

Religion the Highest Wisdom, and Sin the Greatest Madness and Folly

by Samuel Davies

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prioritizing one's immortal state and living a life of holiness and virtue, warning against the folly of neglecting God and living contrary to His will.

Scripture: Job 28:28, Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 1:7, Luke 12:20

Topics: "True Wisdom", "Eternal Consequences"

Description

Samuel Davies preaches about the importance of true wisdom, highlighting the fear of the LORD as the beginning of wisdom and the necessity of following His commandments for good understanding. He emphasizes the contrast between the honorable character of wisdom and the reproachful nature of folly, especially in matters of religion and eternity. Davies exposes the madness and folly of those who neglect the concerns of their immortal souls while being wise in temporal affairs, urging them to prioritize the pursuit of everlasting happiness through holiness. He challenges the common excuses and contradictions of those who claim to believe in Christianity but act contrary to its teachings, pointing out the absurdity of hoping for heaven without evidence of fitness or title to it. Davies concludes by highlighting the madness of prioritizing temporal matters over eternal ones and the depravity of human nature in neglecting true wisdom and understanding.

Transcript

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Sin the Greatest Madness and Folly

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"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His commandments have good understanding." Psalm 111:10

WISDOM is a character so honorable and ornamental to a reasonable being, that those who best knew the dignity of their own nature, have had no higher ambition than to be esteemed and called lovers of it. Hence the original of the name 'philosopher', which signifies no more than a lover of wisdom. On the other hand, there is hardly any character deemed more reproachful, or that is more resented, than that of a fool.

Men are often as jealous of the reputation of their understandings as of their morals, and think it as great a reproach to be without sense--as without goodness.

There is a prodigious diversity in the intellectual capacities of mankind, and their souls differ as much as their bodies; but whether it be owing to the intrinsic difference of their souls, or to the different formation of their bodies, is not my present purpose to determine. Some, who share in human nature, give very little discoveries of reason above the most sagacious sorts of brutes. The generality are endowed with common sense, which, though it has nothing brilliant or pompous in it, and does not qualify them for high improvements in science, or making a figure in the learned world--yet it is sufficient for all the purposes of life, and the necessities of a human creature. There are a few also who seem raised beyond their species, and perhaps approach near to the lower ranks of angels by a superior genius. These have been the first inventors and improvers of useful arts and sciences; which others, of inferior understanding, are able to put in practice for their own purposes, though they had not sagacity at first to discover them.

This little world of ours is an improved spot in the creation. How vastly different an appearance does it now make from its original state of pure nature, when it emerged out of chaos, uncultivated by industry! What numerous arts and trades have been found out to furnish life with necessaries and comforts! How deeply have some penetrated into the world of knowledge! They have traced the secret workings of nature; they have even investigated the worlds above us, and discovered the courses and revolutions of the planets.

When you see these discoveries, you would conclude mankind to be a wise race of creatures; and indeed in such things as these, they reveal great abilities. Almost every man in his province can manage his affairs with some judgment. Some can manage a farm; others are dexterous in mechanics; others have a turn for mercantile affairs; others can unfold the mysteries of nature, and carry their searches far into the scientific worlds; others can conduct an army, or govern a nation. In short, every man forms some scheme which he apprehends will conduce to his temporal advantage; and prosecutes it with some degree of judgment.

