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*Recd. of the ...
from his friend
in Princeton*

DISCOURSE

ON THE

GUILT *and* FOLLY

OF

Being ashamed of Religion.

PREACHED

At the Old South Church in *BOSTON*,

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BY THE REVEREND

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DISCOURSE

On the GUILT and FOLLY of being
ashamed of RELIGION.

MARK viii. 38.

WHOSOEVER THEREFORE SHALL BE ASHAMED OF ME AND OF MY WORDS IN THIS ADULTEROUS AND SINFUL GENERATION, OF HIM ALSO SHALL THE SON OF MAN BE ASHAMED, WHEN HE COMETH IN THE GLORY OF HIS FATHER, WITH THE HOLY ANGELS.

TO perform our duty, and then without ostentation to avow it, is our most honourable and useful character. It is fulfilling the first law of our nature, and extending religion and virtue in the world, by the influence of our example. To be *ashamed* of our duty, is to be ashamed of our glory. To acknowledge its obligation in secret, and yet disguise it before men, discovers a weakness, and duplicity of mind that is no less inconsistent with dignity of character, than with piety. The sentiment of *shame*, that gives to the opinion of others so great authority over our conduct, is originally

ally a wise and excellent law of nature. But, the depravity of man hath perverted the best principles, and changed the most ingenuous feelings of the heart into ministers of sin. Great crimes are evidently opposed to the interest of society, and therefore they are condemned by public opinion. The depravity of the human heart is equally opposed to the spirit of true religion; and therefore the manners, and, at least, the ostensible opinions of the world contradict the purity and simplicity of the Gospel. The one opposes vice in the extreme; the other tends to encourage vice in a certain degree.

THE world hath so accommodated its conversation, its wit, and its opinions to its manners, that men, in the cause of piety, are afraid of incurring its censure or contempt. They want courage to oppose the stream of custom—they renounce their duty in compliance with fashionable vice, or they conceal their inward reverence for it, and, against their conviction, they live like the world.

To be ashamed of Christ is a sin that may be considered in a variety of lights. Our Saviour in pronouncing this sentence, had probably an immediate view to the testimony which his disciples would be called to bear to his name before the tribunals of their unrighteous judges, where the splendor of courts,

courts, the scoffs of enemies, the ignominy of punishments, and the humble and unfriended condition of the first christians would all contribute to subdue their minds, to make them ashamed of their Master's cross, and to deprive them of the courage necessary to profess, or to suffer for his despised cause.

HONOR elevates the mind, and gives fortitude to the weak. Shame is an enfeebling principle that takes even from the brave the confidence necessary to avow truth, and the firmness necessary to endure suffering. Indeed to be *ashamed* of Christ, and to deny him, are so intimately connected as cause and effect, that St. Matthew, in expressing this declaration of our Saviour, says, "whosoever shall *deny* me before men, him will I also *deny* before my Father who is in heaven."

THROUGH the goodness of God, we are not exposed to persecution. But living in an age in which custom, in which the powers of wit and ridicule, in which the honors of society, and in which even reason and philosophy have been engaged on the side of vice, we are liable to disguise the truths of the Gospel, and to be ashamed of Christ with a more criminal weakness than they who suffered their constancy to be shaken by the majesty of tribunals, and the terror of flames. It is this evil which I propose from the text to explain and condemn,

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- I. By pointing out what is implied in being ashamed of Christ and his words, and
- II. By demonstrating its folly and its guilt.

I. IN pointing out what is implied in being ashamed of Christ and his words, I shall treat of the sentiment of shame directly—and unfold some of its principal causes, and consequences, as they affect the profession of Religion.

