

*The Seasonableness of Religious Societies*

*by*

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*The Seasonableness of Religious  
Societies.*

A

SERMON

Preach'd to the

SUPPORTERS

OF THE

LECTURE

ON

Lord's-Day Mornings,

AT

*Little St. Hellen's, upon April  
the 23d, 1714.*

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By EDMUND CALAMY, D.D.

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## MALACHI III. 16.

*Then they that fear'd the Lord, spake often,  
 one to another; and the Lord hearkned,  
 and heard it, and a Book of remembrance;  
 was written before Him, for them that  
 feared the Lord) and that thought upon  
 his Name.*

THESE are the Words of the last Prophet we know of under the Old Testament, and they, are spoken with Relation to the Professing People of God in Ancient Times, after their Return from Captivity in *Babylon*. This People, as formerly, so also at the Time which my Text refers to, were like two Baskets of Figgs; some very bad, and others very good. *Jeremy* had given that Representation of them, in his Propheisie, when their Captivity began, and *Malachi* gives much the same Account of them when it is over. They were the same as before; and as bad as ever, if not worse. The Number of the Good and Pious was very small, if compar'd with that of the Careless and Profligate: And in such

Jerem. 14.

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a Case it became all to joyn in with the Good, and imitate their Example, if they desir'd to share with them in their treatment, either here, or hereafter. The Prophet speaks distinctly of and to both Sorts; but it is not my Intention to take any farther notice of what is said with respect to the Profane and Vile, than as the Account this Text gives of the Case and Course of God's upright Servants may be from thence elucidated. 'Tis of them the Wotds are to be understood, and in the Account of them that is given, we may observe;

I. Their Proper Native Character. They were such as *feared the Lord, and thought upon his Name.*

II. Their Practise that is taken notice of. They *spake often one to another.*

III. The Season in which they took the Course mention'd. They did it *then*; which Points to somewhat in the Circumstances of the Time when they did this, that made it Particularly remarkable. And,

IV. The Fruit of it also deserves Observation. Their Integrity, Zeal and Faithfulness, was neither unregarded, nor unrewarded: For,

1. It was highly pleasing to the Blessed God, to whom it most concerns his Servants to approve themselves. *The Lord hearken'd and heard it:* And,

2. It was remembred to their Advantage: *And a Book of Remembrance was written before Him for them:* He took such notice of this Carriage of theirs, as not to fail of making  
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a suitable Return. And by that Time I have run over these Particulars, I apprehend you will not only have a sufficient insight into the Sense and meaning of my Text, but you'll see a Plain Foundation for a Doctrinal Proposition, which it may not be unseasonable to offer to your serious Consideration.

1. Then, the Character that is here given of Pious Persons deserves our notice. They are describ'd as *fearing the Lord, and thinking upon his Name*. This was then a Native Character of Persons truly Religious, and it is so still, and will be so in all Times to come. The Prophet speaks of such *as feared the Lord*; such as not only pretended to it, but did so really and truly, and shew'd it by their Carriage. While others disregarded that Great and Glorious and Excellent Being, these Persons *trembled for fear of Him, and were afraid of his Judgments*. They *fear'd God and kept his Commandments*, which they took to be their *whole* Duty and Interest; and thereby shew'd their Piety was Real and Sincere. They stood in Aw of Him that made Heaven and Earth, they took their Measures from Him, and to serve and honour, worship and please Him, was their main Business and their chief Delight. And this is a very Noble Character, according to the Account of Scripture, where the Fear of God is plainly Comprehensive of all the Parts of serious Religion, and Practical Godliness. But 'tis added, that they *thought upon his Name*, While others paid no respect to his Great and Awful Name, these Persons had a mighty Value for it, and were remarkable for

Psal. 110.  
120.  
Eccles. 12.  
13.

Deut. 28. 58.  
Psal. 1. 6,7.

Prov. 18. 10.  
Psal. 124. 8.