But is this all the wisdom that befits a candidate for eternity? Has he a good understanding, who only acts with reason in the affairs of this life; but, though he is to exist forever in another world, and to be perfectly happy or miserable there--yet takes no thought about the concerns of his immortal state? Is this wisdom? Is this consistent even with common sense? No! With sorrow and solemnity I would speak it, the most of men in this respect are fools and madmen! And it is impossible for the most frantic madman in Bedlam to act more foolishly about the affairs of this life, than they generally do about the affairs of religion and eternity! There is such a thing as a partial madness; a person may have, as it were, one weak side to his mind, and it may be sound and rational in other respects. You may meet with some lunatics and madmen that will converse reasonably with you, and you would not suspect their heads are disordered until you touch upon some particular point, and then you are to expect reason from them no more; they talk the wildest nonsense, and are governed entirely by their imaginations. Thus, alas! it is with the generality of mankind in the present case. They are wise for this world; they talk and act at least agreeably to common sense; but hear them talk and observe their conduct about the concerns of their souls, and you can call them reasonable creatures no longer! They "are wise to do evil; but to do good they have no knowledge; there is none that understands; there is none that seeks after God." To bring them to themselves by exposing to them their madness, is my present design.

The text shows us the first step to true wisdom, and the test of common sense: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His commandments have good understanding." This is so

frequently repeated, that it may pass for a Scripture maxim: and we may be sure it is of singular importance. Job starts the question, "Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?" He searches nature through in quest of it--but cannot find it; he cannot purchase it with the gold of Ophir; and its price is above rubies. At length he recollects the primitive instruction of God to man, and there he finds it: "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." Job 28:28. Solomon, the wisest of men, begins his proverbs with this maxim, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Proverbs 1:7; and he repeats it again, Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy, (the knowledge of those that may be called saints with a sneer,) is understanding."

The fear of the Lord, in Scripture, signifies not only that pious passion of filial reverence of our adorable Father who is in heaven--but it is frequently put for the whole of practical religion; hence it is explained in the last part of the verse, by doing his commandments. The fear of the Lord, in this latitude, implies all the graces and all the virtues of Christianity; in short, all that holiness of heart and life which is necessary to the enjoyment of everlasting happiness. So that the sense of the text is this: "To practice religion and virtue, to take that way which leads to everlasting happiness, is wisdom, true wisdom, the beginning of wisdom, the first step towards it; unless you begin here, you can never attain it; all your wisdom, without this, does not deserve the name; it is madness and nonsense. To obey God's commandments is the best test of a good understanding; a good, sound understanding have all those who do this, all of them without exception; however weak some of them may be in other things, they are wise in the most important respect; but without this, however cunning they are in other things, they have lost their understandings; they contradict common sense; they are beside themselves. In short, to pursue everlasting happiness as the end, in the way of holiness as the mean, this is wisdom, this is common sense; and there can be none without this."

Wisdom consists in two things: choosing a right end, and using right means to obtain it. Now what end so befitting a creature to live forever--as everlasting happiness? And in what way can it be obtained, but in the way of holiness? Consult the judgment of God in his Word; consult your own conscience, or even common sense, and you will find that this is the case. Therefore he is a man of sense--who pursues this end in this way. But he is a fool, he is brutish--who chooses an inferior end, or that pursues this in a wrong way.

My time will not allow me to do any more than to mention some instances of the folly and madness of such as do not make the fear of the Lord, the beginning of their wisdom.

I. Men will not take the safest side in religion, which their reason and self-love carry them to do in other cases.

It is very possible the love of ease and pleasure, and a self-flattering disposition, may prompt your mind to form a plausible system of religion; a religion that admits of great hopes with little evidences, and that allows you many indulgences, and lays few restraints upon you; a religion purged, as you imagine, from some of the melancholy and gloomy doctrines of Christianity, and that releases you from those restraints, so painful to a wicked heart, which the holy religion of Jesus lays upon you. It is very possible that you may hope you shall obtain eternal happiness without much pains, and without observing the strictness of universal holiness; you may indulge hopes of heaven, though you indulge yourselves willfully in sin; you may flatter yourselves that God is not so inexorably just, as the sacred Scriptures represent him; and that his threatenings are only tremendous sounds without any design to be executed in all their strictness; you

may flatter yourselves that the punishments of a future state are not intolerably dreadful, nor of everlasting duration; you may excuse and diminish your sins, and make a great many plausible apologies for them.

