



Matters ; and we are assured, that his Name is not to be espoused to any thing but what is Truth and Righteousness, and is dishonoured by every thing that is contrary thereto. This Reverence therefore requires greatest Exactness and Caution, lest by any mistake the Truth suffer, and Justice be perverted : For if we occasion any Man harm, by our wrong Information, and bring God's Name in, to maintain it, we shall thereby take it in Vain.

2. *A Promissory Oath hath respect to Things to be done* : In which we oblige ourselves to the doing of them, and call God to be our Voucher in it. Now the thing which we oblige ourselves to by such an Oath, is promised either to *Man*, or to *God*, and this latter is usually called a *Vow*. Although some distinguish between an Oath and a Vow ; but I know not where it can be better assigned, than to a Promissory Oath. I shall not speak of these distinctly, since the Duty is one and the same in both. As to the Reverence of an Oath, and touching the Lawfulness of Vows, I shall not here debate. It was once a Duty, and it belongs to natural Worship, and is therefore not ceased still. And it is certain, that such a Vow is implied in every Address we put up to God, for any Favour, promising him Obedience. But in all Promissory Oaths, the Fear of God ought to make us cautiously to observe these Rules.

1. *IT must be of nothing, but what is itself lawful*. That which it is a Sin to do, is aggravated by binding ourselves in an Oath to do it ; and to fulfil such an Oath, is still to increase our Guilt. Such was that of those, *Acts 23. 12.* And to vow any thing to God, which is a Sin, is an offer to mock him. So that our Fear of God should put us always upon first considering whether the thing be agreeable to God's Will, and so whether if we do it, it will be acceptable to him. And accordingly, if it be not so, to withhold our engaging, or else if our Oath be past, to repent of it, and not add Iniquity to Sin by performing it.

2. *IT must be of that which is in our Power to perform*. Not but that God hath a superior Power over us, and can obstruct our Purposes in his Providence, when he pleaseth ; for which reason, all such Promises ought to carry this Reserve in them, viz. If God permit. But still it must be in such Things, as in the ordinary course of Providence, we have a prospect that we may perform them. To promise any thing, which is above our Ability, and for which we have no reason to promise our selves that God will make us able, is to despise God, and must needs in the issue reflect upon his Honour. Such Oaths are in themselves fallacious, and must be broken eventually ; and then to charge that upon God's Providence, is an Act of high Profaneness.

3. *WHEN we have past such an Oath lawfully, we ought to stand to it, whatsoever Inconveniences may afterwards arise upon it*. If they
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SERMON CLXIV.

II. **I**N particular, with regard to the several kinds of Oaths, there is something special, wherein this Reverence is to be expressed, besides the forementioned general Duties.

NOW every Oath is either *Affertory* or *Promissory*.

1. *AN Affertory Oath is with respect to Things done ; and it respects Matter of Fact*. And here the great comprehensive Duty is, that we be deliberate in it, and be very careful that it may answer all the *Ends* of such an Oath. Rashness is for that end to be avoided by us. Now the End of such an Oath is mainly that Righteousness may be advanced, and Truth may take place among Men. An Affertory Oath is to end Controversies, and Judgment is therefore to proceed upon it ; so that God's Name is here brought in to issue such

be made to Men, we have that part of the Character of a godly Man, Psal. 15. 4. *He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.* And if it be a Vow to God, we have that Caution given us, Eccl. 5. 5. *Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, then that thou shouldst vow and not pay.* And, Prov. 20. 25. *It is a snare to a man who devoureth that which is holy; and after vows to make inquiry.* And indeed, Reverence to God's Name, which stands concerned, should bear down all the Temptations from outward Damage appearing. Yea, and it is our Duty not to delay here; and some have thought, that the Evil which befell Jacob's Family, was a Chastisement of his delaying to pay the Vow, he had made at Bethel.

4. **HYPOTHETICAL Promises, oblige only hypothetically.** If I promise upon Condition, the Person to whom I make it can demand it only upon that Condition; and if he doth not perform it according to the Nature of the Obligation, the Promise is rescinded, and the Person discharged, without any reflection on the Name of God. And though there is a vast difference between Promises to Men, and Vows to God, yet special Vows made on such an Hypothesis, do not oblige further, because God, by withholding of the Favour sought, cuts off the Opportunity of our Performance; but Promises made to Duties, that always are so, are not hereby made void.

