth, for their disregard of his publick Worship, as the Lord told them by *Haggai*, *Hagg. 1. 4 — 12.* and in two moneths after he sent *Zechariah* to encourage them to go on strenuously in the work of the Lord, that had been so long neglected by their fault.

In the second Verse of this Chapter he told them that God had been sore displeas'd with their fathers; and in the 4, 5, and 6th Verses, he tells them for what God was displeas'd with their fathers; and from thence infers the Exhortation in my Text, as the illative particle (*Therefore*) shews.

In the words we may note,

1. The *Command* of God to this Prophet, *Say unto them.*

2. The *Messag:* which he must deliver to them, consisting for the Matter of it, of three parts: 1. A Precept, *Turn unto me.* 2. A Promise, *And I will turn unto you.* 3. A Ratification, or Confirmation of both, yet applied to each severally, *Saith the Lord of Hosts.* For Exposition of the words:

Turn unto me] Renounce all Idols and mens Devices in my Worship; acknowledge me alone to be your God, and my Word to be your onely Rule, with unfeigned Repentance for your former departures from me, and disobedience to my Word; be my people, and observe my Commandments: for, to cry to God for Corn, &c. is not a turning to God, but to the Creature, *Hof. 7. 14.* but it is to seek God for himself, when nothing will satisfie us besides God himself to be our God, *Psal. 144. 15.* and when we mourn, not so much for the loss, or want of these things, as for Gods displeasure for our sins that have incensed his wrath, and so seek Gods face, & reconciliation with him in Christ, *Psal. 4. 6, 7.* God doth not require this of them, as if it were in their power to do it, but to convince them that it is their duty, whereunto he would excite them by the Ministry of his Prophet, and would quicken and enable them by the efficacy of his Spirit accompanying the same.

And I will turn unto you] Gods turning to us is not like our turning to God: for, our turning to God supposeth a change in us, but Gods turning to us is *without shadow of turning*, *Jam. 1. 17.* both in his Nature, *Mal. 3. 6.* and in his Will, *Isa. 46. 10.* but it is to be understood in respect of his Effects; that is to say, I will be reconciled to you, and shew it by suitable effects, as *Micah 7. 19.* *He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us.*

Saith the Lord of Hosts] This Attribute shews his Absolute dominion over all Creatures in Heaven and Earth, whom he can dispose of by his command, to execute his vengeance upon those that disobey him: in this sense it is added to the Precept. *And to be Instruments of dispensing the effects of his favour to*

those that turn unto him, and obey him; in this sense it is added to the Promise: In both it is suited with their condition, who had experience of the former, and upon their returning to him should finde him ready to use his Hosts for their good.

First, from the *Message* which God commands the Prophet to deliver to them, as the Means whereby God would bring the Jews to turn unto himself, that it might be well with them, the Ministry of his Prophets, *Haggai* and *Zechariah*, note:

Doct. I. Gods usuall way which he will bless for the converting or turning of elect sinners to himself, is by sending his Ministers with a Message from himself to them, in their Preaching Gods Word unto them.

From these words, *Say thou unto them, Thus saith the Lord of Hosts.* I grant, God is able, by his Absolute Power, to convert whom he will, and by what means he will; and that God hath in extraordinary times and cases converted some to himself without these means: thus he wrought faith in *Rahab*, Heb. 11. 31. yet ordinarily he will do it only by these means, where they may be had. This may be cleared from Scripture in a twofold Conversion; 1. From the state of sin to the state of grace, *Acts* 26. 18. 2. From evil in their practice, so *David*: this holds in all the degrees of Conversion to God; 1. Hereby he is wont to convince men effectually of sin, *Job* 16. 9. and to a saving sense of it, and remorse for it. See this in *David*, to whom he sent *Nathan*, 2 Sam. 12. and afterwards *Gad*, in 2 Sam. 24. 10. his heart smote him; how came that to pass? see *Ver.* 11, 12, 13. And, though it is said of *Manasseh*, 2 Chron. 33. 12, 13. that when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his father, and prayed unto him, and he was intreated of him; yet the affliction of it self did not turn him to God, but the principal means of his repentance, and turning to God, were the words of the *Sermons* that spake to him in the name of the Lord God of Israel, as it appeareth in *Ver.* 18. So *Peters* Ministry, in *Acts* 2. 37. Hence the Word of
God

God is likened to *fire*, and to a *hammer*, Jer. 23. 29. in its efficacy. 2. Hereby God is wont to bring men to Christ, and to work faith in their hearts, unto their reconciliation with God by him, Rom. 10. 14, 15. 2 Cor. 5. 18, 19. The Ministry is committed to men, but the Efficacy is from Gods Spirit, Isa. 57. 19. Joh. 6. 44, 45. Eph. 1. 13.

Reas. 1. Because the Lord will thus honour his own Ordinance. He could have converted the Eunuch immediately by his Spirit, yet he sent *Philip* to him, Acts 8. 29. Yea, when himself hath begun the work, yet he hath sent Ministers to them, that the work might be effected by them; as *Ananias* to *Paul*, Acts 9. 11. *Peter* to *Cornelius*, Acts 10. and he ascribes to them as his Instruments, that which is his own work; 1 Tim. 4. 16.

Reas. 2. Because the Lord will thus honour the freeness and power of his grace, in working more effectually by weaker means. The whole Scripture is breathed of God, and therefore infallible, and stamped with Gods own Authority in every sentence of it, 2 Tim. 3. 16. and the Preaching of man is weaker in it self, and more liable to be slighted by proud men, Jer. 43. 2. yet God puts forth his efficacy more in the Word preached, then in the Word read, 1 Cor. 1. 21. for *his strength is made perfect in weakness*, 2 Cor. 12. 9. and therefore the Apostle notes this as Gods end in this dispensation, 2 Cor. 4. 7.