But are you sure of your conjectures? Have you evidence for them, upon which you may venture your eternal all? Think the matter over seriously again; have you certainty that these things are so? and are you willing to perish forever--if they should be otherwise? What if you should be mistaken? What if you should find God to be as strict and holy as his Word represents him? What if all his dreadful threatenings should be sincere and true, and your sins have infinitely greater malignity in his eyes than in yours? What if in a little time you should find that the Scriptures give a more just account of the punishments of hell than your self-flattering heart suggested to you, and that they are indeed intolerable, and strictly eternal? What if you should find, when it is too late to correct the mistake--that those neglected, ridiculous things, regeneration, conversion, holiness of heart and practice, the mortification of sin, and a laborious course of devotion--what if you should find they are absolutely necessary to everlasting happiness? What if it should appear that the willful indulgence of the least known sin will eternally ruin you? Stand and pause, and ask yourselves, What if you should find matters thus, quite the reverse to what you flattered yourselves? What will become of you then? You are undone, irreparably undone through all eternity!

Well, to speak modestly, this may be the case, for whatever you know; and is it not then the part of a wise man to provide against such a dreadful contingency? Will you run so terrible a risk--and yet claim a good understanding? Do you esteem a life of religion so burdensome, that you had better make such a desperate venture than choose it? Do you esteem the pleasures of sin so sweet, so solid, so lasting--that it is your interest to run the risk of intolerable, eternal misery, rather than part with them? Can you form such an estimate as this while in your senses?

No! he is a mad-man with whom fleshly pleasures for a little time, the sordid pleasures of sin--outweigh an eternity of perfect happiness. He is certainly not in his right mind--who would rather be tormented in hell forever--than lead a holy life, and labor to escape the wrath to come! Therefore act in this as you do in other cases of uncertainty, choose the safest side. Believe and regard what God has said; Be holy in all manner of conversation; strive with all your might to enter in at the straight gate; receive Christ as your Lord and Savior. Do this, and you are safe, let the case be as it will; there are no bad consequences that can possibly follow from this conduct. It will, upon the whole, be the most pleasant for you, even in this life; and your reason will tell you, this is a more certain way to escape everlasting misery, and secure eternal happiness, than the contrary.

But if you are resolutely set upon running the risk, and fool-hardy enough to venture your eternal all upon such improbabilities, not to say impossibilities, you forfeit the character of a reasonable being; you are mad in this respect, however wise you may be in others.

II. It is the greatest folly to believe, or profess to believe, the great truths of Christianity--and yet act quite contrary to such a belief!

"They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their works. They are despicable and disobedient, worthless for doing anything good!" Titus 1:16. How many are there who profess God to be the greatest and the best of beings--and yet neglect him, and pay a greater regard to a thousand other things! They own him to be lovely--and do not love him! They own him to be their King--and they do not obey him! They own him to be their Benefactor--and make no returns of gratitude to him. They confess that heaven is better than earth--and yet they pursue the things of this life, to the neglect of all the happiness of heaven.

They believe that their souls are of more importance than their bodies--and yet they will not take half the care about them that they take about their bodies. They confess that a life of sin and impenitence is very dangerous, and that it will end in everlasting misery; yet, with this confession in their mouth, and this conviction in their consciences, they will, they obstinately will, go on impenitently in sin! They own that religion and virtue are excellent things--and yet they never make it the main business of their life--but live carelessly without them. They believe they are sinners, worthy of punishment--and yet they are generally as unconcerned as if they were innocent. They believe that Christ is the only Savior of sinners--and yet they are as little concerned to get a saving interest in him as if they could be saved without him. They believe that all the pleasures of this transitory life are infinitely inferior to the pleasures of true religion and the happiness of the heavenly state; they believe these sordid pleasures will ruin them forever if they continue in them--and yet they will persist in them, though by this they throw away their everlasting happiness, and incur eternal misery!

