

God's Sovereignty, no Objection to the Sinner's Striving.

A
S E R M O N,

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T O T H E

Worthy and respectable Members,

Of the English Presbyterian Church,

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THE following Pages delivered in their Pulpit,
and now printed at their repeated Solicitations;
tho' not without that Diffidence which a first Appearance in Public, and a Sense of his own Inequality to the Subject, naturally beget; are humbly dedicated, with every possible Wish for their Prosperity and Happiness by

Their

Humble

Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

I. Strive



Strive to enter in at the straight Gate.

L U K E, XIII. 24.

SUCH doctrines as Christ taught, his disciples need not fear to teach ; such admonitions as the infallible Saviour of the world hath given, we are warranted to give, and need not fear their consequence. When therefore we behold sinners, in gay and numerous multitudes, gliding carelessly down the broad way, that leadeth to destruction, while a solitary few struggle in the narrow path of virtue ; what tho' some arise and cavil ? What tho' some endeavour to bewilder the pious mind with difficulties ? We may safely warn them, as did our divine master ; we need not fear his displeasure, as some pretend, if we persuade them to stop their career, to strive and struggle, that they may enter the straight gate. But, that you may ascertain the meaning of our great Lord in the text, — I beg leave to direct your attention to two things,

1st. By the straight gate is undoubtedly intended, the terms of Christianity, or the conditions upon which our salvation is suspended.

To be assured of this, we need only reflect upon the figure made use of in the text ; this is more largely and particularly inserted in MATT. vii, 13. Both of the evangelists without doubt, refer to the same expression of our Saviour ;
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both give the same idea, but one more fully than the other ; as in many other instances besides the present : By consulting both, we shall therefore get the true and full *idea*, which Christ designed to convey. MATTHEW only says, “ *enter the straight gate.*” LUKE says, “ *strive to enter.*” MATTHEW gives the meaning ; but LUKE more fully ; that LUKE gives the very words of our Lord, in this part of the sentence, we may reasonably suppose. For first, if he doth not, he certainly conveys an idea, more than was ever intended by Christ. A *struggle towards entering* is certainly more than simply *entering*. It appears in the second place, perfectly agreeable to the latter part of the figure, where the narrowness of the gate implies, the necessity of striving to enter it. MATTHEW mentions one reason for the direction, viz. “ *for straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth to life ; with this addition by way of alarm, and few there be who find it.*” LUKE doth not mention this, but another as alarming, viz. “ *that many shall seek to enter and shall not be able.*”

By taking both together, you find our Lord’s direction at large, which is this. “ *strive—struggle—be in great earnest to enter the straight gate ; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many go in thereat ; but straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth to Life, and few there are who find it ; and let this your strife be without delay ; for many, when it is too late, shall seek to enter and shall not be able.*”

WHERE, it is easy to perceive, that man, since the fall, is represented as by nature travelling in pursuit of happiness, but in a mistaken path ; travelling in a way which tho’ broad, descending and easy, yet leads unerring to the abode of death. Our divine Master represents himself as one who filled with compassion, at the sight of this numerous throng, gaily moving on to ruin, hath in his *gospel* opened a narrow gate for their reception, which, with the most disinterested pity, he persuades them to strive to enter. “ *The way you are in, says he, is confessedly broad, and you* “ are

“ are kept in countenance by the multitude ; but—I warn
 “ you, eternal death hath his dwelling *there*. This way
 “ is narrow and difficult ; but life and happiness dwell *here* :
 “ Strive and struggle then to enter.” &c.

By the *straight gate*, is therefore intended, the terms of Christianity, or the conditions of the gospel. And what are these, but *repentance* and *faith*? By the *narrow way* — *The continuance in these terms, or the progress of the Christian*. These are termed straight and narrow, because of the natural corruption and evil propensities of the soul, which make the duties of Christianity difficult and mortifying.

To enter the straight gate then, means neither more nor less, than to *begin* to be a Christian : to submit to the terms of the gospel, or to enter a state of grace : Remark this my beloved brethren, for it will be the foundation of our discourse.