Reas. 3. Because thus the Lord will make known the efficacy of his Spirit in and with the Word preached, that the glory of turning elect sinners to himself, may be ascribed wholly to himself: hence the Ministry of the Word is called *the ministration of the Spirit*, 2 Cor. 3. 8. because the Spirit accompanieth that Ordinance; therefore they that disobeyed the word spoken by the former Prophets, are said to harden themselves against *the words which the Lord of Hosts sent in his Spirit* by them; therefore there came a great wrath from the Lord of Hosts, Zech. 7. 12. So *Steven's* hearers are said to resist the holy Ghost, Act. 7. 51. Hence the Apostle ascribes the conversion of men by the Ministry of the Gospel, onely to God, Gal. 2. 8. Rom. 1. 16. 1 Cor 3. 5, 6, 7. 2 Cor. 10. 4, 5. and the Heathen man converted confessed it,

1 Cor.

1 Cor. 14. 24, 25. nor can it be considered to any less power, if we consider the quality of the afflictions that have been converted by it: *Isa.* 11. 4, 6. *Wolves, Leopards, Lions*: *Mat.* 21. 31. *Publicans and Harlots*: *Acts* 6. 7. *Scuffers*, ver. 37. open and professed enemies, *Job.* 7. 32, 46.

Use 1. for Instruction: 1. That it is no easie thing for sinners to turn unto God. 1. You see great and long-continued afflictions, of themselves, cannot convert men: so the Text. The building of the Temple had been hindred above fourty years, which they should have been affected with, as an effect of Gods displeasure for some sins yet remaining among them, and they should have been provoked thereby to turn unto God: but on the contrary, they turned their thoughts to minde the building of their own houses. Then the Lord was further displeased, and afflicted them with scarcity of food, by Drought and Dearth; yet they were dedolent and stupid, till the Lord sent the Prophet *Haggai*, to call them to consider their wayes, and to shew them for what cause this Judgement was upon them, and to stir them up to remove the Cause, that the Effect might cease. 2. The multitude and variety of afflictions one following another successively, cannot of themselves turn sinners to God, *Prov.* 27. 22. This we may see in *Pharaoh*, who though under the stroke of punishment he sometimes confessed his sin, and promised amendment, yet after ten plagues, remained as hard-hearted as at first: And in *Ahaz*, 2 *Chron.* 28. 22. and in the people of *Israel*, *Amos* 4. 6 — 12. 3. Nor can outward Mercies of themselves work this, *Isa.* 26. 10. 4. Nor can awakings of Conscience by the shameful and dreadful Effects of sin, of themselves work this. This made *Adam* fly to hide himself, when he heard Gods voice walking in the garden, *Genes.* 3. 15. Nor can the outward Ministry of the Gospel, though accompanied with Miracles, of themselves work this: this we see in Christs hearers, *Mat.* 11. 20, to 25. unless the Spirit by his divine Efficacy turn men to God, it cannot be done. See *Dent.* 29. 2, 3, 4.

2. See from whence this comes: 1. From the many Advantages

vantages and Helps that sin hath to keep its possession and dominion in mens hearts, as, 1. The rooted Enmity against God in the Nature of man, *Coloss. 1. 21.* and Custome addes strength thereto, *Jer. 13. 23.* and hereunto the course of the world, and the working of Satan, *Eph. 2. 2, 3.* and to these Gods desertion, *Psal. 81. 11, 12.* but above all, the love of sin in the members, which works against the law of the minde, and captivates even those that have a principle of grace in them. Paul complained of this, in *Rom. 7. 23.* *I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my minde, &c.* A Law there signifies, a strong compelling inclination, which forceth to its obedience, as it were by authority, *2 Pet. 2. 14.* 2. It is called the law of the members, because it inclines not by reason, but by naturall force, as the members of the body are moved and acted by the will. 3. It is said to war against the law of the minde, to shew that there is a strong faction of lusts against grace: the members are many, so are these lusts, which constrain to evil, and restrain from good.

2. Learn therefore to proportion your endeavours to the difficulty of the work. It is an evident proof that they are yet unconverted, who think its an easie thing to turn unto God, *Matth. 11. 12.* What then is to be done? 1. In sense of your own inability, cry mightily unto God day and night, and leave not praying for it till the thing be attained, *Jer. 31. 18.* *Lam. 5. 24.* *Ephraim* and the ten Tribes finding that Afflictions could not do it, pray to God to turn them: And the two Tribes found that their Captivity in *Babylon*, of it self, could not do it, therefore they cry unto God that he would do it. 2. Complain unto God of the Impediments of it in your selves, and pray him to remove them, *Isa. 63. 17.* 3. Look unto Christ for efficacy to be put forth upon you, in and by the Ministry of the Gospel. Though the Disciples could not cast out the Devil out of the Childe, yet Christ could and did: therefore the father of him took a right course, when he brought his son that was possessed with a Devil unto Christ, *Mark 9. 17, to 30.* When lusts are too strong for a man, Christ comes as a Prince

and overcomes them, *Acts* 5. 31. Do not rest in your own resolutions, but go to God in Christ for strength, *Eph.* 3. 16, 20. where the mighty power that works in us, is the power of Christs Death and Resurrection: Believe in him, and thou shalt overcome. 4. Improve all the wayes which God useth for this end, that the purpose of God in them may be effected; to wit, (1.) Attend his Word, in Precepts, Promises, Threatnings, and the impressions of them in thy heart at any time. (2.) His Providences, in some great cross upon the commission of a sin; some dangerous sickness, though not unto death; some inward terrours of Conscience upon sin committed; some evil report, or some judgement executed in our sight upon another, for like sin to yours, *Dan.* 5. 22. *Jer.* 3. 8.