Thus they believe, or profess to believe; and our country is full of such 'believers'; but what absurd, self-contradicting creatures are they! What madness is it to entertain a belief that answers no other end but to condemn their practice, and aggravate their sin! Do they really believe these things--or do they not? If not, then what folly is it to profess to believe them! Do they think to impose by an empty profession, on Him who searches the hearts and the thoughts? or have they no other end in their profession of religion, than just to be esteemed Christians by men? Can they think that their faith will indemnify them in contradicting it? or that they may sin safely, because they sin against knowledge? Are these the conclusions of a sound mind? Must not a man be out of his senses, before he can admit them? But if you suppose they believe these things, it is certain they are entirely mad in this affair.

What! to neglect God, and holiness, and heaven--when they know they are of infinite importance! to choose the ways of sin--when they believe they will end in ruin! Is this the part of a wise man?

Should a sick man tell you he is certain to die unless he takes such a medicine--and yet you should see that he does not take it--but continues to drink the most deadly poison; what would you think of him? Would you not conclude either that he did not believe himself, or that he was deranged? But this is the very conduct of many professed believers, who yet think they have no small share of wisdom. I will not dispute your wisdom about your secular affairs; you may be wise to do evil; but I am sure in these instances you are quite delirious; and yourselves will be convinced of it to your cost, when God shall say unto you, "You fool! This night shall your soul be required of you!" Luke 12:20.

All your pleas to vindicate or excuse your conduct do but aggravate your folly. Do you say, "Your lusts are headstrong and ungovernable, and you cannot restrain them?" I doubt not but this is true; but is this a reason why you should be so easy and careless? Are your enemies so strong? And will you, on that very account, be faint and inactive in your resistance? Ought you not to rise and cry to God for his grace to change your nature; to subdue these strong sins, and make you holy, since without it you cannot be saved?

Besides, consider whether your pretended excuse is not a real aggravation to your sin. "Your lusts are so strong," you say, "that you cannot restrain them." What is this but to say that you are so wicked--that you have no heart to break off from sin! and is the inveteracy of your wickedness, an excuse for it? Does not common sense remonstrate against such an absurdity? Do you plead, that "you intend to repent of this inconsistent conduct hereafter?" But if true religion is an excellent thing, as you profess to believe it--why do you not choose it now? the sooner the better.

Again, is it not the greatest folly to indulge yourselves in a practice that you deliberately intend to repent of? If your present conduct is wise, why do you intend to repent of it? the very intention implies that you are even now convinced it is foolish; and what will your repentance be but a deep sense of your folly? And can there be a greater madness than deliberately to do anything which at the very time you intend to repent of? Is there anything more absurd and ridiculous? Is this your conduct in other things? Will you make a bargain which you know you will afterwards repent of? Will you prosecute a scheme which you deliberately intend afterwards to condemn and be sorry for? Can you do such things--and yet be offended to be called fools?

Further, why do you design to repent? Is it because you hate sin? No! for if that was the reason, you would immediately forsake it. Is it because you love God and holiness? No! for then you would devote yourselves to the service of God immediately, and could not bear a delay. But you intend to force yourselves upon a little remorse of conscience, when the punishment of sin is just ready to fall upon you, with no other design but just to escape it! And can you think there is any value in such extorted sorrows, that proceed not from hatred of sin, or love to God--but merely from self-love and servile fear of punishment? Can any wise man look upon this as repentance to life, or hope that God will accept of it?

Finally, are you sure of that uncertain hereafter, in which you purpose to repent? Is there any man in his senses that dare pretend he is certain of another day? or that he shall not die by some sudden accident, or in a delirium, in which he has no time nor composure to repent?

III. It is the greatest folly for men to pretend to love God, when their temper and conduct are inconsistent with it, and plainly evidential of the contrary!

If you go around the world with the question, "Do you love God? do you love him above all?" you will hardly meet with anyone but what will answer, "Yes, to be sure; I have loved him all my life." Well--but where are the evidences and effects of this love?

