

C. J.

*The Desirableness of the Christian Faith
illustrated and applied.*

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED at the

Triennial VISITATION

O F

The Right Reverend FATHER in GOD,

T H O M A S

LORD BISHOP of SARUM,

Held at READING,

On THURSDAY August 30, 1744.

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Rector of SHOTTESBROOK, Berks.

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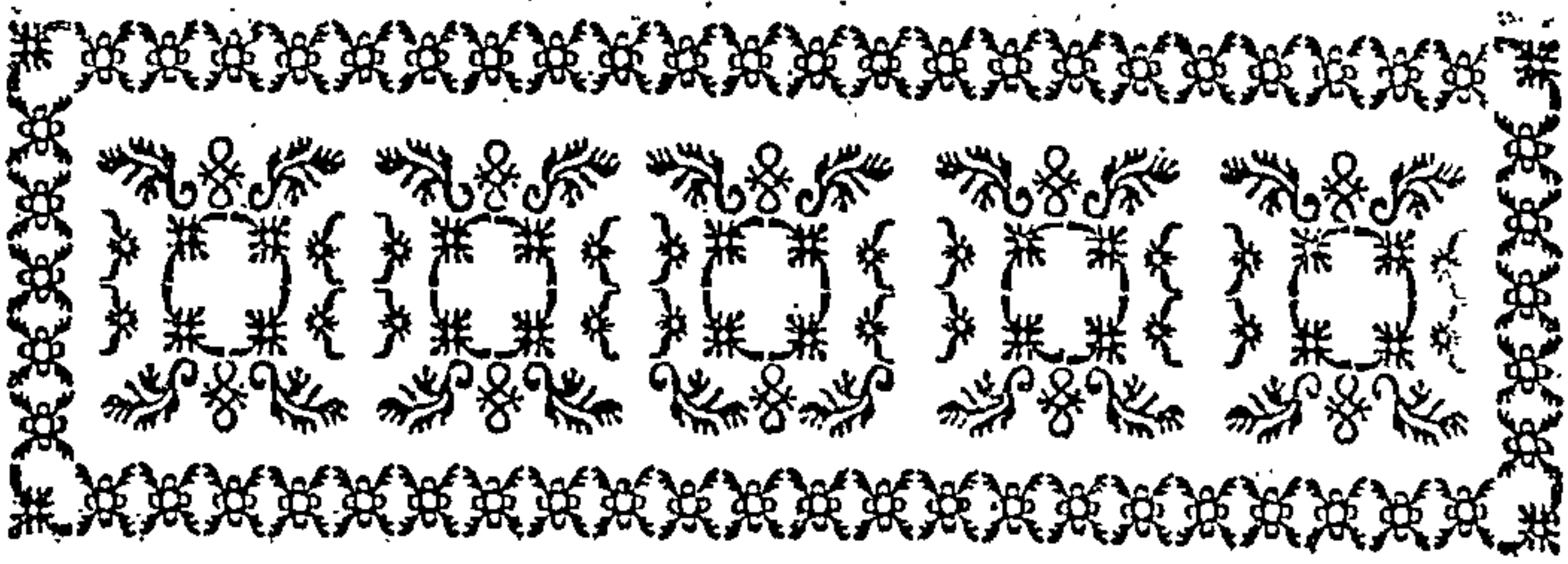
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*In whom, though now ye see him not,
yet Believing, ye rejoice with Joy
unspeakable and full of Glory.*

THE *Desire of Happiness* is so strongly implanted in us, it has so deep a Foundation both in Nature and Reason, that one should be apt, under a close and unprejudiced Attention to it, to imagine, that the *best* and *noblest* Prospect of it should almost necessarily influence Mens Faith and Practice; that they should be *desirous of believing* a System which promises an eternal Happiness, and equally *studious to perform* the Conditions of attaining it. But if we descend from *Contemplation* to *Fact*, if, from what we might reasonably *expect*, we turn our Thoughts to what we actually *see*, the Principles and Practices of Mankind give us a very different, a very melancholy Prospect. Their Defects, however, and Miscar-

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riages in *Practice*, though far from *defensible*, are yet easy enough to be *accounted for*. The same urgent *Desire of Happiness* makes them either *overlook* or wilfully *neglect* a more important future Interest for the Sake of a present and more immediate Pleasure. There is some *Temptation* at least, some imaginary Appearance of Satisfaction in these Cases, and they are far from *choosing Evil as such*, or for its own Sake.

But our *Speculative Infidels* seem to have arisen even to this unaccountable unnatural Height of Self-Delusion, and to *triumph* seriously in such a deplorable Scheme, as, one would think, must *terrify* all serious considerate Persons. Our glorious Faith is renounced, and with an Appearance too of great *Satisfaction*, for a Persuasion full of real Horror and Mortification; and the Professors of Christianity are even insulted and ridiculed, for being willing to acknowledge their own Title to an *happy Immortality*. Yet if this be not a Truth, it is such an Error as we have certainly a natural Prejudice in Favour of; and therefore were the Advocates for *unassisted Reason* guided in Earnest even by *that only*, yet the least they could impartially have done, had been to express with *Concern*, that they could not acquiesce

esse in the Evidence of so *desireable* a Creed as we Christians profess.

But on the contrary, *Infidelity* is made Matter of *Mirth* and *Triumph*. They *rejoice*, or at least profess to do so, in having, as they think, discerned the insufficient Foundations of that Revelation, on which the Pardon of all our Sins, the Security of all our Hopes, and our Title to everlasting Happiness, depend. But is this at the lowest, on their own Principles, if I may call them such, a Matter of *Sport* and *Satisfaction*? Or when considered by a *Christian*, does it call for our Pity rather, or our Indignation, to see Men taking Pleasure in such miserable Principles, and exulting as if they had made a Discovery of great Consequence to the Benefit and Welfare of Mankind?

