

The successful *PREACHER*:

A S E R M O N

Delivered at the *FORKS* of *BRANDYWINE*

APRIL 22, 1761.

At the *ORDINATION* of the Reverend
MR. JOHN CARMICHAEL,

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By *JOHN BLAIR, A. M.*

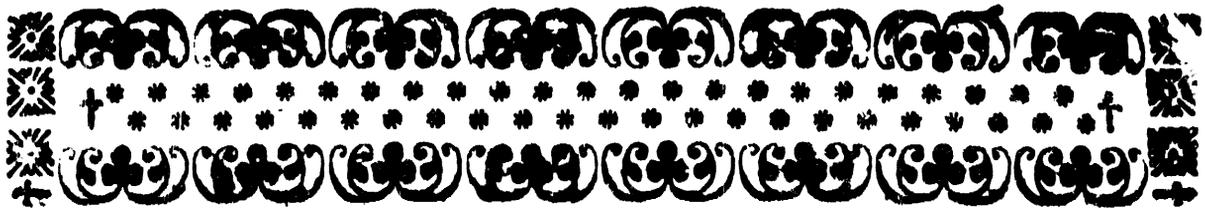
Minister of the Gospel at *Fogg's Manor.*

* *Th. ii. 4, 5.* But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing Men, but God which trieth our Hearts; for neither at any Time used we flattering words as ye know, nor a Cloak of Covetousness: God is Witness.

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I Cor. II. 4, 5.

And my Speech, and my Preaching was not with enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, but in Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power: That your Faith should not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God.

THE noble Grandure, and yet, at the same Time, artless Simplicity of Stile in the holy Scriptures, is justly esteemed a very considerable Evidence of their Divinity. The spiritual Excellency of divine Truths, when represented plainly as they are, fully recommends them. They need no Varnish to set them off. There are, indeed, bold Figures, a lofty Language in the sacred Scriptures; but these are not a meer Flourish of Words: they are the genuine Grandure of Expression with which the Mind naturally cloaths great Ideas and sublime Sentiments: and therefore, give no room to suspect artful Design and Imposition. They appear every way worthy

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thy of the holy Spirit as their Author. But because the sacred Writings contain spiritual Matter, the Beauty of which, the natural Man cannot discern; and don't dazzle with the Gaudery of rhetorical Flourishes, they are despised by carnal Wits: yet, they are Wisdom among them who are perfect, i. e. candid and sincere. They are mighty, thro' the Energy of the holy Spirit, to turn Sinners to God; while all other Means are insufficient to produce so glorious Effects.

HENCE, the holy Spirit is the only Resource, to which faithful Ministers look for the Success of their Labours, and therefore, take the Model of their Addresses to Mankind from him. Accordingly, the Apostle, in my Text, rejects the enticing Words, or Arts of Persuasion suggested by Man's Wisdom; and takes his Instructions from divine Revelation, which exhibits the Doctrines of Religion with the most demonstrative Evidence; is calculated to penetrate the Heart, and rendered efficacious to this Purpose, by the Influences of the holy Spirit.—He assigns a very solid Reason for this Determination, viz. That the *Faith* of his Hearers should not stand in the *Wisdom of Men*, but *in the Power of God*.

THE several Terms in my Text will be more fully explained, in the Prosecution of this Subject, under the following Heads:

I. I shall enquire what those Methods of Persuasion, devised by humane Wisdom, are, which the Apostle here rejects.

II. Shew what is imported in Preaching in Demonstration of the Spirit, and of Power.

III. Endeavour to explain the Reason which determined the Apostle to chuse this Manner of Preaching, and a little illustrate its Force.

I am,

I. To enquire what those Methods of Persuasion, devised by humane Wisdom, are, which the Apostle here rejects.

MAN'S Wisdom is here opposed to the Demonstration of the Spirit. The Words, which Man's Wisdom teacheth are opposed to the Words, which the holy Ghost teacheth. v. 13. Context. And therefore must signify the Contrivance of Mens own Hearts about the Things of Religion; framing them according to their own vitiated Taste (either as to the Matter of their Doctrines, or the Manner of treating them) without a due Regard to divine Revelation, or the Teaching of the Spirit. The enticing or persuasive Words of Man's Wisdom, must intend, those Methods of Persuasion, which humane Wisdom contrives, instead of the Topicks of Argument exhibited by the holy Spirit in his Word. Which includes such Particulars as these following:

1. MAN'S Wisdom devises a System of Religion upon meerly, or at least chiefly, logical and philosophical Principles. This the Apostle points at, in his serious Warning, Col. ii. 8. *Beware lest any Man spoil you thro' Philosophy and vain Deceit, after the Traditions of Men, after the Rudiments of the World, and not after Christ.* The Apostle does not condemn the Use of true Philosophy in its proper Place. It becomes us as rational Creatures to search out the Works of God, and read his Name, his Glory, in the Book of Nature. Thus far, this Science is greatly subservient to the Purposes of Devotion. But to philosophize upon the Principles of Religion, to make the Principles of Reason; of natural or moral Philosophy their Standard, according to which they are to be determined, is what the Apostle here guards against. Teachers upon this Plan are very complaisant to the carnal World: and try to accommodate Religion to their corrupt Relish. Such as set up for the Wits of the Age, commonly treat genuine Christianity with Sncer and Contempt. They affix the scornful Epithets of *Cant*, *Whim*, and *Enthusiasm* to the special Doctrines of the Gospel, which open up the Nature of spiritual experimental Religion. To avoid giving Offence to such Cavillers, these philosophical Preachers drop the **Mysteries** and grand **Peculiar**s of
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the Gospel of Christ. They either professedly reject them, or compromise Matters with their Adversaries, by treating them as abstruse Speculations, of little Influence upon the religious Life; and generally pass them over in Silence: insisting chiefly upon moral Virtues and social Duties. These they explain upon the Principles of Reason alone. They consider them only as they result from our natural Relations and Connexions. They enforce them by refined Reasonings upon the moral Beauty and Excellency of Virtue, and its great Advantages to civil Society. But they are very sparing in any Kinds of divine Authority, the Obligations of Conscience, or the Solemnities of a future Judgment. They would rather quote Authorities from the Heathen Philosophy, than that *obnoxious* Book the Bible. Much of their Reasonings turn upon Man's noble Excellencies and Capacities. They draw his Characters in such a Manner as to give a very exalted Idea of him. But lest they should spoil the fine Picture, the spiritual Death and universal Corruption of humane Nature must scarcely ever be mentioned, or touch'd with a very tender Delicacy.

