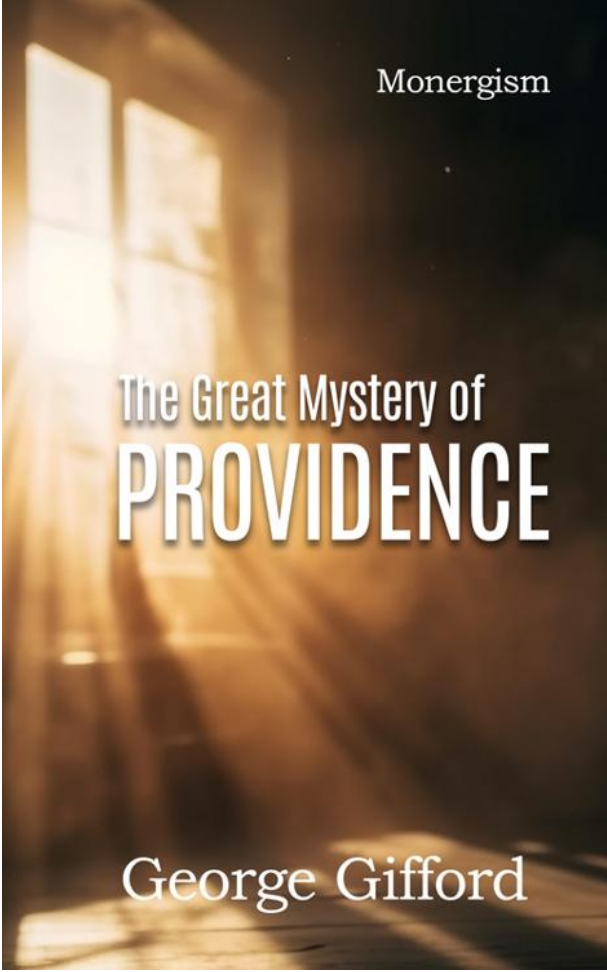


Monergism

The Great Mystery of  
**PROVIDENCE**

George Gifford



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# **The Great Mystery of Providence**

OR, The various Methods of GOD in Ordering and Over-ruling the  
Actions of Wicked Men and Devils to great and glorious Purposes.  
With the Vindication of his Holiness therein.

BEING The Substance of several SERMONS preached by the  
Reverend, Judicious, and Orthodox Divine Mr. GEORGE GIFFORD,

Late Minister of St. Dunstan in the East, London.

HEB. XI. 4. He being dead, yet speaketh.

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## **TO THE READER.**

NEXT to the Knowledge and Belief of a God and the Essentials of Religion, there is not any Truth of greater moment or more needful

to be rightly known of all persons, than this before us, namely, How far the holy and righteous God is, or may be concerned in, or make use of the evil Actions of wicked Men and Devils, without any Impeachment of his Righteousness and Holiness, or making him the Author or Approver of Sin; the Ignorance or Misunderstanding of which, in all Ages, has exceedingly promoted Atheism and Irreligion among the Wicked of the World, who take occasion from hence to think and say in their Hearts (if not with their Mouths) either there is no God, or He is not a Righteous and a Holy God. And the Consideration of the Prosperity of Wicked Men in their Evil Actions, and the Suffering of Good Men thereby, have been an occasion of stumbling and offense to holy Persons, as we find in Scripture. The Truth of this matter lies in the middle, between two Extremes, as the Author hereof has informed us, who was a very Judicious and Orthodox Divine, of great Note in this City. I doubt not but the Reader, if he brings a serious Mind to know Truth, and not to cavil at it, will find this matter so plainly and truly, though' briefly stated and determined, as to answer all material Objections of Atheistical and Profane Gainsayers, and such as are wise in their own Conceit, and to be a Foundation to good Men of Patience and Resignation to the Will of God in all Sufferings and Calamities, public and private, from evil Men, and instead of murmuring and repining, will cause them to adore that Infinite Wisdom and Goodness, that can bring Good out of Evil, and overrule all the Sins and Follies of Men, to the greater manifestation of his own glorious Attributes, and the Good and Welfare of his Church. These Sermons having been calculated only for a popular Audience, the Reader must expect no other Eloquence than that of the Apostle Paul's great plainness of Speech, which best becomes Divinity, and especially the weighty Subject before us. Therefore I shall conclude with only one Request to the Reader, That he will peruse these Lines with the same Spirit which the Author declares he had in the delivery of them, namely, with a holy Fear and

Trembling, and then I doubt not but he will receive that benefit and advantage by them as shall give abundant cause to bless GOD for them, which is the Chief End of the Publisher,

J. D.

## **The Great Mystery of Providence**

GEN. XLV. 8. —So that it was not you that sent me hither, but GOD.

THE joyful discovery of Joseph to his Brethren, I have already spoken of out of this Chapter, after his rough treating of them: after so many Fears and Dangers, at last the Sun breaks out from these Clouds, and then he cries out, I am Joseph. And there I handled, that this was an Emblem of God's dealing with his own People; He leads them at first into crooked Paths, but then after all these Tempests and Storms there will be Joy and Peace at the last. And I proposed to you, how that after some great Affliction, but above all Spiritual Desertion, when God has shown himself a long time as it were an Enemy to his People, at last he shines forth, and says, I am your God and Savior. The second thing I have handled, is, Joseph's pardoning and loving his Brethren, that had so barbarously sold him to be a Slave: he is now so far from revenging himself on them, that he loves and embraces them. And upon this I handled that high and excellent Duty of loving and forgiving those that injure us; that the true and noblest way of revenging Injuries, was, by overcoming Evil with Good. I come now to the next thing, and that is, the Arguments Joseph makes use of to comfort his Brethren that were so overcome with Shame and Fear. He does three times repeat it; the first is drawn from the Providence of God in working this great thing, It was

not you that sent me hither, but God; as if he should have said, Do not look anymore upon Second Causes: It is true, it was a Fault in you who sold me, but look upon the good Hand and Providence of God in it, God sent me before you, and it was not you that sent me hither, but God. This so frequent inculcating of it, was to raise up them, and also us, to a serious Contemplation, how all the Evils of Men are ordered by the wise Providence of God to good purposes. In this action God and they both worked together; they sold Joseph, and God sent him for Good, for the preservation of God's Church in Jacob's Family. I shall, by God's assistance, sit here for some time upon the Providence of God in over-ruling the Actions of wicked Men.

First, Here is an Ingenious Charity; see how often Joseph repeats his acknowledgments of the Hand and Providence of God in this matter. I observe there is nothing will make us more willing to forgive them that have done us any Injury, than to look up to the Providence of God, and refer all to that: we are apt to look to Instruments and Second Causes, and not think of the Hand of God in them.

Secondly, God sent me before you, to preserve you a Posterity, and to save your Lives by a great Deliverance; and it was not you that sent me hither, but God. I observe here God's gracious Providence and Care over his Church and Children, so long before providing for their Safety. It is one of the most excellent Observations of God's Providence towards his Children in the whole Scripture, When God intended to bring a most dreadful Famine upon the World (in which Jacob and his Family might probably have perished) yet God made a provision for him and them 20 years beforehand, in such a way as Jacob and Joseph never thought of; He sends Joseph 20 years beforehand to be a Harbinger for his Church and People: God, after a secret and ineffable manner, does order all Events so, that at last

they tend to the good of his Church; as we find several cross Providences in this History of Joseph and his Brethren, yet they all contribute to this good end and conclusion. This should teach us, in all the Difficulties and Troubles that beset God's Church, and when we know not what will become of us, to resign up all to the Providence of God, he will take care and provide for us by such means as we little dream of.

Thirdly I shall treat of the Providence of God in governing and overruling the Actions of wicked Men, It was not you that sent me hither, but God: and yet certainly, Beloved, they had a hand in the Action. I observe from hence, it was God that overruled their Counsels; all the Actions of sinful Men, yea, of the Devils themselves, are ordered by a strange but yet most wise Council of God himself. It is a point of great concern to resolve how the Righteousness and Holiness of God can consist in ordering and ruling of the Sins of Mankind. There is a great Difference among Interpreters, how to reconcile the Providence of God in the Actions of sinful Men with his Holiness, Justice, and the Liberty and Freedom of Mankind. Therefore,

First, I shall demonstrate from this Example, That all the Actions of Men, even their sinful Actions, are under the Providence of God, they sold Joseph, and God sent him.

