

# S E R M O N CLVII.

## QUESTION XLVII.

**W**HAT is Forbidden in the First Commandment ?

A N S W E R.

THE First Commandment Forbiddeth the denying, or not worshipping and glorifying the true God, as God, and our God; or giving that Worship and Glory any other, which is due to him alone.

THE right stating of a Truth, is the way to have the best discovery of Falsehood. And if we are well informed what is Duty, we have therein a good Rule, by which to determine what is Sin. Having therefore observed what is required in the First Command, we need but consider what is contrary to this, and safely conclude it to be Sin. However, because a Christians whole Life is concerned with the Law, the Holy Scriptures which are our Directory, are accommodated to our Warning, as well as Direction, by telling us this is Duty, and that is Sin, and our spiritual dulness stands in need of it. This Method is therefore pursued in our Catechism, which I shall endeavour to follow: Though having stated the Precept, the Prohibition may be more briefly laid open.

WE have been formerly put in mind, that there are two ways in which Men may sin against every Command of God, either by *Omission* or *Commission*; either by *neglecting* to do the thing *required*, or by *doing* that which is *forbidden*. And the reason of this is, because in every Precept, there is either express,

or necessarily implied, something *Positive* and something *Negative*. We have heard what are the Duties required in the First Command, it now follows that we observe how it may be violated, either by *Neglect* or *Transgression*. Now the Sins mentioned in this Answer, are to be reduced to three Heads, as they stand in Opposition to the three Duties, in which the former was summed up. Accordingly, all the Breaches of this Command may be considered, as they refer to one of these three Heads, viz. *Atheism*, *Contempt*, and *Idolatry*. And we may take a short account, of the more remarkable things that belong to either of these.

1. *ATHEISM*, which is expressed by the denying of God: And this is opposed to our knowing and acknowledging of God, which is the Duty of all Men, and he that doth not thus know and acknowledge him, doth *implicitly* or *consequentially* deny him. Now there are diverse sorts and degrees of this Atheism, and the things wherein it is expressed are almost uncountable; and there are some remains of it, in the best of God's People in this Life, by reason of remaining Original Sin in them. The first general Distribution of Atheism is into that which is *Professed*, and that which is *Practical*, and we have the ground for this in, Tit. 1: 16 *They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him.*

1. *AS to professed Atheism*, it may come under a double Consideration, viz. either when Men do in *terms* deny the Being of a God, or when they *maintain such Principles* as necessarily infer such a Denial. And here,

(1.) *WHETHER* there be any thorough professed Atheist in the World, who doth absolutely deny the Being of a God, is questioned by many, and may so be with a great deal of Reason.

Reason: and if there have any such been, who were so left to a reprobate sense, they have justly been accounted *Prodigies*. And indeed, there are so many Demonstrations of a Deity, in the very light of Nature, and legibly written in the Works of Creation and Providence, and so accommodated to the Conviction of a natural Conscience, that Men must wilfully shut their Eyes, may be judicially blinded, if they do not resign themselves up to the evidences of it; as hath formerly been discovered. Hence the Apostle tells us, Rom. i. 19, 20. *Because that which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.* And the Philosopher could observe, that there is no Nation so barbarous or brutish, but which have the notices or discoveries of a Deity among them: The Impressions whereof enforce them to profess and practice some sort of Divine Worship.

(2.) THAT there are too many that maintain such Principles, as carry in them Atheistical Inferences or Conclusions, is too notorious to be denied, and may therefore be here enquired after.

2. PRACTICAL Atheism is when Men live as if they did not believe that there is a God. And this Carriage of theirs hath a convincing Language in it, and those that observe it may safely conclude upon it, as Psal. 36. 1. *The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before their eyes.* And let it be observed, that to this practical Atheism I refer, not only what Men Do, which contradicts any point of Natural Worship, but also what they Neglect to do according to the directions of it. But because the most of these things will fall under the Second Head proposed, I shall here only observe the Things wherein the Atheism it self here forbidden, is to be discovered; viz.