their serious Regard to it. According to the Solemn Charge of *Moses* their Law-giver, they *fear'd this glorious and fearful Name, the Lord their God. Others are Charg'd by this Prophet with despising his Name, and with Polluting it, and with great freedom (as is intimated in this Context,) did they speak against God and his Justice, but these Persons rever'd God's Name, and consulted the Honour of it. They did not barely think upon it, in a Notional or Speculative way, but they contemplated it with great Pleasure. They counted it a Strong Tower, to which they might run and be: safe. Their Help was in the Name of the Lord, who made Heaven and Earth. They highly esteem'd his Name, and awfully regarded it. They endeavour'd to walk in a way becoming those that had the Knowledge of it, and so as to avoid what they could discover would dishonour it. As light as others made of the Name of God, they magnify'd it, and studied how to express their Peculiar Esteem of it. The Name of God is Himself, as far as he is discover'd to his Creatures. These Persons therefore being said to think upon his Name, that which is thereby meant is, that with great Freedom and Pleasure they entertain'd themselves with admiring Thoughts of his Glorious Excellencies and Perfections, they honour'd, lov'd, serv'd, and trusted him; and had a becoming Veneration, and a Peculiar Value for whatever belong'd to Him, in Proportion to his Concern in it, and its Relation to Him. And this is what the Real Servants of God in any Age are remarkable for, Let others behave as they will, these will*



will be found *fearing the Lord, and thinking on his Name.* And then,

2. That *Practise* of these Persons that is here particularly mention'd deserves our Notice: They *spake often one to another.* The Original does not express the Word *often*; and therefore, some only render it thus, *they spake one to another:* But it is evidently enough included in the Word *Nidbaru*, and properly supply'd by our Translators. We are not told what they said, nor how they manag'd their Conversation; but somewhat of it may be easily gather'd from attending Circumstances. *They spake one to another,* and therefore they did not live like Strangers. They kept together and did not scatter. They met amicably and like Friends, with a desire and design to keep Religion from expiring and languishing: And that they might do it the more effectually, it is not to be wondred that they *spake often one to another.* They met together frequently, and they did it with a warmth and concern, that discover'd they were in Earnest. Their Conversation did not run barely upon common and trivial Things, it was not taken up with secular Matters; they did not merely entertain one another with Injuries,<sup>1</sup> or Discoveries about the Weather, News, the Goodness or Badness of Trade, or the Affairs and Infirmities of their Neighbours, Friends, and Acquaintance, (which things have too much ingrossed the Conversation of Professors of Religion as well as others, at all times;) but those things which they apprehended might be to the Honour of that God whom they fear'd and serv'd, and that would turn to a good Account also to themselves were their usual Entertainment at their Meetings, Had they had no other

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1 Ch. enquiries.

other than the usual Conversation, it would scarce have deserv'd *remembering*: For who can think it worth while to have a *Book of Remembrance*, for the recording of common *Chit Chat*, the bare repeating which would in most cases, occasion more Shame than Satisfaction or Commendation! It could not be thus with them. Their meeting together being the Consequence of their *fearing the Lord, and thinking upon his Name*, must be design'd to serve a religious Purpose. They did not when they were together, talk for Talk sake, or only to pass the Time away, but as the Apostle expresses it, they *exhorted one another daily, least any of their Hearts should be harden'd thro' the Deceetfulness of Sin*. Their Intention was to Admonish, Encourage, and quicken one another to their Duty. They met together in little Clanns, not only aiming at the promoting Amity and Friendship, and a brotherly Correspondence (which yet in its place is very Desirable) but with an Intention to excite one another to a serious Regard to God, and there by to shew that there were still some left, that had Religion at Heart, and were warmly concerned to do what in them lay, to promote a like concern in others. When they were together they spake up for that God, whom others took the Liberty to speak against: They discours'd together of his Mercy, Justice, and Patience, and his Holiness and Wisdom in his Government of the Sons of Men; and endeavour'd to establish one another, against the Assaults of such Proud, Contemptuous Disputes,<sup>1</sup> as the Prophet speaks of in the foregoing Verses. They encourag'd each other to continue waiting upon God, while many turn'd their Backs upon him. They spake Good of God and his Methods of Dealing,

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Heb. 3.13.

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<sup>1</sup> Cn. Disputers.

his Worship and Service, and the Consequences that would attend it. They spake Things that did as much become the Ways of God, as what the wicked spake did Disparage them. Whilst as is here declar'd, the Words of others were *flout against God*, and carry'd in them great Insolence, and such Reflections as were altogether unbecoming and undeserv'd, these Persons spake for God one to another. While many said it was *a vain thing to serve God*, and to no Purpose to run any Hazard for him, they spake to one another of the Profit of it, with Pleasure and Satisfaction. Their very Practise in this respect had a Language. They did what they could to hinder others from falling in with the profane; and appear'd firmly resolv'd, that if they could not stemm the Tide, at least neither they nor such as they could Influence, should swim with the Stream. This way they discover'd their reverential Regard of God and his Name. But farther,