Secondly, I shall inquire what Efficiency or Concurrence the holy God has in the sinful Actions of Ungodly Men.

Thirdly, I shall inquire into the Ends of such Orderings, how God works, and ordains the Actions of wicked Men to Ends beyond what they desired or designed. This is a point that I look upon as most seasonable, to be well weighed and considered under our present Disquiets and Fears.



I shall begin with the first, That the Actions of Men and Devils, both good and bad, yea, all the Sins of wicked Men and Devils, are under the government of the Providence of God. (1.) I shall prove the point by four or five places of Scripture, the first shall be drawn from those general places in Scripture, that ascribe everything to the Will and Providence of God; so Psal. 35.6. Whatever the Lord pleased, that did he in Heaven and in Earth. There is nothing comes to pass without the Will of God, Dan 4.35. He doth according to his will in all the armies of Heaven and Earth, and none can stay his hand. *Voluntas Dei est omnium rerum necessitas.* There are many things, it is true, that are contrary to the preceptive part of God's Will, but there is nothing comes to pass without the Providence of God, or against what he would have done: yea, the Devils themselves, when they most cross the preceptive Will of God, they do then most fulfil the Will of his Providence; There are many devices in the heart of man but the council of the Lord that shall stand. Whatever designs Men or Devils may have, yet he tells us, they all act but according to the providential Will of God. The (2.) Head is this, That such Actions as are brought to pass by wicked Men, are said to be done by the eternal Council and Ordination of God, they are the Contrivance of God's Decrees: it was so in this case of Joseph, God had decreed Joseph 's advancement in Egypt, yet this was not brought to pass without the Sin of his Brethren. I will give you one Instance in Scripture, That Action that proved the greatest Blessing to Mankind of any in the World, yet was brought to pass by the greatest Villany in the Instruments that ever was in the World, I mean the Suffering of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, Acts 2.23. Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands crucified and slain. In the same Action there was the Wickedness and Envy of the Scribes and Pharisees, there was the Villany and Treachery of Judas, in betraying of him, yet he saith all this was done by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

So Acts 4.27, 28. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, and the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. This is a singular Comfort, that all things come to pass not according to wicked Men's Counsels, but according to what God doth determine. (3.) Wicked Men, when they do the unjustest actions, yet they are said to be the Instruments of God's Providence, to execute his Counsels, his Designs, and Purposes; I will give you some few of them: Isa. 10.5. God's Church were to be invaded by the Assyrians, O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation; I will send him against an hypocritical nation. Well, look to the 7th Verse, Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth he think so, but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations. That is, this proud Prince thinks of nothing of God's Providence and Purposes in this matter, his design is to gratify his Pride, and Revenge, and Covetousness, but God Almighty gives way to it for other holy and wise ends. And again v. 15. Shall the ax boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or, shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? There is a great emphasis in these words, to show, that wicked Men and their Actions are all in the Hands of God, as the Ax and the Saw in the Hand of the Workman. (4.) That even when wicked Men go about wicked Actions, God is said to stir them up to it: so in this Instance of Joseph, and in that Isa. 10.6. God is said to send the Assyrians against an hypocritical Nation, to punish and chastise them. So 2 Sam. 12.11. you see there (Beloved) God threatens to raise up evil against David in his own house, that is, by the Rebellion of his Son Absalom, and his Villany and Insolence against his Father's Wives and Concubines; but was God the cause of this Wickedness in Absalom? No, but Absalom having these Lusts in him, God permitted him to exercise them for the punishment of David 's Sin. So 2 Sam. 16.11. Shimei doth unjustly revile David, but saith David, The Lord

hath sent Shimei to curse David; but this was to punish David for his former Sins: Psal. 105.23. it is said, He turned the hearts of the Egyptians to hate his people, and to deal subtly with his servants; He made use of their Sin for righteous ends. (5.) I do observe out of Scripture that the Children of God, whenever they suffered most unjustly from wicked Men, yet they have not imputed it so much to the Instruments as to the Justice of God; as for example, I will give you here an Instance in Joseph, It was not you that sent me hither, but God, saith he. Thus in holy Job you shall see what a complication of Wickedness there was to bring about his afflictions, there was the Devil's Malice seeking to ruin and destroy him, there was also the Malice of wicked Men, the Chaldeans and Sabaeans, and yet Job 1.21. he ascribes all to the Providence of God, The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord. So David, when his Son Absalom rebelled against him, still he cries, It is the Lord, &c. Thus in the Book of the Lamentations, when Israel had been so barbarously destroyed by their Enemies, yet they referred all to the Providence of God: yea, (Beloved) in that act of the betraying and murdering of our Saviour, though there was so much Wickedness in Men, yet our blessed Saviour expressly saith, it was the cup that his heavenly Father gave him to drink; and therefore in all unjust oppressions it is our work and duty to look above Men to the Providence of God, therefore we must hear the voice of the Rod, and him who hath appointed it, and not dwell too much upon the Instruments or Second Causes, they are but as the Ax or the Staff, or the Rod, it is God's Hand that limits, orders, and appoints them for holy and gracious ends. And so much for the first part, how that all the Actions of wicked Men are ordered by the Will and Providence of God.

Secondly, I come now to inquire how far the holy and righteous God can or does concur in the evil actions of Men; that He does so is most

certain, but how far is the Question, and most Interpreters have been puzzled in this matter, but I shall endeavour to do it first negatively, for I will tell you, the truth lies between two Extremes; (1.) It is the highest Blasphemy for anyone, from these places of Scripture, to charge God with being the Author of Sin. (2.) There is another Extreme to be avoided, to think this Providence of God is only a bare permission of Sin; and then I shall show you afterward more particularly of the influence and concurrence of the most holy, wise, and good God in the evil actions of wicked Men. First, Almighty God is not, neither can be, the Author or proper Cause of any Sin: that I shall lay down for a great truth, that He never works Sin itself, or moves us to sin inwardly; that He does not necessitate Men to sin, because from these conclusions some Adversaries would charge Sin upon God. God can neither do Sin nor compel us to sin; to affirm this would be very Blasphemy; for, first, God is the Supreme Good, he is all Goodness, Holiness, and Light, and there can be no Evil, no Darkness in him; for to ascribe Evil of Sin to the Supreme Good, is to make light the cause of darkness: Heb. 6.18. It is impossible for God to lie. Again, he that hates Sin, he that forbids it and severely punishes it, it is impossible he should be the Author of Sin. It would be the unjustest thing in the World for God to punish that which himself causes. Again, I consider, if God should do so, Sin would be no Sin, for all Sin is that which is a contrariety to God's Will and Law; and therefore the Apostle St. James tells us, Let no man say when he is tempted that he is tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil neither tempteth he any man. It is inconsistent with the holiness and purity of God, to be in any wise the Author of Sin; therefore St Basil saith, It is as high a Blasphemy to make God the Author of Sin, as to deny him to be a God. No, beloved, all Sin comes from the Creature, Thy destruction is of thyself, though God makes use of it for gracious purposes; as for example, the Envy and Malice of Joseph 's Brethren came from themselves, but only God

ordered it for the good of his People. We must distinguish between the cause of Sin and the use of Sin; Man is the cause of Sin and the Actor of Sin, but God can use Sin for purposes beyond what Man designed by it. You know the Viper has Poison in it, which is of a destructive nature, and yet a skillful Physician can make use of this Poison as an Antidote against Poison. I will draw this as a second Caution, That in God's ordering and making use of Sin there is more than his bare permission of Sin, that is, to let Men be wicked, and take no farther care in it. No, I say, in all those places I have quoted, as his sending Joseph into Egypt, &c. it implies an Efficiency. The most Sins that are done in the World are done by evil Men, and though God be not the Author, yet he is the Orderer, the Governor and Disposer of them. A wise King can make use of a Traitor to bring to pass his own ends, so God makes use of wicked men's Sins to work contrary to their ends. So Joseph 's Brethren never thought of bringing about God's end in their malice against him. So a Physician applies Leeches to draw out corrupt Blood, but they only desire to satisfy their Lust. So God makes use of wicked men's Covetousness and Ambition to chastise his People, and do them good.