(1.) IGNORANCE of God. This belongs to the Character of an Atheist, Psal. 14. 2. It is true the Infinite Perfections of the Divine Nature are incomprehensible by a Creature. Hence that Job 11. 7, &c. *Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?* There is therefore an Ignorance which is not a Sin, but only argues the finite Capacity of a created being. For it is said of God, 1 Tim. 6. 16. *Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see.* But then there was a concreated Knowledge of God, bestowed on Man at first, by virtue of the Divine Image imprinted on his mind, which he lost by the Fall, and therewith contracted a sinful Ignorance, the remains whereof are in the best of Men here. Whence his Complaint of himself, Prov. 30. 2, 3. *Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I have neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of*

the holy. But this wofully prevails in unregenerate Men, who, as they know him not, so neither do they seek to know him, but content themselves in their ignorance of him, Job 22. 17. *Which said unto God, Depart from us? And this renders them altogether incapable, of paying him that Natural Worship which is his due.*

(2.) THE denying to God of his Divine Perfections. God hath made himself known to the Creature in his back Parts, i. e. by the display of his Attributes, which are to be read in his Word and Works. Now these Attributes of his are, in him, his own absolute Being, tho' our manner of Conception entertains them distinctly; so that to deny any one of these unto him, is to attempt the robbing him of his Deity. To confess a God, and yet to question or disbelieve his Infinity, Eternity, Omniscience, Omnipresence, &c. is a contradiction unto such an Acknowledgment: for these Perfections are inseparable from his Being. They therefore were guilty of Atheism, Psal. 94. 7. *Yet they say, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.* And they with whom he so expostulates, Jer. 23. 23. *Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?* And they, Psal. 78. 19. *Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?*

(3.) SUCH as call in question his Providence. Epicureism is Atheism. To acknowledge a God, but to deny him to be any whit concerned in the Management of the Affairs of the Creation, an idle God, who looks after nothing, but letteth every thing go as it will, while he takes his ease and pleasure in the Heavens; a God that is neither Holy nor Just, neither Rewards Righteousness, nor Punisheth Sin, is Atheism in a prodigious degree, and contradicts all the true resentments of a Deity. The very Heavens accounted those for Atheists, who discharged God from the care of the World, as a thing too mean for him, and about which he would not concern himself. Such were they, Ezek. 8. 12. Psal. 10. 11.

(4.) SUCH as disown the Divine Subsistences. How far the Light of Nature did at first acquaint Men, with the Doctrine of a Trinity of Persons, in the Unity of Essence, is not easy for us to determine; but that God hath in his Word revealed this Truth to fallen Man is certain; and for one that professeth the revealed Religion, yet to confess one God, but deny that this One God, is Father, Son, and Spirit, every one of them true God, and yet all One & the same God, is to incur the Guilt of Atheism. And therefore to deny the Divinity of the Son and Spirit, and so make the one a Created God, and the other a meer quality, is a branch of this Sin. Nor can Men Worship God aright, except they pay their Worship to each of these Persons as God. Hence that, Joh. 5. 23. *That all men should honour the Son, as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent*

sent him. Deism therefore, which removes all revelation from Religion, naturally issues in Atheism.

(5.) *SUCH as Attribute to God, things inconsistent with his Being and Perfections.* For Men to say, that they believe there is a God, and withal to fancy him to be such, as would make him as bad as the vilest of Creatures, is horrible Atheism. For Sinners to frame an Idea of God, after their own imagination, and suitable to their mind, is to make him no God. Such were they, *Psal. 50. 21. Thou thoughtest, but I was altogether such an one as thy self.* When Men think that he approves of Sin, and likes all that they like, they do in effect deny him to be God. Now all this Atheism is directly forbidden us in the First Command, as that which is directly contrary to Natural Worship.

II. *CONTEMPT.* This is express in not Worshipping and Glorifying him as God, and our God. This we observed contains in it the substance of Natural Worship: The neglect therefore of it must needs be a despising of God; which is directly contrary to that Glorifying of him, which this Precept requires. Sinners are therefore charged with despising of God, which is the fruit and discovery of Atheism in them. And there are diverse things here also, which are the Effects of this Sin, as flowing from Contempt, viz.