5. **A Promissory Oath, tho' lawfully made to Men, yet may be discharged by the person to whom it is made, if he sees meet.** And the reason is, because the end of it is so answered, which was the securing to him the performance of such a thing, which he, by such a release, accepts of as performed; and so God's Name is not wronged hereby. And sometimes it may be a moral Duty in Persons who have such a power, so to take off the Obligation, and it may be oppression in them not so to do it. Yea, and God himself sometimes accepts of the Will for the Deed, and prohibits the actual performance of Vows made to him; as in the case of David's Vowing to Build an House for God. Compare, Psal. 132. 2, &c. with 1 Kin. 8. 17, &c.

6. **THE Fear of God, calls for Uprightness and Integrity, in all our Promissory Oaths either to God or Man.** What we thus promise, must be with a sincere purpose to perform, in all plainness, according to the tenour of the Promise, without fraud, or any sinister designs. And the reason is, because God himself is called in as a Witness, who knows the Heart and is not mocked. Hence when those Men asked advice of the Prophet, and so engaged themselves, Jer. 42. 5, 6. God makes that Animadversion upon it, ver. 20. *For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God, and according unto all that the Lord our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it.*

Thirdly, **WE should carry the awe of these Names, Titles, and Attributes of God upon our**

Hearts, so as to influence our whole Conversation. Our Lives should in all things be so ordered, as that every of these should appear to have made a suitable impression upon us. For this reason we should do as David did, Psal. 16. 8. *I have set the Lord always before me.* And hence, we should be as much careful to our selves, in the most secret Actions, as in those which are done before Men. We should improve every Attribute of God practically, by it to learn what is our Duty, and make an Argument of it, to be very circumspect in all that we do. In a word, to pursue that great Precept of our Saviour, Mat. 5. 48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

AND here, besides the **Universality** of this Duty in *all things*, of which we have that general Precept, Prov. 23. 17. *Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.* There is one special use, in which this is to be observed, viz. in **Lottery**. The word *Lottery*, is sometimes used largely, for any thing in which there is a meer contingency, in respect of second Causes; and so there is a Lottery in almost every thing that we intermeddle withal in this Life, Eccl. 9. 11. *I returned, and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all.* But sometimes it is taken more restrainedly, for the determining of any matter in Controversy, by an application to the Divine Providence, in the use of a **Medium**, which hath nothing in its own Nature, to discover the equity of the Case.

THAT it is Lawful, and sometimes Expedient among Men to make use of such a **Medium**, is beyond Dispute; else Controversies must be undecided by Men, and give endless troubles, because there is no other way to issue them. God therefore ordained them among his People. Now tho' a Lot, as to the use of it, is a Civil thing, yet in the Nature of it, it is Religious, and in that respect belongs to the first Table, and is by some assigned to the **First**, by others to the **Third** Command. And doubtless the reverence to be observed in the use of it, is to be referred hither.

NOW that **Reverence** due to the Name of God upon this Account, will be discovered by the Nature, Occasion, Matter and Manner of it. Here then,

1. **THE Nature of a Lot, is the referring the determination of any case in debate, to God's Providence.** Hence we have that Observation, Prov. 16. 33. *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.* The Name and Attributes of God are therefore to be acknowledged in it, which do always require the reverence of the Creature; and his Supremacy and Wisdom are to be adored in it, which requires a suitable behaviour. Which, what it is, will be considered under the last Head.

2. *THE Occasion of this is the determining some Controversy by the governing Providence of God.* So that there must be something that is controverted, else there is no Occasion for it. Now that it may give just Occasion for this, *two things* are requisite,

1. *THAT it is a Case that requires a determination.* It must be a matter of moment, either in it self, or in its circumstances. To use such a Solemnity, in matters of no moment, is inconsistent with that reverence of God's Name, which is due to it. In small and trifling matters, it becomes such as fear God, rather to come one to the other, than by contending to drive it to such an issue.