WHEN human Reason is thus set up as the great Standard of Religion, it becomes luxuriant. Its Votaries are vainly puffed up by their fleshly Mind, and intrude into
 Things

Things which they have not seen. They aim at curious Speculations. Thus did the philosophizing Teachers in the Apostle's Days, in a *voluntary Humility, and Worshiping of Angels*, Col. ii. 18. They pretended to acknowledge themselves to mean to approach to God immediately, and therefore, would apply to angelic Mediators. Hence they were led to many high imaginary Notions about the Orders and Hierarchy of Angels. With these Fictions, they amused their Hearers, and thus diverted them from the true Worship of God, to a superstitious Adoration of created Spirits. So that the Wisdom of Men is sometimes employed to introduce and garnish wild Superstition and Idolatry.

2. ELOQUENCE, or the Embellishment of Rhetorick, is the Method of Persuasion, upon which human Wisdom depends. This is what the Apostle calls the *Wisdom of Words*, 1 Cor. i. 17. The *Excellency of Speech*, or of *Wisdom*, verse 1. of Context, which he determined to decline. The Apostle is far from condemning the modest Use of Rhetorick to excite the Affections, after the Understanding has been duly instructed. When divine Truths are opened up and explained, for the Information of the Judgment; it is very proper to interest the Heart more deeply in them, by a pathetic Address to the Passions

Passions and Affections. The Apostle himself, frequently uses the true Sublime; and wisely touches all the Springs of human Nature, in the most persuasive Manner. How grand the Ideas, and how greatly spoken! in the 11th and especially in the 12th Chapter to the *Hebrews*. With what fine Touches of true Oratory, does he excite the *Corinthians* to contribute to the Relief of the poor Saints at *Jerusalem!* and persuade *Philemon* to be reconciled to *Onesimus!* but then the Pathos lies rather in striking Sentiments, and the Significancy of Words, than the gaudy Flowers of Stile.

WHAT the Apostle rejects, is a swelling Parade of Words, calculated rather to tickle the Ear by the smoothly flowing Periods, and raise an Admiration of the Speaker, than impress the Heart with a solemn Sense of Things. When a Preacher's principal Care is about the Ornament of a Discourse, he will employ almost all his Art upon the Fineness of Composition and Elegance of Stile; he'll be more anxious about what will please, than what will edify; his great Study will be to qualify his Hearers; the whole Discourse must be form'd so as to glide smoothly on, even that Part which, at least, should be didactick or doctrinal, must flourish. Hence it is esteemed polite, by many to entertain an Auditory with only neat elegant Orations.

If the tender Passions are touch'd, and the Discourse applauded, the Preacher has obtained his Aim. The Spirit of a Sentiment must be dropt, and its Edge abated, for the Sake of making a Sentence flow easily.— In a Word, as social Virtues and moral Duties are the principal Subjects, which such Preachers insist upon, so they labour to establish them, by refined Reasonings upon natural Principles, without deriving their Authority from the Word of God; and depend upon the pompous Language, and fine Elegance of their Discourses for their Success.

THESE, and such like, are the Arts of human Contrivance, the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom; which yet Experience shews to be ineffectual to the Reformation of Mankind. Weapons these, which do no Execution in our degenerate World! as I shall endeavour to make appear under a following Head: It is therefore with great Wisdom and Propriety, that the Apostle chuses another Method of preaching, *viz.* in Demonstration and of Power; which leads me,

II. To shew what is herein imported.

AND, *1st* it imports the Choice of the peculiar Doctrines of divine Revelation, for the principal Subjects of a Man's Ministry. Tho' nothing can be admitted as a Revelation from God, that is repugnant to Reason; yet, it must be supposed to make known many Things

Things which Reason could not discover. These must be Matters of highest Importance to the Recovery and Salvation of Men; (otherwise such a Revelation could not be indispensibly necessary) and therefore should be principally insisted upon. Reason can infer and explain many of our moral Obligations; but can never settle and adjust the Rights of the divine Government, which is injured by the Creatures Rebellion; or whether, or in what Way, Sin can be expiated. It cannot account for, nor sufficiently explain the universal Depravity of human Nature. The Mediation of Christ, Justification thro' his Righteousness, Regeneration, supernatural Grace, Union to Christ, and in Consequence of that, the In-dwelling of the holy Spirit by his gracious Influences, and Communion with God in holy Duties, &c. are Doctrines which human Reason could never have thought of; but are clearly opened up in the Word of God. It is the great Design of divine Revelation to inculcate them. They are essential and fundamental to the Christian Religion. The Salvation of fallen Man is impossible without the experimental Knowledge of them, it must, therefore, be the main Business of a Gospel Minister to insist upon such important Articles as these.---Thus says the Apostle, *We speak the Wisdom of God in a MYSTERY, even the hidden Wisdom which God hath ordained*

concealed before the World unto our Glory, which none of the Princes of this World (those Men of Learning and Reason) knew, for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. 1 Cor. 2. 7, 8.

SUBJECTS of Morality are, indeed, also to be treated in the Pulpit; nor are Considerations from the Nature and Reason of Things to be neglected, in explaining and confirming them. Yet, even these Things which Reason can discover, are more clearly and strongly represented in the Word of God. Hence the Deists themselves, those great Boasters of the Sufficiency of Nature's Light, are much beholden to the sacred Scriptures for the Perspicuity of their Discoveries. Divine Revelation sets moral Subjects in a very different Connexion, from that, in which meerly philosophical Reasonings place them; and establishes them upon different Principles. The Gospel Minister, therefore, is not to treat them as a Philosopher, but as a Divine; and to consider them in the Light of Revelation. Which leads me to observe,

2. **THAT** to preach in Demonstration of the Spirit, is to open up and confirm divine Truths, by such kind of Demonstration as the holy Spirit uses.

