

**GOD'S  
MERCY  
MIXED WITH HIS  
JUSTICE.**

by

**John Cotton**



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**GOD'S  
MERCY**

**MIXED WITH HIS  
JUSTICE**

*OR,*

**HIS PEOPLE'S DELI-  
verance in times of danger.**

*Laid open in several SERMONS.*

By that learned and judicious Divine, and faith-  
ful Minister of Jesus Christ  
John Cotton.

*LONDON,*

Printed by *G. M.* for *Edward Brewster*, and *Henry  
Hood* at the Bible on Fleet-Bridge, and in  
*S. Dunstones Church-yard*, 1641.

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## To the Christian Reader.

**W**E read of Elijah that zealous Prophet, that having finished the work of his great Lord and Master upon earth, he was rapt away by a whirl-wind into Heaven, and left only his mantle behind him, which was preserved by Elisha as a sacred relic wherewith he wrought wonders, dividing therewith the waters of Jordan, 2 King. 2:11, 13, 14. Thus the reverend and most learned Author, another Elijah, a faithful and zealous Prophet, boldly rebuking sin, frequent, and fervent, and powerful in prayer, among the people whom the Lord had sent hint too; many years together, accounted by some Ahab like spirits an enemy to, and a troubler of Israel, which was true of themselves, he being of a most mild and peaceable disposition, maintaining war only against the sins and corruptions of the times, was at last rapt out of his own Land into another World, by a terrible whirl-wind of violent opposition raised by Satan and his instruments, through the permission of God, and hath only left his mantle behind him, caught by some pious Elisha's, I mean some broken Notes of his powerful soul-searching Sermons taken from

his mouth by the diligent hand of some well-disposed hearers and followers; which as they wrought wonders while he was here dividing between many poorer souls, and the world and their lusts, and bringing them home to God (wherein scarce any of his Brethren was more successful) so it's hoped they may tend to the effecting or furthering of the same good work for the future upon those that shall make use of them: And to that end as some pieces of that Mantle have been presented to the Church formerly; so

some other are here tendered, which I doubt not but the judicious Christian will kindly accept from the hands of those that have preserved and presented them to their view.

I could say much of the Author, thereby to make you in love with the work, and not pass the bounds of truth, and soberness; but the truth is I am too rude a limmer to draw the proportion of him, of his admirable learning, and more admirable graces: It's fit only to be done by some skilful Apelles. And besides both the University, and the place wherein he wad settled Pastor many years together; yea the whole Land almost, as also divers foreign parts, the Divines whereof some came to enjoy converse with him, others had intercourse with him by letter, have been acquainted with, and do retain in memory his parts and graces; so that (at P.wlfiidof Firus) hispratfeistn the Gospel, almost throughout all the Churches. Very few that equalled him, scarce any that excelled him in the knowledge of the Arts and Tongues, and in all kind of learning divine and human, which made him as a Scribe, instructed unto the Kingdom of

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Heaven; like a good House holder bringing out if his full treasury things new and old, for the comfort and refreshment of God's family, over which he was set as a dispenser of the my Heirs of salvation: and whereby he was enabled in a very great measure to shew himself approved to God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth, as Paul requires of his beloved Timothy, 2 Tim. 2:15. Scarce any of his Brethren were so diligent and painful in the Lord's Harvest, so instant in season, and out of season to preach the word. Neither did he feed his people with the empty husks of vain discourses, but he kept the true Pattern of wholesome words, all his Sermons being either Meat to feed, or Medicine to heal his hearrs. Neither was he only a shining light by his Doctrine, but a burning light by

*his jealous and holy conversion. His life was, vita vocalis, preaching by his example that Piety, Justice, Sobriety, which he urged in the Pulpit. His actions were, though silent, yet real Sermons (as Greg. Naz. said of Basil.) So that we had cause to cry out for the rapture of this Elijah (as Elisha for that other) O the Chariots of Israel and the Horsemen thereof! A great part of our strength being lost in him. But our God hath thought good to set him a work in another part of his vine-yard. Let us therefore make some good use of what we enjoy of him in these and ether of his Sermons.*

*Good Wine (saith the Proverb) needs not an Ivy-bush, Customers enough will find it out, without a sign: Here is much good wine, even form of*

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*those Flagons the Spouse desired to be cheered with by her Beloved, Cant. 2:5. Some of those wines on the lees well refined, Isay. 25:6. Many sweet and seasonable Doctrines, to refresh the spirits, and to make glad the hearts of Christians, so that had men but a good appetite, were not their souls too full, this work needed not any Ivy-bush of commendation to be hung at its door.*

The Sum of the 1 Sermon, the Title whereof is mistaken.

*Here we have the great love of our God discovered to us, the riches of his patience and goodness, and long-suffering in knocking at the door four hearts, and waiting, and suing for entertainment, and promising most sweet and comfortable communion with himself, to the soul that opens to him by Faith and Obedience. Never did God knock louder at the hearts of any people, then at ours, by the exhortations, admonitions, instructions of his faithful Ministers out of the Pulpit and Press, by many rare mercies and admirable deliverances, and by opening so fair a door of hope to us now of freedom from many pressures and corruptions we have groaned under, and of*

becoming a more part and glorious church then ever, O let us not make our good God wait any longer in vain at our doors, but let us hear all his knocks, even that which he gives in the reading of these Sermons, and open to him that we may receiver much comfort from him.

The 2. Sermon.

*Here we have also God's power and mercy laid forth, in delivering his people out of all troubles and tribulations, which they meet with in this vale of tears. Omnis Christianus crucianus, saith Luther, All Christians must be cross-bearrs.*

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*All Christophers that hone taken up Christ on the shoulders of their Faith, must wade through a Sea of Afflictions, disgraces, oppositions, Persecutions. What a comfort and encouragement is it to be assured that God will make this Ocean fordable and passable to his Saints, that they may go through it to Heaven, and not be drowned.*

The 3. Sermon.

*We have here likewise God's Mercy to his people shewn by his Justice to his and their enemies. His love to, and care of the good Corn, in burning up the Bryers and Thornes with the fire of his wrath, that hurted and choked it, which (if ever) we see made good among us at present: So as the reading hereof (as a Prophecy fulfilled in our times) may stir us up to thankfulness.*

The 4, 5, 6. Sermon.

*We have here likewise laid open the craft of the wicked, as subtle Foxes to entrap the godly (which the late times have given many sad instances of) by reading whereof those that have avoided their snares may know whom to bless for it, even the wisdom and love and care of God over them, and may learn for the future to seek to be furnished with the wisdom of Christ our Head, that the Pharisees and Saddu-*

*ces may not prejudice us by their craft and subtilty.*

*All these as so many sweet Cups of Wine are here presented to you, I invite you to taste, yea to drink abundantly hereof by serious Meditation and consideration, promising much comfort and benefit to your souls thereby, and requiring the payment of no other shot, then*

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*of your Prayers for the Reverend Author, and the well-meaning Publishers hereof. Farewell.*

From my Study in London,  
May 20, 1641.

Thy Servant for Jesus sake,

MAT. SWALLOW.

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1

## GOD'S MERCY IN HIS People's deliverance.

**REVEL. 3:20.**

Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

**I**N these words observe a note of attention and of admiration, in this word [*Behold*] for [*Behold*] ever requires attention; and often in Scripture, admiration, as *Esa.* 7: 14. *Behold, a Virgin shall*

*conceive and bear a Son, &c.* 1. *Behold*: Attend to it, and consider it, and *Behold* it with admiration, so here; *Behold*, consider it well, and stand and wonder that God should *stand in*

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*the door and knock* there and offer such conditions there, that if any man will open the door and he will enlarge his goodness and grace so far to such, as that he will come in and feast with them.

The first part is a note of attention and admiration, and then the matter to be attended unto what to *behold*.

In the matter of attention, there is,

First, a double act of God, preventing us and going before any care of ours in our turning to God: *Standing and knocking*.

Secondly, a double act of ours, following this double act of God. Hear my voice, *Open the door*.

Thirdly, *Behold* also a double act of God, that follows this double act of ours, *I will come in unto him, and sup with him*: 1. Feast with him, and be feasted of him: These be the parts.

A necessary counsel and charge to all the people of God, that live in a Church subject to lukewarmness, that have some affections stirred up, but with much want of fervency and life of grace.

This whole verse may be fitly opened to you in opening three principal notes, carrying an end the sense of the whole Scripture.

First, when our Saviour saith, *Behold I stand a the door and knock, &c.* We are first to enquire, what this *door* is, which we shall see in this one Doctrine.

3

*Doctrine.* That the heart of a man is the door of the soul.

The heart is the way of the entrance of God into the soul, or into the whole man: For, when the Holy Ghost will give us an example of this very thing of the opening of the *door*, speaking of *Lydia*, he expresseth it thus, whose *heart the Lord opened*, *Acts 16:14*. the door to be opened, was the heart of *Lydia*, that was it, at which Christ *stood and knockd*, and that she opened unto him, and so *Psal. 24:7, 9. Be ye lift up you everlasting doors*, and what are those doors: but the hearts of men? They are not the doors of a mans house, not the gates of a city, for they will be consumed, but these be everlasting doors, and such as into which the *king of Glory must enter*, and they must be enlarged, this is certainly meant of the heart of man, and of the willed mad which dwells in the heart.

Now for the Reason, why the heart is called the door: for you might say, if the heart of a man be the door of the soul, what is the inward chair of the soul, what is more inward, then the heart of a man? Satan can tell what is in a man's fancy and many times what is in a man's heart that he knows nor, if there be any secret in a man it is in his heart and will: Why is it then that he calls the most inmost closet of the soul, the door of the soul?

*Reason.* It is called the soul of the soul, because

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of that authority that the heart and will hath over the whole soul, and the power it hath to rule both soul and body. As in cities, the strength of the city is in the gates, there was their Seats of Justice in those days, and there

was munition stored up for war, so that open the gates to an enemy, and you give him all, this commands all; give the heart of a man, and you have a free passage into the whole man, if a man get the gates of a city, he hath all: So give God the heart, and then you give him the whole soul and body too, *John 10:7, 9. I am the door, by me if any man enter he shall be saved:* Take Christ, and you take salvation with him: you take Heaven with you, and all the blessings of God at once, that if He be opened unto you, there is nothing denied you, or all the living treasures of the grace of God, have Him, and you have a strong entrance into your own salvation, have Him and you have a good calling to any personal estate, in Family, Church or commonwealth: so in this respect our Saviour calls the heart of a man the door; give God the heart, and you give him authority over your whole soul, in the whole course of your life. And therefore God saith, *Prov. 23:26. My son give me thy heart;* as if a Prince lying before the gates of a city, give him the gates, and you resign your selves in subjection to such a Prince, and so is it here.

*Use.* It doth shew you how far short we are from giving God any possession within us, any hold of

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as, as long as we content our selves with any measures of knowledge and grace, and do not change and open the heart: If that a man were filled with all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom, and fully enlightened in his mind and judgement, so as he may know the whole body of the Scriptures, and if God have this, and only this, he hath yet nothing, *he stands at the door:* yea if this man should come off with many good affections, sometimes with grief for sin; and sometimes trembling at the word; and some-

times joy in hearing; as *Herod* rejoiced in *John's* Doctrine; and *Ahab* grieved at the threatening, and *Felix* trembled, and *Jehu* was zealous in executing the word of the Lord, and yet God had as yet no part in any of them: Christ stood yet without doors, and had no part in *Herod*, *Ahab* or *Jehu*, &c. no place within them, yet if a man were as forward as *Herod* to reform many things, *Mark* 6:10. yet if Christ have not the heart, he hath nothing. And therefore this calleth upon us all, never to rest in any beginnings of grace, nor in any measures of grace whatsoever they be, until God have the heart, till our wills receive and embrace him, and so open to him, that he may come in conquering to conquer, and in subduing to subdue, our judgments and passions, and affections and speeches, that God may pass through our whole man freely without disturbance, till then God hath nothing: It is true you may give a Prince the gates of a City, and yet he may find distur-

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bance and battle in the market places and so it is with many of the servants of God though we have given the heart to God, and he hath taken possession thereof with some entrance into the whole man, yet when he comes to meet with us in this and that business wherein our affections are most stirring, there is some way or other, some insurrections made against God. Many times worldly business and strength or lusts may oppose much; but if indeed God have our hearts, given him, then though he have work enough with us, to subdue our pride and worldliness and wantonness, and other distempers in us, he shall have something to do when he comes to these passages, wherein nature is more stirring, many skirmishes there will be against God, but if we have once given God

the hearts in time he will have all, and though he meet with many skirmishes, yet he will prevail in the end: so that let not men satisfy themselves in giving God any part of their lives in the whole course of their conversation, or any affections, but give him the heart, and when he hath that then he will take the rest, withhold that and give him all the rest, and he makes account you give him nothing.

Come we then to the second point, and to speak note fully of that,

*Doctrine 2. The patience and bounty of God is great towards sinners, even admirable great in calling them home to himself.*

It is worthy all admiration to behold this pati-

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ence of God. This is expressed in the two first acts of God; it is very great patience of God, that he will stand and wait upon us, it is not a word of course that is there used to fill up the sentence, but it expresseth that in which we would express our patience, if we stood it a man's door from day today, and from week to week with strong desires to enter into it, is not that patience? And therefore when he saith, *I stand*, it argues the patience of God.

And this argues his bounty too, that he not only stands there, but he uses vehement and effectual means to be heard, and such means as by which he might make way for opening to himself: First, for God's patience that this is done by God in calling us home to him, that is the very scope of our Saviour in this Text.

And for his standing at the *door*, see his Patience in that *Rom. 10:21. All the day long have I stretched out my hand, &c.* it was a long standing, and that day is not meant a natural or artificial day, but a long season of grace, *Luke 13:7. These three years have I stayed and looked for fruit*, three years

God stayed for it, Yea, you read, *Psalms*. 95:10. God complains, *Forty years long was I grieved with this generation*. Forty years God sometimes stays before he will threaten, *that they shall never enter into his rest: yea yet longer; My Spirit shall not always strive with man*, *Gen.* 6:3, 5. the sons of God, the best of mankind are become flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years, he will stay for that generation be-

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fore he bring the flood an hundred and twenty years.

But that I may more fully express to you the patience of God in staying thus for us, let me shew you it in particulars.

1. First, in staying long before he do take any notice of sin, he saith nothing though we sin, and continue in sin, and multiply transgressions against him day after day, and year after year: God takes no notice of any thing we do, but carries it, as if he saw it not, and heard it not, *Psal.* 50:20, 21. *I held my tongue and said nothing*: I stayed so long as that thou thoughtest I did approve of thy evil course, he thinks God looks at him now, as he did twenty or thirty, or forty, or an hundred years ago, and he never found check in his soul for what he had done, nor any judgement of God upon him in any remarkable manner, so as he thinks he hath done no evil.

2. Secondly, another act of his patience is not only a holding his peace so long, but when he doth begin to stir, he doth always usually threaten before he strike, *Amos* 4:11, 12. *because I will do thus unto thee O Israel, prepare to meet thy God*, he usually threatens before he strikes: he seldom doth strike, at least irrecoverably, till he give men warning.

3. Thirdly, when he threatens, he will not yet strike, but will yet stay a good time after he hath threatened, *Hos.* 11:7, 8, 9. *My bowels are turned within me for thee*, so that God when he is about

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to strike, it comes into his mind, how shall I do it, what would become of thee, if I should take this course with thee, and so leave thee hopeless and helpless for after time.

Fourthly, he doth not only so; but suppose he do strike (as usually he doth) in the end, if all this prevail not, yet see how long he stands, he doth withdraw his blow when he hath stricken, he doth not stir up all his wrath, but withholds the fierceness of his displeasure, at least for a good time, and rather gives warning then breaks forth in his full displeasure, *Ps.* 78:38. *Many a time he turned his anger away and did not stir up all his wrath*; He did express his displeasure, and sometimes afflicted some of them, and sometimes others of them; but did not consume them utterly: See it in the example of *David's* carriage to *Saul*, when he cut off the skirt of his garment, he might as well have cut off his life: So *Saul* when he was riding to *Damascus*, to destroy all them that called on the name of the Lord Jesus, Christ meets him, and strikes him down to the ground, and struck him blind; he might as easily have struck him dead, and so hath done many, *Act.* 9:4, 8. The same stroke that struck him to the ground, might have struck him into the grave, and from thence into the nethermost hell, but where had then been all *Paul's* gracious Epistles and glorious sufferings and therefore well may we say, God was willing to shew an example of long-suffering towards him, else

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when God had struck him down he would have there have let him lyen, and not let him rise again and given him leave to hear more good counsel, that he might turn to God, and become a new man, as he did, which shews you the wonderful patience of God before he fall upon a creature in the utmost of his displeasure.

Secondly, Behold also the bounty of God towards poor sinners, when he calls them home to him: *I stand at the door and knock*, that expresseth some vehement urging that sinners might open to him.

Now what are these strokes of God by which he doth express this knocking?

1. First, he strikes with the hammer of his word, as many doors have hammers hanging at them, that make a shrill and a loud noise, that will waken men though they were a sleep; so God compares his Word to an hammer, *Jer. 23:29*. Sometimes, puts such weight upon his Word, that the Word spoken by the Ministers of God, to the hearts and consciences of men, rings a loud noise in the ears of men; so as afterwards they cannot eat, nor sleep for thinking of the sad noise that word did ring in their ears.

2. But 2. He knocks also by his judgements, and knocks a loud; there is not any sickness befalls us or ours, not any loss in our estates, not any kind of evil that befalls the places where we live, so far as it reaches us: but it is a knock of God's hand to turn to him, *Acts 16:26*.

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When the Earth was smitten with a great earthquake, so as that the prison doors were opened, and the power of God in them both did shake the heart of the Gaoler, that out of bed he escapes, and to the prison he comes, and there had like to

have slain himself, fearing the Prisoners had been fled; but seeing none of them was run away, it pleased God so to strike in with that stroke, that he presently falls down and cries out; *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* When a judgement comes and makes the foundations of a man's heart to shake, it sets his spirit a trembling, and puts him into a fear, so awakened with the power of God, expressed in some judgement, that he knows not what to do. You know how mightily God *knocked* at *Pharaoh's* heart, when as in sundry of the latter judgements, the Text saith, *That he sends for Moses in haste, and confesseth that the Lord is righteous, and that he had sinned,* and comes off very seriously, as if he would now wholly yield to God's will, though before he had said, who is the Lord, such a mighty powers in the judgements of God.

3. Thirdly, There is another voice of God that knocks, and God in that shews much bounty; and that, is when God is pleased to knock at the doors of our hearts by the work of his Spirit; by opening our conscience, which is as a fortress before the doors of our hearts; as in many great cities there are some out-works to defend the gates; God so convinces the

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conscience, and enlightens the mind, and informs the judgement, and the memory and affections; so as that all the out-works of the soul are subdued, whereby it comes to pass they profess to God that if he will but spare them to a certain further time, they will do whatsoever God commands them; this many times falls out, that God takes hold of the mind and judgement and conscience, and affections, so as nothing stands out but only the very door, the heart is only shut, *John*

16:9. *They are convinced of sin, of righteousness and of judgement*, which argues that the Spirit of God when he comes, he will heighten the mind, and convince the judgement, and let the world plainly see that their way is wrong, and that they are yet in a damnable estate, because they believe not in him; this is one of the strongest knocks of God, when the mind and judgement is convinced, and the heart ready to condemn it self, and acknowledge that if it should now stand out any longer, the case would prove dangerous. And when God takes this pains, is there not a plentiful expression of his bounty to us.

