

The Mysteries of the Christian Faith Asserted and Vindicated

by Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester.

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1 Timothy 1:15.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

If these words were to be understood without any restriction or limitation, *that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners*, they would overthrow the great design of the Gospel, and make its excellent precepts useless and ineffectual. For, to what purpose should men be put upon the severe practice of repentance, mortification, and a continued course of a holy life, if the mere being *sinner*s did sufficiently qualify them for salvation? This indeed would be thought a doctrine *worthy of all acceptation* by the *greatest sinners*; but it could not be a *faithful saying*, being not agreeable either to the nature of God, or revelation of his will by Christ Jesus. But St. Paul speaks of such *sinner*s as himself had been; i.e. such as had been great sinners, but had truly and sincerely repented, *of whom I am chief*. What then? must we look on him as the standard and measure of such *sinner*s whom Jesus Christ came to save? What will then become of all those who have been sinners of a higher rank than ever he was? It's true, in the verses before the text, he sets out his sins, as a humble penitent is wont to do, with the worst colours and deepest aggravations, [verse. 13] *who was before a blasphemers and a persecutor, and injurious*; but yet he adds, *that he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly, in unbelief*. How then is St. Paul the *chief of sinners*? Are sins of ignorance and mistake the greatest of sins for which Christ died? Is there no *expiation* for any other by Jesus Christ? What will become then of all such who sin against knowledge and conscience, and not *in ignorance and unbelief*? Can none of these hope for mercy by Christ Jesus, although they do truly repent? [1 John 1:7.] But *the blood of Christ* is said elsewhere *to cleanse us from all sin*; not while we continue in them, but if we repent and forsake them. And Jesus Christ is said [1 John 2:2.] *to be a propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world*. And therefore this expression of St. Paul notes his great humility and deep sense of his own sins; but doth not exclude others from the hopes of pardon, whose sins have other aggravations than his had. For, if we leave out the last words as peculiar to his case, yet the other contain in them a true proposition, and of the greatest importance to mankind;

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This, you may say, is a matter out of all doubt among all such who hope for salvation by Christ Jesus; for all are agreed, that one way or other we are to be *saved by him*. But there is great difficulty as to the way of saving sinners by Christ Jesus: whether by the doctrine and example of the man Christ Jesus; by the power he attained through his sufferings; or, by the eternal Son of God's assuming our nature, and suffering in our stead, in order to the reconciling God to us, and making a propitiation for our sins. These are two very different hypotheses or notions of Christ's *coming to save sinners*: and the former seems more easy to be understood and believed; and the other seems to have insuperable difficulties in point of reason, and to run our religion into mysteries, which expose our faith, and make Christianity appear contemptible to men of sense and understanding. Is it not therefore much better to embrace such a scheme of it, as will have the least objection against it; that so men of reason may not be tempted to infidelity, and men of superstition may not, under the colour of mysteries, bring in the most absurd and unreasonable doctrines?

These are plausible insinuations, and would be apt to prevail on considering men's minds, if they were to form and make a religion that might be most accommodated to the genius and humour of the age they live in. And truly no men (by their own authority) can pretend to a right to impose on others any mysteries of faith, or any such things which are above their capacity to understand. But that is not our case; for we all profess to believe and receive Christianity as a divine revelation; and God (we say) may require from us the belief of what we may not be able to comprehend, especially if it relates to himself, or such things which are consequent upon the union of the divine and human nature. Therefore our business is to consider whether any such things be contained in that revelation which we all own; and if they be, we are bound to believe them, although we are not able to comprehend them.

Now here are two remarkable characters in these words, by which we may examine these different hypotheses concerning the way of salvation by Jesus Christ.

I. *It is a faithful saying*, and therefore must be contained in that revelation which God hath made concerning our salvation by Christ.

II. *It is worthy of all acceptance*; i.e. most useful and beneficial to mankind.

Now by these two I shall proceed in the examination of them.

I. Which is most agreeable to the revealed will of God.

II. Which doth offer fairest for the benefit and advantage of mankind.

I. Which is most agreeable to the revealed will of God. For that we are sure is the most *faithful saying*; since men of wit and reason may deceive us, but God cannot. When the apostles first preached this doctrine to the world, they were not bound to believe what they affirmed to be a *faithful saying*, till they gave sufficient evidence of their authority from God, by the wonderful assistance of the Holy Ghost. But now this *faithful saying* is contained in the books of the New Testament, by which we are to judge of the truth of all Christian doctrines. And when two different senses of places of Scripture are offered, we are to consider which is most reasonable to be preferred. And herein we are allowed to exercise our reason as much as we please; and the more we do so, the sooner we shall come to satisfaction in this matter.