If you pretend friendship to men, they expect the expressions of it from you on every occasion; otherwise they will see through the pretense and pronounce it flattery. They expect you should often think of them with tender affection, perform them all the good offices in your power, study to please them, be tender of their characters, solicitous about their interest, and delight in their society. These are the inseparable effects of love. And certainly, if you sincerely love God, your love will have such effects; especially since, if you love him at all with sincerity, you love him above all other people and things.

But men will insist upon it that they love him above all--and yet very seldom or never think of him with tender affection! They profess that they love him above all--and yet indulge themselves in sin, that abominable thing, which he hates! They profess that they love him above all--and yet have little solicitude about pleasing him, and doing his will! They profess that they love him above all, and yet are unconcerned about the interests of religion in the world, which are his interests, and careless about his honor and glory! They profess that they love him above all--and yet have no pleasure in conversing with him in prayer, and the other ordinances of his grace, where he holds spiritual interviews with his people. They love him above all--and yet love and delight in a thousand other things more than him!

They would highly resent it--if one should begin to question the sincerity of their love; and they hope God will accept of it, and reward it. But can men in their senses think that this will pass for true and supreme love--with him who knows all things? They cannot expect that their fellow-creatures should thus be imposed upon; and is it not the greatest madness to imagine they can thus impose upon Omniscience!

Indeed it may astonish any man that knows what love is, to find that the most of men pretend they love God, even while they are giving the most glaring evidences of disaffection to him; and after all, it is almost impossible to convince them that they do not thoroughly love him. What madness has seized the world, that they will not receive conviction in such a plain case! What base thoughts must they have of God, when they think to put him off with such an empty compliment, and hypocritical profession!

IV. It is the greatest folly for men to hope for heaven, when they have no evidences at all of their title to it, or fitness for it!

Is it not the dictate of common sense, that no man can be happy in anything but what he has a relish for, and delights in? Can an illiterate rustic find pleasure in learned scientific theories? Can a man of pleasure and business find pleasure in the ascetic, mortified life of a hermit? Can a man, whose taste is vitiated by sickness, enjoy happiness in the entertainments of a feast? No, nothing can make a man happy--but what is suited to his relish and disposition. And yet there are thousands who have no relish for the enjoyment of God, no pleasure in thinking of him, or conversing with him, no delight in his service and acts of devotion--who yet hope to be forever completely happy in these exercises in heaven.

The happiness of heaven, as I have often told you, consists in such things as these, and how can you hope to be happy there--while you have no pleasure in them? There are thousands who have no delight in anything holy or pious--but only in the gratification of their senses and the enjoyment of earthly things--who yet hope to be happy in heaven, in the lack of all sensual and earthly enjoyments. There are thousands who now ridicule the society of the pious as intolerably precise--who yet flatter themselves they shall be perfectly happy in the company of saints and angels, where the lowest is incomparably more holy than the most sanctified creature upon earth.

And have they a sound understanding, who can entertain such absurd hopes? Does not common sense tell us, that God, who does everything wisely, will bring none to heaven but those whom he has made fit for it beforehand? And that as none shall be sent to hell--but those that were previously wicked; so none shall be admitted into the world of glory--but those who are previously made holy? None first begin to be holy in heaven--or wicked in hell: both parties bring with them those dispositions which are fit for their respective places and employments. How absurd is it, therefore, to hope for heaven--while you have no heavenly dispositions! You may as well hope to see the sun without eyes.

Further, God has assured you in his Word, and you profess to believe him, that without regeneration, faith, repentance, and interest in Christ, and universal holiness--you cannot enter into his kingdom; and yet, are there not some of you who are foolish enough to hope for it, though destitute of all these? Has he not told you that drunkards, swearers, immoral, malicious, contentious people, liars, and the like, shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven? And yet, though you know these are your characters, and the world knows it too--you will hope for admission to it, in defiance of God's most express repeated declarations! What madness is this! The debauchee will not expect happiness in mortification and devotion, nor the prodigal in hoarding up useless wealth; and yet thus absurdly will they act in their expectations of heaven!

