

The Reformation of Manners

by John Wesley

The Society for Reformation of Manners aims to make an open stand against ungodliness and unrighteousness, prevent dishonour to God's name, and promote righteousness and restrain sin.

Scripture: Psalm 94:16, Matthew 5:14

Topics: "Reformation", "Unity Against Sin"

Description

John Wesley preaches on the necessity of uniting against wickedness and the importance of the Church's role in opposing the works of darkness. He emphasizes that true members of the Church should actively engage in reforming society and combating sin, rather than indulging in it. Wesley recounts the historical efforts of the Society for Reformation of Manners, which successfully addressed various societal vices, and calls for renewed commitment to this cause. He stresses that those who wish to engage in such reform must possess faith, courage, and love, and act with humility and sincerity. Ultimately, Wesley urges all believers to rise up and contribute to the fight against ungodliness for the glory of God and the good of humanity.

Transcript

Preached before the Society for Reformation of Manners

On Sunday, January 30, 1763

At the Chapel in West-Street, Seven-Dials

"Who will rise up with me against the wicked?" Ps. 94:16.

1. In all ages, men who neither feared God nor regarded man have combined together, and formed confederacies, to carry on the works of darkness. And herein they have shown themselves wise in their generation; for by this means they more effectually promoted the kingdom of their father the devil, than otherwise they could I have done. On the other hand, men who did fear God, and desire the happiness of their fellow-creatures, have, in every age, found it needful to join together, in order to oppose the works of darkness, to spread the knowledge of God their Saviour, and to promote his kingdom upon earth. Indeed He himself has instructed them so to do. From the time that men were upon the earth, he hath taught them to join together in his service, and has united them in one body by one Spirit. And for this very end he has joined them together, "that he might destroy the works of the devil;" first in them that are already united,

and by them in all that care round about them.

2. This is the original design of the Church of Christ. It is a body of men compacted together, in order, first, to save each his own soul; then to assist each other in working out their salvation; and, afterwards, as far as in them lies, to save all men from present and future misery, to overturn the kingdom of Satan, and set up the kingdom of Christ. And this ought to be the continued care and endeavour of every member of his Church; otherwise he is not worthy to be called a member thereof, as he is not a living member of Christ.

3. Accordingly, this ought to be the constant care and endeavour of all those who are united together in these kingdoms, and are commonly called, The Church of England. They are united together for this very end, to oppose the devil and all his works, and to wage war against the world and the flesh, his constant and faithful allies. But do they, in fact, answer the end of their union? Are all who style themselves "members of the Church of England" heartily engaged in opposing the works of the devil, and fighting against the world and the flesh? Alas! we cannot say this. So far from it, that a great part, I fear the greater part of them, are themselves the world, -- the people that know not God to any saving purpose; are indulging, day by day, instead of "mortifying the flesh, with its affections and desires;" and doing, themselves, those works of the devil, which they are peculiarly engaged to destroy.

4. There is, therefore, still need, even in this Christian county, (as we courteously style Great Britain,) yea, in this Christian church, (if we may give that title to the bulk of our nation,) of some to "rise up against the wicked," and join together "against the evil doers." Nay, there was never more need than there is at this day, for them "that fear the Lord to speak often together" on this very head, how they may "lift up a standard against the iniquity" which overflows the land. There is abundant cause for all the servants of God to join together against the works of the devil; with united hearts and counsels and endeavours to make a stand for God, and to repress, as much as in them lies, these "floods of ungodliness."

5. For this end a few persons in London, towards the close of the last century, united together, and after a while, were termed, The Society for Reformation of Manners; and incredible good was done by them for near forty years. But then, most of the original members being gone to their reward, those who succeeded them grew faint in their mind, and departed from the work: So that a few years ago the Society ceased; nor did any of the kind remain in the kingdom.

6. It is a society of the same nature which has been lately formed. I purpose to show, First, the nature of their design, and the steps they have hitherto taken: Secondly, the excellency of it; with the various objections which have been raised against it: Thirdly, what manner of men they ought to be who engage in such a design: And, Fourthly, with what spirit, and in what manner, they should proceed in the prosecution of it. I shall conclude with an application both to them, and to all that fear God.

