



Mr. *Dickinson's*
SERMON

Preached at the opening of the

SYNOD

AT

PHILADELPHIA,

September 19. 1722.



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Whererein is considered the Character of
the MAN of GOD, and his Furniture
for the Exercise both of Doctrine and
Discipline, with the true boundaries of
the Churches Power. *K*

By *Jonathan Dickinson*, A. M.
Minister of the Gospel at *Elizabeth-Town*.

*Isai. VIII. 20. To the Law and to the Testimony;
if they speak not according to this Word, it is be-
cause there is no light in them.*

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A

SERMON

Preached at the SYNOD at

Philadelphia.

2. Tim. III. 17.

*That the Man of God may be perfect, throughly
furnished unto all good Works.*



HERE has no one thing
had an equal hand in the ma-
ny Heresies, Schisms, Convul-
sions and Confusions, which
the Church of God has always
laboured under, with HU-
MANE INVENTIONS
and INSTITUTIONS, in

the Affairs of Gods House.

Hence

HENCE the first rent in Christ's seamless Coat, and the continued successive Feuds among the ambitious Clergy, that rendred the Church rather, literally, an *Army with Banners*, than the Spouse of the *Prince of Peace*.

HENCE the *Man of Sin*, with all his *Pagan Idolatry, Antichristian Hierarchy, Theatrical Pageantry, and Bloody Cruelty*.

HENCE numerous Sects and Factions among Christians, and even among *Protestants*, too commonly flaming with bigotted Zeal and uncharitable Asperity, one towards another.

HENCE the weak are wounded; Infidelity strengthened; and Religion its self, with all its blessed and peaceable Doctrines, is become a subject of Debate, instead of a Rule of Faith and Life. And I may add to all this,——

IT's a bold invasion of Christ's *Royal Power*, and a rude reflection upon his *Wisdom and Faithfulness*, for *proud Worms* to make any Addition to that perfect Pattern, which he has given us; For how artfully soever this Mischief may be painted over, with the fair Colours of *Apostolick Tradition, Antiquity, Order and Decency, The band of Union and Communion, The well Government or greater Good of the Church, or whatever other Pre- tence*; it may be justly challanged with a **WHO HAS REQUIRED THIS AT YOUR HANDS.** *Since he who is faithful to him that appointed him, as Moses was in all his House, has given us a compleat Rule for Doctrine, Worship and Discipline, sufficient to make the Man of God perfect, througibly furnished to all good Works, as we find in our Text, in which is notable*

1. AN honourable Compellation given to a Gospel Minister. *The Man of God*. The meaning whereof, I shall hereafter find occasion to consider.

2. THE only *Rule and Standard* of a Ministers whole Work and Duty. That by which he may be perfect, *thoroughly furnish'd unto all good Works*; fully acquainted with the Will of God, and directed unto the discharge of every part of his Office. That there is no *Rule* wanting for his Guide, no *Law* for his Observance, no *Rubrick* or *Ritual* for his Worship, no *Foundation* for his Faith or Hope; but what is there fully provided for. Nor any room left for political *Inventions* or *Institutions*, in order to the full and faithful discharge of his whole Trust. And this comprehensive *Rule* (as we may see in the foregoing *Verse*) is the SACRED SCRIPTURE. *All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God, and is profitable, &c. that the Man of God may be perfect, &c.*— But that I may more distinctly explain the Words, I shall consider them as consisting of these two Propositions.

I. THAT a Gospel Minister is a *Man of God*.

II. THAT the *Holy Scriptures* are every way sufficient to make him perfect in, and thoroughly furnish him for, the whole Work of his Ministry.

Prop. I. A Gospel Minister is a *Man of God*.— This dignifying Title, though most frequently given to the *Prophets* and *Inspired Teachers*, is applicable to the ordinary Ministers of the Gospel, in these respects.

