

SERMON 8

**THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION NOT DESTITUTE OF ARGUMENTS
SUFFICIENT TO SUPPORT IT IN ANSWER TO A PAMPHLET,
INTITLED, 'CHRISTIANITY NOT FOUNDED ON ARGUMENT, etc.'**
1743

A Testibus dicemus secundum Auctoritatom, & Vitam Testium & Constantiam Testimoniorum — Cum multa concurrant Argumenta, & Signa, quae inter fe consentiant, Rem peripicuam, non suspiciosam videri oportere. CICERO Heren. Lib. 2.

In this Age, great Liberties are taken with the Holy Scripture, in order to lessen its Authority, and bring its peculiar Doctrines into Disesteem. The Penmen of it have been represented in the *most invidious* Light: Their Characters have been used in a most unjust Manner, and a *false* Turn has been given to almost everything they acted. All Rules of Decency, Good- Manners, and Justice, due to the Memory of the Deceased, have been violated, by Gentlemen, whose highest Pretensions are, to Politeness, good Sense and Honor: And if we were to be determined, in our Opinion concerning them, by what they say of themselves, no doubt could possibly arise in our Minds: respecting the Justness of their Claim, to the beautiful Characters they profess to be enamored with, *viz. rational, polite, and ingenious* but if we may be allowed Freedom of Thought and Enquiry on our Part, in making use of that Liberty, we can't fail of discovering, that they are not the Men, they are *extravagantly fond* of being accounted.

The Author of Christianity not founded on Argument does not indeed proceed altogether in this Method; but it is his apparent Design, to prove that we are Christians, without being able to assign any convincing Reason why we are so, and that Christianity is really destitute of Arguments sufficient to support it.

How he succeeds in this *laudable* Attempt, I purpose, under the Assistance of him, whose the Scripture is, to impartially weigh and consider. And I promise him all the Advantage that a Searcher after Truth can desire: I will not crave more in Favor of Revelation than, I presume, he will readily allow in everything else, and leave him to determine, why that which is thought a proper and rational Evidence of Truth and Fact, in any Thing but Christianity, must not be so esteemed, where that is concerned.

I freely grant him, that Reason is to judge of the Truth of Revelation, and that when rational Proofs are not to be produced in Favor, of any *pretended* heavenly Discovery, its no better than Enthusiasm, to be persuaded of its *divine Original* Farther, I allow that Reason is to judge of the Terms and Expressions, used in that

Revelation, which it hath been the Pleasure of God to afford to Men. And surely it is just and proper, to interpret the Language of Scripture, agreeable to those Ideas, which are commonly intended to be conveyed by it, when we use the Words and Expressions of which it consists.

First. This Writer strenuously contends that Christian Faith cannot be rational. Several Things he advances against it.

We are required to think all alike. This he supposes is impossible; but I am of Opinion that it is far from being so, that, on the contrary, it is very practicable. If we consider what is necessary to Unity of Sentiments among Christians, how different so ever their Capacities are, we shall easily discover, that it might reasonably be hoped for.

The Scripture contains the Sum of what they are required to believe, and if the Word of God, which is the only Rule of their Faith, in its Terms and Expressions was duly attended to, and their *natural* and *obvious* Interpretation, was freely allowed of by all, there would not be any *material* Difference among Christians.

For Instance, the holy Scripture affirms that God is one, and that he alone is to be worshipped. *The Lord thy God is one Lord. Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* Farther, it as expressly requires us to worship three, Father, Son, and Spirit, in the Commission given to the Apostles, to teach and baptize (Matthew 28:19.). Hence it is easy to see, that Unity of Sentiments, in this Doctrine, upon the Evidence of Revelation, relating to it, is no difficult Matter: It is as easy, as to understand, that in Numbers, one is not three, and that three consist of three times one. It is not difficult to discover, that there is but one God, and that these three, Father, Son, and Spirit, are the one only living and true God. The Scripture doubtless, has a proper and determinate Sense, and that Sense certainly is, what the Words and Expressions of it properly import; and therefore, when Christians are required to be *of one Mind* no more is designed, than, that it is a Duty common to them all, to interpret sacred Writ, without any Force or Violence, and to readily allow, those Ideas to be true, which are therein expressed. If this was done, it seems evident to me, even to a Demonstration, that very little Difference in Opinion would be found among them. And such is the Language of the Bible, that a Reader of ordinary Capacity, and unfurnished of Learning and Science, may understand it, and form a true Judgment of its Doctrines. *Men are threatened into Consequences,* says he. If by Threatening, he means human Threats of Punishment, in case they form not their Judgments, agreeable to the Opinion of others, as that is foreign to the true Nature of Christianity; I have no Concern with it, shall not defend, but condemn it, as much as himself. But if he intends the divine Expression of Displeasure, in Case Men disbelieve that Doctrine to be true, which they can't but know, is agreeable to the Language of Scripture, and is the proper Import of the Words and Expressions, It uses, it is highly just. For surely if God condescends to reveal his Will to Men, and

addresses them in such Language, as is in common Use among them, and which they are capable of understanding, it is nothing unreasonable to threaten them with Punishment, and actually inflict it, if they refuse to believe, that when he speaks of one, he means as he speaks, and that when he speaks of three, he intends as he expresses himself.

He observes *that we are baptized into Christianity when we are Infants, and know nothing of the matter.* As I think this Practice not agreeable to Christianity, and can't but esteem it an Innovation, I shall not say anything to it. Let them defend it whose Practice it is, if they are able.

Praying for Improvement in Christian Knowledge, he thinks inconsistent with a Conviction of the Truth of Christianity, upon rational Evidence. Is Prayer then needless, where we are to exercise our reasoning Powers? It is by our Faculty of Reasoning, that we discover the Difference between Right and Wrong, Truth and Falsehood. Now is it an improper Thing, to pray to God, to bless the means, which in Providence he hath afforded us, of the Conviction of our Duty, for our Increase in the Knowledge of it: And to pray, that our corrupt Habits and evil Inclinations, may not influence us to act a Part, for which our Consciences would certainly condemn us?

Is it then preposterous to offer him our Praises, for the good Influence our Knowledge, under his Providence, has over our Lives, to make us virtuous, wife and just in our Conduct? Of this Opinion indeed was *Cicero*, and some other Philosophers, and also Poets But this immediately strikes at the Root of all Religion, not only revealed, but also natural, and perhaps, by so much the more, it may gain the Approbation of this Infidel.

Says he, *The rational Christian, whoever be he, must have originally set out a Sceptic, and hesitated for a Time, whether that Gospel were true or false.* But why is this necessary, is there nothing, that we rationally believe, but what we doubt of the Truth of for a Time? If so then let me become a Sceptic in some other Matters, besides Christianity. For Instance, let me doubt whether Language had the same, and not a contrary Meaning, in the Times of *Plato*, *Cicero* and *Epictetus*, etc. as it hath now, and call upon this Man to prove it had the same, if he is able: This I assure him is done with a favorable View to those Philosophers, and he may thank me for it, because if we fall into the Opinion, of a Change of Language, *Plato* and some others may be defended from allowing the detestable Practice of the promiscuous Use of Wives, and *Cicero* may be acquitted of Pleading for Obscenity and Uncleaness, and by this means *Epictetus* may be cleared of encouraging Dissimulation and Hypocrisy in the Worship of God. And therefore, I should think this Gentleman, who it is probable has a great Veneration for these extraordinary Men, may consider this as a happy and ingenious Thought, and deferring his Thanks. But the Mischief is, if it should be allowed, that Language had in those Times a contrary Meaning to what

it now hath, then we must understand those excellent Philosophers, to recommend Vice, when they condemn it, and to condemn Virtue when they extol it. Then it will follow, that in their Opinion, not the wife and virtuous Man is happy, but the Fool and the Knave. Then we may prove, that when they deliver the best Sense, they express the greatest Nonsense. This would lead us to conclude, that *Xenophon* thought God knows nothing of Things past, nor present, nor Things to come. Again if Doubting is necessary to rational Belief, then why may I not doubt, whether it is unlawful to take away this Man's good Name (if he has one to loose), whether it is unlawful to deprive him of his Property, or even of Life itself?