1. *WHEN Men neglect the Duties of Natural Worship that God requires of them.* And the very Consideration of his being God, carries Conviction with it of these Duties: What these Duties are, hath been formerly taken notice of, and how the Light of Nature, offers Conviction of their being Duties. Now voluntarily or carelessly to neglect these Duties, is to despise the Authority of God, and the Voice of Conscience speaking to us in his Name: and in nothing more is this discovered, than in a living in the neglect of Prayer to God. There is no Duty of Worship which the natural Conscience, doth more fully convince Men of, than this. And for Men, who must acknowledge their whole dependance to be upon God, to omit seeking to him, and presenting their requests before him, for those things of which they stand in need, is faith that they despise him. Hence that, *Job 21. 15. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him.* On this account natural Men are awfully threatened for their neglect of thus calling on his Name, *Jer. 10. 25.*

2. *WHEN Men Renounce their Dependance on God for all Good.* This also is to despise him. As he is glorified by our accounting him our All, so he is contemned when we have our reliance any where else, and not on him alone. And there are many ways in which this Contempt is practised. Partly, by the fore-cited Neglect of Praying to God. For therein we signify, that we think we can do well enough without him, which derogates from his due Glory. Partly, when Men rely upon other

things for good, and not upon God. We read of such, *Psal. 20. 7. Some trust in chariots; and some in horses.* These contemn God, when they trust to their own Wisdom and Industry, and do not refer themselves to the Supreme Government of God, when they go to Second Causes, and not to the First; when they pay their Acknowledgments of what they have Success in, not to God, but to themselves or other Creatures, *Hab. 1. 16.* They who can place their reliance, any where else but on God, for any thing; or whose returns for Good received, reach no higher than Second Causes, do therein despise God, *Isai. 22. 10, 11.*

3. *WHEN Men put the Fear of God away from them.* There is a reverential Fear, which all owe to God, and without the exercise of it, they cannot Worship him aright, nor yet maintain a due respect of him, in them. It is the demand, *Jer. 10. 7. Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain.* Here also there are diverse ways, in which this irreverence and want of fear is manifested: When Men are not awed, with the due consideration of his glorious Majesty, so as to acknowledge the infinite distance there is between him and them, and therefore to carry it with all submissiveness to him; when his Authority is not sufficient Obligation upon their Consciences, to engage them to constant Obedience to him, and resolutely to withstand all Temptations that are offered to us, to draw us from our Duty; When Men dare to break his Laws, & transgress his Commands, and are unconcerned about his holy displeasure, but can boldly run the adventure of it, as if they did not expect it, or not regard it: When after they have sinned, they lie quietly under the guilt of it, and do not make it their business to seek to be reconciled again. All these, and whatsoever else is of this Nature, flow from Mens undervaluing thoughts of God, *Psal. 36. 1.*

4. *WHEN Men do not Love God above all.* That there is a love of other things, not only lawful, but a Duty, is certain; but in nothing do we more glorify God, than in placing our best Love upon him, and so subordinating our Love of every thing else hereto, as to hate them comparatively with our loving of him, as, *Luk. 14. 26.* When therefore other things, are not only loved equally with God, but are advanced above him in our Affections, and have more of our Hearts than he hath, we do therein really despise him. This was their Sin, *Rom. 1. 25. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.* When Men can adventure to displease God to gratify Men; when the Command of God, hath not that influence upon us, which the Authority of a Man hath, and we can do more for him, than for God, it proves that we do not love him as God. In a word, when they can take more content in any thing else than in him, he is despised.

5. *WHEN*

5. *WHEN Men nourish in themselves despair of God's Mercy, and dare not place their whole trust and reliance upon him.* When Men sit under the Gospel Discoveries of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and yet under Convictions of Sin, put away Hope, and refuse to receive the Encouragements, given to Sinners to come to him, for Peace and Pardon; and resolve as they, Ezek. 37. 11. *Behold, they say, Our bones are dried, & our hope is lost, we are cut off for our parts.* They cast the greatest Contempt upon him. God is then glorified by Men, when they hope in his Grace. When they believe the reports that are made of it to them in his Word, they therein glorify him. Whereas despair is a fruit of the most horrible Pride, and Men by it, do reject the whole Gospel of Salvation. God hath said, in Isai. 1. 18. *Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* And Chap. 55. 7. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* But they say there is no such thing, and what is this, but to undervalue him, and make him a liar.