1. IN that they have their Mission and Commission from him.— They have their Commission not of man, nor by men; but from Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead*. And no man may take this honour to himself, but he that is called of God as was Aaron †—

Though a mediate Separation to the Sacred Office, be the instituted Means to propagate the Ministry thro' the succeeding Ages of the Church; yet the Office it self is immediately from Christ, who has ascended on high, to give gifts unto men, and continue Pastors and Teachers in his Church, till we all come in the Unity of the Faith §. And God who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, hath given to us the Ministry of Reconciliation*.— Thus a Minister is a Man of God, by him appointed and authorized; and by him allowed to be put in trust with the Gospel. 1 Theſ. II. 4.

2. A Minister is a Man of God, in that he is engaged in the immediate Service, and employ'd in the Sacred Things of God.— He who commands the Service of innumerable Legions of Angels, has been pleased to dignify poor Dust and Ashes, with the Character of his Servants, and betrust them with the great Affairs of his Kingdom. That by their Ministry, (how contemptible soever in the eyes of the World) He may break down the strong holds of Sin and Satan in the Hearts of Men, rescue Sins miserable Captives, advance the Kingdom of his Grace, and erect Trophies on the ruins of Satans Interest in the World.— And as he has honour-

* Gal. I. 1. † Heb. V. 4. § Eph. IV. 10, 11, 12. * 2 Cor. V. 18.

ed them with this awful Trust, so has he set 'em apart to it, and sent 'em to preach in his Name the Gospel of the Kingdom, to instruct the Ignorant, to awaken the Secure, to comfort the Mourners, to detect the Self-deceivers, refute the Erroneous, discover the deceitfulness of Mens Hearts, lay open the Devices of Satan; and both by *Doctrine* and *Discipline*, earnestly pursue the rescue of Sinners from Destruction, and their Reconciliation unto God.— Thus are they *Men of God, Men separated unto the Gospel of God*, Rom. I. 1. *Labourers together with God*, 1 Cor. III. 9. *And Ministers according to the dispensation of God, which is given to them, to fulfil the Word of God*, Col. I. 25. And this Appellation belongs to the Gospel Minister.

3. AS he represents God, and acts in his name and stead, in the discharge of his Ministry.— Such are the riches of free Grace, and such the wonders of Divine Condescension, that injured Justice is stooping to treat with Rebels about a Reconciliation, and for that End he *who is in Christ reconciling the World unto himself, has committed unto his Ministers the word of Reconciliation**; and commission'd 'em in his Name, to propose the Treaty of Peace to poor Sinners; and to press upon 'em both the sweet Allurements of the Gospel, and terrible Thunders of the Law, as powerful Incentives to their compliance with offer'd Mercy.

AND as God graciously condescends to treat with Rebels, so also to bring them into his Family,

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family, and to deal with 'em as *Children*, and for that End has made his Ministers *Rulers over his Household*, to give every one their *Portion of Meat in due season* †. And has given them charge of the Affairs of his House, as *Stewards of the Mysteries of God**. — Thus then they are *Men of God*, as they are *Ambassadors for Christ*, as though God did beseech us by them, as they pray us in *Christ's* stead, to be reconciled to God. 2 Cor. V. 20. And as they are *Stewards of the manifold Grace of God*. 1 Pet. IV. 10. — Thus I come to make some brief Reflections upon this Proposition.

AND I must first apply this Truth to you, My *Reverend Fathers and Brethren*, whose Character I've now been considering. Suffer the most unworthy of your Number and Order, to stir up your *pure Minds by way of Remembrance*.

1. ARE we *Men of God*, this teaches us the Sacred Dignity of our Office and Character. — The Service of God is an Honour that the brightest *Intelligences of Heaven* are ambitious of. What cause have we therefore with ravished Souls, to admire and adore that Grace of God, which dignifies such worthless Worms with the Character of his *Ambassadors*? What cause of an holy Emulation to walk worthy of so high an Honour; that God ben't dishonour'd, our Persons contemned, the Ordinances by us dispensed slighted and disesteemed, nor our Labours fruitless, by a licentious Walk, or by base sordid mean Spirits or Actions.

2. ARE

† Luk. XII. 42. * 1 Cor. IV. 1.

