

S E R M O N CXLVII.

QUESTION XXXIX.

WHAT is the Duty that GOD requires of Man ?

A N S W E R.

THE Duty that GOD requireth of Man, is Obedience to his revealed Will.

WE have taken a Summary Account of the first part of Man's Religion, as we are taught it in the Scriptures, viz. Faith, or the things which he is to believe concerning God. We are now to pass over to the Second, *Observance or Obedience*, the discovery whereof consists, in *the Duty which God requires of Man*. The Ground or Reason of this Distribution hath been handled in the Explication of the Third Question; where we observed, that *the Scriptures are a compleat Rule of Faith and Manners*, pointing us to God as the first Cause and last End of all things. And because not only Knowledge and Practice must go together, according to Joh. 13. 17. *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*. But it is necessary that we know God, in order to our right serving of him; hence Faith, by which we obtain that Knowledge, must be first in order of Nature.

THE Proposition now under Consideration, is only a general Account given of Man's Duty, which is further and more distinctly illustrated in the Sequel. We may therefore here, take only a general Account of it. Here then two Things are to be considered, viz.

1. That *there is a Duty which all Men stand obliged in unto God*. 2. That *the Things required in this Duty is Obedience to his revealed Will*.

I. THAT *there is a Duty which all Men stand obliged in unto God*. All Creatures both rational and irrational, are God's Property, and owe themselves to him; being for his Glory. But they cannot properly be said, to be under a Duty. For *Duty*, in the appropriate Notion of it, *is an Obligation lying on the Creature in Equity, and by the force of a Precept, to the doing of a Thing*; and this, none but a Reasonable Creature is capable of. It is therefore called a *Reasonable Service*, Rom. 12. 1. Intimating that there is a strong and manifold Reason requiring it of them, and hence that it is unreasonable for them to deny it to him; and that they must use Reason in doing it. Here two Things may be considered, 1. That *Man owed a Duty of Service to God at first*. 2. That *he is not discharged from it since the Fall*.

1. That *Man owed a Duty of Service to God at first*. This will be evident if we consider,

1. THAT *God made all things for his own Glory*. That all Beings besides God, had their Being from him, and that they derive from him, not naturally, but voluntarily, hath been before demonstrated: According to, Rev. 4. 11. *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created*. Now every wise and free Agent, proposeth to himself, an end of his actions. And as the Consideration of the Holiness of God assures us, that he can have no other last end, in his Works of Efficiency, than his own declarative Glory. Isai. 42. 8. *I am the Lord, that is my Name, My glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images*. So the Word of God assures us, that he had this design in all his Works. Prov. 16. 4. *The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked*

wicked for the day of evil. And but for this, no second Being had ever been called out of the Abyss of Nothing.

2. THAT all Creatures were made to glorify God, according to the Capacity they were endowed withal. That the Creatures are ranked in several Orders and Kinds of Being, and therefore furnished with very different Capacities, is obvious to every one that hath any rational Consideration of them. And herein God expresses his manifold Wisdom, *Psal. 104. 24. O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all : the earth is full of thy riches.* Now the Wisdom of God in this variety appears, in his fitting them to the great End, in the way for which they were adapted in their Natures. We read, as of the whole frame of Creation, so of every Order of Being in it, that they were *very good*, *Gen. 1.* Now the Goodness of a Creature, is in its being useful to the end of its Being. For to make a thing for an end, to which it is incapable of serving, is folly and not wisdom. So that by the capacity of the Creature, when it came out of God's Hand by Creation, we may discern, how God is to be glorified by it.