Now according to reason we may judge that sense to be preferred,

(1.) Which is most plain and easy and agreeable to the most received sense of words; not that which is forced and intricate, or which puts improper and metaphorical senses upon words which are commonly taken in other senses especially when it is no sacramental thing, which in its own nature is figurative.

(2.) That which suits most with the scope and design not only of the particular places, but of the whole New Testament; which is to magnify God and to depress man; to set forth the infinite love and condescension of God *in giving his Son to be a propitiation for our sins*; to set up the worship of one true God in opposition to creatures; to represent and declare the mighty advantages mankind receive by the sufferings of Christ Jesus.

(3.) That which hath been generally received in the Christian church to be the sense of those places. For we are certain this was always looked on as a matter of great concernment to all Christians; and they had as great capacity of understanding the sense of the apostles, and the primitive church had greater helps for knowing it, than others at so much greater distance. And therefore the sense is not to be taken from modern inventions, or criticisms, or pretenses to revelation; but that which was at first delivered to the Christian church, and hath been since received and embraced by it in the several ages; and hath been most strenuously asserted, when it hath met with opposition, as founded on scripture and the general consent of the Christian church.

(4.) That which best agrees with the characters of those persons from whom we receive the Christian faith; and those are Christ Jesus and his holy apostles. For, if their authority be lost, our religion is gone; and their authority

depends upon their sincerity and faithfulness, and care to inform the world aright in matters of so great importance.

(1.) I begin with the character which the apostles give of Christ Jesus himself; which is, that he was a person of the greatest humility and condescension, that he did not assume to himself that which he might justly have done. For let the words of St. Paul be understood either as to the nature or dignity of Christ, it is certain that they must imply thus much, that when Christ Jesus was here on earth, he was not of a vain assuming humour, that he did not boast of himself, nor magnify his own greatness, but was contented to be looked on as other men; although he had at that time far greater and diviner excellency in him than the world would believe. Less than this cannot be made of those words of the apostle, [Phil. 2:6–7.] *Who being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.*

Now this being the character given of him, let us consider what he doth affirm concerning himself. For although he was far from drawing the people after him, by setting forth his own perfection; yet upon just occasions, when the Jews contested with him, he did assert such things, which must savour of vanity and ostentation, or else must imply that he was the eternal Son of God. For all mankind are agreed that the highest degree of ambition lies in affecting divine honour, or for a mere man to be thought a god. How severely did God punish Herod for being pleased with the people's folly in crying out, [Acts 12:22.] *The voice of God, and not of man!* And therefore he could never have borne with such positive assertions and such repeated defenses of his being the Son of God in such a manner as implied his being so from eternity. This in his disputes with the Jews he affirms several times, [John 6:32–33.] *that he came down from heaven,* not in a metaphorical but in a proper sense, as appears by those words, [John 6:38, 50, 58, 62.] *What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?* In another conference he asserted, [John 8:58.] *that he was before Abraham:* which the Jews so literally understood, that, without a metaphor, [John 8:59.] *they went about to stone him;* little imagining that by Abraham the calling of the Gentiles was to be understood. But above all is that expression which he used to the Jews at another conference, [John 10:30.] *I and my Father are one;* which they understood in such a manner that immediately [John 10:31.] *they took up stones to have stoned him.* What means all this rage of the Jews against him? What? For saying that he had unity of consent with the Father? No, certainly: *but the Jews misunderstood him.* Let us suppose it; would not our Saviour have immediately explained himself to prevent so dangerous a misconstruction? But he asked them, what it was they stoned him for? They answered him directly and

plainly, [John 10:32–33.] *Because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.* This was home to the purpose. And here was the time for him to have denied it, if it had not been so. But doth he deny it? [John 10:36.] Doth he say it would be blasphemy in him to own it? No; but he goes about to defend it; and proves it to be no *blasphemy for him to say that he was the Son of God*; i.e. so as to be God, as the Jews understood it. Can we imagine that a mere man, knowing himself to be such, should assume this to himself; and yet God to bear witness to him not only by miracles, but by [Matt. 26:63.] *a voice from heaven*, wherein he was called his *beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased*? Could God be pleased with a mortal, finite, despicable creature, as the Jews thought him, that assumed to himself to be God, and maintained and defended it among his own people, in a solemn conference at a very public place, in one of the porticoes of the temple? And this he persisted in to the last. [Matt. 26:63.] For, when *the high priest adjured him by the living God to tell, whether he were the Christ the Son of God* (for he, no doubt, had heard of the result of this conference in Solomon's porch), [Matt. 26:64.] *Jesus said unto him, Thou hast said.* St. Mark, more expressly, [Mark 14:62, 64.] *Jesus said, I am.* And this was the blasphemy for which they put him to death; as appears by the evangelists. [Luke 22:71.] So that this ought to be a dispute only between Jews and Christians; since it was the very point, for which they condemned him to death. And in his last most divine prayer, just before his suffering, he owns the glory which he had with the Father before the world had a being: [John 17:5.] *And now, O Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.* Was this nothing but the glory which God had designed to give him? This is so far from being peculiar to Christ, that it is common to all whom God designs to glorify; and takes away the distinction between the decree and the execution of it.

