A-4

On Gratitude to Almighty God.

Ephesians, 5th Chap. 20th Verse

Giving thanks always, for all things, unto God.

The words of my text by their construction imply, that something has gone before with which they are connected, but as it is foreign to my present design to point out this connection I shall come directly to my point, which is, to consider the duty of Gratitude to Almighty God. Gratitude may be defined a just apprehension and attentive consideration of benefits received, for he who is ignorant of, mistakes or slights favors conferred upon him, never can be grateful, our duty then must be, duly to consider, carefully to remember the divine benefits, otherwise we may incur the guilt of ingratitude through mere carelessness or inattention; by disregarding the blessings we every day enjoy, we come to neglect those which occur less frequently, and yet nothing is plainer, than that we ought to be most grateful for the blessings which we oftenest experience, how rare is it for men to feel themselves warmed with gratitude for the rising of the sun the descent of fruitfull showers, the returns of pleasant seasons, the preservation of life, the enjoyment of health, the competency of worldly goods and the like, but any instance of the particular care of Providence, instantly excites sentiments of praise and adoration; is this then gratitude? no it is an effect of necessity, of an impulse which they are unable to

resist, but gratitude is voluntary and rational, wherefore sudden and thoughtless starts of the affections have nothing to do with it; the really grateful are industrious to comprehend the nature and extent of the obligation they lye under, that their acknowledgments may proceed from cool reflection, and be truly acts of the mind. if to be sensible of a good office at the very time it is done deserves to be called gratitude, all mankind may be said to be grateful, even the perverse and obstinate Jews were so; when Almighty God by his his wonderfull power, and by means the most extraordinary that can be imagined, delivered them from the tyranny and oppression of their enemies, when he caused water to gush from a rock to refresh them, exhausted with heat and fatigue, when bread descended in showers from heaven, and the air was darkend with clouds of falling Quails to satisfy their hunger, then indeed they were not insensible to the goodness of God, then they owned confess his power, and were in haste to renew their engagements to fidelity and obedience, but then their thirst was hardly assuaged, and stomachs replenished with food, when as the Psalmist complains, they forgot his works and the wonders he had shewn them they remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy; they no longer trusted in him, they complained of his rigor, refused obedience to his commands, and hastenously turned their backs upon his covenant; such returns did they make for kindness that exceeded their utmost expectations, for

kindness of such magnitude, that the King of Heaven alone was capable of shewing it. on the contrary we find that great pattern of gratitude, as well as melancholy ex-ample of human frailty David, continually revolving in his thoughts, impressing upon his memory, meditating upon and renewing in his mind, the numberless instan-ces of divine favor which his nation and himself had experienced; I will remember, says he, thy wonders of old; I will meditate of all thy works and talk of thy do-ings; my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate up-on thee in the night watches, because thou hast been my help; no place it seems was unfit, or time unseason-able, for the performance of this great duty, his sa-cred hours were employed in it, and even the repose and of sleep was by him postponed to meditation on the di-vine beneficence; his gratitude was vigilant and watchfule, his hours of solitude were devoted to reflec-tions on what returns he owed his protector and fra-vorer, length of time could not erase the impressions his mind had received, nor the thoughtfulness and care of governing a nation cause him for a moment to forget him, whose favor had set him over it and whose Providence defended it against its nu-merous and enraged enemies. Surely it is the sacre-dest homage we in gratitude can do to Almighty God to acknowledge our dependance upon him, and

obligation to him for the good things we enjoy, to con-
fess that his mercies are worthy of thanks, to publish to
the world our experience of his goodness, and with that
breath which he has bestowed upon us, proclaim his con-
drous love; I will, says the Psalmist, sing of the mer-
cies of the Lord for ever, with my mouth will I make
known his faithfulness to all generations; thus if a
grateful affection live in the heart it will respire
through the mouth, there will be a correspondence be-
tween it and the tongue, if one be susceptible, the o-
ther will not be silent; neither will such a warm sen-
timent content itself with soliloquies, or praise God
in whispers only, for gratitude is of an open and diffu-
sive nature, of a free and communicative temper and
sociable disposition; it delights to impart and pro-
pagate itself, it affects the light, and cannot endure
to be shut up and confined in privacy and obscurity;
its best instrument therefore is speech, by which our
thoughts and feelings are circulated in such sort, that
we, as it were, catch the flame, and love by example, the
tongue then that best organ when kept within due and
religious bounds, and directed only to those purposes for
which the Author of our nature bestowed it upon us, ought
surely to be oftenest employed in this its noblest office of prai-
ses and thanksgivings to him that made it, and endow