The Illustration of our better Hopes will be both an *agreeable* and a *profitable* Subject of Meditation; for, in the Result, the whole Strength of Infidelity depends on the contrary Supposition. It is not by mere Speculation and Argument, that we can expect to recover those to our holy Faith, who were never tempted and seduced from it by any Strength of Argument. The *Evidences of Religion* have been a thousand Times proved and demonstrated, and do and ever will stand unanswered by them.

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Their Cavils at *Scripture Difficulties* have received distinct and satisfactory Solutions, and have indeed been answered to a surprizing Degree of Clearness, considering the Distance of Time we stand at from their Original Promulgation. The only real Temptation therefore to loose Principles lies in this, that Men flatter themselves, that the Disbelief of Religion will afford Ease and Comfort, and that they may enjoy themselves and their Pleasures more truly and satisfactorily under this Refuge, than under the Acknowledgment of the Christian Faith. It cannot therefore be an unserviceable Work to detect this Error also; to shew that our Religion is as well an *amiable* System as a *certain* Truth, and that the Delight and Comfort even of our present Station may and can only be provided for by the Influence of the Precepts and Promises of the Gospel. And we cannot take Occasion to represent this from a more emphatical Expression, or more distressful Exigence, than that which the *Text* sets before us, *In whom*, says St. Peter, speaking of the Author and Finisher of our Faith, *In whom, tho' now ye see him not, yet Believing, ye rejoice with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory.*

It was addressed by the Apostle to those, who were under the trying Circumstances of *Persecution*

cution for this very Profession; and yet even here he represents it as the Foundation of such Joy, as could not be equalled either in Kind or Degree by any other Persuasion. The *Christian Faith*, in the ordinary Course of Things, did plainly provide for their better Security from all Dangers; and by the beneficial Virtues which it prescribed, was calculated for social and personal Prosperity and Delight; and where extraordinary Violence and Calamities interrupted the natural good Effects of such heavenly Duties, there its *future Felicities* were applicable with greater Force, would enable them to triumph under Affliction, and convert their heaviest Sorrows into a Subject of Joy and *Consolation*.

The whole Passage is full of this grateful Spirit of Triumph and Exultation on a View of the Blessings of the Evangelical Dispensation, and that best Support, which it would afford them in the worst Circumstances. *Blessed*, says the Apostle, *be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant Mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively Hope, by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead, to an Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you; who are kept by the Power of*
God

God through Faith unto Salvation, ready to be revealed in the last Time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a Season, (if need be) ye are in Heaviness through manifold Temptations; that the Trial of your Faith being much more precious than of Gold that perisheth, though it be tried with Fire, might be found unto Praise, and Honour, and Glory, at the Appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet Believing, ye rejoice with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory.

Indeed, the *Christian Faith* is throughout the whole System *joyous* and *delightful*. The *End* it proposes to us is ravishing and glorious, and the *Means* it prescribes are salutary and beneficial. It represents the present Life as a Passage to a better, its *Enjoyments* as Earnests of more valuable Hopes, and even its *Afflictions* as Means of improving our Virtue and enhancing our final Recompence. The Sum of all its Doctrines and Precepts is either *delightful* in itself, or made so by this Article, in Respect to the After-Scene of our Existence; and therefore in this View highly deserves our Attention, and will encrease our Regard to the Religion that blesses us with it.

Whether this Article be *peculiar* to this Revelation alone; whether the Heathen Philosophers

Philosophers or Jewish Teachers believed a future State of Recompence, or not; (though I am firmly persuaded that both did) yet with Regard to the *Clearness* of the Representation, the *Nature* and *Degree* of its Glory, and more especially the Title to it, on which our Hopes are founded, in these Respects it is entirely *Christian*, and our Saviour may particularly be said to have brought *Life and Immortality to Light through the Gospel*. A happy Futurity is not only taught by his Doctrine, but founded on his Merits, and purchased by his Blood; and all our Pretensions to it are built on the *Propitiatory Oblation* offered by him to the Divine Justice, as an Atonement for our Transgressions.

This is the meritorious Cause of our Salvation; this the true Ground of the *Christian Triumph*, for which alone even our forsaken Sins are pardoned, and our best Works accepted. Here we have a sure *Claim*, where others have but an uncertain *Hope*. In this as well as other Instances, *our Faith* excels the Efforts of unassisted Reason; and it is the great Privilege and Blessing of our Religion, that it opens to us this gracious Method and System of Mercy, and gives us, upon our best Endeavours, though a more *humble*, yet as
secure

secure a Title to Acceptance and Happiness, as if we had been *Self-sufficient*, and could have pleaded Original Righteousness. Our Saviour, the Scripture tells us, *once suffered for us* upon Earth, *the Just for the Unjust*, that he might bring us to God, and to the same Purpose is now interceding for us in Heaven; and though for that Reason, *now we see him not, yet Believing in him, we rejoice with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*. Justified by his Merits we can look up with *Comfort*, and supported by his Promises we can look forward with *Delight*; and by both can regard with Indifference the transitory Vanities and Troubles of this Life; fixing our Attention on that glorious Conclusion of them, which neither Force nor Fraud can deprive us of; nor can our most exalted Imaginations raise us to a due Notion of its Value and Felicity.

