

nistry. The Apostles are still triumphant in the doctrine of the Cross, and will be *always*, even to the end of the world : so that it fully appears, that God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty.

As it is evident that the Apostles and Evangelists were called to their respective duties by Jesus Christ, and qualified to fulfil them by the operations of his Spirit, we cannot conceive that they will meet with his approbation, who are not qualified for the work of the ministry, and called by them that believe in his name to preach the gospel of his grace.

We are told, as certain prophets and teachers, ministered unto the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto *I* have called them ; and when *they* had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. Now, we have no reason to suppose, that

that such men entered on any *particular* service on any inferior call; or that, in any instance, they fulfilled their Christian ministry without the energy of the holy Spirit. The ablest minister of the New Testament, speaking of himself, and of his Fellow-Apostles, said, Our sufficiency is of God.

It is granted, that common pastors and teachers, cannot pretend to the same extraordinary call and assistance with the Apostles of Christ. This would be absurd. For this would be to suppose, that they had the same duties to discharge, the same temptations to resist, and the same oppositions to surmount, as those Ambassadors of Christ; which is evidently untrue. Nay, this would be to suppose, that the labours and writings of the Apostles were, in a great measure, useless to mankind. Yet what should we be, if they had not gone before us; since the wall of the city of God hath twelve *foundations*, and in *them*, the names of the twelve APOSTLES of the Lamb?

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But as *our* qualifications for the ministry are dispensed in different degrees, and as there are a diversity of gifts by the same spirit, it becomes us to be very cautious lest *we* infringe on the liberty of prophecy. Since all of us confess, we know but in part, and prophecy but in part, and that we now see through a glass darkly, why should we indulge airs that are utterly inconsistent with such a becoming confession?

It were well, says Bishop Taylor, if men would as much consider themselves as the doctrines which they teach, and think that they may as well be deceived by their *own* weakness, as persuaded by the arguments of a doctrine which *other* men, as wise as themselves, call inevident. For it is a hard case, that we shall think ALL Papists and Anabaptists and Sacramentarians to be fools and wicked persons; certainly, among all these sects, there are very many wise men and good men, as well as erring; and although some zeals are so hot, and their eyes so inflamed with their ardors, that they do not think their adversaries look like other men, yet certainly
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we find, by the results of their discourses, and the transactions of their affairs of civil society, that they are men that speak and make syllogisms, and use reason, and read scripture; and although they do no more understand ALL of it than we do, yet they endeavour to understand as much as concerns them, even all they can; even all that concerns repentance from dead works, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ: and therefore, methinks this also should be another consideration, distinguishing the persons; for if the persons be Christians in their lives, and Christians in their profession; if they acknowledge the eternal Son of God for their master and their Lord, and live in all relations as becomes persons making such professions; why then should I hate such persons whom God loves, and who love God, who are partakers of Christ, and Christ hath a title to them, who dwell in Christ, and Christ in them; why should I hate them, because their understandings have not been brought up like mine, have not had the same masters, they have not met with the same books, nor

the same company, or have not the same interest, or are not so wise, or else are wiser, (that is, for some reason or other, which I neither do understand, nor ought to blame,) have not the same opinions that I have, and do not determine their *school questions*, to the sense of MY *sect* or *interest*?

These are admirable remarks; but when were they written? Alas! when the Established Church was under oppression and persecution. But to the honour of Bishop Stillingfleet, he wrote his *Irenicum*, when the Church of England was in a more settled situation; and, it is owned without regret, that some of her ablest ministers, since the days of Stillingfleet, have pleaded for reasonable liberty in a manner that secures the credit of their intellectual and moral attainments.

Of necessary qualifications for the ministry of the gospel, it is in vain to consult the jarring-jumble of human opinions: interested tutors, parental ambition, and the vain desires
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of pupils, have long since concurred to make that necessary which seldom is of any use; and that reputable, which, in common, is something worse than a mere waste of time. But the opposite extreme is equally to be deplored. For who can say, whether that science, which is falsely so called, or that ignorance, which is the unavoidable shame of so many preachers, is most hurtful to a man who would pass for an acceptable minister of Jesus Christ?

Of the *final* end of the ministry we can better judge, since this is the Christian edification of those that sit under it, terminating in the glory of God. Yet even of this, to form a just judgment, is by no means so common as might be expected. Dissenters claim the right of choosing their own ministers, and it would certainly be not right to deprive us of that practice. Yet, *we* must confess, that the exercise of this right is often abused. Perhaps when a minister is wanting, the best way of being supplied is to engage with none who is not well recommended; and then, on trial,
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for the Church that wants him to judge whether he is or is not suitable for *them*.

From these difficulties, which cannot be concealed, I think we should always distinguish between a man's being called to the ministry at *large*, and his being chosen as a *stated* preacher. In the latter case, you have had my opinion; which, after my decease, I wish you to regard. In the former, I apprehend, whoever holds the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and is disposed to state and defend them to his fellow men, if he meets with any believers who are willing to hear him, and who soberly affirm, that his labours are to their edification, no man may forbid him.