I. 1. I am, First, to show the nature of their design, and the steps they have hitherto taken.

It was on a Lord's Day, in August, 1757, that, in a small company who were met for prayer and religious conversation, mention was made of the gross and open profanation of that sacred day, by persons buying and selling, keeping open shop, tippling in alehouses, and standing or sitting in the streets, roads, or fields, vending their wares as on common days; especially in Moorfields, which was then full of them every Sunday, from one end to the other. It was considered, what method could be taken to redress these grievances; and it was agreed, that six of them should, in the morning, wait upon Sir John Fielding for instruction. They did so: He approved of the design, and directed them how to carry it into execution.

2. They first delivered petitions to the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, and the Court of Aldermen; to the Justices sitting at Hick's Hall; and those in Westminster; and they received from all these honourable benches much encouragement to proceed.

3. It was next judged proper to signify their design to many persons of eminent rank, and to the body of the Clergy, as well as the Ministers of other denominations, belonging to the several churches and meetings in and about the cities of London and Westminster; and they had the satisfaction to meet with a hearty consent and universal approbation from them.

4. They then printed and dispersed, at their own expense, several thousand books of instruction to Constables and other Parish Officers, explaining and enforcing their several duties: And to prevent, as far as possible, the necessity of proceeding to an actual execution of the laws, they likewise printed and dispersed in all parts of the town dissuasives from Sabbath-breaking, extract from Acts of Parliament against it, and notices to the offenders.

5. The way being paved by these precautions, it was in the beginning of the year 1758, that, after notices delivered again and again, which were as often set at naught, actual informations were made to Magistrates against persons profaning the Lord's day. By this means they first cleared the streets and fields of those notorious offenders who, without any regard either to God or the king, were selling their wares from morning to night. They proceeded to a more difficult attempt, the preventing tippling on the Lord's day, spending the time in alehouses, which ought to be spent in the more immediate worship of God. Herein they were exposed to abundance of reproach, to insult and abuse of every kind; having not only the tipplers, and those who entertained them, the alehouse keepers, to contend with, but rich and honourable men, partly the landlords of those alehouse keepers, partly those who furnished them with drink, and, in general, all who gained by their sins. Some of these were not only men of substance, but men in authority; nay, in more instances than one, they were the very persons before whom the delinquents were brought. And the treatment they gave those who laid the informations naturally encouraged "the beasts of the people" to follow their example, and to use them as fellows not fit to live upon the earth. Hence they made no scruple, not only to treat them with the basest language, not only to throw at them mud or stones, or whatever came to hand, but many times to beat them without mercy, and to drag them over the stones, or through the kennels. And that they did not murder them was not for want of will; but the bridle was in their teeth.

6. Having, therefore, received help from God, they went on to restrain bakers likewise, from spending so great a part of the Lord's day in exercising the work of their calling. But many of these were more noble than the victuallers. They were so far from resenting this, or looking upon it as an affront, that several, who had been hurried down the stream of custom to act contrary to their own conscience, sincerely thanked them for their labour, and acknowledged it as a real kindness.

7. In clearing the streets, fields, and alehouses of Sabbath-breakers, they fell upon another sort of offenders, as mischievous to society as any; namely, gamesters of various kinds. Some of these were of the lowest and vilest class, commonly called gamblers; who make a trade of seizing on young and unexperienced men, and tricking them out of all their money; and after they have beggared them, they frequently teach them the same mystery of iniquity. Several nests of these they have rooted out, and constrained not a few of them honestly to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow and the labour of their hands.

8. Increasing in number and strength, they extended their views, and began, not only to repress profane swearing, but to remove out of our streets another public nuisance, and scandal of the Christian name, common prostitutes. Many of these were stopped in their mid career of audacious wickedness. And in order to go to the root of the disease, many of the houses that entertained them have been detected, prosecuted according to law, and totally suppressed. And some of the poor desolate women themselves, though fallen to

The lowest line of human infamy,

have acknowledged the gracious providence of God, and broke off their sins by lasting repentance. Several of these have been placed out, and several received into the Magdalene Hospital.