I/z. IN the first place, the sentiment of shame.—This, like other simple feelings and emotions of the human mind, cannot be easily understood, except by exciting the perception, and calling to mind the occasions on which we have most sensibly felt its constraints.—Let us recollect those seasons in which a sinful regard to the observation of men has tempted us to decline the duty to which we have been urged by our own hearts—or, in which we have gone into criminal compliances with the world, through a weakness of mind that was unable to support the presence, or to contradict the opinions of our fellow sinners. Let young persons, particularly recollect their fears, lest it should be known that they worship God, and pay to the Creator the first duty of a creature. Recollect what it is that sometimes clothes you with a light and thoughtless air in the house of God; afraid to be serious, lest you should appear too much to believe the Gospel, or to be affected by its truths,

WHEN,

WHEN, at any time, the divine word begins to seize upon your hearts, what is it that excites you to shake off the conviction? And when, almost persuaded to be Christians, what withholds you from being persuaded altogether? It is shame. You are afraid the world will remark it—the world, whose presence weighs more with you than the authority of an invisible Deity. If you feel the compunctions of repentance, you fear lest they should be imputed to melancholy, or to weakness. If you perceive the duty and importance of making salvation your first care, and of honoring your Saviour by a public profession of his name; yet, you want the necessary resolution to encounter the world—to meet the sneers of your companions, their looks of suspicion, their hints of hypocrisy, their presages of inconstancy.

THUS may every hearer understand this sentiment by recalling to mind the occasions on which he has felt it, and on which it has checked his desire, or destroyed his resolutions of duty.

Ind. I shall farther illustrate it by pointing out some of its principal causes. These may be reduced to the three that follow—the pain of singularity—the power of ridicule—the want of sincerity.

SINGULARITY is always painful to an ingenuous mind. It seems to hold us out as exceptions from
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the general law of human nature—as insensible to its feelings—and worthy neither of the affections, nor of the confidence of mankind. Singularity always attracts the censure of the world, or, by contradicting general practice, or opinions, it invites contempt. The public manners have numbers on their side sufficient to brand with ignominy whatever, by differing from them, implies their condemnation. Superstition, contraction of sentiment, weakness of mind, illiberality of heart, are the mildest reproaches that fashionable dissipation bestows on piety that dares to be singular. Wealth and power, objects before which the human mind is prone to bow, being too often on the side of vicious fashion, give it great advantage in establishing wrong ideas of honor and disgrace. And because the multitude of men of science, like the vulgar multitude, are frequently in the same interests, even philosophy and wit have been pressed into its service by these its obedient sons. To withstand so many formidable enemies is an arduous task even for confirmed virtue. Little is the wonder then if first resolutions in religion should be shaken by them; and if the young should sometimes not have fortitude to bear up against them. To be singular in piety is to dare incur contempt for the despised cross. A hard sacrifice for human pride, and especially for juvenile virtue! Many more are found who are ready to forsake the Saviour, than
 who

who have firmness of mind sufficient to overcome the constraints of a false shame. Imperious fashion, both in conduct and opinion, will for ever sway the worldly heart. To rise above its influence requires an extraordinary zeal in religion, that seems to annihilate the temptations of the world, or an established and respected character in piety that gives a man authority over his own actions. But, in the commencement of a religious life, and before a character in it hath become appropriated, as it were, and sacred, for a man to enter into the society of his companions with reserve—to go with it only a certain length—to seem to enjoy it with constraint—to reproach them by more severe and corrected morals, and to incur their suspicion, obloquy, or contempt, requires uncommon prudence, and uncommon fortitude. How often does the dismaying power of shame subdue the heart before so many difficulties !

ANOTHER source of false shame is found in the power of ridicule.

RIDICULE is perhaps the severest assault which a man about to enter upon duty is called to sustain. It is apt to dismay and humble him much more than the coolness of contempt, or the violence of power. So sensible of its force are some infidels, that with this weapon alone, do they attack christianity which they
have

have so long in vain assailed by reason. It is a species of attack which every man can use against religion; because all can laugh, though few can reason. It can be used against religion with peculiar success; because its perfections are often invisible to sense, or withdrawn from the view, while the imperfections of its professors, which are mistaken for it, are obvious to every eye. The saints! The hypocrites! The weak fools! are titles that will furnish abundant sources of amusement to those who mistake names for characters, and laughter for wit. And when other matter fails, mimickry, the lowest species of ridicule, comes in with a thousand malicious and false additions to dress out the last scenes of humble diversion. The wise and experienced christian arrives at length to feel his superiority over these ludicrous attacks; but the young and inexperienced find them almost irresistible. They feel the humiliating contempt of laughter—they are degraded in their own esteem—ridicule dismays them—a senseless smile subdues their hearts—and, before a sinful generation, they are ashamed of Christ, and of his words.