And is not this then a very *joyful* Consideration? Would not every rational Person wish, that a Prospect so *agreeable* and *delightful*, might prove well-founded, and that our Hopes herein were secure and certain? Where then is the mighty Foundation for *Triumph* in the contrary Opinion, the extraordinary *Satisfaction* pretended in having detected this Error? We know indeed the *Misery* of this Opinion, because we
know

know for certain the fatal *Delusion* that they are under, and that irreverfible *Mifery* which will one Day fadly convince them. But I would at prefent rather confider the *unhappy* State of an *Infidel* upon his own Principles, the *uncomfortable* Influence that the Difbelief of another World has, and muft neceffarily have, upon the *Enjoyment* of this. A brief Confideration of which will at leaft evidence the little Reason he has to be fo mightily *pleafed* himfelf with his imagined Discovery, or fo *ftudious* to propagate it amongst others. To this End I fhall confider him both as a *Member of Society*, and as a *private Perfon*; and in each View the *Comfort* and *Defireablenefs* of this Article of our Religion will appear, as the only tolerable Security from the Injuries of others, the only fure Foundation for any perfonal Satisfaction.

As for the former, the Question is briefly this, whether *Honefty*, whether *Virtue* and *Confcience*, are of any Service to Society; or whether it be more eligible to dwell amongst thofe who have no Reftraint on their Paffions, nor any Tie whatfoever to regard the Life and Welfare of others. That any Doubt concerning a future State is reducible to *Atheifm*, or what is juft the fame to us, to a *Denial of Providence*,

vidence, is evident; and that upon the *Disbelief* of that, there cannot be either any Obligation to, or any sufficient Enforcement of Virtue, is equally certain. Even Natural Religion owes all its binding Force to the Consideration of the great *Author of Nature*. Reason itself is not, properly speaking, the *Ground of Obligation*, but only the Means and Manner of discovering the *Will of him*, whose Will we are in Duty bound to obey. Take away the Acknowledgment or Superintendence of that Being to whom we owe our own, and we have certainly an uncontrollable Liberty over ourselves and our Conduct. I might add, that upon this *Atheistical* Supposition, even the *Reason of Things* would bear a quite different Notion from what it does on *Religious Principles*, and a Man might argue as strongly for making his own private Interest the chief Rule and Principle of his Conduct, as for any other Scheme whatever.

It will be the less necessary therefore to enlarge on the *Insufficiency* of every other Enforcement of Virtue. To omit many other material Exceptions to each, there is this obvious and important Defect in them all, that they cannot prevent a *secret* Mischief. Where there is no Obligation on the Conscience, no Appre-
hension

hension of a superior Being, or a future Account, there it is plain, that there is no other Motive to an honest Practice, than what arises from the Convenience or Inconvenience attending it. Now *Human Laws* may frequently by Force or Fraud be evaded; *Reason* may be neglected, silenced, or perverted; and as for *Honour*, or a Regard to Reputation, where it is duly stated, it cannot affect our *private* Actions; and where it is not, as according to the present prevailing Notion of Honour, it is much otherwise; there this very Principle, which is to pass for a sufficient *Restraint on Passion*, is really in itself more mischievous and destructive than any natural Passion in our Constitution.

And is not then the Infidel in a *comfortable* Situation upon his own Principles, and is not Society deeply indebted to him for his Discovery? Is there not great Reason to triumph in such a Scheme, as would put every one in *Ishmael's* Condition, of *having his Hand against every Man, and every Man's Hand against him*, and would destroy the most effectual Restraint that Men lie under from the worst of Injuries and Cruelties to each other? Particularly, can it be Matter of Satisfaction to *him*, to destroy the only Security for that Life beyond which

he claims no Prospect, or at least no Title to Happiness in it, against the Designs of Resentment, Interest, or any other vicious Motive? Or rather, is not the general Welfare of the Publick, and therein every private Man's Happiness concerned, that *Religious* Principles should prevail, and that we should be influenced by *Conscience* in our Intercourse with each other? One would think, this must be acknowledged *desireable*; and even that very Supposition, that Religion was the Contrivance of crafty *Priests* and *Politicians*, according to the Language of our Times, is sufficient at least to prove this Point. To consider him therefore no longer as a *Member of Society*, let us view him in his *personal* and private Capacity, and observe, on the Disbelief of the Christian Doctrine of another Life, what Foundation would be left for any *Relish* in the *Enjoyments* of this, or for any *Remedy* against the *Afflictions* of it.

As Man is compounded of two Parts, a *Body* and a *Soul*, all the Satisfaction that he is capable of, must arise either from the Pleasures of *Sense* or of *Reason*. And as our present Constitution stands, each of these require in some Degree the Gratification of each other, to make either truly comfortable. Whilst our
Souls

Souls are united to this Mass of Flesh and Blood, we cannot live comfortably merely upon *shining Speculations*, but are deeply interested in the Welfare of this inferior Part of us; and though a thinking Man upon rational and religious Reflections may bear *resignedly* the Sufferings and Afflictions of it, yet *Afflictions* however they must be allowed to be at the present. Much less can the *Pleasures of Sense only* compleat the Felicity of a Creature distinguished by the superior Principle of *Reason*. Yet even this lowest View of Enjoyment is contradicted and defeated by the very Scheme which is purposely calculated to promote it. For what is this unbounded Liberty of Practice, gained by this Discovery, but in Effect a *Licence* to make ourselves *miserable*? Those Vices, which are forbidden by the Christian Law, are such as a wise Man would shun for his own Sake, such as are equally destructive of his present Happiness in this World, as they are of his Welfare in the other according to the Doctrine of Christianity. What deplorable Objects are there in the World, reduced to the miserable Condition they are in, by the free Use of that *uncontrouled Liberty* which they claim over themselves and their Actions? How ruinous are the natural Effects of Debauchery,

which

which is the very End and Aim of this licentious Scheme? And would not every wise Man then, even on the Motive of Interest alone, be desirous of being tied by the strictest Obligations from Practices which are so fatally pernicious and destructive? Is it *desireable*, that we should lie under no Restraint from those strong and alluring Temptations, which, if followed, would unavoidably lead to *Ruin* and *Misery*?