3. THAT Man was made capable of serving God Actively. There are two ways in which Creatures may be improved in the Service of God, viz. *Passively* and *Actively*. In the former way God is glorified by all sorts of Beings, in as much as they are Mirrors in which his glorious Perfections are displayed, and are used by him as instruments in bringing to pass, his Purposes in the World. Accordingly we read, *Psal. 19. 1. The heavens declare the glory of God : and the firmament sheweth his handy work.* And *Psal. 146. 8.* In the latter respect, only rational Beings are fitted to serve him. Actual Service done to God, is voluntary and upon Choice. Now Man was furnished for this in his Creation; partly in respect of the Nature which God gave him, viz. An Understanding and Will by which he was fitted to know and cause this Service; and all the other Powers in him, subordinated to these, by which he was fitted to pursue his deliberate Choice: Partly also by reason of the Image of God, which was concreated on him, by which all his Faculties and Powers were set right, being *Sanctified to the Service of God.* *Ecc. 7. 29.*

4. THAT God required Duty of Man, under a Promise and Threatning. Of the former we are told, *Rom. 10. 5. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth them shall live by them.* Of the latter, *Gen. 2. 17. But of the tree of the knowledge of good & evil, thou shalt not eat of it : for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.* Now these do evidently declare, that it was not a matter of indifferency whether Men served God or no. For such Sanctions carry in them, the strongest Obligations that can be. Where Life or Death are the assured issues of the Man's Carriage, it declares that it is a matter of greatest Consequence.

5. THAT God had a Right & Authority over Men, thus to oblige them. When therefore he hath so done, it must needs amount to a Duty. For what else constitutes a Duty; but the Command of a Superiour given to a Subject: And if it be nothing but what is just in itself, and suited to the Capacity of the Subject on whom it is laid: And such is this. God's Right is founded in his Absolute Supremacy. All second Beings are his own, they have their Being from him, and are upheld by him, and owe themselves intirely to him. All their Powers are on this account to be at his Direction, and accordingly employed for him, *Psal. 100. begin.*

2. THAT he is not discharged from Duty to God since the Fall. As to Man's particular Obligation to the Law of Government given at first, that will be considered afterwards. But that he still stands in Duty bound to serve God is here to be observed; and it is enough to evidence it, because he is not discharged from it, notwithstanding the Apostasy. The truth of this Assertion will stand against all Cavils; because either the Fall itself must give him this Discharge, or the new Covenant must do it; but neither of these do.

1. THE Fall itself hath not discharged him. It hath indeed deprived him of the Power, having stripped him naked of the Image of God, by which he was enabled to it. Fallen Man is *worth at strength*, *Rom. 5. 6.* That is a Truth concerning every natural Man, *Josh. 24. 19.* He hath contracted the Image of Sin, which hath filled him with Aversion from, and Enmity against the Law of God, *Rom. 8. 7.* But the natural Tie, and moral Obligation to Duty, do still abide upon him for all this. He doth not cease to be a Creature, and so to owe himself to the Glory of his Creator, nor doth he cease to be a reasonable Creature, and so to owe to God a reasonable Service. His revolt itself doth not disoblige him, that cannot make either God's Right, or his Duty to cease; he therefore abides still under the Sanction, which holds him under a Sentence of Death. Nor can his impotency do it, since he was created with full Furniture for it, and hath lost it by his own Default. And that God should lose his Authority, because Man hath cast off his Ability, is without Reason.

2. NOR doth the new Covenant take off the Obligation, but reinforce it. What alteration is made in the state of the Duty in which they that are under the New Covenant are obliged by it, belongs to an after Consideration. But that Man is not by it freed from Duty to God, is certain. And indeed the Obligation itself is founded in Nature, and therefore cannot cease so long as the natural Order of Beings abides. God must cease to be Man's Creator and Governour, or Man must cease to be a Creature and a Subject; before he can be enfranchised from owing Duty to God. Nay, the new Covenant doth add a new force to the Engagement, in as much as it

it brings in an additional Right that God hath to the Service of Man, which is founded in that Redemption which is wrought out by Jesus Christ, and applied to us by his Holy Spirit. For we are told, for what end he redeemed us, Tit. 2. 14. *That he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* And accordingly, the Apostle useth it as the most forcible Argument to engage us to Duty, 1 Cor. 6. 19, 20. *What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

II. **THAT** the Thing required in the Duty, is Obedience to his revealed Will. We have here a very full and comprehensive Description of Man's Duty; in which there are two things to be observed, 1. *The Subject-Matter of Duty;* viz. *the revealed Will of God.* 2. *The proper Nature of Duty;* or that wherein it is to be performed by us, viz. *Obedience to that Will of his.* A few words to each.