2dly. But to whom is this direction given?—A second particular, which you will please to attend to. Is it to the saints? To those who are already in a state of favour with God, and are already treading the rugged paths of virtue? No—It would be an absurdity, that those who have already entered, should be persuaded to enter. They are not desired to continue—but to begin ; it is to sinners, that the words are addressed ; it is to those who are in the broad way of sin, which corrupt nature makes easy, and throngs with a multitude.

And what direction doth he give them? What advice flows from his divine infallible lips? What direction, of consequence, is fit and proper to be given to all such poor wanderers by nature? What direction are his ministers, here-from warranted to give to the numbers, whom they behold treading the same downward road? Why,—“ strive
 “ to enter the straight gate.” Let me remark, my brethren, there is more emphasis in the original word, translated “*strive*,” than can be crowded into any one English term, AGONIZESTHE, Let your strife be most intense and earnest ; not only strive but struggle, as one who would
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force thro' a narrow pass. It signifies a struggling with a meer agony ; I would render it *agonize*, and bow every power of the soul in the earnest attempt, as one who would save an immortal soul.

WHAT difference ! What immense difference is there between this advice, and the opinion of certain modern reformers of doctrine, who insist, that sinners ought not to be put upon striving for the salvation of their souls ; that they ought not to be directed to seek for faith, or an entrance into this straight gate, into these mortifying conditions of the *gospel* ; and who brand all attempts to enter upon the narrow way of Jesus, with the foulest names.

OUR Lord commands ; and therefore there must be certain strivings, not only lawful, but the absolute duty of the unconverted, that they may enter the straight gate.

BUT, because this notion is supposed by some to be inconsistent with God's sovereign disposal of grace ; let me take up a little of your time

I. In reconciling the notion of the sinner's striving, with *that* of the unmoved bestowment of grace. And in the

II. Place, let me answer the objections offered to the doctrine.

I. In order to the first, let me lay down a few plain propositions, or considerations ; which being attended to, the difficulties vanish, and the truths appear reconciled of themselves. And,

1st. God in the bestowment of his grace or *sanctifying the soul*, treats man not as he would a stone, in the new modelling its form, but as a reasonable being ; by his divine power making use of motives and means, in changing his disposition. Such rational means and motives, as are in themselves fitted to influence the mind, infinite power makes use of, as the instruments in converting the mind. To what other end are all the rational and persuasive calls, to sinners in the gospel, if they are not to be the means in the hand of God, for their conversion ? To what end are such glorious prospects set before them to awaken their hopes ? Why such

such awful terror to alarm their fears ? Such powerful motives to their gratitude ? Such afflictive providences ? Such instances of mercy and goodness which, (the apostle expressly asserts) lead to repentance ? Are these only sent to vex and disquiet them, without any tendency to bring them to God ? Why do we preach, and you hear ? Why do we persuade, and you listen ? Is the whole intent, the only design of this to condemn and make miserable ? God forbid, that we should harbour such a thought ! To suppose that God would lay and execute such a plan, the whole design of which is to condemn and render more wretched — is a thought highly injurious to the great fountain of happiness.

Now, altho' we can conceive of God's implanting a principle of holiness into the soul, by his immediate power, without the interposition of any instruments, yet we have no reason to think that this is his ordinary method. Tho' by a single fiat the whole creation might have come into its present existence and order, yet he chose to do it in days, and by distinct commands ; he saw fit that his spirit, or his winds, should move on the face of the water, &c. altho' he might have caused the whole human race to *be* in a moment, by a single command ; yet he sees proper to make use of instruments in its production. As in the world of nature, so in the world of grace, he uses his word and ordinances ; they are the instruments in the hands of infinite power, to produce the change ; but they are only instruments, which without that power, would never effect it, more than the naked inactive tools would frame an house, without the workman's strength and wisdom. Hence God is said to “ *beget us by his word.* ”

BUT here it is replied — what is this to our striving ? Is there no distinction between the means which God uses with us, and those which we use with ourselves ?