V. It is the greatest madness to be more concerned about the affairs of time--than those of eternity!

It is plain to any man in his senses, that the happiness and misery which are extreme, and which shall endure forever--are of infinitely greater importance than all the enjoyments and all the sufferings of this transitory state. And you will hardly meet with any man but will own this to be his belief. But alas! into what consternation may it strike us, when we survey the conduct of the generality of people! Are they as much

concerned about the eternal world to which they are hastening--as the trifling concerns of time? Are they as laborious and zealous to obtain everlasting happiness--as to gain the riches of this world, or to gratify their sensual appetites? Are they as solicitous to avoid everlasting misery--as to shun sickness, poverty, or any temporal calamity? Are they as cautious of sinning, which ruins their souls forever--as of drinking poison, which may endanger their health or temporal life?

How is it with you? Are not the concerns of this life--the principal objects of your thoughts, your cares, and labors? And what can be a more consummate folly? You practically prefer a trifle of an hour--to a substantial good of endless duration! You are careless about everlasting torment--and yet cautiously shun the light sufferings of a few moments! It matters not what you think or say in this matter; it is your practice that determines the affair; and does not that show that fleeting time outweighs a vast eternity with you? And what can be more absurd! If you should throw away an estate--to gain a penny; if you should run upon a drawn sword--to escape a prickle; if you should prefer pebbles--to crowns and kingdoms, darkness to light, or one luxurious meal to the support of your whole life--it would not be so shocking a piece of madness!

I might give you many more instances of the madness of those who do not begin this wisdom with the fear of the Lord--but the PRACTICAL INFERENCES from the subject are so numerous and important, that I must reserve the rest of the time for them.

1. Since there is so much folly in the world in matters of religion, how astonishing it is, that it is not universally despised and ridiculed, or pitied and lamented! If men act a foolish part in other things, they soon furnish matter of laughter and contempt to the mirthful and witty part of mankind; and the thoughtful and benevolent view them with compassion. But let them act ever so foolishly in the concerns of eternity, there is hardly any notice taken of it; the absurdity is no way shocking; nay, the generality commend their conduct by imitating it themselves! And if any are so wise as to find fault with this madness, they are termed fools themselves, and the general laugh is turned against them!

How unaccountable is this, that men who act prudently in other things, and are easily shocked with a mad and foolish behavior, can view the folly of mankind in this respect without horror, or perhaps with approbation! The only reason for it is, that the generality are madmen in this respect, and the folly is approved because it is common! To be singularly wise--is to be foolish, in the opinion of the world; and to be fools with the multitude--is the readiest way to get the reputation of wisdom! They prove religion to be folly, by a consensus of opinion; and as many who are fools in this affair--are wise in other respects, their judgment is implicitly submitted to. But please, sirs, use your own reason, and judge impartially for yourselves, and I am sure you must see the wild absurdity of their conduct! Be nobly singular in beginning wisdom with the fear of the Lord; and whatever others think of you now--God, angels, and godly men will applaud your wisdom; and even those who now ridicule it, will approve of it at last.

2. How do the ungodly despise and demean those who make true religion their great concern--as weak, silly creatures! Sinners, let your own reason determine, can there be anything more foolish than your own behavior? And does it befit you to brand others with the odium of folly? Alas! you have reason to turn your contempt upon yourselves, and to be struck with horror at your own willful stupidity! Do you set yourselves up as the standards of wisdom, who lack sense to keep out of everlasting ruin! Are you wise men--who throw away your eternal happiness for the trifles of time! No! they alone are wise--who are wise for eternity!