4. Fourthly, There is only one stroke more which God many times doth follow the rest withal, and always doth when he intends to knock prevailingly, and it is this: He doth many times break open the door of the heart, though we be unready and unlisty to open, he lets fall in some favour of the Lord Jesus,

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and some relish of the Spirit of Adoption *Cant.* 5:4, 5. that though the heart be drowsy and dead in sin, yet it begins to arise and open to Christ; and then though Christ be gone, yet the heart turns after him, and though she cannot of a long time find him, yet she continues to seek him; and this is when the Spirit of Adoption hath made it a broken heart.

Now, why should God be thus wonderful patient and bountiful in standing and knocking at the doors of our hearts?

*Reason 1.* The first and principal reason is taken from God himself and it is from the purpose he hath to glorify the riches of his mercy and grace to poor sinners, notable is that speech, and remember it for ever, & let it sink deep into your hearts like Myrrh

which may preserve your favour, *Esa.* 30:18. Therefore will the Lord wait that he may be gracious to us: This is the first Reason, why God will thus wait and stand and knock, and tarry our leisure, that he might exalt the glory of his rich grace towards us, if the King or some great man should stand waiting long at our door, if he should stand ten, twenty or an hundred years, you would think he debased himself, to stand waiting so long on such wretches as we are; but God's thoughts are not like man's, when he waits long; it is that he might be gracious, and he will be exalted in so doing: waiting and exalting is put, the one to express the other: They interpret

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and expound one another, to magnify the riches of his patience he will wait and not be weary of waiting, sometimes for some scores of years together, and indeed God is not disappointed, for such he will prevail with in his own time to open to him, *1 Tim.* 1:14, 16, 17. *The grace of God was exceeding abundant towards me, I was a blasphemer and injurious, a persecutor &c. but the grace of God was exceeding abundant towards me,* and he tells you wherein God shewed forth his long sufferance to me, as a pattern of all those that should afterwards believe: And see how he ends that speech, *vers.* 17. *Now to the King immortal; to the only wise God be power and glory forever.* Thus you see what this waiting of God wrought, he waits and knocks that he might be exalted in that day; that when they see, what a dangerous estate they are in, and yet see how patiently God hath forborn them, and bountifully expressed himself towards them, and see in the end God hath broken in upon them, and will no longer stand: then this grace was exceeding abundant towards me, and now God is exalted:

the mouth is for ever after open to God's praise.

2. *Reason* taken from the will and purpose of God for the salvation of our souls. God is not slack, when he is so flow in pouring out his devouring judgements, but patient to us ward, (2 *Pet.* 3:9.) who would have no man to perish, but all men to come to repentance: this is the Reason why he is thus patient, and long-suffering, that we might

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not perish, but might come to the knowledge of his will: if God were not patient towards us all, and knocked but once or twice, we had been crushed into the nethermost hell, where had all his glorious Saints in Heaven, and all his gracious servants in Earth been, if he had not been a patient, and bountiful God; but he is not willing we should perish. Every child of God had perished and that everlastingly, had not God magnified his patience toward them. He did not stir up all his wrath. Because, [*Reason 3.*] *He remembered we were but flesh, a blast of wind, that goes away, and returns not again, Psal. 78:38, 39.* as if he should say, if God when we provoke his patience, and stand out long against him, should then stir up all his wrath, we should have no hope to turn to God, for we are but dust, blown away and return not again. If God strike a man with death, what hope is there that he shall return again: where had *Paul* been if he had been struck to death as well as to the earth, he had never returned then to have seen the light of the living. God therefore that considers what sorry things we be, and that if he should but stir up all his wrath, we should be utterly undone, he will therefore stay many years, before he pour out all his wrath, and utterly consume us.

*Reason 4.* He waits and knocks long to leave all flesh without excuse that will not turn to Him, *Rom. 1: 20.* speaking of such as had but the light of nature, yet men are left without excuse, that they

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do not acknowledge God, and glorify him as God, how much more when he endures with long patience, and such loud and vehement knocking at the hearts of men; and sometimes by taking the out-works of the soul, the mind and judgement, and affections, &c. he will leave men without excuse, if after all this they will stand out against him.

*Use.* To lead us to Repentance, *Rom. 1:4, 5.* it is a pregnant place to this purpose; *Despisest thou the patience and bounty, and long-sufferance of God, &c.* See what vehement reasons the Apostle useth to persuade and urge us to take advantage hereby to turn unto God by Repentance. See how he glorifies these attributes of God by casting shame upon us, if we repent not. *Despisest thou,* who speaks he of? He speaks to the *Romans*, the great Lords of the world at that day, for none of the Nations were like unto them, for prowess and government and authority and yet despisest thou? Thou *Roman*, what thou that hast been exalted above all Nations, thou whom God hath so highly advanced and adorned withal manner of excellencies, as if he should say; Thou: Who art thou, or what art thou at the bed, who art thou that thou shouldest despise the bounty of God, thou whom God hath brought up from so mean a condition, is it for thee to stand contesting with God; let me tell thee whoever thou beest, it is not for moral men, dust and ashes, a blast to despise the patience and bounty of God; so that the Apostle

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doth strongly press this duty of Repentance by an argument taken from the patience and bounty of God. How therefore should this awaken the heart of every one that hearts me this day, call every (thou) every one of your souls by name, and say, what thou, whom God hath been so patient too, twenty, thirty, forty, an hundred years (Thou) whom he hath visited with so much sickness, (Thou) whom God hath brought from a mean condition, to a large measure of estate, (Thou) whom God hast been thus patient too; *despisest thou the patience of God?* press this upon your hearts, and abuse his patience no longer.

And consider another srgument. The bounty and long sufferance of God; consider your danger, he intends to terrify the heart of the most stubborn sinner, with what he speaks in *verse 5. Thou treasurest up wrath against the day of wrath, Treasurest up wrath*, there is not a man that stands out the patience of God, but this is his case, *he treasures up wrath against the day of wrath*. A treasure consists not in trifles and sorry things, though a man have store of them, treasures are choice things, and variety and store or such things makes a treasure: Now what would the Apostle awake the heart to see and know? that a man that doth despise the patience and bounty of God, he doth procure to himself special, rare, choice and extraordinary wrath and judgement, not only one or two, but variety, choice and store, upon body, soul and con-

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science upon children and estate left behind. And therefore suffer the word of Exhortation, and receive this counsel from the Apostle, and that to your hearts, if you do not turn to God, when he thus turns to you, you will

be upbraided by God, *despisest thou*; or else the wrath of God, will in the end be treasured up in such rare and singular judgements upon you, that he that hears of it, both his ears shall tingle; Neighbours and Friends shall stand amazed to see the woeful judgements that befalls thee: Now therefore delay the time no longer, despise God's patience no more; treasure up no more wrath, there is enough gone out already, but even now turn to God with all thy heart.

*Use 2.* To teach sinners not utterly to despair, though sometimes they have stood out long against God; for God is indeed patient and long-suffering, he stands and that very long: You see what pains he takes, and still stands to see if we will open to him; and therefore let no man be discouraged, what if thou hast stayed three years, what if forty, what if a hundred and twenty years, yet all this time God hath stayed; let it not now hinder thee from turning to God, for fear he should despise thee, or so much wrath belongs to thee, as is merciless. It is true, men may justly so fear, but as long as God waits, and especially so long as he knocks, there is some hope, if thou wilt but open there is hope.

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But you say, how shall I know that God stands knocking? If a man be grown old in sin, and his conscience seared as with an hot iron: that he discerns not a knock of God in his heart, then time is past with him. But as long as God stands and knocks, so long he hath a mind to enter.

But how shall I know whether he knock or no?

Doth God hammer thy conscience, and all as upon an Anvil, the case is dangerous but if God

strike and thou feelest it, there is yet hope, or if some judgement befall thee, say it be some inward anguish of soul, and doth it bring thee down and set thee a wrestling for grace, now God is a knocking: And if thou findest the Lord convincing thy conscience and possess thy mind and judgement of the danger of thy estate, and if thou seest out of the Word, that God is now a laying siege to thy soul, surprizing the out-works thereof, accusing and condemning thy conscience, all this while there is hope in *Israel*, unless thou at length provoke God to further wrath, yet God waits still, that he may be gracious to exalt his mercy, and the abundant riches of his grace and his long-sufferance; therefore be not discouraged, but now take opportunity, lead thou go on to despise and seal up wrath against thee.

*Use 3.* To teach all those who have had experience of this patience and bounty of God, leading you to repentance, and have found comfort

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in it, now live chearfully and magnify the rich Name of the Lord Jesus, and his glorious bounty, and hold it forth as a patterns to all about thee, that thou hast stood out so long against so many warnings and expressions and manifestations of God's bounty, since that is the end God aims at, let now his name and his great patience and bounty be magnified and speak of it from one generation to another, that the memory of it may not die.

*Doctrine 3.* Such as do hear the voice and knocks of Christ and do open the door of their hearts to him, he will vouchsafe fellowship with them, familiar and continual fellowship with them, feasting of them and be feasted by them.

To hear the voice of Christ, is to hear it with a bored ear, and with regard and re-

verence, he so hears, as he never forgets what God speaks, he hears with an everlasting ear, *Jam.* 1:24, 25, 26. *Mine ears hath God opened.* *Psa.* 40:6. God hath digged into a man's ears (so it is in the Original) so *Esa.* 50:4, 5. *The Lord hath opened mine ear, so that I was not rebellious nor turned back,* *John* 6:25. he hears with an everlasting ear, it is a sound that never goes out of his ear, whether God speak to him in his Word, or in his judgements, or by the voice of his Spirit in his heart and conscience, he hath heard the voice of his rod, *Micah* 6:9. this is hearing with a digged ear: Such an hearing as *David* saith, *I will never forget thy precepts,* *Psalms* 119.

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But how then are we said to open the door?

By these several acts.

First, We open to Christ, when we believe all that God hath spoken: for we may hear and understand much, but our hearts believe it not, and then we do not open the door of faith, and so do not open our hearts, if we open the heart we give up our hearts to God to imbrace whatever he hath spoken, *Act.* 14:27. We believe the truth of the Word, and give credence and have assurance of the certainty and goodness of it to our souls, when we are able to say; good is the Word of the LORD, this is the key of Faith.

Secondly, We open the door of our hearts, when we go to God and openly confess from our hearts all the despite and contempt we have put God's grace too, when we in confession open the mouth and the heart together, and confess that all God hath spoken to us of our dangerous course, hath been the Word of his truth and goodness, when we confess former and latter

sins, and judge our selves as unworthy of any mercy, he that thus confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy, *Pro.* 28:13. he that keeps his heart fast locked, he keeps out God, and hardens his heart from good counsel, he shall fall into mischief, and for him there is no remedy, *Prov.* 29:1. but if we confess our sin unto God; this is the way to soften and open

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Thirdly, If we have made God stay long before we open to him, this will further be found: We open our hearts, when as we desire to give up our hearts and souls to God, not only to receive him and his grace, but even to yield professed subjection to the Gospel of Christ; when our hearts profess, it is too long that we have stood out so many knocks, but now for time to come, we yield and offer our souls to God, not to leave an hoof behind? but now Christ shall have mind and judgement and conscience, all our endeavours, all that we are or can be, *2 Cor.* 9:13. when we yield every thought to professed subjection to Christ and his Gospel, when we will not allow our selves in any passage of sin, but yield up our selves, souls and bodies and spirits and all to be guided by him, to do and suffer his will, that we may be delivered from the wrath to come.

Now suppose we do thus, what will God then do to us?

Why Christ will vouchsafe familiar communion with us, he will come in and dwell with us; to dwell with a man is to continue with him, and to grow to more familiar fellowship with him, give him your heart, and then he will never depart from you, *Jer.* 32:40.

*He will sup with us, and we with him.*

That implies still more familiar communion with him.

We are said to *sup* with God: First, when he

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doth refresh us, set before us the fat things of his grace, set before us the Lord Jesus Christ, and gives us his holy Spirit, set before us peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and all the gifts and graces of his Spirit, invites us to his Ordinances, and sets before us the comfort of them.

1. He graciously invites us to his Ordinances,
2. and there sets before us Christ and his benefits,
3. and then at supper time he carves us out some choise portion reserved for us, he gives us a testimony of our welcome in the dishes of his ordinances, and in the meat in them Christ, and in the benefits he carves out to us, he saith, here is a part for thee son or daughter, here is not a dish upon the Table, but thou hast thy part in it, God will so take order, not one benefit of Christ Jesus, not a Sermon, not a Sacrament, not a blessing in Christian communion, but there is something in them to feed thee, and therefore see thou be strengthened and comforted in them, and built up by them, there is nothing but something is for thee, no promise but its thine, no Commandement but it belongs to thee, no example but for your good and imitation, and then are we said to sup with him.

But when is he said to sup with us?

1. When he will be present with us in every duty, when he shews us his presence and 2. assistance in every performance, and when he not only shews his presence and assistance, but is pleased 3. to accept this and that duty, we

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offer him our service, and endeavours and desires, whereby we bid him welcome to our house and

then he shews us his acceptance of our duties, it is our meat and drink to perform Christian duties in a Christian manner, when you little think that God takes notice of them, yet he accepts it all. And,

First, Christ will rejoice in us. Secondly, some poor Christians that join with us shall be glad to hear of such expressions come from us; the loins and bowels of poor Christians shall be refreshed, and it shall be as much comfort to them, as if you had layed a good morsel upon his trencher. And all from this; because we have heard Christ's voice and opened unto him; if there be first a willing mind it is accepted, *2 Cor.* 8:12. If God give us grace to perform any poor duty with a willing mind, he accepts it, this is the best entertainment we had for him, and the best courses we can take, we could wish our entertainement were better for him; but it is sufficient, for it is accepted.

*Use 1.* It is of Exhortation to all that never knew what it was to sit down at table with God, this is commended to you; *If any man will hear my voice, if he will but open the door I will come in to him*, dost thou desire to be entertained at the Lord's Table, or when thou comest to any ordinance of God, wouldest thou have the Lord Jesus Christ to bid thee welcome, this is the course that is commended to thee, set open an everlasting care to hearken what this day is

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spoken to thee, consider all the good counsel God hath given you out of his Word, *harden not your hearts as in the day of provocation*, let none of the seeds of God's word fall to the ground in vain, but what you have once heard, hear it forever, *Hebr.* 2:1, 2. You have this day heard of the great patience and rich grace and large bounty of God, let not the word of his grace fall to the ground in

vain, call it to mind and believe the truth of it, and in believing of it profess your hearts to God in an hearty confession, that indeed you have stood out long against him, and against all his bounty, and truth, beseech him to break open the stony doors of your heart, and burst the bars of Iron in asunder, and to give you an heart to give up your soul and body and spirit to him, which is a reasonable serving of him, give up mind and judgement and affection to God; and if you find your hearts sluggish this way, remember on the one side, *You will treasure up wrath against the day of wrath*, if you do not: and if you do so, then Christ will come in and *sup with you*, taking in good part, what you perform, and making you a continual feast, *Prov. 15:15.* and others shall rejoice in your behalf, and this will be a supper to you; you shall need no more nor better meat, till you go so your everlasting long home, having gotten such a supper you may then go to bed when you will, and you shall sleep most sweetly and comfortably, in another world he will make his last meal with you, when your eyes shall close up in ever-

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lasting peace, remember this and make use of it for ever.

*Use 2.* To teach the servants of Christ that have sometimes supped with him heretofore, if you have not found Christ, carving out a portion to you of a long time, it is a direction to you as you would have Christ present with you, and his acceptance in al your duties, it behoves you so often as you come before God, come with a boarded ear, that every word may sink deep into you; and know that the reason why Christ was not present with you, in public or in private, was, because you either have not heard or not opened to him, you have not believed, not confessed your miscariages,

not yielded to God your after-course, and hence you have come to duties, and neither your selves nor others better for them; set therefore open your hearts to Christ, and hear his voice, and give up your selves to be wholly taught of God for time to come, and then he will readily accept you, and will carve you out a blessing out of every ordinance you come to; and you shall find this verified, he will keep a feast with you this night, and the last night you sleep, shall be sweet to you, and you shall awake with comfort at the resurrection of the just.

FINIS.

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27

**THE  
SAINTS  
DELIVERANCE  
OUT OF TRI-  
bulations.**

REV. 7. latter part of the 14, ver.

*These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

**F**rom the ninth verse of this Chapter you have a description of God's Church and people that obtained victory and deliverance out of a great danger which lay upon themselves, and the whole Church of God'; the judgement and danger is expressed in *verse 1, 2*. Their preservation by the

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seal of God see upon them is expressed from *verse 3.* to the 8.

In the ninth verse you have a description of the persons preserved and so delivered.

First, as *John* did perceive them to be by his own view and hearing, *I beheld, &c.*

Secondly, as he did learn them to be by the information of one of the Angels. As he perceived them by his own discerning, he describes them.

1. First for multitude, a *great multitude*, so great as none could number them.

2. Secondly, for their country and the variety of them, *They were of all people and nations and languages.*

3. Thirdly, for their place, *they were before the throne*, which appears from *verse 4.* had a place in the Church.

4. Fourthly, he discerns them by their habit, *ver. 9. clothed with white robes and palms in their hands.*

5. Fifthly. He describes them, as he sees them to be by their employment, what he heard or saw them do, *they cried out with a loud voice*, and he tells you what it was, and how it was confirmed by the testimony of all the Angels of God: Their preservation in evil and deliverance out of inward and outward evils they ascribe it all to God, *that sits upon the throne*, and to the *Lamb*. All the while that the judgement lay upon the earth, many of God's people were carried to this false conceit and misconceiving of God and themselves,

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in ascribing salvation to themselves, too much respect had they to their own works and merits, but after God had been pleased to wash them in the blood of his son, they saw now that salvation from death and sin and affliction, was from

him that *sits upon the throne*, and the Temple and from the Lamb, the blood of Christ.

This confirmed by all the Angels, *ver. 11, 12. They cried and said, blessing and glory and wisdom, &c. be unto our God forever.*

And then he comes to describe them in the Verse before the Text, and in the Text, he describes them, by what he learned of them by information, and that from one of the *Elders* that stood by and shewed him these things.

The *Elder* enquires first of him, to prepare him the better to understand it: *Knowest thou what these be?* John returns an answer of his ignorance, and likewise an expression of his desire after information; thou knowest and art likely to know it: who then returns him his answer, that they that thus stand with ensigns of victory, *These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb.* So then you have in these words a description of the estate of God's people by a double argument.

First, by their deliverance out of affliction from great tribulations.

Secondly, by their profiting under affliction, which *have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

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These are not a description of the Saints glorified in Heaven, though it be true of them, but he speaks here of the servants of God upon Earth, for in the *verse* following it is said, *They are such as serve God day and night in the Temple* which in Heaven men are not said to do, there is no Temple there to serve God in; but it is meant of the servants of God in earth, described as you heard before.

These two particulars yield two doctrines.

*Doctrine 1. The tribulations of God's people art sometimes great and deep, but always safe and passable.*

*Great and deep, great and deep tribulations, sore afflictions they were exercised with, but even then safe and passable. These are they that are come out of their great tribulations, they are preserved in them, and safely delivered out of them, and now they triumph in the Church of God with the presence of the Lamb of God, and sing Psalms to his praise. It was the earned Amplification of Christ our Saviour to his Father, Mat. 26:39. If it be possible let this cup pass from me, his earnest desire was that the great tribulation he was then entering upon, which caused him to sweat clods of water and blood, and made him cry out, God had forsaken him, he desires that it might be a passable tribulation, that he might not be swallowed up of it, nor over-whelmed by it, and he was heard in the thing which he prayed for, Hebr. 5:7. so as that this great tribulation, greater then which never any creature suffered, this cup passed from him, it did not o-*

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ver-whelm him: And as it was with Christ the head, so it is with all his members, what ever cup the Father mixes for us to drink, when we have drunk of it, it passeth from us, it doth not make us drunken as the cup given to *Babylon* did, their affliction did so over-whelm them that they were the worse for it ever after; but God's people's affliction is passing great, and many (for so the word signifies, *Psal. 34:19.*) are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivers them out of them all, be they never so many and great, yet the Lord delivers them out of them all, they are all of them safe in the bottom and in the issue, and all of them passable, *Psal. 40:2. He brought me out of the horrible pit, out of the horrible pit of the grave and hell, out of the miry clay,*

where he could find no bottom, and set him upon a rock, and then he found a bottom, though there was no bottom at the first to be found to his feeling, yet he found safety in it and a good issue out of it, *Psal 71:20. Thou which hast shewed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me again from the depths of the Earth:* Suppose a man were fallen into deep afflictions, and lay under great and sore troubles, yet thou wilt revive me, and lift me up from thence, this God will do, though the Apostle sometimes say we are in desire, he was troubled out of measure, and had received the sentence of death in it self, but he hath delivered us from so great a death, there is great tribulation, and that brings great death, and great

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fear of death, which put him to great pain and anguish, and yet out of this the Lord delivered him.