II. WE answer by our second proposition, which is, that as our souls are rational, and to be changed by the interposition of certain motives and arguments in the hand, and set home by the power of God ; so it is necessary, that we some

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how or other, attend to these motives and arguments. If this is not the case, the *Toupinambouys* in *Africa*, are in as fair a way to be converted by the gospel, as we who have it in our hands. If there is not a necessity that we diligently attend to it, there can be no benefit in having it. If we never hear, if we never attend to these motives and arguments, how can they be the instruments of our conversion? If we never hear, if we never read, if we never meditate on the word of God at all; how can that word be the means of *begetting us again*? In this sense undoubtedly, “Faith is said to come by hearing,—and hearing, by the word of God.” Now says the apostle, “How shall they hear unless there is a preacher? and how shall he preach unless he be sent?” Upon the apostle’s plan, there must be a preacher—he must preach—we must hear, attend and connect, or else we cannot have faith. Here you see—we must be active in the matter. Now, as this is the ordinary way in which it hath pleased God to communicate faith, is not he very absurd, who dreams of getting faith without such attendance and reflection, and all those other things which are consequent upon, and necessarily connected with it? And is not this, reason enough for us to persuade mankind, to go and hear the word preached, to attend with all their might, to strive by reflection to see and feel its force, and so on as to other duties? This kind of striving, you see, is absolutely necessary to faith and holiness, in the *ordinary course of God’s dealing with sinners*.

AND we can see no reason, why this notion should be objected to, because there seems to be something done in the matter, which God hath not immediately done: For if it may be his sovereign pleasure, to make use of the instrumentality of others towards my conversion; I see not why he may not also make use of the instrumentality of my own thoughts and reflections, to bring about that desirable end.

AND if we may call the dealings of God with us, by the instrumentality of others, *The means of grace*; I can see no reason, why we may not also term his dealing with us by our own instrumentality, the means of grace likewise.

Now,

Now, my brethren, tho' some loudly exclaim against our calling these means, *the way in which* God usually confers his grace, because CHRIST hath by way of eminence stiled himself *the way*, that is, *the foundation or procuring cause of salvation*; yet, as there is an evident distinction between *the way, or manner in which*, and the *procuring cause for which*; and inasmuch as we always use it in the former sense, when we speak on this subject; I can see no reason to change the term, a term so expressive, until our great reformer of Christianity shall furnish us with a better.

To conclude this section, Altho' the salvation of a sinner, from first to last, may in a sound and theological sense, be termed a *miracle*, and is begun and accomplished *according to the working of GOD's mighty power which he wrought in CHRIST when he raised him from the dead*; EPH. i. 19, 20. Yet, as it has pleased God to subject his works in nature, to the instrumentality of second causes, and the ways of his providence and grace, in their ordinary dispensation, to the *rational use of means*; we are not to expect our salvation, or even the common blessings of this life, without using the means appointed to obtain them. There is a wide difference between what God can do, and sometimes does in an extraordinary way, and what we, as reasonable creatures ought to do. And we leave it to our hearers to judge, whether, according to the instituted method of divine grace, revealed in the holy scriptures, and confirmed by the experience of the saints, it is not as reasonable to hope, that God will overset nature, and extinguish the sun by a miracle, for our salvation, as to expect it *without striving*; and in all seasons, whether ordinary or extraordinary, which have happened in the Church of God, the first evidence we have of a sinner's return—is, after diligent use of appointed means, and previous earnest striving. Saint PAUL's conversion was very sudden, and as miraculous as any we read of, yet the first notice we have of it, is, *behold he prayeth*. ACTS ix. 11. The conversion of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, ACTS ii. 37. was in the way of an anxious concern for salvation,

vation; and we read, that from the days of JOHN the Baptist, the kingdom of heaven suffered violence, and the violent took it by force. MATT. xi. 12, And we have no reason to suppose, that salvation can be obtained upon easier terms at this day.

OBJECTION. BUT if his striving is so necessary — may he not make a merit of it, and thus the bestowment of grace not appear wholly free? See here the principal objection to this scheme; which gives occasion to our