2. ARE we *Men of God*, this teaches us, that we must render an account of our *Stewardship* unto him. *We watch for Souls, as those that must give an account* *. And blessed Lord! what a dreadful Account shall we have to give, if at last exposed to that Reprimand, *Thou slothful Servant!* — May the consideration of this Account always dwell in our Hearts, and invigorate our Ministerial Duties. May we obtain Grace of God to be faithful, and so discharge the Ministry committed to us of the Lord, as to give up our Account with joy. May we be among those blessed Servants, whom our Lord when he cometh shall find so doing, and then see that desirable fruit of our Ministry, many that shall be our crown and rejoicing in the day of our Lord Jesus. But I now turn me to others.

3. ARE Ministers *Men of GOD*, How worthy are they then to be most seriously regarded, in those most weighty and important Affairs, upon which they come unto you in the Name of the Lord. — Our business with you is of most awful Concernment; It is to pray you in *Christ's stead to be reconciled to God* †. It is, if possible, to check your career for Hell, and pluck you as Brands out of the Fire; It is to labour with unwearied Diligence to have Christ formed in you. And with what fervour of Affection, and agony of Soul, do we come unto you, warning every Man, and teaching every Man in all Wisdom, that we may present every Man perfect in Christ Jesus §. — And now dear Souls! what must be the

* Heb. III. 17. † 2 Cor. V. 20. § Col. I. 28.

the fruit of our Labour and Travail for you? Will you be prevailed with to accept of Christ, and his Salvation? This will be to the Glory of God, and the Crown and Rejoicing of your faithful Ministers in the day of Christ, as well as your own Salvation. Or must we preach to the Wind? Must all our affectionate Addresses be as Water spilt upon the Ground, that can't be gathered up? Must we still have occasion to lament over you, that *we have labour'd in vain, and spent our Strength for nought?* You shall then know, whether you'l hear, or whether you'l forbear, that the Men of God have been among you*; and that God resents your barrenness under the Means of Grace, as a great indignity to him; and will punish your impenitence in Sin with greater Condemnation, than if you had never heard the joyful Sound. And now I come to

Prop. 2. THAT the *Holy Scriptures* are every way sufficient, to make the *Man of GOD* perfect in, and throughly furnish him for, the whole Work of his Ministry.—— For the illustrating this Proposition, let us take a short view of the *Man of GOD*, in the discharge of the several Duties of his Function, and we shall find full and compleat Furniture from this Sacred Treasury, for every part thereof.

IF we consider him as a *Teacher* and *Instructor* of poor ignorant Souls, in the way to the Kingdom of God. Labouring to store their dark Understandings with the knowledge of the Doctrines and Practice of Christianity, and to unfold

* Ezek. II. 5.

fold the Myſteries of Salvation. The Scripture is profitable for *Instruction* *. Thence may he bring to the Sinners view, his fallen State and native Miſery, with the bleſſed Remedy provided, and glorious Salvation exhibited. Thence may he ſhew the Sinner the dreadful Perils of Impenitency, and his laſt Neceſſity of accepting offered Mercy. Thence may he mark out the path of Life, and diſcover the many Precipices, Errors and Miſtakes, to which the poor Pilgrim is expoſed in his way to Heaven. In a Word, Thence may he be furniſh'd with whatever is neceſſary for Faith or Practice, and *out of theſe Treasures may he bring forth things new and old*. There is nothing Needful, nothing Lawful to be added. But *if an Angel from Heaven preach any other Doctrine, let him be accuſed †*.

IF we follow the *Man of GOD* into his Study, what is the buſineſs of his private Meditations, but to conſult the Sacred Oracles, that he may know what is *the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God*? Whatever additional Helps may come into uſe, they are profitable only as being ſubſervient to his clearer underſtanding, and better improving the Contents of this bleſſed Book; out of which he may be furniſh'd with Addreſſes agreeable to every Circumſtance of his Flock, and qualified to *ſhew himſelf approved unto God, a Workman that need not be aſhamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth*.