3. The *Season* in which they thus behav'd themselves, is represented as particularly Remarkable. The Prophet says, they did this *then*, and there he seems to lay his Emphasis. *That* they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another: Intimating, there was something in the time of their doing this, that made their Practise in this respect the more Seasonable, And the more Notable. Tho' this was a thing that would have been Commendable at any time, yet *then* and at such a time as that was, it was peculiarly so. They did this *then*, when Religion ran so low, and Profaneness was so common, as is complain'd of in the foregoing Parts of this Prophecy. They did it *then* when they were come to their Dreggs: *Then* when  
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Impiety and Irreligion was at a very great Height. At a time when Iniquity was bold and Barefac'd, and would scarce admit of any Restraints or Checks, *then* did they openly stand up for God, in the view of the World. *Then* when Religion was publickly reproach'd, and represented as a mean, a melancholy, and a contemptible thing; *then* when it was run down as an effectual barr to Preferment: *Then* when God and his Providence were boldly reproach'd, strict Piety past for needless Singularity, and was turn'd into a Jest, and made the Subject of common Banter: *Then* when Atheism would do more to recommend, than serious Veneration for a Deity, and reveal'd Religion, pass'd with such as set up for Wits, for a meer *Tale of a Tub*: Yet *then* had the Persons here spoken of the Courage to declare for God and his Ways, and strengthen one anothers Hands in a firm Adherence both to him and them. At a time when the Enemies of God and his Servants, his Cause and Interest were only<sup>I</sup> to pervert and seduce, all whom they could Influence and reckon'd upon nothing less than carrying all before them: When the Prophets of the Lord had severely rebuk'd People for their Sins, but to very little Purpose, and they seem'd Incorrigible: When Judgments approach'd, and the Day was *coming* that it was declar'd would *burn up the proud and wicked as Stubble, and so as to leave them neither Root nor Branch*: When the *Enemy was coming in like a Flood*, Desolation was at hand, and a common Ruin seem'd hastning apace, then did these Persons combine together to shew their Veneration for God and his Name. Had they done it when Religion was in Fashion, and when the Reputation of Piety might have helped to  
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Chap. 4. 1.  
Isa. 51. 19.

Advance them, it had been less to have been wondred at; so much Notice would not have been taken of it as a Peculiarity: But to do it at such a time as this, was a plain Evidence they were really in earnest. And tho' to be in earnest for God and his Service, and warmly concern'd for his Honour, had been praise Worthy at any Season, yet to behave themselves thus at such a Juncture, was what the Prophet thought worthy of a special Remark, and it very well deserv'd it. But then the,

4. Fourth and Last thing to be here observ'd, is the Fruit and Consequence of such Carriage. It is intimated that it was not unregarded, nor would it be unrewarded. Two things are here declar'd concerning it. As,

1. That it was not, it could not be unregarded; it was highly pleasing to God; *The Lord hearhied and heard it!* This was what he could not overlook. After the manner of Men he's represented as listning attentively to such Discourse of his Servants, who *feared him and thought upon his Name*; and as minding what pass'd in their Meetings together, He observed what they spake of him, and for him, and what a Concern they discover'd for his Honour: And he took the more Notice of it, because of the Season, which made it so remarkable. He as distinctly observ'd, what such Persons as these said, and did for him, to shew their Regard to him, as of what those of the opposite Stamp, said and did against him.

2. 'Tis farther intimated, that it would not fail of being Rewarded: it would be remembred for their Advantage. For 'tis added, *a Book of Remembrance, was written before*

fore him for them. Humane Records are to prevent Oblivion. With respect: to the Omniscient God, there is not the least Danger of Oblivion: And yet when he takes special Notice of things, a Book of Remembrance is said to be written, by way of Accommodation to our Methods. The mentioning this in the present Case, is a fair Intimation, that God would remember this Carriage of these. his Servants, in such a Juncture, to their great Benefit. A Book of Remembrance; was written *for them*; that is in their Favour. This Carriage of theirs God would so remember, as to deal with them as his peculiar ones. He declares of some that they should be *his peculiar Treasure*: And the Prophet here assures he would deal with the Persons he was speaking off, as such: And therefore he adds in the very next Verse, *they shall be mine saith, the Lord of Hosts, in that Day when I make up my Jewels, or special; Treasure; and I will spare them as a Man spareth his own Son that serveth him.* Hereby is Assurance given, that God would to such a Degree remember these his Servants, who so distinguish'd themselves from others, as to make a manifest Difference between them and the rest of the World, in his Way. of Treatment 'Twas Common in ancient Times, for Kings and Princes to have Books of Memorials, or Records, and they were, sometimes *brought and read before them.* By. way of Allusion to this Custom, we read in Scripture of God's having Books for Remembrance; but all that is thereby properly to be understood, is, that the things which are spoken of, are as surely known, and had in Remembrance by him, as if they were written

Exod. 19. 5.  
Psal. 135. 4.

