

The Trial of the SPIRITS,

A

S E R M O N,

On I JOHN IV. 1.

Preached at Norrent, in Norwich, MARCH 17, 1762;
and published at the Desire of those who heard it.

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CONNECTICUT.

1 Joh. viii. 22. *To the Law and to the Testimony, if ye will come to this Word, it is because Love is in us, and we love the Truth.*

Matt. xxiv. 4, 5. *Take heed that no Man deceive you. For many shall come in my Name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many.*

2 Th. ii. 9, 10. *Whosoever coming in after this Manner shall come, and bring Wonders, and Signs, and mighty Deeds, and shall be the Cause of many to fall into the Snare, because they shall not have received the Love of the Truth, that they might be saved.*

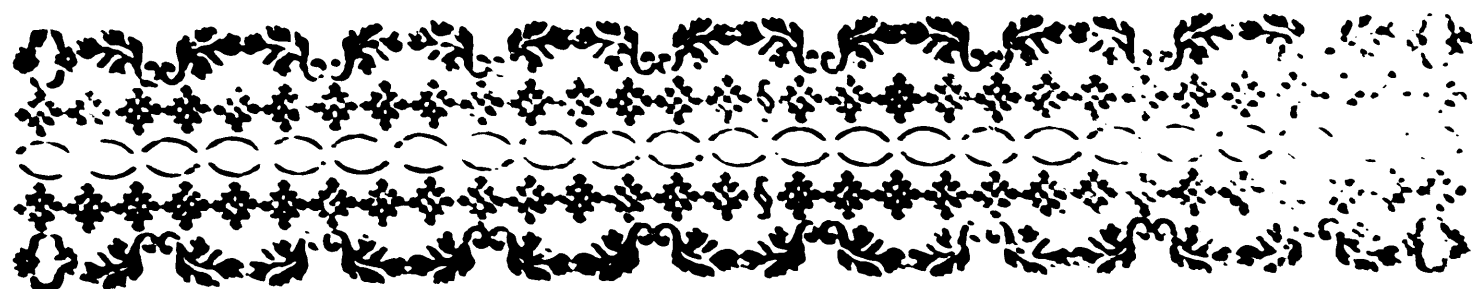


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THE P R E F A C E.

WHERE never has been any greater Occasion of Mourning, Grief, and Humiliation to the Church and People of GOD in all Ages, excepting in dwelling Sin, than these two;

1. *The sad and mournful Decay of true Godliness and undefiled Religion, in the Hearts and Lives of Professors, and the general Security, Ease, Unconcernedness and Stupidity of Men under the Gospel, where Bibles and Ministers, Sabbaths and Ordinances are enjoyed; where the Terrors of the Law are sounding in their Ears, the Lightnings of Mount Sinai are flashing in their Faces, and the awful Scenes of Death, Resurrection and Judgment, with the final Rewards of the Righteous and Wicked, are frequently set before their Eyes; and while the Gospel, crowded full of the most pressing Invitations, large and free Offers of Pardon, Righteousness, Life, and every Blessing; precious, rich and boundless Promises, all confirmed by the Oath of GOD, and Death of CHRIST, and Seals of the Covenant, are brought to them in the Ministry of Reconciliation.*

This is indeed for a bitter Lamentation, and what Sea of Blood is sufficient to lament this awful Blindness, whereby Men grope in the Day Time as in the Night? If our Heads were Waters, and our Eyes Fountains of Tears,
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and we should weep Day and Night, we could never enough express the dreadful Nature, and mournful Consequences of this sad Ignorance, Blindness and Security, which has seized poor immortal Souls, hanging over everlasting Burnings, upon nothing but abused Patience and long-suffering Mercy; and causes Men to despise and reject Christ, the only Remedy for lost and perishing Sinners. O how sad is it, that such Multitudes of Men and Women, Youth and Children, even where the Word of God is powerfully taught, who have Bibles in their Hands, and live in Coshen, a Land of Light, should run headlong in the broad Way which leads down to Destruction; that they should so greedily pursue the lying Vanities of this World, and so wretchedly despise the real Mercies relating to a better Life; that they should so highly prize and constantly gratify the Flesh, which must shortly be Food for Worms, and so basely slight and neglect their Souls, which are of an angelick Nature and eternal Duration; that every Soul-murdering, damning Lust, should, by them, be so heartily embraced, and Jesus the Soul-saving Lord but coldly and complementally entertained; and that the broad downward Way to Hell, should be so exceedingly crowded; and the narrow Way to Heaven almost wholly neglected and unoccupied! Surely this is one principal Ground and Reason of Sorrow and Mourning to the Church and People of God; for the Removal of which, they should be importunate at the Throne of Grace, Day and Night, and give God no Rest, till he pour out his Spirit, and blow on the Valley of dry Bones that they may live. But this is not all; for*

2. The Prevalence of Error and Delusion, among those who profess to set their Faces Heaven-ward, is another principal Ground of Lamentation and Mourning to the true Lovers of Zion. To see a Soul bound for Eternity, secure in Sin and passing down to Hell without Fear, is a Heart-breaking Sight to any that are duly sensible of the Worth of Souls, and Importance of Eternity: But is it not full as sad to see immortal Creatures, high in their Hopes of Heaven and Happiness, treading the same downward Road, led on by the Prince of

of Darkness, transformed into an Angel of Light, while they dream they are walking the narrow Way to eternal Life? Are not such Sinners as much to be pitied, yea more than the Secure, as their Recovery is more doubtful, and their Disappointment will be inconceivably greater?

The Devil is a fierce, a raging Enemy, and full of Subtilty; he spares no Pains to ruin the Souls of Men, and he has many Devices and Snares to take them, so cunningly contrived, and secretly and artfully laid, that few can discover them, till they are fast in his Gin, and often not then, till Death and Judgment open their Eyes, and they find themselves irrecoverably in his Power. This calls for Mourning, and is an Occasion of much Sorrow and Grief to the People of God, who love the Souls of Men, and know the Importance of eternal Things. This, no less than the Security of Sinners, calls upon us to be earnest with God for the Effusions of his Spirit, and the Manifestation of the Truth to bewildered, deluded Souls. This should excite us to the most critical Search after the Truth, and alarm us to a constant Care, not to shut our Eyes against the Light of the Word, nor on the other Hand, to receive every Appearance of Truth, but to try what is of God, and what is not.

To assist you in this important Inquiry, is the Design of the following Pages, in which I have briefly touched on several Marks of the true Spirit, and have, by Way of Contrast, endeavoured to describe the opposite Character of the False; esteeming it necessary not only to point out the true Way, but also to set up a Mark at the Entry of By-paths, lest the unwary Traveller mistake the False for the True.

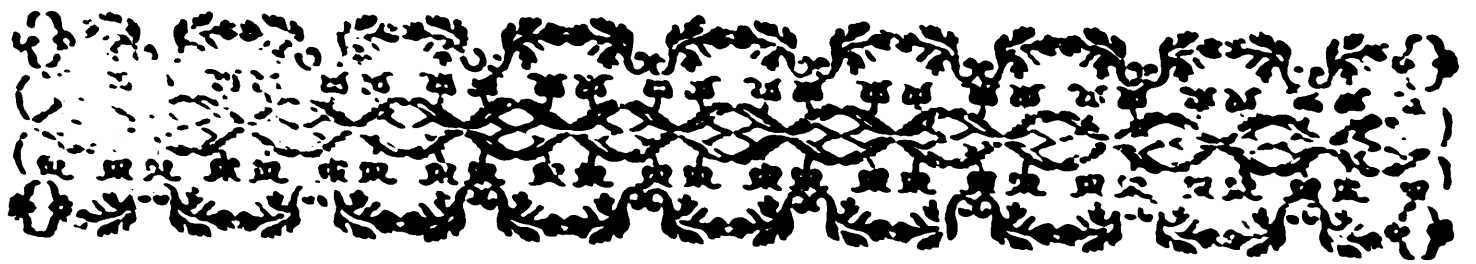
I hope none will be offended at the Lowliness of the Style, nor the Plainness of the Speech. If any one should think himself, or Party pointed at, let him consider, whether what is written be agreeable to sound Doctrine or not; if it is, then the Suspicion cannot hurt, and his Dislike, will only manifest that he is galled by it. If any Error be found, be that shall point it out in a friendly Manner, will be entitled to my Love and Esteem, and if I am convinced by it, and the Nature of the Case so require,

require, to retract it, will be a Debt I shall owe to God, my own Conscience, and the World. But if any shall attempt to quarrel and dispute, they must expect to be answered with Silence.

If it shall please the GOD of all Grace, to bless this Discourse, for the reclaiming of one precious Soul from the Snares of Satan, or the preventing any from the Paths of Error, I shall have abundant Reason to bless his Name, for the Providence which calls it forth to public View, and shall count my little Pains abundantly recompenced.

N. WHITAKER.





The Trial of the SPIRITS ;

A

S E R M O N, &c.

I JOHN IV. I.

Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God: Because many false Prophets are gone out into the World.

HERE are none of all the Devices of Satan more difficult of Discovery, effectual for the Ruin of Men, or harder to resist, than his Artifice of *changing* himself into an *Angel of Light*; by which he deludes precious Souls into Hell, under the specious Cloke of Religion, and spreads the broad Road with the pleasant *Branches* of the *Hope of Heaven*, by which Means they ride triumphant to Destruction; and their Ruin is made more *certain* and more *dreadful*. This is Satan's strongest Hold:

1. As hereby he doubly Ruins. He raises their Hopes to Heaven, and while they dream of nothing but the *celestial Canaan*, he carries them down the pleasant Streams of *Jordan* into the dead Sea and Gulf of Ruin. "As Arrows upward shot, more dreadful by Delay," they fall from highest Hopes into central Horrors, the *Scorn* of Hell, and *Derision* of Devils.

2. By this Means Satan has the *strongest Hold* on Men, as none of his Devices can place them farther out of the Reach of *Conviction*. While he can persuade Men, that their Heaven is secure, and all well between God and them, 'tho' all the while they are in a State of Death, no Terrors can reach them; no Fears rouse them, no Threatnings awaken them to enquire, *Is there not a Lie in my Right Hand**? They will be deaf to all the Thunders of the Law, and Adamant to all the melting Calls of Gospel Grace and Mercy; they will persuade themselves that *they shall have Peace, tho' they go on to add Drunkenness to Thirst†*. None so far from Conviction as those that have a false Hope. That great and holy Man, Professor *Herman Frack*, in his little Book on *the Fear of Man*, Page 119, says, "Nothing is more a Hindrance to the
" Salvation of Men, than that false Conceit, when Men
" fancy they are good Christians, and actually in a State
" of Grace, and have no more Need of Repentance, and
" the first Conversion to God." And truly, when Satan can once fix a poor Soul on this Bottom, he is as sure of him as he can be, while he has him not in actual Possession.

3. This is the strongest Hold of Satan, because it is the most dangerous to attack of any. The Difficulty of attacking Satan, when he assumes the Appearance of an Angel of Light, appears in these Things:

1. Those who oppose him, must expect to be condemned as Opposers of Religion, and the Work of God. They are accounted *carneal*, and *unacquainted* with the Work of the Spirit; yea, as *Enemies* to it. This indeed *would be a light Thing*, thus to be judged of Man's Judgment, were it not that the Adversary will improve such Things to destroy the Influence of the true Followers of *Christ*, which otherwise they might have on others to disentangle them from the Snares of the Devil; but such an Opinion, makes all they can say to be disregarded and neglected, as proceeding from those who, as they believe, are Enemies to true vital Godliness; and so easy is the *Transition* from *Persons* to *Things*, that the clearest Truth will not be

* *Isa.* xlv. 20. † *Deut.* xxix. 19.

be regarded, when it comes from the Mouth of one who is deemed an Enemy to the Cause of God and Truth. *Satan*, when he comes as an Angel of Light, puts on that Mask of Religion which will best suit his Design, and whoever dare oppose him, must be sure to meet with Revilings and Reproaches ; tho' herein he discovers his cloven Foot to any judicious Observer.

2. THAT which greatly hurts the Cause of God and Truth is, that *carnal Sinners* and *profane Persons*, will be sure to join with those who oppose any Thing that looks like experimental Religion ; for as they are ready to belch out their Censures and Reproaches on all Awakenings and Experiences *good* or *bad*, so they are often ready to condemn a *false Work*, and raise an Outcry against it. Hence it is, that those who from Love to Souls, and a Zeal for God's Glory, oppose *Satan* in his Wiles, when he appears as an Angel of Light, must be sure to have many very disagreeable Advocates, even those whose Lives openly declare them to be Enemies to all Religion : And as we may know a Man by the Company he keeps, so openly wicked Men joining in with the Lovers of Truth, (which is natural in this Case, though their Ends widely differ) they are all ranked together, and deemed Enemies to the Cause of Religion. By this Means *Satan* has a great Advantage to maintain his Cause. That subtil Adversary well knows, that it is not always for his Interest, so to carry on a Scheme of false Religion, as to make it appear well in the Eyes of the Wicked and Profane. When he designs to make a Shew of experimental Religion, so as to deceive Souls, he will not so order it, as to make it palatable to the secure and profane Scoffer : This would discover the Deceit too clearly to such Kind of Persons as he has to deal with in this Way ; (though he does not want Devices of such a Kind as will raise the *Hope of Heaven*, even in the openly Vicious, *founded* on a false Notion of Religion) hence it is that the Wicked, being set against all religious Experiences, will fly in the Face even of *Satan*, when he appears as an Angel of Light, for they know him not in this Mask. It is reported of *Herod*, that in his Rage at

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Christ,

Christ, he saw his own Son among the Children of *Belial*; so wicked Men, having in their Hearts an Aversion and Hatred to Religion, will fight against their *Father the Devil*, when he appears to them to be on it's Side. This tends greatly to fix poor Souls in Delusion; for they are ready to say, "If this was not a divine Work, the wicked
" and carnal World would never oppose it as they now
" do; Satan's Kingdom cannot be thus divided against
" itself;" never considering that it is only a *Trick*, which he hereby makes on one Part of his own Kingdom, thereby to draw others to him as being on God's Side: They don't consider that this is one of his subtil Devices, to make their Bands of Delusion strong, and secure them more effectually in his Power. It is no certain Evidence *for or against* a *Work*, that the carnal and secure reproach or commend it; for they are no Judges of this Matter.

As this is *Satan's* strongest Snare, so he lays it most commonly where he sees Danger of Encroachments on his Kingdom. If a *true* and *genuine* Work of the Spirit of God is begun, and some led Captive from his Dominion, it excites his Rage; now for his Stratagems. He cannot drive serious Thoughts from their Minds, and persuade them to be wholly careless. What then shall he do? Why, he will join in with them, as *David* did with the *Philistines**, to the Hazard of their Heads, and pretend to forward the Work; he can and does often affright many, filling them with Terror and Fears of Hell; and then comforting them with some false Discovery of *Christ*, or rather a Discovery of a *false Christ*, or by falsely applying some Promise, &c. by which Means he settles them down on a delusive Hope and sandy Foundation, which will be *as the Spider's Web*†. Yea, in Times of general Security, Satan finds it to his Advantage to stir up Persons to false Zeal, and seeming Religion; thus he did in that secure and carnal Generation in the Wilderness, he stirred up *Korah*, *Dathan* and *Abram*, and filled them with great Zeal, as they doubtless thought, for the Honour of God, when they said to *Moses* and *Aaron*, *We take too much upon you, seeing all the Congregation*

* 1 Sam. xxix, 2. † Job, viii, 14.

*Congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them : Wherefore then lift ye yourselves above the Congregation of the Lord**. Here was great Zeal, lest *Aaron* and *Aaron* should take too much on them, and lord it over God's Heritage ; they looked upon it as dishonourable that the Priesthood should be confined to *Aaron's House*, since all the Congregation were holy, and had as good a Right to it as he. Thus Satan may stir up a wild Zeal in a Time of Security, and cause Fire to come down from Heaven to deceive Men. Alas, how many are there who *perish in the Galilæe of Core†*, even at this Day, stirred up by the same subtle Adversary ! From all which, it appears to be Matter of Grief, Mourning, and Humiliation before God, that Men are thus led on by the Prince of Darkness, transformed into an Angel of Light, in fatal Errors which bear the Name of Religion, but tend directly to Death. These Considerations should excite us all to the most fervent Prayer to the God of *all Grace*, that he would *blind Satan*, that he may deceive the Nations, and his own Covenant People no more, nor fill poor Sinners with Hopes of Heaven, to make their Hell the more sure and dreadful. Yea, these Things should excite us to the most careful and critical Search after *the Truth as it is in Jesus* ; that so we may be able to distinguish a *true Operation of the Spirit*, and *real Religion, founded on the Word*, from mere *Force, Wiles of Satan*, and *natural Affections* of an unsanctified Heart ; that we may not be in Danger, on the one Hand, of condemning and discouraging the genuine Influences of the Spirit of God ; nor on the other Hand, of approving and cherishing every Appearance of Religion, and pronouncing that to be of God, which is the Work of a false Spirit. For this End, and because you are, at this Day, especially called to such an Inquiry, I have chosen the Words which I read to you, as being proper to lead your Thoughts into a serious Search in this Matter.

In which Words we may observe :

1. The Command God has given us to *try the Spirits*, and *not to believe every Spirit*.

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THIS plainly shews us, that every Appearance of Religion is not to be received, and at once pronounced to be *true* and *from* God ; but that it is our Duty, *carefully* and *thoroughly* to try every Spirit, as our *everlasting ALL* depend's upon our being right in the Work of Conversion, and a Mistake here must be infinitely fatal. The Man who sells *all* for a *Pearl of great Price*, plays the Fool indeed, if he does not see that it is really valuable, and worth what he gives for it.