Why should I think, that Slander is a criminal Thing, or that Theft is unjust, or that Murder is sinful, before I have examined upon what Principles I am to view these Actions in such a Light? And, if while I am undetermined in my Opinion, and am only upon the Enquiry, I should do either or each of these Acts against him, why should I expose myself to Censure and the Penalty of the Law, for doing what I have received no Conviction, is criminal, but so far as I can discover, is, if not virtuous, at least indifferent? Farther then, why may I not doubt, whether there is a first Cause of all Things, whether there is indeed a God, and if, while I am in Scruple, (which by the Way may be the whole of my Life) I deny him all Honor, Worship and Adoration, surely I am nothing Criminal, in this Matter, for however evident it is in itself, that the World rose not into Being, without the Exertion of an infinite Power, I am incapable of seeing that Evidence; and therefore, it is nothing at all to me, and by Consequence, I may lead my Life, without any Fear of God, without paying him any Honors, or Desires of his Favor and Protection, and be perfectly innocent all the while.

To proceed no farther in this wild and extravagant Manner of speaking, as there is, a rational and irrational Belief, so there is a rational and irrational Doubting. If it be the Character of a Sceptic, to doubt without Reason, whatever he may think of it, he excels not in Wisdom and good Sense the Enthusiast, who believes without Reason. One is as irrational as the other. And to speak freely, the Sceptic is that in Doubting, which without Reason, he charges upon the Christian in Believing, not the wife and understanding Man, but the foolish and unreasonable one. To doubt whether there is any Difference, between Right and Wrong, Truth and Falsehood, Virtue and Vice, whether Right, Truth and Virtue are amiable, and Wrong, Perfidy and Vice are monstrous and evil, will hardly be allowed rational, and if not, then there are some Things rationally believed, where Doubting cannot reasonably take the least Place. And question not, but Christianity will appear to have such Evidences and Arguments in its Favor, as will necessarily oblige every rational and unprejudiced Enquirer, to allow, that no Doubt can reasonably be admitted concerning Its Truth and great Importance.

He objects that, *Morality is of no esteem without this Christian Belief*. In answer to which, I *observe, that Virtue* and a good Life, are certainly very advantageous, a Person who indulges not to Pride, Covetousness, Uncleaness, Malice and Revenge, will not be attended with the uneasy Consciousness of having so done. But if Men-actually are defective in Morality, if they still are not what they ought to be, if they have in any Instances, acted what they ought not to have done, they are justly liable to the *awful* Resentment of that God to whom they are, accountable in their Conduct in all Things.

And, if Men in Fact are such in their Behavior, either through' Defect in Duty, or in acting contrary to it, as that they on account thereof, deserve the Displeasure of why should it be thought unreasonable, that they are not accepted and rewarded by him, for an Obedience, which is allowed to be deficient and stained with Guilt? If indeed, any Man, this Writer for *Instance*, is as pure and regular in all Things, as he ought to be, I am free to grant he will not be condemned, but be approved by his Maker, and receive Happiness from him. But if he is not the Man he ought to be, in every Branch of his Conduct, he will find nothing contrary to Goodness or Justice in his Condemnation.

Here he seems to discover a Dislike of expecting Pardon, alone through the Mediation of Christ, if Revelation had not recommended that Doctrine to us, I suppose this Author would not have represented it as destitute of Arguments and Evidences, sufficient to support its divine Authority. In this Place he also observes that we may not live long enough to go through with a proper Enquiry, into the Evidences of Christianity, and that, that may prove of fatal Consequence. Prodigious Labor, great Pains and long Study it seems, are necessary to a rational Belief of Christianity! Labor as great, as to learn the Import of the Terms, God, Sin, Punishment, Savior, Mediation and Suffering, to which how few are equal!

Labor as difficult as to discover, that none but God can foreknow the free Actions of Men, and declare the Parts they will act, Centuries of Years before they exist, that none but God is able to alter the Course of Nature, raise the dead to Life, and work Miracles of the like kind. A Task attended with as great Difficulty, as discovering that Men existed more than seventeen Hundred Years ago, and what Proof can be given of that, which may be thought a proper Foundation for a rational Belief of it? Extraordinary Labor this, doubtless! to which every Man of common Sense is equal, and may, and must, be assured of the Truth of Christianity, if he exercises Reason, the very Moment he takes into Consideration the Evidences of it, upon such Testimonies, as he would believe any else in the World, better Testimonies than which, he has not, to found his Belief upon, that the World existed, so long a time since, as Christianity is supposed to have been introduced into it.

Few Men says he are qualified for Reasoning. This Writer would doubtless be esteemed of the Number of the happy Few, who have this rare and uncommon

Qualification. He is able, by his superior Penetration to discover that Works proper to God, are not clear and sufficient Proofs of the Exertion of his Power, that Predictions of the Parts Men Will act Hundreds of Years before their Appearance on the Stage of Life, which he only can be acquainted with, is no infallible Evidence of his conveying to us the Knowledge of his Will. He is able to prove, by his admirable Talent of Reasoning, that we have no certain Ground to believe, that there ever were such Men in the World as *Alexander, Plato, Cicero, or Julius Caesar*: Nay, that it is a Thing disputable, whether the World is two Centuries old, for we have it only upon Report and Hearsay, which are very fallible and uncertain Things. And if indeed the World is of such Standing, as the Times in which these Men are supposed to have liv'd, he can teach us, that it is uncertain whether Language has not passed under an entire Change, that those Terms which now stand for Virtue might then mean Vice, and these Words which now express Valor, might then be used to express Cowardice, and therefore, we learn from this accomplished Reasoner, that it is uncertain, when we read *Plato, or Cicero, Quinius Currius, or Caesar's Commentaries*, whether we are to understand them of recommending Virtue or Vice, whether *Alexander* was a Coward, or a bold and resolute Man, whether *Currius* and *Caesar* speak of Flight or of Victory. Rare Discoveries *these* indeed, and truly worthy of a Free-thinker or Infidel.

The Reasonableness of Religion in Speculation nothing to the purpose, says he: *It is one Thing whether a Proposition be indeed true in itself, and another whether a Man be bound to apprehend and believe it.* A Man is bound to believe where doubting is unreasonable, for Difference is unsupported by Reason, is as irrational, as Faith without Evidence, and Foundation. And with Respect to the Proofs of the Truth of the Christian Revelation, they are such, as admit not of rational doubting. Works, which men really must and cannot but know, to be truly divine: And discoveries of future Events, which depend on the free Actions of men, are incontestable Proofs of a heavenly Appearance and Instruction: And if we have such Evidence, of Works of this Sort, being performed, and such Discoveries being made, as is thought *sufficient* to support us in the belief of other Facts done, as long a Time since, it is here doubtless, altogether as *valid* and *sufficient*, and it is not Reason to scruple that Evidence, but downright Madness and Obstinacy.

Besides, no uncommon Degree of Knowledge and Improvement, are requisite to enable a Man, to discover that, interrupting the Course of the sun, or of the Earth, is a Work proper to him, who gave Motion to the one, or to the other; whether it is a Work truly divine and proper to God, the Fountain of Life, to raise a Person from the State of the Dead. A Man must as certainly, and as soon be persuaded of this, as that God formed the World, and upholds the Frame of Nature.

Says he, *The ablest and best of Men are disqualified for fair Reasoning, by their natural Prejudices.* How! yes, how! The ablest and the best Men disqualified,

etc. I ask how Man came to be *rid* of all his natural Prejudices and Prepositions, is he so happy? Why then may not some others also enjoy that Happiness? Does he think, that he is the only Person in the World who possesses this most desirable Privilege? After this, surely, we may credit him, if not our Savior, or his Apostles. Here is a Man divested of all Prejudices, the thing which prevents the *ablest* and *best*, of Men (well then he is *not* of that *Number*) of finding Truths: That to believe a doctrine attested by *supernatural* Works to be true, is sound and credulous: That to yield an assent to the Truth of Facts; which all the Reason we have, dictates to us are *indisputable*, upon the Evidence afforded us in Confirmation of those Facts, is unreasonable. In short, let us give up ourselves to the Instruction, of this *singularly* happy Man, and let him enjoy an Honor, which the *ablest* and *best* of Men, because of their natural Prejudices, have no just Claim to *viz.* to be esteemed *fair* and *impartial* in Reasoning. He is no doubt an Interpreter of Ten thousand. Had he not concealed his Name, what Honors would have been paid him, and what *humble Submissions*, would have been made to him! How in the World came this non-such Man to affect Secrecy? If thro' Humility, he is more modest, in my Opinion; than he is discerning, whoever he be; but I don't take it, that this is the Fact: I rather think somewhat else, *viz.* a Consciousness of endeavoring to shock the Christian in his Faith, upon Grounds, far from being *rational* or *just*.