THIRD proposition, viz. *There is a wide difference between the way or manner in which GOD chooses to bestow his grace, and the procuring meritorious cause for which.* You may exemplify this in the case even of the saints. How are saints appointed to get more grace? Are they to be idle, and carelessly wait, to see whether a sovereign God will bestow it? No. They are to cry for it, and act like babes; according to St. PAUL, they are eagerly to “desire the sincere “milk of the word, that they may grow thereby.” Now their eager desires, their praying and crying, were it prolonged to eternity, cannot be esteemed an equivalent for one smile of their God. Their desires and prayers are not the procuring cause, or the merit for which God bestows more grace: They do not move him to do it, by way of desert; and yet he hath appointed this as the way, in which *for CHRIST’s sake*, they may expect it. These ordinances, are the means he makes use of in conveying it; — CHRIST, and CHRIST alone, is the meritorious and procuring cause. Thus you see, there is an undeniable distinction, between the way, in which God, as a sovereign, chooses to confer; — and the procuring cause, for which. And if the saint, who obtains fresh supplies of grace in this way, hath no cause, and will never find cause, to boast of his having deserved, or moved God to it, by his prayers; much less will the poor sinner, whose attendance upon the means of grace, is so much more imperfect. “*Boasting is therefore wholly excluded.*”

IF we consider matters strictly, we shall find that our diligence to eternity, is not a sufficient payment for a morsel of bread.—The smallest mercy of God cannot be repaid by an eternity of our little services—much less can the unspeakable blessing of a new heart—a blessing, that extends its happy influence thro’ perpetual ages! I say, much less can this be purchased, by a poor worm’s listening, or praying, or crying. What! hath it ever entered the heart of a rational man, to suppose, that a few sighs, a few tears, a few moment’s attendance to the proposals of the gospel, is a price to purchase a forfeited happy eternity? God therefore being under no obligation to our merit, even after we have done all, need not bestow his grace : And this scheme represents him as sovereign in his gifts, as sovereignty itself ; or as the opposers of our doctrine can wish. You can conceive of nothing more sovereign and free, than that which is bestowed without any foundation of merit in the subject, but against merit. It is necessary that we should attend in that way, but the necessity of our so attending, doth not argue any desert in it, or that God is brought under any obligation ; it only argues that God is sovereign in choosing the way of his bestowment, and even when we attend in that way, he is sovereign in bestowing, or not bestowing, as he pleases.

WE therefore cannot see any cause our opponents have to cry out against the doctrine, as tending to lead sinners to expect justification in part, by their striving, and to leave only part of their justification to CHRIST. In this argument we have nothing to do with justification ; and so much as to bring it in, by way of objection, is a gross impertinency, and only calculated to blind the unwary. Justification can only be founded on merit ; and in this affair, we plead for no merit at all ; we insist there is none.

IT is true, the sinner, who is thus active, is less guilty than he who lives in rebellious contempt. But a bare absence of guilt—my being not so wicked for instance, as Beelzebub, is no reason God should bestow peculiar favours on me ; it is no positive merit, but only a reason why I should not be punished equal to another.

BUT, say our opposers ——— “ Suppose the man who hath thus attended and sought for mercy, to meet with his miserable friend in eternity, who had neglected thus to seek, and died in his sins; would he not have a right to accost him thus? “ O thou miserable wretch! why didst thou not “ strive as I did, and have obtained?” Hinting, that his seeking had in some degree deserved the favour. We answer — thro’ rich grace, the saints have a prospect of better judgments, than to be liable to the absurd mistake. The triumphant happy spirit, would necessarily see, that altho’ he had attended in the way which his sovereign hath made necessary to his salvation; yet his so attending (altho’ it rendered him, as far as it went, less guilty) had no procuring merit in it; and far from ascribing the praise to himself, his redeemer, who procured the blessing, would be all his song.

ONLY reason with yourselves, and you will find that the glorified saint, who sits upon a throne of more exalted eminence, in the world above; will have just as much reason to exult over his inferior friend, as the saint will have over the sinner. For God is as sovereign, in the bestowment of superior degrees of grace, in the use of means upon saints, as he is in giving grace to sinners at all. Our opponents cannot deny this, consistent with their own sentiments. And do you think that the most exalted spirit above, will have an opportunity to boast over the inferior? You need not alledge, that God hath bound himself by promise to his people, and therefore, there is a difference; they may strive and obtain more grace. God never acts, God never promises under the gospel, but upon the footing of equity and merit. If he hath promised, it is not upon the footing of desert in them, but only in CHRIST, and that in their attendance upon the means of his institution. The saint cannot deserve the mercy by his doings, more than the sinner. The favour conferred on him, is therefore as free grace, as that on the sinner; and if the sovereignty and freedom of grace, is an argument against endeavouring to obtain

obtain it, it wars as much against the saint's endeavours, as against those of the sinner.