Use 2. For *Reproof* of two sorts of people: 1. Of such as for worldly Accommodation, live in places where they have not the Word powerfully preached to them. Remember *Lot*. 2. Of such as live under such means, but are unprofitable and disobedient hearers. Two things I have to say unto such.

1. No course that God ordinarily takes with men will cause you to turn unto God, if this doth not, *Luke* 16. 31. therefore do not look at this (That you are not the better toward God after you have lived long under the Ministry of the Word) as a small evil; for it is great in Gods account, *Heb.* 6. 8. If you be not the better, you are the worse by it, *2 Cor.* 2. 16.

2. Marvel not if God frustrate your Expectations in the fruits of the Earth, when you frustrate his in the fruits of the Word, *Isa.* 5. 2. *Luke* 13. 6, 7. for God hath threatned this punishment against those that disobey his Word, *Lev.* 26. 14, 21, 23, 27. and a worse famine then that of Bread, even of the Word, in *Amos* 8. 11, 12.

Secondly, From the *Message* it self: Hence sundry Doctrines may be observed.

1. From Gods suspending of his promise of turning to sinners, till their turning to him;

That it is in vain for any to expect Gods turning to them, that do not turn to him.

2. From

2. From the Connection of the Promise with the Precept ;

That Gods readines to turn to those that turn to him, should mightily prevail with sinners to turn to him.

3. From Gods promising to turn to them that turn to him ;

That Gods being reconciled to sinners, will infallibly follow their turning to him.

4. From Gods Attribute, *The Lord of Hosts*, added to confirm both the Precept and Promise ;

That if sinners break through all impediments to turn to God, as the Lord of Hosts, God will break through all difficulties to do them good, as the Lord of Hosts.

From Gods suspending his promise of turning to men, till they turn unto him, and implicitey threatning to arm all his Creatures against them for their hurt, if they do not turn to him ; This Point of Doctrine may be gathered :

Doct. II. *That it is in vain for any sinfull persons to expect Gods turning to them in mercy and favour, who do not turn unto him with true repentance and reformation ; but while they continue in their sins, they must expect that God will come forth against them, as the Lord of Hosts, commanding and ordering all his Creatures against them for their hurt.*

There are two parts of this Doctrine :

1. *That it is in vain for any that continue in their sins, to expect any mercy or favour from God.*

2. *That such ought to expect, that Gods wrath incensed against them by their sins and impenitency, may be executed against them by all and any of his Creatures, as he is the Lord of Hosts.*

In the handling of this Doctrine, I must first shew what this Turning to the Lord implies and imports. Secondly, prove the

the Doctrine, in both the parts of it severally.

First, *Turning to the Lord*, implies, 1. That by sin continued in, men turn from the Lord, and against the Lord: as when men turn from one another in enmity, they turn their backs one to another, and their faces to opposite objects; so it is in this case, continuers in sin turn from God and his Word, to Sin, and the World, and Satan, which are opposite to God in his holy and righteous Laws; and God turns his face and favour from them, and his wrath and indignation against them. Hence it is that the Lord saith of those that disobey the instructions of his word, that *they have turned the back to him, and not the face*, Jerem. 3. 33. and accordingly he threatneth them, that he will shew them his back, and not his face, in the day of their calamity. Thus you see what this turning to the Lord implies.

Secondly, This *turning to the Lord* imports two things; Repentance for, and from all their evil wayes; and Reformation of them: A hearty turning to God, through faith in Christ, and unfeigned love to God in Christ, with an universal conformity to his holy and righteous Rules and wayes; as they resolved in *Isa. 26. 13.* It is true, that we cannot turn unto God of our selves, till he turn us unto himself, as you may see in *Deut. 29. 2, 3, 4.* yet, when God calleth the vessels of mercy to turn unto him, and addeth his Promise for their encouragement thereunto, his Spirit in and by the promise, works converting grace in them: which works in them 1. Hearty prayer unto God to convert them, as *Isai. 63. 17. Jerem. 31. 18. Lam. 5. 31.* 2. Actual Conversion to God, in answer to Gods calling them thereunto, *Psal. 27. 8.* as in *Jer. 31. 22.* This turning to God is right,

1. When it ariseth from right motives. The right motives of *turning to God*, are not Temporal, onely for removing of some temporal Affliction, whether felt or feared; or for obtaining some temporal good, which we want and desire: for such a turning is not to the Lord, but to our selves, as you may see in *Hos. 7. 16.* with *Zech. 7. 5.* But the right motives of *turn-*

ing to God are Eternal, viz. A serious and fixed apprehension of Eternal life and death, in relation to God, and his everlasting favour and wrath, in the incomprehensible greatness and vastness of them: when these are not transient and vanishing; but fixed in the heart by the Spirit, and when they are looked at, not as farre off, but as present; Then they work an effectuall and present conversion to God. Therefore Christ taught his Disciples to use this motive in preaching the Gospel, for the conversion of sinners to God, *Mark* 16.16. and Christ himself used the same motive, *Job* 3.18,36. and the reason is, because then a man seeth better and stronger reasons for his turning to God, then the world can give for his continuing in sin, *2 Cor.* 4. 18. from love to God, *Psal.* 97.10. *Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.*

2. When it's done in a right manner, with the whole heart, *Joel* 2.12. that is, when a full resolution of turning to God, follows a full illumination and conviction; otherwise, when men have some motives to turn, but not enough, they are not fully convinced, and so they turn but by halves, and feignedly, *Jer.* 3. 10. Hence a right turning to God, is described as the Effect opening mens eyes, *Acts* 26. 18. wherein is included the opening of their hearts, as in *Acts* 16.14. *Lydia.*