IF we conſider the *Man of GOD* as preſiding in, or performing any part of Divine Worſhip,
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* 2 Tim. III. 16. † Gal. I. 8.

the Pattern in the Mount is his Directory, even unto every Tack, Pin, and Fillet of the Sanctuary, not one Nail may he drive in the Tabernacle, but according to that Pattern; the least deviation from which, tho' it may have a *shew of Wisdom and Will-worship*, yet will render the Worship in vain. *In vain do they worship me, teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men.* Mat. XV. 9.

IF we further consider him in the Pulpit, thence addressing us in the Name of the Lord. He hath no business there with *enticing Words of Mans Wisdom*, with flourishes of his own Parts or Learning, or with the Authority of any Men or Churches, how ancient, pious, or famous soever. But whatever he delivers, must have the sanction of a **THUS SAITH THE LORD.**— He must keep exactly *to the Law, and to the Testimony, if he speaks not according to this word, it is because there is no light in him* *. They are the very Words of the Royal Commission, whence he has his Authority, that he *teach Men to observe whatsoever Christ has commanded him* †.

LET us still go on to consider him as a *Ruler of Christ's Household*, holding the Scourge of Discipline in his Hands, to awe Men from scandalous Courses, and chasten obstinate Offenders. And what perplexed or difficult Cases soever, or whatever crafty or perverse Delinquents he may meet with, he may by a diligent Search, & prudent Application, find sufficient Directions from the Scriptures, without the assistance of any
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* Isai, VIII. 20. † Mat. XXVIII. 20.

Humane *Canons* or *Constitutions* whatsoever. And indeed I can't see any place such can have in the House of God, since we have *but one Law-giver, who is able to save and destroy* *.

IF we yet continue our view of the *Man of GOD*, under the various metaphorical Appellations he obtains in Scripture. As a *Steward*, out of this Treasury must he provide *every one their Portion of Meat in due season*. As a *Watchman*, he must hence take the Trumpet, to sound the Alarm to poor secure Sinners. As an *Ambassador*, he has here full Orders and Directions, how to negotiate the weighty Affairs of Christ's Kingdom. And to sum up all in a Word, he is hereby *thoroughly furnish'd unto all good Works*.

AND now I come to the main thing intended, to make some Improvement of this Proposition.

I. WE are hence instructed, that the *Man of GOD* has no Power or Authority to make any *New Laws* or *Constitutions* in the Affairs of God's House; or to make any Additions unto, or Alterations of those *Laws*, that Christ has left us in the Divine Oracles. This being an Affair that has caused much Struggle and Debate; and that has been (as I observed before) throughout all succeeding ages of the Church, the source of innumerable Mischiefs and Confusions. I shall take liberty to be something particular upon this head, and consider what it is to make *New Laws*; and as I pass along, disprove our Claim to that Authority.

I. Then

*J am. III. 12.

7. THEN the devising and imposing any PART or MODE of Worship that wants a Divine Institution, is a *Legislature* that we have no just claim to.— There are indeed several circumstantial Appendages to the Worship of God, such as *Time, Place, &c.* that are not, nor is it possible they should be, particularly provided for in the Word of God. *Wisdom is therefore profitable to direct*, and determine these things, conformable to those general Rules, that require all things to be done *to Edification, Decently and in Order.*

BUT then to Institute any new PART of Worship, or to bring any thing into Gods immediate Service, not expressly instituted by Christ, is a bold Invasion of his Royalty, who is *Head over all things to his Church**; and whose Prerogative it is, to give *Laws and Ordinances* to his House. And no pretence of Innocency, Indifferency, or the like, will legitimate our thus *setting our Thresholds by Gods Thresholds, and our Posts by his Posts †.* What more Innocent, what more Indifferent, than the cleanly Ceremony of *washing Hands before Meat*? Yet when Religion comes to be placed in it, and it's made a Decree of the Sanhedrim, *Gods Commandment is transgressed by this Tradition.* Mat. XV. 3.