(2.) As to the apostles, the reason we believe their testimony is, that they were men of great sincerity and plainness, and of great zeal for the honour and glory of God. And according to this character, let us examine what they say concerning Christ Jesus.

He that was most conversant with him, and beloved by him, and lived to see his divinity contested by some, and denied by others, is most ample in setting it forth in his admirable, sublime, and divine introduction to his gospel: which all the wit of mankind can never make tolerable sense of, if they deny Christ's being the eternal Son of God; [John 1:1–2, etc.] and it is he that hath preserved those conferences with the Jews, wherein he asserts his own divinity.

St. Paul was a stranger to him while he lived; but at the same time when he was so zealous to persuade the Gentiles to the worship of God, and not of

creatures, he calls him *God over all, blessed for evermore*. And when he saith, that *the eternal power and Godhead are made known by the creation of the world*, he attributes the creation of all things to Christ, applying to him those words of the Psalmist, *Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thy hands*. Which cannot be understood of any metaphorical creation. [Rom. 9:5, 1:20; Col. 1:16, Heb. 1:2, 10.]

And after the strictest examination of copies, those will be found the best, which have that reading on which our translation is grounded: [1 Tim. 3:16.] *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh*. So that God's *being manifest in the flesh* is made a great part of the mystery of Christianity.

But here arises a difficulty, which deserves to be considered; i.e. "If there were nothing in the Christian doctrine but the way of saving sinners by the doctrine and example of Christ, there would be little objection to be made to it; since the obtaining eternal life is certainly the best thing that can be proposed to mankind, and the precepts of Christ are divine and spiritual, plain and easy to be understood, and agreeable to the reason of mankind: but many other things are imposed on men as necessary to be believed concerning Christ Jesus, as to his divinity, incarnation, and the hypostatic union of both natures, which perplex and confound our understandings; and yet these things are not only delivered as mysteries of the Christian faith, but the belief of them is required as necessary to the salvation of sinners; whereas, if they are revealed, they are no longer mysteries; and if they are not revealed, how come they to be articles of faith? The scripture knows of no other mysteries of faith, but such as were hidden before the revelation of them; but since they are revealed, they are plain and open to all men's capacities; and therefore it is a great injury to the plainness and simplicity of the gospel to impose such incomprehensible mysteries as necessary articles of faith; and it is abusing the credulity of mankind, to make such things necessary to be believed, which are impossible to be understood. But those who have ever loved to deceive and abuse the rest of the world, have been always fond of the name of mysteries; and therefore all such things are to be suspected, which come under that name. For, all such points, which will not bear examination, must be wrapped up and revered under the name of mysteries, that is, of things to be swallowed without being understood. *But the scripture never calls that a mystery which is incomprehensible in itself; though never so much revealed.*" [Discourse of the Word Mystery etc. p. 5.]

This is the main force of the objection, which I shall endeavour to remove, by shewing,

(1.) That God may justly require from us in general the belief of what we cannot comprehend.

(2.) That which way soever the way of salvation by Christ be explained, there will be something of that nature found in it; and that those who reject the mysteries of faith run into greater difficulties than those who assert them.

(3.) That no more is required as a necessary article of faith than what is plainly and clearly revealed.

(1.) That God may justly require from us in general the belief of what we cannot comprehend. It is to very little purpose to inquire, whether the word *mystery* in scripture be applied to such particular doctrines, whose substance is revealed, but the manner of them is incomprehensible by us; for why may not we make use of such a word, whereby to express things truly revealed, but above our comprehension? We are certain the word *mystery* is used for things far less difficult and abstruse; and why may it not then be fitly applied to such matters, which are founded on divine revelation, but yet are too deep for us to go to the bottom of them? Are there not mysteries in arts, mysteries in nature, mysteries in providence? And what absurdity is there to call those mysteries, which in some measure are known, but in much greater unknown to us? Although therefore in the language of scripture it be granted, that the word *mystery* is most frequently applied to things before hidden, but now revealed, yet there is no incongruity in calling that a mystery, which being revealed, hath yet something in it which our understandings cannot reach to. But it is mere caviling to insist on a word, if the thing itself be granted. The chief thing therefore to be done is to shew that God may require from us the belief of such things which are incomprehensible by us. For, God may require anything from us which it is reasonable for us to do; if it be then reasonable for us to give assent where the manner of what God hath revealed is not comprehended, then God may certainly require it from us. Hath not God revealed to us, that *in six days he made heaven and earth, and all that is therein*? But is it not reasonable for us to believe this, unless we are able to comprehend the manner of God's production of things? Here we have something revealed, and that plainly enough; viz. that God *created all things*; and yet, here is a mystery remaining as to the manner of doing it. Hath not God plainly revealed that there shall be a resurrection of the dead? and must we think it unreasonable to believe it, till we are able to comprehend all the changes of the particles of matter from the creation to the general resurrection? But it is said, that there is no contradiction in this, but there is in the mystery of the Trinity and Incarnation. It is strange boldness in men to talk thus of monstrous