3. When it produceth suitable effects: 1. That sin, which had dominion in them, is dispossessed, and grace is made Master of the house; so as though sin gets in and dwells in them, yet it is by intrusion and usurpation, as a Thief or Enemy, which are expelled as soon as they are discovered, and sufficient strength is gained. 2. That sin is hated; as the Lord commanded *Israel* to do against *Amalek*, *1 Sam.* 15. 3. this appears,

1. By their thrusting out the motions and lusts of sin out of their hearts with indignation, *Isa.* 30.22. and shutting the doors of the Soul, the Eyes and Ears, against temptations to it. They say in effect, as *Ephraim* did, in *Hos.* 14.8. *What have I to do any more with Idols?* Thus *Amnon* dealt with *Tamar*, *1 Sam.* 13.15,17.

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2. By their seeking the utter destruction and full mortification of sin: for, hatred is implacable against the whole kinde, as we see in a Wolf against all Sheep; nothing will satisfie but the death of its object, as the Lord commanded *Israel* to do against *Amalek*, 1 Sam. 15. 3.

3. By a continuall fight against sin, till it be fully subdued. Gal. 5. 17. *The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.* 1 Pet. 2. 11. *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which warre against the soul.* Hence they will account them their best friends that help them against sin, their worst enemy.

Two Reasons of the first part of the Doctrine; *That it is in vain for sinfull persons to expect that God should turn to them in mercy and favour, who do not turn to him with true repentance and reformation.*

Reas. 1. Because continuers in sin do frustrate Gods end and expectation, both in all that he doth for men, and in all that he requireth to be done by them.

For the first; The Church is Gods *Husbandry*, 1 Cor. 3. 9. Ministers are the dressers of his Vineyard, Luke 13. 7. the Ordinances are his manuring of it: and is not good fruit the end of Husbandry? Therefore where this follows not, what can be expected? but, as Isa. 5. 5, 6, 7. *God should take away the hedge thereof, break down the wall thereof, and lay it waste:* and, as Luke 13. 6, 7. in the Parable of the Figtree, when the dresser of the Vineyard came three years seeking fruit, and found none, *Cut it down, why cumberst it the ground?* Christ comes in Ordinances, and Providences; To what end? *To purifie the sons of Levi, and to purge them:* but when the Means attain not this End, see what follows, Jer. 6. 30. *Reprobate silver shall men call them.*

So for the second, what God requireth to be done by his people; He requireth Reading, Hearing, Meditating, Praying, Conference, &c. but God regardeth not these performances, except the doers of them turn unto him; if they prevail not

to turn men to the Lord, they are but *bodily exercises*, that profit little, 1 Tim. 4. 8. In Rom. 2. 29. Paul distinguisheth outward Circumcision, and a *few outwardly*, from that which is inward, and concludeth, that the latter *bath praise of God*, not the former, whose praise is onely of men, who see onely that which is outward; but God searcheth the heart, if that he turn not unto him, the rest he regardeth not.

Reas. 2. Because God rejecteth all other grounds, whereupon men expect that God should turn unto them his face and favour in the time of their Affliction, if this their *turning unto God* be wanting; viz.

1. Sinfull Childrens relation to godly Parents: Matth. 3. 9. *Think not to say within your selves, We have Abraham to our father: John 8. 39, to 45. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abrahams children, you would do the works of Abraham.*

2. Grown persons, (1) Professing Religion, Psal. 78. 34, to 38. (2) Covenanting with the Lord and his People, Psal. 50. 16, 17. Hos. 8. 1, 2, 3. *He shall come as an Eagle against the House of the Lord, because they have transgressed my Covenant, &c.*

3. Church-priviledges, Jer. 7. 4. *Trust not in lying words, saying, The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord are these. What is become of the Church of the Jews, and of those seven Golden Candlesticks, and of the Church at Rome?*

4. Performance of Religious Duties: Isa. 1. 11----15. *To what purpose is the multitude of your Sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord? &c.*

5. Extraordinary Humiliations: Isa. 58. 3, 4, 5, 6. *Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness? &c.*

Secondly, One Reason of the second part of the Doctrine; *That while they continue in sin, they must expect that God will come out against them as the Lord of Hosts, &c.*

Reas. Because continuers in sin, continue their *rebellion*

of God. Wherefore I may say to them, as *Paul* in *1 Cor. 10. 22.* *He whom you provoke to wrath is the Lord of Hosts: All Creatures in Heaven, Earth and Sea, are his Souldiers to fight against them. Angels are called the heavenly Host, Luke 2. 13. there are an innumerable company of Angels, Heb. 12. 22. and they all excell in strength: one of them destroyed all the first-born of Egypt together; & one destroyed an hundred eighty five thousand Assyrians in one night; the Stars in their courses fought from heaven by their influences against Sisera, Judg. 5. 20. the Lord slew many of the Amorites with great Hail-stones cast down from heaven upon them, Josh. 10. 11. See what Armies the Lord imployed against Egypt in the ten Plagues, Exod. Chap. 7, 8, 9, 10. and against the Israelites, Joel 1. 3, 4. which are called Gods great Army, Joel 2. 25. See also Amos 4. 9. The time would fail me, if I should proceed unto particular Instances. When God would destroy the old World with water, he opened all the Fountains of the great Deep, and the windows of Heaven, to make a Deluge, so that the waters arose fifteen cubits upwards above the highest Mountains, and all flesh died that moved upon the earth, Genes. 7. 20, 21. When he would destroy *Solom* in a moment, he Rained Hell out of Heaven, as *Salvian* said; or as *Moses* saith, he rained upon *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah* brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, and overthrew those Cities, and all their Inhabitants, Gen. 19. 24, 25.*

Use 1. For the furtherance of our humiliation before the Lord, and that we may justify the Lords righteousness in the Calamities which we have already felt, or may further fear, for our sins are great. *Isa. 24. 5.* *The earth also is defiled under the Inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the Laws, changed the Ordinance, and broken the everlasting Covenant. The Lord may say of us, as Jer. 5. 23, 24, 25. But this people hath a revolting and rebellious heart, they are revolted and gone, &c. and our Impenitency, as Amos 4. 7. to the end. And if he should give us up to forreign Enemies, he may justly expostulate with us, as Jer. 2. 17. Hast thou not procured this unto thy self,*

to turn unto Him.