A rational Faith when attained would not answer the Ends. He instances in several Things, *It would not work Miracles.* A mighty Discovery! Who ever thought that a Persuasion of the Truth of Christianity, upon the most reasonable Conviction, would enable a Man to perform miraculous Works? Christianity requires it not, suggests it not.

It would prove too cold. This is also granted without any Prejudice to the Cause of Christianity.

Too changeable. That some have altered in their Sentiments, with relation to very important Doctrines the Christian Religion, is well known; and it is equally well known, that they have so changed, without reasonable Grounds and Motives: As did *Dr. Whitby*, to whom this Writer has Reference.

Would not administer that Spirit of Comfort, in the Reflection. This is freely granted.

Not of Force, sufficient, to command the Passions. This is also readily allowed.

Much left to suffer Martyrdom. This is not denied. But what are all these Things to the Point in View? What if a Persuasion, upon the most rational Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion, will not influence a Person to all, or any of these Things: but something must be superadded to that Persuasion, is this any Proof, that the Belief of Christianity, is without rational Ground and Evidence?

Because Men act not up to their Principles, is that to be objected to the Reasonableness, of the Belief of those Principles? A small Degree of Reason, far less to be sure, than this Author is Matter of, will enable a Person to discover the Absurdity of such an Imagination.

Secondly. This Writer undertakes to prove, that Christ and his Apostles, never proceeded in this Method of giving rational Evidence of the Truth of those Doctrines they taught, but constantly required Men to believe without it.

Before I enter upon the Consideration of what he offers, on this Head, I desire it may be carefully observed, that those Things which were Proofs of the divine Mission of Christ, or of his being a Teacher come from God, ought to be allowed Proofs of the Truth of those Doctrines he delivered: And that if his Apostles failed not to give full Evidence, of their having a heavenly Commission to teach, it is Unreasonable, not to allow that Evidence to be a Proof of the Truth of those Points of Doctrine they inculcated. Now Christ gave the fullest Proof of his divine Mission, such as would not admit of the *least reasonable* Doubt. He proves it by the Writings of the Prophets, who all spake of him, of his Family and Birth, of his Circumstances and Wisdom, of his surprising Works, of his Sufferings, Death and Resurrection, all which Particulars were exactly fulfilled in him, and therefore, were evident and undeniable Proofs, of the extraordinary Mission of those Prophets, as well as of the divine Mission and Authority of our Saviour himself. Again, he confirms it by his Works, the miraculous Works which he performed bore witness of him, he healed the sick, gave Sight to the Blind, cleansed Lepers, cast out Devils, and raised the Dead to Life; which were the Works of such a Nature, as could only be effected by *divine Power*, and therefore, *not to be performed* by a Person who had not a *divine commission*. To these Works Christ appeals, and urges them as Proofs of his being sent by God, both with the Jews and with his Disciples. With the Jews, *If I do not the Works of my Father, believe me not: But if I do, tho' ye believe not me, believe the Works: That ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.* (John 10:37, 38.) In the same Manner he reasons with his Disciples: *The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the Works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me: Or else believe me for the very Works sake.* (John 14:10, 11.) Since our blessed Redeemer gave abundant and unexceptionable Proof, of his being clothed with divine authority, is it reasonable to think he was *too assuming*, when he *taught as one having Authority, and not as the Scribes*, who were *not* invested with such *heavenly Powers*? Surely not. And since his disciples had clear and full Evidence, of his divine Mission, was it unreasonable to expect, that they should readily assent to the Truth of what he taught: And were they not justly blamed for not believing him to be the Person, they had the highest Reason to conclude he was? Christ's reproving them for Incredulity, when they had all reasonable and sufficient Ground to believe, is objected to the Clearness and Sufficiency of the Evidence

afforded to them, in order to the Faith. And if they had appeared forward of Belief, then, no doubt, this Man would have represented them, as *credulous*, and disposed to believe, without a *solid* and *substantial* Ground for Faith, and have argued that, for that Reason their Testimony is less deferring of our Notice. — This Man's Sneer at the Disciples of our Lord, how much so ever he may be delighted with the *fine Turn of Wit* it contains in it, is as *bold* and *impious*, as 'tis *low* and *trifling*: It

is this, *they knew nothing of Reasoning, it was quite out of their Element; they had had their Education on the Water, and tho' they understood their Trade so far as to be well versed in mending their own Nets, would go near it is likely to be entangled themselves, when they had to do with the figurative ones of sophistry or Syllogism.* The Art of Logic is doubtless of Use in Reasoning; but that Men know nothing of Reasoning, who have not made themselves Masters of that Art, is an Observation, that a Man of the least Degree of good Sense or Modesty, would even blush to make.

But why does this Man mention Sophistry? I hope he don't think that every Syllogism is a Sophism; if he does, he is not much better acquainted with Logic, than the most credulous Christian he despises. Sophisms either express what is not true, or less than is true, or more than is so, and therefore, Truth is not to be taught or demonstrated by Sophisms; and by Consequence, a Teacher of Truth only, as our great Lord was, can't be supposed to make use of Sophisms. Besides, Christ reasoned in the most clear and nervous Manner, infinitely better than this Man anywhere does; and if he pleases, he may, put his Reasoning into a syllogistic Form, if that will give him Satisfaction: Thus, Whatever God gives Testimony to, is true; he gives Testimony to my Doctrine by his Word and by Works, and therefore nay Doctrine is true. This is the Manner of Christ's Reasoning in John 5:36, 37, The Truth of the Proposition or Major must be evident to every Man, I suppose to this Author, and the Truth of the Minor cannot be called into Question, without giving the Lye to Christ, who is *Truth*; and at the game Time offering Violence to Reason, and therefore, the Assumption; I should think must necessarily be allowed. Again, tho' the Disciples were Persons unprovided with Learning in the common. Way, they did not remain illiterate, for by a Miracle they became such Linguists, as this Author may despair of ever being (Acts 2:4, 8, 9, 10.); which by the way is an evident Proof of their divine Mission. And Christ, who sent them to preach; was a *Mouth and Wisdom to them, which all their Adversaries were not able to gain say nor resist.* Farther, is it to be expected of a divine Teacher. that he shall evidence the Truth of his Doctrine, by Argumentation and, Reasoning from *natural* Principles? What Need. is there, for a Teacher, who proceeds in this Way only, to prove his Call to teach, by a pompous Shew of Miracles, since he advances no other Doctrines, than what he confirms by Argument and Logic? Is there any Necessity to excite Men's Belief of such Principles, by *supernatural* Works, which when clearly stated and

fairly proposed, they must needs know to be true by the Light of *Nature*? This surely is unnecessary. But, as our Saviour taught Doctrines, which, Reason could never discover, though' they are not contrary to it, it was proper and necessary, that his Mission from Heaven should be well-attested, as it really was, that no Ground of Scruple might remain concerning the Truth of those Doctrines.

Moreover, since many of the Principles, our blessed Lord and his Apostles preached, were not discoverable by Reason, it is irrational to expect, that he or they should prove them by Reasoning and Logic: For that is arguing from some known and allowed Principle of Truth, to the Truth of Some Other Thing connected with it, dependent on it, and necessarily arising from it.