2. *THAT it be no otherwise determinable.* For this is an applying of ourselves to a more than ordinary course of Providence, and that is *more* immediate, though not absolutely so. For it is above the common Rules of humane Judgment. So that if God's ordinary Providence, hath already determined the thing, it is Vanity to provoke to that, which is more than so. For why should I expose my Right to Lot, when God hath made it already indisputable? Or if the thing be at present under a Debate, and not determined, yet if the common Law of Equity and Justice will decide it, which God hath given us for the Rule of Government, there is no need of an higher Appeal to God; inasmuch as God hath made it Man's Duty, to conform to these Rules, where they may be used, and acquiesce in them; and what is it less than tempting of God, to ask a farther Determination of that, which he hath already determined? And that is far from the Reverence which is due to him.

3. *THE Matter of it;* and this will come under a *double* Consideration, *viz.*

1. *THE Matter about which it is to be used.* This we observed, is a Case under Debate; but there are *two* sorts of Cases, which may be so, *viz.* Things *done and past*, and things *not yet done, but future.* That Lots of both these sorts were in former times among Israel, made use of, by God's Appointment, is evident, by the History of those Times. Thus was *Achan* detected of his Sacrilege by a Lot, *Jesh.* 7. And thus were the Lands of Israel appointed to be divided by Lot. But the former of these was not appointed for a common Rule, to detect Crimes by, no not Murder it self; which was therefore to be left a secret till Men were otherwise discovered in the ordinary way. As will appear from that Law, in *Deut.* 21. *begin.* So that no Lot might be cast for the finding out things past, without an extraordinary and special Command of God for it, since there is no Precept for it, either in the Law of Nature, or in the written Law: Whereas of things future, about which there may also be Contention, it hath a foundation in both, *viz.* for the Dividing Estates, especially of Inheritance; and Election of Persons to Places of Trust.

2. *THE Matter of a Lot;* or the *Medium* which is to be used in the determining the question controverted; and that is a thing in it self *meerly* Contingent. And by this I intend such a thing as in its own Nature hath no power to determine the Justice or Equity of the Case, but is equally capable of falling out this way or that. So that every Contingency is not fit matter for a Lot: because in some there may be the skill or art of Man in it; or the thing though not necessary, yet hath more of probability to fall out this way than the other. For there is nothing of advantage to be given to either Party in it; for that would take away the reason, and subvert the very end and design of a Lot.

4. *THE Manner;* and this is to be gathered from the Premises. And here these Rules are to be observed,

1. *THE Universal Governing Providence of God, is to be acknowledged and adored by us.* Without this the whole Action would be irrational. The very Heathen, being ignorant of the true God, did on this account make blind Fortune a Goddess: And so do all they interpretatively, who resign the case up to *meer* Contingency, to be determined by it, unless they have a due regard to the Governing Providence of God. It's therefore to be practically believed, that he doth Efficiently over-rule things that are most Contingent, and determine them according to his infinitely wise Counsel; according to the forecited, *Prov.* 16. 22.

2. *HENCE the Matter is to be intirely submitted to this Providence.* God is not else duly revered. We ought therefore always to address our selves to God, at least with our Ejaculatory request, that he would put the issue to this Affair, according to his Holy and Sovereign Counsel: That he would accomplish his All-wise Purpose in it. We are to chuse him Umpire in this matter, and acquiesce in him as such. And say as he, *1 Sam.* 14. 41. *The Lord God of Israel, give a perfect lot.*

3. *HENCE there is no course to be used to forestall this Providence, by any cunning of our own.* There is no humane Art at all to be used to influence the Lot, so as to make it to incline more on one side than another. There is no craft to be used, or endeavour to know how to put a bias upon the thing, so as that it should incline to our side: No foresight to over rule our Choice: No bribing of the Person that is to manage it: Which things have been too frequent in such Occasions. Nor any trying by such things that we have more skill in, than our Antagonist: For so it ceaseth to be a Lot, and is turned to a Mockery, wherein God's Name is greatly dishonoured.

4. *THE determination is quietly to be rested in, as the voice of God himself.* And this is a genuine practical Conclusion from the Premises. To murmur or be discontent at the event, plainly argues irreverence, and that

we did not aright acknowledge God in the Thing. For God doth certainly tell us his mind by the Lor, and not to be content with it, is to rise up against his Government.