2. OBSERVE, that there are many Spirits which are not of God, *i. e.* many Doctrines and *Appearances of Religion*, which are not the Fruit of God's Spirit, but of the Spirit of Error. In the Days of *Abab*, *Elijah* was alone the Prophet of the LORD, while *Baal's* Prophets were Four Hundred and Fifty *; so there are many false Spirits, and but one that is true ; *for many false Prophets are gone out into the World*, by which many poor immortal Souls have been and still are deceived. The Apostle, having shewed us these Things, next gives us the Marks of the *false* and *true* Spirits, agreeable to the Point that was then in Controversy, which was, *Whether Christ the Son of God was come in the Flesh* ; and he declares, that every *one* who owned and confessed this Truth, *was of God* ; *i. e.* herein they were right, and owned the Truth agreeable to the Mind of God ; and if they did truly confess him, and cordially submit to him, then they were born of God, and led by the true Spirit. But such as would not own this Truth, were not of God, but *Antichrist*.

In farther assisting your Meditations and Inquiries, and to shew the Design of the *Holy Ghost* in these Words, more fully, I will endeavour ;

I. To give you *some of those Reasons why we are to try the Spirits, and not believe every Spirit.*

II. Point out *the Rule by which to try the Spirits.*

III. Set before you *some of the Marks of the true and of the false Spirit.*

I.

I. I am to give you some of those Reasons why we are not to believe every Spirit, but to try the Spirits.

THE Apostle has, in the Text, given us one Reason why we should *not believe every Spirit, but try the Spirits*, viz. *Because many false Prophets are already gone out into the World*. It has pleased God in many Places of Scripture to acquaint us, that *Satan as a roaring Lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour**; that he is our Adversary, and we in Danger, least as the Serpent beguiled Eve, so poor simple Souls should be beguiled, and their Minds corrupted from the Simplicity that there is in Christ†. He tells us, that there is a Spirit of Antichrist gone out into the World‡, by which many are deceived; yea, this Antichrist has Power to work lying Miracles, and to cause Fire to come down from Heaven in the Sight of Men, to deceive them §: Thus Abab was persuaded to his Ruin, by a lying Spirit put into the Mouths of his Prophets||. How often and earnestly does Christ warn his Disciples to beware of false Christs and false Prophets? Plainly intimating, that there would be many Deceivers come in his Name; yea, he asserts that many would do so, and deceive many¶, even the Elect if it were possible; therefore he says, take heed to yourselves that no Man deceive you; for many shall come in my Name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many**. How sadly, therefore, are they mistaken who take every Pretender for an Apostle, and every Appearance for sound Godliness. Surely Christ would never have been so particular and urgent in his Warnings against Deceivers, if there were to have been none in the World, and if Men were not in great Danger of being ensnared by them. The Reason why we should *try the Spirits*, and not believe them till they are *tried*, appears yet stronger, if we consider, not only, that there are many false Spirits and Prophets in the World, but also because they go in Disguise, and wear the Livery of Christ. The Apostle tells us, that *Satan himself is transformed into an Angel of Light*, the more effectually to deceive††. He and his Angels are ever ready to assume one Mask or Shew of Religion or other,

* 1 Pet. v, 8. † 2 Cor. xi, 3. ‡ 1 John, iv, 3. § Rev. xiii, 13.

|| 1 Kings, xxii, 22. ¶ Matt. xxiv, 24. ** Matt. xxiv, 4, 5.

†† 2 Cor. xi, 14.

other, as will best suit their End, and most agree with the *Tempers* and *Prejudices* of those he has to deal with; and by his secret Suggestions, endeavours to lead Souls into fatal Snares. Did he appear as an open Enemy to Religion, it would not be so difficult to oppose him; but as he begun with our *Race* by subtil Stratagem, and pretended Love, when he seduced our first Parents, so he has continued ever since. He never gains much by open Attacks on Religion, for if he opposes the true, (as he always does) yet he will put on the Appearance of Religion, in some Shape or other. This is his Engine, which he plays with the *greatest Success* against the Kingdom of *Christ*, and Souls of Men.

AND as Satan is suggesting Error and Delusion to the Minds of Men, so he has his *Ministers* and *Ambassadors* about the World to *press* and *inculcate* Error, and poison their Minds, to carry on the same Design. These will *transform themselves into the Apostles of Christ*, though *they are false Apostles and deceitful Workers*, as the Apostle tells us*. These, in my Text, are called *Spirits*, *believe not every Spirit*; yea, *false Spirits*, for *many false Prophets are gone out into the World*. They are false, because actuated and influenced by a lying and false Spirit, *even Satan the Father of Lies, whose Ministers*, the Apostle says, *they are*†. Hence it appears, what Danger we are in of being deceived; so that if it were not for the Guardianship of Heaven, and the encircling Arms of everlasting Love, Power and Wisdom, the *very Elect* would be finally *deceived*. What wonder then, to see many led Captive by this *subtil Deceiver*, and posting willingly after him down to Ruin!

ANOTHER Reason why we should not believe every Spirit, but try the Spirits, is because *we are commanded by God thus to do*; and to neglect it, is not only to expose our own Souls to infinite *Hazard*, but to rebel against God, and break his Commands, yea, his Commands of *Love*; for He lays this Command on us only for our own Safety. Besides it will be no Offence to Him, not to believe the Operations of his own Spirit at a Venture,
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and *without Trial*; for even these has he subjected to the Rule he has given us, and required us to try every Spirit, and his *own* as well as others; so that we shall not offend God, when we suspend our Judgment of the Operations of his own Spirit, until we can get Light to judge by. There is therefore the plainest Reason why we should not believe every Spirit, or *any Spirit*, 'till it be fairly and carefully tried by an unerring Rule. This brings me to the second Head, *viz.*

II. *To point out the Rule by which to try the Spirits.*

THE Apostle, in the Verses following my Text, lays down the Rule by which to determine the Point then in Controversy, which, as has been observed, was, *Whether the Son of God was come in the Flesh*; the Rule to try the Spirit by, or the Truth by which every Spirit or Opinion, in this Debate, must stand or fall is, *Every Spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the Flesh, is of God. And every Spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the Flesh, is not of God, but the Spirit of Antichrist.* The Word and Assertion of an inspired Apostle would be sufficient to determine this, and make it a lasting Rule by which to decide this particular Debate, yet this Rule is not only suggested to the Apostle by the *Holy Ghost*, but is for Substance the same, which the same Apostle gives us from the Mouth of *Christ*, *If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your Sins*†: This Rule therefore is founded on the plainest Scripture, as well as supported by the Authority of an Apostle; hence it is a plain Intimation to us, that we must have Recourse to the Scripture of Truth, as the Rule by which to try all Spirits: For the Rule here given, will not reach every Case, since there are many, who are not Antichristian in *this*, but *confess that Christ is come in the Flesh*, and in other great and important Points do err exceedingly; as is evident from the Practice of the *Church of Rome*, which confesses *that Christ is come in the Flesh*, and yet is evidently *Antichrist*. Therefore, as this Rule of the Apostles in this Case, is
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† *Job. viii, 24.*

drawn from Scripture, so to the Scripture we must repair for the Rule by which to try every Spirit: And as we are commanded *not to believe every Spirit, but to try the Spirits whether they be of God*; so we must believe no Spirit, *i. e.* we must not conclude that any Spirit is of God, till we have tried it by the *Word*; and so far as its *Doctrines* and *Operations* are warranted and supported by this *infallible Standard*, they may be received, but no farther. The Scripture makes this Point exceeding plain. It is the Declaration of **GOD** himself, *To the Law and Testimony, if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them**. Our Lord in the Days of his Flesh, when the Jews had condemned Him as a *Rebel to the Law*, for healing on the Sabbath Day, and as a *Blasphemer* in calling Himself *the Son of God*†, and were about to kill him, tells them, to search the Scripture as the Rule by which *even his Actions and Professions* were to be tried. He does not insist that they should believe him to be Son of God upon his bare Word, and hence He says, *If I bear witness of myself, my Witness is not true*‡, that is, it might be justly suspected of Truth among Men, because a Man's Witness of himself is not to be ordinarily relied on; but *the Works that I do, they bear Witness of me that the Father hath sent me*§. This therefore is the *only* Evidence which can be produced by any to prove *that they are sent immediately of God*. If by miraculous Works, such as *Christ* and his Apostles did, any one will prove his divine and immediate Mission from God, we are bound to believe him, and receive his Message; but if such Witness be not produced, all Pretensions of *immediate Mission* from God, are not only a bare Falshood and Lie, but involve in them the Nature of Perjury, as it is an Appeal to God that he hath sent them, when he hath not; and instead of believing them, it is our Duty to esteem them as the most daring Affronters of the great God, who are *not to be received into our Houses, nor bid God speed*§; and notwithstanding all their high and daring Pretensions of *immediate Revelation* from God, and their great Zeal, they are

* *Lai.* viii, 20. † *Joh.* v, 18. ‡ *Jer.* 31. ¶ *Joh.* v, 36. § 2 *Joh.* 10

are to be accounted as Impostors, and the Message rejected as a Message of Lies; *Take Heed to yourselves that no Man deceive you; for many shall come in my Name, &c.** Miracles therefore were one Proof, on which *Christ himself* rests the Truth of his Mission; and for a farther Evidence, he refers them to the Scripture, which spake particularly of him, in a Manner they do of no Man at this Day, (which therefore cannot be brought as a Proof of any particular Man's Mission now, as speaking directly of him by Name, as it did of Christ) *Search the Scriptures, saith He, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life, and these are they that testify of me†*; to these therefore he sends them as the highest Proof that he came from God, and was the true Messiah.