Ver. 17.

Esther 6. 1.

ten down before him. We read also of the *opening of these Books*; by which we are to understand God's manifesting his Knowledge of things, and dealing with Men accordingly, either for good or bad. And the Prophet by saying here, *that a Book of Remembrance was written before the Lord, for them that feared him, and thought upon his Name*; gives these Persons an Assurance, that their Faithfulness and Zeal <sup>★</sup> was distinctly taken Notice of by him, and that he would in due Time make it known, by his distinguishing them from the wicked, and his great Care of them, to preserve them from those heavy Judgments, and that Destruction, which would seize upon those by whom he had been Despis'd, Dishonour'd, and Insulted.

Dan. 7. 10.  
Revel. 20.  
12.  
Isa. 65. 6.

★ See Dr.  
Pocock on  
the Place.

The Words being thus open'd and explain'd, offer this seasonable Truth to our serious Meditation;

*That the religious Associations of such as Reverence the sacred Name of God, are highly pleasing to him; but are never more Seasonable than when true Piety runs low, and the Times are Perilous: And they shall not go without a Reward.*

In discoursing Briefly on this Subject, which would well deserve to be handled copiously, I shall,

I. In a few Words tell you what I mean by Religious Affociations.

II. Describe the Persons that should Concurr in them, and shew you how they should be qualified.

III. Give you some Evidence of God's being pleased with them.

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IV. Shew you the peculiar Seasonableness of them in times of Degeneracy and Danger.

V. Consider how far a Reward may be depended on, by such as act Uprightly and Faithfully in them. And then,

VI. And Lastly, I shall apply, my self suitably to all that hear me in the General, and afterwards to you that are Members of that Society in particular, at whose Request I engag'd in the present Service. And I begin.

I. With an Account of what I would have understood when I speak of Religious Associations; which does not require many Words. In all Cases where Activity is requisite, the joint Concurrence of many, gives the better Prospect of Success. Trade may be much promoted by regular Combinations, that have the publick Good for their Basis: And useful Learning has been much promoted, (and might perhaps if due Care were taken be yet more so) by the joint Endeavours of such as are earnestly inquisitive after Truth. Nor is there any Reason to be assign'd, why it should not be the same also as to Religion. It was with this View that the Great and Blessed God, the Common Parent of all Mankind, oblig'd them to Social Worship as well as Personal, all along from the time that they were so far multiply'd as to be Capable of it: And it is worshipping God in Society, that has help'd to keep Religion alive in the World, which without it, had in all Probability expir'd long ago. But it is not Churches, either in the Scriptural or Ecclesiastical Sense of the Word, that I would be suppos'd to confine my self to, when I speak of Religious Associations:

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It is my Intention to take in, any Agreements of a Number together, in order to the serving Religious Purposes, and the Promoting or Increasing the Fear of God in themselves and others: Any Stated or Occasional Meetings of well disposed Persons, in order to the joint expressing of Veneration for the Great God, or the Conferring together of the Truths which he has reveal'd, or the Duties he has injoin'd; or with a Design to warn or watch over one another, Promote Knowledge or Holiness, or prevent Sin and Vice, Errour or Heresie, Schism or Uncharitableness. Under this Title it is my Design to Comprehend, all Combinations of greater or smaller Numbers Acting in Concert, that tend to weaken the Interest of the Dark Kingdom, and Promote, Increase or Strengthen the Kingdom of Light and Love, Purity and Peace. I'm very Sensible it is a Possible Thing for there to be such Confederations as may be call'd Religious, that may be meerly Calculated to serve a Party, or even to Spread and Propagate Superstition; and the *Romish* Church has many such, among its several Orders that are Stil'd Religious: But serious Piety has no more Concern in Combinations of this Kind, than the Good of Mankind has in such Agreements as Particular Persons enter into, to Contrive or Spread such Fashions as they fancy might Contribute to their own Advantage. I count those Associations only to deserve the Name of Religious, that are design'd, and have somewhat of a Tendency, to Promote Real Vital Intercourse between God and Men, and to Contribute to the Improvement of such as are Concern'd, in true  
Goodness,

Goodness, and to Check what is of an Opposite and Contrary Nature. And if it be Inquir'd,