9. If a little digression may be allowed, who can sufficiently admire the wisdom of Divine Providence, in the disposal of the times and seasons so as to suit one occurrence to another? For instance: Just at a time when many of these poor creatures, being stopped in their course of sin, found a desire of leading a better life, as it were in answer to that sad question, "But if I quit the way I now am in, what can I do to live? For I am not mistress of any trade; and I have no friends that will receive me:" -- I say, just at this time, God has prepared the Magdalen Hospital. Here those who have no trade, nor any friends to receive them, are received with all tenderness; yea, they may live, and that with comfort, being provided with all things that are needful "for life and godliness."

10. But to return. The number of persons brought to justice, from August, 1757, to August, 1762, is.....9,596

From thence to the present time: --

For unlawful gaming, and profane swearing..... 40

For Sabbath-breaking..... 400

Lewd women, and keepers of ill houses..... 550

For offering to sale obscene prints..... 2

In all.....10,588

11. In the admission of members into the Society, no regard is had to any particular sect or party. Whoever is found, upon inquiry, to be a good man is readily admitted. And none who has selfish or pecuniary views, will long continue therein; not only because he can gain nothing thereby, but because he would quickly be a loser, inasmuch as he must commence subscriber as soon as he is a member. Indeed, the vulgar cry is, "These are all Whitefieldites." But it is a great mistake. About twenty of the constantly subscribing members are all that are in connection with Mr. Whitefield; about fifty are in connexion with Mr. Wesley; about twenty, who are of the Established Church, have no connexion with either; and about seventy are Dissenters; who make, in all, an hundred and sixty. There are, indeed, many more who assist in the work by occasional subscriptions.

II. 1. These are the steps which have been hitherto taken in prosecution of this design. I am, in the Second place, to show the excellent thereof, notwithstanding the objections which have been raised against it.

Now this may appear from several considerations. And, First, from hence, -- that the making an open stand against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness which overspread our land as a flood is one of the noblest ways of confessing Christ in the face of his enemies. It is giving glory to God, and showing mankind that even in these dregs of time,

There are, who faith prefer

Though few, and piety to God.

And what more excellent than to render to God the honour due unto his name? To declare by a stronger proof than words, even by suffering, and running all hazards, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous; doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth."

2. How excellent is the design to prevent in any degree the dishonour done to his glorious name, the contempt which is poured on his authority, and the scandal brought upon our holy religion by the gross, flagrant wickedness of those who are still called by the name of Christ! To stem in any degree the torrent of vice, to repress the floods of ungodliness, to remove in an leisure those occasions of blaspheming the worthy name hereby we are called, is one of the noblest designs it can possibly enter into the heart of man to conceive.

3. And as this design thus evidently tends to bring "glory to God in the highest," so it no less manifestly conduces to the establishing "peace upon earth." For as all sin directly tends both to destroy our peace with God by setting him at open defiance, to banish peace from our own breasts, and to set every man's sword against his neighbour; so whatever prevents or removes sin does in the same degree, promote peace, -- both peace in our own soul, peace with God, and peace with one another. Such are the genuine fruits of this design, even in the present world. But why should we confine our views to the narrow bounds of time and space? Rather pass over these into eternity. And what fruit of it shall we find there? Let the Apostle speak: "Brethren, if one of you err from the truth, and one convert him" (not to this or that Opinion, but to God!) "let him know that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins." (Jas. 5:19, 20.)

4. Nor is it to individuals only, whether those who betray other into sin or those that are liable to be betrayed and destroyed by them, that the benefit of this design redounds, but to the whole community whereof we are members. For is it not a sure observation, "righteousness exalteth a nation?" And is it not as sure on the other hand that "sin is a reproach to any people?" Yea, and bringeth down the curse of God upon them? So far therefore as righteousness in any branch is promoted, so far is the national interest advanced. So far as sin, especially open sin, is restrained, the curse and reproach are removed from us. Whoever therefore they are that labour herein, they are general benefactors. They are the truest friends of their king and country. And in the same proportion as their design takes place, there can be no doubt but God will give national prosperity, in accomplishment of his faithful word, "Them that honour me, I will honour."

5. But it is objected, "However excellent a design this is, it does not concern you. For are there not persons to whom there pressing these offenses and punishing the offenders properly belong? Are there not Constables, and other Parish Officers, who are bound by oath to this very thing?" There are. Constables and Churchwardens, in particular, are engaged by solemn oaths to give due information against profaners of the Lord's day, and all other scandalous sinners. But if they leave it undone, -- if, notwithstanding their oaths, they trouble not themselves about the matter, it concerns all that fear God,

that love mankind, and that wish well to their king and country, to pursue this design with the very same vigour as if there were no such Officers existing; it being just the same thing, if they are of no use, as if they had no being.

