

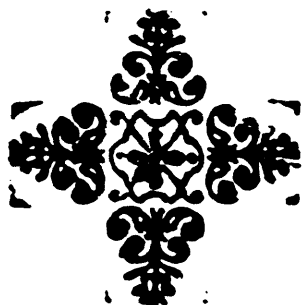
*Humane Impositions proved Unscriptural,
Or,
The Divine Right of private Judgment.*

A
S E R M O N

Preached at the Opening of
PRESBYTERY in *Charlestown*
in the Province of *South*
Carolina, March 5th. 1728,9.

By J O S I A H S M I T H, M. A.
Now Pastor of the Dissenting Church at *Cainboy*.

I Cor. 10. 15. *Judge ye what I say.*
I Thes. 5. 21. *Prove all things.*
I Joh. 4. 1. *But try the Spirits.*




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PREFACE.

Assure the Reader, 'tis not the common ambition, and natural fondness of being an Author, much less a satisfaction in what might seem, at first view, to commence a Paper Contest; but a just and necessary Defence my Conduct, which prompts me to make the following discourse publick.

THE Case was plainly this; One of my Reverend brethren, I have the charity to think, upon good & pious motives, has lately, in a Sermon before the Presbytery, convened in Charlestown, advanc'd (if I remember,) Power of Imposition, in matters of pure Speculation and rith; denying a Liberty in People to judge for themselves, and (if I retain his phrase) to believe as they seeason: And lest we should say, we had nothing but Ipse Dixit, and private assertion, to support such Power, He endeavours to fix it upon the Union of the ONLY ONE; inferring from thence, an infallible Knowledge what are really the Fundamentals and Essentials of Christianity, in every one that was Anointed; and as a natural and necessary Consequence, a Power to impose their Sentiments upon others.

I could neither, for my part, see the Orthodoxy of the doctrine, nor the force of the Author's Arguments establish it: it appeared to me to be a Doctrine of very

P R E F A C E.

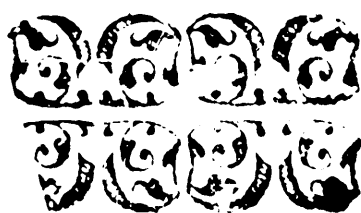
tensive and pernicious Consequence ; and (what particularly affected me,) scarcely reconcileable with Protestant and Reforming Principles.

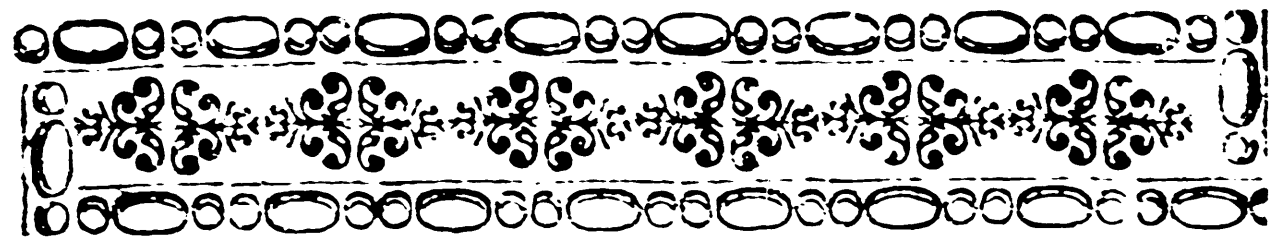
FOR which reason, when it was my turn to Preach before the same Audience, I thought, I could not, consistent with my Character of a Watchman on the Tower, wholly suppress my Observations on that Performance.

MY freedom, however, I find, has been censured by me, who out of a disproportionate zeal, seem to forget the peaceable Spirit, Doctrine & Prayer of CHRIST their Master ; and would even fetch fire from Heaven to consume their Brethren : And notwithstanding the tendency of my whole Discourse, to beget in my Hearers the high-Veneration for the HOLY SCRIPTURES is the only Rule of Decision in all debates of a religious nature, and in the respectful mention I publicly made of the Westminster Confession, at the close of my Sermon ; I am yet, (I will not determine, whether from ignorance, or malice) presented as preaching down said Confession, and of consequence, as chargeable with all the Heresie, which that incomparable Piece is levell'd against. And the only Remedy to undeceive a credulous People, when the Fault became so universal in the Province, was, I thought, to publish the Sermon in the same form and language wherein it was delivered, without the least Interference or Correction ; and so I may justly claim a larger share in the Reader's candour, to excuse the inaccuracy of Style and Diction.