## **SECTION II.**

I shall now enter upon this great Point, (but I must tell you with as much fear and trembling as ever I did upon any Subject) namely, How far the holy and wise God does or may concur in the evil actions of sinful Men. I shall keep close to the Scripture, and show you in nine particulars.

1. God does concur by permitting of them, that is, by not hindering the committing of those Sins as he might have done; and this is

expressed Acts 14.16. He suffered them to walk in their own ways, says the Apostle. I confess, it's very clear so far, for no Sin in the World could be done if God did not permit them. And I will show you several ways whereby God hinders the commission of Sin: thus he hindered Abimelech from committing folly with Abraham 's Wife, Gen. 20.6. so he hindered Balaam, when he came with a resolution to curse Israel, he hindered Esau from hurting his Brother Jacob. Nay, the Devils in Hell are under Chains, God can hinder them, and does hinder them, when he will. We read he could not touch Job nor his Cattle, till God had given him liberty. There are several ways and means whereby God does this, (1.) By taking away the power of wicked Men, as he did of Jeroboam, when he stretched forth his hand against the Prophet, sometimes when he stirs up another power to deliver his People from Oppression, sometimes by secretly inclining the Hearts of Men to do good to such as they designed to hurt, as he did by Laban, when he went after Jacob: so God sent Abigail to divert David from exercising his intended Revenge against Nabal. Now when God removes these impediments, this is the first way of God's concurrence, when he does it by his permission; and for this, we are much obliged to God, for keeping wicked Men and Devils in Bonds, and for limiting their Malice and Enmity, for if God should give leave to them to execute their Power and Malice, all the World would quickly be in flames.

2. God concurs in the evil actions of Men by a general concurrence and co-operation in the action itself, for you must know God Almighty has an immediate influence and concurrence in all the actions of his Creatures, both good and bad, Acts 17.28. In him we live and move and have our being. It is that which all Christians and most Philosophers do agree in, That all actions of

the Creature do depend upon the motion and influence of the first Cause. I will instance in those that curse and swear and blaspheme the Name of God, they could not move their Tongues, if God did not give them leave, and co-operate in the action: so the power whereby a Thief steals is from God. But here they do not make God the cause of their Sin in a moral but in a physical sense: they say well. That God does concur as to the natural action itself, but not to the sinfulness in that action: God concurs to the natural action, but the obliquity of it proceeds from the wickedness of the Sinner's Will.

3. God does concur by his Providence, in administering occasions and opportunities which wicked Men do abuse to Sinfulness. So Jer. 5.22. God tells us of laying a stumbling block in the way of Sinners; He gives or lays before them things that perhaps are not sinful in themselves, as when he gives to wicked men Health, Strength, Wealth, Prosperity, Beauty, &c. these have no harm in themselves, but when they take occasion to abuse them to their Lusts, and there are some that make their Table a Snare to them: Nay, those things that in their own nature would tend to make them better, yet they take occasion to make themselves worse by them: as for instance, How often does good Admonition make some Men the worse? nay, I tell you, the very Divinity and Miracles of Christ did harden the Pharisees' Hearts; nay, sometimes when God by his Providence does suffer Men to fall into wicked Company, as he did Joseph, when his Brethren designed to murder him, God did at the same time order some Midianites to go by, that they might sell him to them.
4. The fourth way of God's concurrence is by withdrawing his Grace, and leaving Men to the power of their Lusts. Wicked men have a violent inclination to many Sins, which God in his

Providence many times restrains, but when he leaves them up to themselves, they quickly run into the commission of them, they are oftentimes as a Dog chained up, that cannot do the Mischief he has a mind to. When God says of wicked Men as he did to Ephraim, when he was joined to Idols, Let him alone; when God leaves them so to their Sin, as to be without any Afflictions or Terrors of Conscience, it is the most dreadful Judgment in the World. And by this, you may understand those Scriptures where God is said to blind and harden Sinners' Hearts: This is most righteous and just, that they who despise God's Grace, and willfully run into Sin, that God should punish them with their own Sins, and say, He that is filthy let him be filthy still; O, this is the most dreadful Judgment in the World when Men are given up by God to their own Lusts.

5. The fifth way is when God leaves Sinners to the temptations of the Devil, or of wicked Men, as when he leaves them up to wicked Acquaintance, to tempt them and flatter them in their sins. I will give you 2 or 3 Instances in Scripture: thus God permitted a lying Spirit to go forth in the Nation of the Israelites, God says Go, and thou shalt prevail; so Ezek. 14. God tells them, that for the Sins of the People he would leave them up to wicked and false Prophets, and when they come to inquire of them they shall deceive them, and this as a Punishment of their former Sins. So 2 Thes. 2. the coming and prevailing of Antichrist is there said to be with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders. God may suffer false Prophets to work signs and wonders, and to come with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, but what was the reason? because they did not receive the truth in the love of it, that they might be saved; and therefore God gave them over to strong Delusions, to believe Lies, that they may be damned. I pray God



we are not in a great measure concerned in this point; you see God has sent forth a lying Spirit, whereby our Adversaries have drawn away thousands, what is the reason? because they have not lived up to the Light of the Gospel. When Popery comes, it makes People unnatural to Parents, to destroy Cities and Kingdoms; why certainly Beloved, as the Apostle says, 2 Tim. 2.16. such are taken captive of the Devil at his will, that is, whatever Sin the Devil gives them the opportunity to commit, when he tempts them to Uncleaness or Drunkenness, they are ready to act it: such, like Judas, are given into the full possession of Satan.

6. A sixth way of God's Providence in sinful actions (and I desire you to take notice of it) is a directing by his secret Providence the Sinner to such or such a particular Object, which perhaps he was indifferent to before: as for example's sake, a wicked Man may be covetous, or angry, or cruel, now it may be indifferent to him which of these Sins he commits, but God in his secret Providence lets him go out upon one and not upon another, like a great Mastiff in chains, it is indifferent to him who he bites and hurts if he be loosed, but the Owner lets him loose upon one that he would have him hurt, and he accordingly falls upon him. And therefore Solomon tells us, A man devises his own way, but the Lord directs his steps. Nebuchadnezzar the great King of Babylon was resolved to fall upon some of his Neighbors, he could not tell whether he should fall upon Amon or Judea, now God in his Providence directed him to fall upon Judea; so 1 Chron. 5.26. it is said, God stirred up the spirit of Pul to go against Israel; and this is done without any Sin to be therefore imputed to God. It is said, the hearts of Kings are in the hand of the Lord, and he turns them as the rivers of water. It is an illusion to those Countries where there was little Rain from

Heaven, all their Gardens and Meadows were watered by standing Waters or Pools, where they had Sluices and Gutters, which they could pull up, and so let the Water run which way they pleased. So God can order the Hearts of Kings as shall best please him.

7. A seventh way is when God gives wicked Men power and success and to prosper in unjust actions: this is constantly verified in Scripture, and by Experience in the World, that God may suffer good People to be afflicted and injuriously dealt with in just causes, and wicked Men to prosper and bring wicked and unjust actions to pass: so when God raises up a great King to be a Scourge to his Neighbors, he will give him Wisdom, Policy, and Success; and also when the Lord is resolved to punish a Nation, he can take away their Wisdom and Success. Thus God many times suffers the Tabernacles of Robbers to prosper, and suffers good men for good causes to fall into the hands of wicked and unreasonable men. Christ himself says, that the Power Pilate had to crucify him, he had it from God; but you will say, Is this no prejudice to his Holiness? I answer no, for God doth not give wicked men Success as a reward for their actions, but to make use of them as the Instruments of his Providence: as, suppose a King should make

8. The eighth way of God's Providence in governing wicked men and their actions (and I desire you to take notice of it) is, by limiting, governing, and disposing wicked men and their actions, that they shall not be able to hurt whom they will, nor when they will, but just so far as God would have it: as we find in Joseph's Brethren, their design was to murder him, but (1.) God stirs up Reuben to divert that purpose: well, afterwards God, to bring his Ends to pass, lets them sell him, and at that very moment orders

the Midianites to come by. How admirably was this matter ordered and limited by God? So, for the time, God will not suffer wicked men to act at one time, and yet will suffer the same to bring about their purposes at another time. So it was with the Jews, they would oftentimes have taken Christ, but could not, because the hour was not yet come; but afterwards he tells them, I taught daily in the temple, and you laid no hands on me, but now is your hour. So we may observe how God doth sometimes stop Fire from doing Mischief, and at another time suffers it to break out with irresistible violence: so also, for the continuance of wicked men in their actions, it is said, The Rod of the wicked shall not always rest upon the Lot of the righteous. It may come upon them, but it shall not rest upon them: so God will not suffer good men to be tempted above what they are able; wicked men shall not be able to put one dram into the Cup of bitterness, more than what God has appointed. Indeed, this is the foundation of all our Comfort, to remember, that whatever we may suffer, wicked men are but as an Ax in God's Hand, they cannot, as to time, or continuance, or degrees, go beyond what God has purposed.