It is of great moment to be fully satisfied Christ is the HEAD of his own Church; that, to this end, he hath assumed our nature, and makes believers in him partakers (in a sound sense of the term) of the divine nature; and that he is the life, light, and glory of his own people. Such views of our Redeemer
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most deeply convince us, of his right to rule over us, and of its being our duty to endeavour in all things to be subject unto him. Such views most deeply convince us of his care and compassion to the members of his mystical body, and that he is as willing, as he is able, to save them evermore. Such views most deeply convince us, that his ministers, in every age, are raised up by his power, qualified by his grace, and called by his Spirit to labour in word and doctrine. This hath an effect which is doubly pleasing. For, it makes the ministers of Christ humble under their greatest attainments, and their hearers thankful for those gifts and graces which he has bestowed on men for their advantage.

A standing ministry in the Church of Christ, though inferior to those ambassadors unto whom was first committed the word of reconciliation, is a great blessing to mankind. The shafts of ridicule, whether levelled by lords, or wits, against this sacred institution would fall back from whence they rose with-
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out alarm, if every minister was conscientious in his calling, sound in his judgment, and diligent in his profession. In every considerable occupation, but that of a religious complexion, a succession of settled and appointed professors, are thought to be expedient. Who imagines the statesman has less of professional knowledge, because he is a statesman? Or the lawyer, because he is a lawyer? or the physician, because he is a physician? or the merchant, because he is a merchant? or even the tradesman, because he is a tradesman? Must then, a preacher know the less of theology because he is a preacher? All professional men are liable to err; but that they should know less of their profession, than those who are of another, or than those who are of none, is one of those paradoxes at which wisdom revolts.

Not only a stated ministry, but a stated minister in one place, if he be competent to the discharge of his duty, is of great service. He knows more of his hearers; his hearers know more of him, than any occasional ministers

ministers and hearers know of each other. A hint in one discourse, awakes, or produces, an association of ideas, in reference to others on the same subject, or bordering upon it, that cannot be expected from a stranger. It has given me pleasure to observe, that very few attempts to introduce promiscuous preaching among *dissenters*, have succeeded; while, at the same time, I have observed, that the cause which some people have warmly espoused, cannot be carried on without it. What disgrace would a man of upright intentions, of tolerable parts, and of good understanding, think it, if, with all this, before three months elapsed, he *must* give way to another, and he, in his turn, to another; so that the quarters, if not the months in the year, might be numbered by the different ministers who preached to the same people! Pious men may have some plea to gratify this fickle temper, therefore the severity of censure might be unjust; but I own, I should think myself dishonoured by indulging it. If indeed, a man has a stated service, to preach occasionally to others, or to invite others to preach

preach for him, may, with prudence, be commendable : but how different this is from that unsettled procedure that some are industrious to support, I need not specify. Only let me add, they who are so fond of changes have no countenance from the conduct, or spirit of the Apostles. For, first, their commission was peculiar to their office ; which office does not now exist ; and, secondly, it is well known, that where the Apostles were successful, churches were settled, and pastors and deacons provided. They set in order the things that were *wanting*, and ordained elders in every city.

But, whatever may be my sentiments on this subject, they who in these things act amiss, would do still worse to go out of their own way, unless they themselves were convinced they had acted improperly. Let every man be fully persuaded in his *own* mind, in reference to his *own* actions. But, there let him stop ; and not imagine his neighbour is bound to approve, much less to applaud, his favorite decisions.

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To conclude . It is Christ who maketh fishers of men ; and, without his Spirit, no man ever was, is, or will be, an able minister of the New Testament. It is he also, that preserves those who are caught. They are taken to be improved, not to be injured : taken for their master's use, not to be the prey of artful men. Let us pray therefore, that the Lord of the harvest, would send forth labourers into his harvest, that vacant congregations may be well supplied, and that those who have not yet heard of that Lord, may hear the voice of the Son of God, and live ! AMEN !

SERMON

S E R M O N X.

ON THE SENTENTIOUS SAYINGS OF CHRIST.

MATTHEW vii. 24.

THEREFORE, WHOSOEVER HEARETH THESE SAYINGS
OF MINE, AND DOTH THEM, I WILL LIKEN HIM
UNTO A WISE MAN, WHICH BUILT HIS HOUSE UPON
A ROCK; AND THE RAIN DESCENDED, AND THE
FLOODS CAME, AND THE WINDS BLEW, AND BEAT
UPON THAT HOUSE; AND IT FELL NOT: FOR IT
WAS FOUNDED UPON A ROCK.

SHORT isolated sentences, we are told, was the mode in which antient wisdom delighted to convey its precepts, for the regulation of life and manners. Not that we are to imagine, this was the only mode in which antient wisdom was pleased to convey instruction. Far from it. But, while this method was in fashion, Solomon excelled all men in
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proverbial speeches; and, before it was out of fashion, the sententious sayings of Jesus Christ, were sufficient to convince the intelligent how far such a method of teaching might be improved.