contradictions in things above their reach. The atheists may as well say, infinite power is a monstrous contradiction; and God's immensity and his other unsearchable perfections are monstrous paradoxes and contradictions. Will men never learn to distinguish between numbers and the nature of things? For three to be one is a contradiction in numbers; but whether an infinite nature can communicate itself to three different subsistences without such a division as is among created beings, must not be determined by bare numbers, but by the absolute perfections of the divine nature; which must be owned to be above our comprehension.

For let us examine some of those perfections which are most clearly revealed, and we shall find this true. [Psalm 90:2; Rev. 1:4, 11:17.] The scripture plainly reveals that *God is from everlasting to everlasting; that he was, and is, and is to come*; but shall we not believe the truth of this till we are able to fathom the abyss of God's eternity? I am apt to think (and I have some thoughtful men concurring with me) [Bisterfield. c. Crell. p. 50. Petav. de Trinit. l. iii. c. 9. sect. 15.] that there is no greater difficulty in the conception of the Trinity and Incarnation than there is of eternity. Not but that there is great reason to believe it; but from hence it appears that our reason may oblige us to believe some things which it is not possible for its to comprehend. We know that either God must have been forever, or it is impossible he ever should be; for if he should come into being when he was not, he must have some cause of his being; and that which was the first cause would be God. But if he was for ever, he must be from himself; and what notion or conception can we have in our minds concerning it? And yet, atheistic men can take no advantage from hence; because their own most absurd hypothesis hath the very same difficulty in it. For something must have been forever. And it is far more reasonable to suppose it of an infinite and eternal mind, which hath wisdom and power and goodness to give being to other things, than of dull, stupid, and senseless matter, which could never move itself, nor give being to anything besides. Here we have therefore a thing which must be owned by all; and yet such a thing which can be conceived by none: which shews the narrowness and shortness of our understandings, and how unfit they are to be the measures of the possibilities of things. *Vain men would be wise*; they would fain go to the very bottom of things, when, alas! they scarce understand the very surface of them. They will allow no mysteries in religion; and yet everything is a mystery to them. They cry out of cheats and impostors under the notion of mysteries; and yet there is not a spire of grass but is a mystery to them. They will bear with nothing in religion which they cannot comprehend; but above other things the divine perfections, even those which are

most absolute and necessary are above their reach. For let such men try their imaginations about God's eternity, not merely how he should be from himself, but how God should coexist with all the differences of times, and yet there be no succession in his own being. I do not say there is such difficulty to conceive a rock standing still when the waves run by it; or the gnomon of a dial when the shadow passeth from one figure to another; because these are gross inactive things; but the difficulty is far greater where the being is perfect and always active. For, where there is succession there is a passing out of not being in such a duration into being in it; which is not consistent with the absolute perfection of the divine nature. And therefore God must be all at once what he is, without any respect to the difference of time past, present, or to come. [De Consol. lib. iii.] From whence eternity was defined by Boethius to be "a perfect and complete possession all at once of everlasting life." But how can we form any conception in our minds of that being all at once, which hath such different acts as must be measured by a long succession of time? as, the creating and dissolving the frame of the world; the promising and sending the Messiah; the declaring and executing a general judgment; how can these things be consistent with a permanent instant, or a continuance of being without succession? For, it is impossible for us in this case, as to God's eternity, to form a clear and distinct idea in our mind of that which both reason and revelation convince us must be. The most we can make of our conception of it is that God hath neither beginning of being, nor end of days; but that he always was, and always must be. And this is rather a necessary conclusion from reason and scripture, than any distinct notion or conception of eternity in our minds. From whence it evidently follows, that God may reveal something to us, which we are bound to believe, and yet after that revelation the manner of it may be incomprehensible by us, and consequently a mystery to us.

Hath not God revealed to us in scripture the spirituality of his own nature? [John 4:24.] that *he is a spirit*, and therefore will *be worshipped in spirit and in truth*? For, that is a reason why spiritual worship should be most agreeable to him. Now if we could have a clear, distinct, positive notion in our minds of God's spiritual nature, we might then pretend that there is nothing mysterious in this, since it is revealed.