AND no less faulty is the Invention, and Imposition of any Unscriptural MODE of Worship. For God has shewn us *the form of his House, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all*

* Eph. I. 22, † Ezek. XLIII, 8,

All the Ordinances thereof *. That Gods Worship wants not to be deckt with Ornaments of Humane Invention, nor the gaity of uninstituted Rites, to render it pleasing and beautiful in his Eyes: But on the contrary, is it not haughty Arrogance for vile Dust to suppose, he can worship God in a way more *decent* and *orderly*, than he himself has contrived? And is it not an assuming Christs Prerogative, to enjoin as Terms of Communion, any *Modes of Worship*, that he neither requires nor warrants?— In whatever guizes or disguizes this impleaded Practice may appear, with whatever specious Pretences it may be palliated; let it appear with the hoary head of Antiquity, with the Authority of never such great Men or Churches, or with never such a shew of Religion or Devotion; it will come under the same Condemnation with *Feroboam's Feast*, that it is *devised of our own Hearts* †. And I can't see, but that the most plausible Arguments by which this can be patronized, may be urged with as fair a shew in justification of *Nadab and Abihu*; of *Uzzab*, or *Abaz's Damascene Altar*.

2. THE forming and imposing any New Acts or Constitutions, in the Government or Discipline of the Church, I take to be an unwarrantable *Legislature*.— That I may clear this something particularly, I shall premise these three things.

1. THAT Christ has appointed a *Government* or *Discipline* in his Church. Christ has not left
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* Ezek. XLIII. 11. † 1 King. XII. 33.

his Church to be a Garden without Enclosure, a City without Walls, or a Vineyard without a Hedge; nor has he left his Disciples to be *Lambs in a large place*, an ungovern'd *Mobile*; that (as when there was no King in Israel) *every one should do what is good in his own eyes*, take his swing in sinful and licentious Courses; to the scandal of Religion, profanation of sacred Ordinances, and destruction of his own Soul.—— But that Offenders may be reduced, rotten Members cut off, Scandal restrain'd, and the Church edified; Christ has constituted an Ecclesiastical Regiment, and for that end appointed his own proper Officers, Laws, Ordinances, and Censures. The Necessity of which is manifest, from the Constitution of the Church, which consists of *barren*, and *fruitful* Branches; of Sound and Unsound; Tares and Wheat; Sheep and Goats; and must therefore quickly become a *Babel*, if without *Discipline*. The truth of which is also abundantly evident from many places of Scripture, particularly from *Mat. XVIII.* from 15 to 20th Verse, *Tit. III.* 10. and *I.* 13. *2 Cor. II.* 6. *1 Tim. V.* 20. *cum multis aliis.*

I don't now design a Dispute upon the controverted Modes of Church-Government; but will venture to say with due deference and respect to those otherwise minded, that the *Presbyterian Government* appears to me the most conformed to the *Laws of Christ*, of any whatsoever; and does, for ought I know, as exactly quadrate with the Rule, as may be hoped for in this state of Imperfection.

But I go on to premise,

2. THAT there are some External Circumstances of *Discipline*, that are not set down precisely, or expressly provided for in the *Word of God*; but are left to the prudent Conduct of Church Governours. To exemplify this, we in these Parts manage the Discipline of the Church in *Sessions, Presbyteries, and Synods*; and have doubtless the Divine Warrant for our so doing. In order to this, there must be Time and Place appointed for such Conventions, and some Order and Method for carrying on our Consultations decently, and without Confusion: And in this case there being only general Rules left us in the *Scripture*, it necessarily belongs to us to consult and agree upon such Methods, as may best subserve the great Ends of Discipline, the Glory of God, and the Churches Weal.— The *Synod at Jerusalem* mention'd *Acts XV.* does indeed give us considerable Light, even in this case; but leaves many necessary Circumstances to be provided for, by Humane Wisdom and Prudence. But then,

3. ALL the Substantials of Government are left upon Record in the Word of God, and are unalterable by any Humane Authority.— As Christ is sole *King & Legislator* to his Church, it is an incommunicable Jewel in his Crown, to give all the *Laws* and all the *Ordinances* thereof; and it would therefore be an egregious Reflection on his Faithfulness, to suppose any Case that can possibly occur unprovided for. It is a worthy saying of a venerable Synod*, “ Christ
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* Vindication of Presbyterial Government, p. 4.