This Author charges Our Lord with being backward of explaining to his Disciples the Doctrine he taught, but without the least Foundation, for tho' he reprov'd them sometimes, for their Incredulity, as he very justly might, he was never wanting to favor them with farther Instruction and Explication, upon Application to him for that Purpose. Another false Charge this bold Man dares to exhibit against him, *viz.* that he expected *Conviction to precede Evidence, as the germs of a Favor consequently to be enjoyed*: Because in some Instances he asked Persons desiring a Miracle to be wrought by him, in their Favor: *Believest thou that I am able.* But how is this a Proof, that he expected Conviction to precede Evidence? He only called upon them to express that Faith they acted on him, supported by preceding Evidences of his divine Power and Mission. Farther, whereas he infers the same Thing, from the *Pharisees* requiring a Sign, and Christ's blaming them for it, he is quite beside the Truth, It by no Means appears, that Christ considered it Presumption and wanton Curiosity to expect Evidences of his heavenly Power and Authority, in order to believe in him, for many such he gave, to that End; But the Case in Fact was this, they wanted a Sign from Heaven (Matthew 16:1.), they would choose the Sign themselves. Most unreasonable and impious! What if divine Power is exerted to confirm the Truth of any Doctrine, in working a great Variety of Miracles, shall Men refuse to believe, because such a particular Miracle is not wrought, as they desire, and take upon them to dictate to the Almighty what Sort of Wonders he shall work, if he gains their Credit? Well might our Saviour call them an *adulterous Generation*, for this daring Presumption and Impiety, Yet let it be observed, that our Lord gave at the same Time, Assurance of such a Sign, Which is an unexceptionable Proof of his divine Mission, *viz.* his Resurrection from the Dead, which was attended with an Appearance of Angels from Heaven.

We now come to the Apostles: This Writer might have spared every Word he here expresses, He observes they had *not Leisure*, nor *Qualifications for Reasoning*. And what then, if they' had not Leisure nor Qualifications, for doing what it was not their Business to do, no Damage will thence arise to the Cause of Christianity.

They brought Doctrines agreeable, to, and of which, Reason was capable of making some feebler and less evident Discoveries. And they discoursed of those Doctrines, in a much better Manner, than ever any Philosopher did, or than this Man, who despises them and their Writings, is able to do; and urged the Practice of *all* moral Virtues, upon the Command and Authority of God, and the Pain of his Displeasure, if Men did not; which Manner of treating on moral Subjects, is, I suppose, exceeding *disagreeable* to the Taste of this extraordinary Man. It is farther to be observed, that they taught some Doctrines, quite cut of the Verge of Reason, concerning God, and his Purposes, concerning Sin and its Consequences, and a Deliverance from all the dreadful Effects of it, by the Mediation and Death of Christ: Things out of the Reach of Reason, and which it could never have discovered; it is therefore irrational, to expect Demonstration from Reason of their Truth. What the Apostles had to do, as Teachers of Mankind, was to prove their heavenly Mission and Authority, which when done, as it actually and fully was done: For *God bore them Witness both with Signs and Wonders, and divers Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Ghost*; they might lawfully claim a Right to be heard and credited, without Wrangling and Dispute. But this Person will not allow Miracles to be a sufficient Proof of Doctrine, *because*, as he is pleased to assert confidently enough, *they have Time out of Mind undoubtedly been performed in Favor of false Doctrines*. I find however incredulous the Author is, with Relation to Bible History, he is not so with Respect to other Histories, it requires, as he pretends, an extraordinary Degree of good Sense, and the Acquisition of a considerable Share of Learning, to be able to form a true Judgment of the Facts, recorded in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles: And they at most have only a Probability of Truth; but other Histories are easily understood, and the Facts reported in them may be proved true, and relied on, without that labor's Reasoning necessary to prove the Truth of those Facts related in the Holy Scripture. I must take the Freedom to tell him, that as he is a Sceptic, with regard to Revelation, I am so with Respect to this confident Assertion of his, I doubt of its Truth, and challenge him to prove, that *real* Miracles were ever wrought in favor of *false* Doctrines: Let him tell us of what sort, by whom, when, in what Place, upon whom, and before whom, they were performed. He who is so incredulous himself, where the Authority of Scripture is concerned, may surely allow another, not to take up with a Thing, upon his have Affirmation, without proper Vouchers. I am tempted to think, how reasonable so ever this Demand is, he will excuse himself of the Labor, from a Consciousness of the Difficulty attending it. Let him not take *lying* Wonders for real and true Miracles, as here he does: *This*, says he, *the Scripture itself confesses, when it warns us of lying Wonders, and false Christs*. We see a Man of distinguished Capacity, and singular Accomplishments may mistake, where the rude and unpolished would not, he takes false Christs for the true Christ, and lying Wonders, for real and true Miracles: If he does not, he argues most impertinently.

He is speaking of true Miracles, the Scripture speaks of *lying* Wonders, of Things that seem to be of an extraordinary Nature, but are not in Fact: what they seem to be. But, because *lying* Wonders and feigned Miracles, may be performed by Imposters and false Teachers, it by no means follows, that *real* and *true* Miracles may, such as were wrought by Christ and his Apostles. *Lying* Wonders may be done by *lying* Teachers, but *true* Wonders can *only* be effected by Teachers of Truth, in Confirmation of their Doctrines. I can no more believe, that God would exert his Power to work Wonders, to confirm a Lye, than I can think, he is able to express a Falsehood, the *former* seems to my Understanding, as *irrational* as the *latter*, and as much contrary to the Rectitude and Truth of the divine Nature. Next follows a very extraordinary Observation, in our Author's Performance, *viz*, *The Miracles of Christ and his Apostles*, says he, *were natural Effects of Gospel, Benevolence*. And what then, do they lose anything of their Force, because of that? What, because they were Works of Mercy, as well as of Power, is the Evidence they afford less clear and shining? It may be it would have greatly gratified this Writer, if the Miracles of our Saviour and of his Apostles had been of a contrary Nature, if Men had been rendered miserable instead of being made happy: If they had been delivered into the Hand of Satan to torment and rack them, instead of being rescued out of his power, if they had been killed instead of being raised to Life when dead: I say perhaps, Wonders of such a Sort would have highly gratified him, that he might have had an Opportunity of objecting to the Christian Religion, as introduced with Cruelty and Vengeance, and not suitable to the Goodness. of God, and therefore not likely to be any Religion supported by his Authority, Let this Man perform Works of the same Nature, and display the same Benevolence as Christ and his Apostles did, in healing the sick, giving Sight to the Blind, cleansing Lepers, and raising the dead to Life, if he is able, and I will acknowledge him to have a better Title to being credited in his *bold* Assertions, than at present, I can persuade myself, he has a just Pretension to.

Again, he observes, *especial Care was taken not to have them made public*. Our Lord then was not ostentatious and ambitious of popular Applause. So far sure he may be intitled to the Characters of *humble* and *modest*. It had been happy for this Man, if in any Degree, his Temper and Conduct had given him a Claim in Characters like these.

But, what this Person aims at, in this Observation, he will never be able to prove, *viz*. that our Saviour did not work Miracles, in the Presence of a sufficient Number of Men, to give an undeniable Testimony to their Truth: For various of his Miracles were done in the Presence of many Witnesses, yea in the View of his Enemies, and they were obliged to confess the Truth of them; that is to say, such of his Miracles, as he intended should stand in the Face of the World, for Proofs of his Authority and heavenly Powers. And his forbidding those on whom miraculous Cures were wrought in private, spreading them abroad, is an Evidence, that he was

resolved the Proof of his divine Power and Authority, should not rest on Facts, which, on Account of their Secrecy might be disputed; but on such Facts, as were well known and might be attested, beyond all Possibility of Contradiction. Farther, he remarks that, *seeking them was discouraged, and instances in Herod*. This is recorded in Luke 23:8. If an extraordinary Person appears in the World, and gives Proof of his heavenly Mission, in the Presence of many Witnesses, shall it be Matter of Charge against him, or thought a Defect in the Evidence of his Authority, if he will not satisfy the vain Humor and Curiosity of every one who shall expect it, and take upon him to demand it? Is it fit that infinite Wisdom should be directed by the unreasonable Will of Man, and Almighty Power be called forth to work Wonders, to gratify the Curiosity of every impertinent Seeker of Signs. Apprehensions of this Sort, can only be agreeable to such kind of Men as this Writer as, who have less of Reason than Incredulity.