1. **THE Subject-Matter of Duty, is God's revealed Will.** So is Duty described, 1 Pet. 4. 2. *That he should no longer live the rest of his time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.* And this is that which sets the Bounds to our Duty. Whatsoever God wills us to do, is our Duty, and nothing else but what he so wills; and the supreme Reason why it is our Duty, is because he wills it, Deut. 12. 32. *What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.* The Will of God in Scripture Language, cometh under a double Consideration, sometimes for his *Will willing*, sometimes for his *Will willed*. In the former sense it is nothing but God himself, as he is apprehended by us after the manner of our analogous Conception, having such a moral Faculty, as is best represented by a Will in rational and moral Agents. In the latter respect it is ascribed to him metonymically, as an Act or Effect flowing from his essential Will; and so we are here to understand it. And to this Will of God Divines do usually apply the Distinction of *secret and revealed*; which Distinction is manifestly grounded on the Word of God. The latter of which is that whereon Man's Duty depends, according to Deut. 29. 29. *The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed, belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.* Not as if this did constitute two diverse Wills in God, much less opposite, one to another. For we are told, Job. 22. 13. *But he is in one mind, and who can turn him; and what his soul desireth, even that he doth.* But this Will of his is thus diversely represented to our Consideration according to his different Manner of dispensing it in his Works. His secret Will, is his everlasting Counsel within himself, concerning all Things that come to pass in

Time; and is therefore called secret, because none was of Counsel with him, nor can dive into his Purposes any further than he is pleased to make them known. Of which see, Isa. 40. 13, 14. *Who hath directed the spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding? His revealed Will is nothing else, but the discovery which he makes to the Creature of his own Purposes, so far as it hath pleased him. And this also comes under a double Consideration, viz. either it is the Manifestation which he makes of the Things which he himself from Eternity purposed to do, which is done either by his Word, or by his Works. By his Word, and so it comprehends all those Predictions, which he hath given of future Things, which he did extraordinarily discover to his Prophets, and hath recorded in the Scriptures, many whereof have since been accomplished, and the rest shall certainly be so in their proper Season. By his Works, and so whatsoever comes to pass in the Providence of God, is an infallible Revelation of what God before the Foundation of the World, intended should be, Lam. 3. 37. *Alls 4. 28.* Or else these Discoveries which he hath made to Man, of the Things which he requires of him to do; by which Discovery he makes it his Duty to do them: according to Mic. 6. 8. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* This also belongs to, or flows from his Eternal Purpose; for though he did not Purpose that all Men should actually do these Things; for then they should have so done eventually; for the Counsel of the Lord shall stand; yet he purposed that it should be Man's Duty to do them, and he therefore violates his Obligation, if he neglect so to do. And this is that which Divines call his preceptive Will, because he hath revealed it in the way of a Law or Command, as will afterwards be considered. This then is that Will of God, that prescribes unto Man the matter of his Duty, and lays a powerful Obligation on him to comply with it. And this will be evident if we consider these things.*

1. **THAT God hath a supreme Authority over the rational Creature, so command it as he sees meet.** To dispute this, is to make it a Question whether God be God, or the reasonable Creature be a Creature; for so long as that Relation between God and him abides, the reason of God's Authority and his Subjection continueth. He that made the Creature for his Glory, may dispose of it as he sees best, for that End; and therefore, where he hath put moral Powers into any second Beings, he hath a right to regulate them according to his own Wisdom. And if he command, it is with Authority.

2. **HENCE his so commanding, lays the Crea-**

ture under Duty. If there were no Command, there would be no Duty, and if there be, it both constitutes Duty, and carries the Reason of it. God's Holiness and Justice are sufficient to assure us, that he will Command no unjust or impure Actions, but it is in his absolute Jurisdiction over us, which forbids us to dispute, and engageth us readily to comply with all that he requires of us. How often therefore do we find him affixing of that Seal to his Precepts, *I am the Lord?* Tho' he could have given other Reasons, yet he will have us to understand, that if he say it, there is no liberty for us to demur about it.