In the consciousness of want of sincerity we find another cause of that weak shame which is prone to deny, or to disguise our reverence for religion. Pretences to an unsupported character are, in the highest degree, dishonorable and reproachful. The world,

world, that differs in so many things from the disciples of Christ, agrees with them in condemning visible hypocrisy. Many young persons, dreading the contempt that is due to this character, are deterred from making a declared choice of religion. Conscious that a conduct grave, devout and holy, should accompany the profession of piety, and fearing lest they want that sincere and courageous zeal which will enable them to make such a resolute and conspicuous change of life as becomes the followers of Christ, they decline to appear openly for his cause. They are afraid of discovering for it that reverence and attachment which they really feel, lest they should not be able to support the profession with uniformity and consistency. Ah! my brethren, if our hearts were sincere, the importance and glory of divine things would at once decide our choice, and overcome the apprehensions of being ever willing to sacrifice them to worldly interests, or to worldly pleasures; to the solicitations, or the sneers of men. But insincerity fears the reproach of hypocrisy more than it fears hypocrisy itself—insincerity shrinks from the opinion of a worm, but does not tremble before the justice of the Creator—insincerity is ashamed of our glory, in the midst of sinners who are forever glorying in their shame.

III*d*. THE consideration of the effects as well as the causes of this principle will assist in explaining its nature.

nature. One of the most certain consequences of being ashamed of duty is to lead to boldness and audacity in vice. Shame is, perhaps, the evidence of a middle character, neither virtuous nor abandoned. It is always accompanied with some remaining reverence for God. But, judging, from the licentious face of the world, that other sinners are not subject to the same constraints, it blushes for this sentiment as for a weakness. Endeavouring to cover its belief, or its fears, it assumes a greater shew of infidelity and licence than perhaps is real. It soon affects to talk in the stile of the world—to divert itself with serious persons, and at length, with serious things—it gives hints of libertinism, which it represents as superiority to vulgar prejudice—it sometimes pushes these appearances farther than would be necessary, if men were really infidels, to secure to themselves, without controversy, that honorable character. But conscious insincerity urges them to extremes to cover its own deceptions. And men being prone to form their opinions, no less than to derive their feelings, from sympathy, these mutual appearances contribute to create, at length, that vice and infidelity to which all, in the beginning, only pretend. It is, besides, a principle of human nature, that pretence itself will ultimately form those dispositions and habits which it continues to affect.

BUT if shame more modestly resolves not to
renounce,

renounce, but to postpone the care of our salvation, is there not reason to fear that this unhappy resolution will eventually come to the same issue? Need I repeat in this assembly the usual fruits of delay? Ah! my brethren, men always find the same reasons for delaying—and those who, through a false shame, and fear of the world, postpone their duty, may usually be considered, in effect, as resolving to renounce it. If conscience, however, or, if other motives prevail with some men, who are, notwithstanding, under the influence of a criminal shame, openly to acknowledge their Saviour, will it not often corrupt the principles, and pervert the spirit of religion? They study to accommodate its spirit and principles to the opinions and manners of the world, that the world seeing nothing in their piety but its own image, may cease to reproach them. Piety becomes with them prudential maxims of behaviour. The distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel, the denial of ourselves, the regeneration of the heart, and spirituality of life, are little to be observed in persons who are afraid of nothing so much as of being remarked for religious singularity; and who aim no higher than to pay the same ceremonious respect to the church which they do to the world. Lest their piety should be reproached as superstition, they are careful, perhaps, to make it understood that they do not place too high a value on the public institutions of religion. Lest it should be derided as enthusiasm, do they not banish from their devotion all appearances

appearances of zeal? Left they should incur the imputation of a narrow or illiberal mind, do they not often run so far into the principles and manners of a dissolute age that hardly can you discern they are the friends of religion?