Cainhoy, South-Carolina.
March 12th 1729.

J. S.





A SERMON &c.



JOHN XVII. 8.

-- *I have given them the words which thou gavest me.*

THE words are part of that pathetic Prayer, which our blessed LORD, some small time before his Arrest and Crucifixion, uttered for Himself, and His Disciples, in the Apostolical and succeeding Ages. My Text falls in that division of the Prayer, which respected the Apostle and other Disciples then on the stage. Among many prevailing Arguments, urged on their behalf, His Fidelity in preaching, and their Assent, Attention, and Proficiency, in this and the preceeding verse, was one. *Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee, for I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.*

Tis not my design, as conceiving it not so pertinent to the present occasion, to consider here the force and significancy of such reasoning. Having therefore no regard to the Words which I have chosen for my Theme, as part of Christ's Prayer, or under any respect they bear to the Context, I shall endeavour to improve them as an absolute Proposition under these two Heads,

PROP. I. *WHATEVER* Christ Revealed was given Him of the Father.

PROP. II. *WHATEVER* was given Him of the Father, that He Revealed.

PROP. I. *WHATEVER* Christ Revealed was given Him of the Father.

THIS Assertion must not be understood, to imply the east inferiority of Nature in CHRIST to the FATHER. He is God in His Original Character, the FATHER'S Equal in divine Perfection, and could properly receive nothing from Him : But as Mediator, He acts in an inferiour Capacity by Commission from His FATHER : In the EOconomy, Order, or Scheme of Redemption, the FATHER Projects and Commissions ; the SON Receives and Executes ; the SPIRIT Applies and seals. In this inferiour sense and not another (as the *Arians* would insinuate) whatever CHRIST revealed was given Him of the Father.

Arg. I. *WE* have His own Word for it in the Text, and we know His Record is true. He expressly declares, *I have given them the words which Thou gavest me.* The Doctrine I have delivered is thine and not mine, thy Word and thy Will. And this Declaration is more considerable, because not made to fallible man, subject to some artful delusion, but to GOD Omniscient, the searcher of Hearts, who knows all things, and could not be deceived. How can we think, CHRIST would dare to appeal, with so much solemnity, to His FATHER, for a known falshood : What were this, but implicitly to deny the perfection of His Knowledge, or to make Him a patron of Lies ? CHRIST well knew the extent of His Divine Knowledge, that He could not evade His Eye and Notice ; and the absolute purity of His Nature, that He abhorred falshood and deceit. What then, (to mention nothing of His own Character, which I may have occasion to do afterwards) could tempt Him into it ? Verily nothing ; is therefore sufficiently attested by the Mouth that

2. *THE Nature of His Office argues it.* He was the FATHER's Embassadour; the Angel of the Covenant; He came out from God, Him the FATHER sent and sealed. Now the Embassador's Office implies a strict conformity to the Orders and Precepts of the Powers which He represents. Therefore CHRIST, Officiating in that Capacity, was in Justice obliged to pursue His FATHER's Prescriptions; and had no more Authority to enlarge than to contract His Commission: and supposing (if the expression may be pardoned) our blessed LORD could be guilty of such infinite presumption, as to extend His Commission and multiply His Instructions; yet, without the Seal of His FATHER's Authority, these Additions must be null and void, and serve no good purposes at all: Which is an Argument of no inconsiderable force, that CHRIST has delivered His FATHER's mind and will according to the Original Pattern in the same Form and Extent.

3. *THERE was no Necessity why Christ should Reveal more.* As the FATHER projected the Scheme of Man's Recovery, no doubt, He gave His SON all the Powers and Instructions that were essential to the End and Accomplishment of that Scheme; and so of course all additional Revelations became useless: I say, no doubt, if we consider it as a Projection of His free Grace, and what He was neither compelled, nor surprized into: 'Tis natural to think, he would employ His Wisdom upon a work of Choice and Deliberation, and we wrong that divine Attribute, if we think it leaves any undertaking unfinished, or takes only one improper step, in the prosecution: In honour therefore to the FATHER's essential Wisdom, we are obliged to conclude, that He gave the SON whatsoever was necessary to be revealed, and no reason to imagine the SON should reveal any thing, that was not, some way or other, conducive to the common end.