His principal Objection is still behind, and he seems to expect its Weight will bear down all before it, 'tis this: *Miracles are no longer Evidences of the Truth of any Doctrine than they are continued: Nor, to any other Persons, than those who see them*. By Age, it seems they lose all their glaring Evidence, and by Time intervening the whole of their Force sinks and vanishes. Fine Reasoning indeed and suitable enough to a Freethinker, *i.e.* a Man free from Prejudice it may be in every Thing except Religion, wherein, in an especial Manner he ought to be: But, in that, deeply and perhaps irrecoverably sunk into the basest and most unreasonable Prejudices.

This Person of free Enquiry, thinks it, I suppose, reasonable to conclude, that the World has existed more than seventeen Hundred Years, that such Men as *Alexander, Cicero and Julius Caesar* really were, and that the last named was assassinated by *Brutus* and others. And yet he cannot know. either of these Particulars, upon other or better Testimonies, than he may know the Certainty of the Miracles of Christ, which are related not only by his Friends, but by Enemies also. If we consider that the Disciples of Jesus were not credulous, but different, and with great Difficulty were persuaded who Christ was, and what was the true Nature. of his Work, and not without the fullest Evidence: If we consider, that they had nothing to expect in embracing his Religion, (that is to say in this World) but Hatred, Reproach, Contempt and the most cruel Persecution, and Death itself: Things which Men don't usually choose, except for some very important Reasons; and that they cheerfully took up with the greatest Afflictions, and voluntarily submitted to Death, out of a religious Regard to their great and good Master, and to seal the Truth of their Testimony concerning him, and the Truth of those Doctrines, they had learned from him: If we consider that one of his Apostles was a Zealot in a Religion (as corrupted in that Age) *opposite* to his, was miraculously converted to it, readily embraced it, and bravely defended it, tho' he hereby exposed himself to the greatest

Dangers and Sufferings, to Perils by Sea, to Perils by Land, yea that Bonds and Afflictions attended him Wherever he went, and that at length he also sealed the Truth of his Testimony concerning his Lord, in whom he gloried, with the Loss of his Life: If we consider the Predictions of future Events Concerning the Nation Of the Jews, the Destruction of their Temple, and of their Polity and Government, and their Dispersion in the World; and the Predictions of future Events relating to the Church of *Rome*, in her Principles and Manners, delivered in the Gospels and Epistles; and the exact Accomplishment of those Predictions: I say if we consider these Things, we must surely be unreasonably incredulous, if we hesitate a single Moment concerning the Truth of Christianity. As I have before observed, it is as irrational to doubt without Reason, as it is to believe without Evidence. He who does the latter is an Enthusiast, and he who does the former, acts a Part equally absurd and unreasonable.

Now, what is it that the Sceptic with any plausible Shew, can object to the Evidences of Christianity? Were those Evidences few? No, but numerous. Were they performed in a Corner and in the Presence of Friends only? No, but publicly and in the View of Enemies, and the Truth of the Facts they attest, though' they ascribe them to a wrong Power. Did the chosen Witnesses of Christianity gain Ease, Wealth, Honor, or Power, by their Testimony? No, it exposed them to Disgrace, Poverty, Loss of Liberty and Life itself; if therefore, they imposed upon the World, it was without any Temptation, nay even contrary to all their own Interests, (that is supposing their Testimony is false) and consequently we must think they acted not only a fraudulent, but a most foolish Part, and ran upon their own Destruction, without any thing of Moment, or Weight to invite them to it. This Man, inconsistent as he is., when he thinks that he shall gain some Advantage to the Cause of Infidelity, and do prejudice to the Interest and Truth of Christianity by it, can observe a rational conviction of the Evidences of the Christian Religion, will not enable Men to part with present Good and Pleasures, for distant Hopes and future Enjoyments: And now he can be content to suppose, that the Apostles resigned all their Ease, Pleasures, and the Enjoyments of Life, without and future Good in Hope or Expectation. Is there a Disagreement in the Testimony of these Witnesses, do they contradict one another? No, their Relations of Facts agree in all material Circumstances. Was there any Age, in which the Christian Religion was unknown, and in which there were none of that Sect: Or can any other Account be given of their Rise and Spread, of their Principles, Conduct and Sufferings, sufficient to let aside the Account of them in all these Respects, which is transmitted down to us, in those Pages they esteem sacred? No. Do those Writings contain any thing absurd, that is to say, which contradicts our Senses, and is repugnant to Reason? Not so: They indeed inform us of some Things, we could never have known, without such heavenly Intelligence; but though' those Things are undiscoverable by Reason, they are not repugnant to it.

Are their moral Rules defective, do they make any Allowances for the Weaknesses and Foibles of Mankind, do they spare a darling Lust and permit Men to indulge a favorite Passion? No, but their Precepts of Morality are pure and strictly rigid, and such as might be expected to come from God. Were they immoral and dissolute in their Behavior? No, they had a true Fear of God, a zealous Concern for his Glory, adored served and obeyed him, even to the Hazard of their Lives. They were inoffensive, meek, patient, submissive, temperate, compassionate, just and humble in their Deportment.

These are the true Characters of the Men this Infidel would persuade us, palmed a Forgery upon God, and put a Cheat on the World, and to their Disadvantage in this State, and to their certain Destruction in a future one, if this Man in Reality will allow us to think that Men do and will exist after Death. What Reason therefore can be offered, why these Evidences and Testimonies of the Truth of Christianity should not be credited? No solid, no substantial one can be assigned, and therefore he is not a wise Man, who withholds his Assent, when such Evidences demand it; he is not governed by Reason, how much so ever he boasts of it; but Humor and the most unreasonable Prejudice.

Miracles are necessary to confirm a Doctrine, that is absolutely undiscoverable by Reason; but that when Miracles are done to that End, to suppose there must be a Succession of other Miracles, to support the Truth of those before done, is a wild Imagination. The Miracles already wrought, ought to be eternally allowed what they are in Fact, *viz.* sufficient Evidences of the Truth of those Doctrines they were performed in Confirmation of. The Intervention of Time changes not the Nature of these Evidences and Testimonies, as this Person urges it does; they were truly divine, and cannot become human, Which he asserts they do. The utmost which can be pleaded by this Infidel, or any other on this Head, Is, that our Knowledge of these supernatural Proofs of the Christian Religion, is acquired in the same Way we get the Knowledge of other Facts done as long a Time since; but this proves no Change in the Nature of those Evidences. I find our Author's Logic fails him sometimes, as great a Proficient as he is in that Art. To believe Doctrines concerning God, his Purposes, and his Methods of Procedure towards offending Creatures, either in a Way of Penalty or Mercy, which Reason could not discover, or the Light of Nature could not point out to us, without any supernatural Evidences, or divine Testimonies of their being true, might I think, be very justly censured and pronounced Enthusiasm: But, to expect the Continuation of such Evidences, or to require a perpetual working of Miracles, in order to our yielding an Assent to those Doctrines, is *bold* and *impious*. It is sufficient that in our Age, we have such Proof that Miracles, great and wonderful, were once wrought to confirm the Truth of Christianity, as we allow to be full and convincing in any Thing else. And why that Proof may not be thought so here, I should be glad if this Infidel, or any other, would

plainly tell us. Will this Man believe nothing but what he has seen, or does see? Does he think it any unreasonable Thing so to do?

I imagine not. Does he think the World to be no larger in Compass, than what has fallen under his View? Can he persuade himself that more Men have not liv'd, or do live upon the Earth, than he has seen, or does see? Would he scruple to punish a Person, as the Law directs, that should privately steal his Property, upon the Testimony of credible Witnesses, though' it was done in his Absence? Would he decline to bring a Murderer of a Friend or of a Relative to Justice, because he did not see the horrid Fact committed? I can't think he would be so incredulous, as not to prosecute such a Wretch, upon the Testimony and Evidence of others: That Kind of Evidence which he will not allow to be a rational Proof of a divine Testimony, being often given to the Truth of Christianity, will serve his Turn, yea far less, I doubt not, where Life is concerned. And therefore, he is most unreasonable, not in grant, That that Kind of Proof is here rational, certain, and every Way sufficient. I cannot think that he would have his Manner of Reasoning take place in any Thing besides Christianity, or, that he would stand to the Consequences of it, in any one Thing else. *That seeing indeed is believing, has ever been allowed Reasoning,* says he, *but that I am to believe a Thing because another says he saw it, and it is not in my Power to prove a Negative, and contradict him, is surely a very unprecedented and new fort of Logic.* Not so unprecedented and new, but this Infidel has acted, doth and will act upon it, in the most weighty Affairs which

can occur in Life, or else he really is a Noun Substantive, and differs from all the rest of Mankind.