HAVING thus far considered what is implied in being ashamed of Christ and of his words—
I proceed—

Idly. To shew its folly and its guilt: “Of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed.”

THE folly and the guilt of this vice are reciprocal. They mutually contribute to illustrate and aggravate each other. In this connection, its folly deserves in the first place, to be considered with the most serious attention.

It consists

1st. IN being ashamed of our true glory.—

2nd. IN hoping to avoid, by renouncing religion, an evil which cannot be shunned among men, I mean, detraction and ridicule.

3d. IN fearing an imaginary evil, that is, reproach for real virtue and piety.

4th. AND, finally, in exposing ourselves to infinite danger for the sake of covering a fruitless deception.

1st. IT consists in the first place, in being ashamed of our true glory.—

WHAT

WHAT is the highest glory of man?—Whether we consider ourselves as creatures, as sinners to be redeemed, or as moral agents, the most important lights in which we can be viewed, our glory and our duty are the same.—Obedience, to the Creator, gratitude to the Saviour, and conformity to the laws of our nature. If God is our parent, and the author of our being, doth not every idea of duty and of honor, require us to worship him, and publicly to claim our relation to him? On the worthy and obedient child, the virtues of the parent are reflected; and every related object derives a splendor from the dignity of the principal. But examine all the things on earth that are the subjects of human boasting, and are they not, in his presence, “less than nothing, and vanity?”—O God! the universal Father! Origin of being! Fountain of Good! in union to thee, in conformity to thine image, in obedience to thy will, consists the glory of the rational and moral nature! To be ashamed of thee is not the absurdity only, but the madness of human folly!

GRATITUDE to the Saviour is the second duty, and the second honor of man. To shew a defect of gratitude where it is justly due, is a decisive proof of a degenerate and ignoble mind. But the greatness and condescension of the Redeemer, the meanness and the guilt of man, concur in this case, to impose a boundless

boundless claim on our gratitude and love. Is it not our true glory, my brethren, to feel, with all their force, the infinite obligations created by redemption? Is it not our glory, to acknowledge them with warmer gratitude, in proportion as they are forgotten or neglected by the world? Yes, this is the dictate of a true, a generous, a grateful, as well as pious heart.

Lastly, THE honor of man consists in fulfilling the end of our being, which is the will of God. But this weak principle, which makes him desert his duty, changes, at the same time, and degrades his rational and moral nature, and sinks them from their original and native glory, the one to a resemblance of brutal natures, the other, to an image of infernal spirits.— O man! ambitious of glory! afraid of nothing so much as of disgrace! Unwise and foolish man! Thou art ashamed of thy glory! and thou gloriest in thy shame!

2nd. THE folly of being ashamed of our duty appears, in the next place, in vainly hoping to avoid, by renouncing religion, an evil which cannot be shunned among men, I mean detraction and ridicule.—

WHAT is the world but a vast theatre where envy and malice are perpetually sharpening the tongues and the wit of men against each other? What is half the
intercourse

intercourse of life but a scene of obloquy and sneer, where the characters of the absent are the constant sacrifice to the vanity of the present? Wherever you have rivals, and that is, wherever you have acquaintance of the same sex, or age, or profession with yourself, you find those whose weak minds have no other means of exalting themselves, but by depressing you. Change then your life, you only change the subject of discourse. You cannot gain, by continuing of the party of sinners, what you fear to lose by embracing the cause of religion—their friendship or their good opinion. And why should you fear, in the service of God alone, an evil to which you must be equally, or even more exposed by remaining in the interests of the world?—I say more exposed; for it greatly augments the folly of this sin.