Yet these Mischiefs consequent upon these pernicious Principles are still inconsiderable in respect of those, which are derived upon the superior Part of our Composition. The Pains and Miseries which licentious Scepticism brings upon the *Body*, are small in Comparison of those more pungent Evils, which it necessarily creates to the *Mind*. For there is a natural *Desire of Immortality* in us, which all the Arts of Oblivion cannot blot out. And the very *Importance* of the Subject, though it was not natural, would awaken every thinking Man's Reflections. Whether we are to continue for ever in a future State, or must lay down our Beings with our Lives, is an Enquiry of so much Consequence, that *Indifference* concerning it is unnatural and astonishing.

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And here the *Infidel* embraces the *dark Side* of the Question, and professedly sets himself on a Level with *the Beasts that perish*. The Prospect of *Hereafter* he freely disclaims, and concludes that his Dissolution will prove the Extinction of his Being. And is not even this a very *terrifying* Reflection, sufficient to render insipid and comfortless the best, the most fortunate Situation in this Life? Would not the Prospect of our own Annihilation annihilate even all our present Satisfaction? For what Relish could there be in the best Worldly Enjoyments to one who knew not, but that the next Moment might put an *End* to his Delights and to himself? Would it not then be a melancholy Consideration, that we should have *Reason* just to make us capable of *superior Misery*, and to distinguish us from the Brute Part of the Creation by more afflictive Sufferings?

Yet this is really the Case, if there be no future State of Retribution. For the *Beasts* are troubled with the *Pains of Sense* only, and consequently with those only, which are *present*. Having not the Power of Reflection on distant Events, they disturb not themselves with past Sufferings, nor anticipate future ones by uneasy Prefages. But *Man*, to make him more compleatly wretched, is endued with the
Power

Power of Thought to aggravate the Sufferings which now oppresses him, to renew the Smart of those which are past, by Memory and Reflection, and to forestall those which are to come, or which in Possibility only may happen hereafter. It is true, the first Mention of the *Christian Doctrine* clears up every Difficulty of this Kind, and under the Prospect which that affords us, we can even *rejoice with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*.—But according to the Infidel's boasted Scheme, this is the universal State of Mankind, to begin by Chance, to live in Misery, and to end in nothing. A most *comfortable* Opinion truly of our Creation, and a most encouraging Motive to give in to such an inviting Scheme!

Or seriously, can there be a greater Principle of Horror and Uneasiness, more shocking to Nature and disquieting to Reason, than to believe, that our earnest Desire of Immortality will be defeated, and that we shall be hereafter, as though we had never been? Why as melancholy a Consideration as this is, there is still a more aggravative Circumstance of Affliction in this pretended Scheme of Satisfaction. For however it may in common Discourse be termed *Infidelity*, it can never amount to more than *Scepticism*.

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The *Prejudices of Education*, as himself will argue, or as we with better Foundation, the *Presages of Nature*, will not suffer him to go farther than *Doubt* on this important Question. He does not, he cannot, with all his other Absurdities and Contradictions, pretend to demonstrate on any Principle the *Impossibility* of this; and there are such weighty Evidences both from Reason and Revelation for it, as must stagger the most hardened and obstinate Infidel.

But now in this Situation he is still more miserable. *Annihilation* is his best Hope, since either *Nothing* or *Misery* must be his Portion hereafter. Or could the Preference of these be possibly disputed, as some indeed have pretended to call it in Question, yet total Destruction, or irreversibile Damnation, are at the best a very terrifying Dilemma. Uncertainty on the most important Event in the World, with the Expectation of so dreadful an Issue on every Side, must surely break through every inferior Thought, extinguish every pleasurable Enjoyment, and render Life itself a continual and intolerable Burden. Accordingly we frequently see these unhappy Men discharge themselves with their own Hands out of the *miserable State* which their Scepticism has brought

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them

them into, and cast themselves into the Terrors of the other World, to avoid the Agonies of Doubt and Distrust in this. And indeed, it seems a much greater Wonder, that *Suicide* is not always, than that it is so often the Consequence of Infidelity. For there is not any Thing truly and for its own Sake valuable in this Life, but the religious Expectation of another; not even in our *best* Situation, when our Hopes are the least crossed and our Fears the least fulfilled; much less in the *frequent Afflictions* of Life, against which there is no Remedy on this deplorable Scheme.

For an *Infidel in Calamity* is the most miserable Creature that Imagination can paint. There is no possible Ground of Consolation in his Case, but he is on every Side left *destitute, afflicted, tormented*. Whenever Misfortune befalls him, which will be no uncommon Case, whilst he continues amidst the Changes and Chances of this mortal Life, then will his Thoughts be necessarily roused towards what will not bear Reflection. When the World proves troublesome and afflictive, when Friends become deceitful, to what Refuge shall he fly, or with what comfortable Thought shall he support himself, who has no superior Friend to make his Appeal to, nor any comfortable Prospect

Prospect of a better Situation hereafter? Nay so uneasy and self-contradictory a Thing is *Scepticism*, that those who in one rash Moment, in an Agony of Despair, have attempted to destroy themselves, have at all other Times been the most *afraid of Death* of all Mankind, and as the Apostle expresses it, *through Fear thereof have continued all their Life-time subject to Bondage.*

Having thus imperfectly illustrated, by a View of the opposite Scheme, the Comfort and *Desireableness* of those Truths which the Infidel takes such pretended Pleasure in exposing, I shall now improve what has been said on this Subject into some useful Inferences and Observations.