II. *IN respect of God's Ordinances, viz. those Institutions of his Worship, which have his Name underwritten: I am the Lord. And this Reverence is to be used in three respects.*

1. *IN a due Preparation to attend upon these Ordinances.* In them we draw near to God, to enjoy Communion with him; we ought therefore to get ourselves in a readiness for such a Meeting, as we would do to meet with a great King. We should gather up our Hearts, that we may carry them with us; Rouse up our Graces, that they may be ready for Exercise. Lay off our Affections to other things, and go with the most earnest longings to meet with God, and enjoy Fellowship with him. Get into the Psalmists Frame, Psal. 84. begin. *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts? My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my flesh crieth out for the living God.* It is our Duty, whenever we come before him in the way of his Ordinances, to do it with Reverence. Lev. 26. 2. *Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.* Psal. 85. 7. *God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints: and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.* We ought therefore to prepare before hand, by due Meditation and Prayer, accounting it our Happiness to enjoy him, and making his reckoning, Psal. 84. 10. *For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.* We should therefore put every thing aside, which will offer any Impediment to our free Communion with him, 1 Pet. 2. 1, 2. And guard our Affections that they do not carry us after vain Objects, Eccl. 5. 1. *Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.*

2. *IN our attending upon the Ordinances, we should take heed to our Carriage both of inward and outward Man.* As to our inward Man, we should attend with greatest Diligence and Submission; and to that end, get our Hearts fixed, our Minds intent, our Understandings exercised, our Wills subdued, our Faith enlarged, our Affections pressed for Service, and our whole Man in an obediential Frame, ready to bear what God hath to say, and practice whatsoever he requires of us. And as to the outward Man, we ought to look well to our Behaviour; that we use no irreverend Gestures, in the Ordinances, whiles dispensed, but in our whole Carriage remember whose Presence we are in, and to be very careful to guard our senses; to see that our Eyes and our Ears are rightly employed, and to take heed of Drowsiness, and bodily Indispositions: For the Body is to serve, or else it will obstruct the Soul.

3. *IN our after Improvement of Ordinances.* They are appointed for our Growth in Grace and Knowledge, for our Conviction, Direction, and Excitation. And we then only pay God due Respect for them, when we live up-

on the Supply we have by them, and improve it to our spiritual Nourishment. Hence that, 1 Pet. 2. 2. *As new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.* For this end we should both meditate on what God hath offered to us; Pray over it for his Blessing, and set ourselves to live the Truths which we hear,

III. *IN Respect of God's Word.* Which is also one great Part of his Name: and we cannot duly reverence him, unless we do pay an awful Deference to that. Here also three Rules may be considered.

1. *WE must pay a Divine Credit to it, i. e. we must entertain it as the Word of God, and the Manifestation of his Will to us.* And for that Reason we must pay an entire Belief to the Truth of it, not in the least questioning the Truth of any part of it. It is true, we ought to be well grounded in the Persuasion; that it is infallibly the Word of God, and no cunningly devised Fable. But on this Conviction, we are neither to doubt of the Truth of one Article of it, how far soever some of them may surpass the Comprehension of our Understandings; nor to think meanly of any part of it, as if impertinent, though we do not see into the Design. Nor despise it for the plainness of the Style; but give it all Honour because it is his Word, who is infinitely Wise and True. This Commendation Paul gives to them, 1 Thes. 2. 13. *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe*

2. *HENCE we ought to pay an entire Subjection to it, and to God in it.* We must make it the whole Rule of our Faith and Manners. We must resolve our whole Faith into the Revelations of it, and take all our Measures from it, and order our whole Conversation according to it, Psal. 119. 105. *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.* Mat. 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.* We must take nothing from it, nor make any Additions to it, but content ourselves with the Directions of it, Deut. 12. 32. *What thing soever I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.* We ought to be entirely at the Command of it, and yield a compleat Obedience to all the Precepts of it, and not turn from it to the right hand or the left. We ought to give Credit to the Threatnings of it, and be ever awed by them, and to rely upon its Promises, as sure, and which cannot fail. And all this because it is His Word, who is to be Feared and Reverenced.

3. *WE ought to be very cautious how we take this Word into our Mouths.* We should beware of a common frame of Spirit, when we either read it, or speak of it. Hence we ought to be very serious at all times when we mention

it, and do it with Gravity, Sobriety and Veneration of the Author of it. We ought not therefore to use it for any jocular Purposes, much less to furnish ourselves for profane Discourses. We ought not to advance civil Mirth with it, much less vain Drollery, by making Jestts of it; all which are directly contrary to the holy Reverence due to the Name of God.