6. "But this is only a pretence: Their real design is to get money by giving informations." So it has frequently and roundly been affirmed; but without the least shadow of truth. The contrary maybe proved by a thousand instances: No member of the Society takes any part of the money which is by the law allotted to the informer. They never did from the beginning; nor does any of them ever receive anything to suppress or withdraw their information. This is another mistake, if not wilful slander, for which there is not the least foundation.

7. "But the design is impracticable. Vice is risen to such an head that it is impossible to suppress it; especially by such means. For what can an handful of poor people do in opposition to all the world?" "With men this is impossible, but not with God." And they trust, not in themselves, but him. Be then the patrons of vice ever so strong, to him they are no more than grasshoppers. And all means are alike to Him: It is the same thing with God "to deliver by many or by few." The small number, therefore, of those who are on the Lord's side is nothing; neither the great number of those that are against him. Still He doth whatever pleaseth him; and "there is no counsel or strength against the Lord."

8. "But if the end you aim at be really to reform sinners, you choose the wrong means. It is the Word of God must effect this, and not human laws; and it is the work of Ministers, not of Magistrates; therefore, the applying to these can only produce an outward reformation. It makes no change in the heart."

It is true the Word of God is the chief, ordinary means, whereby he changes both the hearts and lives of sinners; and he does this chiefly by the Ministers of the gospel. But it is likewise true, that the Magistrate is "the minister of God;" and that he is designed of God "to be a terror to evil-doers," by executing human laws upon them. If this does not change the heart, yet to prevent outward sin is one valuable point gained. There is so much the less dishonour done to God, less scandal brought on our holy religion; less curse and reproach upon our nation; less temptation laid in the way of others; yea, and less wrath heaped up by the sinners themselves against the day of wrath.

9. "Nay, rather more; for it makes many of them hypocrites, pretending to be what they are not. Others, by exposing them to shame, and putting them to expense, are made impudent and desperate in wickedness; so that in reality none of them are any better, if they are not worse than they were before."

This is a mistake all over. For, (1.) where are these hypocrites? We know none who have pretended to be what they were not. (2.) The exposing obstinate offenders to shame, and putting them to expense, does not make them desperate in offending, but afraid to offend. (3.) Some of them, far from being worse, are substantially better, the whole tenor of their lives being changed. Yea, (4.) some are inwardly changed, even "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

10. "But many are not convinced that buying or selling on the Lord's day is a sin."

If they are not convinced, they ought to be: it is high time they should. The case is as plain as plain can be. For if an open, wilful breach both of the law of God and the law of the land is not sin, pray what is? And if such a breach both of divine and human laws is not to be punished because a man is not convinced it is a sin, there is an end of all execution of justice, and all men may live as they list.

11. "But mild methods ought to be tried first." They ought: And so they are. A mild admonition is given to every offender before the law is put in execution against him; nor is any man prosecuted till he has express notice that this will be the case unless he will prevent that prosecution by removing the cause of it. In every case the mildest method is used which the nature of the case will bear; nor are severer means ever applied, but when they are absolutely necessary to the end.

12. "Well, but after all this stir about reformation, what real good has been done?" Unspeakable good; and abundantly more than anyone could have expected in so short a time, considering the small number of the instruments, and the difficulties they had to encounter. Much evil has been already prevented, and much has been removed. Many sinners have been outwardly reformed some have been inwardly changed. The honour of him whose name we bear, so openly affronted, has been openly defended. And it is not easy to determine how many and how great blessing even this little stand, made for God and his cause against his daring enemies, may already have derived upon our whole nation. On the whole, then, after all the objections that can be made, reasonable men may still conclude, a more excellent design could scarce ever enter into the heart of man.

III. 1. But what manner of men ought they to be who engage in such a design? Some may imagine, any that are willing to assist therein ought readily to be admitted; and that the greater the number of members, the greater will be their influence. But this is by no means true: Matter of fact undeniably proves the contrary. While the former Society for Reformation of Manners consisted of chosen members only, though neither many, rich, nor powerful, they broke through all opposition, and were eminently successful in every branch of their undertaking; but when a number of men less carefully chosen, were received into that Society, they grew less and less useful, till, by insensible degrees, they dwindled into nothing.