But let such men examine their own thoughts about this matter; and try, whether the utmost they can attain to be not something negative, viz.: because great absurdities would follow if we attributed anything corporeal to God; for then he must be compounded of parts, and so he may be dissolved; then he must be confined to a certain place, and not everywhere present; he cannot have the power of acting and self-determining, which a mere body hath not. For the

clearest notion we can have of body is that it is made up of some things as parts of it, which may be separated from each other, and is confined to a certain place, and hath no power to move or act from itself. But some of these men, who cry down mysteries and magnify reason to shew how slender their pretenses to reason are, have asserted a corporeal God with shape and figure. It was indeed well thought of by those who would make a man to be God, to bring God down as near to man as might be. But how to reconcile the notion of a body with infinite perfections is a mystery to me, and far above my comprehension. But if it be no mystery to such men, they must either deny God's infinite perfections, or shew how a bodily shape can be capable of them. But some men can confound finite and infinite, body and spirit, God and man, and yet are for no mysteries; whereas these things are farther from our reach and comprehension than any of those doctrines which they find fault with. But to proceed:

If we believe prophecy, we must believe God's foreknowledge of future events: for, how could they be foretold if he did not foreknow them? And if he did foreknow those which he did foretell, then it was either because those only were revealed to him, which is inconsistent with the divine perfections; or that he doth foreknow all other events, and only thought fitting to reveal these. But can they solve these difficulties about divine prescience? Is there no mystery in this? Nothing above their comprehension? What then made their great master deny it, as a thing above his comprehension? [Socin. Prael. c. 11.] Because nothing can be foreknown but what hath a certain cause, and therefore, if evil actions be foretold, God must be the cause of them, and men will not be free agents in them. And yet it is most certain that the sufferings of Christ by the wickedness of men were foretold. What then? Must we make God the author of sin? God forbid. Will the righteous Judge of all the earth punish mankind for his own acts, which they could not avoid? Then we must yield that there is something in the manner of the divine prescience which is above our comprehension. And the most searching and inquisitive men have been forced to yield it at last, as to the connection between the certainty of prescience and the liberty of human actions. Is it not then much better to sit down quietly at first, adoring the infiniteness of God's incomprehensible perfections, than after all the huffings and disputings of men to say, *In ignorantia sola quietem invenio*, [Cajetan in 1. q. 22. art. 4.] as the great schoolman did? Surely then here is something plainly revealed, and yet the manner of it is still a mystery to us.

I shall not now insist on any more of the particular attributes of God, but only in general I desire to know whether they believe them to be finite or infinite? If to be finite, then they must have certain bounds and limits which they

cannot exceed; and that must either be from the imperfection of nature, or from a superior cause, both which are repugnant to the very being of God. If they believe them to be infinite, how can they comprehend them? We are strangely puzzled in plain, ordinary, finite things; but it is madness to pretend to comprehend what is infinite; and yet if the perfections of God be not infinite, they cannot belong to him.

I shall only add, in consequence to this assertion, that if nothing is to be believed but what may be comprehended, the very being of God must be rejected too. And therefore I desire all such who talk so warmly against any mysteries in religion, to consider whose work it is they are doing; even theirs who under this pretense go about to overthrow all religion. "For," say they, "religion is a mystery in its own nature; not this or that, or the other religion; but they are all alike, all is mystery; and that is but another name for fraud and imposture. What were the heathen mysteries but tricks of priestcraft; and such are maintained and kept up in all kinds of religion. If therefore these men, who talk against mysteries, understand themselves, they must in pursuance of their principles reject one God, as well as three persons; for, as long as they believe an infinite and incomprehensible Being, it is nonsense to reject any other doctrine which relates to an infinite Being, because it is incomprehensible."

But yet these very men, who seem to pursue the consequence of this principle to the utmost, must assert something more incomprehensible than the being of God. For I appeal to any man of common understanding, whether it be not more agreeable to reason to suppose works of skill, beauty, and order to be the effects of a wise and intelligent Being, than of blind chance and unaccountable necessity? whether it be not more agreeable to the sense of mankind to suppose an infinite and eternal Mind, endued with all possible perfections, to be the maker of this visible world; than, that it should start out from itself, without contrivance, without order, without cause? Certainly such men have no reason to find fault with the mysteries of religion because they are incomprehensible, since there is nothing so absurd and incomprehensible as their darling hypothesis; and, there is nothing which can make it prevail, but to suppose mankind to be as dull and insensible as the first chaos.

Thus I have shewn that it is not unreasonable for God to require from us the belief of something which we cannot comprehend.