Thirdly. I now proceed to consider what he offers under his third Head of Discourse. Here he sets up for an Interpreter of Scripture, the Authority of which he disputes and therefore, according to him nothing is to be proved by it. In this Place he labors exceedingly to render it ridiculous, and puts such a Sense upon the Terms and Expressions of the Word of God, as he thinks will effectually answer his Design. This Infidel contends, that the Scripture makes it the Privilege of every Man in the World to be infallible, that every Individual of Mankind, is immediately, and at once rendered perfect in heavenly Knowledge, without the Exercise of his reasoning Faculties, or taking into Consideration, what Discoveries are made in the Bible of divine Truths. But what if this Man mistakes the Scripture, and the Principle he advances, and palms upon it, is not there found; but is as contrary to that, as it is to all Experience and good Sense? Then his Sneer upon the Bible, and its holy Doctrines, Will appear as groundless as it is *impious*. And that this is the Fact, will quickly be evident.

The Word of God, is the Rule of our Faith, or it contains all those *important* Truths, which it concerns us to know, in order to Our Happiness; it is *able to make us wise unto Salvation*: For as it is the only Rule we have, by which we are to form

our Judgments of divine Things, it is a perfect one. — It is plain and explicit, and suited to the Capacities of Persons unfurnished with Learning and Science. Its Doctrines, are *sublime* and *mysterious*, but the Language in which they are there expressed, though' not destitute of the greatest Beauties, is easy to be understood: So, admirably are Simplicity, Elegance; and Majesty at tempered together in the sacred Style. — It is the Duty of all Men to read and study the Bible; they ought to *search the Scriptures*, and search *them daily*, and *compare Spiritual Things with spiritual*, *i.e.* one Part of holy Writ with another. And it is their indispensable Duty, to pray that they may have Hearts disposed to conform their Conduct to the excellent Rules therein prescribed. — And therefore, no immediate Inspiration is to be expected from Heaven, to instruct us into the Knowledge of Truth, That is *absolutely unneedful*, according to the scriptural Account of Things: For every heavenly Truth we are required to believe and embrace, is therein discovered and proposed to our Enquiry: *To the Law, and to the Testimony: If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them.* Hence it is evident, that this Writer puts a forced and unnatural Sense upon various Texts, to introduce he knew to be absurd and false in Fact, and must of Necessity expose Christianity to the greater Contempt. The holy Scripture gives us no Reason to expect: an *immediate* Revelation of any divine Truth to our Understanding, as he confidently affirms it does; but whatever we are obliged to believe, by Virtue of its Authority, is already therein revealed, and proposed to our *serious* Consideration and *free* Enquiry. Indeed we have need of divine Illumination, to enable us to discover the *Excellency, Glory, and Importance* of those *momentous* Doctrines, the Scripture teaches us, and which we, as Men, by a due Exercise of our reasoning Powers, without this Illumination, may discover are therein contained: This is graciously promised, and is certainly communicated, to whomsoever it is agreeable to the Will of God so far to favor. What then becomes of all the curious Observations of this Infidel, with Relation to a Conveyance of heavenly Knowledge, in an *immediate* Manner to the Soul? As of *universal Influence, of proper Weight, of instant Effect, of absolute Certainty, and such as Books could never furnish.* This is no Principle of Revelation: Nor will he ever be able to prove, that it countenances Enthusiasm, which he so eagerly charges it with, and with an uncommon Assurance palms upon it, to promote his wicked Design of bringing it under Disgrace. This is no other than a Notion of his Invention, and therefore, he is only exposing a Brat of his own fertile Brain. The Christian Religion is not in the least affected by all he is pleased to say upon this Head.

The Infidel is guilty of the most fragrant Contradiction, when he says, *the Tender of this Conviction. greatly depends upon the Disposition of our Minds to give it Reception, for its Efficacy.* It seems after all, it is not an actual Conveyance of Light, to the Soul, but is only an Offer of it: Just now it was so strong a Light flashing into. the Mind, that it was of *instant* Effect, and bore away all Prejudices and

Darkness before it. But by this Time it is sunk into a *bore* Tender of Knowledge, if Men will receive it. Can this Man expect to be in the least regarded, when he so egregiously trifles, and manifestly contradicts himself? Infidelity is a Crime, and may be so proved, but not in the Way he points out. If Men have the same rational Grounds to believe that Christianity is true, as they have that the World has existed so long a time, as that is supposed to have been introduced it, they must be guilty of Perverseness and Obstinacy, to call the Truth of it into question: And that they have such rational Grounds, is unquestionably Fact. That Men are culpable in embracing of Heresies is certainly true: For if the Scripture expresses its Doctrines, in Words easy to be understood, but Men will not allow them their proper Meaning, because they disrelish the Doctrine, they must in that case grant to be true; they act a very *criminal* Part; and this is really the Fact. — The Infidel speaks of the sudden Conversion of some Persons as a Thing ridiculous. But he ought to have proved, that those Conversions were without rational Grounds; since he has not done this, he truly becomes what he falsely represents them to be, *exceeding ridiculous*. The Samaritans had just Reason to conclude that Person to be endued with heavenly Powers, who could give a Woman a Narrative of her Life, whom, till that Time, he had not seen, and with whom he had not before conversed. — The Writings of the Prophets plainly foretold the Sufferings and Death of the Messiah, and his Resurrection from the Dead, and therefore, the Disciples of our Lord, were culpable in not believing what they had such Means of knowing to be true, consequently they were justly reprov'd by Christ for their Incredulity, notwithstanding all this Infidel offers to prove the contrary.

The next Thing he labors to prove is that there is a Repugnancy between Religion and Reason. It is allowed that the Christian Religion contains Mysteries, which are above and not discoverable by Reason; such are the Doctrines of the Trinity, of the Incarnation of the Son of God, his Substitution in the Sinner's Room, bearing his Guilt and Punishment, *etc.* But neither of these Things is repugnant to Reason, nor will ever be proved opposite and contrary to it, by this Man, or any other breathing. It is no Prejudice to the Cause of revealed Religion, or Evidence that it is destitute of rational Proof, that Philosophers have opposed it, because they could not comprehend it. All that in Justice can be demanded to a rational Proof of its Doctrines, is, that it is a Revelation from God; that once proved, it is unreasonable to hesitate concerning the Truth of its Doctrines, how much so ever those Doctrines may exceed our Comprehension. The Conduct of the Philosopher, who disbelieves Revelation, because he finds it contains Principles that transcend his Reason, speaks the Language of his Heart to be this: That if God will reveal his Will to Men, if he expresses more, or any other Thing, than what might be known and demonstrated, before and without this Revelation of himself, the Truth he expresses can lay no Claim to his Assent. This is the *impious* Principle of *Philosophy and vain Deceit*,

which the Scripture warns us against. And hence arises all the Philosopher's Opposition to the Gospel of Christ. The holy Word of God contains nothing, teaches not any Thing *contradictory* to Reason, tho' it discovers some Things that Reason could not come at the Knowledge of, without this Revelation of them; which Things therefore, it is not to be expected should be proved by Argumentation, or Reasoning from such Principles, as the Light of Nature leads us to acknowledge are true. Nor is it to be thought strange, that revealed Religion should contain Principles mysterious and incomprehensible, since natural Religion obliges us to believe what we are unable to comprehend, *viz.* the eternal Existence of God, his Immensity and Infinite Knowledge: And the Production of all Things out of nothing, by an Act of his almighty Power. But why do I mention natural Religion, when I am considering what this Infidel objects to revealed; since he seems to give very little Credit even to that? I have sometimes thought it is impossible, that any one in human Shape can be an Atheist: in Opinion but, perhaps, I may be mistaken in that: For this Infidel seems to apprehend that the Being of God, will not admit of evident and unexceptionable Proof: It seems to be a Question with him, whether natural Religion hath rational and sufficient Evidence to support it. I own, I hardly thought it possible, that a Creature possessed of the lowest Degree of Reason, could advance any Thing so irrational. Dr. *Clarke*, it seems, by producing ingenious Arguments to prove the Being of God, has, in the Opinion of this Infidel, contributed to Atheism, and thrown Men into Doubting and Scruples about it; what Sort of Men they are, is easy to guess, such as this Man is, or who have as little Reason as himself, and really are a Disgrace to human Nature.