2. The number, therefore, of the members is no more to be attended to than the riches or eminence. This is a work of God. It is undertaken in the name of God, and for his sake. It follows, that men who neither love nor fear God have no part or lot in this matter. "Why takest thou my covenant in thy mouth?" may God say to any of these; "whereas thou" thyself "hatest to be reformed, and have cast my words behind thee?" Whoever, therefore, lives in any known sin is not fit to engage in reforming sinners: More especially if he is guilty, in any instance, or in the least degree, of profaning the name of God, of buying, selling, or doing any unnecessary work on the Lord's day; or offending in any other of those instances which this Society is peculiarly designed to reform. No; let none who stands himself in need of this reformation presume to meddle with such an undertaking. First let him "pull the beam out of his own eye:" Let him be himself unblamable in all things.

3. Not that this will suffice: Everyone engaging herein, should be more than a harmless man. He should be a man of faith; having at least, such a degree of that "evidence of things not seen," as to "aim not at the things that are seen, which are temporal, but at those that are not seen, which are eternal;" such a faith as produces a steady fear of God, with a lasting resolution, by his grace, to abstain from all that he has forbidden, and to do all that he has commanded. He will more especially need that particular branch of faith, -- confidence in God. It is this faith which "removes mountains;" which "quenches the violence of fire;" which breaks through all opposition; and enables one to stand against and "chase a thousand," knowing in whom his strength lies, and, even when he has "the sentence of death in himself, trusting in Him who raiseth the dead."

4. He that has faith and confidence in God, will, of consequence, be a man of courage. And such it is highly needful every man should be, who engages in this undertaking: For many things will occur in the

prosecution thereof, which are terrible to nature; indeed, so terrible, that all who "confer with flesh and blood" will be afraid to encounter them. Here, therefore, true courage has its proper place, and is necessary in the highest degree. And this, faith only can supply. A believer can say,

I fear no denial; no danger I fear;

Nor start from the trial; -- For Jesus is near.

5. To courage patience is nearly allied; the one regarding future, the other present, evils. And whoever joins in carrying on a design of this nature, will have great occasion for this. For, notwithstanding all his unblameableness, he will find himself just in Ishmael's situation, -- "his hand against every man, and everyman's hand against him." And no wonder: If it be true, that "all who will live godly shall suffer persecution," how eminently must this be fulfilled in them who, not content to live godly themselves, compel the ungodly to do so too, or at least to refrain from notorious ungodliness! Is not this declaring war against all the world? setting all the children of the devil at defiance? And will not Satan himself, "the prince of this world, the ruler of the darkness" thereof, exert all his subtlety and all his force in support of his tottering kingdom? Who can expect the roaring lion will tamely submit to have the prey plucked out of his teeth? "Ye have," therefore, "need of patience; that, after ye have done the will of God, ye may receive the promise."

6. And ye have need of steadiness, that ye may "hold fast" this "profession of your faith without wavering." This also should be found in all that unite in this Society; which is not a task for a "double-minded man," -- for one that "is unstable in his ways." He that is as a reed shaken with the wind is not fit for this warfare; which demands a firm purpose of soul, a constant, determined resolution. One that is wanting in this may "set his hand to the plough;" but how soon will he "look back!" He may, indeed, "endure for a time; but when persecution or tribulation," public or private troubles, "arise because of the work, immediately he is offended."

7. Indeed, it is hard for any to persevere in so unpleasing a work, unless love overpowers both pain and fear. And, therefore, it is highly expedient, that all engaged therein have "the love of God shed abroad in their hearts;" that they should all be able to declare, "we love him, because he first loved us." The presence of Him whom their soul loveth will then make their labour light. They can then say, not from the wildness of an heated imagination, but with the utmost truth and soberness, --

With thee conversing, I forget

All time, and toil, and care:

Labour is rest, and pain is sweet,

While thou, my God, art here.