2. *Secondly*, What Sort of Persons they should be that should Concur and be Active in such Associations, and how they should be dispos'd that would be most likely to reach the end of them, and secure a Blessing, I answer, my Text furnishes with their Proper Character: They should be such as *fear the Lord, and think upon his Name*. Such as have a Real inward Veneration for the Blessed God, and his Name, and whatever bears his Stamp or Impress upon it; such as are heartily concern'd for his Honour, Reverence his Word, make that their Standard, and are desirous from thence to take their Measures; such as have some suitable Awe of Things Sacred upon their Hearts, and are unfeignedly desirous of a Conformity to God in Holiness; these evidently are the Persons who are the best dispos'd to serve such a Purpose. Others may indeed join in with such, tho' they are in reality of an Opposite Character and I can't see how it can be avoided; since there is no way of certainly distinguishing such from others: But the greater Number there is of Persons thus dispos'd, concern'd in such Associations, the greater is the Benefit likely to be from thence accruing, and the more Ground may there be to expect a Blessing. And unless there be a Number among them that are thus dispos'd, there is but very little likelihood (as far as I can discern) that any Valuable End should be thereby Answer'd. It may also be added, that they should be Prudent  
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in their Management, and aware of the Wiles of the Devil, who knows how to lay Snares for the unwary, even in the best designed Undertakings. They should be humble, and not heady, for fear least debates let in Contention; and least attempting to act out of their Sphere, they do more hurt than Good. And as they that would manage such Religious Associations to the best Advantage, should keep close to the Rules of Scripture, so should they take heed of any Opposition; to the Gospel-Ministry, as a standing Office in the Church of Christ. They should pretend to nothing in Contempt of that, but be Content to Act in Subordination to it, and so as to Promote and not abate the Success of it, and respect for it. They should Act in Concert with Prudent and Faithful Ministers, who how concern'd soever they might be for the Honour of their Function, yet would not dare to do any Thing to discourage such Methods as have a tendency to serve the Purposes of Real Vital Religion; Nay could not but think themselves bound in Conscience to encourage and assist them; and that the rather, because the Success of their own Pains would be thereby very much Promoted. And now,

3. Let us see what Reason we have to think that the Blessed God is well pleas'd with Combinations and Associations of this Kind. The Apostle speaking of *doing Good and Communicating*, bids us *not forget it*, for that *with such Sacrifices God is well pleas'd*. And we may very safely say the same in the present Case. Very justly may we infer it as a Conclusion, from his being said in my  
Text,

Heb. 13. 16.

Text, to *hearken and hear*, and to *have a Book of Remembrance written before Him*, for the Persons that are spoken of. If Things of this Nature had been displeasing to Him; Nay, if they had not been highly pleasing, we may be assur'd that this had never been said. How can He be any other than pleas'd, when such Combinations and Associations are much for his Honour, and tend to spread Religion. Such Agreements when well manag'd and pursu'd, have so much of God in them, in the Spirit that Breaths in the most Active Members, and in the good Effects that are Produc'd, that they cannot but be agreeable to Him. The wicked very frequently Act in Bands and Troops, in the Service of their Head and Prince; and the Devil Gains by it, and therefore is well pleas'd with their doing so: And there is to the full as much Reason for expecting that the well Regulated Meetings of Pious Persons, and their speaking one to another for God, and Acting in Concert in his Service, should be to the Advancement of Real Religion; and therefore it cannot but be a Thing very pleasing to Him. To take this way indeed to Cover an ill Design, cannot be pleasing to God; it can be no other than an Abomination to Him: But the Acting therein heartily and disinterestedly, and out of a serious regard to Him, is a plain Evidence, that the best Things are the most Valu'd. And tho' it be no impossible Supposition, that notwithstanding this, there may sometimes be a mixture of Imprudence in the Management, yet is the sincere Desire and Intention pleasing to Him that searcheth the Heart, and trieth  
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the Reins. Such Associations are pleasing to God, in as much as they Cross the Designs of the Devil, and help to six Persons the more firmly in the best Interest, and to preserve them from a spreading Contagion. So that for any to pretend to Question whether such Things, under good Conduct, are pleasing to God, must make it also dubious whether Religion, or the Want or Contempt of it, be the more agreeable to Him than which nothing can be more absurd, if Religion be allow'd to have any Thing at all in it, and not to be, a meet Forgery and Fiction, or Fancy. Farther,