Self, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, when he led thee by the way? and upbraided us, as ver. 19. Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backsliding shall reprove thee: know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing, and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of Hosts. So that whatever the Lord hath done, or may yet further do against us, we must humble our selves, and say, The Lord is righteous, 2 Chron. 12. 6. and with Daniel, Dan. 9. 7. O Lord, righteousness belongeth to thee, and to us confusion of faces, as at this day, &c.

Use 2. for Exhortation: 1. To behold the works of the Lord, and to consider them, Psal. 78. 5. Haggai 1. 7. Thus saith the Lord, Consider your ways in your hearts.

2. As Lam. 3. 40. Search narrowly, as they did for leaven before the Passover, and diligently; for self-love makes it hard to finde it: Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Psal. 139. 24. sayes David, Search me, and try me, see if there be any way of wickedness, &c. If any way of wickedness be found in you, it will cost thee thy life: A way of Envy, of evil speaking, of murmuring, of earthly-mindedness, of sinning secretly, of omissions, or slight performances of duties continued in: Take warning by what hath befallen others, to fear God. This the Lord expecteth, Zeph. 3. 6, 7, 8. I have cut off the Nations, their Towers are desolate, I have made their streets waste, that none passed by; their Cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none Inhabitant: I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction, &c.

3. To prepare to meet God, Amos 4. 12. by turning to him, Hos. 6. 1. with true Repentance, and speedy Reformation. Jam. 4. 8, 9. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you: Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purifie your hearts, ye double-minded: be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. When you have provoked the Lord to wrath by sin, think not to take up the matter by Confessions, or Prayers, or Fastings; but remember

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remember the Doctrine, That God requireth these, and turning to him besides. This was the counsel of God to *Joshua*, *Josh.* 7. 10, 11. Also we must have good Purposes and Intentions, yet these are not sufficient, unless they produce a reall and actuall turning to God. *Deut.* 5. 29. *O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep my Commandments alwayes, that it might be well with them, and with their Children for ever.* Natural Conscience enlightned and awakened, and self-love seeking a mans own preservation and salvation, may work such good intentions and purposes, but they neither continue, because they arise from temporal motives, or self-ends; nor are they effectually, because the subject in whom they are is irregenerate, and carnall, and therefore such are his purposes; and *all flesh is as grass, that withereth and fadeth, but 1 Pet.* 1. 23, 24, 25. *the word of the Lord endureth for ever.*

Lastly, Turn from your evil wayes to God, and the Rules of his Word. This I might apply to sundry particulars; but at present I shall speak onely to one Abuse of this season of the Year, which is called *CHRISTMAS*: which is to be witnessed against, whether it be done upon a *Religious*, or *Civil*, or *Mixed-Account*.

1. If upon a *Religious Account*; None can sanctifie Time to make a day holy to the Lord, but the sanctifying Spirit, in and by some Word of God in Scripture. The Feasts of *Purim* were Civil Festivals, called *Good dayes of feasting, and sending gifts one to another, not Holy times*, separated from common uses to holy. Now we no where finde warrant in Scripture for setting apart the day of *Christs Nativity* from common use, to religious holy use: Indeed the day of his Resurrection, the *first day of the week*, that is by Christ sanctified to be the *Christians Christian Sabbath*: for that was the beginning of *Christs Exaltation*, but the day of his Birth, was the beginning of his *Humiliation and Abasement*; so that there is not a parity of reason between them.

2. If upon a *Civil Account*; How comes *Christs Name* to be

be used in it, that it is called *CHRISTMAS-DAY*? whether *Mass* be taken in the *Saxon* sense, as signifying a *Feast*; or in the *Popish* sense, special *Masses* being appointed and used in *Popery* on that day, I will not now dispute: but if in the first sense, how is this Time abused by all profane, and loose spirited persons, unto *Gluttony*, *Drunkennes*, and *mis-spending* of precious time, in *Gaming* at *Cards* and *Dice*, and other wickednesses? as if *Christ* was born, and given to us, to set mens lulls at liberty, and their persons to serve sin, and *Satan*; or as if *Christians* would imitate the *Pagans*, in their *Bacchanalia*, and *Saturnalia*, rather than *Christ* in his temperance, and doing good.

3. If upon a *Mixed Account*; This is not the time of *Christ's* *Nativity*: for *Christ* was not born in *Winter*, but rather in *September*, as I shall evince;

1. From *Augustus* *Cesar's* *Taxing* all the *Roman* *Empire* at the time when *Christ* was born, whereupon *all went to be taxed, every one to his own City*; which caused *Joseph*, with *Mary* his espoused *Wife*, to go unto *Bethlehem*, at that time when, and place where *Christ* was born, *Luke* 2. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. Now the *Winter* had been an unfit season for such affairs and travels.