You have some famous examples in Scripture that stand as guides in the way, to give light to them that pass by, what great afflictions God's servants have been in, and yet preserved in them and delivered out of them: *Daniel* in the Lions' den, the three children in *Nebuchadnezzar's* fiery furnace, *Dan. 3:6*. Famous is the story of *Jonah* in the whale's belly; such examples as these, stand as Monuments of this truth, these are they which come out of great tribulations: Thus *Jonah* and *Daniel* and others like unto them that have been in great and sore dangers, when in the gates of death, and the waves have overwhelmed them in the gulf of destruction: yet God hath called them from thence, and lift them up and delivered them. The *Ægyptian* darkness which God's people suffered in the house of bondage: The *Babylonian* captivity in which the people of God were a type of that great cap-

tivity, partly of sin, which God's people are subject to be drawn too, and partly of bondage, which the Church of God under Antichrist were likely to endure, they both express what the Church of God felt; now from all these it pleased God to redeem them, and put songs of salvation into their mouths, and Palms of victories into their hands.

*Reason 1. Reas. 1.* From the fellowship which God's people have with Christ Jesus in his death and resur-

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region, that is the first and principal ground, and often shall you read it, *Col. 2:10. We are dead and risen with Christ:* If Jesus Christ the *Lamb of God*, if he die and rise again from the dead, all his people shall have a time at one time or another to bring them as low as the grave, and yet out of the grave shall they rise again; for the death and resurrection of Christ is a pledge of a three-fold death and resurrection in us.

First, in that we are dead in sin, we shall rise from that.

Secondly, though dead to the grave, yet we shall also rise from thence.

Thirdly, dead in afflictions, yet we shall rise out of them all, none of all those evils that God's people are subject too, be it sin or the grave or affliction, and what ever else; by the death of Christ we die to all these, and by his resurrection, we rise again out of them all; there is no evil we can fall into, but he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken us, from sin, the grave, hell, and from all afflictions: *Timothy* was a young Soldier of Jesus Christ, and *Paul* that was more beaten to that warfare, when he encourages him to suffer as a good Soldier, he bids him remember that *Jesus Christ was risen from the dead*, *2 Timothy 2:5, 8.* Do you think it is likely that such a great and eminent servant of

God, as *Timothy* was, should forget that Christ was risen again; why truly we do forget it, as often as we are discouraged with afflictions, but therefore that he might encourage Christians to look at all afflictions as dead matter, as

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already crucified, look we at all tribulations, and do but remember that Christ was dead and is risen again, and it will be a ground for our Faith, whenever we come into affliction.

*Reason 2.* That (which flows from hence) and it is taken from that great redemption, which the Lord Jesus by his death and resurrection hath wrought for us. We have fellowship with him in his death and resurrection, and from hence comes *plentious redemption*, *Psa.* 130:7, 8. so that if there be *plentious Redemption* in Christ, then though our tribulations be great and plentiful and deep, yet with the Lord is *plentious redemption*. *David comforted* himself with it, when he was in deep affliction, *vers.* 1. *Out of the deep I cried.* Deep affliction, and deep tribulations, but no tribulation so deep, but there is redemption as deep and more plentiful, *Zach.* 9:11. *By the blood of thy covenant, I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit in which was no water,* and he means the *Babylonian* captivity, no comfort in it, but by the *plentious redemption* purchased by the blood of Christ, but therefore we have comfort.

*Reason 3.* Taken from our *Baptism*, which God would have all Christians well acquainted with, it was the first ordinance we were called unto under the fellowship of the Church, and that which we had need to live by all our days; for the water doth not only type the blood of Christ, to wash away the guilt of sin, nor only the spirit of grace washing away the stain of sin, but

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water in baptism doth likewise figure to us all those afflictions wherewith we shall not only be sprinkled, as some are, but sometimes drenched and dowsed all over, as was the old manner of baptizing; this is that we do enter into in our first solemn *Covenant*, that we openly make with God in the face of the Congregation; our Fathers made a covenant before us, but this was the first on our part, that we are dipped into *water*, and yet rise again out of it, never a whit the worse, but better. Our Saviour calls *Baptism*, *affliction*, *Mat. 20:22, 23*. Can you endure to be so drenched in the laver of God's wrath, as I shall be; they say they are able, but they spake they knew not what; but he answered, *you shalt indeed be baptized*, that is sprinkled, and he seals it, with a *verily, verily*, an *Amen*, that as sure as you have been baptized into the Family of the Lord Jesus, and your consciences sprinkled with *the blood of the Lamb*, and the *water* of the Holy Ghost, so sure shall you be drenched and dipped in *affliction*, when as the Apostle *Peter* had spoken of the *deluge* of *water* in *Noah's* time, when but eight Persons were saved, *1 Pet, 3:20, 21*. He would figure *Baptism* thereby, that look as the same *water* that drowned the world, yet lifted up the people of God that were in the *Ark*; truly, so it is in this case, *afflictions* answer our *Baptism*, the same afflictions that over-whelm the whole Earth, they lift up all that are in God's *Ark*: All those that are wrapped up in the *Covenant* of God's grace and peace, all

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the waters of affliction do but lift them up higher, far above the highest mountains of the Earth. And it shews us, that we shall be lift up out of all these sprinklings and afflictions wherewith God hath drenched us to

the skin, and we shall find a bottom and a *deliverance* in due time.

*Reason* 4. Taken from that which flows from all this; for God having given us fellowship with Christ in suffering, and wrought redemption for us thereby, and sealed up unto us assurance of preservation in *affliction* and *deliverance* out of them in our *Baptism*; it is meet that he that promised this, should be present with his servants to make all this good to them. This reason is taken from the *presence of God* with us in all our afflictions; so you read, *Esa.* 43: 2. *When thou passest through the water, I will be with thee, and in the fire, &c.* which was expressly verified in the *three children* in the *furnace*, *Behold, I see four, and one of them like the Son of God, Dan.* 3:24, 25. He was the fourth that was there present with them. And this is that you read, *Exod.* 3:2. *The bush Burning and not consumed*, expressed the estate of the Church of God at that time, which was all of a *light fire*, they were scorched with sore afflictions; but not consumed, *because the Angel of the Covenant*, the Lord Jesus Christ, (*ver.* 7.) *was in the bush*: So that hence it is that the servants of God do find some kind of supportance under their afflictions, in their deepest mire.

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*Use* 1. It is to prevent the discouragements of God's servants in time of *affliction*, and to nil our hearts with faith and patience in our worst times, in the greatest evils and forest *afflictions* that can befall us; in the midst of them all, fill your hearts with Faith and Patience and consolation: No distress so grievous but may befall the best of Gods servants, and yet no great danger, for there is a rock in the bottom, upon which we shall stand, and there will be safe passage out of it, *Thou that hast*

*shewed me great and sore troubles, then wilt revive me and lift me up from the depths of the Earth.* His Faith assured him God had led him into the one, and he would also lead him into the other. See how he stays his heart by a lively Faith, *Psal. 23:4. Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, because the presence of God is there, thy rod doth comfort me;* God puts some staff of former experience into our hands whereby he comforts us. This is that which *Paul* expressed of himself in his worst houses, *2 Cor. 1:9, 10.* When he had spoken of his troubles beyond measure, says he: *All this is that we might not trust in the flesh, but in the living God, who hath and doth and will deliver us:* so that afflictions are to draw from us Faith and patience, it is a point Christians are too much ignorant of, when they come into afflictions they think no man is so afflicted as they are, and sometimes thereupon call in question, whether they be

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38 [misnumbered 30]

Christians or no; I would only say to such souls whether were you baptized or no, and if so, was it not into the death of Christ, and were you drowned when you were baptized, were you not rather lifted up; did you nor then covenant with God, that whatsoever afflictions you wrestled with and were drenched in; that you would not look at them as any strange matter; the first day you came into the Church you were baptized, and God made account you should look for affliction from that day forward, and if they be many and great and sore exercises, the greater and deeper your troubles be, the deeper you drink of Christ's cup, the more sweet will it be in the bottom; there is something in the bottom will counter-vail all; you will find the blood of Christ in the bottom, and the Spirit

of grace, and the presence of God there, and if you be dragged to deep? and sore exercises, yet comfort your selves in this, *These are they which come out of great tribulations*, and that will be great grace to you.

Come we now to speak of God's peoples profiting under afflictions, *They have washed their robes and made them white*.

*Doctrine 2. The people of God that have come off well out of great tribulations, have washed their robes, and made them white with the blood of the Lamb.*

It is plain in the Text; they triumph with *Palms in their hands*, which is first, an *ensign of victory*, and also the *Palm-tree*, the more it is pressed down with weight, the more it grows;

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39 [misnumbered 31]

now these that come off gloriously *out of great tribulations*, see how they Triumph, and see how it fares with them, *ver. 3, 4. The Angels of God sealed them that they might have no hurt*, and they come off also with glory and renown and victory.

*Robes*] you say, were not many of them poor men, poor creatures, that lived in times of darkness, in the days of Popery, and many of them exercised with deep tribulations; poor men, yes, yet they were adorned with *robes*; had it not been enough to say, *washed their garments*; what must poor men be set up with *robes*? Yet *robes* they have, and *white robes*, and *they washed in the blood of the Lamb*: So that it shews you that the servants of God that come well out of tribulations, they get more *royal spirits* then ever before; for *robes* become royal Persons and Princes; when *robes* in good earnest are put upon any, they put upon them princely Majesty, a spirit of glory and royalty is put upon them; he carries himself no more like a base drudge of this world, he is able to over-wrastle all tribulations and af-

fictions of this world, and all the temptations all the profits and pleasures thereof, he looks at them as those things that are but husks, fit matter for earthly minded men to seek for; but his own part, he goes on as becomes a Prince: And these endowments of a man's mind they are the apparel of his soul, when a man hath many royal endowments put upon him, they are princely garments.

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But why are these called *white robes*? I cannot better expound them then the Lord himself doth, *Revel.* 19:8. it was given to the Spouse of Christ to be *clothed with white linen, pure and clean, which is the righteousness of the Saints*, so that these *white robes are the righteousness of the Saints*, the endowments of holiness and righteousness which God puts upon them, and upon every Spouse of his, every poor soul that he hath been pleased through his grace to deliver out of deep tribulations.

*Righteousness*, both imputed from Christ to us; *All that his perfect obedience and patience and righteousness ascribed to us is made ours*, 1 *Cor.* 1:30. And *righteousness of sanctification*, not only Christ's righteousness imputed, but the Spirit of grace works inherent righteousness in us; *Faith* and *Patience*, and *Humility* and *Zeal*, and whatever grace accompanies *Salvation*; these be the *royal robes of Righteousness* God clothes his servants with, when they come out of afflictions.

Why are they said to be *white robes*?

First, what is it to *wash* their robes?

This word *washing*, signifies tribulation like water; tribulations are like mire and water mixed together, in which the people of God are afraid they shall sink down, and never can recover, until they begin to find there is the blood of Christ in that water, and finding the power of it,

their *garments* that were besmeared with afflictions, are so scoured and rubbed off from their own *righteousness*, as that they are glad to depend

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wholly on the righteousness of Christ: neither doth the garments of Christ's imputed righteousness, stand in need of *washing*, save only the further assurance and light of it; but the garments of our Sanctification, the best whereof is like *filthy rags and menstrual cloths*, *Esa.* 64:6. so bespotted and besmeared with much filthiness; *Faith* mixed with much *doubting*; *Patience* with much *unquietness*; *Humility* with *Pride*; *Zeal* with *coldness*; *Love* with much *hollowness*; yea, our truest *Sincerity* with much *Hypocrisy*: So as that God's people looking at their own righteousness, are ashamed of their best gifts, and best performances; so that this *washing* is a cleansing out this filthiness and worldliness and unfavouriness, that is found in our best righteousness, the spots that were before found in our graces *are now washed*, and now we can be patient and faithful, and our doubtings are gone; whereas love of God and of the world were mixed together before; now love to the world is gone; *Humility* hath gotten victory over *Pride*; every grace is washed by the things we suffer; and this mire is turned into soap, whereby our corruptions and lusts are *washed* away, but yet there will be some spots that need scouring off, and therefore he saith, *They made them white*. You may have such *washing* and rubbing as gets out the filth and mire, and yet not be comely, but if together with *washing* they become *white*, that is perfect and clean *washing*.

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Now they are made *white*, what is that?

*White* implies three things.

First, *Purity*, they are made *pure* and clean, according to that in *Rev.* 19:8. *clean* and *white* are put together, so purely *washed* and scoured, that now he shines *white*, & bright, clearly *white*, full of purity and brightness, so as that now there is some kind of pure semblance and lusture in their (graces) their *garments*, not only soul spots and greater defilements rubbed out, but likewise the graces of God are splendant and bright and clear without that mixture and dross that sometimes lay upon them; Faith is pure and clean from doubting; Love is fervent and mining; Knowledge and wisdom is clear and bright; Patience and meekness now such as becomes and adorns the Gospel of Christ, so as they adorn us, and we by them adorn our profession; this is to *wash* and make them *white*; our graces, not such as we and our Brethren are ashamed to own, but such as both they and we rejoice in.

Secondly, this brightness or whiteness of garments doth not only shew you their purity and cleanness, but it likewise shews their glory and their excellency: when Christ was transfigured, his *raiment* was *white* and bright (*Matth.* 17:3.) so as no colour upon earth was like unto it, it did set forth the glory of Christ, and so all such Christians as are thus *washed* and *whitened*, a spirit of glory, and of God resteth upon them, 1 *Pet.* 4: 4. so as they now can *glory in tribulations*, *Rom.* 5:2, 3. They are now made more like to the Saints in

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light, that rejoice in the presence of God continually.

Thirdly, *White garments* express comeliness of spirit, joyfulness of spirit: When *Solomon* would exhort a godly man, whose works are accepted of God to a cheerful walking with God, *Eccles.* 9:8. he saith, *let thy garments be always white*, implying that a Christian spirit, that hath

made a good use of his afflictions, he hath not only put upon him a royal spirit, but hath washed away all stains out of his old heart, and now his graces are more pure and more glorious, and more comfortable, his spirit more clear and cheerful.

*In the blood of the Lambe]* that is in the sufferings of Christ Jesus, when we have made use of the sufferings of Christ to redeem us out of those afflictions, the very same blood of Christ that pardoneth our sin in affliction, doth also heal us therein, and doth also trim up the spirit to an holy purity and gloriousness before God and man.

And this is called *the blood of the Lamb*. Christ is called a *Lamb*, because his is *innocent*, 1 *Peter* 1:10. and *patient*, *Esa.* 53:7. because he blood is the blood of an innocent and meek and patient Christ, whence it comes to pass that such as are drenched and *washed* in his blood, rise out of afflictions, not only *washed* from *spots* and stains, but are grown to such *Meekness and Patience*, and to such purity and cheerfulness and glory, as they are now made *white in the blood of the Lamb*.

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*Reason.* This comes from hence, it is from the powerful efficacy of all blessed and sanctified afflictions; and their efficacy is to set all the graces of God a work, and all the duty of Religion a work, and by which the blood of Christ is applied to our souls, and that purifies and glorifies a Christian.

1. See it in particular. First, *Sanctified afflictions* have ever this work, they first, *humble the soul of a man* before God, *Levit.* 26:41. *if your uncircumcised hearts be humbled, he will then deliver you out of your afflictions*; this is the nature of all sanctified affliction, it works Humility: And God *gives grace to the humble*, 1 *Pet.* 5:5.

2. Secondly, *Afflictions set a work confession of sin*, *Lev. 26:40*. Now what will confession bring? It will likewise bring us grace, 1 *John 1:9*. it will bring us to *cleansing from, all unrighteousness*, it drives us to examination, and humble confession it besprinkles us with the blood of Christ, and so we are cleansed from all our unrighteousness.

3. Thirdly, *They set Faith a work*; afflictions are called *the trials of our Faith*, *James 1:3*. 1 *Pet. 1:5*. so they put us upon consideration, whence they come, and to what end they come, and *Faith purifies the heart*, *Acts 15:9*. *eph. 3:17*.

4. Fourthly, *Afflictions quicken the heart of a Christian to prayer*, *Zach. 13:9*. *They shall call upon me, and I will hear them*: They learn a man to pray, who was never acquainted with prayer before.

5. Fifthly, *Afflictions set patience a work*, these

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trials bring forth patience, *Rom. 5:3*, 4. and *patience*, let it but have its *perfect work*, and it will make you entire, wanting nothing, *James 1:2*.

6. Sixthly, *Afflictions work obedience*, for they purify from it sin, and train us up to bring forth the peaceable and quiet fruits of Righteousness, *Esa. 27:9*. *Hebr. 12:11*. So as now we grow more awful in our walkings before God; the sinful failings that were wont to be found in our obedience are now taken away.

And righteous duties are now performed with much quietness and evenness; before we had much ado to pray, but sanctified afflictions help this.

*Use*. It is 1. an Use of *Trial*, that any of us may make of our own afflictions; how many of you have been exercised with great affliction; some through anguish of conscience; some with deep and sore sickness, some in body, some in spi-

rit, some in estate; we may most of us say, O Lord, thou hath shewed us great and sore troubles and yet if a man should now come and ask me, who are these? We may say, *These are they who have come out of great tribulations* within a while, now God forbid, but would you know whether we are come surely off from afflictions or no, that we be not be mired; that the flesh of our sins stick not still about us, that you may carry *Palms in your hands*, while you live, and carry them to Heaven with you when you die: Why you shall know it by this; If God have

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brought you out of *great tribulations*; well, he hath taken your old garments from you, and hath, put upon you *robes* whatever you were before: If you were to pull a child out of mire, one of your first works would be to put other clothes upon him, God doth so to his servants, and the mire he turns into soap, and makes it cleanse us: Whatever frame of spirit you brought into affliction, it will become a *Robe* when you come out of it. Consider therefore what spirit thou hast now, art thou not able to over-look the world, and all the comforts of it, nor to forbear the pursuit of it for a minute of an hour, why then they are still deceitful treasures, therefore now gather up a spirit of an higher rank, thou thoughtest before that the things of this life were great and glorious things; but when the question was, whether you were a live or a dead man; what found you to be the answer: If you then found the world to be but unprofitable stuff, when Gods wrath lies upon your soul; and have you now a more royal spirit and art able to over-look all the world, and canst despise thine own worldliness and covetousness and all the sinful distempers of thy soul, and art able to overcome thy self and children

and yoke-fellow, or whatever it be, then thou shalt carry a *Palm* for an ensign of victory in thy hand; but if in this case with the young man you go away sorrowful, you will have dirty *robes* out upon you. And further if thou comest fair off, thou wilt find thy spots taken away,

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whatever pride or Hypocrisy, unruly affections, wrathful speeches, it is the nature of affliction, it washes them clean out, so as they shall be but little to what they were before; and this blood of Christ will make thee *white*, thou wilt be adorned with pure and precious graces, with *love* and *Zeal*, &c. and put you into such a frame of grace, as will make your hearts comfortable; sanctified afflictions will make your spirits more cheerful in a Christian course, and make you bring more glory to God.