Thus we see, a proper attendance to the plain distinction between *the way in which*, and the meritorious cause, *for which*, entirely removes all the difficulty about boasting.

But, you will say — “ There is a wide difference ; the saint can do actions that are spiritually good ; the sinner cannot, for he is represented as spiritually dead. We answer, this doth not at all alter the case, as to the sovereignty of God's bestowment, unless it be supposed that the spirituality of these actions do really merit such a bestowment ; but this our opponents cannot allow, upon their own principles. And if their spiritual actions do not justify, or merit, they are as much the subjects of pure mercy as the sinner. This brings us to our

FOURTH proposition, which is, “ Tho' the unconverted can do nothing that is spiritually good, yet they can do what is materially good ; nor is this distinction vain. The matter and the form of duty are most obviously distinct. *Praying* is the matter of a duty — *with faith*, is the form of it. *Hearing* is the matter of a duty — *with love*, is the form ; *doing alms*, is the matter, *from a principle of divine charity*, is the form. Where these good dispositions are wanting, the form of the duty is bad — tho' the performer is nevertheless not so guilty, as he who neglects matter and form both. Now the sinner can pray, he can hear, he can do alms, he can do things materially good, tho' not formally so. The performance of these duties, as a natural man can perform them, is the way in which God usually confers his Grace, for CHRIST's sake, altho' *they* do not merit it ; and such performance leaves him less guilty, than if he did not perform them at all. The one is only an improper compliance, the other an open affronting denial. If this is not a truth, then you can make no difference, as to guilt, between the most profligate, and him who is only outwardly moral. 'Tis as absurd therefore, as it is shocking, that some oppose the use of any means, by men in their natural estate, under the notion that they only render themselves more guilty,

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than they would be without them. It is not only contrary to reason, and sides with the cursed suggestions of the wicked heart, but opens a door to all licentiousness.

OBJECTION, “ But will God ever reward duties sinfully performed ? ” It is not a reward that we look for in the present case ; it is not a reward that we would have sinners expect. They are only to attend upon God in the way in which he ordinarily takes notice of sinners, hoping that sovereign pity will deign to light on them, and confessing that they may with justice be abandoned after all.

Our fifth and last proposition is founded on the rest. viz. *The man who carefully attends upon the means of grace, and seeks for the renewing influences of the holy Spirit, hath all the encouragement which fallen sinfull creatures should dare to ask ; but those who live in the avowed neglect of the gospel have no encouragement at all.*

First, As for the former, he is encouraged from the gospel scheme. He knows that CHRIST hath died to make it possible for such to come to God : He knows that he hath purchased the holy Spirit for that very purpose ; he knows that faith comes by hearing, and that God ordinarily bestows his grace by the instrumentality of these means &c. And is not this a sufficient encouragement to make him attend upon them ?

Secondly, As to those who live in the avowed neglect of the gospel, they have no encouragement to hope for grace at all.

First, When they look at the general course of his proceeding, they cannot hope from that. As to the motives and means in the gospel ; they withdraw themselves from them. And to hope that God will convert them in an extraordinary and miraculous way, is as absurd as to hope that he will change the course of nature. What if he hath done it in a few instances ? so he hath also caused the sun to stand still, but is it to be expected that he will always do so ? and especially that he will make thee a signal instance, when thou presuming on that, dost make it a foundation to abuse him ?

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BUT above all, methinks there can be no idea more detestable to our rational nature, than that propagated by some, — viz. that the most presumptuous heaven daring sinner, is in as fair a way to meet with GOD's favour, as he who is seeking for grace as a natural man may seek. Nay, — say some, he is in a fairer way—for, “publicans and harlots should enter the kingdom of heaven, sooner than the self-righteous pharisees.”