“ as a King now sits at Gods right Hand, and is
 “ made head over all things to his Church, which
 “ Church is called the House of God, and who
 “ should appoint Orders for the Government of
 “ the House, but the Lord of the House? And
 “ to say that he hath not ordain'd how his
 “ House should be govern'd, is to make the
 “ Master less faithful in his own House, than his
 “ Servant Moses was.— These things premis'd,
 I reassume the Proposition, *That it is an unwar-*
rantable Legislature, to make any Acts or Constitutions
for the Substantials of Church-Government.

IT is an excellent Saying of the *Bishop of Ban-*
gor, worthy to be printed in Letters of Gold, and
 transmitted to latest Posterity *. “ And in this
 “ Sense therefore, his (Christ's) Kingdom is not
 “ of this World, that he has in those Points left
 “ behind him no Visible Humane Authority, no
 “ Vicegerent that can be said properly to supply
 “ his place, no *Interpreters* upon whom his Sub-
 “ jects are absolutely to depend, no Judges over
 “ the Consciences and Religion of his People.
 “ For if this were so, that any such absolute
 “ Vicegerent Authority, either for the making
 “ *New Laws*, or *Interpreting* old ones, or judging
 “ his Subjects in Religious Matters, were lodged
 “ in any Men upon Earth; the Consequence
 “ would be, that what still retains the Name of
 “ the *Church of Christ*, would not be the *Kingdom*
 “ of *Christ*; but the Kingdom of those Men vested
 “ with such Authority.— The truth of this
 will appear most manifest if we consider, That

* Sermon before the King, March 31. 1717.

THAT whatever Acts or Constitution, can be devised, must be such as Christ has already made, or such as he has not made. There is no place for making Acts already made; and it's a daring Usurpation of Christs Throne, and rushing upon the Pikes of that terrible Threatning, *Rev. XXII. 18.* to make new ones that he has not instituted. Again,

WE can make no Constitutions, but what must be either binding and obligatory, or not. If not, such chimerical Acts can be of no further use, than as a subject of Debate, and bone of Contention. If binding, we exercise a kingly Dominion and Authority, and make our selves *Lords over Gods Heritage*, contrary to our Lords exprefs Command, *Mat. XX. 25, 26.* and *1 Pet. V. 3.* Moreover,

IF we make any Laws for the Discipline of the Church, they must be made either by Authority derived from Christ, or by our own Authority. I'm sure it's imperious enough to claim such an Authority of our own, and I challenge the World to produce any such *Dedimus potestatem* from Christ, or the least lisp in the Bible that countenances such a Regal Power. I add,

WHATEVER Constitutions can be formed for Church-Government, must be either of a Religious Nature, or meerly Humane Politicks and Prudentials. Now it's a ruled Case, that *all Religion is of Divine Original*, and we have no Authority to put the Stamp of Religion upon the most innocent and indifferent thing in the World, as I have already proved from *Mat. XV.* And as for meerly *Humane Politicks*, the horrible
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Confusion they have already brought upon the Church, would make 'em appear with but a very indifferent Aspect, in the eyes of all serious and thinking Persons, if we had not been forbid to *set our Thresholds by Gods, and our Posts by his.*

THESE, among the many Reasons that might be assign'd, make it appear, that no Pretence whatsoever can justify this usurped Power.

IF never so many, and never so famous Churches have set us this Copy, we may not write after it.

COULD we make Acts never so innocent in themselves, and never so agreeable to the State and Circumstances of our Churches, the *Law-making Faculty* would still be an Usurpation.

LET us make never so many Pretences to found such Constitutions upon the Word of God, all the Churches in the World may put in the same Plea, and even the *Papal Hierarchy* and the *Canons of Trent*, pretend to the same Foundation, and have as much claim to this *Legislative Authority* from such Pretences, as we can have; that is, none at all.