*Use 2.* To exhort you all in the fear of God to see what God requires of you; if God have delivered you out of affliction, you must now walk as becomes Kings and Princes before God, look at afflictions as they be, that they are as soap and nitre to wash you, and know that by affliction you have a royal spirit of grace and glory put upon you: Now therefore suffer not a spot to be found in any part of thy convention, before God or man, and now walk on with more cheerefulness and freedom of heart in holy duties then ever before; and *wash* thy soul *the blood* of the innocent *Lamb*, and be patient and meek for God under any affliction: Let us be like *Lambs* under them, and not so much as open our mouths; but if we be as proud as ever, as wrathful and passionate as ever before, now then how poorly are we come out of great tribulations. Therefore I charge you in the Name of the Lord Jesus, as ever you look to find comfort in a day of tribulation,

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fuller not your selves to be spotted, but away with all passions and distempers that before defiled you, and walk so as the name of God, and his Gospel may be better spoken off by you.

*Use 3.* It is a ground of comfort to all God's poor servants, against their greatest *tribulations*, we know not what troubles and afflictions may come, all of us may be sure to meet with *tribulations* in one kind or other, long it will not be till we see a change, but be not troubled at it if they do come, be not dismayed at them, what ever may or can befall thee; know it is, but so much soap to cleanse thee, and to make thee *white*, they are but to *wash* thee from thy filthiness, and to make thy spirit more comfortable, and the frame of thy carnage more glorious before God and man; and therefore fear not the evils that may befall thee in regard of thy Christian course, they will bring thee to such a comfortable frame that Ministers may stand and say, who are these; Some take these *Elders* to be Ministers, but I take them to be (as in *Chapter 4.*) common Christians, and *John* is the Minister that reveals this to the Church of God: For many times it so falls out that a Minister in a Congregation doth not know the good that afflictions have wrought in and amongst sundry of Gods people: That if a Neighbour should come and ask a Minister, what think you of such or such an one, it may be that he cannot tell, they have been in *great tribulations*; but what good is come of it I know not

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but if they be come out well, so as that they are made *white*, this is matter of Angular comfort, both to Ministers and Neighbours, and every man stands and wonders that afflictions by the mighty power of God's grace, should meet with

such a wonderful work as this is, to make such as before were stained and polluted and unfavoury are now made *white* and pure and clean and glorious and gracious; and this is matter of joy and rejoicing both to Ministers and people, and therefore in this comfort your selves. Onely in this be carefull with holy wisdom in making such a precious use of afflictions, yield your selves and brethren and sisters and Ministers, that comfort who shall enquire of you, or be enquired of concerning you, that you may have come so pure and clean out of afflictions, that you and they, and all that ever may know and hear of you may for ever rejoice in this Mercy and Goodness of God to you.

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**GOD'S  
MERCY Ma-  
nifest IN HIS  
Justice.**

*Esay 27. part of the 4. together with the 5. v.  
Who would set the briars and thorns against me  
in battle, I would go through them, I would  
burn them together.*

*Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may  
make peace with me, and he shall make peace  
with me.*

**T**Hese words are part of an heavenly Song, which the Prophet in the name of the Lord, exhorted the people of God to sing unto the Lord, at what time he delivered them out of the hands of their greatest enemies, and when he under-took to preserve his

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Church which he calls his *vineyard*, *vers.* 2, 3, and will watch over it night and day least any thing should hurt it, because a *vineyard* of *red wine* (which is the best wine, *Prov.* 23.) because even in the Church of God, among the best grapes, and the best frame of spirit, because among them are found many hypocrites, and such as undermine the peace and welfare of the Church. The Lord manifests his mercy thus far to them, that he threatens their danger, if they continue in such an estate, but promises grace and mercy, if they turn from it: look therefore what he commanded his people in the Law, *Deut.* 20:10. to 13. If they went to make war with any people, they should first offer conditions of peace, before they strike; so the Lord himself observes the same course and performs the same work in this place. 1. He doth here lay siege to all the evil members in a vineyard of red-wine, to all the ill members in his Church, *I will, burn them together*, a sore and a greivous threatening unto the hardest and most obstinate spirit, and best mounted and sensed with the strength of their own resolutions. But as he threatens what he will do in case they stand out against him: So he also offers terms of peace, if they think no good to try it put in battle with me, if they think it will be too hot a service for them, let them then take hold of my strength, if he see it be a safer course for

him; *Let him make peace with me, and he shall be at peace*; even then when he gives them most

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terrible threatnings, then he also offers them gracious terms of peace.

In the words themselves observe the estate of evil men in the Church of God, even in the *vineyard of red wine*, in Churches of purest grapes, among them there be such as are evil. And they are called *briars* and *thorns*, who will set them in *battle against me*? Which though some understand of vices, yet I choose rather with them, that think its meant of vicious and evil persons. For God proclaims war, not so much against vices as against persons, Therefore this is the estate and frame of evil men in the Church, *they are as briars and thorns*.

Secondly, Observe here the danger of such men's estates, when they do rise up against God, and set4, themselves against him in battle, will they set themselves, or set one another? who will undertake if, let me see them face to face, what will be their danger? *I will march through them*, (as it is in the Original) he will not hinder his work, notwithstanding all their opposition, he will go through them, and further his own work.

Thirdly, observe a redress or remedy to such, in such a dangerous estate, or an offer of mercy to such, who discerning themselves to be in such a dangerous estate, do think it more safe for them to take a wiser and better course, to come in to GOD, and to yield to him, to take hold of God's strength, and to be at peace with him.

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From these words we may observe three several notes.

*Doctrine 1. Evil men are as briars and thorns.*

For of these he speaks in this *vine-yard of red wine*; as in a *vine-yard*, unless much heed be taken, there will be *briars* and *thorns* springing in it: So will there be in the Church of God, evil men will grow up in the Church, in a *Vineyard of red Wine*, and God esteems them as *briars* and *thorns*, the children of *Belial*, *David* then when he styles himself, *the sweet finger of Israel*, lest you should think he was in some poor frame of spirit embittered against such persons, yet it was in his old-age, when his heart was most free, from all distemper and passion, and gives special charge concerning good government; and also calls to mind that faithful and gracious covenant which God hath made with him and his house, notwithstanding his own and his children's unworthy walkings, yet 2 *Sam.* 23:6, 7. he saith, *The sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands, but the man that shall touch them he shall be fenced with yroit, &c.* so //4.9.18. *Wickedness burneth as a fire, it shall de-voure the briars and thones&c.* The same persons, meaning the wicked themselves. And in *Ezek.* 2:6. *Though thou beest with briars and thorns and dwellest among Serpents, yet be not dismayed nor afraid.* So that these are the styles which in Scripture are given to wicked men.

Now for the Reason. Wherein stands the

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resemblance between *briars* and *thorns* and evil members of the Church.

*Reason 1.* First, Look as you see *briars* and *thorns* were the fruits of God's curse upon the ground, *Genesis* 5:17, 18. So it is the curse of God upon sinful mankind, sinful Parents, the ground from whence we are taken, and also the curse of God upon the very Church and Common-wealth and Family, where ever any such live, it is the curse

of God upon them, that they yield and bring forth evil men.

*Reason 2.* As you see it is in *Briars* and *thorns* they are of an intricate and perplexing nature, hanging one within another, and such are wicked men who are knit and joined together in their confederacies, and perplexing practices against others with whom they live: So the Holy Ghost notes it of wicked men, *Psal.* 3:5. to 8. *I will not be afraid though ten thousand of people beset themselves round about against me.* So *Esay* 8:9. there is an association, and a confederating themselves together, implying that there is a certain kind of entangling, and a drawing one within another, a folding of themselves together, to pull them asunder, you cannot, take men that are enwrapt and entangled within ill company, you may as soon pull one thorn or briar from another, as pull them asunder one from another; indeed sometimes, if they lie pressed under some hand of God, they will promise to abhor it and to leave it, but as soon as ever they are but unfettered, and let to their own length again, that God allows but life

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and liberty, they are again entangled one within another, *Psal.* 2:2. *The Kings of the Earth stand up and take council together against the Lotrd and his annointed,* broken and pulled asunder they will not be, especially if there arise any occasion of dealing against God's people. And as their confederacies are such, so is their conveyance and wrapping up of businesses, closely and strongly and secretly conveyed and folded up, he uttereth his mischievous design, so they wrap it up, *Micah* 7:3, 4. *The best of them is a briar, the most upright is sharper then a thorny hedge:* So wise is God in all his dispensations, that when he comes to visit such briars and thorns, it will be when their sins are perplexed and folded

together, the day of their perplexity shall come as if he would suit them with a judgement fit for their sins, as they have folded and wrapped up their plots against the godly, so as by no means they can escape them; so they shall be folded up in a judgement, such as they shall by no means rid themselves of, but shall be entangled within it.

*Reason 3.* As in *Briars* and *Thorns*, there is indeed an use and fruitfulness, but it is but a common use, as to serve for the use of Cattle, and so forth; for no other employment: So all the use, and the best service that evil men can do, is to be fruitful and helpful to beasts, to worldly and sinful men like them selves.

*Reason 4.* As in *Briars* and *Thorns*, there is a searching and pricking and stinging nature in them; so as who-

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soever man touch them shall be wounded by them, especially if they be to deal with the servants of God, as the poor Lilly among the Thorns, *Cant.* 2:2, 3. The poor people of God living among these briars and thorns are exposed to continual pricking and fretting and galling; thus they do express themselves; therefore the Lord promises, *Ezek.* 28:14. that when his Church and people shall be freed and delivered from their evil Neighbours, then *Tirus* and *Sydon* shall be no more a pricking *Briar*, nor a *piercing Thorn* to the house of *Israel*.

*Reason 5.* As *Briars* and *Thorns*, the best use that is commonly made of them, is but to hedge and fence in: So many times it so falls out, that God makes use of these briars and thorns for the benefit of his servants, so as that they are kept in a marvellous innocent frame to what else they would be, if they were not well fenced in, but lay open, they would wander and straggle abroad, as Cattle do out of unfenced pastors;

truly so is this case; God doth make such use even of all the evil neighbours of his Church, as that he doth fence in his Church with them, lead they should run awry, *Hosea 2:6. Therefore behold I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall that she shall not find his paths, they shall be galled if they turn aside to the right hand or to the left,* but God by this means, hedges and fences them in.

6. Lastly, Besides their perplexity in this life, you read this likewise to be the end of them,

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that which brings forth briars and thorns is near unto cursing, whose end is to be burned *Hebr. 6:8.* they are in the end to be stubbed up and dried, and so made fit fuel for the fire, *2 Sam. 23:5.* they shall be burnt together, and such is the end of all wicked and ungodly men, without they make their peace, *they shall be burnt,* as it is here in the Text.

*Use.* It may serve to discover unto evil men that unworthy frame of spirit that is in them, they are not orelly unprofitable in themselves, but prejudicial likewise to their neighbours; see how most unworthy of all the trees of the Field, they are neither fruitful nor serviceable for building, as Oaks and Cedars are, but to be only briars and thorns, which of all other shrubs are the most accursed trees. A man should therefore most of all bless himself from such a frame, though we should not be fruitful in the places where we live, yet some good service we may do, Oaks yield small fruit, and as little doth the Cedar, but yet they are both harmless and useful, but these briars and thorns bring forth no fruit, if any, it is but for beasts, and they are of no use, but to hedge in God's people, and to prick and gall them if they run from God; now what a most uncomfortable condition is it to

be born and brought up a child of God's curse: There is a profitable use of briars and thorns, but they were to grow only in hedgerows, this is a fruit of the curse, that they grow in the midst of fields and pastures, for in all the Paradise

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of God was nothing that did hurt, but when once the Earth grows accursed, it brings forth briars and thorns, in the best soils, in the midst of Fields and Meadows: So that then this is a cursed condition, there to stand and grow, where a man shall, and is apt to choke the best seeds that is sown, and hinder them that else would be coming on to Religion there to live where he will be pricks in the eyes of them whom he converses withal; this is a frame of spirit; however men may please themselves in it, that they can gall and sting poor Christians, but do you consider that while you so do sting and vex and fret the hearts of your Neighbours, is not this the work of briars and thorns, you are a curse to these Churches and Commonwealths and families where you dwell; this is a fearful condition that a man mould expose himself to be a child of the curse.

*When will men do set themselves against God, they do not hinder God's work, but hasten their own burning, their own ruin.*

*Who will set themselves against me in battle: If they set themselves or one another against me, shall God's work be hindered? No, I will keep my pace, so the word signifies, as soldiers, I will pace or march through them, not only he will do that which is good in his own eyes, notwithstanding all their opposition, but I will march an end, his servants shall not only carry an end their course, but march, nor retire disorderly, nor fly away as men routed*

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and disheartened, as turning back, giving ground, or yielding to the opposition brought against them, but *I will go through them*, that is to say they by standing in the way shall not hinder me, but what I mean to do, and what my servants are to do, they shall do it, they shall go through with an even pace, and not turn aside to either hand. God's work shall not be hindered; What then? *But I will burnt them up together*, that is to say, when their confederacies are most strongly combined, and closest compacted, and begins to prevail with most strength, then God will begin to set a fire among them, and this will be the issue of it, when God begins to burn and begins to seize upon any one man's conscience and burns that, and falls upon his estate, and weakens that, and casts a fire into a man's tabernacle, and wastes the fruit of his body, and blasts the endeavours and works of his hands; so he sets him all a fire, and he will burn them up together, when the fire is once kindled, it will not cease till it have burned them all up; when a man hardens himself against God, and against the good counsel of God's servants, when God begins with him he will kindle a fire, that shall not go out till all be consumed. There was a conspiracy among the *Sodomites* against *Lot*, *Genesis* 19:9. *We will deal worse with thee then with them, and they pressed upon him, ver. 11. And the Angels plucking him in, they struck all them, and it was a*

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*cloudy mist to them, they were all struck blind, and what was the issue of it? Why, vers. 24. the Lord rained fire and brimstone upon them, and destroyed them all, They rise up against God, against his Angels and servants, and professed*

they would do it, then God strikes them; first, with blindness, a fair warning, and if that will not serve the turn, he will burn them up together, four Cities of them in one day, and God set them forth as an example of his vengeance to all them that shall come to the like wickedness: If therefore any shall set themselves against God and his servants, and make battle against him, he will go on with his work in his servants, but them he will destroy and burn up together; there is no man that lives in an estate of nature, but is in a cursed estate.

*Reason*, My true intent is to speak to this point, how men in a carnal frame of spirit, have intangled themselves in sin, and thereby warring against God do thereby draw themselves from the fellowship of God's grace, I would herein shew you the counsel of the Holy Ghost; that when God's protection and blessing is upon his Church, he would have no man live in his Church but be better for it; for God saith, *Fury is not in me*, tell not me of briars and thorns, if men will be such then they shall be burned together; but yet this he saith, his intent is to keep his vine-yard pure and free from these evils, but if they will have

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peace, let them take hold of my strength, and they shall have peace.

*Reason 1.* Taken from the just indignation that God doth conceive against all evil men, when they do harden their hearts against him; if a man be born in a cursed estate, and allow himself therein, and to fall short of the grace of God, God takes this as a just matter and cause of provocation, *Jer. 7:19. Do they provoke me to anger, and not themselves to the confusion of their own faces. Never did any wax fierce against*

*God and a prosper, Job 9:4. Esa. 45:9. Woe to him that strives with his Maker, God takes it as a matter of great indignation, when men resolve to live and die in an estate of nature.*

*Reason.* It is taken from the power put upon the Lord Jesus Christ; God hath set him up on the *holy hill of Sion, and he hath given him the Heathens for his possession, and a rod of iron, whereby he rules in the midst of his enemies, Psalm 2:8, 9. Psalm 110:2.* Whence it is that there is a wall of fire round about the Church, whereby such as grieve him shall be burnt and together.

*Reason 3.* From the estate and condition of God's people, when God undertakes the protection of his Church, he describes his Church to be a burdensome stone, *Zachary 12:2.* men shall cut their hand with it, and *ver. 3. Jerusalem shall be as a torch in a sheaf, verse 6.* and like a fire among wood, and all the people that come against it shall be as dry stubble; and he

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will make *Jerusalem* as a cup of poison or astonishment, so as whosoever comes against *Jerusalem*, if he either refresh himself with doing evil to the Church of God, or profit himself by it; it shall be a cup of poison to him, so as a man cannot hurt the Church, but it will make him to run mad, which shews what hot service it is for men to take up any evil against the Church of God, he doth not hinder God's work, but hasten his own mine.

*Use 1.* It may serve for a ground of strong consolation to all the servants of God that do bring forth red wine, well relished, not wild and unsavoury grapes, carnal fruits of the flesh; if sweet and savoury to God and our brethren, here is a promise of his protection to them, nothing shall hurt them, and if briars and thorns rise up against

them, yet he will go through them with his work, and he will burn up all their enemies together: So that when men live in places where they are ready enough to prick and gall, and scratch at the life and liberty of God's servants; yet fear not; there are more with us then against us.

I saith a Christian, I should never fear the opposition of the sons of men, but here is my fear and danger, my own unworthy base heart is ready to start aside from God, and to dishonour him and the ways of his truth and grace, and I am apt to walk unworthily, how shall I do in such a case?

Why here is thy direction and consolation in

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such a case, God hath promised that he will march through with his work, if God give us an heart to submit to his colours, and bring forth fruits that himself relisheth, then this will follow, God will never retire dishonourably to himself and his children, however they may be scattered, yet he will march an end, not only it, his own providence, in still maintaining and keeping his Church for good; but as he himself will look to his own, so he will march an end in his servants, he will breath in them by his Spirit of wisdom and power, that what ever comes upon them, they will keep Faith and a good conscience, according to all the truth and goodness God hath manifested to them, they will march in his strength, and he will keep them that they shall not retire disorderly.

And so it is a Use of Direction to admonish his inthe fear of God to take heed (as ever we desire God should keep us safe from the workers of iniquities; according to the verse before the Text, take heed we bring not forth wild grapes, much less bitter grapes, fruits of the

world, and of the flesh, and of the pride of our own hearts; but be sure we bring forth good fruits to God, and not only good, but in some kind generous, of the best spirits. *Judah* is described by the redness of his eyes, *Gen.* 49. alluding to that excellent life and spirit that should be in him: the red wine is the most generous, so Christians should not only bring forth good fruit, such as hath lawful warrant from the

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word, and within bounds of calling, but such as hath in it some measure of life and spirit and power of grace breathing forth in it, and if at any time we be straightened, as many times we come off with much flatness in duties; we then complain off, and bewail such evils before God, and rest not till God again renew us and enlarge us, that so God may defend us; or if any prosper against us, we may either be preserved secure therein, or if I must and do retire, then that we may come off fairly, that God may not be dishonoured, nor any evil report be raised against the Gospel, by reason of any ill walking of ours; see that there be life and spirit in your walkings before God in both your particular and general calling; and then if God transplant us he will march before us, and we in his strength shall go through any entanglements without being ensnared, it's a world to see the perplexities of some men's consciences, who have ill carried a business, and defiled themselves in it, but if the Lord keep us spotless, and our consciences void of offence, that we walk evenly with him, according to his truth and goodness, that whatever exercise God puts us too; yea, if here move our vine-yard, it will not make us barren, but more generous, and fruitful, we shall carry our root with us, and be set in ano-

ther place and our fruit will be more sweet and savoury.

Now for the last part of the Text, it is a direction to all thar are not able to make this

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good to their souls they bring not forth good clusters to refresh both God and man; if we be not fallen into malicious opposition, observe we this point.