IV. *IN respect of God's Works.* God's Name is written upon all of these, and we ought to read it, and reverence it in them. It is true, the Works themselves are not to be adored by us, because God is in them. This was a great part of the Pagan Idolatry and Superstition. But yet we are to observe what of God is to be seen in them, and pay him the Veneration which is due, to such a God, as they discover him to be. Now these Works of God, are either those of *Creation*, or of *Providence*.

1. *WE are to reverence him, in the Works of Creation*; by observing and ascribing to him, those glorious Perfections of his, which are imprinted on them, and shine forth in them: As, his infinite and admirable Wisdom, Power and Goodness. We are told, Rom. 1. 20. *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, so that they are without excuse.* And there are astonishing Rays of his Divinity, which appear, not only in the great Works of the Heavens, Sun, Moon and Stars, of which, Psal. 19. *begin.* But in the least and most contemptible, yea, in all of them. Of his Wisdom, Psal. 104. 24. *O Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all.* His Power in speaking such a World into Being, Psal. 33. 6, 9. *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made: and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spake, and it was done, he commanded, and it stood fast.* His Goodness, ver. 5. *The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.* And there is not the least Worm that we tread on, nor the least pile of Grass which grows out of the Earth, but carries more Wonders in it, than the greatest Philosopher is able to resolve, and proclaims God to be its Author, and it calls us to fear this God.

2. *WE are to adore him in regard of his Works of Providence.* The Preservation and Government of the Lord are so admirable, that God is to be seen in them, and they afford matter of awful Speculation and Improvement. And that we may suitably express this Reverence,

1. *WE must acknowledge him to be the Author of all those Providences that fall out in the World.* We must not ascribe them to Chance, or the Management of second Causes, but to God alone, that it is his Hand, and second Causes his Instruments. This therefore are Men faulted for, Isai. 26. 11. *Lord when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see.*

2. *WE must study those Lessons from these*

Providences which may fortify our reverential Fear of him. And this will be by reading those Perfections, which shine forth in them, from whence these Lessons are to be learned. We are here to see his *Sovereignty*, that he doth his Pleasure in all, and that the whole Creation are at his Dispose, Psal. 135. 6. *whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places.* His *Wisdom and Power*, in upholding all things, and keeping the World in that Order in which it is. His *Holiness and Righteousness*, in all the Testimonies which he bears against the Wickedness of Men; His *Love* to his People, and *Faithfulness* to his Promise, in all his Appearances for them in their hours of need. And hence learn, how fearful a thing it is for Sinners to fall into his Hand, and how great is the Happiness of all those who have him for their God and Portion; which will put us on studying to please him, and Care lest we offend him.

3. *A suitable Acknowledgement of him in all the Providences that befall us in the World.* These are either Merciful or Afflictive; if he bestows Kindnesses upon us, we should acknowledge his Benignity, undeserved by us, and engage ourselves thereby the more to his Fear. And therefore we have that, Hof. 3. 5. *And shall fear the Lord and his goodness.* And if he lays his Hand on us in Afflictions, we are to adore his Supremacy, to acknowledge his Righteousness, to celebrate his Patience, to submit to his Hand, to accept of his Chastening, and to avoid all Fretting or Murmuring at him; much more charging of him, with the least Injustice. And in all these Respects we are to take care, that we preserve the Honour and Glory of God's holy Name.

USE. AND if this be our Duty, let it engage us to see and bewail our woful shortcoming; and accordingly shew us, what need we have of Christ, to answer for us, and procure our Pardon: so to put us upon a more careful heed to, and watch over ourselves in this Regard: and in the Sense of our own utter impotency to comply with the Precept of ourselves, to seek to Christ, for his Spirit and Grace to help us in our Duty, that we may sincerely and constantly pursue it; and to give acceptance to our Sincerity. And let us entertain an high esteem of God's precious Name, and when we see it so much taken in vain by vile Men, let it engage us, with the greatest Circumspection, to look after our Hearts and Lives; that having a deeply rooted veneration for him in our Hearts, we may regulate our Thoughts, Words and Actions according thereunto: That so we may be found in the Number of those that fear before him, for whom he hath laid in great and precious Promises; which give us to understand that God hath not commanded us to fear him in vain.