THOSE publicans and harlots who came to our Lord and sought for his favour, it is true, were in a more likely way to obtain it, than those self-conceited men, the whited sepulchres, who denied him and despised the only Saviour of mankind : But to suppose that publicans and harlots in general, have a fairer prospect than the moral seeker, not only contradicts all our notions of GOD's working on the heart, by the means and motives of the gospel, which cannot be in the case of him who never attends to them, but it casts a most horrible reflection upon the very nature of GOD, as if he were inclined most to mercy, where the most abominable guilt is, and therefore the more accursed our crimes, the nearer to heaven. O infernal blasphemy ! upon this plan—go on ye profane ! laugh at heaven, despise the terrors of GOD --- blaspheme the awful name—exceed hell itself, and cause the damn'd to shudder at superior crimes ! the more execrable, the more likely to be exalted. And ye infidels, ye atheists of every name ! ye who most disbelieve and most condemn the gospel ! ye have the fairest prospects of salvation by it.

IT is in vain that you attempt to excuse the blasphemous insinuation, by saying that it gives more glory to the grace of GOD. Is it giving more glory to his grace to say, that it is readier to alight on a greater transgressor than on a small one ? that the more guilty, the more fit objects for his mercy ? does this give a lovely idea of the nature of the best of beings ? we do not deny that he can, and does make some examples of his grace among the most profligate, to shew the happy extent of his gospel, to shew that Christ is

able to save even them. But to argue from hence that it is more agreeable to his nature, than to let his mercy fall upon smaller transgressors, is blasphemous and false; and even to say that he makes as many instances of grace, among the former as among the latter, is also false. The least vicious have no claim to his favour by that, as it is no virtue or real merit in me, that I am not so bad as the devil. Yet to say that the most vicious are not farther off from God, and of consequence that their salvation is not more improbable; implies blasphemy. And if the gospel my beloved, brethren, gives you any such notion of God; if it renders the salvation of the greatest sinner only as probable as that of the least: O be terrified! the gospel encourages the presumptuous sinner, and you ought not to receive it: Reject then that impious book, that gives so false an idea of infinite perfection, and serves to poison the already poisoned souls of mankind. But rather blast the wretched pen, which would palm on inspiration, doctrines of which this is the plain consequence; and thus, under the guise of friendship, betray the cause, like Judas.

But to sum up the whole. If God ordinarily bestows his grace, in the use and by the instrumentality of certain means, and thereby hath rendered our attendance upon those means necessary; if our attendance upon those means, infers no obligation upon God by way of merit, but leaves him still sovereign in his bestowment; If he who strives hath sufficient encouragement, and he who does not hath none; What shall we conclude? what, but that it is reasonable and warrantable to urge home the advice of my text upon sinners? strive to enter the straight gate.

Secondly, A few objections remain to be answered.

First, "The essence of true religion, say some, seems to consist, in an entire *willingness* to return to God thro' CHRIST. Now it appears absurd to suppose that a man can strive to make himself willing; for it is to be supposed that we are willing already when we strive."

We answer, common experience may contradict this, for who knows not, that often our rational judgment and our practical judgment, contradict each other? "What I would, that

“ that do I not, and what I would not, that do I,” could an apostle say. In my depraved estate, I often find myself unwilling to do what my reason dictates. And when I am convinced that the ways of holiness are best in themselves, and lead to life ;--- when my conscience approves them, and yet I find my heart reluctant ; may I not sit down and calmly strive to reason myself into a willingness ? are not the people of God, often obliged to do this when they find reluctance within ? why then may not the sinner use this means, and many others ? and how know you that God will not render them effectual to that end ? so that you see, we may be unwilling and yet strive.

II. OBJECTION, “ The apostle gave no such direction to the trembling jailer, who asked, what he should do to be saved.”

WE find his reply is only, “ believe”.

THE apostle answered according to the question, which proceeded from pagan ignorance of the *terms* of salvation. And such also should be our answer when a blind heathen is solicitous to know what is required of him, as a suspending term of salvation. But if we are asked what is the most probable way to have this faith implanted --- the question is different, and we must answer as in our text.

III. “ BUT is not this setting up a new law of works ?” yes, if we made our doings the procuring cause for which, or the means of our justification : But when we exclude them from having the least share in it, and only admit them as the most probable way to get faith, we are not afraid of this imputation.