6. *WHEN Men Fret and Repine at the Providences of God.* He is then honoured by us, when we adore him in all his Dispensations of himself to us: When we can cordially profess, as Psal. 145. 17. *The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.* And can say under the darkett, and most distressing of them, as Psal. 22. 3. *But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.* Whereas, when what he doth, displeaseth us, and we endeavour to pick holes in what he doth, and if he do not do in all things as we would have him, we charge him with wrong, injustice, unkindness, unfaithfulness, or imprudence, we herein cast reproach upon his Name. This was the fault and folly of the Psalmist, Psal. 73. 13. *Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain.* And he taxeth himself severely for it, ver. 22. *So foolish was I and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.* There are some that find fault with the whole course of Providence, and think they could govern the World themselves, better than God doth. And this is an Atheistical reflection of dishonour upon him. Yea, all fretting of this Nature, is for that reason universally forbidden, Psal. 37. 8. *Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.*

7. *WHEN Men Neglect the settling & securing of an Interest in God as their God.* There is no Worshipping of him aright, under any other Consideration. Now all Men by Nature are strangers to God, they cannot challenge him as theirs; they are far from him. But God hath in the New Covenant, discovered a way, in which Men may come thus to be related to him, and makes offers of it to them in the Gospel Invitation: But Sinners that

live under the Gospel, and are treated with about this Affair, do not regard it, but they live content in their Natural state, they seek not to be reconciled to God, they refuse to accept of Salvation offered, are prejudiced at the Terms of the Covenant, will not part with their Lusts, for a part in Christ; these are guilty of prodigious Contempt, Jer. 2. 8. This is charged on them, Psal. 81. 10, 11. In all these ways Men live in the breach of this Command, and with-hold from God the Glory which is his due.

III. *IDOLATRY.* This is declared in those words; *giving that Worship and Glory to any other God, which is due to Him alone.* This is not to be understood, as if there were indeed any other God, but it intends an esteem given to any, or a respect that is shewn them, which cannot be paid but to him whom Men take to be their God. Now there are two sorts of Idolatry which are prohibited by this Precept; *Gross, and Covert.*

1. *THERE is a more Gross Idolatry,* which Consists in an open profession or practice, of Worshipping any other Object as God, besides the true God, by ascribing that to them, which is proper only to the Deity. And there are several Things here to be considered as *Gross Idolatry*, viz.

(1.) *POLITHEISM.* He that Worships more Gods than one, is an Idolater; and the reason is manifest, because whatsoever hath Divine Worship paid to it, and is not the true God, is an Idol. Whereas it is certain that there is, that there can be, but One God. So that a multiplicity of Gods, necessarily involves this Sin. If a Man have many Gods, all but one must necessarily be Idols. And herein is one difference between *Pagan*, and *true* Worshippers, 1 Cor. 8. 4, 5, 6. Hence that, Isai. 42. 8. *I am the Lord, that is my Name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.*

(2.) *HETERO THEISM.* A Man may pretend to Worship but one God, and yet be an Idolater. For if the God whom he offers his Service to, be not the true God, it is an Idol. And that not only when it is an Image, made with Men's hands, or some Creature of God, as the Sun, &c. but when Men have shaped a false Idea of God, in their imaginations, and Worship it: both these Sins the Heathen were guilty of, they had their Pantheon, their Jupiter, Saturn, and an innumerable Rabble, and none of them the true, except him whom they ignorantly devoted an Altar to, *Act* 17. 23. And of the Idolatrous Jew it is said, *Jer* 2. 28. *According to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah.*

(3.) *SAMARITANISM.* Which is, when Men will join other fictitious Gods with the true God. They pretend to be for the true God, but will join false Gods with him. This is usually called *Samaritanism*, because it was notoriously practised in *Samaria*, after the Captivity. See 2 *Kin* 17. 41. Tho' it had been before that practised in *Israel*. This was *Solomon's*

Solomon's Idolatry, who maintained Temple-Worship, but it is said, in 1 Kin. 11. 5. For Solomon went after Ashtaroth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And afterwards in the times of Jafab, Zeph. 1. 5.