In the sacred Book of God, wrote by the Inspiration of the holy Ghost, we shall find no laboured Art: No Impositions upon the Credulity

Credulity of Mankind, or Attempts to excite Superstition, by lying Wonders and false Mysteries, which appear, such, only, by some crafty Intrigue and artful Concealment. But Facts are related with a noble ingenious Simplicity, and submitted to the most publick Examination, together with the Reasonings from them. *We have not, says the Apostle, follow'd cunningly devised Fables, when we made known unto you, the Power and Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; But were Eye-witnesses of his Majesty.* 2 Pet. i. 16. The System of Religion which the holy Spirit has revealed, is so far from soothing the Corruptions, or flattering the carnal Passions of Men, that it runs directly counter to them. The Depravity of fallen Man is plainly opened up, the Evil of Sin exposed, and its Mortification insisted upon. All the Doctrines concerning our Recovery thro' the Mediation of a Redeemer, and by the Energy of divine Grace, are directly suited to this wretched State of Things; all tending to maintain the Dignity of the divine Government, and to restore, and promote the moral Goodness of the apostate Creature. Matters are set in so solemn a Point of Light, the Nature of true Religion is so descriptively represented, and with such Dignity and Authority, as to be exactly calculated to reach the Conscience, and affect the Heart. *The Word of God is quick*

quick and powerful, sharper than any two edged Sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the Joints and Marrow; and is a Discerner of the Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart. Heb. 4. 12.—The spiritual Excellency and Purity of the Doctrines, contained in the sacred Scriptures, their Congruity to the divine Perfections; their Opposition to all moral Evil; their Address to every Man's own Conscience, who will seriously consider, and impartially compare himself with them; their obvious Hope and Tendency, which is to magnify and display the Glory of God, and reduce the revolted Creature to a State of Subjection to him as his supream Lord, and Happiness in him, as his chief Good; are convincing Demonstrations of their being divine, a Revelation from God: And whereby the holy Ghost convinces *the World of Sin, of Righteousness, and of Judgment.* John 16. 8.

Now, it is the Business of the Gospel Minister to explain, enforce, and inculcate these Truths, in their native Simplicity and Purity, without any adulterating Mixtures; to set these irrefragable Evidences of their Authority fairly in View; and to take Care that such Marks of Sincerity, Purity, and strictly following the Light of God's Word, appear in the Whole of his Preaching. By these, and such like Considerations, the
Apostle

Apostle *Paul* vindicates his Ministry. 2 Cor. 2. 17. *For we are not as many, which corrupt the Word of God (like Vintners, who adulterate their Wines, by mixing them with Water) but as of Sincerity, but as of God, in the Sight of God, speak we in Christ.* Chap. 4. 2. *But have renounced the hidden Things of DISHONESTY, not walking in CRAFTINESS, nor handling the Word of God DECEITFULLY, but by MANIFESTATION OF THE TRUTH, commending ourselves to every Man's CONSCIENCE, in the Sight of God.* Eph. 4. 14, 15. *That we henceforth, be no more Children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the sight of Men, and CUNNING CRAFTINESS, whereby they lie in Wait to DECEIVE; but speaking the TRUTH in Love, may grow up into him in all Things, which is the Head, even Christ.*

3. To preach in Demonstration of the Spirit, is to follow those Methods of Persuasion, which the holy Spirit uses in his Word.

IT is not enough to illustrate Doctrines, and demonstrate them to be true, but the reluctant Hearts of Men are to be persuaded to a Compliance. Without this, the Things of Religion are treated only as Matters of cold Speculation. Now while human Wisdom depends, for this Purpose, upon refined Reasonings upon the moral Beauty and Advantages of Virtue, the Disadvantages of Vice;

Vice; upon Elegance of Composition, and the Excellency of Speech; the holy Spirit, in his Word, urges the Conscience, with the Consideration of our being accountable to God; the Solemnity of a future Judgment; the important Realities of Heaven and Hell: and addresses the Heart with Arguments drawn from the Love of Christ, the Grace of God, the abundant Riches of divine Mercy, the Glory of God, and the great Things he has laid up for them who love him.

THESE then are the Topicks, which should furnish out the Rhetoric of the Pulpit. These are the Methods of Persuasion we find used by the Apostles and first Ministers of the Gospel. Thus says Paul, Rom. xii, 1. I beseech you, Brethren, by the MERCIES OF GOD, that ye present your Bodies a living Sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable Service. 1 Cor. 6, 19, 20. What, know ye not that your Body is the Temple of the holy Ghost, which ye have of God, and ye not your OWN? FOR YE ARE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE; therefore, glorify God with your Body and your Spirit, which are God's. 2 Cor. 5. 14, 15, 20, 21. For the LOVE of CHRIST *constraineth us*, because we thus judge that *if One died for all*, then were all dead, and that *he died for all*, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him, which died for them

them and rose again --- We pray you in Christ's Stead, be ye reconciled to God. For HE HATH MADE HIM TO BE SIN FOR US, who knew no Sin; that WE MIGHT BE MADE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM. Phil. 2. 1, 2. If there be therefore, any Consolation in Christ, if any Comfort of Love, if any Fellowship of the Spirit, if any Bowels of Mercies; fulfil ye my Joy, that ye be like minded, having the same Love, being of one Accord, of one Mind.