9. The last way is, by God's over-ruling and ordering the Effects of Sin beyond, and many times contrary to the purpose and design of Sinners, and this makes up the complete government of Sin. So it was in Joseph's case, As for you, you thought evil, but God meant it for good, to bring to pass as it is at this day, to save much people alive. You meant it for evil, and indeed, beloved, in one and the same action there are different ends proposed. Many times wicked men design nothing, but to bring about their own Malice, Covetousness, and Envy, but God turns it to many wise and holy ends. So in Job's case, the Devil's design was to make him curse and blaspheme God, but God's design was to

make Job bless him. So God is said to send Assyria against Israel, to punish a hypocritical Nation, but he thinks not so, his design is to root up and destroy much People; his design was to plunder and destroy, but God's design was to correct Sin. So it was in the Sufferings of our Blessed Saviour, the Pharisees out of envy sought to murder him, Pilate only for fear condemned him; the Soldiers, all that they meant was their Profit; but now the Envy and Malice of the one, and the Covetousness of the other God over-ruled, to bring to pass the greatest Blessing that ever befell Mankind, the Death and Resurrection of Christ; so that God can make wicked men work his ends when they seem most to cross them. Thus Physicians can make an Antidote to expel Poison out of Poison itself. And I conclude this point in telling you, that the most excellent Works of God's Providence that were ever brought to pass in the World are when He makes use of the sinful actions of Men to effect matters quite contrary to what they intended. Thus I have endeavoured to clear the Providence of God from any mistake of Injustice or Unholiness, and have shown how the holy and wise God overrules and governs the evil actions of wicked Men and Devils.

### **SECTION III.**

I come now to the third Point, and that is, That God Almighty can make good use of the sinful actions of wicked Men, that what they intend for Evil, that he can and often does turn to Good. This is here expressed in the Text, God sent me before you to preserve life; and I will ground this upon another expression of Joseph, Gen. 50.20. As for you, you thought evil against me, but God meant it for good. You

shall observe in this Story, that the design of his Brethren was nothing but the gratifying their own Envy and Malice, in sending him away; the Ishmaelites in buying him meant nothing but their own profit; Potifer's Wife, we read, minded nothing but her own Lust, and yet all these things were over-ruled by God Almighty for the good of his Church. I shall here handle, that God Almighty doth turn the Sins of wicked men to good, he makes them serve his designs for good. I shall here vindicate the Providence of God from the great Quarrel that has been against it in all Ages, by reason of the actions of wicked men, and the great wickedness that is in the World; for, it is a Saying of the Atheists, That if the World be governed by a God so just, holy, and wise, why is there so much wickedness in the World? Can he not hinder it? I shall therefore show you, that God's permitting so much Sin in the World is a fruit of his infinite Goodness, because he can bring so much good out of it. St. Austin saith,

God, who is infinitely good and powerful, would not permit Sin in the World if he were not able to make that Sin turn to some great Good. All wicked Men and Devils are under God's Dominion; he overrules all their actions, and there is no Evil in second causes, but he makes it serve his own holy and wise ends. It is true, Sin, as it is in the Creature, is the greatest deformity, darkness, and disorder in the World, but God Almighty is able to order it as a wise Physician can make use of Poison to expel Poison, so, though Sin in itself be wholly evil, yet God Almighty can make it serve his best and wisest ends. For the truth of this proposition, I may observe to you that the greatest actions that God ever brought to pass in the World have been occasioned by the Sins of wicked men, as the occasion of sending Christ was the Sin of Adam, and the bringing to pass our Redemption could not be done without the concurrence of wicked actions; as in Acts 2.22, "By wicked hands you have crucified and slain him," saith the Apostle; and in Acts 4.27, "For of a truth,

against thy holy child Jesus, Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the People of Israel are gathered together." Consider how much wickedness there was in that act; the Treachery of Judas, the Envy of the Pharisees, the Covetousness of the Soldiers, the Cruelty of the rest, and yet all this God made use of to bring to pass the most glorious action that ever was in the World. I will give you some more Instances of this, and mention two things whereby I shall more evidently demonstrate that God does make use of the Sins of wicked men for good purposes: firstly, for the manifestation of his own Glory; secondly, for the great good he does thereby in the World. In Romans 3.7, "The truth of God aboundeth by my lie unto his glory, and he maketh the wrath of man to praise him." I shall mention five Attributes of God that are more especially illustrated by God's permitting and ordering the Sins of wicked men: Firstly, the Attribute of God's Patience and Longsuffering. He proclaims himself, "The Lord God, merciful and longsuffering." Where could there have been room for the exercise of his Patience and Longsuffering if there were no Sin? So in Romans 9.22, "How should we know God's Patience if with much longsuffering he did not endure the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?" Secondly, the glory of his Justice. God's punishing of Sinners could not have been known without the permission of Sin. "I will get myself glory over Pharaoh; how so? by executing my Judgments upon him for Sin; For this cause have I raised thee up, that I may show forth my power in thee, and make known my glory in all the earth." And there is no question but the Glory of God is shown forth in the manifestation of his Wrath, both here and hereafter. Thirdly, the Glory of his Mercy and Free Grace appears in pardoning Sin; how could that have been done if there had been no Sin? "Romans 5.20, Where sin abounded grace did much more abound." In a word, all the Riches of God's Mercy and Goodness and Free Grace to the Creature suppose Sin; it could not be without Sin; had Man remained without Sin, Christ had never died, there had

been no Covenant of Grace. Fourthly, the Glory of God's admirable Wisdom appears in ordering and governing the Sins of the World; the chief part of his Wisdom consists in bringing to pass those ends by means that seem most improbable and unlikely. Thus it is in matters of State policy; it is the greatest part of Wisdom to know how to govern evil and discontented Subjects. There is nothing in the World so contrary in itself to the Glory of God as Sin is, nothing that God more hates. Now, is not this the glory of his Wisdom, to make wicked Men and Devils themselves, when they strive most to oppose his glory, then to do him most honour? I will give you several Instances; sometimes in opposing the Counsels of wicked men, and taking them in their own craft; and so He did Pharaoh, that what wicked men design for the ruin of his People, he can turn it to their advantage. Nazianzen saith, That the Masterpiece of God's wisdom is to make Enemies do his own work. Lastly, It makes appear the greatness of his Power; the greatness of his power appears in working without means or contrary to means; it was to make a thing of nothing when God created the World. Yet there seems to be greater power in turning Evil to Good than in making the World, because here is nothing to contribute, but all as may be to oppose it. It is the Almighty Power of God that brings light out of darkness, and evil out of good, and the greatest good out of the greatest evil.

The second general Head is to show the good that God works in the World by wicked Men. I beseech you to mind these things.