(4.) **PAPISM.** So call'd because it is woefully practis'd under the *Papacy*. And it is when Men pay any part of that Worship to a Creature, which is due to God alone. And this is most notorious in their Prayers to Angels and Saints departed, for help; and the most gross of all is their Prayers to the Virgin Mary, to whom they ascribe more Power than to Christ himself; and place more reliance on her than him. And to this may be added, *Socinianism*, in which we are told that Christ is a mere Creature, and yet that Divine Worship is to be paid unto him.

(5.) **WITCHCRAFT.** It is certain that all false Worship *Objective*, is by God accounted Devil-Worship, Deut. 32. 17. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God. 2 Chron. 11. 15. And he ordained him Priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made. And when Men go to the Devil for Counsel & Help; when they make explicit Covenants with him; or when they seek to Fortune-tellers, or Conjurers, to tell them what shall befall them; as Saul did, 1 Sam. 28. Or to discover to them things Lost or Stollen: They herein commit gross Idolatry, and are justly chargeable with it.

2. **THERE is a more Covert Idolatry:** Which tho' secret, yet God sees it, and will charge it on Men, whatsoever open pretences they make of the true Religion. And it hath these things,

(1.) **WHEN Men, in base flattery, give those Titles to Men that are due on'y to God.** This sort of Adulation, hath been too much practis'd among pretended Christians. Thus when the *Incommunicable Attributes* of God are ascribed to Men; as he who made his Dedication to his Prince, under the title of, *Your Eternity*: Or, when the *Communicable Attributes* are attributed in the *Abstract*, which belongs only to God, and cannot without Idolatry be given to any second Being, but in the *Concrete*: as not to be content to say, such an one is wise, but Wisdom itself, &c Hence that, Job 32. 21, 22. *Let me not, I pray you,*

*accept any mans person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man, For I know not to give flattering titles, in so doing my maker would soon take me away.*

(2.) **WHEN Men seek their own honour more than God's Honour.** They will exalt themselves, tho' it be to the reproach of him. They care not what becomes of his Name, so they may but have a Name. This was Herod's Sin; for which God smote him; who would be a God, and was soon convinced, that he was a Mortal, Act. 12. 22, 23.

(3.) **WHEN Men put their trust in any Creature.** That which a Man leans his reliance ultimately upon, is his God. And if it be a Creature, it is an Idol. Some Men trust in their Estates, Psal. 99. 6. And we read; Prov. 10. 15. *The rich mans wealth is his strong city.* These are their God. Some Men trust in Men, and all their confidence is in their favour; by which they make Idols of them, Psal. 146. 3.

(4.) **WHEN Men are carried with an over-eager, and insatiable pursuit after the things of this World.** Such as those make Mammon their God. And for this reason, Covetousness is more than once branded with the title of *Idolatry* in the Gospel, Col. 3. 5. Eph. 5. 5.

(5.) **WHEN Men give themselves up to Carnal Pleasures.** When they devote themselves to the things of this Life, and count it their only Felicity, to Eat, Drink, and make Merry. And hence such are said to make their Belly their God, Phil. 3. 19. And it is evident, because on this account they renounce him that is the true God, Job 21. 13, 14.

**USE.** *LET this call upon us all, to be exceeding wary to our selves, lest we incur the Guilt of breaking this Great Command.* We see here, how many ways it may be violated, both by *Atheism*, *Contempt*, and *Idolatry*. What need then is there, that we look to our ways, lest we Sin on this account. And what humbling Conviction would this lay us under of our folly, and need of *pity* and *pardon*, did we thoroughly Examine our selves by these things. Nor is it a *light matter*, or to be despised by us. This Sin is enough to *Condemn* us, and expose us to the Wrath of God, and nothing but the *Blood of Christ* is able to cleanse us from the Guilt of it.

[ AUGUST 26. 1701. ]

## S E R M O N CLVIII.

QUESTION XLVIII.

Commandment, teach us, that GOD, who  
 seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is