But I'll hasten forward, and consider,

3. THAT any authoritative obligatory *Interpretation* of the Laws of Christ, is a *Law-making Faculty* that we are not entitled to. — It's true the Ministers of Christ have Commission to *Interpret* his Laws, and it concerns them with utmost application to study his Mind and Will, that they may declare his whole Counsel to his People. But then these having no claim to *Infallibility*, can have no Authority to impose their *Interpretations*; nor is any Man absolutely oblig'd

ged to receive them, any farther than they appear to him just and true. The Reasons of this are obvious.

WHATEVER Subjection is either required or performed unto such *Interpretations*, must be in obedience either to God or Man. Obedience to God it cannot be, when our Consciences (whether Regular or Erring, it's the same thing) tell us, that God requires no such thing at our hands. And if we owe any Obedience to Man in this case, it must be because he has an *absolute legislative Power*, and is *Lord over our Consciences*. But *who is he that judgeth another Mans Servant? since to his own Master he must stand or fall **. Besides,

THIS Power to impose *Interpretations* of Scripture, must necessarily blend Light and Darknes, Truth and Falshood together; oblige us to believe greatest Contradictions, and build our hope of Salvation upon the most contrary Foundations.

To exemplify this.

THERE are some that *Interpret* the Scriptures in a *Popish*, some in a *Protestant* Sence; some in an *Arminian*, some in a *Calvinist* Sence; some (to instance no more) in an *Arian* or *Socinian*, and blessed be God, the most in a contrary Sence; and all these have an equal claim to impose their *Interpretations*. And must we believe them all? Must we believe that we are justified by Works *ex condigno*, and yet that we are *justified by Faith alone, without the Works of the Law*? Must we believe the Decrees of God Absolute, and yet Conditional?

* Rom. XIV. 4.

ditional? That our blessed Saviour is a mere Creature, and yet that he is essentially God, coequal, and coeval with the Father? and a hundred more like Contradictions, that may be collected out of the *Interpretations* of Scripture, among these different Seats.

IF we consider this with relation to Discipline, the Consequence is the same. — The Keys of Discipline belong to the Pope, say the Romans; To the Patriarch of Constantinople, say the Greek Churches; To Prelates, say the English Church; To Presbyters, say most other Reformed Churches; To the Community in conjunction with the Presbyters, say our Congregational Brethren. And which of these must we believe? I answer, none of 'em all. For though we agree in Principle with some of these, it is because we esteem their *Interpretations* just, and agreeable to the Mind of Christ; and so its Christs Authority, & not theirs, that we found our Faith upon.

THERE are two plausible Objections lie in our way, which I shall therefore endeavour to obviate.

IT may be objected, How can Ministers be said to represent Christ, to preach in his Name, and by his Authority; and yet their Hearers not be obliged to receive their Doctrine; but at liberty to follow their several Sentiments, and (oftentimes) erring and misguided Consciences? But the Answer is easy.

THE *Ministers of Christ* do come to us in his Name, and by his Authority, when they preach nothing but what is contain'd in his Word, and we are under indispensable Obligation to receive the

the manifest *Truths* of God by them preached, *not* as the *Word of Man*, but as (it is in truth) the *Word of God* *. But they have no Commission to teach us to observe any thing, but *what Christ has commanded them* †. And when they teach any other Doctrine, they come in their own Names, and not in Christs. — So then, we are to esteem them as *Christs Ambassadors*, and with awful Reverence to attend their preaching, as if *Christ was speaking to us by them*, when we are convinced that they declare the *Counsel of God*: But are not bound to an implicate Faith, against contrary Convictions. It concerns them therefore, to justify their *Interpretations* of Gods Word, by clear Scripture Evidence, to the Conviction of their Hearers; and thereby lay 'em under Obligations to Observance and Obedience.

IT may be further *objected*, That this Doctrine will destroy all Discipline. For if we have no power to impose our *Interpretations* of Christs Laws, neither have we Authority to impose any *Censures*, founded upon such Interpretations. To which I answer :

THERE can be but two Cases in which Censures should be administred, the one is *Scandal*, the other *Heresy*. And I can't see any imposition of our *Interpretations*, by Regular Discipline, in either of these.