*Doctrine 3. That such, as do take hold of God's strength and make peace with him though their condition, were never so bad and mischievous against God and his Church, yet if they take hold of God's strength, they may make peace with him, they shall have peace.*

Though they be *briars* and *thorns*, and bring forth cursed fruits of cursed ground, that never did good to any but beasts; suppose your case were so, that you never did good in your place, but have grieved all the good ones about you in Church and Family, that every one have fared the worse for you, which is a fearful condition; but were it so and though perplexed in ill company and cannot get rid of them, yet behold here God makes a fair offer to you, stand not upon your own defence against him, but take hold of his strength, and make your peace with him, and you shall be at peace: Now this is wonderful mercy; did you ever read of a promise to *briars* and *thorns*, not only weeds, but noisome, stinking weeds, yet if they think good to escape burning, let them take a safer course, and they shall be accepted.

*Reason.* Why God so graciously offers himself to such and gives them leave to lay hold on him?

1. First, Taken from the glory of his own name, when God shall be pleased to pardon and heal such sinners, it magnifies the glory of the rich

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grace of God, *Whais a God like unto thee? Micah 7:18.* Whenever God shews mercy to briars and thorns, such as have pricked and pierced God's people, no man that sees it, but will have cause to wonder and stand amazed at the riches of God's mercy to them: Who is a God like unto thee that subduest, that treadest down our high thoughts and imaginations? Who is a God like unto thee that subduest such and healest such sins as these be? This God: will do instead of *thorns shall grow the Myrtle tree, Esay 55:13.* that this may be for a name never to be forgotten, that he might gain a name to religion, and make it famous and glorious; this shall be to the Lord for a name, to his Church and to such Christians for a name, as are thus transformed from briars and thorns, a name to the glory of His grace, and the power of his ordinances, it shall stand for an everlasting remembrance never to be forgotten, it shall stand for a monument of his mighty power of the mighty power of God; this shall stand for a Trophy of glorious victory: And such an ensign was *Paul, Gal. 1:2, 3.* when they heard that *Paul*, sometimes a *Persecutor*, and now preached the Faith, they glorified God in me: When he was a pricking briar to the house of *Israel*, Christ meets him in the way, and makes him glad to lay hold on his strength, and thereupon he becomes a tall and eminent and straight tree in the garden or God, and the Church glorified God for him.

*Reason 2.* It is expressed in the first words of the Text, ta-

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ken from the readiness of God to lay down his fury, when men lay aside their sins, and God plants a vine-yard of red wine, the Lord will water it, and nothing shall hurt it, and fury is not in me, neither against his Church, nor the bri-

ars and thorns, if they will lay down arms against me: If they will fight it out then I will burn them up, but if they will be saved, let them come and take hold of my strength, and they shall see that fury is not in me; but let briars come and make peace with me, and they shall find no backwardness in me.

*Use 1.* Serves to give counsel and exhortation to every soul, whose grapes are not yet sweet, that bring forth fruits to sin, and are notable to say, God hath filled their hearts with generous liquour of savoury grace: Every Christian duty is without life, if we bring forth either bitter or flat fruits, here is the charge and counsel given to you, to stand out no longer against God, but in the name of God take hold of his strength that you may make peace with him, but if you still stand out and bring forth no fruit to God: consider of it if you will stand out against God, and will be hurtful and prejudices in your places, yet shall be confounded, he will march forward and consume you root and branch but let a man take hold of God's strength and make peace with him.

But you may say, how may I come to do it, my fruits are flat and dead, and do nothing but for fashion sake, I am conscious to my self of

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many evil offices I have done, wherby I have been an occasion of hindering others in well-doing; but how shall I now do to lay hold on God's strength.

1. First, If you would lay hold on God's strength then lay down all your own weapons, all weapons of hostility against God, do not only lay aside opposition against God's Church, but what ever sinful frame of heart or life thou hast in thy heart or way, cast it from thee, and have no more to do with it, *Esay 55:6, 7, 8.* lay aside all wicked imaginations and sinful lusts, allow not

your selves in any sin, he that allows himself in any sin, he fights against God: and therefore away with all hostility, and then God will abundantly be ready to forgive and pardon thee; if we would have God to pardon sin, it is for us to leave sin; as long as we retain it, God never remits it, but when they shall forsake their evil ways, then I will heal their rebellions, and my anger is turned from them.

2. Secondly, we are to lay down all confidence in our own goodness, for if so be that God see we put trust in our own strength, in any gift we have received, we shall be but weak creatures, and shall still walk doubtfully of our condition: but if we desire to find peace sealed up to our hearts, in such a case we must have no confidence in the flesh, *Phil.* 3:2, 3, 4. *We have no confidence in the flesh, and count all loss that I may lay hold on Christ;* a man must lay down all confidence in his own goodness and education, and in all ordinances: *Paul* relinquishes

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all as that which had not see his heart through with God, *Ephesians* 6:10.

Thirdly, To believe on the mercy of God, as his great power and strength; if he shall be good to such as we are, this is to lay hold on God's strength, when *Moses* makes intercession for such men, he would have them to lay hold on God's strength, and fitly explains this Phrase in hand, *Numb.* 14:17. *Let the power of my Lord be great, the mercy of the Lord is great:* The great power of God is shewed in making good this word of the forgiving the iniquities of his people; so that when a soul takes hold of God's strength, he looks at it as a matter of God's great power, that he should ever shew mercy to such an one as he was, that ever he should forgive such sins, and subdue such iniquities, this is to lay hold on God's

strength: Let men come and see and know that God must put forth mighty power and strength, if ever he shew mercy to such wretches as we are: As long as a man looks at sin as a small matter, and makes account God hath pardoned as great sins as his, and if he defer his Repentance, the Lord have mercy will serve his turn, this is not to lay hold on God's strength, and so long a man makes himself incapable of such a mercy, but when a man sees and knows he stands in need of the great power of God in forgiving and pardoning him, that God shall never forgive such sins as his, unless *the multitude of his mercies he put away his iniquities*, as long as a man thinks that a small matter will

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serve the turn, it's a sign he sees not his sin to be out of measure sinful; but when a man sees he stands in need of the treasures of grace, treasures of patience, powerful and great mercy to pardon such great and crying sins as his is, then he takes hold of God's strength.

Fourthly, Let a man lay hold on God's strength not only by Faith, but lay hold of him in prayer and in God's promises and in all the word of God, and in his attributes and press God with the greatness of his power, and of his promise, and the riches of his grace in pardoning such sins as his, and then, saith God in such a case, *let me alone*, as if *Moses* had laid hands on the power, *Exod.* 32. When the soul holds out with constant longings after God, and will not let him go till it find some hope of pardon then it doth lay hold on God's strength.

It may serve to exhort and stir up every soul that knows his heart and life is unprofitable and never brought forth any sweet or savoury fruits to God to this day, to see now what God calls it too: as ever we desire to be free from everlast-

ing burnings (as who is there that can dwell in everlasting burnings, *Esa.* 33. last) as ever you desire your souls might find peace with God, and to enjoy the benefit of the gracious offer, which God now tenders to you; so now lay hold of God's strength, lay down your quarrels against the ordinances, and all the sinful lusts that you have addicted your selves to; as Pride and Hypocrisy, and whatever we have displeased God

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with, forsake your imaginations, even your secretest thoughts, and put no confidence in whatever courses you will take, and put hoc of God, till you come to this or that age, or to this sickness, or till you be married, and have provided your children such and such portions; and presume of your own strength and wisdom, this will deceive you; but if you can bring your hearts to this, that if ever God do shew mercy to you, it must not be a crumb, but a bottomless depth of mercy, multitudes of great mercies, *Psal.* 51. Let it appear that it is power of mercy and rich grace to you that ever you may have your sins pardoned, take hold of it, and look at it as a strong mercy that you must have and lay hold by a strong hand of Faith, and by strong prayers and cries, and sighs and groans, and a constant pursuit after him in every ordinance of his; seek God earnestly and constantly, *And so shall you find him speaking peace* and pardon to you, according to this promise here in the Text.

*FINIS.*

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**THE  
WICKEDS  
CRAFT TO IN-  
SNARE GOD'S  
People described.**

MATTH. 16:1, 2, 3,

*The Pharisees with the Sadducees came and tempting him, desired him that he would shew them a sign from Heaven, &c.*

**A**fter these Parabolical speeches which are set down in in the fore-going Chapter of the *Syrophaenician* woman, the next Parable which follows, whereby our Saviour sets forth by similitude his Doctrine to the people is this. The *Pharisees* and *Sadducees* come to tempt him, and desire a sign

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and a sign from Heaven; our Saviour answers them according to their question, here proves both them, and their Question, and shews the ground of it.

It may seem by the dependence of his Chapter upon the former, that the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees* came to our Saviour to demand a *sign from Heaven*, before he had fed the people in the end of the former Chapter, where he fed four thousands of them with seven loaves and a few fishes, a miracle that filled the mouths of them all with much rumour round about the country, and the *Scribes and Pharisees* were not a little exercised therewith, they thereupon to dazzle the glory of

this great work of God, come to him, desiring him not to put them off with such earthly signs as he had now done, in multiplying earthly loaves but to *shew them a sign from Heaven*, that they might see and believe; I guess this to be the occasion of the discourse, not only, because this miracle was described immediately before: but because upon occasion of the like miracle, they came to him in like sort, and demanded the like sign, *John* 10:6. to 13. & 30, 31.

Now in the words read we have to observe two parts.

1. First, The demand of a sign, *a sign from Heaven*.

2. Secondly, Our Saviours rejection of this demand.

1. In the demand of a sign, observe the efficient or causers of it, *Pharisees and Sadduces*.

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2. The end for which they did desire it, and that was to tempt him.

Now in our Saviour's rejection of this demand you have two things considerable.

First, The reproof he gives them, and their persons: *O you hypocrites*.

Secondly, Observe the ground of his reproof of them and that is a conviction of their readiness to believe more uncertain things upon less credible ground, then they would believe him to be the *Messiah* sent from God, upon most certain and evident grounds, and this he shews them by instancing in natural things. *If the evening be red and bright, ye say tomorrow will be fair weather, and it many times so falls out; can ye discern the face of the sky, by such as probabilities as these be, and can ye not discern the estate of the estate of the times from all the Prophecies from Heaven, and all that assistance that you see in these works.*

A note or two from the words, and first as they may be taken from those that demand these signs, *the Pharisees and Sadducees.*

*Doctrine 1. Wicked men though enemies one to another, of never so contrary minds, yea and contrary religions, yet can tell how to combine and agree together to oppose the truth and to undermine it.*

These *Pharisees* and *Sadducees.* They were men of contrary minds, of contrary Judgements and Religions and Professions, and could not suit by any means in ordinary course one with another, for so we read of this difference between them.

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First, The *Pharisees* they did not only receive the Law, but did add to it sundry traditions of their own, as *Josephus* reports. These *Sadduces* thought it arrogancy in the *Pharisees* to put upon the Church, traditions of their own, which they renounced, and they did not only renounce their traditions, but rested only in the five Books of *Moses*: Whence it is observable by the learned, when the *Sadduces* came and tempted Christ about the resurrection, (which they deny, *Matth.* 20:22, 23.) Christ to convince them of the point of resurrection, he fetches a testimony, not out of the Prophets, because he thought they would not submit to it, but out of the Books of *Moses*; *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*

A second difference the Apostle *Paul* makes mention of, *Acts* 23:8. *The Sadduces say, there is neither Resurrection, nor Angels, nor spirits, but the Pharisees confess both:* Both what? both the Resurrection of the bodies, and likewise the immortality of spirits; and not of men's spirits only, but of Angels: And yet notwithstanding we must not look at these *Sadduces* as Epicures, though it be the next way to bring in Epicurism;

for if there be no spirits nor immortality, then they may commit any wickedness; but though they did deny the Resurrection of the body, and the immortality of the soul, yet they did not deny the providence of God as Epicures do.

Another difference is also noted that the *Pharisees* were more gracious with the people, found

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greater applause, and greater respect, as being accounted more holy men, *Gal. 1.* the strict sect of the Religion of the *Pharisees*: but the *Sadduces* though less gracious with the people, yet prevailed more in the Court among great men; for great men love not strictness, but rather to take more liberty, and therefore it is that we shall sometimes find, the leaven of the *Sadduces* and of *Herod*, or of the *Herodians* put together, *Mat. 16:6. Mark 8:17.* They had a conceit there was neither reward nor punishment in another world. Thus they were of such contrary Religions, that they could not stand one with another; but if it come to under-mine the truth and to tempt our Saviour then they both agree together. The same you shall read practised in *Matth. 22:16, 16. The Pharisees and the Herodians came to tempt him, saying, Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not?* These *Herodians* did press upon the Jewish Common-wealth *Cæsar's* government, and the *Pharisees*, thought it not meet to submit to a foreign jurisdiction, they did not favour it: yet though these *Herodians* were every way contrary to the *Pharisees*, they agreed both upon this point, *to tempt him*; so *Luke 23:7.* to 12. *Herod* and *Pilate* had been at enmity a great while; and when *Pilate* saw he belonged to *Herod's* jurisdiction, he sent him to him, and the same day *Pilate* and *Herod* were made friends; when it comes to the matter of crucifying Christ,

then *Herod* and the Jews and the *Roman* soldiers can conspire together to put disgrace upon Christ

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You have something suitable to both these Rev. 16:13, 14. *There were three unclean spirits like frogs came out of the mouth of the Dragon, and the beast and the false Prophet, they are the spirits of Devils, which go forth to the Kings of the earth to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty.* The *Dragon* is the *Turk*, and the *Beast* and *false Prophet* is the *Pope* and his crew: Now though these be of such contrary Religions, that you would not think it possible that they should join their forces together; yet so the matter will come to pass that the factors of the one shall consult with the other and both of them join with all the Princes of the World, at least the great Lords of the World, and draw them altogether to the battle of the great day of the Lords, when with one consent they shall fight against, nor only the Jews that shall rise against the *Dragon of Constantinople*; but against those Christians that shall arise against the *Beast of Rome*, and so shall join their strength to rise up against the Lord Jesus Christ: so that this is no new matter in the world.

*Reason 1.* Taken from the strong and greatest opposition that is found between all truth and false-hood then that which is found between any false-hood in the world, there is a far stronger opposition between light and darkness, then can be found between one darkness and another: There is some blush of blackness in all darkness; now there is no such disproportion between the grounds, and ends and

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rules of the *Pope* and *Turk*, as between them both; and our Christian Religion, if once it appear, as now for some years it hath done,

that the grounds of Popish Religion and the end they aim at is worldly and carnal, at their own wealth and usurpation; and if for that end they make use of the word of God, and can make use of their traditions to be of equal value with the Scriptures: Grant them that, and will be no hard matter to conceive, that when Christians shall startle that Beast, and the Jews fall upon the Turk, that when the Pope sees he cannot maintain Head against Christian Princes, nor the Turk against the Jews; they will conceive yet, the Bishop of *Rome* may maintain his own strength and authority, and rule over such Princes, by his Canons and Decrees, and so will join together against the Gospel of Christ, and all that profess the truth of his Name.

*Reason 2.* It is taken from the wisdom of Satan, who though he can tell how to make his own advantage out of the enemies of contrary factions and errors, one against another, yet when they both come to be opposed with the truth of the Gospel; it will not stand with the wisdom to maintain any longer such factions in opposition one to another, being opposed to Christian Religion: It is true, as long as factions and errors are flashing one against another, Satan knows how to advantage himself by their contestations and tumults and wars one with ano-

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ther, to multiply conflation and disorder, and diffusion of Christian blood; in this respect the wicked spirit of darkness fats himself in his course, and fills the gates of hell and of death: but now in case the Christian truth come to oppose such kind of errors as are at difference one with another, it will not now stand with Satan's wisdom to suffer further continuance of dissensions among those of the other side; but he will then bend

the wits of all the subtle creatures he hath to take pains with the cheese on both sides, to lay down their weapons one against another, and to sheath their swords in the sides of a common adversary. No wonder to see sometime *France* or *Spain* at sharp wars: Let them fight, for it hinders not his kingdom, that his own Subjects should fall out one with another, so it be any thing whereby God is most dishonoured: but if that Christian Protestants, resist and oppose the Catholic religion, and seek to root it out; in such a case you shall not need to expect a strong opposition of him, and all his instruments; and all the three Nations plotting together, and join heart and hand, that with one consent they might fight against the Protestant Princes; and this our Saviour touches upon, *Every Kingdom divided against it self cannot stand*, *Mat. 12:25, 26.* and his reason is right; for though sometime one spirit will cast out another; and a good witch (as they call them) will heal what a bad witch doth, or one spirit is too hard for another; yet the truth is our Savi-

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ours reason stands firm, where there is so much pride, there cannot but be much contention, but if Christ come and oppose these spirits, and if he will call out Devils, Satan cannot hinder him: If Christ should cast out Devils in the name of *Belzebub*, that's no hinderance to Satan's kingdom, but if Christ cast out Devils in his own name, then its time for Satan to stir, and therefore now *his kingdom cannot stand*: and so you see the truth of the Point.

*Object.* If this be true that men of contrary Judgements, can tell how to sawder themselves together against the truth; how then came it to pass that *Paul* fell upon such a

stragem as he did in *Act. 23. 6. to 10.* perceiving one part was *Sadduces*, and the other part *Pharisees*, the very same persons in the Text; he thought that by this breach between them in their judgements, he should creep out of the snare, and therefore in heavenly wisdom, he takes the advantage of it, *I am a Pharisee*, (saith he) *and the son of a Pharisee*, and when the Scribes, that were of the *Pharisees* part heard him say so, they begin to contend for Paul against the *Sadduces*, and come out with a divine speech, *we find no fault in this man*; if an Angel or a spirit, that was wont to speak in any of the Prophets have said any thing to this man; let us not fight against him, and then Paul was safe enough; now if a Christian

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man may make such an advantage by that means to escape the enmity of them both how came it to pass, that both these sects *did* not consent with one consent against Paul?

*Answ.* Paul had put the case unto them in such terms, as that he comes not upon them with any Christian truth, he conceals his opinion of any Christian truth at that time, which was opposite to them both, but only names that which was only peculiar to one of these sects; Paul doth not say, he was accused for that he was a Christian, for such a word would have combined them all together against him; but he professes he was of one of these sects bred, and therefore they might imagine he was wholly on their side, and they knew he was a *Pharisee*, and imagined there was no great difference between him now, and what he was before, and so they shelter him, and the *Sadduces* of the two were the fiercer opposers of Religion: they were

sometimes full of indignation, *Act. 5:17. They raged against Peter and John*, now therefore *Paul* took the best course, he would escape their hands that were the most cruel, though the other were sought, yet of the two they were the better.

But you say, doth this become a sincere hearted Christian to say, he is of the profession of the *Pharisees*, which is such as unless man believe and practice better, he shall never come to Heaven, *Matth. 5:26.* when he

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knows they are men that our Saviour had condemned for Hypocrites, and went up and down to make proselytes to themselves: would he now profess himself to be an Hypocrite, a traditioner, to be a man that *under pretence of long prayers, devour widows houses*, would he profess himself to be of that sect that was ever ready to carp at our Saviour, would he rank himself among them?

I confess, it is that which troubles Interpreters, how to excuse *Paul* in this case, to profess himself to be a *Pharisee* in the open Congregation, a great multitude, and before them all, to profess himself a *Pharisee*: When as all the world knew, where ever he came, he beat down the whole sect of the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees*, and all their Doctrines and practises.