In the first Place then, this very *Desireableness* of our Religion is an high presumptive Proof of the *Truth* of it. For is the Acknowledgment of an After-State necessary to keep *Society* in tolerable Order, and can we believe that God has sent Man into the World a sociable Creature, without those Restraints and Motives which are necessary for a Creature in that Condition? If the Apprehension of a future Life be requisite to preserve the Peace and Welfare of this, certainly we cannot imagine, that an all-wise Being has so ill provided

for the Work of his own Hands, as to leave them without the necessary Means of their Well-being. — Thus again with regard to a Man's private and *personal Satisfaction*. As the Acknowledgment of a better Life hereafter can alone give Relish to any of the Enjoyments of this, or administer Comfort under the Afflictions of it, may we not securely *infer*, that there is such a State provided for us; that *Man* was not sent into the World merely to inherit *Vanity* and *Misery*, without any Rule for his Conduct, or any better Prospect for his Encouragement; that the *Desire of Immortality* was not implanted in him merely to *torment* him; nor the Gift of Reason; as was before argued; bestowed on him only to perplex and disquiet him, and to aggravate the more severely his unavoidable Afflictions? For are these Terms of Existence worthy the End of our Creation? Or could an all-wise Being make us for such a State only, as no wise Man, could it before be offered him; would without farther Expectations, accept of?

We may therefore, Secondly, from the *Desireableness* of this great Article of our Religion, infer the *Folly of Infidels*, both in that *unnatural Joy* which they pretend to themselves, in that terrifying Scheme which they
have

Have formed, and in their unaccountable Diligence and Industry to promote such dreadful Principles amongst others. For is there now any Foundation for *Joy* and *Satisfaction* in having cut off the Hopes of Immortality, and consequently in that *contemptible* Account and Notion, which the Infidel gives you of himself? For such an one upon his own Principles is a most *despicable* Animal. According to his own Account of himself, his present Existence he owes entirely to *Chance*, and expects no more than to have it extinguished with the Loss of his Breath. An *End* indeed, very suitable to such an *Original!* How he came hither, he cannot certainly tell, but this he seems most secure of, that he is to *go no farther*, though one would imagine, that this should be at least as doubtful as the other. For it may be observed after all, that even the utmost Extent of the *Atheist's* own Scheme would not conclude absolutely against a *future State*. Another World may altogether as well be made by *Chance* as this, and we may *happen* once more to come into Being, by the same lucky Concourse of Atoms that sent us hither at first. Thus, however, in his own Esteem, he is the Child of Fortune, and the Servant of
Fate,

Fate, inconsiderable in Life, and nothing in Death.

But now is not this a very *terrifying* Account of human Nature? Is it not such an one, as must rather *shock* than *delight* a Creature endued with the Power of Reflection? Is it a Matter of Pleasure and Triumph, that this Scene of Vanities is to bound our Prospect, and that we are to look for nothing better hereafter? Is this *degrading* Scheme a serious Ground of *Consolation*, and can it be a *joyful* Reflection, that Man should be so inconsiderable a Creature? Why as if it were really thus, we see them continually *exulting* upon having thus argued themselves out of Being; and valuing themselves highly upon having seen farther than others into their own *Insignificancy*: But the Pleasure of having made so *mortifying* a Discovery is what no wise Man will envy them.

But if the Infidel be *self-condemned* in that boasted *Satisfaction* which he pretends to take in his own Scheme, are not his industrious Endeavours to propagate it amongst others still more irrational and unaccountable? For upon what Motive is this undertaken? The great *Truths of Christianity*, or these *vulgar Errors*, as he esteems them, are, however, beneficial

neficial to Society, and highly contributive to the Peace and Satisfaction of every individual Person. Our holy Religion, to place it at the lowest, without Regard to its infallible *Evidence* and *Truth*, is, however, a *desireable* Scheme, necessary to give us any firm Security from others, or any real Comfort in ourselves. To what End then are these studious Pains to banish out of Mens Minds a Sense of Religion, and consequently to undermine the Foundations of all publick Justice and all Personal Satisfaction? On what imaginable Motive can this Conduct be *justified*, or even *accounted for*? Or what could possibly be the Consequence of the End they aim at; but universal Misery, Ruin and Confusion?

Very different and commendable are the *Christian's* Motives in propagating his Faith, even waving the absolute and infallible *Certainty* of it. When we offer to convert an Unbeliever, we offer to shew him an easy Path to endless Happiness, by such Principles as shall contribute as much to his present Peace as future Felicity; such as shall supply him with Consolation in all the Distresses of Life, and enable him to overcome the Fear of Death. We offer to convince him of his own Interest, to teach him what we believe will be

infinitely

infinitely *profitable* for him; to remove him from tormenting Doubts to satisfactory Hopes, from dangerous Errors to saving Knowledge. And this must be confessed to be a very *charitable* Attempt, if it was not founded on such unquestionable Evidence as it is. But now the Infidel can have no such Motive to *propagate* the unhappy Principles he has fallen into. He cannot insinuate any *Danger* in the Belief of Christianity: He cannot deny but that it is at least a *desireable* Scheme. When he weakly attempts to object to it, he attempts not only contrary to Duty and Reason, but also contrary even to our private Satisfaction, to remove us from a comfortable fixed Faith to a dreadful State of Doubt and Distrust. He would persuade us out of our *joyful Expectation* of eternal Bliss; and in return for this he does not pretend to offer any settled Form of Belief, grounded on clearer Proofs, or established on better Promises. He would leave us in such Principles as would make us Enemies to one another, would destroy the Peace and Comfort of our Minds, would make us live with *Uneasiness* in this World, and send us out of it in a deplorable *Uncertainty*.