THE great Apostle of the Gentiles followed the Example of his Lord. Speaking to the *Corinthians*, he saith, *I speak as to wise Men, judge ye what I say‡*. He did not require them to give up their Reason and Understanding, and yield an *implicit blind Faith* and Obedience to what he said, but directs to compare what he delivered to them by the Rule of Wisdom. The *Bereans* are highly commended for not receiving *even the Preaching of an Apostle*, without searching the Scriptures, and comparing what they delivered with the Word; *These were more noble than these in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all Readiness of Mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether these Things were so||*. The Truth of an Apostle's Doctrine must be tried by the Scripture. The Apostle Peter, speaking of the Vision they had in the holy Mount, at Christ's Transfiguration, when they heard a Voice from the excellent Glory, saying, *this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*, says, *We have also a more sure Word of Prophecy; whereunto ye do well to take Heed, as unto a Light that shineth in a dark Place¶*. Even a Voice from Heaven, yea, from the excellent Glory, is not to be relied on as the Scriptures of Truth are, and is to be approved or disapproved as it agrees or disagrees with the more sure Word of

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* Matt. xxiv. 4, 5. † Job. v. 39. ‡ 1 Cor. x. 15.
 || Acts xvii, 11. ¶ 2 Pet. i. 19.

of Prophecy recorded in the Scripture. So that the only Rule by which to try the Spirits is the written Word.

BUT as Scripture itself is frequently misapplied, and contrived to suit with every Opinion, and is brought in to bear Witness to every false Spirit, by the wicked Subtily of Satan and his Angels, even as he did when he tempted *Christ*; so it is necessary that we *carefully observe* this Rule of interpreting the Scripture.

COMPARE *Scripture* with *Scripture*, one Text with another, which teacheth the like Truth; and these again with the *Analogy of Faith*, i. e. with the general, *plain* and *fundamental Doctrines* taught in the Scripture, and that *Sense* which clashes with and contradicts any plain and express Scripture, or the *Analogy of Faith*, is by no Means to be admitted; but that which agrees therewith, is to be allowed and received. The Scripture is it's own best Interpreter; and that which it most clearly insists upon, and most frequently asserts, is the *Analogy of Faith*, or Standard by which to try every doubtful Matter, and to which all must agree; for the *Doctrines* and *Duties* of it are all harmonious. Therefore, those *Doctrines* and *Duties*, which it most frequently and clearly maintains, are, as I apprehend, to be esteemed *essential* in Religion; and what is but seldom and cursorily mentioned, may not be insisted on as essential: But here let it be observed, that those *Doctrines* and *Duties*, which are the native and necessary Consequences from the great Essentials of Religion, are according to their Nature, as binding as the Principals from which they flow, altho' they are not so expressly revealed.

WAS this Rule of interpreting Scripture, closely adhered to, and the plain, obvious Sense of the Text, as it stands in Connection with the Context and *Analogy of Faith*, relied on, we should not find so many Errors in the World; neither would there be so much allegorizing away the Sense of the Scripture as now there is. Many there are, who will feel no Force from the most positive and express Texts, because they have learned that abominable and *diabolical* Art of turning it into an Allegory or *spiritual*

Spiritual Sense, as it is called, which is to discard and lay aside the Scripture as the *only Rule*, and set up the LIGHT WITHIN (called by the Name of *spiritual Sense*), and their *own Spirits* and *Notions*, as the Standard to which the Scripture must be brought, and by which it must be tried. This is one of Satan's subtil Devices, by which he leads Men into Error, and keeps them fast bound under it; for he too will use Scripture to prove a Falshood, to give it the greater Appearance of Truth, tho' to answer this End he always, either applies it wrong, or puts a Sense on it which it never intended. People little think how fast they are running into *Deism*, and rejecting of all Revelation, when they are bringing the Scripture to the Standard of their own Opinions, preconceived Notions and Prejudices, and then giving it the specious Name of *spiritual Sense*. This is the same with that dangerous Principle, too well known in the World, which teaches Men to try the Scripture by the LIGHT WITHIN, which is a real, tho' an artful Way, to set aside all the Authority of that *sacred Rule*. *Christ* did not put a foreign, or (as it is now called) a *spiritual Sense* on the Scripture, when he had Occasion to bring it to establish any Truth; it was the plain Sense and Meaning of the Words, and undeniable Consequences from them, that He brought to maintain the Truth, and convince Gain-sayers; while it was the common Practice of the *Pharisees* and *Errorists* of his Day, to put a refined Sense upon it, whereby they made void the Commandment of God. The Scripture as it stands, was *spiritual* enough for *Christ*, and the *plain Sense* of the Word was sufficiently full of true Divinity for Him; He did not use to tell his Hearers or Opposers, *That they could not understand the Scripture, that it was a sealed Book to them, that there was couched under the Words a hidden spiritual Meaning, which none could ever find out but such as were taught by the Spirit*, and so assume to himself the only Right of interpreting it to them, or Capacity of understanding the Doctrines and Duties of it, and turn them off with this; but he directed them to search the Scripture, where, if they were not wanting to themselves, they might

find the Mind of God clearly revealed, and be able to discover many Errors, into which they were plunged by their Inattention to it. Altho' supernatural Illumination, and the sanctifying Influences of the Spirit, are absolutely necessary to lead Men to see the Spirituallity, and divine Beauty of the Truths revealed in the Word, since *the natural Man cannot discern the Things of the Spirit of God, because he has no spiritual Discernment**; yet the natural Man may understand the Truths God has revealed; yea, many natural Men do understand them in a far more extensive, connected, exact and orthodox Manner, than some who are really the Children of God, and who see the divine Glory and Beauty of the Truths they know, in such a Manner as the greatest carnal Man cannot. But I proceed;

III. *To set before you some Marks of the true, and of the false Spirit.*

To enter largely into this Subject, would be too extensive for the Compass of one short Sermon: I shall therefore confine myself to such Marks and Characters, which, as I apprehend, best suit with those Appearances of Satan in the Garb of an Angel of Light, which of late Years he has assumed, and with which he has made such Havock of the Churches of *Christ*, and the Souls of Men in this Land; and as I go along, shall set over against such of *these* as I mention, the Marks and Characters of the true Spirit, tho' it is but few of these that can be now pointed out.

As nothing can be of greater Importance, or more demand our serious Attention, and most careful Consideration and Inquiry, than the right Way to the eternal Enjoyment of God; especially as there is but one Way essentially right, and can be tried but once, which lies among a Thousand *By-paths*, which lead to Destruction: As this is the Case, it becomes us all, with earnest Prayer to God for the divine Guidance, to inquire after the Marks of the Way to the only City of Refuge, and to have

have an exact Knowledge of all the counterfeit *Marks*, which are set up to draw poor Souls aside and detain them, 'till the Avenger of Blood overtake them. Let me beseech you therefore to lay aside all Prejudice, and receive the Word in the Love of it. It is better to be undeceived now, while the Mistake may be retrieved, than to walk in Darkness 'till your Feet stumble on the dark Mountains and you fall into Ruin; the *Truth* will never do you any Hurt, only as you reject it. It will be for your greater Condemnation, if, when the Light shines, you choose Darkness*; bring then every Spirit to the Word, and inquire at the Mouth of the *Lord* concerning them, and what that faith, God faith, and may be relied on, without Danger of Error. To assist you in this Inquiry, is my present Design, therefore accept it in Love, and if what is delivered be agreeable to the Word, if you reject it, you do it at *your Peril*.