4. The Peculiar Seasonableness of such Religious Associations in Times of Degeneracy and Danger is very evident. St. *Paul* speaking of, the *last Days*, freely foretels that *Perilous Times* should *Come*; and He gives a Large List of those Sins that would make them *Perilous*: But there is not any one Article in the List given, which such Associations well manag'd have not a tendency to Check or Prevent. Supposing there to be a General Declension, they yet help to keep from farther Decays, that might Issue in a Total Apostacy, join'd with an Intire removal of the Gospel Candlestick, and a Departure of God's Glory, which, has been the Case in some Places. When young ones particularly are free and forward to become Members of such Societies, with Spirits any thing suitably affected, if the Disposition spreads, it Promises well as to the Rising Generation. 'Tis true, we have many Sorrowful Instances of Persons that once were exceeding Hopeful, who at their first setting out in the World

<sup>2</sup> Tim. 3. 1,  
&c.

have taken no small Pleasure, in Listing themselves in such Religious Clanns, that have afterwards broken thro' all Restraints and Confinements, into the utmost Height of Wick- edness, and prov'd rather worse than others: But I cannot discern how that is any Argu- ment, but that others may be and are this way preserv'd. And I question not but that we have some among us, who for want of such Helps might have Swum with the Com- mon Stream, and help'd to spread the fatal Contagion, who now by their Exemplary Piety have a Good Influence the other way. Nothing can be more Seasonable, than to be Eminently Good, in Times and Places that are remarkably bad. It is then Peculiarly Commendable; and the uncommonness of it, Heightens its Value: And Associates in this, as well as in any other Case, very much strengthen and hearten, and Incourage one Another. And then,

5. They that Act faithfully and uprightly in such Religious Associations, may depend upon a suitable Reward. God Values such Peculiarly, and is in a special manner inclin'd to spare them. Often does he spare others for their Sakes, and therefore to be sure he cannot be backward to spare them themselves, when his so doing would be for his Honour, and would best serve the Pur- poses of his Providence. And he is never at a Loss for a Way and Method to save, even when Things are brought to the last Extre- mity. For as the Apostle declares, *the Lord knoweth how to deliver the Godly out of Temptations*. No Danger can be so pressing, but he can easily Rescue from it. Sometimes, in  
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a Common Calamity, he distinguishes those by his Special Favour and Protection, who had distinguish'd themselves before, by their Eminent Piety and Zeal. He did not bring a Flood upon the World of the ungodly, till He had Shipped his Servant *Noah*, and shut Him in the Ark. Nor did He Rain down Fire from Heaven upon *Sodom*, till He had remov'd Righteous *Lot* to *Zoar*. *Haste thee*, says God, *Escape, thither, for I cannot do any Thing till thou be come thither*. And if there had been but Ten Righteous Persons in *Sodom*, God would not have destroy'd it for Tens Sake. And (as Ecclesiastical History informs us) \* *Jerusalem* was not taken and Sack'd by the *Roman* Forces, till the Christians according to warning before given were retir'd to *Pella*. Such are as likely as any to be hid in the Day of the Lord's Anger. The Prophet *Zephany* gives such Persons some Incouragement to hope for it: For; he lays of them that *seek Righteousness, that it may, be they shall be Hid*. And that Character of *seeking Righteousness*, more truly and justly belongs to none, than to such as *fear the Lord, and think upon his Name*, and shew they do so, by speaking often one to another, in Times of great Degeneracy. Our Prophet *Malachi* in the Verse that immediately follows my Text, goes yet farther, and declares Positively that God would spare such: He would save them in a Common Desolation. I can't conceive it would be safe, for any to pretend to give like Positive Assurance in our Times, whatever may be coming upon us for our Sins: But of this may we be assur'd, that in what manner soever such

Gen. 7.1,16.

Gen. 19. 22.  
Gen. 18. 32.

\* Euseb.  
Eccl. Hist.  
Lib. 3. Cap.  
5. Epiph. in  
Hær. Nazarr.  
Cap. 7.

Zeph. 2. 3.

as shew their Zeal and Fidelity to God, at a Time when others are either Profane, or Lukewarm and Careless, may be treated at the present, there will most certainly be a Remarkable Discrimination made at last. God will in the Final Judgment, before all the World, own, approve, and Reward them, and make them an ample Return when others shall be *Punish'd with Everlasting Destruction, from the Presence of the Lord, and the Glory of his Power.* And the more Pains and Care they took, to distinguish themselves from others, by their Piety and Zeal, while they were here, the Greater shall their Reward hereafter, be.