it with such surprising powers. although it is shame to Christians to go to Heathens for instruction, yet their duty of gratitude to the divinity is so strangely forgotten, that it is expedient to shew them how much more dutiful and religious they were in the point of gratitude than we. it was among them an universal law, at all times, and by all ways, by hymns and panegyrical compositions, some of them in the sublimest strains of Poetry, to express their gratitude for the gifts of their false Gods, and the blessings they enjoyd through their goodness, as for want of better knowledge they supposed; in their public sacrifices and solemn festivals, ascribing their imaginary Deities, exciting their glorious achievements, and acknowledging that to them they were indebted for the fruits of the earth, the enjoyments of life, and the protection of their country, being to be sure mistaken in the object, but not at all transgressing in the substance of the duty. for they paid, if I may so speak, a just debt, although they did not know their true Creditor, and I wish we were as ready to imitate them in that which was right, as to censure them for that which was wrong; acknowledgments of the divine goodness, and solemn testifications of our thankful sense of it, ever were, and ever will be the chief and noblest part of allowed duties immediately to God, for goodness is his favorite attribute; and what resentment must he not feel, if his

people are insensible of it. Secondly - the duty of gratitude requires, that we should make a more than equal return of benefits, provided opportunity and ability permit; that we do not confine ourselves to declarations and professions, but are ready to prove by our actions that we will administer aid and comfort to our benefactors, provided they stand in need of them, or are in a capacity to receive them, but if our benefactor is so circumstanced that all we are able to perform is wholly useless to him, then to desire to please him by such behaviour and deportment as we know to be agreeable to him, becomes our duty, and if we forget or neglect it, we are not only undeserving of further favor, but we deserve punishment; for as the soil that has been refreshed with rains, manured with great labor, and cultivated with all the arts of husbandry, unless it makes a due return is undeserving of further culture, so the man who daily partakes of the bounty of Providence, yet has no grateful sense of the happiness he enjoys, nor feels any emotions of love towards the bestower of every thing that constitutes his felicity, undoubtedly ought to be accounted unworthy of any further regard, if indeed much worse is not strictly due to him; tis true that the Almighty has no occasion for our homage, he never can immediately receive any benefit from us; we cannot enrich with our gifts, him who by unquestionable right and actual possession, is Lord and Master of the Universe; we cannot by our weak endeavors advance

him to honors, who is already seated on the throne of glory
can in any wise contribute to his complete and perfect happi-
-ness, for such it is in itself and we must remain, let what
will become of us, besides his benefitts exceed all possibili-
-ty of a suitable return from us, yet we may dulate our wil-
-lingness to serve him, we may by our obedient and dutiful
demeanor shew that we desire to please him, we may by
our beneficence and charity to those of his creatures who
stand in need of our assistance, make an infinitely de-
-fective, yet notwithstanding, perfectly acceptable requi-
-tal to his benefits; what says the Psalmist, shall I ren-
-der unto the Lord, I will take the cup of Salvation and
call upon his name, I will pay my vows unto him. thus
he intimates, that addresses, praises, and vows of never
failing love and obedience, make some kind of compensate-
-on for his mercies; and to the same purpose speaks his
accomplished son Solomon when he advises, to honor the
Lord with our substance, and with the first fruits of our
increase. our Creator, altho he really does, and consider-
-ing the relation in which we stand to him, cannot humanly
speaking otherwise do, yet will not seem to bestow his fa-
-vors altogether gratis, he will have some return of duty
and service from us, because such performances with
respect to him, greatly conduce to our own comfort and
happiness by keeping our minds in a proper frame
and ordering our affections in such a manner as that
they may not become irregular and headstrong, and