2. From the time when the *Angel* reported the *Birth* of *Christ* to the *Shepherds*; it was when *they were keeping watch over their flocks by night*, *Luke* 2. 8, 9, to 15. Now *Shepherds* watch their sheep by night, not in the open fields, in the *Winter*, but in the beginning of *Autumn*: in the *Winter* they house them.

3. From the description of *Christ's* *Incarnation*, in *Joh.* 1. 14. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*: The word *ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν*, which signifies, *He tabernacled among us*, alluding to the *Feast* of *Tabernacles*, which was on the *fifteenth day of the seventh Moneth*, *Levit.* 23. 24. which was a type of *Christ's* *Incarnation*, when they were commanded to leave their filled houses, and store-houses, and to dwell in *Boothes* seven dayes, to teach them to rejoyce, not in their worldly abundance,

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abundance, but in Christ Jesus. In allusion hereunto, the conversion of the Nations to Christ, is expressed by their *keeping the Feast of Tabernacles*, in *Zech. 14. 16.* Lay down therefore all former vain pretences, and yield to this Truth, *That the keeping of Christmas in this season, is unseasonable, and in the manner as it is usually done, is unscripturall, irrationall, and unlawfull.*

We proceed to the third and last part of my Text, containing Gods Promise, *I will turn unto you*; together with the Ratification of it, *Saith the Lord of Hosts.* Whence this Doctrine may be collected :

Doct. III. *When people who have been formerly under the effects of Gods displeasure, do turn unto him with unfeigned Repentance, and Reformation of their former evil wayes, God will certainly turn unto them in mercy, and make all his Creatures serviceable for their good, as he is the Lord of Hosts.*

Two particulars must be cleared and proved;

1. *That God will certainly turn to such in mercy.*
2. *That as he is the Lord of Hosts, he will make all his Creatures serviceable for their good.*

I. *That God will certainly turn to such in mercy*; that is, he will alter the Effects of his Providences toward them, that whereas formerly they had been afflicting, now they shall be comforting, healing, restoring. Herein two things are meant;

First, That he will pardon their sins, and so remove the impediments of their good: *Jer. 5. 24, 25. Your iniquities have turned away things, and your sins have withholden good things from you.* See *Isa. 1. 16, 18.* He had exhorted them to *cease to do evil, learn to do well,* ver. 16, 17. And if they should object, *What good shall we get by this, if our sins and miseries be so great as you have said?* To prevent this, he addes, *v. 18.*

Though

Though your sins were of the deepest dye, as Crimson and Scarlet are, yet you shall be as perfectly cleansed from them all, as if you should see Scarlet become as white as Snow, or Crimson as white as Wooll, none of the former tincture remaining. And because this is a thing difficult for sinners to believe, he addes, *Come, let us reason together*: as if he should say, It will require strong reasoning to cause you to believe this. Therefore the Lord useth strong Reasons to confirm it.

Reas. 1. From his Essentiall Properties, *Exod. 34. 6, 7.*
Obj. But he is just also. *A.* True; and that is for your encouragement: for Christ hath satisfied his Justice as your Surety, and it would not be just that he should require the payment of one and the same debt twice: And he is Faithfull also; see *1 Joh. 1. 9.* *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Reas. 2. From his engagement by his Word: Therefore David said, in *Psal. 56. 10.* *In God I will praise his Word; in the Lord I will praise his Word.* Now, you may see how strongly he is engaged by his Word, before many witnesses: in *Micah 7. 20.* *Thou wilt perform the truth unto Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn to our fathers from the dayes of old.* Hereupon the Apostle infers, *Acts 10. 43.* *To him give all the Prophets witness, that through his Name whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins.* *1 Joh. 5. 9, 10, 11.* *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, &c.* *Psal. 119. 4.* *Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.*

Reas. 3. From his Fatherly Relation in Christ to Believers by the Covenant of grace, *Joh. 20. 17.* *2 Cor. 6. 18.* he is their Father, and they his sons and daughters. Hence he pitieth them, *Psal. 103. 13, 14.* and spareth them, *Mal. 3. 17.* and upon their repentance renews the manifestation of his Fatherly love to them, *Ier. 31. 18, 19, 20.*

Reas. 4. From the Means and Instrument whereby forgiveness is purchased for Believers, and conveyed to them, *Ephes. 1. 7.* *Heb. 12. 24.* Compare 1. The Persons; *Abel*, a meer man,

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man, with Christ the Mediator: there is an infinite disparity. *Acts* 20.28. God purchased the Church with his own blood. 2. The speaking of their Blood; there is no proportion in their value and virtue, *Heb.* 9.14. 3. The thing spoken for: *Abels* blood cried for vengeance against *Cain*, whereunto God is slow; *Christs* blood requires forgiveness of humbled and believing sinners, wherein God delighteth, *Micah* 7. 18. and ready to it, *Psal.* 86.5.

Reas. 5. From the Freeness of God herein, *Rom.* 4. 24,25. he requireth no condition, but coming to Christ, as beggars do to a free dole, without which none can receive it; and thirsting, without which none will duely prize Christ, or come unto him upon Gospel terms, *Joh.* 7.37. *Rev.* 21.6. & 22. 17. and when they are come unto Christ, he poureth upon them the Spirit of grace, &c. *Zech.* 12.10. and giveth repentance and forgiveness of sin, *Acts* 5.31. *Obj.* But my sins are 1. Many, 2. Great, 3. Iterated. *Ans.* So were the people of *Israels* sins; yet see *Ezek.* 36.25. & *Zech.* 13. 1. a Fountain alwayes cleansing those that come to it.

II. That when people who have formerly been under Gods displeasure, do turn unto him with true Repentance, and Reformation of their former evil wayes, God will remove the Effects of his displeasure, and do them good.

Reas. 1. For his Promise sake, *2 Chron.* 7.14.