But though the Security of others calls on us to expose duly the *Mischief* of these Principles,

ples, let us however be careful to distinguish, as we ought, betwixt their *Errors* and their *Persons*; and whilst we are magnifying the one, in order to excite in ourselves a just Abhorrence of them, let us charitably and earnestly recommend the other to the tender Mercies of a long-suffering God; whose Grace alone can defeat those industrious Endeavours whereby they seem to be fortifying themselves against a Possibility of Conviction; and let us remain assured, that they are really the greatest *Objects of Compassion* that can present themselves to us.

The *Desireableness* of Religion however teaches us, Thirdly, to *rejoice* in the Light of our holy Faith, and to be immoveably constant to it. For as it was briefly observed at the Entrance of this Discourse, the Infidel's chief Strength stands in the *Pleasure* and *Satisfaction*, which his Prospect vainly promises him. It cannot stand before Reason and Argument, and it never could prevail, were it not for that false Appearance of *Comfort* and *Indulgence* which it carries with it. Consider it then in this just Light, and if ever you are assaulted with Temptations of this Kind, bear this honest Prejudice in your Minds against it, that you are going to be betrayed into the most deplorable

and comfortless Situation, and to be cut off from every *Hope* and *Consolation*, that can administer any *rational Delight*. View it not barely in the fancied Pleasure of that Indulgence of your Lufts and Passions which it will allow you in, but take Time to consider this Scheme in all its Parts, and you will see it made up of Perplexity, Misery and Terror. Even the very *Temptation* to it ought to be a sufficient *Antidote* against it, for it were Misery enough to be let loose to our own Passions and the fatal Consequences of them; yet that is indeed the best Side of this melancholy Prospect, the least of all the many Miseries attending it. Under this View, and an impartial one it is, there will be no Temptation to Apostacy, no Kind of Motive to desert the comfortable Profession we have been baptized into. Under this justifiable Prepossession in its Favour, let the Evidences of Religion be fairly examined, and fully judged of, and they will ever upon the Test shine the brighter, and appear the more satisfactory. This likewise we are principally to remember, that *Difficulties* are no Arguments against *Demonstrations*, and that we are perplexed with infinitely fewer of these under the Christian Religion, than under the Infidel's Scheme, which is wholly made up of Doubts, Difficulties and Uncertainties.

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O come then, let us sing unto the Lord, let us heartily rejoice in the Strength of our Salvation. Let us reflect with Satisfaction on the comfortable Influence of the Christian Doctrine, which has in every Article advanced our mutual and personal Happiness; which with Regard to *one another*, has bound the Duties of Justice and Honesty on our Consciences, not on any weak and precarious Motive, but by that strict Account we shall hereafter give, and that suitable Recompence we shall receive: Which with Respect to our *own Comfort* has, by the Revelation of a future State, dissipated those momentous Doubts and Difficulties, that before darkned and disordered the human Mind, and by the Welfare of that important Condition, has tied us to the Practice of those Virtues that are naturally contributive to our present Peace and Satisfaction: Which by that glorious Prospect that it has given us beyond the Grave, has made us the more to value our present Situation, and yet the less unwilling to leave it; to relish the little Enjoyments of it without uneasy Reflection, and to bear the many Calamities thereof with joyful and weighty Consolation.---In a Word, to be more cheerful in Prosperity, and less dejected in Adversity,

Adversity, and to be better pleased and satisfied both with our Continuance in Life, and our Deliverance out of it.

It may be seasonable and pertinent to observe, Fourthly, the Excellence and Benefits of *that Ministry*, by which these *joyful*, profitable, saving Truths are communicated and confirmed to the World ; to vindicate our holy Function, and to shew, that with Regard to the Interest as well as Duty of Mankind, we are not that prejudicial, are not that useless Set of Men represented, whilst we neither pervert the Design, nor exceed the Bounds of our Office. Thus St. *Paul* applies a suitable Quotation from the Evangelical Prophet, *Rom. x. 14, 15.* Speaking of the joyful Truths of the Gospel, he goes on, *How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a Preacher, and how shall they preach except they be sent ? As it is written, how beautiful are the Feet of them that preach the Gospel of Peace, and bring glad Tidings of good Things ?* To the same Purpose the same Apostle elsewhere significantly expresses the Nature of this Office, *2 Cor. i. 24. We have not Dominion over your Faith, but are Helpers of your Joy.* The Doctrine, which we are commissioned to preach, is such as alone can give Value to Existence,

istence, such as alone can regulate our Passage through this World, or afford it a joyful Conclusion. It is jointly profitable in our civil and our religious Capacity, would compose the lesser Differences, and prevent all greater; and if faithfully applied and universally practised, would make this Earth as well an Emblem of Heaven, as a proper Preparative for it.