I. THAT Spirit which does not bring Light to the Understanding, but first moves the Passions of *Fear*, or *Hope*, or their *Attendants*; tho' it cause Persons to put on the Appearance of Religion and Zeal for God; is a false Spirit, and not to be believed. It is no hard Thing for Satan to terrify Persons, especially those of tender Constitutions, and vapory Habits, with some general Thoughts of their being great Sinners; and by filling their Minds with dreadful Apprehensions of a burning Lake of Fire and Brimstone, or *Hell*. That he can present these Things to the Imaginations of Persons, is beyond all Doubt, to any who duly consider his Artifice of presenting to our Saviour, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth, and the Glory of them*†. Why may he not also present Hell and its Horrors to the Imagination, so as to fill Persons with great Distress and Fear, and then persuade them they have true Conviction? He that can make Fire come down from Heaven, surely can terrify and affright poor silly Men and Children, and make them horribly affraid. Yea, he can also present something like *Heaven* and *Happiness*, as well as he could shew the Glory of the World to our Saviour; he can work

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on the Imagination an Idea that represents a Man on the Cross, who they will call *Christ*, and so can excite Joy and Comfort, and fill Persons with Rapture and Triumph in Hope of Heaven, and make them speak much of the Love of God. He can impress comforting Texts of Scripture on the Mind, with great Force, and make them appear to the Unwary, as tho' they were the Voice of the true Spirit; such as *Son, Daughter, be of good Cheer, thy Sins are forgiven thee*, and such like. These, a false Spirit may, and often does impress on the Mind, as spoken to them in particular; and by this Means gives them strong Assurance of their good Estate, as being confirmed by the Voice of God, speaking to them as by Name; and hence their Confidence will be exceeding strong, and they will not believe they are in a perishing State, however they live, and whatever Testimonies come against them from the Word, for it was once revealed to them by the Spirit of God, that their Sins were forgiven, and therefore their State must be good, tho' they fall into Sin, and lose the Power and Life of Religion. Yea, he can counterfeit all Kind of Conviction and Conversion, and Exercises of Religion; but none of his Operations does he effect by letting Light into the Understanding, so as to shew the moral Deformity of Sin, or Beauty of *Christ* and Holiness. He first begins with the Affections and Passions, and having drawn these over, he leads on the Judgment blindfold; the Passions have got the Command, and the Reason or Judgment follows where they lead. Now the Difference between these Persons, and those who are openly vicious, is only this, these have the Passions of *Hope* of Heaven, and *Fear* of Hell, to influence them; while the *Thief* has the Hope of Gain, and Fear of Want, to spur him on in Sin, which drag his Judgment after them. A false Spirit gives no true Conviction of Danger on moral Principles; it lets in no Light by which the Soul can see the Evil of Sin, as it is against God and the *Soul*; hence many who are affraid of Hell, can give no Account why they are affraid, only in general, *they are great Sinners*. But ask them, why they think so of themselves? and they know.

know not. Their Fear and Distress seem to arise only from Terror, without any Conviction of Truth; for Conviction of the Truth, and Terror which often arises out of and accompanies Conviction, tho' not always, are very different, not only in their Natures, but also in their Causes. Conviction arises from the Influences of the Spirit of God; but Terror arises from Conviction, (as is often, tho' not always the Case) or else from frightful Apprehensions of Hell, a dreadful Pit yawning ready to receive them, devouring Flames ready to destroy them, Devils just ready to seize on them, and such like Things, with which Satan can fill the Mind, in order to affright them; but never with a Design to bring them to see the Truth of their State, nor the moral Evil of their Hearts and Lives, nor the abominable Nature of Sin, as committed against God. In all this there is nothing but Darkness, and these are terrified with Imaginations, just as timorous Persons are affrighted in a dark Night, with imaginary Ghosts and Dangers, which are not Realities, but are the Product of a distempered Mind. But when God works, he begins with the Understanding. He lets in Light; he shews to the Understanding, by his Spirit, the Truths revealed in the Word; such, for Instance, as God's infinite Hatred of Sin; the dreadful Wrath denounced against Sinners; the everlasting Punishment to which every one is liable, who breaks the Law of God in one Point; that he is a Sinner against the Law in numberless Instances, and the Mind often dwells on many actual Breaches of God's Law; and sees the just Desert of Wrath; it sees it's infinite Obligation to perfect Obedience, and hence endeavours to reform and keep the Law, till it finds itself utterly unable to obey it aright in one Point or Tittle. Thus the Spirit of God goes on to lead the Sinner to see the *Ground and Reason* of Things as they are set forth in the Word. He does not first awaken *Fear*, and afterwards shew them the Reason why they are affraid, but begins first with *Light*, as it was in the old Creation, *God said let there be Light, and there was Light*§. This was his first Work; and so
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It is in the new Creation, *He that commanded the Light to shine out of Darkness*, at first, *shines into our Hearts to give us the Light of the Knowledge of the Glory of God in the Face of Christ**; and by this Means bows the Will, and draws or wins over the Affections. This is a Mark of the true Spirit. He, therefore, that holds forth Light in preaching the Word, is a *Worker together* with that Spirit which opens the Eyes of the Blind, and causes them to see the lost Estate they are in, and also *the Glory of God in the Face of Christ*, in order to *change them into the divine Image*; both are carrying on the same great Design of *turning Men from Darkness to Light, and from the Power of Satan to God†*. It is because of Darkness in the Understanding, that Men *do not believe, the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them that believe not*, and his End is, *lest the Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine into them‡*.

It is the great Mr. Cranrock, I think. who some where observes, that “it is the Devil’s Way to begin first with
 “the *Affections*, and win them over to a *seeming Religion*,
 “and thus will make a Shew of loping off some of the
 “Branches of Corruption, that he may the more effectually deceive the Soul by a *seeming Holiness*; knowing
 “that these will grow again, and ordinarily prove a Scandal to Religion. Like a treacherous General, who, not
 “intending to reduce the City he is sent to fight against,
 “only batters down some of the out Works and Ornaments, and puts the Inhabitants into some Fright, but
 “as for the Castle, he meddles not with it; he leaves
 “this as strong as ever, and turns out none of its old
 “Commanders and Soldiers, unless it be to put in some
 “that will better carry on his treacherous Design, that
 “the Castle being left in the Hands of the Enemy, it
 “may recover all again. But when God begins, he falls
 “to the Castle first, *i. e.* the Understanding, and having
 “gained this, the *Will* and Affections, and all the Powers
 “of the Soul, submit of Consequence.”

THAT Spirit, and those Preachers which work chiefly and primarily on the Affections, while the Understanding is neglected, are not of God, but are Antichrist.

2. THAT

2. **THAT** Spirit, and those Preachers which lead Men to trust to a **CHRIST** *without* them, as exhibited in the Word, are of **GOD**. **CHRIST** *in the Word*, and there *only*, is the Object of Faith and Trust; and the true Spirit and true Preachers lead Souls *to the Word*, to find *Christ* in the Offers and Promises of the Covenant of Grace, and to rest upon him there. It brings them off from all Confidence, not only in their own Works and Duties, in Point of Justification before God, but also from all Confidence in, and Dependance upon their best Frames, Tears, Enlargements, Influences and Attainments, to a solid Life of Faith upon Grounds that are *unchangeable*, viz. the *Promise* of God, the *Righteousness* of *Christ*, the *Grace* and *Fullness* that are in him, all *which* are held up in the Word, as the Object of Faith, and can be found no where else: The *Spirit* and *Word* of Faith, do not cause Men *to ascend into Heaven to bring Christ down from Above, nor to descend into the Deep to bring Him up from thence*; but they teach us, *that the Word is nigh us, even in our Mouth and Heart*, even the Scripture, which is *the Word of Faith*.*

BUT there is an *enthusiastick, antichristian* Spirit, which leads poor Souls to rest upon Impulses, Impressions, Motions, and what they feel within them, as if they were the Ground and Reason of their Faith and Hope; whereas, the true sealing and feeling of the Spirit, is the Fruit and Effect of Faith, and not the Ground of it. *After ye be- lieved, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit*†. The true Spirit leads the Soul to a Dependance upon **CHRIST** *without him*, even upon *Christ* in the Word of Grace and Promise; and not upon a **CHRIST** *within him*, nor upon any created or communicated Graces, Gifts, Experiences, Tears, Sorrows, Joys, Frames, Feelings, Faith, Hope, Knowledge, or whatever else can be named, that is not God in *Christ*, exhibited in the *Word of Faith*, and *Covenant of Grace*. These *Things* may be Evidences of Grace, and our good Estate, for *Christ* in us is *the Hope of Glory*‡; but they are not the Object of Faith, or Ground of Trust.

A false Spirit and false Apostles, often lead Men to trust to a *Christ* in their *Lrains*, to an Image of *Christ* painted

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* *Rom. x, 6, 7, 8.* † *Eph. i, 13.* ‡ *Col. i, 27.*

painted on the Imagination, as being nailed to the Cross, with his Arms extended, Side pierced, and the Blood streaming, they hear his Groans and bitter Cries, they see him fainting, gasping and expiring: Or, perhaps, they have a lively Idea of him, as on a Throne in Heaven, shining in the greatest Splendor and Beauty, and hear him speaking Comfort to them, and, it may be, in the Words of Scripture too; and thus being filled with Comfort, they esteem this Image as *altogether lovely, the Chief among Ten Thousand*, and falling down they worship and adore it. Some such imaginary Apprehensions of *Christ*, have possessed the Minds of many, and been the Ground of their Hopes of Heaven. These Fancies are ever ready to crowd themselves into the Mind, not only of awakened Sinners, but also of the *true Children* of God: They are often beset with such vile Images rising up before them, and, Satan like, claiming their Worship; and it is a Grief and Burden to them, which they would gladly be rid of, and which they mourn over; so far are they, when led by the true Spirit, from taking such Imaginations for Discoveries of *Christ*. *The Flesh profiteth nothing; my Words they are Spirit, and they are Life**; and *the Weapons of our Warfare are—mighty through God—casting down Imaginations, and every high Thing that exalteth itself against God, &c.†* Giving Heed therefore to such vain Fancies, is directly opposite to the Spirit of the Gospel; yea, it is *real*, though *mental Idolatry*, and highly offensive to God, *who will not give his Glory to another, nor his Praise to graven or mental Images‡*. Such Discoveries as these, never influenced any one Soul to believe in *Christ*, though they often crowd into the Soul that does act Faith in him; and so far as they are attended to, so far do they take off the Mind from the Object of Faith, even the Truths God has revealed concerning his Son, to which the Spirit of God leads the Mind, as the only unchangeable Bottom on which he can rest his everlasting Hopes, all other Things being Nothing and Vanity, compared to this.