(2.) I now come to consider, whether those who are so afraid of incomprehensible mysteries in our faith, have made it so much more easy in the way they have taken. And notwithstanding all the hectoring talk against

mysteries and things incomprehensible in religion, I find more insuperable difficulties in point of reason in their way than in ours. As for instance,

(1.) It is a more reasonable thing to suppose something mysterious in the eternal Son of God's *being with the Father before the world was made by him* (as St. John expresses it in the beginning of his Gospel), than in supposing that although John the Baptist were born six months before Jesus Christ, that yet Christ was in dignity before him. What a wonderful mystery is this! Can men have the face to cry down mysteries in deep speculations, and matters of a high and abstruse nature, when they make such mysteries of plain and easy things? and suppose the evangelist in profound language and lofty expressions to prove a thing which was never disputed, viz. that although Christ Jesus were born six months after John, yet he was in dignity before him?

(2.) It is a more reasonable thing to suppose that a divine person should assume human nature, and so the *Word to be made flesh*; than to say, that an attribute of God, his wisdom or power, is made flesh, which is a mystery beyond all comprehension. There may be some difficulties in our conception of the other, but this is a thing beyond all conception or imagination; for an accident to be made a substance is as absurd, as to imagine it to subsist without one.

(3.) It is more reasonable to suppose that the Son of God should come down from heaven and take our nature upon him, than that a man should be rapt up into heaven, that it might be said that he came down from thence. For in the former supposition we have many other places of scripture to support it, which speak of his *being with God, and having glory with him before the world was*; whereas there is nothing for the other, but only that it is necessary to make some tolerable sense of those words.

(4.) It is more reasonable to believe that God should become man by taking our nature upon him, than that man should become God. For in the former, there is nothing but the difficulty of conceiving the manner of the union, which we all grant to be so between soul and body; but in the other there is a repugnancy in the very conception of a created God, of an eternal son of Adam, of omnipotent infirmity, of an infinite finite Being. In the former case, an infinite is united to a finite; but in the other a finite becomes infinite.

(5.) It is more reasonable to believe that Christ Jesus should suffer as he did for our sakes than for his own. We are all agreed that the sufferings of Christ were far beyond anything he deserved at God's hands; but what account then is to be given of them? We say that he made himself the voluntary sacrifice for expiation of the sins of mankind; and so there was a great and noble end

designed, and no injury done to a willing mind; and the scripture as plainly expresses this, as it can do in words. But others deny this, and make him to suffer as one wholly innocent; for what cause? To make the most innocent persons as apprehensive of suffering as the most guilty; and the most righteous God to put no difference between them, with respect to suffering?

(6.) It is more reasonable to suppose such a condescension in the Son of God to take upon him the form of a servant for our advantage, than that a mere man should be exalted to the honour and worship which belongs only to God. For, on the one side, there is nothing but what is agreeable to the divine nature, viz. infinite love and condescension and piety to mankind; on the other, there is the greatest design of self-exaltation that ever was in human nature, viz. for a mere man to have the most essential attributes and incommunicable honour which belongs to God. And whether of these two is more agreeable to the spirit and design of the New Testament, let any man of understanding judge. For as it is evident that the great intention of it is to magnify the wonderful love of God in the sending of his Son; so it is as plain that one great end of the Christian doctrine was to take mankind off from giving divine worship to creatures; and can we then suppose that at the same time it should set up the worship of a mere man with all the honour and adoration which belongs to God? This is to me an incomprehensible mystery indeed, and far beyond all that is implied in the mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation. For it subverts the very foundation of the design of Christianity as to the reforming idolatry then in being; it lays the foundation for introducing it into the world again: for since the distance between God and his creatures is taken away, in the matter of worship, there is nothing left but the declaration of his will; which doth not exclude more mediators of intercession but upon this ground, that the mediation of redemption is the foundation of that of intercession. And it is far more easy for us to suppose there may be some things too hard for us to understand in the mystery of our redemption by Jesus Christ, than that at the same time it should be both a duty and a sin to worship any but the true God with proper divine worship. For if it be idolatry to give it to a creature, then it is a great sin; for so the scripture still accounts it: but if we are bound to give it to Christ, who is but a creature, then that which in itself is a sin is now become a necessary duty; which overthrows the natural differences of good and evil, and makes idolatry to be a mere arbitrary thing. And I take it for granted, that in matters of religion moral difficulties are more to be regarded than intellectual; because religion was far more designed for a rule of our actions, than for the satisfaction of our curiosity.

And upon due examination we shall find that there is no such frightful appearance of difficulties in the mystery of the incarnation, as there is in giving divine worship to a creature.

And it ought to be observed that those very places which are supposed to exclude Christ from being the true God, must, if they have any force, exclude him from divine worship. For they are spoken of God as the object of our worship; but if he be not excluded from divine worship, then neither is he from being the true God; which they grant he is by office, but not by nature. [John 17:3. 1 Cor. 8:6. Socin. ad Eutrop. p. 96.]