He thinks that *a Christian's Examination of Christianity* is absurd.

But why must it be thought so? A Man has undoubtedly a Right to examine the Evidences of the Christian Religion; but then, as he may examine freely, I hope it Will be allowed he ought to examine impartially, and admit those Evidences to be sufficient here, which he will not deny to be so in any Thing else, if such Evidences are here to be found, and that they are not this Infidel will never be able to prove. — *Infallibility* he makes a *necessary Qualification of a Christian Preacher*.

But very absurdly, for as the Preacher and the Hearer have one and the same Rule of Faith, the Hearer, though' he may not be capable of expressing so well, and illustrating those Ideas of divine Truths, which he forms in his Mind, and discovers are contained in the Word of God, yet he is able to discern, when that Doctrine the Preacher delivers, is agreeable to the holy Scripture, for all divine Truths are therein expressed in such Language as he understands himself. And therefore, an infallible Interpreter of this infallible Rule is unnecessary. Farther he asserts that, *Examination can't be under any Obedience*. Strange! no, what if the Evidences of the Thing examined are clear, full, and every way sufficient? Then a Man is not bound to believe, where his Reason demands a ready and firm assent of him. *What may be*

examined may be rejected, says he, May it so? I hope not merely because it may be examined. The Opinion of the Being of God may be examined, but a Man is not at Liberty to reject it: And he must be a Fool that does. The Opinion of God's creating the World may be examined, or the Evidences of it may be enquired into, but it may not be rejected. The Opinion of the Immortality of the Soul may be examined, but it may not be rejected; and a Man must offer Violence to Reason, if he will reject it. The Opinion that intelligent Creatures stand obliged to honor God and practice Virtue may also be examined; but it may not be rejected: Nor is it necessary a Man should doubt of the Truth of either of these things, when he begins to examine into the Evidences of them. Christianity may doubtless be examined; but it ought not to be rejected: For it hath such Evidences and Arguments in its Favor, as would certainly be allowed sufficient, to prove the Truth of any one thing else in the World. Neither is it necessary for a Man to become an Infidel, in order to his being a rational Christian: as it is not necessary to become an Atheist, in order to discover with Certainty, the Being of God. And as a Man would not be excusable in becoming an Atheist, when he examines the Evidences and Arguments of the Existence of Deity; so he would be inexcusable in becoming an Infidel, when he sets himself about the Examination of the Evidences of Christianity. And yet a Man can't be supposed to believe the Being of God without Evidence; nor the Truth of the Christian Religion without it. For as soon as a Man knows, what Idea the Words God and Deity stand for, so soon he must necessarily discern the Evidences of the Existence of God, and therefore, cannot reasonably admit any Doubt concerning it. And as soon as a Man can frame an Idea of what Christianity is, or understand what it means, so soon must he necessarily discover sufficient Evidences of its Truth, and by Consequence cannot reasonably be in doubt about it. I dare say, if a Man will but allow that to be sufficient Evidence and Proof here, which he will not deny to be so in anything else, he will not, he cannot hesitate concerning the Truth of Christianity a single Moment. — And tho' we esteem the Religion of Jesus the most sacred Thing in the World, as we have nothing to fear from a fair Opponent, (if such it can possibly have) we are not against the most rigid (let it be but impartial) Examination, of the Evidences and Arguments on which we form our Persuasion of its Truth.

Neither will we ever call upon the civil Magistrate, to *put a stop to the Reasoning* of Infidels against Christianity: For 'tis Pity but they should be allowed the free Exercise of the little Reason they have, and from which we know, no Prejudice can ever arise to the glorious Cause we defend, Yet we can't but wish (for their own sakes) that their Talents in arguing were better employed. — With Respect to what this Man observes, of its being the Opinion of Bishop Beveridge, *that a Conveyance of heavenly Light is necessary to a saving Knowledge of the Doctrines of Christianity*; it is a Truth which Revelation abundantly teaches us. A Man may know those Doctrines to be true, by the bare Exercise of his reasoning Faculties,

upon the Word of God; but he cannot enter into the Spirit, Importance and Glory of them, without the Super- addition of heavenly Light. This gracious Influence upon the Mind is not a Discovery of Truths which Men had not Means of knowing before, and which they could not by the Help of such Means discover without it. For those Doctrines, which under this benign Influence and heavenly Guidance, are apprehended to be of the greatest Importance, glorious, and every way worthy of their divine Author, are expressed in the holy Scripture, in such Language as Men may easily understand, and therefore may learn that those Doctrines are Truths, by a proper Exercise of their reasoning Powers, upon Revelation, without this Supernatural Light and Influence.

Let me instance in the Doctrine of the Deity of our Saviour. He is represented to have been, or existed in the Beginning, and is asserted to be God: *In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1.). He is called *the mighty God* (Isaiah 9:6.), *the true God* (1 John 5:20.), *over all, God blessed forever* (Romans 9:5.). *He* hath ascribed to him those Perfections, which are incommunicable to a Creature, and are certainly proper to a Deity, *viz.* Eternity (John 1:1.), Immutability (Hebrews 13:8.), Omniscience (John 21:9.), Omnipresence (John 3:13.), Omnipotence (Revelation 1:8.). He is affirmed to have *made all things*, and 'tis denied that *any Thing was made without him that was made* (John 1:3.). He is declared to *have laid the Foundations of the Earth, and the Heavens* are asserted *to be the Works of his Hands* (Hebrews 1:10, 11, 12.): Even in those very Records, which constantly make Creation a Work proper to God, and argue his Being, Power and Wisdom from it. He is proposed as the Object of Worship, in those very Writings which throughout condemn the Worship of a Creature. *He is thy Lord and worship thou him* (Psalm 45:11.). *Again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the World, he saith and let all the Angels of God worship him* (Hebrews 1:6.).

Christians are to be baptized into his Name $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\ \tau\omicron\ \omicron\nu\omicron\mu\alpha$ (Matthew 28:19.). Prayer is directed to him jointly with the Father (2 Thessalonians 1:16.). And of him Grace and Peace are implored (Ephesians 1:2.). Doxologies of Praise are ascribed to him (Jude 1:24.). And together with the Father he is adored (Revelation 7:10.).

These Particulars concerning our Saviour are asserted in the Scripture, in Language, so plain, explicate and full, that Art and Criticism are not necessary to understand it. Much of both indeed are required to evade the Force of these clear Testimonies, in Favor of this fundamental Truth of the Christian Religion. And the Use Men of Letters make of both, to obscure the Light of these Evidences, only serves to shew us, that learned Accomplishments enable them to argue in such a perverse and unreasonable Manner upon the Scripture, as a Man of Sense would even blush to do, upon any human Writings in the World. But I suppose it is excusable to argue most perversely here, provided it is learnedly.