3. THE Operations of the true Spirit tend to empty Men, and make them *become as little Children, teachable* and

* *John* vi, 63. † *2 Cor.* x, 4, 5. ‡ *Isa.* 'ii, 8.

and *humble*, having to learn every Thing, both what they are to hope for or fear, and what they must do; it makes them willing to *become Fools*, that *they* may receive the *Wisdom*, that God in *Christ*, proposes to them in the Word. This Spirit empties them of all high Concepts of themselves, of their Gifts and Attainments in Knowledge or Grace, that they may be disposed to prefer others in Honour before themselves. The good Spirit empties a Man of *his own Wisdom* and *Knowledge*, making him in his own Eyes, *more brutish than any Man, not knowing the understanding of a Man**; and thus disposes him, like *Mary*, to sit at *Christ's* Feet, and hear his Words, as being the proper and only Cure for his Ignorance, and is more ready to hear, than to offer the Sacrifice of *Feasts*†. This Spirit empties a Man of his own *Faith*, his *Joys*, *Sorrows*, *Trials*, *Feelings*, *Discoveries*, *Attainments*, and every Thing *acquired* or *communicated*, and leaves him nothing to depend on but *Christ*, in a bare *Word* or *Testimony*, a *Tutus* saith the Lord: It leaves him nothing in all the World to *trust* on, but the *Gift* of *God's* *Love*‡; the *Faithfulness* of a *promising* *God*, a *divine* *Testimony*: It leaves him neither *Righteousness*, nor *Strength*, nor *Faith*, nor any Thing else to trust on, that he may come in the proper Language of *Faith*, saying, *Surely in the Lord have I Righteousness and Strength*§: It leaves him *wretched and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked*, in his own Sight, that he may be disposed to look to *Christ*, for *Gold tried in the Fire, white Raiment, and Eye Salve*, which He has to give: It leaves him *quite destitute of, and denied to all Good in himself*, that he may have nothing but what he has in *Christ*: In a Word, it makes him *poor in Spirit*.

BUT a false Spirit fills Men with *high Thoughts of themselves*, and they are ready to speak and act as though they were *more holy than others*: It makes them bold and forward, inclined to shew themselves, their Gifts and *supposed* Graces. Hence, contrary to *Christ's* Command, they are ready to take the *uppermost Seat in the Synagogue, and even at Feasts*, i. e. to put themselves forward on every side of any to *pray, preach, or perform any Duty in Religion*; but

* *1 Cor. xiii. 2.* † *Eccl. v. 1.* ‡ *1 Joh. iii. 1.* § *1 Joh. iii. 24.*

could you follow these same Persons into their Closets, you would find them either unsteady, having now and then a Flash of Affection, anon a perfect Stupidity and Senselessness, according to the good or bad Opinion they think others have of them, or they have of their own Performances and Graces, or trifling and wandering, yea, careless in secret Duties. This Spirit, disposes Men to look with Contempt on those they think have less Holiness than they have; and with Envy at such as outdo them in extraordinary Appearances. Such are ready to think their Hearts are as good as the best; they feel a good Heart within, in all they do, and so feel not the Want of all Good, which is *Poverty of Spirit*. A false Spirit leads Men to rest satisfied with, and to depend on some Flashes of Joy or Sorrow, and the Exercises of their Faith, and so make their Faith and other Graces, the Ground and Object of their Faith. If they can but get their Affections at Work, they think they have Religion and Grace in Exercise; never considering that there are many affectionate Hearts that are very corrupt. Carnal Men may love some Truths that are striking to the Mind, as they do a fair Face; they may be joyfully affected with an engaging Description of the Glories of Heaven; they may be filled with Fear and Distress, when the Miseries of Hell are spoken of, and yet be quite destitute of saving Faith; yea, in all may have these Affections moved by Satan, transformed into an Angel of Light. Some may weep bitterly to hear the Sufferings of *Christ* described, and yet so little Religion is in all this, that such Kind of Weeping seems to be forbid, *Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, &c.** Yea, they may have such strong Imaginations of *Christ* on the Cross, excited by a false Spirit, as to affect them as strongly as if they actually saw the dreadful Scene acted. But in all this there is no Religion; it proceeds from a lying Spirit, so far as any Image of *Christ* is formed in the Brain, and relied on as an Object of Faith. But the Spirit of God empties a Man of all these Imaginations, and brings him to rest on the Truth revealed in the Word, as that alone which can bear him up through Death and Judgment.

4. THE Spirit of GOD disposes Men, while they are faithful, to be charitable also to others : They that are influenced by this good Spirit, are disposed to hope the best, where there appear any Marks of the *divine image* ; they are, like *Christ*, not disposed to *break the bruised Reed, nor quench the smoking Flax** ; they are so sensible of their own *Weakness*, and *the Body of Sin within them*, that they are ready to pass by Offences, and *restore such as are overtaken in a Fault, in the Spirit of Meekness†*.

BUT a *false Spirit* disposes Men to be *censurous*, condemning all that do not come to their Standard of *Doctrine* and *Experiences*. It is a false and antichristian Spirit, which disposes and persuades Men to *judge* of the State of others, and *pronounce* them converted or not, upon *no other Evidence*, but an Account of Experiences. To make ourselves Judges in this Affair, is to go in the Face of the most express Scripture, and is a distinguishing Mark of Antichrist ; for it is his Character, that *he sitteth in the Temple of God, calling himself God‡*. And do not those *fit in the Seat or Temple of God*, and call *themselves God*, who assume to themselves that divine Prerogative *to search the Heart and try the Reins*, by which God distinguisheth himself from all other Beings ? He asserts this as belonging to him alone ; and is it not a bold Invasion of the Seat of God, for any to pretend to determine the States of others, by viewing their Experiences ?

THAT the Experiences of others, when known, may demand our Charity ; and a *holy Life and Walk*, a yet greater Degree of it, is evident, and allowed on all Hands ; but to enter into the State, and peremptorily determine who are the Children of God, and who not, this belongs to God only. It is true, that the Life and Conduct of a Person, joined with his Profession, is a sufficient Evidence to us of his *visible Standing*, but not of his *invisible State*, excepting those who carry the *Mark of Death* in their Foreheads, by living in allowed, open Sin. Few Men know their own Hearts, yea, the Heart of Man is unsearchable to *all*, but God only ; for Men therefore, to enter on this Work of searching the Hearts of others,

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* *Isa. xlii, 3.* † *Gal. vi, 1.* ‡ *Ezek. xxviii, 2.* 2 *Thess. ii, 4.*

argues their wretched Ignorance of themselves, and the Deceitfulness of their own Hearts, and is the Fruit of the Teachings of the Spirit of Antichrist. Our great Redeemer will never approve our Attempts to pluck up the Tares out of his Field*. I do not mean to insinuate, that inward Experiences are of little or no Importance in Religion; for it is abundantly evident, that all true Religion hath it's Root in the Exercises and Tempers of the Heart, and is maintained by the Influences of the Spirit of God, discovering the Importance and Glory of unseen Things, and thus changing it into the divine Image. True Religion, therefore, in it's Spring or Source, consists in what we call Experiences, and without them there can be no Religion. But the Way and Method which God has established in his Word, for us to come to the Knowledge of the Truth of the Experiences we have had, and which others say they have had, is not chiefly by viewing the *Experiences*, but by the Fruit they produce, as is abundantly evident from a Multitude of Scriptures†. Experiences therefore, in order that they may be clear Evidences for us, must be tried themselves, by that Rule God has given us, which requires *Fruit* unto Holiness, and this alone can prove our Experiences to be of the right Kind. He that will determine the Nature of his own, or any particular Man's Experiences, by viewing them abstractly from the Fruit, is ever liable to be deceived. We know very little of the intrinsick Nature of Things, which are most obvious to our Knowledge; we determine their Nature from their Effects: And surely few are so Eagle-eyed as to determine the Nature of a particular Person's Experiences, by viewing them abstractly from their Effects; we cannot do this even in our own Case, much less can we do it in the Case of others, whose Experiences we are acquainted with only by their Account of them, in which we are liable to be imposed on, and also to misunderstand what they design honestly to communicate. It is therefore, high Presumption for any to determine the State of others, on the Evidence of their inward Exercises.