8. What adds a still greater sweetness, even to labour and pain, is the Christian "love of our neighbour." When they "love their neighbour," that is, every soul of man, "as themselves," as their own souls; when "the love of Christ constrains" them to love one another, "even as he loved us;" when, as he "tasted death for every man," so they are "ready to lay down their life for their brethren;" (including in that number every man, every soul for which Christ died,) what prospect of danger will then be able to fright them from their "labour of love?" What suffering will they not be ready to undergo to save one soul from everlasting burnings? What continuance of labour, disappointment, pain, will vanquish their fixed resolution? Will they

not be

'Gainst all repulses steel'd, nor ever tired

With toilsome day, or ill-succeeding night?

So love both "hopeth" and "endureth all things:" So "charity never faileth."

9. Love is necessary for all the members of such a Society, on another account likewise; even because it "is not puffed up:" It produces not only courage and patience, but humility. And O how needful is this for all who are so employed! What can be of more importance, than that they should be little and mean and base and vile in their own eyes? For, otherwise, should they think themselves anything, should they impute anything to themselves, should they admit anything of a Pharisaic spirit, "trusting in themselves that they were righteous, and despising others;" nothing could more directly tend to overthrow the whole design. For then they would not only have all the world, but also God himself, to contend with; seeing he "resisteth the proud, and giveth grace" only "to the humble." Deeply conscious, therefore, should every member of this society be of his own foolishness, weakness, helplessness; continually hanging, with his whole soul upon Him who alone hath wisdom and strength, with an unspeakable conviction that "the help which is done upon earth, God doth it himself;" and that it is He alone "who worketh in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

10. One point more whoever engages in this design should have deeply impressed on his heart, namely, that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." Let him, therefore, learn of Him who was meek, as well as lowly; and let him abide in meekness, as well as humility: "With all lowliness and meekness," let him "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called." Let them be "gentle toward all men," good or bad, for his own sake, for their sake, for Christ's sake. Are any "ignorant, and out of the way?" Let him have "compassion" upon them. Do they even oppose the word and the work of God; yea, set themselves in battle array against it? So much the more hath he need "in meekness to instruct those who thus oppose themselves;" if haply they may "escape out of the snare of the devil," and no more be "taken captive at his will."

IV. 1. From the qualifications of those who are proper to engage in such an undertaking as this I proceed to show, Fourthly, with what spirit and in what manner it ought to be pursued. First, with what spirit. Now this first regards the motive, which is to be preserved in every step that is taken; for if, at any time "the light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! But if thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." This is, therefore, continually to be remembered, and carried into every word and action. Nothing is to be spoke or done, either great or small, with a view to any temporal advantage; nothing with a view to the favour or esteem, the love or the praise, of men. But the intention, the eye of the mind, is always to be fixed on the glory of God and good of man.

2. But the spirit with which everything is to be done regards the temper as well as the motive. And this is no other than that which has been described above. For the same courage, patience, steadiness, which qualify a man for the work, are to be exercised therein. Above all let him "take the shield of faith:" This will quench a thousand fiery darts. Let him exert all the faith which God has given him, in every trying hour. And let all his doings be done in love: Never let this be wrested from him. Neither must many waters quench this love, nor the floods of ingratitude drown it. Let, likewise, that lowly mind be in him, which was also in Christ Jesus; yea, and let him "be clothed with humility," filling his heart, and adorning his whole behaviour. At the same time, let him "put on bowels of mercies, gentleness, longsuffering;" avoiding the

least appearance of malice, bitterness, anger, or resentment; knowing it is our calling, not to be "overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good." In order to preserve this humble, gentle love, it is needful to do all things with recollection of spirit; watching against all hurry, or dissipation of thought, as well as against pride, wrath, or surliness. But this can be no otherwise preserved than by "continuing instant in prayer," both before and after he comes into the field, and during the whole action; and by doing all in the spirit of sacrifice, offering all to God, through the Son of his love.

3. As to the outward manner of acting, a general rule is, Let it be expressive of these inward tempers. But to be more particular: (1.) Let every man beware not to "do evil that good may come." Therefore, "putting away all lying, let every man speak the truth to his neighbour." Use no fraud or guile, either in order to detect or to punish any man, but "by simplicity and godly sincerity" "commend yourself to men's consciences in the sight of God." It is probable that, by your adhering to these rules, fewer offenders will be convicted; but so much the more will the blessing of God accompany the whole undertaking.