4. *THE Father has never charged Him with any thing like it.* Had the SON, especially in a thing of

this nature and importance, made any Addition to the Father's Instructions, 'tis past doubt, that God, who is jealous of His Honour, and has ever insisted upon his Prerogative, would have charged him with it : But where do we read of such a Charge ? So far from this, that there *came a voice from the excellent glory, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, Hear ye him.* Would God be well-pleased with His Son, and style Him his Beloved, had He been unfaithful in the discharge of His trust ? Would He exhibit that testimony by an audible Voice from the opening Heavens, in a manner so open, visible and glorious as this ? Or would He testify His Fidelity, by discharging Him from the arrest of Death, and the prison of the Grave, and conferring upon Him, the very Honours, He had before promised as a Reward of Fidelity ? Or would He, once more, suffer that Text to stand in our Bibles ; Heb. 3. 1, 2. *Holy Brethren, consider the Apostle and high Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus who was faithful to him that appointed him : As also Moses was faithful in all his house ; and Moses verily as a servant, but Christ as a Son ?* Would the FATHER I say, have honoured the SON with such visible universal Testimonials, had He been unfaithful ? No verily.

5. *TIS entirely inconsistent with the Son's Character.* Consider Him in the exalted Character of a God, and 'tis more than Impiety, and no less than Blasphemy to say, He was unfaithful to His FATHER's Counsel, and imposed upon the World in what He revealed. Consider Him in His lowest Character as the Son of Man, we have no Corruption seated in his Nature to fix this Charge upon ; for he knew no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth : or unite His two Natures, and view Him as Mediator God-Man ; His Fidelity shines yet brighter : He was One, it seems, with whom the FATHER, that knew His Heart, could trust the Souls of all His Elect , and without Fidelity He could not serve the FATHER's Designs, nor execute His Eternal

Decrees. For such a high priest became us, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, that he might be a faithful high priest in things pertaining to God. Thus under every view and inquiry, CHRIST'S Fidelity, shines out with an unspotted Lustre; and His Character makes it appear, that He revealed nothing more than His FATHER'S will. I will add,

6. *THAT* the credit of all He Revealed depends upon His Fidelity in this point. Why do we receive any of CHRIST'S sayings, as faithful and true; but upon the supposition, that He is the faithful and true Witness? But how can Fidelity and Truth consist with the Hypothesis, that He revealed any thing more than what His FATHER gave Him. These are plain opposites; and if we could once believe, that CHRIST exceeded His Commission in one Article, we should have no rule to determine, which of His Instructions had, and which had not, the seal of His FATHER'S Authority, and, of consequence, equal reason to doubt of all; which, in the issue, must undermine all our hopes of Salvation. Therefore whatever CHRIST has Revealed was given Him of the FATHER.

I pass to the

II. *PROP. THAT* whatever was given Him of the Father that He revealed. I have given them the words which thou gavest me. [*The Words*] without any exception or restriction; the expression is indefinite, and therefore universal; yet not simply and absolutely so. If we speak of CHRIST'S absolute Knowledge, 'tis impossible He should reveal to finite man, what was comprehended in His own infinite Mind. We must therefore understand it in a more qualified meaning; that whatever the FATHER Commission'd Him to teach, He has fully and faithfully taught; Revealed all that was necessary Man should know to make him a Christian. And the Truth of this Proposition, in this light and view, may be established upon the same Proofs as the first. We have CHRIST'S word and testimony for it: The Nature of His Office

no more forbids Him to exceed, than it required Him to come up to His Orders : There was no necessity, why He should partially omit any one point of Instruction, and not reveal all the FATHER gave Him ; but needful rather He should fully declare it. The FATHER has never charged Him with any partiality or contempt of Authority ; nor is it consistent with His Character, Divine, Humane, or Mediatorial ; nor yet with His Doctrine, when He so often, and with such severity, reprov'd it in others ; nor yet the less destructive to the whole design of His Mission ; for, supposing a reserve, we know not, but what He reserved, may be as Fundamental (if not more) as what He revealed, and must be ever uncertain, whether we are acquainted with every thing that is necessary to warrant our Faith, and secure the Salvation of our souls. As therefore the *two Propositions* stand upon the same Basis and Evidence, I shall unite them in the following *Improvement*.