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* *Mat. xiii. 30.* † See this Point fully demonstrated in the *Christian's Treasure*; by JONATHAN EDWARDS. Page 200.

5. THE true Spirit teacheth us, that Religion consists chiefly in *Practice*, i. e. in *holy Actions*, arising from *holy Tempers* and *divine Exercises of the Heart*. It teaches us that *nothing* is to be esteemed *true Religion*, but that which brings forth the Fruit of a *holy, humble, self-denying Life*; for *pure Religion, and undefiled* — *the God and the Father, is this, To visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction, and to keep himself unpolluted from the World**. It teaches us to look on all Experiences as *false*, how high and fair soever they appear, that do not bring forth good Fruit, and to look on all as *Enemies of Christ*, who do not *keep* his Commandments, *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his Commandments, is a Liar†*; that all our Experiences are to be tried by this Rule.

BUT a false Spirit will persuade Men to hope all is well with themselves and others, if they have had a certain *Set of Experiences*, although they fall into Sin and live in it. *Once converted, and always converted*, is a true Maxim; but it is a dreadful Handle by which Satan ruins those from whom the Gospel is hid; for having settled this Point, and once concluded themselves in a State of Grace and Favour with God, on the Foot of a certain Set of Experiences they once had, they will maintain this Persuasion, as long as they can call to Mind those former Exercises, although they now live and act as *carnal* and *worldly* as ever. Satan will persuade them, that they are yet the Children of God, though they have many Failings; that good Men, as *David, Solomon, Peter, &c.* have fallen into great Sin, and some of them continued in it for a long Time without Repentance; and therefore that their *Sin* and *Deadness* in Religion, is no certain Evidence that they are not the Children of God, especially as they are sure they were once converted, and had Discoveries of *Christ*. Hence they feel easy, and hope for Heaven, while they are going in the broad Way of Sin and Death, and do not consider, that none have a Right to eat of the Tree of Life, but such as do his Commandments‡. But the *true Spirit* teacheth us, that *he that doth not Righteousness, is not*

* James i, 27. † 1 John, ii, 4. ‡ Rev. xxii, 14.

*not righteous**; and *he that committeth Sin is of the Devil*. Hence it is, that those who are led by the *true Spirit*, are filled with many Doubts and Fears, and lose the Evidences of their good Estate, when they fall into Sin, which answer an excellent End, as they excite the Backslider to double Diligence and Watchfulness over his Temper and Conduct. Those, whose Evidences are not darkened by Sin, never saw the Light, but walk in Darkneis, whatever Dreams they may have that they see Light.

I could mention many other Marks of the false Spirit; but as these are some of the Devices of Satan, which at this Day he chiefly useth to insnare and delude Souls, I have thought it most necessary to mention them. Having now gone through what I proposed, let us see what Use may be made of these Things, for our spiritual Good.

USE I. OF INSTRUCTION.

I. WHAT has been said, may serve to teach us *the Danger we are in from without*, i. e. from Satan transformed into an Angel of Light, and those whom he influenceth to carry on the same Design of deluding and destroying Souls. We are ever ready to let down our Watch, and be off our Guard, and to suppose all safe and secure; little considering that the Enemy of Souls is at Hand, and using all possible *Art and Stratagem* to destroy us. Much of our *Danger* lies in our being *insensible of our Danger*. This lays us open to the Attacks of Satan, and leaves us wholly in his Power, excepting so far as the *immediate* Power of God upholds us; and he wants neither Malice, Rage, Power, nor Subtilty, to destroy those who are in his Power. This Motive the Apostle proposes to excite us to *Sobriety and Vigilance*, *because our Adversary the Devil walketh about seeking whom he may devour†*. He is an Adversary, full of Rage and subtil Stratagem; he *goeth about*, is ever restless, losing no Advantage through Idleness, and he seeks to devour and utterly destroy: Therefore, it becomes us to be *sober and vigilant*; we should be always on our Guard, because he is always making his Attacks. Some, yea *many*, are so in his Power, and at his

* 1 John, iii, 10. † Verse 8. ‡ 1 Pet. v, 8.

his Command, that they feel no Disturbance from Sin *within*, or Satan *without*; they can hardly believe he has any Thing to do with, or troubles himself about them: The Reason is, they make no Resistance to his Government, and *the strong Man armed keeps the House*, and *his Goods are at Peace*; but no sooner do any oppose him, than this *roaring Lion* is engaged in his Assaults to ruin them. Hence, those who are most watchful, have the most frequent Combats, and happy for them, they obtain the most frequent Conquests too. Very few are acquainted with Satan's Devices, or consider themselves as engaging with this subtil Adversary, which gives him a double Advantage, for his Success depends greatly on his being unknown; therefore he often comes as an Angel of Light, that he may not be suspected, and under this Appearance, he lays Waste the Church of *Christ*, and the Souls of Men, and leads many Captive, pretending to shew them the Way to the celestial *Canaan*. This shews us the Danger we are always in; and should excite us to the greatest Diligence and Watchfulness. We should examine every Spot on which we set our Foot, lest a Snare be laid for us: It would be for our Safety ever to apprehend Danger near. This would make us more watchful of our Conduct and Tempers; and this would excite us to a more close Walk with God, in whose Hands our Safety lies. Could we always be sensible of the Greatness of our Danger from Enemies, both *within* and *without*, and of *our* own Weakness, how would it awaken us to fly for Refuge to the great and glorious Redeemer, who holds Men and Devils in Chains, and can crush Satan under our Feet.

2. WHAT we have heard, teacheth us *the Obligations we are under to God, and our own Souls, to try the Spirits*. This is enjoined by the Authority of God himself; and as we would not be treacherous to him and his Interest, so we must try the Spirits. It would be great Treachery to our King, to harbour every one that pretended to be his Subject, because many such are Spies; and is it not equally treacherous for us to take every Appearance of Religion for true Religion, and neglect the Trial to which

God hath subjected all Religion? To do thus, is also Rebellion against the Authority and Command of God; and surely they cannot be the Friends of God, or his Cause, who will not obey his Commands. We are also *under strong Obligations to ourselves, to try the Spirits*, because we run a dreadful Risque of perishing forever, if we do not: It is far more likely that we shall be deceived, than otherwise, if we do not carefully try the Spirits; and then our Ruin will be dreadfully aggravated, as we have been warned of our Danger.

3. FROM what we have heard, we learn the absolute Necessity of keeping close to the Word of God as our only Rule; this must be *a Light to our Feet, and a Lamp to our Paths*, or we shall run far into Wandering and Wee. If we would but keep to the Word of God, as the only Rule of Faith and Practice, how many Errors might be prevented and refuted, which are now carrying Multitudes out of the Way! We should soon find, that *the Law of the Lord is perfect*, and wants no Additions from new Revelations. The Word of God is a *tried Word*; it has been the Clue by which the Saints in all Ages have found their Way to Heaven; it is that Voice, when accompanied by the Spirit, which *they bear behind them, saying, This is the Way, walk ye in it**. This not only shews us the Way to Heaven, but also Points out the Ways to Death and Hell, that we may avoid them; it sets up awful Warnings at the Entry of every By-path, to prevent Men from Destruction. The Scripture is a plain Rule. All that is necessary to Salvation is clearly revealed there, so *that he that runs may read*; and happy would it be for the Church of God, and Souls of Men, if the plainest and most obvious Sense of it was closely adhered to: This would save us from innumerable Evils and Mischiefs, and would bury many Errors out of Sight; this would unite the jarring Parties of Christians, and make the Church of CHRIST *beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, and terrible as an Army with Banners†*. To forsake this *only Rule*, and in its Stead set up our own Reason, *spiritual*

* *Isai.* xxx, 31.

† *Cant.* vi, 4.

Spiritual Sense, as it is called, or *the Light within*, or *new Revelations* from strong *Impulses*, *Voices*, or *Visions*, is to forsake *Truth*, for a *Falshood*, Light, for Darkneſs, and in the End, Heaven and the eternal Enjoyment of God and *Chriſt*, for the dark Abode of Hell and the Company of Devils. To the Law and the Testimony, let us apply for Direction and Counſel in all our Ways; and let not any think themſelves at Liberty to form any Standard for themſelves or others, by which to try either Doctrines, Experiences, or Practice, beſide this only, this perfect Rule.

4. THIS Diſcourſe alſo teacheth us, *that there may be*, and often has been, great Appearanceſ of Religion, which have bid fair for the Name of real Godlineſs, which all the while have the Prince of Darkneſs for their Author. Satan may counterfeit true Religion ſo nearly, that few will readily diſcover the Cheat, and when it is diſcovered by ſome, others will not believe it. Thoſe that take every Appearance of Religion, and every kind of Concern, Terror, and inward Diſtreſs, about the future State, for true Conviction, and every Appearance of Joy and Comfort, of Faith and Love, for true Converſion, ſeem to be very ignorant of the Devices of Satan, and the many counterfeit Appearanceſ of Religion, which he has been the Author of in the World. Let us therefore learn, *not to believe every Spirit, but try the Spirits*, by the Rule of the *Word*, *whether they are of God*.