WHEN the Apostle would perswade to moral Duties; to Liberality to the poor Saints at *Jerusalem*, ex. gr. he does not do it meerly as a Philosopher, from the Consideration of their mutual Connexions as Members of Society; and the Pleasure that relieving the Needy affords to a generous Mind; but as a Christian Minister, uses the more melting and effectual Persuasions, which the Gospel affords. For ye know, says he, **THE GRACE** of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, that tho' he was **RICH**, yet, for **YOUR SAKES** he became **POOR**, that ye thro' his **POVERTY** might be Rich. 2 Cor. 8. 9. and Chap. 9. 7,---15. Every Man, according as he purposeth in his Heart so let him give; not grudginly, or of Necessity; **FOR GOD LOVETH a cheerful Giver.** And God is able to make all **GRACE** abound towards you, that ye always having *All-sufficiency in all Things, may abound to every*
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good Work : (as it is written, he hath dispersed abroad, he hath given to the Poor ; his Righteousness remaineth for ever. Now *he* that ministereth Seed to Sower, *both minister Bread for your Food, and multiply your Seed sown, and encrease the Fruit of your Righteousness*) being enriched in every Thing to all Bountifulness, which causeth thro' us *Thanksgiving to God*. For the Administration of this Service, not only *supplieth the Want of the Saints*, but is **ABUNDANT** also by many *Thanksgivings* UNTO **GOD**. (Whilst by the Experiment of this Ministration they **GLORIFY GOD** for your *professed Subjection unto the Gospel of Christ*, and for your *liberal Distribution* unto them, and to all Men) and by *their Prayer* for you, which long after you, for the *exceeding Grace of God* in you. Thanks be to God for his **UNSPEAKABLE GIFT**.

A Group of persuasive Arguments these, arising from the Gospel of Christ, which Man's Wisdom would never have suggested ! and yet, how much more pathetic !

4. IN Order to preach in Demonstration of the Spirit, it is requisite that the Preacher himself be much under the Influence of that divine Spirit.

No Man can have a thorough Idea of vital Religion without the Experience of it in his own Soul. He may have very orthodox Speculations about Faith in Christ, and the other
Graces

Graces of the holy Spirit ; but he cannot duly apprehend the internal Actings and Sensations of the Soul in the Exercise of them, unless he himself has felt them. And consequently, he cannot represent them to the Life, and describe the Energy of divine Grace, so as to convey, to his Hearers, an Idea of the inward Feelings of God's People, in its various Exercise. One, indeed, who has had some considerable Experience of the common Operations of the Spirit, may come much nearer the Matter than others; but still, he must be very deficient in distinguishing between common and saving Grace. Nor can it be expected, that a Man, whose Soul does not relish the spiritual Things of Religion, will dwell upon such Subjects in the Course of his Ministry. They will not only be undelightful, but, as his carnal Mind is Enmity against God, disgusting to him. He will rather mould Religion so as will best suit his own Experience, and comport with his false Hopes and carnal Security.

BUT it is not enough that a Minister be in a State of Grace ; he must also have the quickening Influences of the holy Spirit from Time to Time, in Order to enable him to preach the Gospel in a clear, practical, demonstrative Manner. It is a lively Sense of divine Things, that will make him solemnly in Earnest, and animate his Discourses with a proper

proper Spirit. When a Man does not feel his Subject, his Sermon will be cold and languishing. Faithful Ministers often lament under such Indispositions, that they cannot do Justice to divine Truths. But let the Heart be under the deep Influence of spiritual Truths, and the Preacher's Lips will be as the Pen of a ready Scribe. He will enter into the very Spirit of his Subject. He will open it up with such Perspicuity; will set it in View with such Life and Energy of Language, such fulness of Evidence, as will have the happiest Tendency to warm the Hearts of true Christians, and, at least, command the Attention of others, and leave a Testimony in their Consciences. The Man, with whom is the Secret of the Lord, to whom he shews his Covenant (Psalm 25. 14.) is certainly the most likely to open it up to others in such a Manner, as to speak to their very Hearts. It was when *Stephen* was full of Faith and Power, that they were not able to resist the Wisdom and the Spirit, with which he spake. Act. 7. 8, - - 10. To this Purpose also the Apostle observes in our Context, Verse 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, that Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have entered into the Heart of Man, the Things which God hath prepared for them who love him, *but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit*; for the Spirit searcheth all Things, yea the deep Things
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of God. For what Man knoweth the Things of a Man, save the Spirit of Man, which is in him! even so the Things of God knoweth no Man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the Spirit of the World, but the SPIRIT which is of God; that we might know the Things that are freely given to us of God. Which Things also we speak, not in the Words which Man's Wisdom teacheth; but which the holy Ghost teacheth; comparing Spiritual Things with Spiritual.

Once more,

5. To preach in Demonstration of the Spirit imports, a Dependence upon the holy Ghost for Success.

FAITHFUL Ministers consider themselves only as Instruments, which the blessed God condescends to make Use of; but all the Efficacy of their Labours is from him. Thus says the Apostle, who then is *Paul*, and who is *Apollos*, but Ministers by whom ye believed even as the Lord gave to every Man. I have planted, Apollos watered, but God giveth the Increase. 1 Cor. 3. 5, 6. True Believers are said to be the *Epistle of Christ*, (ministred by his Servants) written, not with Ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in Tables of Stone, but in the fleshly Tables of the Heart. 2 Cor. 3. 3. i. e. the Doctrines of the Gospel make deep and fixed Impressions on the Heart, as the Pen or Type does upon the

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the Paper ; but then, it is by the Energy of the holy Spirit they do so. The Ministers of Christ, know they *are not sufficient of themselves*, to think any Thing *as of themselves*, but their *Sufficiency is of God*. It is *he*, that *makes them able Ministers* of the New-Testament. The Gospel is called the *Ministration of the Spirit*. 2 Cor. 3. 5, 6, --- 8. Hence the Servants of God seek the holy Spirit's Aid in order to the right Discharge of their weighty Work, and depend upon his mighty Influence, and gracious Blessing, as the only Source of their Success. He it is, who so fully demonstrates divine Truths, as to conquer and persuade the Heart.