THEN such teaching had much to recommend it. For, it was of great antiquity; had acquired considerable reputation, both in the church and world; since what was thus taught, was generally acute, easy to be retained, and pleasing to the hearer. In short, it was so acceptable, that all nations have had their peculiar proverbs; and, I believe, that most individuals have been more influenced by short pithy sayings, which they approved, than by laboured systems, profound treatises, or long and tedious disputations.

It is true, the abuse of this mode of instruction, on the one hand, and the dread of undistinguishing censure on the other, have made many averse to glean up the principles of wisdom from such mutilated forms of speech. These censures have produced dis-

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gust, where nothing more than caution was wanting. They have done what is worse ; for they have opened a wide door to loads of sentimental trash, which has been raked up, and brought to market, in confidence of a rapid sale. But, however the vicious may applaud those dashed-off discourses, heavy-laden with idle digressions, speckled with marks of admiration, and abounding with double-meanings, they who are possessed with a tolerable degree of judgment and taste, nauseate such flippant and ensnaring productions.

To such, the sententious sayings of our Lord will prove a treat. But, as I am allowed, in this situation, to suppose, that some may be present not so well acquainted with his sayings as others ; to them, I would observe, that the most simple method of gaining instruction from the maxims of Jesus Christ, is, perhaps, the best : which, as I take it, is to read the New Testament carefully, and, as any sententious saying occurs, to mark it
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with a pen, or pencil, that it may, with ease, be re-consulted upon any future occasion.

Further ; as any of us have capacity and leisure, it would increase the probability of our gaining advantage by the aphorisms of Christ, if we observe how they were introduced, and when ; the subject with which they are connected, the end they are designed to answer, and the agreement between them and those doctrines which are sometimes more fully explained in the New Testament.

Permit me now to lessen your labour, by laying before you a specimen of the sententious sayings of our Lord, selected from what is commonly called his sermon on the mount ; from which, the words of my text are taken.

But previous to this, it may be proper to remark, that I shall not take any notice of the BEATITUDES in the beginning of his excellent discourse ; not because they are not, every one of them, deserving our attention, but because they are more in number than

could now be introduced, unless we were to confine ourselves to them alone.—I have only to add, that to every saying of our Lord which may here be brought forward, a short comment will be subjoined.

I. YE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

Matth. v. 14.

CHRIST is most eminently the light of the world. Next to him, and by him, his *Apostles* were the light of mankind; and all his genuine *Disciples*, in every age, are children of light.—The words of the text chiefly refers to that doctrine which the Apostles received and taught, and which they were to propagate in every nation.—Without the doctrine of life and immortality, the conduct of the Apostles appears to be unaccountable. With it, their behaviour was consistent, and illustrious. *Their* light was not only distinguished from the light of *others*, but from their *own* good works: and, as their good works were done in the light, and distinguished by it, so it is equally evident, they
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were performed in the spirit of adoption ; for they were such as would glorify their FATHER who is in heaven.

II. THINK NOT THAT I AM COME TO DESTROY THE LAW, OR THE PROPHETS : I AM NOT COME TO DESTROY, BUT TO FULFIL. Matth. v. 17.

Fear and hope commonly produce a crowd of thoughts on the same subject, but with different sensations. They who feared Christ would destroy the law, or the prophets, would naturally think of such ruin. They who hoped for such destruction, would likewise indulge many thoughts on its supposed approach. But the first would think and tremble ; the second, would muse on the same subject and rejoice. Christ assured them, for such thoughts, on any principle, there was not the least foundation. I am not come, said he, to destroy, but to fulfil. Not to fill-up ; but to fulfil. Not only to fulfil the law, by his obedience and oblation, but also the prophets, by accomplishing their predictions of

his person and grace. Yet he who came to *fulfil* both the law and the prophets, did not come to *confound* them, or to give any sanction to that abuse. The excellence of the law is not undervalued by strongly asserting the pre-eminence of the gospel. We might as well assert that we despise the moon, unless we admit that she is, or that she contains the sun.

III. SWEAR NOT AT ALL. Matth. v. 34.

When we consider that the law required that they who were under it, should fear the Lord their God, and serve him, and *swear* by his name; that Abraham made his servant swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, and that an oath is still required as a useful mean to put an end to all strife, it is not credible that an oath is absolutely forbidden in the prohibition which is now before us. Probably, the injunction refers to those tricks which the Pharisees invented, and which their followers admired. It is said they taught the people, that if they
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omitted the name of God in their oaths, they were not binding, and other dangerous maxims, which our Lord completely refuted. It is yet more evident, that he forbade the use of oaths in common conversation: and, from the context, it appears, they were taught by him to distinguish between those oaths in which they swore to *perform* what they might not be able to effect, and those in which they only attested, in the most solemn manner, what they knew to be truth.

IV. LOVE YOUR ENEMIES. Matt. v. 44.

This is not a mere matter of counsel, but a command. Nor was it unknown, however it might be disregarded, under the Old Testament*. Every body is able to perceive some difference between that charity which suffereth long, and is kind, and that complacency which cannot exist without some delight in the object esteemed. The former is here commanded, not the latter; and this

* Prov. xxv. 21.