*Answ.* Had he spoken in such an audience where he might have encouraged any man weak in judgement, the rather to have cleaved to the sect of the *Pharisees*, that they and their children might become *Pharisees* by his example, it could not then be excused; but *Paul* knew where he was; the people that was there, was either such good Christians as well knew his spirit, or such as were desperate enemies against Christ and his

grace, the true Christians would take no offence, but would understand his meaning, and for his enemies, he knew he should dash them one against another, and that by that means he should escape, and therefore he only instances in such

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parts of *Pharisees*, as in which they did profess the truth; for the resurrection of the dead, and that there is Angels and spirits, and it is true he was a *Pharisee* and brought up a *Pharisee*, and thus far he kept the pharisaical principles; so that this doth not hinder, but that in ordinary course two contrary factions, may combine against the truth, yet a Christian may sometimes so strike in with one, that he may seem not to be an enemy to both; yea sometimes by an overruling providence of God it so falls out, that a Christian may cast such bonds, between two contrary Religions, that the Church may fare the better for it, but yet this will not long hold, for in time they will sawder together again; *Paul*, though he now scapes by this devise, if he should have come before them, it would not have served his turn, he was a *Pharisee* in one point or two, and they thought he had been so in all; part of the truth, and part he conceals, and that was his wisdom.

*Use 1.* To teach all the Professors of the truth of Christ Jesus, neither to trust common enemies, though reconciled, nor to distrust one another to combine in any emulation or enmity one against another, not to truat common adversaries, let them make a league, never so firm as you conceive with us; though they may have just reason to join with a Protestant King, and though they now pretend their grounds and rules and ends are the same; yet they will soon break all bonds and leagues of peace with Christians and sawder

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themselves together again, and therefore trust not such, and if those that are of contrary Religions, can take a course thus to combine together, to undermine a common enemy, shall not the Church of God so much the more, cleave together with one heart and voice, with one moulder, and with all their strength as one man to resist all the enemies of the truth of God, shall God's own servants be so ready to hang of one from another, mouldering out one another and supplanting one another; shall *Pharisees* and *Sadduces* combine together, and shall not the Professors of Christ join together as one man, and by one rule and to one end.

*Use 2.* It may be an use unto all men; Christian men and all men of understanding, not to be led away with the pretences of unity and peace, unless you see and know that you join together always in a common good cause; for even God's own servants sometimes join together under pretence of unity and peace, which is not a sufficient reason; for there may be unity and peace even against Christ, and against his truth, and against a common cause of God; and therefore consider upon what terms you go, what ends you aim at, this is needeful in all mutual confederation and association in any business whatsoever; and take heed of Satan's cunning in stirring up any contentions and strife among the people of God, but keep you your selves in a bond of union for the truth of Christ, least a common adversary come upon you and undermine the truth of God by your means.

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**Mt. 16. three first verses;**

*The Pharisees also with the Sadduces came unto him, &c.*

**C**ome we now to the second Point, the end of this Question and Demand; the *efficients* we heard, the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees*, *They came to him and tempted him*; tempting him to what end? Do you think they desire a sign that they may believe, he had immediately before in the latter end of the former Chapter, fed four thousand men with seven loaves and a few fishes: An evident sign that he that did work this miracle was sent from Heaven, they therefore did not demand a sign that they might believe, but in truth that they might not believe; and now, if he should answer them according to their desire, they would have found a cavil against it; and if not, they will set down and not believe, because he will not give them a *sign from Heaven*.

*Doctrine 2. To demand a sign not to confirm our faith, but to harden our selves in our unbelief is to tempt the Lord.*

They desire a sign that indeed they might be excused from believing: he therefore fitly calls

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them *vers. 4. An evil and an adulterous generation, seeks a sign*; they answer that which an adulterous woman will do, when her husband sends a servant to her or a letter to dispose thus and thus of such a business, and she though she know his hand full well, yet notwithstanding she will ask of the servant a token, whether he comes indeed from his master or no, which token she asks not for, as a confirmation of the thing to her, but that she might be excused from doing that which she should do; just such is this adulterous generation; as if he should say, they do know *that Jesus is a teacher sent from God*, and they know that what he speaks is the word of God, and his message is the truth of

God; and that it is his hand and seal, sealed it with the work of his Spirit, and with the power of his miracles, and yet now they ask a sign, is it that they might believe? No, but to cavil with the messenger, and that they might not believe.

But because this point is very seldom spoken too, this tempting of God, and yet a point of no small consequence in daily practice: let me therefore make it something more plain, the better to fit it for application.

First, Therefore to shew you what it is to tempt God; and then why this kind of asking a sign in this sort is such a tempting of God.

1. For the first, there is a two-fold tempting of God; one may tempt God as they in the Text, unlawfully, and manifest themselves to be gross

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Hypocrites in so doing, they never meant to believe.

2. Secondly, There is on the other side, somewhat a lawful tempting of God. To open them both.

First, For an unlawful and hypocritical tempting of God, such as provokes the indignation and wrath of God.

Tempting of God is nothing else but a trying what God can or will do for the fulfilling of our own lusts. To try what is in God for that end, to put God to it, to shew forth his divine hand for the fulfilling of our lusts, to set him a work to stretch forth his divine hand for the fulfilling our own desires.

Now for clearing it from the word. To answer you this Question, which may stumble some.

First, How can such a man as I put God to it, to shew forth his divine hand, and to set him a

work; what can I do to put him upon it, so as he should think himself tempted by it.

Secondly, How should I do it to fulfill my lusts, an instance of this you have in so many words, *Psal. 78:18. They tempted God in their heart, by asking meat for their lusts; in asking meat they put God to it: Can God prepare a table, or give water in the wilderness, and when he smote the stony rock, and gave them water, and gave them bread, yet can he give us flesh:* Thus they put him to it; do they ask this to strengthen their faith? No, but to satisfy their lusts, they grew weary of *Manna*. But

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But how can I be said thus to tempt God, or to put him to it, to force him or to provoke him to stretch out his mighty hand, be it his power or any other attribute for the fullfilling of my lusts?

*Answ.* There are three things in the ways of the sons of men, by which God is much stirred up to shew forth himself, and we may tempt God by making use of any of them to fulfill our lusts.

First, God is strongly provoked to work if we pray him, thus and thus to put forth his hand to such or such a work for our sakes, and he takes it to be a stirring up himself this way: So in the Text, *They came to him,* and desired him to do it, *Job. 6:30. Shew us a sign from Heaven,* there was a desire of such a thing: and God is very sensible of prayer: men do not think there is such force in prayer, as there is, an Hypocrite cannot put God to it in prayer, but he finds himself provoked, not only out of his compassion to his people, but out of his common goodness to the creature, *Psal. 65:2. The young Ravens cry not but God hears them,* and *Genes. 21. if young Ishmael*

cry God hears him; yea and God hears the roaring of the young Lions; God is sensible of any want, of which the creature desires a supply from his hand, if it be but the prayer of *Saduces*, he thinks himself engaged by it, and though they do but tempt him, yet it provokes him; though he shew his just displea-

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sure against their so asking; this sets God a work and his divine hand a work, his whole goodness is set a work. But yet there is something else sets God a work besides prayer.

Therefore secondly, Faith exceedingly sets God a work, it is an operative grace, whenever it is fastened upon any thing in God, though it be a misguided Faith; if Faith be stirring, or if it will not stir, unless thus and thus answered: God is strongly provoked to do something upon any work of Faith.

Sometimes Faith will force a man to trust upon God for extraordinary blessings, without using ordinary means, when they may be used: this is a delusory Faith, when God offers means, if men thrust themselves upon God in that sort: it provokes him exceedingly that a creature dares trust him in this kind, when he hath not promised to work: So when the Devil tempted our Saviour, *It cast himself down head-long*, when he might come down another way, *Matth*, 4:7. he answers him, *thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*: Though a creature trusts upon God besides and against his promise, it sets him a work, and were the thing according to his will, it would set him mightily a work, but however it provokes him much, sometimes a man urges God with a false Faith; such a Faith as in which they will not trust God not in ordinary ways and

means, unless God will shew his extraordinary power, and that is a soul abuse of faith; men

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will not, nor dare further trust him, not in an ordinary way and means, in the use of their ordinary callings, unless some expression of God's extraordinary presence: So in *Exod. 17:2, 7. Is the Lord amongst us or no*, they doubted whether, the God was amongst them or no, because they wanted something, they would have had some water by miracle, and because it is not easily ready, the rocks not pour out water, nor the Earth cleave asunder, and boil up water from the great deeps; therefore is God with us? though they had plentiful experience God was with them, for he had by a pillar of fire, led them that way; yet unless they have another extraordinary sign, they will not trust him in ordinary course; so our Saviour told the ruler, *John 4:41. Unless ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe*, this is not to trust God in an ordinary way of his providence, but unless God confirm it extraordinarily, we will not believe, and so God is exceedingly put to it; so that God takes himself to be tempted when men will not trust him in an ordinary way.

Thirdly, Another grace in man that doth set God exceedingly a work, and if misguided provokes and tempts him much, and that is obedience; for God hath promised (*Esay 1:19, 21*) much to obedience, and curses disobedience, *Deu. 28.* and *Levit. 26.* So that if we obey God's will, it provokes him to perform his promise; but now we may provoke him preposterously and tempt him when as we dare not obey God's

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Commandements, if we should obey his Commandments, we fear it should go ill with us, when in a way of obedience we fear hard

measure from God, and wrath from him; this tempts him, and when in a way of disobedience, we expect a reward and a blessing from him, a good issue, this tempts God much, *Num.* 14:3. God calls them to the promised Land, and he sent spies to see the fruits of it: Now when the people heard such an ill report of the Land by ten of the spies, they fell a weeping and a murmuring, *we and our children shall be made a prey*; so that they durst not go on to fight, but back again to *Ægypt* they would go, no going an end with safety, back again is best; but in a way of obedience, they fear evil from the hand of God: See how God is troubled at it; they have tempted me now these ten times, whereupon he tells them; *Surely this people shall not see that good Land*; because they looked for mischief in a good way, they should find evil in a way of disobedience to his will; and so he takes that for a temptation; then the people discerning their error, *verse* 40, 41. They tell him they will go now and fight against the *Canaanites*; then saith *Moses*, *why do you thus again tempt the Lord*; But now when they look for the presence of the Lord, he will not be with them: So that you see if the creature shall put God to it, by Prayer or Faith, or Obedience, this stirs up God in this kind, and it is a tempting of the Lord.

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Now men may desire it when it is for the satisfying of their lusts.

When therefore we either pray, or trust, or obey, or disobey God, for any thing thereby to fulfill our lusts, this is to tempt God: So it is said of *Annias* and *Saphira*, *why agree you together to tempt the Spirit of God*; they intend to put God's patience to it; to see whether God would bear with them in that dissimulation or

no, and to see whether God was so present with the Apostles or no, to see if *Peter* could discern their dissimulation, and they did it for their own covetousness sake. Now when they will try the patience of God, and the power of the Spirit of God, for their present covetousness sake, this is to tempt God; they make use of God's patience to mew himself in this kind, to see whether his patience would bear it or no. So you read in that former place of *Numbers*, when they desire flesh and water, they desired them to satisfy their lusts, and put God to it, to express his mighty power for that end, and this is called a tempting of God: *You ask and receive not, because you ask to spead it upon your lusts, I am.* 4:3.

But yet further, this will be better understood, if I shall shew you how far we may lawfully tempt God with acceptance from him.

Lawfully; may we tempt the Lord, sometimes in our Prayers, sometimes in our Faith, and

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sometimes in our obedience in all these being rightly ordered.

Sometimes in our very prayers we may ask a sign and yet not be said to tempt God; I mean, not in an ill sense, but it is only to let God a work to give us a sign.

First, If God offer us a sign, then God takes it ill if we do not ask it, as was the case of *Ahaz*, *Esay* 7:10. to 14. But because God in these days doth not ordinarily offer signs, therefore,

Secondly, We may pray for a sign when the necessity of our callings require it, extraordinary callings require extraordinary signs, and ordinary callings require ordinary signs, in these dayes, 1<sup>^</sup>.4.29, 50.

shew forth signs and wonders for the confirmation of thy truth, *zKings* 8:13, 14. *Whereisth^ Lord Godof Elijah*, he would see the Almighty Power of God that rested upon *Elijah*: And as for extraordinary; so a man may desire an ordinary sign to confirm his ordinary calling. Notable is that, Speech of *David*, many discouragements he had, he was called to a kinedom, but every maaopposed himj his calling wasan ordinary calling to succeed his Master in a place which he was well fitted for, but wanted afisneto^onfinrteitto him, *Psalm* 86:7 *shew a token unto thy servant for good, that they who hate me may be ashamed what they see it*: How should *David* be confirmed in this? He knew he had a calling, but every man thought it o-therwise, and therefore now shew a token unto

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thy servant for good: What an extraordinary one? No no, but such an one at might confirm to him his calling that he had in hand, and foe, *Psalm* 41:11. *By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemies do not triumph over me*. If God preserve him from his enemies that's a token to him for good; let God protect him and assist him, and guide him and enlarge him with gifts for his place, and that is a token to him for good; and this is a lawful demand of a token: Just as *Samuel* gave to *Saul* might have prayed for, he was a man fearful of that calling, *ver.* 22. he said, *The work was too mighty for him*: But if God give another spirit, he shall thereby know his calling to it.

And there is another sign; for there are two sorts of signs for ones ordinary calling, one more inward, the other more outward, in some outward providence that bears witness to that calling *ver.* 4. that shall be one sign to him: a stranger shall meet thee, and give thee two loaves

of bread, which thou shalt receive at his hand, a sign of encouragement, the sons of *Belial* discouraged him, but those whose hearts God had touched followed *Saul*, *v.* 26.

Now in such as case as this a man may ask an ordinary sign for the confirmation of an ordinary calling.

Thirdly, A man may ask a sign to confirm him in his calling, when his faith will not up-

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hold him; *Gideon* was doubtful, but desires to have his faith helped by a sign, *Judg.* 6:36. to 40. and God answers him according to the desire of his heart; and when God shall cast us into such occasions that we shall see need of a sign, in regard of the weakness of our faith, and the necessity of our calling, or else because God offers a sign, then if Faith be discouraged; it is not to tempt God to desire a sign, but to ferve his providence, and to use his ordinances, and to see him a work for the strengthening of us in our callings.

And as we may set God a work in asking a sign, so in Prayer also for the fulfilling of all our just desires, and especially to fulfill his own will in us, to assist us in our work and there is no prayer you so make, but you put God mightily to it, if you pray for a blessing according to his will; he is provoked to shew himself, and to manifest all that goodness that is in him for you.

2. But secondly, we tempt God acceptably, if our faith work in our prayers, *Dan.* 6:26. *Daniel* was delivered, because he believed on his God; as if the question lay between God and the lions, whether of them should have most force; he believed God, notwithstanding the king's courtiers displeasure, God sent his Angels to stop the Lions mouths, and so manifested himself to be stronger then the Lions.

3. Thirdly, In a way of obedience God loves to be tempted, and calls not men hypocrites for so doing, *Mal.* 3:10. if they paid *tithes* duly they

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thought they should not have enough for themselves and theirs; but faith God, pay them, and then prove me upon that point, and see if I will not pour upon you a blessing till there be no room to receive it; which shews that obedience is the only way to prosper: obey you, what I command, and sanctify my name in my ordinances, and then see what I will do; in this case a man may lawfully prove what God will do; but this is not to fulfil our lusts, but to perform the duties of our callings, to be made instruments of God's service in our places; especially if my faith doubt, whether I shall be enlarged or no, now prove God if he will not show himself for us.

*Reason* of the Point. It is a tempting of God, because this is a satisfying of their own lusts, and not asked for the fulfilling of any will of God in the duties of our callings, but to harden our selves in our unbelief: If God refuse to give them their desire, they might well refuse to believe, and if he did give it them, then they would have matter to cavil at; God's will is to give no sign, but to beget or increase Faith; that was the first institution of signs, *Exod.* 4:8. Strange tongues are to make men believe more strongly, *1 Cor.* 14:22. to satisfy lusts is incredulity, *2 King.* 20:8. to 11. *Ananias* he to satisfy his covetousness; and *Herod* to satisfy his curiosity, *Luk.* 23:8. to harden their hearts in unbelief, to strengthen them in their sins; this is an evil tempting of God.

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*Use* 1. First. It serves to reprove the Popish demands of signs from our Divines, they mightily press

upon us for signs and miracles, they would have us to confirm our Doctrine and Faith by miracles: Now I would know but thus much of them; whether if we should shew them signs, would they believe, or do they not ask a sign to excuse themselves from believing, and that is to satisfy their lusts, and all such demands, are but so many temptings of God: It was verified in our Saviours hearers: Though he had done so many miracles among them, *yet they believed not on him, Joh. 12:37.* nor did they mean to believe on him: No though one should have come from the dead; though we could raise up men from the dead to tell them the truth of the Religion we profess, they would not believe it. It is said of many of the Jews, they believed *John* though he wrote no miracle, *John 10:41, 42.* and why cannot they believe us, though we work none, and the same exception they make against us, was made against *John* by the *Scribes*: If we speak of our ordinary calling, they make us where is our succession from the Primitive times; if extraordinary; then where are your miracles; so they questioned *John*; if his calling was ordinary, where was his commission; if extraordinary, where were his miracles: Why, he healed many a blind soul, and raised up many a soul from death to life, and fed many an hungry poor soul, and were not all these great miracles; and so if God help Protestant Ministers to go

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forth in the power of Christ to heal sick souls, and to give light and life to dead spirits, and to give them strength and power to walk in the ways of God's Commandments. Is not here bundles of miracles sometimes compact together in one poor Protestant Minister.

*Use 2.* This will serve to shew you a difference between a cavilling Hypocrite, and an humble

Christian: A cavilling Hypocrite always wants means to believe and obey: These here in the Text had seen even now five thousand fed with a few loaves and a few fishes, and why did they not then believe, why they wanted a sign from Heaven; they pretend that before, but they believed not; because they want a sign, want means to believe, and therefore he calls them hypocrites, it is a true spirit of an hypocrite, he believes not nor obeys, because he conceives some reason to the contrary, but an humble Christian is of a quite contrary frame of spirit; he ever sees he hath means, cause enough, ground enough to believe and obey, he hath just reason to do all that God calls for: But oh! The hardness of the heart of an hypocrite: If this be a sign of an hypocrite for a man to cavil at want of means to cause him to believe and obey, thee it is a good sign of sincerity to confess before God and our brethren that he hath great cause to believe all the truths of God; and all the counsel of God, but he hath an unbelieving heart, a straight spirit, and that grieves him to the heart; he blames not God but him-

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self for his unbelief; so shall you observe it, many men who are nor yet in an estate of grace, who yet live under means of grace, ask him why he doth not believe and obey: he will conceive and say, the fault is sometimes in God, and sometimes in the Minister, if the Minister would preach so or so, and sometimes if the Sermon were more plain, and sometimes if more learned, and sometimes a little shorter, he would believe and obey, something is ever wanting in the means, that God provides for us, and there is not enough in it to bring us to believe, but if thy heart were honest and sincere thou wouldst not find fault

with God, but thus an hypocrite puts God to shew forth some extraordinary change in making people such as he seldom makes any, thou wilt live no where but shalt find Christians many ways failing, but God must work miracles else you will not believe: If all Christians were so humble, and meek and faithful, and helpful one to another, and so rejoicing one in another, then you could believe; but if you go from *Barwicke* to *Dover*, and from one end of the earth to another, and if you *should* stay till you saw all Christians thus tempered, you should scarce ever believe, there may be cause enough in us Ministers to hinder you; but its doubtful, had you other Ministers the Word would find as little acceptance, and therefore, lay not the fault where it is not, I mean not so much fault, as to hin-

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do you from believing and obeying, but let the fault be where it will, there is no fault in God; let us all say, this means that we have is sufficient, because it serves other men to turn to God by; and why not you, other men can be willing to believe and obey, and though there be many failings in Ministers and Christians, yet they can see cause why they should believe and obey, and therefore let not the fault lie upon God, but learn with fear and trembling to submit to the will and truth of God in whatever he calls for.