seek their gratification from such things as he has forbidden
to be enjoyd, therefore what we can pay, it is our interest to
pay; he has appointed thanksgivings, expects tributes and
benevolences, and encourages and accepts free will offerings
from us; thou shalt not appear empty before the Lord, was
an ordonance delivered to the Jewish nation, and the qua-
:lity and measure of their oblations were fixd and sta-
:ted, that is to say, the first fruits of the soil, the first born
of themselves and their cattle, the tenth of their annual
increase, and a certain proportion of the spoils taken in
war, were reserved by the King of Kings to himself, as an
acknowledgment of his bounty to, and preservation of
his people. neither did the gentiles conceive themselves ex-
:empted from the like obligation; it was customary with
them to dedicate the top or best part of the cornheaps to
him whom they had themselves indebted to for the increase
of their fields, and the first and most beautifull part of
the plunder taken from their enemies they consecrated
to the adorning his temple, by whose favor they imagind
they had gaind the victory; no sooner had they begun
their meal than by pouring forth a libation, they did
homage to the Gods for it, and they had likewise their anni-
:versary and casual sacrifices; now we are not to sup-
:pose that these people, at least the most understanding
among them, imagind that the Gods to whom they per-
:formd these services stood in any sort of need, or possi-
:bly could be in any sort the happier for them, but

they held it proper and becoming in men who from
their condition must be dependant, to declare by the most
significant symbols they could invent, their grateful
sense of the divine bounty and goodness to them, and
although it would be improper for us to express our gra-
-titude by the same ceremonies which Heathens used,
yet we are no way freed from, but rather more strongly
engaged to the substantial part of this duty; we are still
to offer not Bulls and He goats, but as St. Paul says, our
own bodies, living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to
God; we are excused from material, but are bound to of-
-fer spiritual sacrifices to God, as St. Peter informs us;
we must burn incense still, the incense of frequent
and devout prayers, and send up continually to
Heaven that thank offering of praise mentioned in the
Epistle to the Hebrews; we must consecrate the first
born of our souls, that is pure and holy thoughts, and
the first fruits of our strength, our most active and vi-
-gorous endeavors, to the service of God; we must slay
our impure inclinations, mortify our corrupt affec-
-tions, and abandon all selfish and uncharitable re-
-gards for his sake; we must present him with our wills
and offer our hearts to his disposal, vowing to him the
most sincere and unremitted obedience; with these
returns our gracious Master is well pleased and satis-
-fied, he approves and accepts them as real testimonies of
our gratitude, and sufficient acknowledgments of his
unceasing care and protection. to conclude. it be-

loves us in framing our minds to the great duty of gra-
:titude, to consider not only to whom it is due, but for what,
otherwise we can never come up to that degree of thankful-
:ness, which the eminensity of the divine goodness requires
at our hands. we are not obligd to our Creator for some
small and inconsiderable matters, but for the most weigh-
:ty and valuable gifts. it is to him we are indebted for
whatever is necessary to our sustenance, convenient for
our use, and pleasant for our enjoyment, and not for
those only which come directly from his own hand, but
for those also which we receive from others; since he bestowd
the will and power, the means and opportunity of doing
us good, him we must thank for all the good things that
we ever did, at present do, and hereafter hope to possess,
as well as for the capacity of receiving and being made
happier by them; he is the author upholder and preser-
:ver of our Being; without his goodness we had never
been, and independent of his Providential care, we can-
:not subsist one moment; he is the Lord and Owner
:ner of all that we possess, we breathe his air, tread his
ground, and are sustaind by his food; our bodies are
the work of his hands, and our souls rendred immortal
by his mercy; he created a spacious and beautiful
world for us to inhabit and take our pleasure in; he
hath subjected a fair territory to our dominion; he
has consigned to our use innumerable goodly creatures;
whose lives are at our disposal, let therefore our lives
souls and bodies be absolutely at his. Now to God the

1786
Windsor April 23.
Falmouth July 23. 14
1792. Windsor June 17.