You may excel them in a thousand things; nature may have favored you with a better genius; you may have had a more liberal education; you may be better acquainted with men and books; you may manage your secular affairs with more discretion; in such things you may be wiser than many of them. But they are wise for eternity! They have sense to escape everlasting burnings! They have wisdom to obtain eternal happiness! And this is a more important piece of wisdom--than all your acquisitions. The wisdom of Solomon, of Socrates, or Plato, is the wildest madness, without this. How absurd is it therefore for you, without this, to arrogate the character of men of wisdom, or even of common sense!

3. How absurd is it for men to pretend they will not turn their thoughts to religion, lest it should make them melancholy or distracted! Alas, sinners! you cannot be more so than you are already; and you will never come to yourselves until, with the prodigal, you determine to return to your father's house. And will you continue fools--through the fear of becoming such? I can assure you, I would rather be the wildest frantic in Bedlam, than be that wretch who ruins his soul for fear of running mad by thinking of it!

4. If the fear of the Lord and true religion, is the perfection of wisdom, how unreasonably does the world charge it with making people mad? There are multitudes that lose their senses by excessive sorrows and anxieties about some temporal affair; many more than by religion; and yet they never fall out with the world on this account. But when any one, who seemed thoughtful about religion, loses his senses, then religion, be sure, must bear all the blame; and the ungodly are glad to catch at such a handle to expose it!

Melancholy people are accustomed to derive terrors from everything in their reach; and, among other things, will pour upon all those doctrines of religion that can affright them. But this melancholy, as such, is a bodily disorder, and therefore has no more religion in it than a fever or a consumption. It is indeed very possible that too intense application of the mind to divine things, with a deep concern about our everlasting state--may be the occasion of melancholy: but there is nothing peculiar in this; let the mind be excessively attentive to anything--it will have the same effect.

How many disorders do men contract by their eager pursuit of the world! and yet the world is their favorite still. But if one here and there suffers by occasion of religion, oh! they pour contempt on it, and think it is a terrible gloomy thing. Those who are pious, let me tell you, are many of them much superior to the wisest of us in all accomplishments; and they are generally as far from madness as their neighbors. Therefore drop this senseless slander, and be yourselves holy--if you would be truly wise.

5. Since men are such fools in matters of religion, since they censure it with so much severity and contempt, how astonishing is it that God should send down that divine, heaven-born thing--true religion, into our world, where it is so much neglected and abused! Where the celestial guest meets with but few hearts that will entertain it; where its professors neglect it, contradict it, and by their practice call it madness; and where even its friends and subjects frequently treat it very unkindly! What astonishing condescension and grace is it, that God has not left our mad world to themselves, since they are so averse to be reclaimed! But lo! he has sent his Son, he has instituted the gospel, and a thousand means of grace, to bring them to themselves!

6. And lastly, Hence we may infer, that human nature is exceedingly depraved and disordered. I think this is as plain as any disorder incident to the body. Men are universally indisposed as to religion; and on this account our world is, as a great genius calls it, "the Bedlam of the universe." The same natural faculties, the same understanding, will, and affections, which render us able to act with prudence in the affairs of this life--are also sufficient for the affairs of religion. But, alas! with regard to this--they are disordered,

though they exercise themselves aright about other things.

They can acquire the knowledge of languages and sciences; but, alas! they have no disposition to know God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. They understand how to trade, and carry on schemes for this world; but they will not act wisely for eternity. They have sense enough not to run into the fire, or to drink poison; but they will run on in the ways of sin to everlasting misery. They will ask the way when they have lost themselves; but how hard is it to bring them to inquire, What shall I do to be saved? They will ask help for their bodies from their fellow-creatures--but how hard is it to bring them in the posture of earnest petitioners to ask immortal blessings for their souls from God! In short, they can contrive with prudence, and act with vigor, courage, and perseverance, in the affairs of time; but in the concerns of true religion and eternity--they are ignorant, stupid, languid, and careless! And how can we account for this--but by supposing that they are degenerate creatures, and that their nature has suffered a dreadful shock by the first fall, which has deprived them of their senses? Alas! this is a truth too evident to be denied!

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