I desire to instance in the Doctrine of Atonement and Satisfaction, by the Death of Christ. He is said to have *bore our Sins in his own Body on the Tree* (1 Peter 2:24.). The Lord *laid on him the Iniquities of us all* (Isaiah 53:6.). *For he hath made him to be sin, for us, who knew no Sin* (2 Corinthians 5:21.). Christ was *wounded for our Transgressions he was, bruised for our Iniquities* (Isaiah 53:5.). *The Messiah was cut off, but not for himself* (Daniel 9:26.). Our blessed Saviour was *made a Curse for us* (Galatians 3:13.). *It pleased the Lord to bruise him, and he hath put him to Grief* (Isaiah 53:10.). *The Chastisement of our Peace was upon him, and with his Stripes are we healed* (Isaiah 53:5.). *He gave his Life a Ransom for many* (Matthew 20:28.). Our gracious Redeemer *purges our Consciences from dead Works, in Consequence of his offering himself thro' the eternal. Spirit, without Spot to God* (Hebrews 9:14.). *Once in the End of the World hath he appeared to put away Sin, by the Sacrifice of himself.* (Hebrews 9:26.). *Unto him who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own Blood* (d), *The Blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin* (1 John 1:7.). *Christ has made Peace by the Blood of his Cross* (Colossians 1:20.). *He has made Reconciliation for Iniquity* (Daniel 9:24.). *Much more then being now justified by his Blood, we shall be saved from Wrath thro' him* (Romans 5:9.). *When we were Enemies we were reconciled to God, by the Death of his Son* (Romans 5:10.), *He is the Propitiation for our Sins* (1 John 1:2.). A Man who shall tell us, that Art and Criticism are necessary to discover the Truth of the Satisfaction of Christ, which is to clearly and explicitly declared, in these Scriptures, may with equal Reason tell us, that the Sun is not visible, when it shines brightest upon us, and we are unable to bear its dazzling Rays, and that a Telescope is necessary to discover it. Men of Learning have long endeavor's, by Art and Criticism, to darken and hide from View the strong Light, which flows in upon us, from these and other sacred Testimonies, in Favor of this important Doctrine, but all in vain. Their Endeavors this Way, only evidence, that their Acquirements enable them to argue against the clearest Testimonies, which can possibly be given of divine Truths, that approve not themselves to their likening and good Opinion.

I beg leave to instance in the Doctrine of the Necessity and Efficacy, of the Operations of the Spirit of God, upon the Souls of Men, in order to their Regeneration and Sanctification. *Except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God* (John 3:3.). *No Man can come to Christ, except the Father. draw him* (John 6:44.). *The carnal Mind is Enmity against God, for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be* (Romans 8:7.) *They who are in the Flesh cannot please God* (Romans 8:8.), *Without Faith it is impossible to please God* (Hebrews 11:5.). *Who were born not of Bloods, nor, of the Will of the Flesh, nor of the Will of Man, but of God* (John 1:13.): *Who of his abundant Mercy hath begotten us, again, to a lively hope* (1 Peter 1:3.). *Thro' Faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the Gift of God* (Ephesians 2:8.). We are *his Workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good*

Works (Ephesians 2:10.). *For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good Pleasure* (Philippians 2:13.). *Not by Works of Righteousness, which we have done; but of his Mercy hath he saved us by the washing of Regeneration, and the Renewing of the holy Ghost* (Titus 3:5.). *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy Calling, not according to our Works, but according to his own Purpose and Grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the World began* (2 Timothy 1:9.)? *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because thou hast hid these Things from the wise and prudent, and hath revealed them unto Babes: Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy Sight* (Matthew 11:25, 26.). *God who commanded the Light to shine out of Darkness, hath shined in our Hearts, to give the Light of the Knowledge of the Glory of God in the Face, or Person of Jesus Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:6.). *A new Heart also will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony Heart out of your Flesh, and I will give you an Heart of Flesh* (Ezekiel 36:26.). *Thy People shall be willing in the Day of thy Power* (Psalm 110:3.). *For thou also hast wrought all our Works in us* (Isaiah 26:12.). *And what is the exceeding Greatness of his Power, to us-ward, who believe, according to the Working of his mighty Power; which be wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead* (Ephesians 1:19, 20.). *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in Trespasses and sins* (Ephesians 2:1.).

The Evidence which these numerous Texts with many others, afford to prove the Doctrine of the Necessity, Efficacy, and gracious Effects, of the Operations of the Grace and Spirit of God upon us, has cost many learned Men great Pains and Labor, in Art and Criticism to obscure it; but altogether in vain. For like the Sun will shine through' the thickest Clouds, they will ever be able to raise in order to darken and keep it from our Sight. Here again I must observe that Art and Criticism are absolutely unnecessary to discover that shining Evidence. Persons of mean Capacities, and unfurnished with Learning and Science may discover it. Upon the whole, it is very apparent that, this Writer dreadfully abuses the Scripture, and puts a forced and unnatural Sense upon it, with relation to what it delivers concerning the heavenly Influence of the Spirit of God, upon the Souls of Men. That is not a Conveyance of the Knowledge of any divine Truths, which Men had not Means of discovering before, and which they were incapable of knowing to be such: But by this Influence, they are enabled to see the Excellency of, and to discern the Goodness, Wisdom, Holiness and Faithfulness of God, which are therein displayed in the fullest Manner. To imagine that God now affords such Light, as will enable us to make Discoveries of Truths, not already revealed to us, in his Word, is real Enthusiasm; and has nothing to support it in the holy Scriptures: On the contrary, such a wild Conceit stands there awfully condemned But that he communicates Light and Grace, to assist us in our Enquiries into those Truths, he hath graciously been pleased to inform us of, in his Word, and by the Help of which, we discern the Glory of these Truths, is a precious Doctrine

the Bible contains, and is at a great Remove from Enthusiasm, and is not in the least absurd or irrational.

It is Time for me to recapitulate and sum up what I have before observed, and I must take leave to give the Reader this Infidel's Recapitulation reversed: or to assert the contrary of what he does in every Particular. 'Tis evident that Men would very little differ in their Sentiments, relating to Christian Doctrines, if the Language of the Scripture, which is plain and easy to be understood, was interpreted in its obvious and natural Sense — That such Accomplishments, as require Time and Pains to attain, are not necessary to understand the Scripture, in the most momentous Points of Doctrine, it requires us, to believe That the Proofs of a Christian Faith are such, and so clear, and so full, that a Course of Study to apprehend them is not necessary: Those Proofs may be understood as soon as Men have learn'd to know, what Ideas the Terms and Expressions used in the holy Scripture stand for — That a rational Conviction therefore, of the Truth of the Christian Revelation, is not the Privilege only of a few Students and Specialists — That there is a certain Connection betwixt the Notion of Duty, and assenting rationally to a Proposition well supported. The Reason is plain, a Man is inexcusable to disbelieve that which he sees evident Reason to conclude is true. — That though' Arguments are but Motives to Assent, it is not a Contradiction to assert, that we are obliged to let them be conclusive, if they are clear and justly founded, and regularly drawn. — That there is not such a Complication of Circumstances to be determined upon, Consequences regularly drawn, and a summoning of Evidence in order to the Proof of Christianity, that should hinder the Certainty of the Event, in an impartial Enquirer, and therefore, it may be foretold and prescribed That the Proofs of Christianity are so evident, and of such Force, that they are calculated to produce an Assent, from every Man, to whom they are proposed, as soon as understood. And those Proofs are of so easy and plain a Nature, that it is a Dishonor, to the Names of *Locke* and *Newton*, to suggest that Capacities like theirs, are necessary to understand their Force and Weight — That Christianity may not only be enforced, as a Fact, but it may also be proved true as a Gospel, in Virtue of such Arguments, as approve themselves to that Reason, of which all Men are professed — That all Men have Leave and Right to examine the Evidences of Christianity, and determine of its Truth, as the Matter shall appear to their Reason; but it is to be observed, that those Evidences are such, that they must necessarily appear pregnant Proofs of its Truth. And therefore, by granting Men Liberty to examine these Evidences and Proofs, we are in no Danger of authorizing Infidelity in Form, and setting it upon the same Footing, in Point of Conscience, with the Profession Christianity itself, as this Author affirms we are. The Man has ill Success indeed, for he has not proved one single Point, with all these Pains and Labor. He might therefore, have very well spared the whole of his pathetic and moving Expostulation, with the *Oxonian*, whom

he addresses, for it is entirely founded on Principles unproved and false; it therefore demands no Regard from me, or any other Christian, let the unreasonable Infidel, such as this Man himself is, pay his Respect to it, and make the best of it, he is heartily welcome.