1 Thes. 1.9.

And now that I may draw towards a Close, methinks nothing can be more easie than the Application of a Subject of this Nature, if our Hearts were but suitably dispos'd. What can be plainer, than that we have Reason with Concern to Lament it, that tho' our Holy Religion has long had Footing in this Land, yet they who have Profess'd it, have taken very little Care Comparatively, to express their Concern for it in the way that my Text Mentions! We have teen Strangers to each other, to what we should have been! We have not talk'd often one to another about the Things of God. Out Differences. have created a Distance and a Shyness. We have been more forward to speak against one another in a way of Re- proach or Contempt, than to speak to one another for God, or with a suitable Concern for our Common Religion. We have been ready enough to watch for each others Halting; but where have been the Persons,  
that



that have spoken often one to another, and shewn by their Practise that they have set a due Value upon the Communion of Saints! This is Sad, and much to be Lamented.

And yet as much Cause as we have for a Complaint of this Nature, I think we have no small Reason to be Thankful, that we have something of a like Spirit with that in my Text stirring in our Times. The many Religious Societies there are form'd among us, may in this Respect give us some Encouragement. The Establish'd Church has a Considerable Number of such Societies: Some for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and others for the Care of the Religious Education of Youth, in order to the amending the Rising Generation. And were these Societies form'd upon a Larger Bottom, and kept more free from a Party Spirit, and more Calculated to the Spreading serious Christianity, than the Propagating such Sentiments and Practises, as have no Real Tendency to make Persons either better Men or better Christians, than they'd be without them; as they could not but be more pleasing to God, so I should think they would be more acceptable to all good Men, and have the more Happy Influence on those that shall rise up after us. And yet in as much as whatever unhappy mixture there may be in them of *Strife* and *Envy*, (for which the Contrivers and Managers are the most Responsible) there is still Reason to hope that some Real Good is done, I can say with *St. Paul* upon another occasion, *I therein do Rejoice, yea, and will Rejoice.*

Philip. i. 18.

Our

Our reforming Societies also, in which Churchmen and Dissenters have acted in Concert, under all the Discouragements they have met with, have been very Beneficial.. If they have not succeeded in amending a loose and vitious Age, so far as were to have been wish'd, they have yet had this good Effect, that they have given an Opportunity, to those that were in the Establishment, and those that were out of it, *that feared the Lord and thought upon his Name*, to *speak often one to another*, and, converse together with Freedom, and be better acquainted, with each other than could otherwise have been expected. For this reason some have freely declar'd their dislike of them, fearing they would be attended with ill Consequences: As if nothing were to be dreaded more, than our coming to a better Understanding among our selves, and discovering both on one side and on the other, that there is nothing in the Principles or Notions wherein we differ, that need hinder truly pious Persons of both sorts, from joining together with equal Ardour, in whatsoever may be for the Glory of God, or the publick good. And having mention'd that, I cant forbear adding, that if this were not fear'd very much by some, (from whom other things might have been expected) 'twould be hard to give any thing of a Reason, why in the Accounts that are given of those Societies, so little Notice should be taken of the Readings of the Dissenters from the very first, to encourage so good a Work, and to contribute their Assistance to it, by their Pains, their Advice, and their Contributions. Why should the Church of *England* ingross all the Honour in  
this

this Case, as if none but Her Members were concern'd, when none have been more Active, Forward, and Zealous, out of a concern for the Honour of our common Christianity, than some that in Ritual matters have not been satisfy'd with the National Establishment, nor dear as to the Power of imposing; of which (after the utmost Searches) they are able to form no other Notion, than this, that it is an unwarrantable Lording it over Confidence?

And among us that are Dissenters, as much as some Despise us, and as freely as they inveigh against us, I hope besides our fix'd particular Churches (which as far as we can understand the Mind of God in his Word, are agreeable to the Rule of Scripture) we have some other. Societies, in which they *that fear the Lord speak often one to another*, that have a very good Tendency. We have some Meetings for Christian Conference, which several have had Cause to bless God for. I am not Insensible that Combinations of this kind manag'd conceitedly, may have ill Consequences, and prove a Nursery for unqualifi'd ignorant Preachers, and intruders into the sacred Ministry: And yet when they are manag'd with Sobriety and Humility, and Persons go not out of their proper Sphere, nor ingage in Things above them, and are willing to be advis'd by such as are more Sensible of the subtle Wiles and Fetches of the Devil than themselves: Thus Limited, I'm abundantly Satisfied, they much promote Knowledge and Love, and profiting by the publick Ordinances of the House of God. It is not the Duty of Ministers only, but of private Christians too, keeping within the  
Bounds

Colos. 3. 16.  
1 Thess. 5. 11.  
Heb. 3. 13.