But a God by office, who is not so by nature, is a new and incomprehensible mystery. [c. Wuiek. c. 11. Catech. Racov. p. 65.] *A mystery hidden from ages and generations* as to the church of God; but not *made known by the gospel of his Son*.

This is such a kind of mystery as the heathen priests [1 Cor. 8:5.] had, who had *gods many, and lords many*, as the apostle saith, i.e. many by office, although but one by nature. But if the Christian religion had owned one God by nature, and only one by office, the heathens had been to blame chiefly in the number of their gods by office, and not in the divine worship which they gave to them. But St. Paul blames the heathens [Gal. 4:8.] for *doing service to them which by nature are no gods*; not for doing it without divine authority, nor for mistaking the person who was God by office, but in giving divine worship to them who *by nature were no gods*; which he would never have said, if by the Christian doctrine divine worship were to be given to one who was not God by nature.

But these are indeed incomprehensible mysteries, how a man by nature can be a God really and truly by office; how the incommunicable perfections of the divine nature can be communicated to a creature; how God should *give his glory to another*, and by his own command require that to be given to a creature, which himself had absolutely forbidden to be given to any besides himself. It is said by a famous Jesuit (I will not say how agreeably to their own doctrines and practices about divine worship), [Smiglec. de Divin. Verb. Incarn. Nat. p. 45.] “that the command of God cannot make him worthy of divine worship, who without such a command is not worthy of it. But it is very absurd to say that he that is unworthy of it without a command, can become worthy by it; for it makes God to command divine honour to be given to one who cannot deserve it.” (For no mere man can deserve to be made God.) But it is more agreeable to the divine nature and will not to give his honour to a creature.” [Nova Monstra. etc. p. 42.]

(3.) But after all the invectives of these enemies to mysteries, we do not

make that which we say is incomprehensible to be a necessary article of faith, as it is incomprehensible; but we do assert, that what is incomprehensible as to the manner, may be a necessary article as far as it is plainly revealed. As in the instances I have already mentioned of the creation and resurrection of the dead; would they in earnest have men turn infidels as to these things till they are able to comprehend all the difficulties which relate to them? If not, why should this suggestion be allowed as to the mysteries which relate to our redemption by Jesus Christ? If it be said, The case is not alike, for those are clearly revealed, and these are not; this brings it to the true and proper issue of this matter, and if we do not prove a clear revelation, we do not assert their being necessary articles of faith. But my present business was only to take off this objection, that the mysteries were incomprehensible and therefore not to be received by us.

II. And so I come to the second way, by which we are to examine the several senses of Christ Jesus *coming to save sinners*: which of them tends more to the benefit and advantage of mankind; or which is *more worthy of all acceptance*.

And that will appear by considering these things;

- (1.) Which tends most to the raising our esteem and love of Christ Jesus.
- (2.) Which tends most to the begetting in us a greater hatred of sin.
- (3.) Which tends most to the strengthening our hope of salvation by Jesus Christ.

(1.) As to the raising in us a greater esteem and love of Christ. We are certain that the infinite love and condescension of Christ Jesus in undertaking such a work as the saving of sinners makes it most worthy of all acceptance.

Some men may please themselves in thinking that, by taking away all mysteries, they have made their faith more easy; but I am certain they have extremely lessened the argument for our love, viz. the apprehensions of the wonderful love and condescension of Christ in coming into the world *to save sinners*. And yet this is the great argument of the New Testament to persuade mankind to the love of God and of his Son: [John 2:16.] *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son*, etc. This is indeed a mighty argument of love, if by *the only begotten Son* be meant the eternal Son of God, [John 3:13.] *who came down from heaven*, as St. John speaks just before; but if no more be meant but only that God made a mere man to be his Son, and after he had preached awhile here on earth, and was ill used and crucified by his own people, he exalted him to be God, and gave him divine attributes and honours; this were an argument of great love to the person of Christ, but not to the rest of mankind. But God's love in scripture is magnified with respect to the world in the sending of his Son. [1 John 4:9.] *In*