IV. BUT it is objected, in the fourth place, that “ sinners are already so prone to depend upon these attempts, to recommend them to God, that it is dangerous to direct them.” And if they are prone to turn good into evil, shall we not therefore insist upon their duty ? all that can follow from this argument is, that we should be extremely careful to shew them, that no dependence is to be placed upon any thing but CHRIST for justification.

V. “ Who

V. “ Who then maketh us to differ ? if the first step towards this is our own, may we not claim a share in the event ? ” no more than the lifeless impotent tool of the carver, can claim a share in the excellency of a fine performance in carving. If the preacher can claim no share in the conversion of that soul, which without the energy of the divine Spirit, had remained in the chains of sin, sure the hearer must be silent. Supposing I laboured under a dangerous disease, and by the order of my physician, it became necessary that I should wait upon him in a certain place ; suppose me, in effect, cured by his prescriptions, — should I not be laugh’d at, if I assum’d to myself any praise of the cure, because I had complied with that order ? Hearer apply it.

VI. As to those objections brought against us by a certain sophistical and splenetick pen, (with which popularity seems to be the greatest crime) drawn from the popularity of this doctrine ; they are insufficient and false.

1. INSUFFICIENT, inasmuch as altho’ we confess that many of the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel are disgusting to the carnal mind, yet we cannot thence infer, that every doctrine which is not so, is not a Christian doctrine. For many of the doctrines of Christianity are so self-evident and really pleasing to the rational mind, that they do not disgust even the wicked : And the case hath been known, where even a pagan emperor desired of an august assembly, that the man Jesus should be enrolled among their gods, on account of some of his doctrines. But the objection to our plan is,

2. FALSE. It is far from pleasing the carnal taste. The carnal mind ever hates the divine sovereignty. And we represent the Deity, *first*, sovereign in designing to bestow grace at all ; *secondly*, sovereign in his conditions ; *thirdly*, sovereign in his choice of the way or manner in which sinners must attend ; and at last he is sovereign in bestowing or not bestowing at all, even after we strive to obtain it. And this idea of the divine sovereignty is at least as mortifying to the carnal mind, as that opinion of our opponents, who represent the most base of mankind, as near to heaven as the moral seeker
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after divine grace. Let none of us therefore my brethren, give into that specious trap, * and suppose that because the promulgator of such pernicious doctrines meets with deserved contempt, they therefore must be genuine Christianity.

Our discourse concludes, with a few remarks upon the pernicious tendency of the doctrine we oppose ; and with a short application to such as our text is addressed to in particular.

1. THE doctrine we oppose, in the first place tends to give an unlovely idea of the nature of God, as being *equally* inclined to have mercy upon the most abhorr'd, as upon the least so. And here, be not afraid that it can be replied, that we represent the sovereign majesty, as actuated by a view of real merit in the least vicious, which is not in him who is more so. We have already observed, and it is evident to common sense, that my not being so wicked, is no positive claim to peculiar favours. An absence of guilt can only procure an absence of punishment, but not positive blessings.

2. THE contrary doctrine represents all the means which are used with sinners, under the gospel, as useless ; and thus all those calls, those motives, those tender arguments, addressed to sinners ; arguments in which all the bowels of heaven seem to sound, are to be esteem'd *as useless lumber*. For unless they are to be attended to, of what use are they ? if they are necessary and useful, must it not be the duty of sinners to attend to them ? and if so, what is the guilt of those who would prevail with sinners to condemn their duty and to omit, alas ! what they are too much inclined to omit already !

3. BUT, what is most shocking — they who would discourage the strivings of the unconverted, *only* join with the reluctant wicked heart, — and join with the enemy of God and man, to encourage a continuance in sin. It is well known, that the carnal heart is *only* to be worked upon by motives of profit and fear, that are present. If therefore

* It is imagined, that that argument, from the unpopularity of the doctrine, has had much influence upon some unguarded tho' well designing persons.