1. God makes use of wicked men sometimes as the Instruments of his Vengeance to punish other wicked men; thus many times he uses evil Angels, but especially evil men, to destroy his Enemies, one wicked man to execute his Justice upon another. So he does when he raises up great Princes to be Instruments of his Vengeance and Plagues upon a wicked Nation. Thus God raised

up Nebuchadnezzar to punish Israel when they had sinned, but he dreamed nothing at all of serving God's Ends, but only his own Ambition. Yet he was God's Instrument. Many times we are ready to quarrel at God's Providence when we see wicked Princes conquer, destroy, and invade without just Right, but we consider not they are acted by a higher Hand. Sometimes God does it by private men; sometimes he raises up one Oppressor to punish another Oppressor; sometimes he raises up rebellious Children to punish Parents who had been disobedient when they were Children; sometimes he punishes some persons with Treachery and Unfaithfulness who had been formerly treacherous and unfaithful themselves.

2. God makes use of the Sins of wicked men to chastise and punish his own People when they have offended and sinned against him. God makes the Sins of wicked men as Rods to chastise them and bring them back from their wanderings. I will give you one or two famous Instances of this. In Isaiah 10.5, God calls Assyria "the rod of mine anger" and "the staff in their hand is my indignation." In verse 6 and 7, and onward to verse 12, God tells us he had a work to do by the King of Assyria, namely, to punish a hypocritical Nation, but his design was only to kill and destroy. Another Instance can be found in 2 Samuel 12.11 and onward. David had committed a great Sin, an indelible Sin that God always remembered. Though upon David's Repentance God pardoned him, he told him he would raise up a Sword out of his own Bowels to correct him. First, one of his own Sons incestuously ravishes his own Sister, then Absalom murders his Brother. Then God raises up this Son to be a scourge to him by lying with his Wives and Concubines, and later by raising up a long Rebellion against him. How many Sins were committed in these matters, and yet God made use of all this to chastise David



and bring him to Repentance. I will give you a familiar Instance to illustrate this from a Leach's drawing of Blood; the Physician applies them to draw Blood to satisfy their natural inclination, but the Physician uses them to draw away ill humours. So wicked men afflict God's people from the hatred they bear them, but God designs it to correct and humble them for Sin and so to bring them to Repentance.

3. God makes use of the Sins of wicked men for the trial of the Graces of his own Children. This is another admirable End, to use the Sins of wicked men to make good men better. This evidently appears in the famous story of Job; the Devil merely out of malice tempts him to curse God, but God makes use of it to increase Job's Graces. I will instance in two points more.
4. When God allows False Prophets, Seducers, and Heretics to undermine the True Religion in a Nation, this is a very sad Providence, yet God has his ends in it, to test his own Children and make them more steadfast in the Truth. So Deuteronomy 13, the Lord tells them that He permits false Prophets to come among them, such as may give Signs and Wonders, which may come to pass. And see what is the reason for all this: The Lord thy God doth it to prove thee, and to know whether thou wilt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul. This same thing is more express in 1 Corinthians 11:19, where the Apostle tells them, "There must be heresies, that they which are approved may be made manifest." God suffers Seducers to come into a Church, the better to establish good men in the Truths they have received. It is true, ignorant and unstable men are quickly drawn aside to Errors, but when the true Religion is shaken by Errors and Heresies, there is nothing that makes good men more attentive, more diligent in examining the Truths of

Religion, and more careful in conforming themselves to them. So, the wicked Practices and Lives of some make those that are good men more diligent, more watchful, and more exact in their Conduct. It is but Reason, for good men ought to live in such a way as to be God's Witnesses against a wicked World. Good men are the best in wicked times and places; the best Protestants are those that live in Popish Countries. In Jeremiah 24, the Prophet mentions two Baskets of Figs, one exceedingly good, and the other exceedingly bad, which were used to illustrate the state of the Church in that day. When there were great Corruptions among them, the good were extraordinarily good, and the bad were very bad. Now it is our Duty to be burning and shining Lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. When we see Intemperance abound, we should be more strict. When we see Uncleaness not only overrunning the Land but growing bold and impudent, we should be more severe and chaste. When people begin to be atheistical and neglect the Service of God, we should more firmly resolve, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Evil times lay obligations upon good Christians to be even better.

5. God makes use of the Sins of wicked men to exercise the Patience and thereby to increase the Reward of good men, who had heard of Joseph's Chastity. For without wicked men, there could be no Persecution, and if there is no Persecution, where can there be any Rewards for Patience? In a word, if there had been no Persecution, where would be the Glory of Martyrdom? Thus God orders it so that when wicked men seek most to destroy the Church, then He makes it so much the more glorious. It was a great saying of a Martyr, "Come ye wicked Heathens, bring more Wracks, more Fire, more Torments, for hereby you add to my glory." Lastly, the overruling Providence

of God appears in making the Sins of wicked men, which were acted to frustrate His Purposes, the very proper means to bring them to pass. What was more contrary to God's Purpose of advancing Joseph than to let him be sold as a Slave and thrust into Prison? So in the Story of Haman and Mordecai in the Book of Esther, there was Haman's Envy, Pride, Malice, and barbarous Design to destroy all the Jews, yet God made all these cross Providences a means for the preservation and advancement of His Church. Thus, beloved, God can do good to His Church and Children by them that intended no such thing, as you may be sure. So Jehu was a means to make a great Reformation in Israel, to purge them from Idolatry. But had Jehu any such intent? No, all his intent was to set up his own House by it. Another Instance we have in Cyrus, who, like other Heathen Princes, sought his own Wealth and Glory. Yet he is said to be the Lord's Anointed, and to be raised up for the sake of Jacob his Servant. Nay, how many times has God made the Lusts of Men, the Ambition of Men, serve those Ends of His, which they never dreamed of? The Papists tell us that it was the Lust and Ambition of Henry VIII that was the occasion of our Reformation in Religion. Why, beloved, we do not deny it, but God can make use of these to bring about good ends. We read in Acts 8 that there was a great Persecution against the Church. What was the end God had in it? It was to scatter the Disciples in all parts of Judea and Samaria, where they preached the Word. If it had not been for this Persecution, they might have remained in Jerusalem. So Philippians 1:12, the Devil, seeing St. Paul so useful a Minister of Christ, causes him to be put in Prison. But what was the end of it? "Those things which happened to me are fallen out to the greater advancement of the Gospel, so that many of the Brethren being confirmed by my bonds have been so much the more bold to preach the Gospel

without fear." The Church of God, like the Vine, flourishes the better for being cut and pruned. It was a Proverb in the Primitive Church, "The Blood of the Martyrs is the Seed of the Church." I could give you Instances of this Providence of God in many private persons, where the malice of their Enemies has been a means to bring them to the highest advancements. I could tell you of a person that was falsely accused of Murder, and having cleared himself, the then Emperor took great notice of it, and advanced him to be a Captain, and afterwards he came to be Emperor himself. How many may say they had been undone if they had not been undone? Thus I have clarified this most excellent point, and there is not a point of greater use for vindicating the Honour of God's Providence.

## **SECTION IV.**

### **Application.**

I shall now draw some Inferences from this Text thus opened, that may have an Influence either for our Instruction, or for the Government of our Lives when we suffer by the Sins of wicked Men. I shall handle them by way of observation.