3. *THAT Nothing else but God's Precept, can be the Rational Creature's Duty.* Nothing else can bind our Consciences. Mat. 4. 10. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* True, there is a Duty that we owe to Men, and that according to the rank and Station that God hath set them and us in. But the reason why we owe it to them, is because it is God's revealed Will that we should pay such a Deference to them. Nor can we lawfully submit our Consciences to them, any further than God hath told us his Will about it. Hence that, Eph. 6. 1. *Children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.* Act. 4. 19. And the reason is, in the relation he bears to us, *Isai. 35. 22. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king, he will save us.*

4. *IT is necessary that Man know his Duty, in order to his doing of it.* It is a reasonable Service, and therefore is not done by instinct, but on free choice, which cannot be, but according as he hath acquaintance with it. Ignorance must needs impede Duty, and make the Man either to sit still, or to do amiss. Hence this is not the least part of the misery of Sinners, Rom. 3. 17. *And the way of peace they have not known.* This made David so often to pray for teaching, *Psal. 119. 33, &c.*

5. *A Man may fulfil the secret Will of God, and sin therein, and he may design otherwise, and yet please God.* That then cannot be the rule of our Duty. It is certain, that wicked Men, when they perpetrate the most notorious Abominations, do therein accomplish the secret Will of God, who purposed, by his active Permission, to let them fall into such Enormities, but that no way takes from the sinfulness of it. Hence we have that Observation on the Crucifixion of Christ, *Act. 2. 23. Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified & slain.* And holy Men sometimes, in pursuance of the Command, engage in that, which it is God's secret Will shall never be, and yet they do their Duty. As when we pray for our Enemies, or for Sick Persons, when God intends to dispose of them otherwise, yet we do our Duty. And when David purposed to build a House for God, which God intended that he should not, yet we read, *2 Chron. 6. 8, 9. But the Lord said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine*

heart to build a House for my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart: Notwithstanding, thou shalt not build the house, but thy son which shall come forth of thy loins, he shall build the house for my name.

6. *NOR could Man have known to put difference between Sin and Duty, if God had not revealed it.* It is true, there was an impression of the Rule on Man's Conscience at the first, which we call the Light of Nature, and there are remarkable reliicks of it on the hearts of fallen Men; according to *Rom. 2. 14.* But yet, it was God that left these impressions on Mens minds, and so revealed his Will in them, For we do not here consider Revelation, as it is opposed to the ordinary way of knowledge, as it is sometimes considered, but as it is contradistinguished to God's secret Will, in what way soever he is pleased to make it known.

2. *THE proper Nature of Duty:* or that wherein it is to be performed by us, viz. *Obedience to his Will of his.* This is that which we owe to God, and therefore in the right discharge of it, we are truly said to do our Duty. Here then we may take an Account of the Nature of Obedience in General. And it may be thus described; *Obedience to God, is the conforming of our Wills and Actions to the Command, from the respect that we bear to God commanding.* From which Description we may observe these things,

1. *THE Rule of this Obedience, is the Command.* All that truly obey God, have a respect to that as their Directory, both to the extent and limitation of their Duty, *Psal. 119. 6. Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.* And therefore we are limited hither, *Isai. 8. 20. To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* If there were no Rule, it would follow, that there could be neither Obedience nor Disobedience; for these must be measured by some Rule, which can be no other than the Command.