4. But let innocence be joined with prudence, properly so called; -- not that offspring of hell which the world calls prudence, which is mere craft, cunning, dissimulation; but with that "wisdom from above" which our Lord peculiarly recommends to all who would promote his kingdom upon earth. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents," while ye are "harmless as doves." This wisdom will instruct you how to suit your words and whole behaviour, to the persons with whom you have to do; to the time, place, and all other circumstances. It will teach you to cut off occasion of offense, even from those who seek occasion, and to do things of the most offensive nature in the least offensive manner that is possible.

5. Your manner of speaking, particularly to offenders, should be at all times deeply serious (lest it appear like insulting or triumphing over them,) rather inclining to sad; showing that you pity them for what they do, and sympathize with them in what they suffer. Let your air and tone of voice, as well as words, be dispassionate, calm, mild; yea, where it would not appear like dissimulation, even kind and friendly. In some cases, where it will probably be received as it is meant, you may profess the goodwill you bear them; but at the same time, (that it may not be thought to proceed from fear, or any wrong inclination,) professing your intrepidity, and inflexible resolution to oppose and punish vice to the uttermost.

V. 1. It remains only to make some application of what has been said, partly to you who are already engaged in this work, partly to all that fear God; and more especially to them that love as well as fear him.

With regard to you who are already engaged in this work, the First advice I would give you is, calmly and deeply to consider the nature of your undertaking. Know what you are about; be thoroughly acquainted with what you have in hand; consider the objections which are made to the whole of your undertaking; and before you proceed, be satisfied that those objections have no real weight: Then may every man act as he is fully persuaded in his own mind.

2. I advise you, Secondly, be not in haste to increase your number: And, in adding thereto, regard not wealth, rank, or any outward circumstance; only regard the qualifications above described. Inquire diligently, whether the person proposed be of an unblamable carriage, and whether he be a man of faith, courage, patience, steadiness; whether he be a lover of God and man. If so, he will add to your strength, as well as number: If not, you will lose by him more than you gain; for you will displease God. And be not afraid to purge out from among you any who do not answer the preceding character. By thus lessening your number, you will increase your strength: You will be "vessels meet for your Master's use."

3. I would, Thirdly, advise you narrowly to observe from what motive you at any time act or speak. Beware that your intention be not stained with any regard either to profit or praise. Whatever you do, "do it to the Lord; as the servants of Christ. Do not aim at pleasing yourself in any point, but pleasing Him whose you are and whom you serve. Let your eye be single, from first to last; eye God alone in every word and work.

4. I advise you, in the Fourth place, see that you do everything in a right temper; with lowliness and meekness, with patience and gentleness, worthy the gospel of Christ. Take every step, trusting in God, and in the most tender, loving spirit you are able. Meantime, watch always against all hurry and dissipation of spirit; and pray always, with all earnestness and perseverance, that your faith fail not. And let nothing interrupt that spirit of sacrifice which you make of all you have and are, of all you suffer and do, that it may be an offering of a sweet-smelling savour to God, through Jesus Christ!

5. As to the manner of acting and speaking, I advise you to do it with all innocence and simplicity, prudence and seriousness. Add to these, all possible calmness and mildness; nay, all the tenderness which the case will bear. You are not to behave as butchers or hangmen; but as surgeons rather, who put the patient to no more pain than is necessary in order to the cure. For this purpose, each of you, likewise, has need of "a lady's hand with a lion's heart." So shall many, even of them you are constrained to punish, "glorify God in the day of visitation."

6. I exhort all of you who fear God, as ever you hope to find mercy at his hands, as you dread being found (though you knew it not) "even to fight against God," do not, on any account, reason, or pretence whatsoever, either directly or indirectly, oppose or hinder so merciful a design, and one so conducive to his glory. But this is not all: If you are lovers of mankind, if you long to lessen the sins and miseries of your fellow-creatures, can you satisfy yourselves, can you be clear before God, by barely not opposing it? Are not you also bound by the most sacred ties, "as you have opportunity to do good to all men?" And is not here an opportunity of doing good to many, even good of the highest kind? In the name of God, then, embrace the opportunity! Assist in doing this good, if no otherwise, yet by your earnest prayers for them who are immediately employed therein. Assist them, according to your ability, to defray the expense which necessarily attends it, and which, without the assistance of charitable persons, would be a burden they could not bear. Assist them, if you can without inconvenience, by quarterly or yearly subscriptions. At least, assist them now; use the present hour, doing what God puts into your heart. Let it not be said that you saw your brethren laboring for God, and would not help them with one of your fingers. In this way, however, "come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty!"