Reas. 2. Because, the Cause being taken away, the Effect ceaseth. There is a Chain of evils, whereof Sin is the first Link, and draws on all the rest; whether Temporal punishments, as you may see at large in *Deut.* 28.15, to the end: or Spiritual, *Rom.* 1. 21, 24. 1. Spiritual desertions: hence the Spirit of the Lord departed from *Saul*, *1 Sam.* 16. Gods withdrawing his merciful and gracious presence from a people, brings all woes and miseries upon them, *Hos.* 1.12. and sin causeth this, *Isa.* 59. 1,2. 2. Tradition, or leaving them to themselves, *Psal.* 81. 11, 12. But when sin is done away by Repentance on mans part, and forgiveness on Gods part, then will the Lord

to turn unto Him

return to his people in mercy, and do them good, *Joel* 18, 19.

Secondly, That then God will cause all his Creatures to serve for their good: 1. The Angels, *Heb.* 1. 14. if they be in danger of enemies, *Psal.* 34. 7. This *Jacob* found, *Gen.* 32. 2. and *Elisba*, *2 Kings* 6. 17. And when others are smitten by the Angels with Warre or Pestilence, or any other Calamities, they shall save them from the hurt thereof, *Ezek.* 9. 4. *Psal.* 91. 11. 2. The Sun, Moon, and Stars, *Psal.* 121. 6. *Josh.* 10. 12, 13. *Judges* 5. 20. 3. All Inferiour Creatures: see *Lev.* 26. 3, to 11. and *Deut.* 28. 1, to 9. *Joel* 2. 23, to 28. *Haggai* 2. 18, 19. *Mal.* 3. 10, 11, 12.

Reas. 1. Because he is the *Lord of Hosts*, by his right of Creation and Government. As they were all made by him, so they are all at his dispose, and under his command, for the good of his people: *The Angels do his commandments, hearkning to the voice of his word*, *Psal.* 103. 20. So of the Host of Heaven he saith, *I have made the earth, my hands have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded*, *Isa.* 45. 12. and the Meteors, Snow, Frost, he ordereth by his Word of command, *Psal.* 147. 15, to 19. So the blessing of the Fruits of the Earth, is by his command, *Deut.* 28. 3.

Reas. 2. Because there is a Covenant between God in Christ, and all those who thus turn unto him: As when Kings and States of divers Nations, that were before in Warre, do make a League by Covenant, all their Subjects have a free Trade and intercourse for their mutuall good: so it is in this case; before man sinned against God, all Creatures of this great Lord of Hosts served for his good: but when he sinned against God, the Lord of Hosts and all his Creatures were against man, had not Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, interposed himself to reconcile humbled believing sinners unto God. Hence, when any are brought into this Covenant, all his Creatures are at league with him, as *Eliphaz* told *Job* Chap. 5. 23, 24. This League secures them from hurt, and assures of good from the beasts of the field: see *Hos.* 2.

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1, 22. It is an admirable *Prosopopœia*, where the affections of men are ascribed to the Creatures; *Jezebel* looks to the fruits of the Earth, and complains of want of Wheat, and Wine, and Oil; they look to the Earth, and speak to it to receive into its bowels the Corn, as desirous to rot in it, that it might feed man; the Trees, to receive moisture from it, that they may cherish man: the Earth looks to the Heavens, with desire of Rain, and Influences from thence, that it may be fruitful; the Heavens look to God, desiring his word of Command and Blessing: and all this by virtue of the Covenant.

Use 1. For Encouragement, to those who have by their sins, and continuance in them, unto this day been under Gods displeasure, and the dreadful Effects of it, now to come in with true Repentance, and Reformation of your former evil ways. Come unto Christ, that in him you may obtain the mercy that God offers; that now you may be reconciled to him in Christ, and receive forgiveness of all your sins past. A Proclamation of Pardon will bring Rebels in, to lay down all their Rebellions, and to become Loyal Subjects, for the time. Hear and hearken to the Lords Proclamation, in *Jer.* 3. 12, 13. where we see, 1. That God is ready to forgive repenting sinners. *Obj.* 1. *The greatness of my sins affright me.* *Ans.* *Isa.* 44. 22. *I have blotted out as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins, &c.* *Obj.* 2. *But our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we pine away in our sins,* *Ezek* 33. 10, 11. *Ans.* Consider those two Arguments, in *Psal.* 130. 3, 4. (1) Else none should be saved; but it is not his will that all sinners should perish, for then the blood of Christ had been shed in vain: but that cannot be, *Rev.* 1. 5. and the offer of Christ, for the Salvation of sinners, would be in vain: but that cannot be, *Joh.* 3. 14, 15. (2.) Else none would worship him; but God will have some that shall fear and worship him, *Deut.* 5. 29. *Hos.* 3. 5. 2. God is not onely ready to receive such, but desirous of it; and there is joy in heaven at the Conversion of such, as Christ assureth us by three Parables, *Luke* 15. 7, 10, &c. And to shew his desire, he sends his Ministers, and by them inviteth, calleth,
com-

to turn unto Him.

commandeth, beseecheth sinners to turn unto him. Ah! let not be said of any of you, as the Lord complained of others, *Hos. 11. 2, 7.* 3. Consider Examples: Christ in the dayes of his flesh, welcomed Publicans and sinners, that came to him with repentance, *Luke 15.* and his mercy is not less in heaven, *1 Cor. 6. 9, 10.* *1 Tim. 1. 15, 16.* onely lose not your season, *2 Cor. 6. 1, 2.* *Heb. 3. 15.* they that put off, may never have such an offer again: for, to those that believed not, in the wilderness, God sware that *they should not enter into his Rest,* ver 16, 18. and when they that were invited to the Wedding feast, came not, but put off the invitation with excuses, the Master of the feast said, *None of those men that were bidden shall taste of my Supper,* *Luk. 14. 24.* Remember the sad condition they were in, that came when the door was shut, *Luke 13. 25, to 29.*