Infer. 1. *WE have an excellent Rule and Precedent in CHRIST for all His Ministers.* That they speak the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. They are Embassadors for CHRIST as He was for the FATHER. As therefore He revealed all that the FATHER gave Him, and nothing else, so should they, all that He has given them : So runs His Commission. *Go teach all Nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.* Agreeably to which, saith Paul, in his solemn appeal to his hearers, *I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men ; for I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.* And the same Spirit should descend to all his Successors. We are not to handle the word of God deceitfully, to gratify the passions of Men, nor to screen us from their sharpest resentments ; but, as Micajah, *The word that the Lord shall put into our mouths that should we speak, not fearing the wrath of a King ; For what*
are

*art thou, O man, that art afraid of the face of man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as grass, and considerest not the LORD thy Maker? Our Bibles we must study, and the Cause more than the Temper of our People. If need require, we must cry aloud and spare not: and lift up our voice like Trumpet, and shew them their transgressions. Yet deny not, but Ministers should be wise as Serpents to discern and choose out the proper Seasons of Instruction and Reproof; else they may give that which is Holy unto Dogs, and cast their pearl before Swine. And in this every Minister will be his own Casui-
And as we must, in its time and place, declare the whole Truth, so nothing but the Truth. CHRIST did not exceed His FATHER'S Commission, nor should we, His. We dare not, to humour a Controversy or from any other sinister Motive, take Texts out of our Bibles which were never in them; pretend them to be Scripture by a strained Construction, which really is not. Add thou not to his words lest he reprove thee: For I testify to every man that heareth the words of the Prophecy of this book if any man shall add unto these things God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.*

Infer. 2. WE infer the vast reverence we owe to Sacred Scriptures, Read and Preached. They are the Voice of God and not of Man. He spake in times past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, and in these latter days he hath spoken to us, by his Son. And He through His Ministers yet speaks. Let us see that we despise not him that speaketh from Heaven, but receive his word not as the word of man, but as it is indeed the Word of God. Always remembering what CHRIST has told them, He that heareth you, heareth me, and he that despiseth you despiseth me, and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me. The contemplation rises from us to CHRIST, and terminates in His FATHER. Remember this in all your Attendance upon

the Word and Ordinances of CHRIST's Church. 'Tis God that speaks by the Mouth of Man. And what Weight and Solemnity does this add to the Scripture ! It puts a life into every Promise, being all *Per et Verbum* : But inconceivable terror into the Threatnings : for the *Mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, and the zeal of the Lord shall perform it.*

Infer. 2. *WE learn, that nothing but what CHRIST has Revealed in the Scripture, can be made a necessary Article of the Christian Faith.* Whatever fine Evasions Men may frame, and whatever Specious Names they impose on their own Inventions, they contemn Divine Authority, and impeach Divine Wisdom ; and have no power to compel our Assent to their Traditions, *when they teach for Doctrine the Commandments of men.* Whatever the FATHER saw necessary, He gave the SON ; and the Words the FATHER gave Him, He hath given us. These are the adequate and only Rule both of Faith and Practice, the immutable standard of Truth and Orthodoxy, by which we must try every Spirit, and every Doctrine ; so that should an Angel from Heaven preach any other, we are not to receive him : And if there come any unto us, and bring of this Doctrine, we dare not receive him into our houses, neither bid him God speed, lest we partake of his evil deeds. Hence the Bereans were commended, as more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so. As great a Novelty as a light of private Judgment may appear to some Eyes, is very evident that it was not only allow'd but approved in the Apostolical time ; and I should never chuse to plead a greater Antiquity than that. But that I would chiefly remark from this pertinent Text this, viz.

1. THAT those who refuse to pin their Faith on other Men's Sleeves, and will receive no Doctrines but what they have first examined by the Scriptures, and

found agreeable to them, are *more noble* than the Brethren of the opposite side ; and if these be *our* Principles, whatever Censure we may pass under from others, we are sure to be approved of by an infallible Writer : For if our Principles appear *Bereans*, our commendation must needs be so.