Now when Preachers make the Doctrines of divine Revelation the Subjects of their Ministry, i. q. in that very Connexion and Point of Light, in which the Word of God sets them. When they open up these Truths in their Purity, native Simplicity, and important interesting Nature; when they demonstrate them from the Testimony of God, and set the innate Character of Divinity, which the Doctrines of the Gospel carry in them, fully in View; when, in the Application of Truths so illustrated and confirm'd, they decypher the Heart, and urge it with such awakening and pathetic Considerations as have been already hinted; when in doing this, they are animated by divine Influence,

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their Hearts are filled with that Fervency, and their Lips with that holy Heart-affecting Eloquence, which a lively Sense of Religion naturally intpires; and when the Influence of the holy Spirit concurs with the Word of his Grace; then there will appear to be Power and Authority in the Word, as well as Light and Evidence. If those who sustain the Character of Christ's Ministers will take their Instructions from the sacred Writings, and faithfully prosecute their Scope and Design according to the foregoing Observations; if they will treat the eternal Interests, the momentous Concernment of immortal Souls with God in such a striking Manner; set them in so very solemn and interesting a Point of Light as the Word of God does, and urge the Heart with such pathetic Importunity and spirited Address as the sacred Pages every where abound with: Then they will speak as those that have Authority. They will speak with Power. With Power sufficient to oblige Men to yeild their Assent to the Truth; to make them see, in some Measure, their own Character; to lay many Restraints upon them; leave a Testimony in their Consciences for God against themselves; render them frequently uneasy in their Way of Sin; and leave them without Excuse; and with Respect to many, the Weapons of their Warfare will be mighty thro' God, to the pulling down of strong

strong Holds, casting down Imaginations, and every high Thing that exalteth itself against the Knowledge of God, and bringing into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ. 2 Cor. 10. 4, 5. Their Ministry will become effectual to open Sinners Eyes, and turn them from Darknets to Light, and from the Power of Satan unto God. Acts 26. 18. The happy Tendency of this plain, practical, and spiritual Manner of Preaching, to so blessed Effects, determined the Apostle to chuse it, instead of the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, that so the Faith of Christians might not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God. This Reason of his Conduct I am,

III. To endeavour to explain and illustrate. Faith in general, is the Credit we give to the Testimony of another. If the Testimony be Man's, our Faith is human; but is called divine, when founded on the Testimony of God. Even when Matters of Religion are Objects of our Belief, so far as it rests upon the Testimony or Authority of Men, it is but a human Faith: And only divine, in so far as the Testimony of God determines it. When the Efforts of human Reason, in its present imperfect broken State, tho' set off with all the laboured Embellishments of Language, fix the Articles of our Creed, then our Faith stands the Wisdom of Men. But when efficacious
Light

Light shines into the Understanding from the Word of God, whereby Ignorance is removed, Prejudices are overcome, and we are persuaded cordially to embrace the Truth in the Love of it, upon the Authority of the divine Testimony, then our Faith stands in the Power of God. This the Apostle aimed at as the great Design of his Ministry, and takes his Measures accordingly. He uses Means directly adapted to this End. Tho' he well knew the Arts of Man's Wisdom, and was as capable of using them, as others; yet he wisely chuses to open up the Mysteries of the *bidden Wisdom of God*, as better calculated to answer the truly valuable Ends of Preaching, and with which only, he could expect the Concurrence of divine Energy.

Now in Order to take up the full Force of the Apostle's Argument, and see the Reason of his Conduct, it will be proper to observe, that such is the present State of our World, that a very great Change must take Place in the Temper and Disposition of Men's Hearts, such a Change as will infer a thorough Alteration of the Life and Conversation; before ever they can be the Subjects of Happiness. However we shall account for it, the Fact is obvious, that Mankind are universally corrupted. The most careful Observer must see, this World is full of Oppression, Fraud, and Injustice; that the human

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Race

Race in general, are under the Influence and Government of irregular Lufts and Passions ; that they are sensual and terrene ; that Pride, Malice, and Envy, are every where prevalent, and shew themselves in their bitter Fruits ; and that Truth and Integrity are rare Things in the World. The Eye of Reason is greatly blinded, and almost put out. Human Wisdom, instead of being able to point out the Remedy of these Evils, is often only employed in garnishing every one's Conceit, yea the most absurd and ridiculous Notions, in order to make them pass. The fabulous Divinity of the Heathens, their Multitude of Deities, and the absurd and often monstrous Worship they paid them, sufficiently shew this. From all this, it is evident, that Mankind being wise in their own Conceits are become Fools, that they are deeply revolted from God, and naturally most opposite to moral Goodness. They must needs be in a most wretched State of Guilt and Misery. Nor can they ever be in a better Condition, till they become quite other Creatures than by Nature they are. It is absurd to imagine that rebellious Sinners, whose Souls are bent upon Iniquity, and disrelish true Holiness, can enjoy Communion with a holy God, and Happiness therein, while so base a Temper continues to govern them. And when we consider not only the Absence of holy Principles,

principles, but the strong Opposition, from evil Habits, to be overcome, it is evident, no less than almighty Power is requisite, to effect so great a Change. But yet it is a Change to be effected, not by Way of meer physical Operation, but in a moral Way, by Means suitable to our rational Nature, adapted to persuade. Divine Truths are therefore the Medium by which this Power is to be exerted. In order to persuade and conquer the Heart, two Things are necessary, *viz.* That the Doctrines proposed carry sufficient Weight in them, to preponderate against every opposite Consideration; and that they be believed. Without the former, there can be no Reason to influence the Mind; without the latter, the most solid Reason can have no Weight. But where both concur, there must needs be Power and Influence in Proportion to the Degree of Faith, which will always be in Proportion to the Nature and Degree of apprehended Evidence.

Now the Apostle would not have the Faith of his Hearers to stand in the Wisdom of Men, because such a Faith is weak and ineffectual; it is destitute of Power, as the Antithesis plainly shews. It is opposed to the Faith which stands in the *Power of God*. Such a Faith must needs be weak and ineffectual; for the Doctrines proposed by human Wisdom do not carry sufficient Weight in them, to

over ballance opposite Considerations ; nor does Man's Wisdom establish these Doctrines upon so certain Evidence, at least, Evidence to level to common Apprehension, as to beget a deep fix'd Belief of them. As will appear from the few following Considerations taken together.