3d. IN the next place, that while it incurs a real, it flies from an imaginary evil. It fears reproach for religion, when, in reality, the world has no reproach to make; when, instead of despising, it respects the beautiful and supported character of piety. Wisdom and goodness, rightly understood, can never be the objects of ridicule, or censure. They vindicate themselves to the judgment and conscience even of the vicious. Misrepresentation, to which an honest mind should ever be superior, is here the only ground

ground of reproach. And what can even misrepresentation alledge? That, in youth, it is an affectation of wisdom and virtue above your companions, and above your years? Alas! can any age be too early to be wise, and to seek for real and durable felicity? If the multitude of your companions afford few examples of piety, is it not the greater honor to rise to a degree of wisdom rarely attained even in mature life; and, at an age, in which we think it much if you learn with docility, to be able already to give an example worthy of imitation? Will the world busy itself to find out false motives for your change? Let such malice serve to disgust you the more with a world the true character of which you are now just beginning to discern.—Will they say with a sneer, “the saints!” “the hypocrites!” “the weak fools!” “Ah! this zeal will not last long!”—Let such ungenerous insults only determine your resolution more firmly to support the dignity of religion by the integrity of your conduct, and by perseverance in virtue. If you do thus, be assured that the world itself, after proving your sincerity, and spending its first resentments upon you for having forsaken its party, will regard you with reverence and esteem. It is not indeed religion, but insincerity, and hypocrisy they despise. If then you would silence obloquy and obtain an honorable place in their hearts, be not
 ashamed

ashamed of the doctrines of Christ. But you must be careful to mix with your religion nothing weak or superstitious, nothing libertine or worldly—do not resemble too much the men of the world—it is their own image which they despise in a christian. Persevere in the path of duty. They will convert contempt or hatred into veneration—they will applaud your resolution—they will envy your destiny—and if they cannot resemble you in their lives, they will secretly sigh that their end may be like yours.

4th. THE folly of this evil consists, in the last place, in its exposing us to infinite danger for the sake of covering a fruitless deception. “Whoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, saith the Saviour, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed.”—Woe to that man of whom the Son shall be ashamed! God, when offended, might be reconciled through his atonement. But, when the Saviour is rejected, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. Is this the issue of being ashamed of the gospel? Is this the reward of that frivolous honor which we would preserve in the opinion of a corrupted world, by renouncing virtue? Is this the fruit of that criminal deception which we strive to maintain by unworthy pretences against the struggling sense of inward duty? Do we derive from it even present gain to make a momentary compensation for the eternal loss? No,
worldly

worldly reputation and interest are, when rightly considered, in favour of religion. But, when the soul—when the hopes of salvation—when the judgment of God, are put in the balance against a slander, a sneer, a suspicion, a look of miserable mortals, and outweighed! oh! infinite folly! My brethren, eternity alone can disclose it in its full magnitude, when we shall see in the dreadful light of everlasting burnings the vanity of human opinion, and all the terrors of that denunciation, “of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed.”

Und. HAVING endeavoured, in few words, to illustrate the folly of being ashamed of religion, I shall, with equal brevity, illustrate its guilt.—Its guilt consists in exalting the authority of man above the glory of God—in ingratitude to him who was not ashamed of us—and in promoting vice by the pernicious influence of our example.

1st. IN exalting the authority of man above the glory of God. His infinite perfection, independently on his rights as our Creator, has a supreme claim to our adoration and love. He is infinitely more worthy than any of his creatures of the fervent and intire devotion of our hearts. He who hath created the powers of understanding and enjoyment is able to fill them with consummate and eternal consolations.

Not

Not to love him therefore—not to make his glory predominate over all other objects, is an evidence that the heart is blind to moral beauty, and corrupted in all its affections. But to make man the arbiter of our duty to God—to make the divine glory stoop to the pleasure or opinion of a miserable worm, is a crime beyond expression. Its malignity is to be estimated from the perfection of him who is offended; and like that, it is infinite.

2nd. THE guilt of this sin consists, in the next place, in ingratitude to him who was not ashamed of us.

INGRATITUDE to a benefactor is among the most detested vices. If the ingratitude of men for the blessings of salvation strikes us with less horror than other examples of this sin, it is because we do not discern in the light of faith, the infinite distance between the Creator and the creature. But when he descends from his eternal throne—when the incarnate Deity submits to suffer—when the divine glory was not ashamed of human weakness—that sinners should be ashamed of him!—be astonished O Heavens at this! And tremble thou Earth who bearest in thy bosom such guilt!