2. *THE Subject of it is twofold.*

(1.) *PRIMARILY the Will;* and that as it is in a Cause by Counsel, and so supposeth the Understanding; for without the Exercise of that, we cannot as we ought, will the good Will of God. And indeed, all true Obedience is rooted in the Heart, which firstly points to the Will in Man, which is in him the supreme Faculty, and unless that be devoted to the Service of God, all else that he doth, though it carry never so fair a shew with it, cannot be properly called Obedience. Hence those complaints, *Psal. 78. 37. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his Covenant.* *Isa. 29. 13. Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me, is taught by the precept of men.*

(2.) *THE Actions as they flow from, and are commanded by the Will.* Obedience is called a doing

doing of God's Will; and we know that the Command enjoyns things to be done, and avoided, which must terminate in the Actions; and all sorts of Actions are comprized under it, which are summarily reduced to Thoughts, Word, and Deeds; all of which come under the very regulation of the Command; as the Word of God abundantly testifieth.

3. *Third special Nature of it is a Conformity of these to the Command.* When we lay this Rule before us, and measure all that we do by it, and take care, that we neither come short of it, nor transgress it. Thus is Obedience described, Deut. 5. 22. *Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded you: you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.* Which Conformity respects the Heart as well as the Actions, and therefore comprizeth in it all the Requisites to render our Actions answerable to the Rule. And that teacheth, not only to the matter of the Duty, but to the manner, and principle, and end; to all of which God hath regard, and reckons of what we do, accordingly.

4. *THE Rise or Root of it is, a sincere Respect that we have to God commanding.* It is an essential property of true Obedience, that it be done to God. Hence that, *Zech. 7. 5.* In which respect, these three things are comprized.

(1.) *AN unrestrained Acknowledgement of his Authority.* Obedience supposeth a stare of Subjection, to a Superiour, to whom it is payed, and that cannot be done cordially without an Apprehension of the Right he hath to command us, else we shall never acknowledge our Duty to obey him. The Church is therefore brought in, ascribing those Titles to him, which include this Right, *IIa. 33. 22. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law giver, the Lord is our king, he will save us.* And this must be unrestrained, there must be no limits set by us to this Authority, but it must be yielded to him in all things. *Deut. 6. 2.*

(2.) *AN entire Approbation of the Command, in every Article of it, because it is his.* Our Obedience cannot be voluntary, unless we approve of the Precept; for if we dislike it, we shall resist against it; and it must be universal, all the Commands, one as well as another, must have this Esteem from us. Hence *Paul* confesseth, *Rom. 7. 12. Wherefore*

the law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good. And the Psalmist, *Psal. 119. 128. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and hate every false way.* *Esa. 49. 9.* And this must be, because they are his. There is a moral Equity appears in many of them, which we are to acknowledge. But if we see no more, yet this should set us down, that he is wise, holy, &c.

(3.) *AN absolute unchangeable Choice of it, from the Cordial Love that we bear to him.* All Obedience is called Love in the Word of God. And the reason for it is, because we can no further sincerely serve God, than we perform our Duty from this Principle. Christ puts these together, *Joh. 14. 15. If ye love me, keep my commandments.* And this Love flows from the election of the Will; because we love God, we love his Law, and herein we prove it, in that we have without any reserve, chosen it, as it is the declared Will of that God, whom we have chosen to be our God. So he, *Psal. 119. 30. I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.* And *ver. 172.* And this choice brings us under the strongest bonds to Obedience, *ver. 106. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous precepts.*

USE. *LET the Consideration of these Things put us all upon it, to be much in seeking Acquaintance with the revealed Will of God.* There is a Duty lying upon us all; we owe Obedience to God on more Scores than one; we cannot live and please him without it; The neglect of it will expose us to his Wrath, which will be our Misery. He hath revealed this Will of his to us in his Word, and gives us the Advantage to inform ourselves in it. If we neglect this, it is a sign that we have no Will or Desire to obey him. And if we live in Ignorance of it, we cannot conform to it. We are naturally Strangers to his Will by Sin, and cannot know what is our present Duty and Happiness, unless he make it known to us and in us. Let us then read, hear, pray, meditate, and wait on him for his Grace to help us, that we may seek to know, that we may do his Will; and so shall we be blessed in our Deed.

[JULY 30. 1700.]

S E R M O N CXLVIII.

QUESTION XL.

WE have under the former taken an Account of Man's Duty in general, but