And if there be then any *Truth* in the *joyful* Prospect we have been taking, if any Evidence for those beneficial Precepts and glorious Promises, which Christianity sets before us; if the Welfare of Mankind be deeply interested in the Belief and Practice of the Gospel, the very first Reflection on their Nature and Situation may convince us, that this Design could not have been carried on and continued without such Appointment of a regular standing *Ministry*; to instruct the Ignorant, confirm the Wavering, confute the Gainsayers, admonish the Negligent, and remind every one of the Certainty and Importance of their Salvation. By the due Discharge of our Office we add at once to the *Reformation* and the *Welfare* of Mankind, and are instrumental to that great End of the Gospel itself, their Improvement in *Holiness* and *Happiness*. We alleviate the Care of the civil Magistrate, and often prevent,

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we hope, the most disagreeable Part of his Office, the Infliction of Punishment, by preventing the Offences to which it is justly due. *He* can only have Influence on the *outward Actions*, and that only by the Fear of Vengeance, whilst *we* apply immediately to the *Heart* with the joint Motives of Rewards and Penalties, and can win them to Duty by the engaging Prospect of *Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*.

And whilst we are thus employed, we are doing the best Service to the World, and have a just Title, according to St. *Paul's* Direction, to be *esteemed in Love for our Works Sake*. If we may not plead the Authority of our Office, yet surely the Influence and Effect of it should recommend us to all the Lovers of Virtue and Friends to civil Government. And where those Interests are rightly understood, and really espoused, we shall not fail of Encouragement, whatever private Slander or public Insults we may be liable to from the different Extremes of Hypocrisy and Prophaneness. It is our great Concern, that we display the good Effects of our Office, by a sincere and zealous Discharge of it; that we *give no Offence in any Thing, that the Ministry be not blamed*; much more, that we do not by any real Misapplication

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tion of our Function bring Scandal and Hatred on it; that we *preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord*, and make not the Gospel of Peace the Instrument of Confusion: In a Word, that no Views of Interest, Popularity, or Applause, prevail with us to stifle seasonable Truths, nor to meddle with Points foreign to our Profession; the true Intent of which, was to inculcate *moral Practices* upon *religious Principles*; to point out to Men the Path to their true Happiness, and to exhort them earnestly to continue in it; to deliver them by the Rules of Piety and Virtue from the severest Part of Affliction, and to support them in such as unavoidably happens, by the delightful Prospect of a joyful Futurity, where Pain and Trouble and Sorrow shall be no more.

Fifthly and Lastly, the *Desireableness* of this fundamental Doctrine of Christianity is an earnest Motive to an holy and virtuous Life. For as nothing but the *Christian Faith* in this Article can make our Abode here truly comfortable, so neither will our Faith avail to this End, without a suitable and *Christian Conversation*. The future Happiness revealed in the Gospel is every where taught to be *conditional*, and though our *meritorious* Title to it, is founded on the *Virtue of another*, yet *our own* is also
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necessary for the Application of it to our Benefit. But is not then the general *Indifference* of Christians as to their *Conduct*, as *terrifying* and *self-inconsistent*, as the Infidel's boasted Satisfaction in his mean Opinion of himself? Nay is it not rather more contradictory? For the former acts as he professes, and lives like that contemptible Creature he takes himself to be. Having disclaimed all Pretensions to another World, he confines his Views and Thoughts as much as he can to this; and so far at least he is intelligible in his Conduct. But the *immoral Christian* acts as *he* does, though he thinks otherwise, and whilst he professes to abominate his Principles, lives just as he would do, if he acknowledged them. The Distinction lies not in any Difference in their *outward Behaviour*, but in the *Motive* only on which they act, (to the Advantage of which Side I will not determine) the one being actually self-condemned, whilst the other pretends to justify his Conduct upon Principle. But fatal will be the *Effect* of *Immorality*, whatever be the *Cause*, whether it be committed against the Dictates of a well-guided Conscience, or by the Licence of a mispersuaded one. To what End then, or of what Avail is all our Heat and Zeal in Speculation, if we continue
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irreligious in Practice? Should we *contend never so earnestly* for this comfortable Faith, and defend it never so justly and learnedly, yet shall we ruin all our Hopes by a vicious Life, and sink ourselves the deeper in the Pit of Destruction, by transgressing against so much Light and Knowledge. Orthodoxy of Belief will not atone for, but aggravate the Guilt of a sinful Conduct; for though vain are all the Pretences of Morality without Religion, yet neither will the Profession of Christianity avail unto Salvation, unless it shine forth in our Lives and Conversations by the exemplary Practice of Virtue and Morality. The Design of this heavenly Doctrine was to afford us the strongest Motives to make us better Men, and to bring us to *Happiness* by no other Means than that of *Holiness*.

Remember then, that That *comfortable* Prospect opened to us in this Revelation, requires still our own Care to make it truly a Matter of Joy and Satisfaction to us; and let us, my Brethren, whose particular Office it is to declare these Things to others, be particularly careful to apply them to ourselves. The *Difficulties*, which we lie under in the Discharge of our Ministry, need not now be insisted on. They are plainly seen, and se-

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verely felt, and were never perhaps greater in every Respect, since the civil Establishment of our Religion. But as we have been hitherto viewing it in the *amiable* Light of its Enforcements and *Encouragements*, let us continue this Application for our own personal Piety and Virtue, from the happy Assistances which our Profession particularly affords us.