The first is, That God Almighty is just, and holy, and good, even in His governing the Sins of wicked men: This shall be to vindicate the Holiness, and Justice, and Purity of Almighty God in His concurrence with the sinful Actions of Men. It is one of the most difficult points in Religion, and one of the greatest depths of the Providence of God. To clear it up, I shall begin with this Story, that is, Joseph's being sold into Egypt: Here are two concurring causes;

his Brethren sold him, and yet God sent him. So it is said in the Acts, "The Patriarchs moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt." I shall here clear up God's Justice in this matter. We read there was first a Determination and Decree of God to advance Joseph, for the preservation of Jacob and his Family; well, to bring this to pass, God intends to make use of his Brethren and their Envy and Malice to sell him into Egypt. God does not infuse Malice into them, nor stir them up to Sin, for that was in their Hearts before. But first, God does not hinder them. You heard before, how, when they first determined to murder Joseph, God would not let it go that way, but when they had a mind to sell him, he did suffer them, because it was for His Ends: and observe how God ordered it, that the Merchants should happen to come by that very day to whom his Brethren sold him. It is a hard Question, Why this Affliction is rather attributed to God than to them, "It was not you that sent me hither, but God"; but the reason is God's permission and offering them an occasion in His Providence, which He knew would take effect; and therefore it was said, God did it. I shall, as briefly as I can, open and answer this Question: In all the Sins of the World, "Let God be true, and every man a Lyar," we must abhor and detest all that does in the least attribute any Sin to be God's; God neither infuses Wickedness, nor tempts or stirs up People to sin, but only by His Providence permits, orders, and governs it for His own wise and holy Ends. I will here answer some Objections briefly; (1) You will say, how can it stand with the Holiness of God to permit Sin when He can hinder it? I answer, It can be no stain to God's Holiness, for God doth but leave the Creature to the liberty of his own Will; and it was most agreeable, that those whom God has made free and reasonable Creatures should not be constrained, but to leave wicked Men and Devils to their own Wills, especially since God can bring so much Good out of Evil. But secondly you will say, Why doth God minister occasion in His Providence? I answer, That doth not reflect upon God neither,

for it is reasonable God should make a trial of the Obedience of His Creature to Him, but He could not know that, or that could not be known, if He did not leave them to their own Wills. (2.) I do consider, that most of the occasions that Men abuse to Sin, are such as in their own nature are good and naturally would drive them to Goodness; for, what is it that they use to harden themselves with, and abuse to Sin, but the very Blessings and Mercies of God.

Again, As to the other thing, God's ordering Sin to His own Glory, and the Good of His People, that cannot be any Objection against God's Holiness or Justice: What is more reasonable, than that God should bring Glory to Himself from wicked Men and Devils, force Glory out of them, above and contrary to their Intents. It is an Instance of the great Wisdom Power, and Goodness of God, that there can be no Evil, but He can regulate and order for good ends. But then you may object. Doth not the Scripture say, God stirs up wicked men, and blinds them, and hardens them, and sends them strong delusions, that they may believe a lie, and be damned? How can you in this vindicate the Purity and Holiness of God? I answer, in all those places where God is said to harden the Heart, &c. We must understand, in some places it imports but a mere permission of God, or, at most, but withdrawing His Grace, and leaving Men up to the Temptations of wicked Men and Devils. Secondly, God never withdraws His Grace from wicked men till they, by their former Sins, have deserved it. So Pharaoh first hardened his own Heart, and then God in a judicial way hardened his Heart also: And, beloved, what is more reasonable, than that they that resist God's motions, and give up themselves willfully to be seduced, that God should leave them up to the seduction of the Devil and wicked Men, He doth but punish them with their own Sin.

The next and greatest Objection, and most popular in all Ages of the World, is, God's prospering wicked men in evil ways, and afflicting good men in good ways This was the great Objection of the Heathens, especially the Epicureans, and it has been a great stumbling to godly men; I remember four holy men in Scripture were shaken, and almost overthrown at the thoughts of it, as Job, Job 21.6. David, Psal. 73. Jeremiah, Jer. 12.1. and Habakkuk, Hab. 1.13. Certainly, to Heathens, and such as deny future Rewards and Punishments, I do not know a greater Objection: But to this I answer, (1.) It is certain, that this Life is not intended by God to be the place of Punishments and Rewards, but only as a Preparation for another Life. (2.) No Man or People were ever so righteous, but they had Sin enough in them, which their own Conscience tells them deserves the greatest Punishment. (3.) I do consider, that wicked men, when God advances them, and gives them Success, it is not for their sake, or out of love to them, but because he raiseth them up in his Providence to be his Instruments to punish other wicked men; He does not give them any Success for their own desert. Now, beloved, this is the most reasonable thing in the World, in all Kingdoms the vilest of men are made use of for Executioners, and indeed there is none fit for this work but the wicked: Doth a Shepherd set his Sheep to worry one-another? Godly men are not fit or qualified to kill or plunder other men unjustly; therefore, I say, God doth not make Instruments of wicked men for their goodness, but because they only are fit for such Work as this is, to be God's Executioners. I remember a Story, when Phocas had murdered the Emperor his Master, and made himself Emperor, and a holy man complaining why God should set so wicked a man over the Nation, the Answer was, They did not deserve a better. It is for the same Reason that God sends Turks to oppress Christians. Again consider, that wicked men, even in their wicked actions, have secret Lashes of Conscience; or if they are advanced a little while, yet, as the Psalmist

saith, God sets them in slippery places. That man that shall now see Pharaoh so stout, and Herod so proud, stay but a while and you shall see one drowned in the Sea, and the other eaten up of Lice. Again, though' God suffer good men to be afflicted of the wicked, it is for their good, it is to fit them for God and Glory, it is to rub off their Rust and Rubbish, and fit them for God. And lastly, I say as St. Austin doth, Stay but till the Day of Recompence, and there will appear no proportion between the Wicked's Prosperity here and their Sufferings hereafter. So also between the Sufferings of Good Men here, and their Eternal Happiness. Geographers tell us the World is round, notwithstanding all the Hills and Mountains in it; but, how can that be? why, they say, all these Hills and Mountains, in comparison of the circumference of the Earth, are nothing. So the Sufferings of the good, and the Prosperity of the wicked, may seem great to us here, yet compare them to Eternity, and they are nothing. Suppose a Person is condemned to death for High-Treason, and his uncharitable Friend shall come and make him merry and drunk, whereby he forgets his Condition, do you envy this poor man this Happiness, when perhaps in two or three hours he must be hanged? So, if you could see a Wretch in Hell, after 40 years of Prosperity on Earth, he would tell you he had paid dear for his Happiness: therefore the Prosperity of the wicked upon Earth is no more a stain to the Holiness of God, than the Beams of the Sun upon a stinking Dunghill do reflect on the Sun. It was an excellent Saying of Dionysius, All things that are seen in the hands of second causes, when they once come to God's hand, he turns and orders them to excellent purposes. Those things that are unjust in respect of Men, yet are righteous as they are Instruments in the hand of God's Providence: as, suppose thy Child or thy Servant shall prove wicked and undutiful to thee, this is unjust in respect of them, but as they are Instruments to punish thy Sins, they are just upon that account. I shall conclude this first Inference by stirring you and myself up to



the contemplating and admiring the Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice of God's Providence, in governing the actions of wicked men; this is the Masterpiece of God's Providence, as Isa. 27.29. "This also cometh from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel." Here we see in the highest sense Sampson's Riddle verified, "That God can bring Meat out of the Eater, and Honey out of the Carcass"; and I tell you, though we now quarrel at Atheism, Debauchery, and Wickedness, God shall make manifest, at the last day, that all these things have worked together for the Glory of God, and the Good of them that serve him, and that we could not well have been without the malice and spite of wicked men. So much for the first Inference.

The second Inference is this, That the concurrence of God in the Sins of wicked men doth not excuse nor extenuate their Sin, nor diminish their Punishment. I am here, beloved, upon another deep point of the Providence of God, That the Providence of God, his Decrees, and his ordering and governing of sinful men, do not in the least excuse them from Guilt or Punishment, though God brings Good out of their Evil. St. Paul proposes and answers the Question, Rom. 3.7. If the Truth of God hath more abounded through my Lie unto his glory, why then am I reckoned a sinner, and not rather as we be slanderously reported? and some affirm, that we say, Let us do evil, that good may come, whose damnation is just. That is, why should God count them Sinners, or punish them as Sinners, that have been Instruments to serve his Providence? This Objection some People make use of, not only among Heathens, but Christians, you shall have them say, I could not help it, if God had not put me upon it I should never have done it. I remember a Story of a Woman, a Harlot, that had three Bastard Sons, which afterwards came to be very great and eminent Persons, as Peter Lombard, Gracian, and Comestor, and when afterwards she was come to Confession, she said, she could not confess herself sinful in this matter because her Sons proved all such

brave Men. But I shall refute this Opinion by these Five Considerations.

First, The Providence of God is not given to be the Rule of our Actions, but his Commands; the Rule of our Actions is his Command, and not what he doth in his Providence: as St. Austin saith, We may will what God wills in his Providence, and yet sin. A Parent lies sick, his good Son is troubled, uses all means for his recovery, God has decreed his Death, he dies, the Son is troubled, why the Son in all this does the Will of God, though it do not agree with his Decrees: so a wicked Son may wish his Father's death, and God decrees it also, he dies, yet though this Will in the Son was agreeable to God's secret and providential Will, it is sinful. The Rule of our Actions is not what God wills, but what God has commanded us to do in his Word. If God's providence would excuse Sin, no wicked Men or Devils could have been guilty of Sin.