this was manifested, saith the apostle, the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we should live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins. The great love we still see is towards us, i.e. towards mankind; but according to the other sense it must have been, Herein was the love of God manifested to his Son, that for his sufferings he exalted him above all creatures. *He that spared not his own Son,* saith St. Paul, [Rom. 8:32.] *but delivered him for us all.* If he were the eternal Son of God, who came to suffer for us, there is mighty force and emphasis in this expression, and very apt to raise our admiration and our love; but what *not sparing his own Son* is there, if nothing were meant but that he designed by sufferings to exalt him? For not sparing him supposes an antecedent relation of the highest kindness, but the other is only designing extraordinary kindness for the sake of his sufferings. Therefore the argument for the love of God is taken from what his Son was, when he delivered him up for us all: [John 1:14, 3:16; Luke 3:22.] he was his own Son; not by adoption, as others are; St. John calls him his *only begotten Son*; and God himself *his beloved Son* in the voice from heaven; and this before his sufferings, immediately after his baptism, when as yet there was nothing extraordinary done by him, as to the great design of his coming. Which shews that there was an antecedent relation between him and the Father; and that therein the love of God and of Christ was manifested, that, being the *only begotten Son of the Father*, he should take our nature upon him, and for our sakes do and suffer what he did. This is indeed an argument great enough to raise our admiration, to excite our devotion, to inflame our affections; but how flat and low doth it appear, when it comes to no more than this, that there was a man whom, after his sufferings, God raised from the dead, and made him God by office! Doth this carry any such argument in it for our love and esteem of devotion to him as the other doth upon the most serious consideration of it?

(2.) Which tends most to beget in us a greater hatred of sin. For that is so contrary to the way of our salvation by Jesus Christ, that what tends most to our hatred of it must conduce most to our happiness; and therefore be most *worthy of all acceptance*. It is agreed on all hands, that Christ did suffer very much both in his mind and in his body. [John 13:21. Matt. 26:37–38. Mark 14:33–34.] In his mind, when it is said, *that he was troubled in spirit, that he began to be sorrowful and very heavy*; and soon after, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death*. St. Luke saith, [Luke 22:44.] *that he was in an agony*; wherein he not only *prayed more earnestly, but his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground*. What made this amazement and dreadful agony in the mind of the most

innocent person in the world? Was it merely the fear of the pains of death which he was to undergo? That is impossible, considering the assurance which he had of so glorious a reward so soon following after; when so many martyrs endured such exquisite torments for his sake without any such disturbance or consternation. But the apostles give us another account of it. [1 Peter 2:24. 1 Peter 3:18. 2 Cor. 5:21.] St. Peter saith, he was *to bear our sins in his own body on the tree*; that *Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust*. St. Paul, *that God made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*. Hereby we understand how so innocent a person came to suffer; *he stood in our stead; he was made sin for us*; and therefore was to be treated as a sinner; and to suffer that on our account which he could not deserve on his own. If he suffered on his own account, this were the way to fill our minds with perplexity concerning the justice of Providence with respect to his dealings with the most innocent and holy persons in this world; if he suffered on our account, then we have the benefit of his sufferings, and therein we see how displeasing to God sin is, when even his own Son suffered so much by taking the guilt of our sins upon him. And what can tend more to the begetting in us a due hatred of sin, than to consider what Christ himself suffered on the account of it? What can make us have more dreadful thoughts of it, than that the great and merciful God, when he designed to save sinners, yet would have his own Son to become *a propitiation for the sins of mankind*? And unless we allow this, we must put force upon the plainest expressions of scripture; and make Christ to suffer merely to shew God's power over a most innocent person, and his will and pleasure to inflict the most severe punishment without any respect to guilt. And surely such a notion of God cannot be *worthy of all acceptance*.

(3.) Which tends most to strengthen our hope of salvation by Christ Jesus. If we believe that he suffered for our sins, then we have reason to hope for the forgiveness of them, although they have been many and great, if we sincerely repent; because the most prevailing argument for despair will be removed, which is taken from the justice of God, and his declared hatred of sin and displeasure against sinners. If God be so much in earnest displeased with the sins of mankind, and his justice be concerned in the punishment of sinners, how can they ever hope to escape, unless there be a way for his displeasure to be removed, and his justice to be satisfied? And this the scripture tells us [Rom. 5:10. 2 Cor. 5:19. Heb. 9:15.] is done by Christ, who died that he might be *a sacrifice of atonement to reconcile us to God by his death*; as St. Paul expressly affirms. And by this means, we may have strong consolation from the hopes of forgiveness of sins. Whereas, if this be taken away, either men must believe that God was not in earnest displeased with the sins of mankind; which must exceedingly lessen our

esteem of the holiness and justice of God; or if he were so displeased, that he laid aside his displeasure, without any atonement or sacrifice of expiation. And so, as many as look on God's justice and holiness, as necessary and essential attributes of God, will be in danger of sinking into the depths of despair, as often as they reflect seriously on the guilt of their sins. But on the other side, if we believe that *while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*; then we may *have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*; and have reason to believe, that there will be *no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus* by a lively faith and sincere repentance; then they may with comfort look up to God as a reconciled Father, through Jesus Christ our Mediator; then they may with inward satisfaction look beyond the grave, and steadfastly hope for that salvation which Christ purchased on earth, and will at last bestow on all such as love and obey him. To which God of his infinite mercy bring us all through Jesus Christ. For, *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that he came into the world to save sinners.*