Use 2. for Instruction. Learn hence, that when any Calamity is upon people, or a particular person, to look through it unto sin as the cause of it. Look not only on the outward means, or instruments, or secondary Causes: that which is outward & obvious to our sense, is but the Vial through which Gods wrath is poured forth. *2 Chron. 12. 7.* David knew that the natural cause of that Famine of three years in *Israel,* was Drought; but he rested not there, but went to enquire of the Lord, what sin was the cause of it, and received his answer, *2 Sam. 21. 1.* This the Lord taught *Joshua* to do, *Josh. 7. 10, 11.* The people of *Israel* learned it by long continued Afflictions, *Lam. 3. 39, 40.*

2. Learn hence to look at sin as the most mischievous thing in the world, that you may hate and shun it more perfectly. When men look upon sin abstractively, onely as a thing done, they think it not so dangerous an evil as it is: therefore look at it in the effects of it, and you will see how mischievous it is. If you should know a man who is alwayes doing mischief, where ever he comes, he poisons one, stabs another, &c. and leaves every where some prints of his villany, how dreadfull and hatefull would he be unto you? Such a thing is Sin: it caused *Ahabs* death, and the dogs licked up his blood; and *Jezebels* also, burnt up *Nadab* and *Abihu*; caused the Earth to open, and swallow up

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Shah, Dathan, and Abiram; struck *Ananias and Sapphira* dead at *Peters* feet. In a word, it blasts the Corn, destroys the fruits of the Trees; brings diseases on mens bodies; brings in Foreign Enemies upon people; fills the Earth with miseries, and Hell with everlasting torments.

3. Learn hence, that if you would have punishments removed in mercy, you must remove sin first. In diseases, till the Cause be removed, there is no Cure wrought; but if the Cause be done away, the symptoms presently vanish. They take a wrong course, that set their heads, hands, feet, and friends on work to free themselves from some Calamity, when the sin remains undone away. For, 1. If the Calamity should be removed, sin not being pardoned, nor repented of, it is not removed in mercy, but in wrath: as when a Physician takes away his Medicines, and leaves the disease uncured, it is a sign that either the Patients case is desperate, or that the Physician is willing that he should perish: and if Affliction doth a man no good, it doth him much hurt; for that which doth neither good nor hurt, is in vain: but God doth nothing in vain. But if sin be taken away, either the punishment will be taken away, or the sting of it. *Obj. David found it otherwise, 2 Sam. 12.* *A.* Two cases, at least, must be excepted: 1. Of Scandal, when the Name of God is blasphemed, *ver. 14.* 2. When a lust is not sufficiently cleansed, the lust being mortified, *Psal. 51. 8, 10.*

4. Speedily get sin done away; for the sentence is gone out, as soon as sin is committed, though the execution be deferred for a time, *Eccles. 8. 11, 12.* and the Decree is in travail before it brings forth, *Zeph. 2. 2.* and it may be sin is not finished, *Jam. 1. 15.* as *Judas*, though he was a Thief, was let alone till he had betrayed his Master. See *Zech. 5. 2, 3, 8, 9.* Sin may lye like a sleeping debt, which is not demanded for many years, but if the debtor hath not an Acquittance, the Creditor may call for it when he will, and cast him into prison.

Use 3. for Exhortation: To be like-minded to God, *Eph. 5. 1.* You call God *Father*; be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful, especially in forgiving; and Christ teaches us in prayer

to turn unto Him.

to call God Father, and to beg of him forgiveness, and in order thereunto to forgive others that have offended us. See how Christ argues for this, in *Mat. 6. 14, 15.* and he teaches us to urge it as an argument in our prayer, for the settled comfort of our forgiveness, *Luk. 11. 4.* Obj. *But wherein must we follow God in this?* Ans. 1. In his forgiving at the mediation of Christ, *Eph. 4. 32.* When a repenting sinner comes to Christ, and Christ mediates for him, God for Christs sake forgives; so should we one that hath offended us, and is sorry for it, and useth the mediation of friends, for his reconciliation to the offended party. 2. In his preventing mercy, which shews his readiness to forgive, *Luk. 15. 20.* When he was a great way off, yet coming, his father had compassion on him, ran unto him, &c. was more quick to pardon, then the son to seek it: see the effect of it in the son. So should we, not stay till an offender hath come up to the height of our expectation, but encourage beginnings of repentance. 3. In not standing too strictly upon a full satisfaction, answerable to our imagination of the greatness of our wrong, which many times is above the offence, and above what we are able to convince the offender of. See that Parable in *Mat. 18. 22. to the end.* 4. In his ending controversies with sinners in such a way, between himself and them, as may keep them from publick shame: whence Gods forgiving, is called his *covering sin*, *Psal. 32. 1.* so should we: Therefore this is noted as the effect of love, *1 Pet. 4. 8.* See the description of *Joseph*, the reputed husband of the Virgin *Mary*, *Mat. 1. 19.* his Justice made him think of putting her away, but his Love and goodness, to do it *privily*: the contrary is condemned in Christians, that will not arbitrate matters, but go to Law, *1 Cor. 5. 7.*

Use 4. for Comfort, to repenting sinners under Affliction: Think not that you shall never be freed from them, but be assured, that if thy heart be humbled, and thy sin mortified, God is as willing as able to remove it. No man is in a hard condition, but he that hath an hard heart. See *1 Pet. 5. 6. Humble your selves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.*

F. I N I S.