IT is but what the Light of Nature teaches, and all the different Sects of Christians are agreed in, that evident and notorious *Scandal*, unqualifies Men for Salvation. For us therefore

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* 1 Thef. II. 13. † See Mat. XXVIII. 20.

to declare that *the Unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God*, That wicked and profligate Persons are unmeet for the Kingdom of his Grace or Glory; or to seclude such Criminals our sacred Fellowship, (which is, for ought I know, the highest Church-Censure) gives no handle of Complaint, nor is any imposition upon Conscience, unless Conscience be made an Umbrage for Licentiousness and Impiety. We impose no *Interpretation* upon the Delinquent, by barring him our Communion, for Obstinacy in notorious Impiety.

AND as for *Hereticks* the Rule is plain, — *Tit. III. 10.* being Obstinate, they are to be *Rejected*. And what imposition upon their Consciences can this imply? — Tho' we have no right to impose our *Opinions* and *Interpretations* upon them, we have an undisputed claim to reject theirs, and even to judge 'em Impious and Wicked, (when they are so) such as render the Heretick unfit for Communion in Sealing Ordinances.

But to make this Case, if possible, a little plainer :

THOUGH some plain and comprehensive Creed or Confession of Faith (for distinguishing such as receive, from those who reject *the Faith once delivered to the Saints*) may be useful and necessary, since the worst of Heresies may take shelter under the express Words of Scripture. Yet we are by no means to force these *credenda*, upon any of differing Sentiments.

WE may not so much as shut out of Communion, any such Dissenters, as we can charitably

bly hope Christ won't shut out of Heaven: But should open the *Doors of the Church* as wide, as Christ opens the *Gates of Heaven*; and receive one another, as Christ also received us, to the Glory of God*.

AND tho' we ought to reject both the Heresy, and the Communion of those, who deny what we esteem the Fundamental Truths of our holy Religion; yet even these essential Articles of Christianity, may not be imposed by Civil Coercions, temporal Penalties, or any other way whatsoever.

THESE things having been thus distinctly considered, I'll give you the sum of what has been said under this *Inference*, in the Words of Monsieur *De la Pilloniere* †. "If you mean by that KINGLY Word NEW Laws, no more than outward REGULATIONS in matters indifferent, about appointing for your selves & those who agree with you, Time, Place, &c. of *Publick Worship*, and other like things, which may conduce to ORDER and DECENCY; I confess thus far *it is no invasion of Christs Regal Power*. But if by the power of making NEW LAWS, you pretend to a power of adding the least tittle to the FAITH *that was once delivered to the Saints*, or of encroaching by way of INTERPRETATION, or any other way, upon that Freedom with which our Redeemer has made us *Free*; then you arrogate to your selves more than the Apostles themselves did, and instead of his *Messengers* & SERVANTS, you become in part, the Usurpers of
" his

* Rom. XV. 7. † Answer to Dr. Snape's Accusation. p. 66

his *Throne*, and the LORDS of his People. But I hasten to a Conclusion, and shall add but this Reflection more.

II. WE are hence instructed, how great are our Obligations to adore and praise the Grace of God, in committing unto us his blessed Oracles, wherein are contain'd every thing necessary for our Salvation.— A Privilege by which we are distinguish'd from many of our Fellow-Creatures, who *sit in darkneß and see no light*; and are under a necessity to perish for lack of Vision, while we are under the happy Influences of the Meridian Sun of the Gospel. God therefore justly expects from us, that we have lasting Impressions of his Goodness upon our Hearts, and that our grateful Reflections thereon, actuate us to a careful Acquaintance with, and diligent Observance of his Will revealed in his Word. He expects that we revere his *Threatnings*, and thereby take warning to flee from the Wrath to come; that we obey his *Precepts*, and study a conformity to his blessed Laws; and that we comply with his *Invitations*, and embrace a tendered Saviour upon his own Terms.— And O! that we might be sufficiently alarm'd with the dreadful Prospect of having this precious Privilege, by our Unthankfulness for, and Misimprovement of it, rise up in Judgment against us, and render our state more intolerable, than that of *Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah*, in the Day of Judgment, according to the Threatning, *Mat. XI. 23, 24*. For *how shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation?*

F I N I S.