7. I have an higher demand upon you who love, as well as fear, God. He whom you fear, whom you love, has qualified you for promoting his work in a more excellent way. Because you love God, you love your brother also: You love, not only your friends, but your enemies; not only the friends, but even the enemies, of God. You have "put on, as the elect of God, lowliness, gentleness, long-suffering." You have faith in God, and in Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; faith which overcometh the world: And hereby you conquer both evil shame, and that "fear of man which bringeth a snare;" so that you can stand with boldness before them that despise you, and make no account of your labors.

Qualified, then, as you are, and armed for the fight, will you be like the children of Ephraim, "who, being harnessed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle?" Will you leave a few of your brethren to stand alone, against all the hosts of the aliens? O say not, "This is too heavy a cross; I have not strength or courage to bear it!" True; not of yourself: But you that believe "can do all things through Christ strengthening you." "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

No cross is too heavy for him to bear; knowing that they that "suffer with him, shall reign with him." Say not, "Nay, but I cannot bear to be singular." Then you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. No one enters there but through the narrow way; and all that walk in this are singular. Say not, "But I cannot endure the reproach, the odious name of an informer." And did any man ever save his soul, that was not a by-word, and a proverb of reproach? Neither canst thou ever save thine, unless thou art willing that men should say all manner of evil of thee.

Say not, "But if I am active in this work, I shall lose not only my reputation, but my friends, my customers, my business, my livelihood; so that I shall be brought to poverty." Thou shalt not; thou canst not: It is absolutely impossible, unless God himself chooseth it; for his "kingdom ruleth over all," and "the very hairs of thy head are all numbered." But if the wise, the gracious God choose it for thee, wilt thou murmur or complain? Wilt thou not rather say, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

If you "suffer for Christ, happy are you; the Spirit of glory and of God" shall "rest upon you." Say not, "I would suffer all things, but my wife will not consent to it; and, certainly, a man ought to leave father and mother and all, and cleave to his wife." True; all but God; all but Christ: But he ought not to leave him for his wife! He is not to leave any duty undone, for the dearest relative. Our Lord himself hath said in this very sense, "If any man loveth father, or mother, or wife, or children, more than me, he is not worthy of me!"

Say not, "Well, I would forsake all for Christ; but one duty must not hinder another; and this would frequently hinder my attending public worship." Sometimes it probably would. "Go, then, and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice." And whatever is lost by showing this mercy, God will repay seven-fold into thy bosom. Say not, "But I shall hurt my own soul. I am a young man; and by taking up loose women I should expose myself to temptation." Yes, if you did this in your own strength, or for your own pleasure.

But that is not the case. You trust in God; and you aim at pleasing him only. And if he should call you even into the midst of a burning fiery furnace, "though thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flames kindle upon thee." "True; if he called me into the furnace; but I do not see that I am called to this." Perhaps thou art not willing to see it. However, if thou wast not called before, I call thee now, in the name of Christ: Take up thy cross, and follow him!

Reason no more with flesh and blood, but now resolve to cast in thy lot with the most despised, the most infamous, of his followers; the filth and offscouring of the world! I call thee in particular, who didst once strengthen their hands, but since art drawn back. Take courage! Be strong! Fulfil their joy, by returning with heart and hand! Let it appear thou "departedst for a season, that they might receive thee again for ever." O be "not disobedient to the heavenly calling!"

And, as for all of you who know whereunto ye are called, count ye all things loss, so ye may save one soul for which Christ died! And therein "take no thought for the morrow," but "cast all your care on Him that careth for you!" Commit your souls, bodies, substance, all to him, "as unto a merciful and faithful Creator!" [After this Society had subsisted several years, and done unspeakable good, it was wholly destroyed by a verdict given against it in the King's Bench, with three hundred pounds damages. I doubt a severe account remains for the witnesses, the jury, and all who were concerned in that dreadful affair!]

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