Now whatever *outward Disadvantages* it is attended with, yet certainly our Office is in itself most *acceptable* and *delightful*; for that which is the Ornament of human Nature is the peculiar Business of our Profession, namely, to study the Ways of God, and to be instrumental to the Salvation of Men. The *joyful Object* of the Christian Hope is the *daily Subject* of our Meditation; and whilst we are preparing for the Instruction of our People, we are thereby continually presenting an agreeable and useful Remembrance to ourselves.—The great Causes of the Ruin of Mankind are *Ignorance* and *Inattention*: A want of a *proper Conviction* of the Truth and Importance of Religion, or an entire *Disregard* to Things of this Nature, through the Hurry of Business or Pleasure. But *we* are happily delivered by the Nature of our Profession from these Occasions of Transgression. It is our proper Employment

ployment to be always looking into and explaining the Grounds both of *natural* and *revealed Religion*, which will ever shine to the greatest Advantage upon the strictest and most impartial Examination. And the *deeper Conviction* we are under of the Certainty of that glorious Prospect which we set before Mankind, the *weaker* of Course will all *Temptations* appear, which by vain and inconsiderable Allurements would interrupt us in the Pursuit of so desirable and so necessary an End. Did Men in earnest believe what they profess, and seriously attend to what they believe, they could not certainly under the actual Reflection contentedly give up the Hope of future Happiness, to gain a present Pleasure or relieve a present Distress. It is *Neglect* and *Inconsideration* only, which ruins all true Believers; but this Occasion of Iniquity likewise *we* are delivered from. Every Day is a *Sabbath* or Day of Rest to us. We are peculiarly set apart for this Purpose, and have dedicated our *whole Time* to the Service of God, and thereby indeed to the true Service of ourselves and our Fellow-Creatures. Every Argument we offer to convince them of the Truth, or to press them to the Practice of Religion, must awaken our own Hearts, and warm us with a true

Sense of Duty, and our Thoughts must often be revolving the most important and most affecting Subjects in every Composition intended for their Service. — And as every Instance of Piety and Duty confirms the general Habit, and leads to higher Improvements, our necessary Attendance on the publick Offices of Religion, and above all, that which is now almost generally neglected in other Families, but still, I hope, kept up in all ours, that of united constant *daily Devotion*; these are strong Assurances in the Support of our Virtue, and real Helps towards the great End of our Being as well as of our Profession.

Farther the Restraints, which the *Canons of the Church* have wisely provided, with Respect to *Habit* and other Particulars, and even those which *prudent Custom* has laid on us in Abstinence from publick Diversions, are Preservatives from Temptation; and nothing ought to be considered as little, which has a real Tendency to that End. Even the *Disadvantages* we lie under, are in this Respect of *Use*; and the more Crosses we have to wean us from the Love of this World, the stronger Motives have we to *set our Affections on Things above*, and to place all our Hopes where they cannot be disappointed, if we are but faithful to ourselves.

selves. Those *Disadvantages* are to a pious Mind more than compensated by these Means and Opportunities of spiritual Improvement; and when we look to the Prospect of *Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*, we cannot be sensible enough of the Blessing of a Calling, which immediately forwards us in the Attainment of it, and deliver us from the usual Impediments to it. For as much and as justly as we complain of the Corruption of the World, we are not Witnesses to the *worst* Part of it. Our Presence is a Check to their Excesses, and our *Profession* excuses us from partaking in Pursuits of a dangerous or but of a suspicious Aspect. If we would preserve the Esteem of the worst, as well as of the better Part of Mankind, it must be by an *uniform Deportment* suitable to the End which we profess to have in View; and none would be more ready to censure and ridicule undue Compliances in a Clergyman, than those who would be most forward to tempt him to it. The Reputation of our Office preserves us from *many* Occasions of Offence, and is itself preserved only by an entire Abstinence from *all*; and the Regard of the World, as well as the Applause of our own Conscience, and the Favour of the great Searcher of it, will all be conciliated only by an

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exemplary Life, and a Conduct answerable to the high Doctrine that we preach.

These, my Brethren, are some of the Felicities of our Station and Employment, which, besides the Sacredness of our Office, the solemn Professions which we made at our Ordination, and the Influence of our Example on the rest of Mankind, tie us to higher Degrees of Holiness ourselves, and more zealous Concern to promote the same Spirit in others. If we are *in Earnest* in the Discharge of our Duty, we shall still meet with some Success and Satisfaction in the Pursuit of it, and many Opportunities of doing Good will then present themselves, which pass unobserved to a less zealous Mind. Though the *Contradiction of Sinners* may sometimes make us uneasy, though it cannot but grieve us to see some *seriously disputing* against their own Interest, others lightly sacrificing their future hopes to the *Pleasantry of a Jest*, and a far greater Number *disregarding* in their Conduct the only Thought worth living for, yet the Consciousness of a sincere Endeavour to stop these evil Principles and Practices, will be some Consolation at present, and the Reward of such Endeavour will make us eternally happy hereafter. Then those, whom we have won over to a true Sense of
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their best Interest, those whom we have brought back to a right Faith by Reason and Argument, to a regular Practice by Admonition and Persuasion, and to both by the Force of a good Example, shall be our happy Witnesses at the great Day, and in their own Title to a glorious Sentence, will evidence and enhance theirs, who were the blessed Instruments of their Recovery and Reformation. For as the Apostle expresses it, *1 Thess. ii. 19. What is our Hope and Joy, and Crown of Rejoicing? Are not even those in the Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming, who have been converted by our Labours to the Belief or the Practice of his Religion? May this Reflection not only have its Weight with us in these occasional Meditations, but be the settled fixed Principle of our whole Conduct; that so when we come hereafter to give an Account of our Stewardship, we may do it with Joy and not with Grief, with Joy that we have faithfully discharged this important Office ourselves, and with Joy that we have thereby successfully contributed to the Salvation of others.*

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