5. WE may hence learn how to diſtinguiſh between the true and falſe Spirits; the true Spirit brings Light and Truth to the Underſtanding, by which Means the Will is bowed, and the Affections gained over to a Life of Holineſs, Self-denial, and ſweet Communion with God. But the falſe Spirit begins with the Affections firſt, and drags the Judgment after them. The true Spirit brings the Soul to reſt on *Chriſt*, in the Word and Promise of God; but the *falſe* Spirit would have Men truſt to a *Chriſt* in the Heart, to their Frames, Feelings, Joys, Sorrows, &c. The Spirit of God empties a Man and makes him *poor in Spirit*, it humbles him and makes him nothing in his

own Eyes; but the Spirit of Darkneſs fills Men with high Thoughts of themſelves, of their Attainments in Holineſs and Knowledge. It puffs them up with their Gifts, and makes them forward and ready to ſet up for Teachers of others, without a due Regard to the ſacred Inſtitution of the holy Miniſtry, which he has guarded in the moſt ſolemn Manner. God, by his Spirit, teacheth Men to be charitable and meek toward all Men, *to hope all Things, believe all Things, and endure all Things*; but a deluſive Spirit often teacheth Men to be cenſorious and bitter towards thoſe who do not come up to their Standard in Experiences, &c.

AND as we may learn to diſtinguiſh the true and falſe Spirits, ſo we hence ſee how to try the Preachers of the Word; for thoſe who preach the Word, are Workers together with the Spirit of God, and both are carrying on the ſame Deſign of *turning Men from Darkneſs to Light, and from the Power of Satan to God*; but thoſe who preach themſelves, their own Fancies and Impulſes, which are Darkneſs, and not Light, they are Fellow-workers with the Spirit of Antichriſt, and are carrying on one Deſign with the Spirit of Darkneſs, even to enſnare Men in Sin and everlaſting Darkneſs. The Rules therefore already laid down to try the Spirits by, are the Meaſure by which to try the Miniſters of *Chriſt*, and falſe Apoſtles. Thoſe who are holding up the *Light* of the *Truth* before the Underſtandings of Men, in order to engage and lead them to God in *Chriſt* for Life, are thoſe who are Workers together with God. But thoſe who uſe all their Powers to work on the Affections, while the Light is but faintly preſented to the Underſtanding, are carrying on a quite different Deſign, and expoſing Men to the Snares of Satan.

USE II. OF TRIAL.

• LET us now, my Brethren, without Partiality or Prejudice try ourſelves, by what we have now heard, and make the Application to our own Souls, and inquire whether we live under a Senſe of our Danger, of being ſeduced by Satan? We muſt remember, that we have an

Enemy

Enemy within as well as without, even a *Heart that is treacherous above all Things, and desperately wicked**; which is ever ready to betray us into the Hand of Satan, and therefore we need a double Guard; but as no one ever sets a Guard where no Danger is apprehended, so those who are insensible of the Danger they are in, from this enemy within and without, will never maintain a careful watch against them. The more we are sensible of our danger, the less are we exposed to it; he therefore that apprehends himself safe, while in this Valley of Tears and Field of Battle, is doubtless asleep, or deluded by Satan into a carnal Confidence; and the more we are awake to our Danger, the more evident is it that we are warring against Principalities and Powers, and spiritual Wickednesses in high Places†.

LET us turn our Thoughts again inward, and inquire whether the Exercises of our Hearts, and the Operations we have experienced, will abide the Trial of the Word? If our Affections and Passions have been awakened, while Darkneſs remains in our Understandings; or, if our Judgment follows our Affections, the Operation is not divine. God is the Author of *Light, and with him is no Darkneſs at all*‡; and if our Minds have not been enlightened to see Things as they are, the Operation has not been of God.

Is the *Truth* of a faithful God in the Word, the *Ground* of your Faith and Trust? and is the *divine Beauty* and *Excellency* of those Truths, the Object with which your Will and Affections close? All that receive the Lord Jesus Christ by Faith, *receive him and rest on him as he is offered in the Gospel*. True Faith never rests on Christ formed in the Heart; this is the *Evidence*, but not the *Object* of true Faith, which always takes Christ in the Word and Testimony of God; and that Faith which receives Christ in a *Testimony*, is that by which he will be admired and glorified at his coming; as you may see, 2 *Thess.* i, 10, 11. True Faith goes out of itself to rest on Christ in the Word.

We have heard that the Spirit of God humbles Men, and makes them as little Children, that it empties them

* Jer. xvii, 9. † Eph. vi, 12. ‡ 1 John, ii, 5.

of all their Gifts and Graces, in Point of Dependance & Merit, and disposes them to esteem themselves as worthless, as *less than the least of all Saints*. If therefore have not been thus empty, yea, if we do not live under the Influence of such a Spirit, we are not influenced by the Spirit of God. Once more; if the Spirit in us do not bring forth the Fruit of Holiness and new Obedience it is not of God. If *we are created anew in Christ, it is unto good Works**; and if *Christ has purified us, it is that we may be zealous of good Works†*. It is by this we are to try all our Experiences. Nothing is true Religion, but that which brings forth good Fruit, all beside must be hewn down and cast into the Fire‡.

It is a Matter of infinite Importance, that we do not mistake in this Affair, as in this lies our eternal State, *for except we are born again of the Spirit of God, we cannot enter into the Kingdom of God§*. How sad will be the Case of such as have had raised Hopes of Heaven, when they come, and knock, saying, *Lord, Lord, open to us, and we shall profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me ye Workers of Iniquity*. Nothing therefore so much demands our Care and Diligence, as to make sure of a real Interest in the Favour of God, through *Christ*, and to see that our Title be founded on the *Word and Covenant of God*.

USE III. OF EXHORTATION.

WHAT we have heard should excite us *to try the Spirits, and not believe every Spirit*. As we are always in great Danger from the Subtilty of Satan, and as he is always endeavouring to draw us aside from the Truth, so it is our Wisdom to keep on our Guard, and admit nothing for true Religion, but what will abide the Trial of the Word. If once this Rule is laid aside, you will wander in the endless Mazes of Error and Delusion: When Men once go out of the Path of Scripture Truth, to what a Length will they wander in Darkness! *To the Law, then, and the Testimony*: Hold your Bibles as dear, yea, dearer than your lives, they are your only Charter for Heaven, and your only

only Compass to direct your Course thither : Take Heed, therefore, that you do not neglect them, or steer your Course without their Direction. Again, be much in earnest Prayer to God for the Direction of his Spirit, to lead you into all necessary Truth. Your *Understandings* *must be opened*, before you will consider and truly *understand the Scripture*, so as to keep you from Error. If God does not direct your Thoughts to the Truths he has revealed, you will not be likely to consider or apply them when needed; therefore, be often at the Mercy Seat, and plead with God, that he would enlighten your Minds into the Knowledge of his holy Will. Plead your own Ignorance and Blindness, with a Heart-affecting Sense of it, before God : plead your Weakness and Insufficiency to encounter Satan, or your own Hearts ; plead the Worth of your Souls, the Blood and Sufferings of Jesus, the rich Grace of God through him ; plead your Covenant Relation to God, as his People, at least in a visible Relation, as his Name has been called on you ; plead the Honour of his own Name, and the Reproach that will come upon it, if Satan is suffered to lead you away into Error ; O, plead earnestly with God, for his Spirit to lead you, by teaching you the Truths of his Word, and influencing you to a Life of Obedience. Betake yourselves daily to *Christ*, by Faith and renewed Repentance, for He of God, is made unto us Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption ; in him is everlasting Strength. And while you are pleading for yourselves, remember others, especially such as appear to be led away by Error and Delusion. O, beware of indulging any Bitterness against them, considering that you are as liable to fall, and be led away by Satan, the Moment God leaves you ; and therefore, pity them and pray for them, that they may be recovered from the Snares of the Devil, and that you yourselves may be kept from Error, and opposing any Thing that is of God. Does not your Hearts mourn for such as are evidently led away by the Prince of Darkness ? And shoul! you not be very importunate with God, that he would deliver them from the Jaws of that devouring Lion ?

FINALLY,

FINALLY, let us all be awakened to a Sense of our Danger, and a close Application to the divine Rule God has given us. To God I would commend you, and to the Word of his Grace, which is able to keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the Presence of his Glory, with exceeding Joy.—To the only wise God, our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, both now and forever. *A M E N.*

F I N I S



THE Reader is desired to correct, with his Pen, the following Errata, and such other as he may observe, which have elapsed unnoticed.

At the Bottom of the Title Page, for MDCLXII, read MDCCLXII.
 Pag. 10, lin. 19, *for* be Son of God, *read* be the Son of God.