Secondly, I answer, Wicked men do not aim at the Glory of God in their Sins, nor at the good God intends to bring about by them, their aims are different from God's aim, as herein Joseph saith to his Brethren, You thought evil against me, but God meant it for good. Isa. 10. the Prophet saith, God would send a Heathen Prince against the hypocritical Nation of the Jews, to punish them, but 'tis said, He meant not so; he doth not intend to do God's Work, but all his End was, to enlarge his Dominions.

Thirdly, The Good that follows from wicked Actions is not a natural Effect of Sin, but comes only from the overruling power of God, and so is merely accidental to the Sin: as for example; Sin is directly naught, no Creature can bring Good out of it: when a man sins, he is said to break God's Laws, and so to reproach and dishonour God himself; now if God, contrary to the nature of Sin, shall occasion

Good by it, Sin is never the less Sin: as for example; Poison is never the less Poison because a wise Physician knows how to make an Antidote out of it to expel Poison.

Fourthly, It follows also, that it is righteous with God to punish wicked men, though they are Instruments to serve his Providence by their Sins; God may use them, and yet they deserve punishment, because God punishes them for their evil Intentions, and not according to the effect of their Sins. Herod, and Pilate, and Judas all went to Hell when God had done with them; so Absalom, when God had by him punished David, then he takes him away.

Lastly, Does not the Intention of God's Glory excuse the Sin? I answer, No; the Sin is not the less sinful upon that account, as Rom. 3.8. for God needs not our Sins to bring to pass his Glory, God will not have us break his Commands out of a pretence to bring to pass his Glory: it is not lawful, for the greatest Glory to God or Good of Mankind, to commit the least Sin; to break God's Laws for God's Glory, is not lawful upon any pretence. And therefore they that can deceive and do Injuries to others, and perhaps their whole Lives have been a course of Injustice, and this under the thoughts and pretence of doing good with what they get, and bringing Glory to God, it is nothing else but a Delusion and Deceit: But thou Hypocrite, what need has God of thy Robberies to do him service? So the Jesuits have determined, that in defence of the Catholic Cause a man may tell a Lie, because it is to a good end, to carry on their Cause. I shall show you something of their Doctrine about Equivocation, from their own allowed Writers. (1.) It is determined, that officious Lies, when they injure none, and do good to others, they are at most but venial Sins: So the consequence is, if they tell an officious Lie for the preservation of themselves, but especially for the honour of God, and the good of their Society, it is but a venial, a pardonable Sin: this most of the

Papists hold. (2.) They tell us of the Doctrine of Equivocation, that some things, as they are spoken, are directly Sins; but if we keep any other true sense in our Minds, it is reconcilable to Truth. Again they tell us, Some things a man is bound to deny, and that upon Oath, That if a Priest, from Confession, knows anything of Adultery or Murder in another, and he be examined in the matter, he may lawfully forbear to tell the truth, or deny it; and the reason is, because he knows it under the Seal of Confession. And they made great use of this Doctrine in the Powder Treason. Again, they hold, When they are called before an unlawful Judge, (as they hold us to be Heretics) they may lie and forswear; but especially they hold, That no Civil Judge can judge a Priest. Again, they hold, If they are accused before a Judge, and the Crime is not clearly proved, and if they have any way to evade the Witnesses, they may lie and forswear themselves with a mental reservation, till the case be made out as clear as the Sun. Again, they aver, That at their Executions they may deny their Crimes too, because when they have confessed to a Priest, and received Absolution, they are in a state of Salvation, and absolved from their Sins. Therefore fix this in your Hearts, That for the greatest Good in the World it is not lawful to commit the least Sin.

## **SECTION V.**

MY third Inference is this, If all the Sins of Men be ordered and governed by God, the only true way to secure ourselves from harm by wicked men, is, to make our Peace with God. It follows most directly true; for, if all the Sins of wicked men be ordered, limited, and overruled by God, the most secure method in all Troubles, is, to

make our Peace with God, for if God be ours, all the Malice of the Devils in Hell, and wicked Men on Earth, shall do us no harm.

The first Lesson we are to learn under every Rod, is, to believe God's Hand in it. It is a thing, beloved, that we all acknowledge in the notion, yet certainly one of the hardest things in practice: Micah 6. the Prophet tells us, It is the greatest part of wisdom to bear the rod, and him who has appointed it; for the greatest cause of our impenitence under God's heavy Judgments, is, because Men generally look no higher than the Second Causes; we impute our Troubles to our own Negligence, and the Malice of Men, but look not up to God: Isa. 36.11. When thou liftest up thy hand they will not see it. So Jer. 5.12. when the Prophet told them God had sent the Assyrian to punish them, they denied it, and said, It is not the Lord. Beloved, we are loath, in any Affliction we suffer, to acknowledge God's Hand in it; and the reason is, because it would be a secret acknowledgment of our own Guilt. Thus, if there happen to be a Defeat in War, we reckon it comes only by Negligence or Cowardice; or if a Fire happens, we say, this is the Malice of Men, but we never look up to God in all this. This is the great cause of Impenitence, for how can we repent of our Sins, if we believe we are only injured by Men, and not punished by GOD? We ought to believe there is no evil in a City but what the Lord has done: all Evils that come either immediately from God's Hand, or from the Malice, Wickedness, and Injustice of Men, GOD has a hand in all. Thus Job, when the Chaldeans and Sabaeans had robbed him, he ascribes it to the Lord, and not to their Injustice, Isa. 10.5. When a plundering Army was to be sent, 'tis said God sent them; so when Absalom rebelled and sought the ruin of his Father, it is said, God would stir up evil to him out of his own house. So, 1 Kin. 11. when Solomon followed strange Women, then God stirred up Enemies against him. God sometimes raises up base and sordid men to be Plagues and Scourges to the

most powerful People, for the Sins of such a People. So Beloved, if we are proud and confident in our own Strength, our Sins may expose us to be a Prey to the basest Nation in the World. Again, sometimes God limits the Career of wicked men, as he does the proud Waves of the Sea, saying, Hitherto shalt thou go, and no further. When God has done with his Instruments, he will destroy them: It follows then, that it is the greatest Folly for men to seek to remove their Afflictions so long as they continue in their Sins against God, for what Folly is it to look to the Instrument, and not to the Hand that moves it? it is as if a poor Prisoner should court the Executioner, and not seek to the Judge. All these are our Follies: For first, we can with no reason expect God should remove his Judgments while we continue in our Sins; if God does for a time cease Judgments, we must not take it as a Pardon of our Sins, or a Removal of our Judgment, but only a Reprieve for a time: If God does withdraw one Rod or Judgment that we may fear, he will find new ones to chastise a wicked People; as the Angel cried, One woe is past, and another woe cometh. So long as we provoke God, though' sometimes we may prevail against men that are Instruments of his Wrath, we shall not always, he will have new Instruments to do his Work. It follows therefore in the last place, our only safe way is, to make our Peace with God, for if he rules and governs all, then without him all the Devils and wicked Men in the World shall do us no harm; if the Lord of Hosts be for us, all Devils and wicked (being of his Host) they cannot act but by his permission; When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh his Enemies to be at peace with him. When therefore we fear to suffer from wicked men, or when we are under their hands, then we are to look up, and see God's hand in all, and to make our Peace with him. I do not speak this that we are to neglect all prudent and careful means to prevent Mischief from wicked men; as for example sake, Suppose they do injuriously take away our Estates, or assault our Lives, we are bound to use all Care, and to seek the Help of the Magistrate to preserve

ourselves; nay, Magistrates are bound to use all possible means to oppose those wicked men that would hurt us: God has never promised to help the idle, slothful, and lazy, but the diligent, and those that use all probable means in subserviency to God's Providence: nay, when God does discover the Designs of wicked men, and put into a Nations hands the means to prevent them, and they will not lay hold on them, it is a fearful sign of Destruction. Beloved, I have often thought what in such cases we ought to do; the first thing we ought to begin with, is, to look up to God above all Second Causes, and to say, when any Trouble comes, Is not the Hand of God in all this? There is indeed much Treachery, Malice, and Cruelty in Man, but is it not all ordered by a wise and holy God. The second thing is, to inquire into the cause why the Lord is angry with us; to search what Sin has gone before this Judgment; when God cuts us short of our Estates, to remember how unthankful we have been for them, and how ill we have used them. Thirdly, before we begin to deal with our Enemies, we ought first to begin with our Sins, to subdue them, and implore God's Help against them. It would be a better sign of England 's Happiness, to see us reform our Sins, than to see all our Enemies under our Feet. Psal. 81.13, 14.