It has sometimes been asked by those who are not willing to make great sacrifices, whether we may
not

not acquit ourselves of duty in secret, without exposing our profession to the view of those who would insult or deride it? I answer no.—Sincerity glories in its object. And when God is the object, the soul, occupied in the blessedness of its portion, forgets, in a measure, the applause or censure of the world. His glory will be a sufficient portion, when the world frowns.—The sense of his love will support the heart against the fear of its reproach.—Shame to that worldly prudence that is ashamed of its God!—Shall sin, the disgrace of our nature walk among us with elevated and impudent forehead? And shall religion, the glory of the reasonable soul, blush and retire, lest the profane eyes of men, dazzled with its beauty, should not be able to endure the sight?

3d. Its guilt consists, in the last place, in promoting vice by the pernicious influence of our example. Example is contagious. And the world becomes more corrupted from the vice that is already in it. To decline the profession of religion through false shame, is, in some respects, more injurious to the interests of virtue in the world, than open impiety.—This sometimes prevents imitation by a certain horror at its enormity.—That, by preserving greater decency, more effectually insinuates its poison. Your example proclaims your unbelief, or your contempt of the Gospel—and invites others to receive it with incredulity.

dulity, or to treat it with scorn. In the account of divine justice, the depravity, and perhaps the perdition of many sinners shall be charged to that criminal shame which alienates you from the life of God, and shall go to augment your guilt.

IN the conclusion of this discourse, permit me to remark, that altho' divine grace alone can effectually secure the heart, and raise it above the influence of a false and unholy shame, yet, it will greatly contribute to this happy effect to have early established just ideas of honor and shame by a well directed education. It is of great importance, in the beginning of life, to preoccupy the mind by good impressions—to teach it to reverence God, before it has yet seen the beauties of holiness—to honour, before it has learned to love religion—and to prepare it to despise, before it has arrived to detest, the vices and the follies of the world. It is of the greater importance, because, our habits and opinions are constantly and imperceptibly forming by all that we see and hear. If religion does not early impart such as are rational and just, the world will necessarily prepossess the mind with such as are pernicious and false. False shame will withhold it from the influence of piety—false honor will raise up within it the most dangerous enemies to salvation.

LET parents and instructors, therefore, be diligent to discharge their duty with fidelity to the rising generation.

generation. The most happy fruits will reward your prudent and honest zeal: Reflect what advantages you enjoy when you plead the cause of piety against vice—and of Heaven against the world. What can be more glorious than the service of the King of Kings? What more great and worthy than virtue which brings to perfection all the best and noblest principles of human nature? Religion is the true glory, as well as happiness of man. Sin only is his real shame. It is accompanied, besides, with unspcakable danger, and is speedily tending to eternal ruin.

SUFFER me to extend a little this idea. It is strongly implied in the expression of our Saviour “of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.”

ALL miseries are included in this threatening. When God condescends to treat the sinner in this language of sarcastic contempt it strikes me as the most fearful denunciation of divine vengeance. Other threatenings seem more definitely to mark their penalties—This presents nothing distinctly to the imagination, but holds up every thing most terrible to our fears.—Shall I call up to view the last tribunal? The Heavens on fire? The Earth shaken and moved out of its place? The Elements melting with fervent heat

heat before the wrath of God and of the Lamb? Shall I speak of Tophet that is ordained of old, the pile whereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord as a stream of brimstone doth kindle it? And shall I not say, after all, that his most fearful sentence is “of him shall the Son of man be ashamed?” This is indignant justice heightened by contempt. The flames of anger may consume the sinner—Shame will bury him forever from his sight in the depths of misery.—What! banished from thy sight O merciful Saviour of men! This is indeed the blackness of the everlasting darkness! Let those unhappy men who are ashamed of Christ and of his words, deeply reflect on this dreadful destiny! To persuade you to this wise and necessary resolution is the whole object of the present discourse.

MAY the Spirit of God add to these instructions his own evidence, and his almighty energy!—May he impart to us a wise estimate of eternity and time! Of the opinions of men, and the approbation of God!—And now to the King eternal, immortal and invisible be rendered, through Jesus Christ, all honor, glory, and praise, from all on earth, and all in Heaven!—

AMEN !

24 JUN 69