their present prospects, as to the favour of God, are wholly the same, whether they serve their abandoned lusts to the utmost, or not ; whether they seek for divine mercy in the abstinence from gross sins, or wholly give themselves up to wickedness ; then, what single motive have we to restrain them ? It is vain to tell them, that they will be more miserable hereafter — *Hereafter* never affects them as the present — They are void of that faith, which is the evidence of things not seen ; and unless they have a prospect of some present advantage, they will not abstain. “ We can but “ be damn’d,” say they, “ then let us fill up our measure, “ since it is as probable that in this way we shall meet with “ favour as in any other.” This is the conclusion the wicked are apt to draw, in spite of all our endeavours to the contrary ; this is the excuse they plead — and methinks there is little need to confirm it. We dare appeal to every wicked heart here present, and it must confess, that it frequently brings our opponent’s doctrine as a plea for its licentiousness ; and we now call to witness the effects — the sad and horrible effects, which have followed where ever the fatal doctrine hath been preached. “ Only let it be proclaimed from this desk, “ that the most vicious are in as likely a way to obtain divine “ grace, as he who is seeking it in a moral life,” And you will directly hear it in the mouth of every impious debauchee, as a justifying argument : The secure sinner makes it a reason for his carelessness, and contempt of every ordinance : The duties of the family and the closet are neglected ; and those who have been baptised, lead the life of pagans. Well did you collect your household churches, ye faithful servants of the most-high ! well did you warn your sons and daughters to turn a deaf ear to the preacher, and to avoid the fatal rock. *

O ! my beloved brethren, it is painful to see the consequences which have followed, and which must follow in places, where the infernal scheme hath been broached. And

We have understood, that some worthy persons have found themselves obliged upon hearing such doctrine, to call their families together, and warn them against it.

IV. WHAT think you can be the design of a man, who takes unwearied pains to propagate it? Can it be to benefit mankind, by preaching the *gospel* in purity? No—his very scheme tends to discourage those who have the greatest necessity for it, from attending upon it. Can it be to mend the morals of mankind? No—for the worst, according to him, in a natural state, have as fair a prospect of the mercy of God, as the best. Can it be to recommend the ministry of the *gospel*? No—all those, who have ever spoken or wrote before his *important Self*, are in errors—and it would seem, the whole ministry, a needless article. Can it be to recommend the *gospel* itself? No—if it represents the Deity, as by nature more *inclined*, or even equally inclined, to take favourable notice of the more vicious, as of the less so; if it encourages to continue in sin, by affording only as good a prospect to the most profane as to the least; what better plea, what stronger argument need the deist wish for against Christianity? In short, sirs——The searcher of hearts knows what is the design of a man——but it becomes us to be aware, to be very suspicious of every one, and of every thing that in its own nature tends to overset that *gospel*, on which are founded all our hopes.

LET me conclude by earnestly entreating the secure and careless, that they will not suffer themselves to be deceived, either by the suggestions of ~~the~~ wicked heart, by the enemy of God and man; or even by this—what shall I name it? infernal machination. Ye who are in the broad road to destruction, who are unwilling to struggle in the narrow paths of virtue and life! O reflect—where do those gay and sprightly ways conduct you? Doth not eternal death hold his domain before you? Why, for a few moments' guilty pleasure would you abandon yourself to eternal pains? The gay mob, it is true, is with you; but why should that encourage you? O learn to look upon them only as oxen, who tho' trim'd with garlands, and playing down an easy passage, are devoted to slaughter.

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THE Saviour of mankind, hath opened a safe retreat from death. The Saviour of mankind, out of disinterested compassion, invites you to *strive to enter the straight gate*. Your souls, your eternity join in the important demand; and all that should influence a rational being, urges home the proposal. In this it is true, you will be opposed by the world, with all its scorn and malice, the flesh with all its corrupt inclinations, and by the devil, with every art; his long practised cunning can invent; and therefore, *striving, struggling, nay agonizing*, will be necessary. That careless, indolent life will never do. But remember, a whole immortality—the love of Jehovah himself is the prize.

AND let it not discourage you, that God, and God alone, must be the great efficient. Were it to be performed by a man, or even by an angel, you would have some room for discouragement; but infinite benevolence, the eternal fountain of goodness and grace, is he to whom your suit is directed.

LET me therefore conclude with the apostle's exhortation to this purpose. (Who by the by, uses our opponent's arguments, to a direct contrary purpose to their's) "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling;" for why? "knowing that it is he who worketh in us to will and to do," and that it is of his own "good pleasure." AMEN!

New-York, Jan. 20, 1765.

F . I . N . I . S .