2. ANOTHER thing I observe from this Text is That a Power of *Imposing*, drawn from *Infallibility* itself, is a very false Inference : For 'tis plain, the Apostle *Paul* was infallible, because inspired by the HOLY GHOST ; yet he is so far from assuming such a Power over the *Bereans*, that they are commended for bringing down his Doctrine to the test of Scripture, to see if these things were so. Which intirely overthrows all the Arguments that can possibly be drawn from the *Unction of the Holy One*. For, supposing every one that had the privilege of this *Unction*, to be infallible ; yet since Infallibility itself cannot infer a Power of Imposing, such a power cannot be collected from that Text. Besides, if that Text proves any thing, it proves too much, setting every private Christian, upon a level with the greatest Christian Assembly : For if Infallibility derive from the *Unction of the Holy One*, then all that are Anointed, must be so far equally Infallible ; and if Infallibility, thus derived, infer a Power of *Imposition*, then a private Christian has not only a Right of private Judgment, but also a Power of imposing his Judgment upon others, even Synods and Assemblies, so far as they are not Christians : And so this Text has unwarily transferred the Imposing Power (if there be such a thing) from Synods as Synods, to private Christians as Christians. And had I Preached upon this Controversy *ex professo*, I know not where I could have found a better Foundation to build the Principles of private Judgment upon. As for that other celebrated Text, viz. *That no Prophecy of Scripture is of any private Interpretation* ; 'Twill appear to any impartial Man, who consults the Context, that it respects

not the *Interpreter*, as if a private Man were forbid to interpret Scripture, but the *Object* of Interpretation, shewing, that when *Holy Men of GOD* spake, they spake as they were moved by the *Holy Ghost*: Not of themselves, who were but private Persons, but of *CHRIST* who should appear in a publick Capacity. So *Psal. 2. 16.* is not to be interpreted of *David*, but of *CHRIST*, of whom *David* was but a type.

BUT methinks, if there were no other Argument to Vindicate the Right of private Judgment, it should go a great way with Protestants, to remember, these are the only Principles, upon which we can justify our happy REFORMATION from Popery: I say, the only Principles: For if our first Reformers had not a liberty of judging for themselves, " what Warrant could they have for leaving *Popery*? Why might not the Clergy then in possession as well deny the People this Power, as the present Clergy can now pretend to do it? If it be said, the *Reformation* was founded upon Scripture. I ask, how the Reformers could know, that *Popery* was unscriptural? Was it not by searching the Scriptures, and the exercise of their private Judgment? Nothing more sure. If therefore Christians had a Right of private Judgment at the *Reformation*, they must have the same Right now: And to assert otherwise, is to strike at the very Foundation on which the *Reformation* has ever since stood: which has made me often wonder, how the *Protestant* and the *Imposer* could meet in the same man. I will add one Argument more, and transgress no longer upon your Patience.

IF Christians have not a Right to Examine all Doctrines by the Scriptures, I would ask, *What use the Scriptures are of to them?* And to what purpose, the *Imposers* appeal to Scriptures? An Appeal implies a Right of Judgment in the Person appealed to; and if I have not a liberty of judging, to what end should they turn me to such and such Scriptures in

in favour of *Imposition* ; for to me in that Case all Texts are equal. The truth is too plain ; the *Papists* take the Bible out of our Hands, and the *Imposers*, who leave it in our Hands, pluck out our Eyes ; and the only Recompence we have, is, to see with theirs.

To Conclude, I would ever make the *Scripture* my Supreme Rule, and my *Reason* the Eye to direct me by it : for as a Rule is useless without the Eye, so is Scripture without Reason. I am far from pretending to exalt Reason above Revelation. But Reason is absolutely necessary to improve Revelation to its proper End. I would also honour *Synods* and *Councils*, as they preserve a mutual Agreement among Pastors, and are of vast service in the Illustration of Scripture ; a standing Evidence whereof is that Excellent Composure, The WESTMINSTER-CONFESSION OF FAITH. 'Tis only the *Imposing* Power I Reject.

F I N I S.