*Use 3.* Let it be an use of dissuasion to us from tempting of God, and of exhortation, to persuade us to lay down all tempting of him in any sinful and hypocritical way; lay aside these Sadducean and Pharisaical deceits, meddle not with them, you see how much it provokes God, he was wrath, because they had tempted him, *Psal. 78:18, 22. and he swore they should*

*never enter into his rest, Psal. 95:9, 11.* and therefore take heed how you tempt God, you say you do not; let me say to you, if any of you shall walk in a way of disobedience, and in a carnal estate, and bless your selves therein, and still defer thy repentance to thy last end, thou now puts God to it, to shew forth an extraordinary patience day after day, and year after year, how long must God stay, must he still reach forth patience, such as no man would extend towards any, take heed it be not to your own confusion in the end: *Annianias and Sa-*

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*phira* tried God's patience till they were both suddenly struck dead: So there are many that live idly, and take no course to provide for themselves or theirs, but think God and friends will maintain them; such trust God beyond ordinary means, and tempt him to shew forth an extraordinary power. And other men there are that make account they are grown ripe, and therefore will not pray nor hear; but when the Spirit moves them, and will not always attend upon the Word; it's for them to attend the Spirit and not to depend upon the letter, and so despise the means, it is a wretched tempting of God, to think God should reach out his Spirit to build up men in good ways, and yet men use no means to that end, in hearing or prayer or conference; and if we stand delaying and deferring with God till his Spirit be so provoked, that he will never offer grace more; it will be woe to us.

*Use 4.* It serves to teach (notwithstanding) God's own people; since there is a kind of tempting of God, which is holy and acceptable, wisely to ponder the difference of tempting of God, that we may make use of him when we are called to it; and therefore it is to teach us in some cases, with mo-

desty and reverence and humility to be so hold as to ask a sign, and yet not to fear we shall be rejected as Hypocrites for so doing: If God call us to an ordinary calling, which himself hath appointed us, and we find our hearts fearful of the issue of it; in such a case you may faithfully

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depend on God, you may pray for signs upon that, as *Elisha* in his extraordinary calling, desires his Master's spirit: So many a Minister, God hath furnished him with gifts, and the people call him out, but he it maybe through modesty is timorous and fearful to go on in the work, why now say, Lord here is *Elijah's* profession, a Minister's calling; but where is the Lord God of *Elijah*, that should now furnish me with a spirit of wisdom and knowledge and zeal, to fit me for this business; so a Magistrate, if God put the mantle of a Magistrate upon any of you; if you come with fear and trembling and distrust your own sufficiency, and ask for the Lord God of that calling, you may expect that God will give you another heart, you may say, *Shew some token for good unto thy servant*, that I may be kept and preserved in my calling, and enlarged and walk in obedience therein; we shall not now tempt him sinfully; but in such a case God takes himself wrought upon, and then he will shew forth his divine hand, In all things we have occasion to use him in; sometimes men fear the loss of wealth and honour and credit; if they should walk in away of close obedience with God, and so it hinders them from many a good work: but hearken to God's Word; do but prove God, and see if he will not open the windows of Heaven to you in such a case: do but prove God; if you find your hearts too weak, entreat God to strengthen you, and wait upon him for the accomplishment of such promises as wherein he

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hath promised help and assistance, and he would then take it for a dishonour to his name if he should not answer you above all that you can ask or think for.

If God take it well when we thus tempt him and ill, if we tempt him in any preposterous manner; let this then teach us to take in good part if God should tempt us. God is willing to be see a work at our tempting of him in a good manner. Why should not we do the same, if it please God to tempt and try us, *Gen.* 22:1, 2. God tempted *Abraham*, and so God tempts his people, and leaves the *Canaanites* to tempt and to prove them, *Deut.* 3:3. *Jer.* 5:4.

There is a double temptation God is wont to put upon all his servants.

First, Make account there is no grace God hath given you, be it never so eminent, but God will take some time to prove yen in it, and how you may employ it to the utmost good; God that gives talents will not have them put under a bushel, he will one time or other put you to express the utmost strength of your strongest grace, whether it be obedience, or faith, or patience, or meekness, or love, or zeal; sometimes, indeed through the pride of a man's heart, and sometimes by reason of the unthankful world, the best gifts in a man are smothered, and so they reap not the comfort of them. But otherwise, if God give *Joseph* in his father's house a spirit of wisdom and government, he will take a time to call him to *Pharaoh's* Court, *Psa.* 105:14. *Junias* takes

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it for the word of eternal life, till the word was fulfilled the Lord Jesus Christ tried *Joseph* with many exercises; but *Joseph* had many excellent gifts, and had he always lived in his Father's house, he had been obscured: So

it God give you gifts, he will put you to trial; it is a sign God accepts his people, if he take pleasure to try their gifts.

Sometimes again, as God will try them in their best gifts, and honour himself by them; so God sometimes tries the best of his people's graces, that they may see their own weaknesses, wherein they are most strong; God will have a time to glorify himself, in shewing them their weakness, in their best condition. If God's people fail, it is in their best gifts, especially if tried by small occasions; if we be tried in great occasions, God will in an especial manner assist us; but in a small trial, in our greatest gifts, commonly we fail most; *Abraham* a man of an admirable Faith, if put to trial in sacrificing his son, he can loose his son and the promises of life, and Christ in them, then he can hazard the loss of them all: God then ment to try him in his great Faith, and he overcame; God tries him again in the same Faith, in a far less matter, in the King of *Ægypt's* court; though God had promised to keep him, where ever he came; yet there was he afraid: See how the faith of this Father of the faithful warps in a small temptation, in his great Faith he shews great weakness. *Moses* the mee-

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kest man on the Earth, yet impatience and want of meekness kept him out of *Canaan*: So *Peter*, most zealous for Christ; and yet if he meet with the temptation but of a silly Damsel, about the forwardness of his Profession, he then denies that ever he knew Christ, and so in his greatest gifts, he shews his greatest weakness. *Job*, whose patience was admirable, yet was chiefly wanting in patience upon trial: *Hezekiah* God left him to try him, in the business of the *Babylonian* Ambassadors, and there he

was lifted up, 2 *Chron.* 32:31. When our trials are great, then we gather up our loins to God, and think we have much cause to draw near to God, and to pray and to use all our faith and obedience, and then God mightily helps us; but in our bed gifts, if God put us upon weak trials and occasions, we commonly there fail. *David* a man after Gods own heart, after God's will, who followed God's will in his whole course, rested and relied on God's will; and yet even *David*, in a small trial, when a small temptation is set before him, he can lust after another man's wife, and so fails in that grace wherein he was most excellent. Now therefore look to it, since God honours himself by your trying of him: So if God put you to any trial, call you out to use all the gifts and graces you have: Be willing to serve God's Providence in such a case, and keep your hearts humble, that God may use you to his advantage, and take heed that you

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do not then warp most when you have least occasion, but wait daily upon Christ, that he may support you, that himself may receive honour by and from you: When it pleases him to call you to trial, and his truth and cause may gain advantage by you.

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**MATTH. 16:1, 2, 3.**

*And he said unto them, when it is evening, ye say it will be fair weather, for the sky is red.*

**W**E now come to speak of the third Point from these words, and the Doctrine is this.

*Doctrine 3. That to pretend more ignorance, or uncertainty in discerning the signs of the times, then the signs of the weather, is mere Hypocrisy.*

You Hypocrites you can discern the face of the sky; you can tell, at least have a near guess by the colour of the sky in the evening, what weather the next morning will be, and by the morning what weather the day will be, but can you not discern the signs of the times: a sign therefore that they are no better then Hypocrites, who are better acquainted and able to discern the signs of the weather then the signs of the times of their visitation.

Now give me leave, first to open you, what Christ means by *the signs of the times*.

2. What are those signs of the times, which declare men to be hypocrites for not discerning.

3. Why it is such a work of hypocrisy.

4. The uses of what is delivered.

For the first; for *the signs of the times*, that (in

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a word) is the evident mark or sign of the times and seasons, the day of their visitation by the Lord Jesus Christ, who now came to visit and redeem his people, according to *Simeon's* song; now is the time of their visitation by Christ, from whom they desired a sign from Heaven that they might know this was he. The same is mentioned, *Luk. 19:41. &c.* our Saviour wept over *Jerusalem*, and said, *Oh that then hadst known the day of thy visitation, but now they are hid from thine eyes:* because they did not know the time of their visitation, therefore their case was miserable, that was the time of their peace, the time wherein God offered them terms of reconciliation and atonement with God, that's the first time, the time of their peace.

Now what were those *signs of the times*, for want of discerning of which, and yet being able to discern the signs of the weather, our Saviour argues them of mere hypocrisy.

There are three or four signs of these times of their visitation, which had they not been willingly blind, they could not but have seen.

1. First, the time limited of their visitation was now accomplished; so as they could not but see it: The times fore-told of old by the Prophets, and that limited time being now come to a period; *Jacob* had told them upon his death-bed, *Genes. 49:10. The Scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a Law-giver from between his feet until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be;* that time was now expired, the *Scepter* was departed

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from *Judah*, and was in the dominion of *Herod* and the *Law-giver* was taken away, the *Roman Empire* made laws, and ruled as it pleased them. *Shiloh* therefore now must needs be come, for God fore-told, they should not want sovereign authority among themselves till he came.

Another time, but under the same head of signs of times fore-told and now come to the period is that you read of in *Dan. 9:24, 27. The seventy weeks were determined unto the city and people of God, to bring in everlasting righteousness;* these seventy weeks were now accomplished by their account, and according to the truth, and this was another sign of the time.

2. Secondly, Another sign of the times was certain Prophecies, of what should accompany the *Messiah*, his coming and what himself should do at his coming. It was fore-told that God would send *Elijah*, or one in the power and spirit of *Elijah* before him, and he should turn the hearts of the *Fathers to the children*, &c. *Mal. 4:5, 6.* and that he would send his *Messenger before him*, *Mal.*

3:1. and that was *John Baptist*, *Matth.* 11:10, 14. Now *John* was come already, and they did to him what themselves thought good. It was further prophesied, that in the days of the *Messiah*, *The feet of the lame should skip, and the mouth of the dumb should be opened and the ears of the deaf should hear, &c.* *Esay.* 35:5, 6. Why you read, *Matth.* 11:5. at the same time when they came to him, he had caused *the blind to see, and the deaf to hear, &c.* and so had accomplished what

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he had fore-prophecied should be done.

3. Thirdly, Another sign of their time of visitation by the *Messiah* was, in that it pleased God to assist Christ, as none of all the Prophets ever wrought before, *John* 15:24. Such miracles as never man wrought, a sign therefore, when they come to ask a sign from Heaven, and see such signs in him, as was never wrought before, at least not by any in their own name and strength; for them now to ask him a sign, was an argument of gross hypocrisy.

4. Fourthly, Another sign of the time of their visitation, which if they had not been willfully blind, and had had any discerning of the ways of God, they could not but have seen, and that was that all the children of wisdom justified our Saviour, and followed him, and depended upon his mouth, planted the strength and stay of their salvation, and redemption in him, *Matth.* 11:19. and that was a sign to them, *when judgement should be turned into righteousness, Psal.* 94:3, 5. the judicious and right ordering of men's ways, when that appears to be righteous; the upright shall see the wisdom of God in it; and the common-people themselves say, when they saw Christ raise the widows form from death to life; *Doubtless*, say they, *a great Prophet is come amongst us, and God hath visited his people:* these

were evident signs of the times of their visitation, all bare witness to the gracious words that came out of his mouth, and gave up themselves to be taught by him, these were all evident signs and

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plain to be discerned: *Nicodemus* said *We knew thou art a teacher sent from God, John 3:2.* for no man could do these things except God were with him, and it was not only evident, but certain and sure, for *2 Pet. 1:9.* they had a *sure word of prophecy* for it, and they saw certain and sure accomplishments of what was fore-prophe-sied. So that it was evident without all exception, and all of them such signs of such matters as nearly concerned them to have respect unto; but the signs of the weather is but conjectural, and many times fails, and when they do not fail, they are not such evident signs; but that a plain or wise man may be ignorant of them, and say, they were both certain and evident, yet do not so nearly concern us, as the knowledge of the signs of our visitation for our everlasting peace.

Now in the next place to shew you why this is such a sign of Hypocrisy, that men should be more weather wise, then wise to see the estate of their own souls, and should be better able to discern these obscure things and uncertain matters, then plain and most necessary things.

*Reason 1.* It is taken from the comparison of these two truths together; these truths of the signs of the weather, are but conjectural and obscure, and altogether less necessary for a man to be acquainted with: These truths concerning the times of our visitation, are certain and evident, and most profitable and necessary to be known: now for a man to be apt to be skilled in the wea-

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ther, in matters more unsafe and obscure, and to pretend more skill therein, then in matters that are more evident and ceitain, and more necessary, is plain hypocrisy.

For a little to speak to these things.

It is true, many times it falls out when these signs are given in the sky, that a red evening, a bright clear, is a sign of a fair day the next day; but the reason of this, is neither so evident to every eye, nor always so sure, nor so evident and certain, but it may fail.

The best reason given, that I meet with in this case is this, the brightness of the clouds in the evening is a sign, they say, of the rariety or thins of the air, in which these clouds are, and is thoroughly pierced by the beams of the Sun, and easily shed or driven away, and so the matter of foul weather is removed: The clear brightness of the cloud in the evening is a sign that the cloud is rare and thin, and the body of the cloud pierced thoroughly, by the beams of the Sun, whence it is that the matter or cause of foul weather is discipated. And so for a reason of the other; If the morning be red and lowring, you say it is a sign of a stormy day: So also I say, the reason of this is not easy for every man to discern, but these men resolve upon the conclusion, whether they know the reason or no. But the reasons I meet with in nature are these in this case; they say, there is some rariery in some part of the cloud, but in that it is cloudy, it is a sign there is thicker matter in the cloud then

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the Sun beams can readily pierce through; and therefore because of the heaviness of the matter, the Sun beams cannot drive those clouds away, not are able of a sudden to dissolve and dissipate them into wind or rain; but in time

they make account wind and rain will follow: but the clouds being lowry and sad, shew an easiness in the clouds, now to dissolve themselves and to water the Earth, and in the end will burst forth into rain and wind that day.

Now first, neither of these reasons is certainly evident, and every man that observes them to be evident, yet finds them not always certain: And those that are best able to discern the reason, and the natural causes are not able to say, that event hath and will always follow; but both these may fall short of an answerable success; for though evening clouds be red, and so those thin clouds likely to be wafted; yet who can tell, but that the Sun may gather up new clouds, from the other side of the Heaven, before it rise to us in the next morning: and if it draw those vapors after it, as many times it doth, we may then have ill weather. And again, suppose the morning do look red and louring, as many times it doth, and therefore by reason the Sun cannot pierce the clouds wholly through, it is likely to break forth into wind or rain before noon or one of clock that day; yet it many times falls out that though clouds be red and louring in the morning, and of such an heavy weigh, that the Sun cannot peirce through

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so soon as it riseth, but yet by that time the Sun is grown high, and the beams fall more directly upon the clouds, and so consequently bear more strongly upon them; it comes to pass that before noon the Sun hath pierced through, and scattered the clouds, that you have fair weather after a louring morning. This is evident in ordinary experience, so that there is neither such sure, evident, unalterable truth in these things, nor such evident plainness, as these *Pharisees* persuaded themselves there was in them.

But suppose these signs of the weather did ever follow, and the reasons were evident; yet notwithstanding, neither the signs of the weather, nor the causes of them are of such necessary consequence, as that a man mould busy himself with the observation of it, or the study of the reason of it, for all the use of it, is but for what a man should do that day; and a man that hath business, will not be hindered by the face of the sky, and whatever the evening shews, yet he resolves his business next morning, and if he be crossed, it is not greatly material with him. But for a man when he hath the signs of the times set before him; for a man then not to know the day of his visitation, this being a matter that so nearly concerns him, upon which his eternal weal or woe depends, not to know this, a matter so necessary, so easy to be discerned, so dangerous to be neglected; for a man not to do this, it is a sign his heart is full of guile and hypocrisy, he thinks he can see and discern the state

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of the weather, but how to order his State and soul before God, he hath no understanding, *O you Hypocrites!* It is the nature of hypocrisy to be very quick sighted in points of nature, but very dull and heavy in matters of Religion and grace, *Sottish children, Jer. 4:22. Luk. 16:8. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of the light;* but in things pertaining to God they are blind and ignorant; the nature of hypocrisy is to be exact and curious in small matters, *Matth. 13:25.* but in more weighty matters of the Law, about their everlasting estate, they are therein blind: not to be able to discern spiritual things when they are manifested to us in a plain and a clear sign; this is gross hypocrisy.

*Reason 2.* Another reason for which our Saviour justly taxes these men of hypocrisy is this: When a man pretends want of light in his understanding and judgement, when as indeed the want is in the subjection of his will to the thing set before him; they pretend want of light in the judgement, they would have the judgement convinced, that this was the *Messiah* sent from Heaven. Now signs are to convince the judgement and understanding, no man could do such things as he did, unless sent of God; but that was not the Point; our Saviour truly calls them Hypocrites, there was no want of light to give them knowledges understanding, they had signs enough from heaven and from earth; and therefore there was no want of means to satisfy their judgments;

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but all the hinderance lay in the wilfullness of their own hearts, they were not willing to believe.

*Reason 1.* Another argument of hypocrisy in them was this, that they are more ready to lay the fault or unbelief upon God, not giving them sufficient helps, then upon themselves, who had means enough to leave them without excuse; for a man to charge upon God, the cause of unbelief, to pretend he could believe if he had a sign, and a sign can only be given by God, and they say, they believe not, because God gives them not sufficient means of belief: this is the frame of the spirit of hypocrisy, to tax God for want of means of Faith to believe, which if they had they pretend they would make use of, wherein God was not wanting to give them abundance of means, *John 12:37.* though he had wrought so many miracles among them, yet they believed not a sign: God was not wanting to convince them of their unbelief, yet they believed not.

*Use 1.* From hence we may learn every soul of us, to stir up our selves to a wise discerning the signs of the times of our visitation; As ever we desire to have any testimony of the truth and sincerity of our own hearts, as we desire not to be up-braided by the Lord Jesus himself our Saviour and judged for hypocrites, it behoves us all to be well acquainted with the signs of the times of our visitation, and much more and better, then withal the signs of the face of the sky; you see how

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much it did iike and grieve our Savior, *Luke 19:41, 42. He wept over Jerusalem, because she knew not the day of her visitation:* As if he should say; it were a case most lamentable and fit for any that ever wished poor *Jerusalem* well to deplore it with bitter tears; it is amost lamentable and miserable case, that persons and places should not discern the times of their visitation; the estate of men that do not know such a time is an estate of hypocrisy, and a fore-runner of certain calamity Would a man know a fore-running sign of following misery and calamity by; this is one (and none of the least) that sure that man's or Churches' calamity is near, that knows not the day of his visitation, takes not knowledge of the time that God offers him grace. It is ever a fore-running sign of a man's lamentable and utter ruin, when a man's friends and all that know him, may sit and weep over him, he knows not the time of his happiness, and now woe and misery is fallen upon him.

Now because this is a point of more then ordinary use, and yet I do not affect curiosity, yet methinks our Saviour would imply something in comparing the signs of the time, and the signs of the weather together. And God having usually made this world to be a map and shadow of the spiritual estate of the souls of men:

therefore give me leave for the better discerning of things in this kind; learn we to discern the signs of our own times; for the signs of the weather in which our Saviour makes his compa-

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risson, and there are certain signs and seasons of the weather to which a man may compare the estate of his own time and season.

There are 3. or 4. seasons and times of visitation, which it behoves Christians to know them well, as they would avoid the imputation of hypocrisy and prevent danger of calamity.

First, There be times and signs of times of grace offered, that is, the times in which God visits men with offers of grace.