Heb. 10. 24,  
25.

Rom. 15. 14.

Bounds of their Station, and the Measures of their Knowledge, to teach and instruct one another. The Scriptures are herein very plain. The *Word of God* is to *dwell in us richly in all Wisdom*, and we are to *Teach and Admonish one another*. You are to *Comfort your selves together*, (or exhort one another) *and edifie one another*: and to *exhort one another daily*. Christians should often meet together for Prayer and spiritual Edification. Therefore says the Apostle, *let us consider one another, to provoke unto Love, and to good Works, not forsaking the assembling of our selves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: And so much the more as you see the Day approaching*. And he commends the Believing Romans, for that they were *full of Goodness, filled with all Knowledge able also to Admonish one another*. These Hints are very plain, and make it evident, that it is a great Part of that Holy Communion which there should be between the Saints, that they mutually exhort, and quicken, and strengthen one anothers Hands in the Work of the Lord. Tho' I wont say that these places mention'd are not at all to be understood of publick Communion, in Church Societies, yet it is plain enough, private Conferences are Intended to be taken in, by way of interchangeable Discourse, in order to mutual Edification. The Gifts of private Christians, manag'd without Pride, Ostentation, and vain Glory, and without despising the Weak, are much for the Honour of Almighty God, and of great Use and Comfort to Fellow-Travellers towards the Heavenly Canaan.

We

We have also several Societies for the carrying on of Lectures, for the preaching the Word of God; some on the Lord's Days, and others on the other Days of the Week, which I hope have brought Honour to God, and been to the Credit of Religion, and Advantageous to many Souls; and I hope may be more so. I cannot but hope this in particular as to your Society; who meet for Worship every Lord's Day Morning early. I most heartily rejoice in the Good that has been this way done, and. pray God that much more may follow. I must own I therefore the more heartily approve this Lecture, because it tends to promote the Sanctification of the Lord's Day, which is a thing upon which thriving of Religion very much depends. It is also convenient for Servants, and for Young People, who either might not otherwise have an Opportunity of two Sermons on that Holy Day, Or might be likely to spend that Time in their Beds, in which they; by this Means are honouring God, and getting God to their Souls. For this Reason, I look upon it as a good Work to encourage and support it. Had I not been of this Opinion; I should not so often have taken the Pains in my Turn, to come so far, and quit the Service of my own Flock, for one part of the Day, to give you Assistance. I take this Occasion, to congratulate your good Success in the Name of the Lord. May you go on and Prosper in this Religious Association.

If you'll allow me to advise you, (and I'm perswaded.you'll herein bear with me) I have a few thirgs to offer.

E

Take

Take Heed of Divisions about Doctrinal matters, remembering that small Sparks may kindle a consuming Flame. Exclude none from tearing a part with you, on the Account of their different Sentiments in lesser things, that discover a Concern for the Honour of God, and real Religion. Endeavour not to stretch your Society beyond the Single and Unmarried, who have no Families, which by their attending with you, they can be charg'd with neglecting. If any of your Members should prove remarkably unfaithful in the Trusts committed to them, (and who knows what may fall out) discover your Concern for the Credit of Religion, by excluding them from any farther Hand in supporting your good Design. Let brotherly Love and Friendship continue (as they have hitherto been) the Bands of Union between you: And do what you can to strengthen and promote them, by mutual Acquaintance and good Offices. Study to be better than others in all Relations, and in your Conversation, that you may thereby shew you really get Good, by being Members of such a Religious Society. Watch against the Infections of the Age you live in. Prepare for Trials. Live in Expectation of Assaults. Watch over and do what you can to strengthen one another. Prepare for an evil Day. Take unto you the whole Armour of God, and beg of Him to keep you firm, whoever Apostatize.

Thus doing, and continuing, you may hope that a *Book of Remembrance* will be *written before the Lord for you*. It may be you may be hid in the Day of the Lord's Anger. In the severest Storm that can come upon us you may then be able to enter, into your  
Cham-

Chambers, and shut the Doors, and may perhaps continue safe, until the Indignation is over-past. Or if not, you may depend upon an ample and abundant Reward hereafter, which the Lord the Righteous Judge shall give you at the great, Day; and not to you only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

*ERRATA.*

Page 5. line 26. for *Injuries*, read *Enquiries*, pag. 6. line 33. for *Disputes*, read *Disputers*, pag. 8. line 22. for *only* read *busy*.

*FINIS.*

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