HERE I may appeal to Fact. Experience shews that the Faith which stands in the Wisdom of Men has no prevailing Efficacy. Some few of the heathen Moralists have reasoned finely upon the Beauty of Virtue, and the great Advantages to be reap'd from it by Mankind, both as individuals, and as Members of Society, in this Life. Tho' they have talk'd, at best, in a very dubious Manner about a future State. But where have they effected any Reformation? where have they put Vice out of Countenance, or persuaded Men to the Love and Practice of Virtue? They have seldom lived according to their own Lectures themselves. Nor have been able to disentangle themselves from the Superstitions and Follies of their Country.

PHILOSOPHICAL Reasonings are too refined for the Bulk of Mankind. They cannot apprehend their Force. The greater Part of People have neither Leisure, nor the necessary Cultivations of their mental Powers, to attend fairly to nice metaphysical Discourses. Neither would they make proper Impressions,

sions, if they could. Let a Man talk never so well upon moral Beauty; the Pleasure arising from Virtue; and the inward Shame and Confusion arising from Vice; they, whose Inclinations lay quite the contrary Way, and who take Pleasure in the Gratification of their Lufts, will never believe him. They cannot see the Beauty he speaks of. He seems to be reasoning against their Sense and Experience.

THE Principles upon which the Wisdom of Man goes, do not *oblige* and *awaken the Conscience*; and do not convince Men of the Danger, to which their present Course exposes them. The enticing Words of Man's Wisdom deduces our moral Obligations only from the Beauty, Reason, and Fitness of Things. Perhaps the sacred Scriptures may be quoted by way of Compliment; but with special Care not to drop a Hint, as tho' their Authority signify'd any Thing in the Case: They are only, it may be, refer'd to as illustrations of, and affording their Suffrage to the aforesaid Plan of Reasonings. But this Method of Reasoning is more than counterballanced by present corrupt Inclinations and delight. The Conscience is never impressed with a Sense of the divine Authority or Obligation of God's Law; the Account we must render to him; and the Powers of the World to come. Hence, tho' Sinners should yeild
their

their Assent to the Truth of such Reasonings, yet they have no great Sense of Danger; and apprehend a present Advantage and Pleasure on the other Side. Meer Reasoning is cold and unaffecting; and Eloquence, at best can but touch the Passions for the present, but cannot change the Inclination of the Will. These will be no more effectual to stem the Tide of Corruption, than Arrows of Straw, to batter down a brazen Wall. A supernatural Energy and Influence of divine Grace is necessary to this Purpose. But human Wisdom cannot assure us whether this Grace be at all attainable, or upon what Terms it may be dispensed: And therefore cannot encourage Sinners to look for it, nor persuade them to seek it.

BUT the Word of God (the Words which the holy Ghost teacheth) presents us with the most moving Considerations, and urges them with such Strength and Plainness of Evidence as to assure the Mind and beget so firm a Belief of them, under the divine Influence, as will deeply affect the Heart.

THE Law of God exhibits to us a Copy of divine Excellencies; of that Disposition of Mind towards, and Conformity to them, which constitutes the moral Goodness of rational Beings, and that Course of Duty, in which this is to be exercised and expressed; opens up the Majesty and supream Authority of

of Jehovah; and sets before us the awful Sanctions, by which our Obedience to him is enforc'd. God has reveal'd to us in his Word, our Apostacy from him, and Violation of these natural and deep Obligations, we lye under to him; explain'd the universal Depravity, and spiritual Death of fallen Man; and seriously represented the rueful Misery to which so base a Revolt exposes him. These Things, bore home upon the Hearts of Sinners in their genuine Light, mightily convince their Consciences, of their Sin and Misery. By this pure and holy Law of God, they are arraign'd and convicted at their own Bar. God's Vice-gerent in their Bosoms, pronounces Sentence, and condemns them. They are filled with a Sense of Almighty Wrath. The Terrors of God fall upon them, and they dread the awful Decision of a future Judgment. Hence they can find no Rest in their present dangerous Condition. They are full of Enquiry, what they shall do to be saved? but their Sin and Guilt now appears in so awful a Point of Light, so infinitely base and heinous, that they know not how it can consist with the Justice, Holiness, and governing Authority of God to shew Mercy to such ungrateful Rebels. This greatly discourages poor awakened Sinners and was there no Relief provided in this Case, absolute Despair would harden them in their Enmity

mity, and prevent all Attempts to seek God.

BUT the Gospel obviates this perplexing Difficulty by opening the Scheme of Salvation thro' Christ. The Glad Tidings of a Mediator, the Account of his Person, and Natures, the History of his Incarnation, Birth, Life, Death, and Resurrection; his Righteousness and Offices; set before us a Door of Hope, and shew us a Way of Reconciliation worthy of God, and every Way consistent with, and adapted to illustrate the divine Glory. The Gospel makes a gracious Tender of Christ, and all the Fulness of Salvation thro' him, to the guiltiest vilest Sinners: They are invited to trust in him. Here, as poor Sinners, a deep distressful Sense of their Guilt and Misery presses and alarms them on the one Hand; so this Report of the Gospel upon the other, encourages and invites them to fly to Christ as their only and safe Refuge.

As poor Sinners are utterly dead and without Strength to embrace the Redeemer, and to turn to God thro' him, they are directed and encouraged to seek the Grace and Influence of the holy Spirit, by whose Energy the Heart is conquer'd and quickened. Here is a Plan laid for his Return to rebellious Men, by Way of gracious Influence, and Operation. And hence Sinners utter Helplessness in themselves, is no Bar in the Way of their Salvation.