If God orders and limits the Sins of wicked men, then our Duty is hearty and fervent Prayer to Almighty God, for if he sends them, he hath power to take them away. Thus penitent Ephraim cries, Come, let us return to the Lord, for he hath wounded us, and he will heal us. Thus Jacob, before he contended with his Brother Esau, he first wrestles and prevails with God in Prayer. Thus Moses, when Israel was fighting with Amalek, his Hands were lifted up to God in Prayer. So the good Emperor Theodosius, when he had laid all night prostrate on the Ground in Prayer, and had thereby overcome God, then he got an easy Victory over his Enemies. And, dearly beloved, I wish we had done so, or would do so, I am sure this is one of the best

ways to prevail with God under the Circumstances we are in: There is none of you, but what are sensible of the Danger we are now in, and as to the Instruments, there has been as much Wickedness used as was ever known in any Nation, to contrive the Death of a King, and the Subversion of our Religion; as to them it is without any cause at all, yet in respect of God it is most righteous; and if He should give us up into their hands, we must say, That God is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works: That long Peace we have abused to Luxury, and other Sins, God may justly take it away from us; but above all, for our living so negligently, and being so lukewarm under that Religion God has given us, our Wickedness will justify the worst Judgments that can befall us; but, beloved, God is merciful, and hath put some stop to the Designs of our Enemies; and, oh that we may now return to the Lord by true and unfeigned Repentance. It is our Sins that give Strength to the Papists and Jesuits; if we did but live up to the Religion we profess, all the Jesuits in Rome and Devils in Hell can never do us any hurt. It is not only a politick Reformation by punishing Offenders, that will do our business, or by making severer Laws, no, these are good in their kind, but the only way for us is, to be good, and walk answerable to the Gospel we profess. I have indeed thought, if God Almighty please to make a full discovery of this Plot, it will be a deadly Blow to Jesuitism, and to Popery itself, but we cannot expect it without a Reformation of ourselves.

Again, if God orders all the Sins of wicked men, then it's a Foundation of true Patience and Comfort in all our Sufferings, to consider they all come from a holy, wise, and righteous God. Dearly beloved, I will give you one Remedy against all Discontents, Fears, and Troubles, and that is, to see God's Hand in every Affliction; and I will show you how to improve them. It was a true Argument the Saints used to content themselves with: so old Eli, when he heard the sad news of Judgment denounced against his Family, It is the Lord,



saith he, let him do what seemeth him good. So David, when he was under great Distresses, I opened not my mouth, for it was thy doing. Thus when he was reproached by Shimei, The Lord hath sent Shimei to curse David. Thus we find holy Hezekiah, when he was told of the ruin of his House and Kingdom, Good is the word of the Lord. So our Saviour, under his bitter agony, saith, The cup which my heavenly father hath given me, shall I not drink it? So St. Chrysostom tells us, All the Malice and Rage of Men, when it comes into God's hand, loses its Sting. Plutarch wrote against them that deny the Providence of God, and uses this Argument, That by so doing they did take away all Comfort from People under their Affliction. Did I believe the Affairs of this World were ordered by wicked men, and God was only a bare Spectator, I do assure you I could not live with Comfort one moment; but when I know, that in all the Confusions and Troubles which they cause here below, they cannot do one thing more than what God has ordered and appointed, I lay myself down, and rest in God's Bosom, and that for these Reasons, (1.) Because they are ordered by a God that is our Sovereign Lord, and can do with us what he pleases. (2.) Though we deserve it not from them, yet we have Sins that do call for it. (3.) When I consider, that notwithstanding all these Confusions, yet God can limit and overrule all as he pleases. And lastly, when I also consider that God can make all these things end in the good of his Church, and make wicked men do his Work and his Church-service against their own wills, where then can there be any room for Discontent? When any Troubles come, that which makes them bitter, is, to consider the Wickedness of the Instruments. We are apt to say, Oh that false Servant, that treacherous Child, if God had done this or that, it would not have troubled us. Why beloved, look into the Text, it is not they, but God that did it, for holy and wise ends. Sudden and unexpected Accidents are great causes of Afflictions, to have a Child or Friend cut off by some unexpected Accident; yet we must consider, though there be such a thing as Chance or Fortune to us,

there is nothing falls out but by the Wisdom of Almighty God: As Deut. 19.5. compared with Exod. 21.13. God suffers not a Sparrow to fall to the Ground without his Providence, much less will he do so by Men: all things that are Chance to us, are eternally determined by God. I have heard many tender-spirited persons say, Oh, I am afraid I have not done all I should in this or that matter, as Martha said, Lord, if thou hadst been here, our Brother had not died. But I say, when God has signified his Will by the Event, then we are to rest satisfied; God knows how to order our Ignorance and Follies to his own holy and wise ends. Again, when we think upon the Injuries of wicked men, the best Comfort is, to quiet ourselves, as David, The Lord has sent this Shimei to curse David. Again, when we see a Deluge of Wickedness and Profaneness overflow a Nation, it is one of the greatest causes of Sorrow to a good man, as it was to David, Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law. It is a just cause of of Sorrow, that you are all called to at this time, but yet, beloved, we ought not to be too much grieved: God will not suffer his holy Name to be always profaned, God can make this overspreading of Wickedness turn to the Good of the Nation: Prov. 19.31. The counsel of the Lord shall stand; they cannot go one step further than God orders, and he can and will overrule them. Again, this will be of great comfort to us in all the Riddles of God's Providence, when we see holy men oppressed, and wicked men, for a time, to prosper in all these intricate Providences; God Almighty will bring to pass his own wise and holy Ends; adore the Lord when you cannot comprehend him. The wicked have one Work to do, and God has another; judge not of Providences by their present faces and appearances: He that had seen Joseph afflicted, and in the Dungeon, how could he have thought that had been the way to a Throne? therefore do not judge of God's Works before you see the Effects of them: God has a Work and Purpose, and it shall be brought to pass, let men oppose and cross it as much as they can; therefore it is one of

the greatest parts of Wisdom to resign up our Souls to God in the darkest Providences, when we can see neither Sun, Moon, nor Stars; Lord, I resign up myself to thee, though I cannot comprehend thy design at present. Lastly, If God works together with wicked men, and turns all their Actions contrary to their own meaning, why then we ought to work together with God. I shall show you how we may draw Good from the Sins of wicked men; when the Sins of wicked men bring me to see my own, and to watch and walk more holily with God, and more diligently seek after Heaven and Heavenly things, when the Malice of my Enemies is a means to increase my Grace, why then, beloved, I draw Good out of Evil. Again, As to the Public, when we see Wickedness abound, we may draw Good out of it: we may now look upon ourselves to be Witnesses for God, and to live well in the midst of a wicked Nation, when we see a Deluge of Drunkenness, to abhor that Sin so much the more: So, as to the Spirit of Whoredom among us, this should make us strive to be so much the more chaste and careful against all Company that may tempt us: When we see a Spirit of Formality and Negligence in the Service of God, this should make us so much the more fervent, and to love Holiness the better: And when you see People come to such a measure of Profaneness, as for many years together to omit the Lord's Supper, this should make us more diligent in our Preparations to it. The best way to overthrow Popery is, to live well, like good Protestants, and especially I would not have a Protestant tell a wilful Lye; and by this means we may turn our present Dangers to a good issue. If we thus repent, thus live, and thus pray unto God, &c.

FINIS.

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