Secondly, There be times and signs of times of grace received, and it is a very needful thing to know the time and sign of it.

Thirdly, There be also times and signs of times of graces decaying and withering.

Fourthly, there be signs of times of judgments removed, and of mercy's breaking in upon us.

Fifthly, there be also times of judgements threatened, and signs of their breaking in upon us.

All these Christians should be well acquainted with, and if not, you see it is taxed by our Saviour of palpable hypocrisy.

First, (because I would go no further then the Text) See it as in the face of the sky, God hath laid down a right observation of the signs of our visitation: How shall I discern the signs of the times of the visitation of my own soul, for grace offered; that this is the time that God offers grace to my heart, that I do not out-sit my time: How shall I know it? How do you discern that God calls you to your business, to walk about the duties of your particular calling: by the

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same, may you discern, when God calls you to accept the offers of grace; the Apostle gives us evident light in this kind, *Rom. 12:11,12. It is high time now for us to awake out of sleep*; how doth he know that? why the night is far spent and the day is at hand? a man knows his time to rise he will for shame get up, when the day breaks and the Sun arises, and shines in at his window And is it not high time for a man to awake out of the darkness of ignorance, and the sleep of carnal security, when the light of the Gospel shines clearly, and the Son of Righteousness arises with healing in his wings, and stares into our minds and consciences, and will not suffer us to sleep, but will so forceably enter in, that we cannot but see and hear and be converted, unless we will be wilfully blind: when the day dawns and the day star arises in our hearts, is it not now time to rise, *2 Pet. 1:19. The Law was a light, but it was in a Lanthorn, or in a dark place, and was not easily discerned, but in the end the daystar appears*, that is the preaching and dispensation of the Gospel, and the Son of the Gospel, and so displays and manifests himself, even as the Sun follows the day star; it is called the Shepherds star, the day star; and so this star of the Gospel is the Shepherds star; the Ministers are stars when they arise with clear and pure dispensations of the Gospel, and manifestations thereof in the faces and hearts of the sons of men: Christ

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himself follows close the pure ministration of his Gospel, and that's the day of salvation; the very sign of the time of grace offered, the time when the day star arises, if a man discern not that to be his time, and put it off from this time to that, thou knowest not how soon this day

star may be taken away, and the Sun wrapped up in a cloud; and then mayest thou go far enough to seek the like offers of grace, that here thou hadst dispensed and never find them; and therefore it behoves men to take notice of the signs of the times of their visitation: *Arise my love, my Dove, and come away, Cant. 2:10. to 13.* whence must she come? from the Babilonian darkeness; why so, what is the sign of her time to arise? *For the winter is past and the Spring draws on; the rain is over, the flowers appear in the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the Turtle is heard in our land, &c. Arise my fair one and come away;* See how he presses her again and again and now to arise, and now it is the time of her visitation and offer of grace, when the winter is past, when the coldness and darkness of ignorance and security and superstition is past; and when the birds begin to sing, and the voice of the Turtle is heard; a bird famous for mourning after her mate; when the time is come, that God stirs up his Prophets in *Judah*, as *Zacharia, Habakkuk* and others, when they begin to sing; and good Levites and good Ministers, tuning their notes, and tuning for

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the good of the people, and Christ mourning for want of his Spouse, and for the hardness of men's hearts, and longing for the conversion of the people, and wooing and alluring them to come home unto him; when this is heard in the Land, there is the face of a spring: some shew of godly ones, to come on to the ways of God's grace, and so some hopeful springing buds arising in the hearts of God's servants. This is one sign of the time of our visitation, when God begins thus to shine upon us by the light of his Gospel, and the beams of his Spirit, and

knocks thereby at our hearts, and yet we love to sleep and will draw about us the curtains of carnal security, and of our own lusts. Now it is high time to awake; O ye Hypocrites, can ye tell when to arise in the morning, and when to go about your business, and to stir your selves about your labours, and cannot you tell when it is time to awake out of your blind couples, wherein you have lain so many years together.

The second time is the signs of the times of grace received? and that is worthy any man's knowledge, to know the time, when God hath risen to his heart, and had respect to the same of his spirit, and promising fair weather; when the evening is red; you say it will be fair weather, for the sky is red; so in this case, if God have been pleased to vouchsafe to any Christian heart a blushing redness, a bright redness of countenance, for sense and shame of all his former evil

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ways, it is an evident sign of fair weather arising to the soul, *Ezra 9:6. O my God I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Heaven:* After that God had done all those great things for them, God had given them a nail in his Tabernacle, and had given them a breathing time, and yet now again they have returned to evil: now says he, *I am ashamed and blush to lift up mine eyes to Heaven; so Ezra 10:2. There is hope of Israel, there is hope of Reformation,* when God gives his people hearts to blush for shame for all the evils they have done in his sight, a sign God hath an intendment to do them good; when a man blushes and shames for sin, it is a sign that he grieves for it as it is, vile and filthy; not as it is dangerous to his soul or breeds honour to his confidence, for that a man more fears, then he is ashamed of: when a man is ashamed of sin

in the presence of God, he blushes at it, and his heart is confounded in him, for what he hath done, *Jer. 31:18, 19. I am confounded and ashamed, because I did hear the reproach of my youth;* When therefore it pleases God to give a man a blushing frame; for that he should live so long and understand so little; sees so many examples of Piety and Godliness before him, and himself so sinful, and is inwardly ashamed, and outwardly blushes at this; there is fair weather toward.

Yea further, there is fair weather towards though these red clouds do but appear in the evening of a man's days, if in the evening of a man's

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life, his heart be pierced with shame and blushing for all the vileness of his course before God, and unworthy dealing with God; that he mould put God to it, to wait upon him so long—if there be then these red clouds of blushing, it is a good sign of an happy morning of resurrection in another world: on the other side, if as you read, *Jer. 6:15.* they were not at all ashamed, they could not blush for all the evils they had done: therefore saith God in the day of their visitation they shall fall, and never rise again; there is a sign of foul weather, when men are convinced of sin, and yet cannot blush upon such occasions as this, then they shall fall and rise no more.

But as a second sign of fair weather, it was you heard, if the clouds were thin, and the bright beams of the Sun had throwly pierced and inflamed them, so that no longer thickness and darkness was remaining, the Sun would soon dispatch them away; but when the sky is red and lowring, there is a sign of foul weather, because the Clouds were too massie, too weighty and heavy to be removed, and

because of that, I am apt to think Christ would give us some light for interpretation, of this word, by a word the Evangelist seems to apply to this point, in what you read in the like case, concerning the young man in the Gospel, he comes to Christ in the morning of his age, *Matth.* 19:6. and *Mark* 10:17. He expressest so much, as that the Text

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faith, *Christ looked upon him and loved him*; there was a blush of colour of virue in him, and had he come on and been a bright cloud, and had been throughly pierced, and enflamed with the beams of Christ's love, he had had fair weather in this world and in another; but he could not yield to all that was laid down before him, there was too much thickness in his heart; and the same word used here for lowering is there used, *Mark* 10:22. *He was sad at that saying*, in the Original it is, *στρυγνάσας*, and so it is sad and lowering; he was laden with a deal of thickness, such as would not suffer him to yield to Christ, but he goes away lowering; when therefore it comes to this, that the beams of the bright light, and Sun-shine of the Gospel shines into the heart, and he will set himself to this duty, and to that, but in the end he comes to meet with something that is a little to unwieldy for him, and then it comes to a *στρυγνάσας*, there will be a storm that day; and thereupon saith our Saviour, *O how hard is it for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Heaven*: So that you may easily see what a fearful storm waits upon such a soul that hath a louting resistance against the bright beams of the Lord Jesus Christ, nay rather that rises up against that light, he will in the end be red and louting, and that louting time of his is a

forerunning sign, of a desperare storm that will drench such a soul to the skin, he

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shall fall, and be utterly cast down; but otherwise when the soul is in this frame, that there is nothing to do or suffer; but he is ready to do and suffer it, there is in him a blushing for shame of sin committed, and there is no wrastling nor struggling against the ways of God's grace; but whatever light the Lord Jesus sends, he is pierced through with it, and when then all mists are removed and scattered, fair weather is then a coming on.

3. A third sign of the time of our vistration is in respect of the signs of the decays of growth in grace. How may I know that grace is decaying, of that grace is growing, and there is signs of both.

First, You know it is a cause of darkening the Moon, if there be an interposition of the body of the Earth, between the Sun and it, and it is a cause of the eclipse of the Sun, when the body of the Moon is interposed betweene the Sun and the Earth; so it is an evident sign of the decay of grace in any, when earthly things begin to take place in the heart of a man, when a man sets his heart upon earthly things, when they come between a man's heart and the Lord Jesus Christ the Son of Righteousness, then there is an eclipse of grace, and that will grow more and more, and if there prove an eclipse in this case, grace will decay. If that *David* fall upon *Bathsheba*, the staff of his lively grace will be

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broken, when any thing takes up the heart, any lust whatsoever it will cloud and over-top the best seed of the word in a man; it will

wholly darken the best hypocrites; and it dams up God's people's graces exceedingly, as in respect of the cares of this World; if a man's heart be set upon these, as that he doth not enjoy the things of this life in the Lord and for the Lord, and from the Lord, but loses God in the creature; if a man lose Christ in the honours and pleasures of this world, there is an eclipse towards, and it is already begun; Whereas on the other side, if a man have and keep an heart open to heavenly things, that the dews of Heaven are not restrained, and the light of the Sun is shining upon him, it is an evident sign of the increase of grace; when doth the Moon increase? is it not when she is gathering towards the Sun, and the beams of the Sun do clearly cast themselves upon the Moon, and the nearer she gathers to the Sun, she gathers and increaseth more and more in light; and when the Earth lies most open to the dews of Heaven, and the bright beams of the Sun, is not then most fruitful, *Job* 38:31. These were influences of the seven stars, that rise in the spring and set in Autumn, and that bring sweet April showers; when the Earth lies open to the dew of heaven, and to the bright beams of the Sun, it grows warm and fruitful, and so becomes both thoughtful and profitable: so when the word

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word of God (which the Holy Ghost compares to these sweet influences, *Deut.* 32:2.) when a man comes to the word, and finds that the sweet influence of the Spirit there is not restrained nor straightened; but the word drops like Heaven's dew upon his soul, and that upon all the parts of his soul and body, as being open to receive it; grace is springing now, and the fruits thereof is growing up in his soul, and it will

thrive more and more when he sees the face of Christ in the Gospel, he is transformed into the Image of Christ, *2 Cor.* 3:18. and he goes on from one glorious grace unto another, when there is nothing lies between a man's soul and Heaven, it's a wonder to see the strange growth of it, otherwise if the case stand, as you read, *Levit.* 26:19. when the Heaven is as iron, the Earth will soon be as brass, when the heart begins to feel no power, in God's holy and pure ordinances, no bedewing of his soul, from these the heart will soon grow barren and unfruitful, and will bring forth nothing but briars and brambles; yea, and this may be the case of God's own Servants.

Another sign of grace decaying is this: If a Christian be grown up to same self-fulness, it is a fore-running sign of grace decaying, when you once become secure and to rest in the fullness of your own strength because the favour of God hath been full upon you, and grace richly communicated to you; if you now grow big and full, then look for a wain shortly, when is the

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Moon nearest to its wain? is it not when she is full in her own orb, though she received it all from the brightness of the Sun: So soon as the Sun is East and the Moon West, the next quartet she decreases, and so extinguisheth, that shortly no beams of the Sun will shine upon her: So is it with a Christian; when was the Moon in full with *Peter*, was it not when he came out with this saying, *Though all men deny thee yet will not I*, *Matth.* 26:33, 35. but was very self-full when he thinks he can stick closer to Christ than all the rest or his fellow Disciples, and might you not then have fore-told him, what a woeful wain he was now falling into, as indeed he did that night, so

*Psalm 30:6, 7. I said in my prosperity I shall never he moved,* it was full Moon now with *David*; but he was soon in the wain, and presently shattered, and not a spark of his heroidal spirit left in him: Indeed, *Psalm 3. David* was in good plight, when his faith recovered again, and then he feared not for ten thousand that rose up against him; but otherwise when he begins to fall, his heart fails him; but when a man is full of the Lord Jesus, strong in his might and weak in himself, *Prov. 30:2, 3.* When a man begins to find himself to be nothing, and yet can do more service for God than his fellows, *1 Cor. 15:10.* and knows how to do any thing through Christ that strengthens him, *Phil. 4:11, 12, 13.* that man is growing and thriving; and the more a man feels his want of

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Christ, the more he cleaves to him, and the more he hath, the more he would have of him to stand fast in that liberty wherein Christ hath set him, now *God gives grace to the humble,* *1 Pet. 5:5.*

3. Thirdly, It is a sign of grace decaying, when a man grows heavy and drowsy and undisposed to good duties. When was it that the Disciples began to fail? was it not when Christ comes again and again and finds them drowsy and heavy, *Matth. 25:41, 42.* when they could neither watch nor pray, and then the issue of it was, *they forsook him.* Is it not a sign of sin growing upon a man, When he cannot hold open his eyes in a good duty? when a man grows drowsy in prayer and hearing, some temptation is now a growing fast upon him; but if a man grow more lively, and spiritual and vigilant, that man is in a fair way to stand fast in all temptations.

4. Now for the 4th and last, and that is signs of the times of Judgement, both approaching and

remooving, or of judgements remooving, or mercies approaching, and there are signs of both; both theie times do pass over us, and how mall we difcerne them *i* For this I cannot give you a better sign from the face of the sky then God himself gives in *Genesis*, *If you find and perceive a bright rainbow in a watery cloud, it is an evident sign the storm is a breaking up, and will be gone and blow over*, *Gen. 9:13, 17*. The Lord hath sworn he will no more over-flow the whole earth with waters, and therefore for a sign of the

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Covenant, he hath set his bow in the cloud, and if it appear the storm will shortly over. Now what is that? to apply it to the signs of the times of our visitation, when we may know that a judgement is ready to remove. What is God's bow? In Scripture phrase, the bow of a man, is the bent of a man. As *Joseph* his Bow abode in strength, *Gen. 49:14*. The bent of his spirit still stood at the full bent and strength in the midst of all discouragements, and did not slug it, though his Brethren, and his Mistress, and his Master, and every one shot sore at him, yet his bow abode in strength; it was old *Jacob's* blessing to him, and so the bent of his spirit abode in strength and in vigour, he still held his integrity; then God's bow is God's bent; a sign that the storm is a blowing over, and fair weather is towards, what is the matter, if God but set a firm resolution, a spiritual gracious disposition, an inclining and bowing of the soul that he bend the hearts of men to God, and to the ways of his grace, and that in a watery cloud, that is, in a soft and melting heart, then there is no judgement will lie long upon that soul, and no mercy will be long with-held from him; if the heart be strongly bent to walk with God, and that not in the pride of a man's spirit; but in a

melting frame of spirit, much an one as this, whatever storms were upon him, now all judgements are a blowing over, and fair weather is towards, and such as that a man may know, there will be the brightness of God's face upon his soul and

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his favour to refresh his heart in all inward and outward occasions. *David* when he was full of his own strength, suddenly in a cowardly manner (if I may so speak) his hear grew dead within him, yet before he was got to *Mahana-im*, he gathered up his spirits again, and girds up his vigour and strength afresh, and then he got a firm bent of a Christian spirit; this is God's bow in the soul of a Christian man; but what cloud was it in? Had it been a stiff resolution of his own strength, it had failed him, but it was in a watery cloud, he and his people went up to Mount *Olivet*, weeping, 2 *Sam.* 15:26. to 30. and was grown into such a melting frame, as that when the Priests would have carried the Ark after him, nay, saith he, *Carry it back again: If the Lord say I have pleasure in David, he will bring me back again, but if not, here am I, let the Lord do with me what seemeth him good:* Here is now a melting watery cloud, the beams of the Son of righeousness had pierced it through, which fore-tells the ruin and destruction of all danger, and shews that *David's* restoring is near. As the heart grows more humble and melting before God, and more firm and resolute in the Lord's strength, so doth any calamity disperse it self, and any mercy break in upon us: There are many excellent promises in *Job* 5:17. to the end of the Chapter, made to that soul, that is well taught and nurtured by affliction, and there are many other promises made to peace and acquaintance with God, *Job* 22.

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from *vers.* 21. to the end of the Chapter; now in such a case as this, when this is the bent of a Christian; when a man is so nurtured by affliction, as that he grows more patient, and more humble and loving, and that a man thereupon acquaints himself with God, and puts away all iniquity out of his heart and hands, and if God then help us to live humbly and meltingly under his hand, and we bless him for his providence, it is such an evident fore-runner of evil avoiding and good a coming, as indeed nothing is more; and this we must be sensible of, as ever we desire to have any signs of comfortable days approaching, to grow strong incur bent in the ways of grace, and in that meekness and lowliness, and melting frame of heart, as that you may see God's rainbow is set in a watery cloud, look now for all storms to blow over, but if you see that the bent of a man's spirit begin to slug it, it is an evident sign of a storm approaching: a weather gall, is but a piece of a rainbow, and hangs not from one end of the sky to another; and so it is a fore-running sign of foul weather, which holds forth thus much, when men will do no more then they think good of, deal by piece-meal with God: a storm is a coming to deal otherwise with them, if they belong to God; when the Church of *Ephesus* had unbent her spirit, and lost her first love, would not now keep so close to God, nor manifest her self so much for God it is way of God, as sometimes she had done, it was a sign that darkness and trouble,

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and danger was a coming to that Church, *Rev.* 2:3, 4. And which is yet a worse sign, when a man is bent against God, and the ways of his grace, and the Devils bow is set in a man, I know that then the Lord is determined to bring mis-

chief upon such a man, 2 *Chron.* 25:16, *I know the Lord is determined to destroy thee*, how did he know that? He saw the Devil's bow bent in the heart of the King, when he saith to the *Prophet*, *Hold your peace who made you of the King's counsel*: So that if you see the Devil's bent in a man, that he sets himself against God, and the ways of his grace, he will be left to most woeful mischief, according to that in 1 *Sam.* 2:24, 25. *They hearkened not to the voice of their father, because the Lord would destroy them*: They would not be ungirt from their wicked course they had been addicted too, and that's a manifest sign thar God will destroy them.

*Use 2.* This serves to shew you, that it is not utterly unlawful for men to make observation of the estate of the weather, and face of the sky; our Saviour doth not reprove it in them, but only reproveth this, in that they were better skilled in the face of the sky, and signs of the weather, then in the signs of the times, *Luk.* 12:54, 55. *When ye see cloud rise out of the West, straightway ye say there comes a shore, and so it is, and when ye say the South wind blow, ye say there will be heat, and it cometh to pass, &c.* he rejects not such kind of conjectures, there is a workmanship of God in them, nor doth he mislike the study of nature.

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*Use 3.* Let what you have heard be a provocation to every soul of us to take heed and beware of hypocrisy, you see how loathsome it is to Christ, he never speaks worse word then this, *O ye hypocrites*, when he speaks with most detestation, yet this is the worst word he speaks of any men, *O ye hypocrites*, and therefore far be it from the spirits of Christian men, Abhor you all seeds of hypocrisy, it's very loathsome to God, when he threatens the worst evil to the worst sort

of Ministers that ever the Church of God bore, *Matth.* 24:51. What will the Lord of such a Steward do, when he comes to give him his portion with hypocrites and unbelievers, a man would be loath to be coupled with a drunken quarrelsome Roister, A man would bless himself from fellowship with such a man while he lives, yet if a man be an hypocrite, he shall be ranked with such companions in hell; if therefore thou wouldest have no fellowship with such spittits and unfruitful works of darkness, bless thy self from hypocrisy, *God loves truth in the inward parts, Psal.* 51:6. better lie open to less torment, then to be yoked with such deboyst spirits in another world.

***FINIS.***