Now

Now when this surprizing Grace of God, this unparralleled Love of Christ is apprehended; these Doctrines of Salvation are really believed, so believed as that poor Sinners venture all their Salvation, their eternal Interests upon this Foundation; make this Righteousness of Christ their only Refuge, and with all their Hearts acquiesce in the new and well ordered Covenant, as containing all their Salvation and all their Desire: When hereupon their Souls are filled with a sweet Sense of pardoning Mercy; how deep and tender the Obligations of Love and Gratitude such must feel themselves under, who are thus pluck'd as Brands out of the Burning! their Hearts are melted and yield; their Enmity conquered, and now they dedicate themselves to God, and chose his Service upon noble Principles. So that this System of Doctrines, open'd up in the sacred Scriptures, have the most direct Tendency in their own Nature, to reduce Rebels to God again. The firm Belief of them will overcome the Reluctance and Opposition of the corrupt Heart.

SEEING that the blessed God has, with so exquisite Wisdom, contrived this Way of Salvation, and has been at so infinite Expence upon it, we may naturally expect, his Arm will be stretched out to accomplish it, in such Instances, as to his Sovereign Pleasure

sure seems meet: That he will exert his Power in impressing these Truths upon the Hearts of Sinners, to persuade them to embrace Christ, and return to their Allegiance. Thus their Faith is of the *Operation of God*, and stands in *his Power*; and is effectual to the purifying of their Hearts.

THEREFORE to preach up these Doctrines in a solemn, practical, and pungent Manner, to open up the Nature of Faith in Christ, and the Change of Heart that accompanies it; and to inculcate all the Duties of Holiness towards God and Man, upon this Foundation, and urge them by the Motives of the Gospel, is the only Means to promote the Holiness and Happiness of fallen Sinners; the only Preaching, upon which we can expect the efficacious Blessing of God; the Co-operation of the holy Spirit.

I proceed now to make some practical Reflections upon this Subject.

Reflect. 1st. HENCE we learn that an experimental Acquaintance with the saving Grace of God, is a Qualification indispensably necessary in a Minister of the Gospel, in order to the skilful and faithful Discharge of his solemn Trust. Without this, he will not be disposed to Faithfulness, nor be capable of it. It is only the Grace of God that will bring down a Man's Conceit of his own Wisdom; and make him become a Fool in his own Eyes,

Eyes, that he may be wise. It is only the Experience of divine Grace that can give a Man a true Idea of vital Religion; and consequently, enable him to explain it with convincing Clearness and Energy. He will, without this, either pervert the Word of God by false Glosses, according to the Relish of his carnal Heart, or at best, leave out the very Spirit of the Gospel, which renders it the Power of God to Salvation. As a carnal Man's Heart is not conform'd to the Word of God, his Discourses will not be moulded according to it; but he will mould the Word of God according to his own carnal Wisdom. Such a Man's Ministry will not only come short of the true End of Preaching, but will really oppose it. Will not only leave his Hearers ignorant of the Nature of true Religion, but give them a false Idea of it. And consequently, it will tend to the Destruction of immortal Souls. O then, what a hardy Adventure is it, for a Man to enter into the sacred Office, without some good Reason to hope that God has taught him true spiritual Wisdom! what an awful Risque does he run! to undertake the Conduct of Souls in Matters of everlasting Moment: Matters upon which eternal Life or Death depend, while he himself does not understand them, how dreadful! O what a Case must he be in, who tries Practice upon immortal Souls at a Venture!

How careful then should the Judicatures of the Church be, to encourage only such who afford some hopeful Evidences of true Piety, and Acquaintance with spiritual Exercises, to enter into the Ministry: And to discourage others. They will betray the Interests of the Church committed to their Care, if they are negligent in this. *

Reflection 2d. How much should it be the Solitude of a Gospel Minister, to be more and more deny'd to his own Wisdom; to be more deeply under the Influence of spiritual Truths, and the Energy of the holy Ghost, in order to answer the great End of his Office.

A Minister must, indeed, exercise Wisdom and Prudence in explaining divine Truths, arranging Ideas and Arguments, and improving Subjects to the Edification of the Hearers. When this is under the Direction of God's Word, and the chief Labour is to set Matters in the most instructive, convincing, and Heart-affecting Point of Light, then it is, indeed

* Surely he is not fit for the Ministry, who does not make a credible Profession of experimental Religion. Tho' a designing Hypocrite may impose upon a Presbytery by a feigned Narrative, yet then the Crime is his own, (and an aggravated Crime it would be) and he may in like Manner, deceive with Respect to the Profession of his Faith. But Charity forbids us to suspect a Man of such awful Perfidy, so solemn Lying, except upon such evident Inconsistency in his Life and Conversation, as would of itself, be a sufficient Objection against him. What Security has the Church for the Continuance of a pious Ministry, a Ministry skilful in spiritual Exercises, if Presbyteries don't conscientiously make a Point of this, to enquire into what Evidence of experimental Religion Candidates can afford them? we cannot, indeed, discern the Heart, but we can judge of the Credibility of such a Profession; and if it be credible, we, at least, obtain some Evidence of their being capable of representing the Nature of spiritual Exercises.

deed, spiritual Wisdom.—But even pious Ministers have the Remains of Pride in them, whence they are in Danger of too great a Propensity to seek their own Glory, and for that Purpose, to take such Measures as will go best down with the carnal World. They may be too ambitious to shine, too solicitous about the Dreis and Ornament of their Discourses, that they may attract the Admiration of their Audience. This indeed, appears under the Mask of supporting the Dignity and Reputation of their Ministry. They may be too ready to accommodate themselves to the depraved Taste of the carnal World, under the Notion of avoiding their Prejudices, and recommending Religion to them. But alas! this is carnal Wisdom. And upon the whole they will miss their Mark. For while they study so much to please the Ear, they forget to point at the Heart with a proper Spirit. They may raise the Admiration of their Hearers for a while, but their Eloquence will soon grow familiar; and having so much the Air of Preaching themselves, will become neglected † It is the Energy of Sermons upon the Heart that will command Respect, and support their Dignity. When the Preacher's own Heart is

† I would not be understood here to plead for a Neglect of good Style, a careless Disregard of Composition. That is to go to the other Extrem. I only oppose such a Delicacy in this Matter, as renders the Beauties of Language, and Nicety of Composition a principal Study: And urge, that it should be only a Secondary and less principal Care. While the Chief Anxiety of the Heart runs in a more important Direction.

is deeply interested in his Subject, and means to impress it upon the Hearts of others, this will naturally dictate the most significant and energetic Language; which will command both Attention and Esteem; and the little Inaccuracies, that may be owing to the Want of laboured Notes before him, will be overlook'd. Therefore, let Gospel Ministers be much engag'd in searching the sacred Scriptures, studying the Gospel of Christ, comparing spiritual Things with Spiritual. Let them be very anxious to obtain a deep-fix'd Sense of divine Truths upon their own Hearts. And to that End, let them seek much of the continual Influence of the holy Spirit. O let them beware of grieving him; and be very careful to keep up a holy Fellowship with him. Then, and only then, they are likely to answer the End of their Ministry.

Reflection 3d. THIS Discourse serves to suggest a good Rule, by which a People may be directed in the Choice of a Minister.

WHEN a People put themselves under the Care of a Minister, they commit to him the Conduct of their Souls in Matters of infinite Moment: The Mismanagement of which, will tend to their Destruction. They have Need then, to have good Evidence of his Fidelity and Ability. In choosing a Minister, they should not aim at having their Ears tickled, and their Fancy amused. But at having their

their

their Hearts instructed in the Knowledge of Christ, and persuaded to embrace him, and to turn to God thro' him. If they act according to this Design, they will certainly choose that Ministry, in which they perceive the manifest Appearance of Power and Authority: That searches and addresses the Conscience; that plainly aims at the Heart. They will make Choice of the Preacher who makes it his principal Business to open up the spiritual Things of Religion, and represents them in a striking pungent Manner. Who, *by Manifestation of the Truth, recommends himself to every Man's CONSCIENCE in the Sight of God.* Who earnestly negotiates a Reconciliation of Sinners to God upon the Plan of the Gospel. They will choose the Man, who exhibits an Example of the Religion he preaches in his own Walk, and maintains a savory Relish of divine Things in his Conversation. Such a Man, and only such, is likely to be a Blessing to a People.

Reflection 4. THE Subject now under Consideration requires me to address myself solemnly to you, Dear Sir, who are this Day about to devote yourself to the Service of God, in the sacred Work of the Ministry.

You have briefly heard in what Manner you are to preach. You will easily infer, Sir, from what has been said, what Diligence in Reading and Study is requisite, in order to
the

the faithful Discharge of this solemn Trust. You are to search the Word of God closely ; to compare spiritual Things with Spiritual. It requires very diligent Application to study, to obtain an extensive Knowledge of the Mind of God revealed in his Word: And to find out the most instructive, convincing, and persuasive Manner of communicating it. The Preacher is to search out acceptable Words, by which he may penetrate the Hearts of his Hearers.

You will readily see how much it concerns you, to obtain a deep Sense of spiritual Things in your own Soul. If you would preach spiritually, you must be Spiritual. If you would preach in Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power, you must obtain the Presence and Aid of the holy Spirit. The more abundantly you partake of the Influences of the Spirit, the more demonstrative and powerful will your Preaching be.

See to it, Dear Sir, that you maintain a Savour of Religion in your daily Conversation. *Be thou an Example of the Believers, in Word, in Conversation, in Charity, in Spirit, in Faith, in Purity.* 1 Tim. 4, 12. unless you live the Religion you preach; unless the Power of your Doctrines appear in your own Life, your public Discourses are like to be treated with Neglect.

IN all your Preparations for the Pulpit, labour

hour to have the Subject of your Study brought home to your own Heart. Seek to imbibe its Spirit. Be not contented to enter the House of God, without being deeply impressed with the Truths you are to deliver. Preach to yourself as well as others. Then you will speak in Earnest, with a natural unaffected Fervency. It is, indeed, an awful Thing to see a Minister of the Gospel aim merely at acting a Part, and personating feigned Characters; or courting the Applause of his People.

To animate and excite you to Faithfulness, consider the Excellency of your Ministry. It is a Ministry of Reconciliation. Your Business is to open up and display the Grace and Mercy of God; the Terms of Peace with him; to pray Sinners in Christ's Stead to be reconciled to God. It is the Ministration of the Spirit, in which you are to be employed. Your Ministry aims at the *perfecting the Saints*, and *the Edification of the Body of Christ*. These are most solemn Matters! to trifle about, or neglect them is very absurd, very awful.

CONSIDER the great Value and Importance of immortal Souls, whose eternal Interests are the great Objects of your Ministry. Each of them are of greater Worth than the whole World. Nothing can counterballance the Loss of a Soul. An infinite Price was paid for its Ransom. A Number of these precious

mortal Souls are now about to be committed to your peculiar Charge. Behold this Congregation! when you consider them as Candidates for Eternity, are they not an august Assembly! If you are faithful, you will deliver your own Soul. But if they perish thro' your Neglect, God will require their Blood at your Hand.

SOULS converted by your Ministry will be your Joy and Crown of Rejoicing in the Day of the Lord Jesus. *They who turn many to Righteousness, shall shine as Stars in the Firmament forever and ever.* Dan. 12, 3. How blessed! to receive the joyful Sentence from the final Judge of all; *well done good and faithful Servant, enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord!*

Tho' you have to deal with wayward and dead Souls, not only without Strength, but opposed to God, at Enmity with him; yet it is Matter of Encouragement, that you have the holy Spirit to depend upon for demonstrating divine Truths to their Consciences, and giving Power and Efficacy to your Ministrations. His Energy will overcome all Opposition. Take Courage, and bear up against all Despondency. *The Weapons of your Warfare shall be mighty thro' God, to the pulling down of strong Holds, and casting down Imaginations, and every high Thing that exalteth itself against the Knowledge of God, and bringing in Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ.*

Reflect.